



School of Economics

Academic Year 25-26, Term 1

ECON118 Economic Development in Asia

- Instructor Name – Madhav S. Aney
- Email – madhavsa@smu.edu.sg
- Telephone – 68280644
- Office – 5041 SOE

Course description

This course will provide an introduction to the developmental challenges in Asia. The course will begin with introducing the distinction between concepts of economic growth and development. The course will have a strong emphasis on understanding the lives of the poor in Asian countries. We will attempt to diagnose the causes of poverty by analysing its components such as lack of sufficient access to education, savings, and nutrition, and study how these can cause the persistence of poverty. We will also look at dimensions of identity such as gender and how development policy can be designed in the presence of discrimination and prejudice. We will also study the constraints to the delivery of public goods such as state capacity, corruption and political institutions. Policy implications emerging from the material we have studied will be also discussed.

Learning objectives

1. To understand the factors that lead to persistence of poverty and under-development in the empirical context of Asia.

2. Learning how to examine the evidence on policy relevant interventions. This will involve looking at tables with statistical output. By the end of the course you should be more comfortable making inferences based on statistical output that is presented to you.
3. To develop and sharpen your analytical and presentation skills by participating in class discussions and group debates.
4. To acquire an appreciation of the issues involved in designing and evaluating developmental policies.

Pre-requisite/Co-requisite/Mutually exclusive course(s)

Please use the class search function at OASIS > Study > BOSS > BOSS Bidding (Plan & Bid page > Add to Cart and Perform Course Search) or the course catalogue in OASIS to check the most updated attributes of this course.

This course is a non-technical introduction to developmental challenges in Asia. Each week we will look statistical output from different randomized control trials conducted in Asia. However, I will not assume that you are familiar with statistics.

Assessment methods

- Class Participation 10%
- Group Debates 30%
- Midterm Examination 20% (To be held on Saturday, end of week 7)
- Final examination 40%

Course Assessment Details

For the debate component, the students will form themselves into groups. Students will be required to come up with their own debate topic. Here are some examples of the topics from previous years.

- Colonialism did more good than harm to the colonies in Asia.
- Asian experience suggests that political freedoms should be introduced only after a country reaches a certain level of economic prosperity.
- The Chinese model of state capitalism is a better model for developing countries to follow compared to the US model of relatively less government participation in markets.
- There a conflict between commercialization of micro-credit and its social role.

- Affirmative action is needed to level an uneven playing field. Examples would include Bumiputera policy in Malaysia, and reservations for socially disadvantaged groups in India.

Recommended Text and Readings

Lecture notes will be provided on the course website each week a few days before class. The course is partly based on the [Challenges to World Poverty](#) course taught at MIT but with a specific focus on Asia. The course text is *Poor Economics* by Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo. You may take a look at this book and the material in its references to assess the level of technical ability at which this course is aimed. Additional readings of about the same level of difficulty may be introduced later in the course.

University Policies

Academic Integrity

All acts of academic dishonesty (including, but not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, facilitation of acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized possession of exam questions, or tampering with the academic work of other students) are serious offences.

All work (whether oral or written) submitted for purposes of assessment must be the student's own work. Penalties for violation of the policy range from zero marks for the component assessment to expulsion, depending on the nature of the offense.

When in doubt, students should consult the instructors of the course. Details on the SMU Code of Academic Integrity may be accessed at <https://smu.sharepoint.com/sites/oasis/SitePages/DOS-WKLSWC/UCSC.aspx>.

Copyright Notice

Please note that all course materials are meant for personal use only, namely, for the purposes of teaching, studying and research. You are strictly not permitted to make copies of or print additional copies or distribute such copies of the course materials or any parts thereof, for commercial gain or exchange.

For the full copyright notice, please visit <https://researchguides.smu.edu.sg/copyright>.

Accessibility

SMU strives to make learning experiences accessible for all. If students anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers due to disability, please let the instructor know immediately. Students are also welcome to contact the university's disability services team if they have questions or concerns about academic provisions: accessibility@smu.edu.sg. Please be aware that the accessible tables in the seminar room should remain available for students who require them.

Digital Readiness for Teaching and Learning (DRTL)

As part of emergency preparedness, instructors may conduct lessons online via the Zoom platform during the term, to prepare students for online learning. During an actual emergency, students will be notified to access the Zoom platform for their online lessons. The class schedule will mirror the current face-to-face class timetable unless otherwise stated.

Weekly lesson plan

Class sessions are of 3-hour duration per week. Each session will involve a lecture and a discussion of the topic for that week. Group debates will take up half of the lecture time in weeks 5-7 and 11-13. The following is the tentative lesson plan. Some readings may be substituted with material of the same level of difficulty closer to the start of term.

Week	Topic	Readings
1. 18 Aug 25	Development and growth	
2. 25 Aug 25	Nutrition	Jenson Miller “Do Consumer Price Subsidies Really Improve Nutrition?” REStat (2011) Deaton and Dreze “Food and Nutrition in india: Facts and interpretations” EPW (2009)
3. 1 Sep 25	Savings	Ashraf, et. al “Tying Odysseus to the Mast: Evidence From a Commitment Savings Product in the Philippines” QJE 2006 Schilbach “Alcohol and Self-Control: A Field Experiment in India” AER 2019
4. 8 Sep 25	Environment	Buntaine et al. “Does the Squeaky Wheel Get More Grease? The Direct and Indirect Effects of Citizen Participation on Environmental Governance in China” AER 2023
5. 15 Sep 25	Education	Burde and Linden “Bringing Education to Afghan Girls: A Randomized Controlled Trial of Village-Based Schools” AEJ: Applied Economics(2013)
6. 22 Sep 25	Integration	Lowe “Types of Contact: A Field Experiment on Collaborative and Adversarial Caste Integration” AER 2021
7. 29 Sep 25	Gender	Cameron et al. “Crimes Against Morality: Unintended Consequences of Criminalizing Sex Work” QJE (2021)
8. 6 Oct 25	<i>Recess Week</i>	

9. 13 Oct 25	Corruption	“Obtaining a Driver’s License in India: An Experimental Approach to Studying Corruption” Bertrand et al. QJE 2007 “Monitoring Corruption: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia” Olken JPE 2007
10. 20 Oct 25	State Capacity	Acemoglu et al. “Trust in State and Nonstate Actors: Evidence from Dispute Resolution in Pakistan” JPE (2020)
11. 27 Oct 25	Political institutions	“Institutional corruption and electoral fraud: Evidence from a field experiment in Afghanistan” Callen and Long AER 2015
12. 3 Nov 25	Media	Chen and Yang “The Impact of Media Censorship: 1984 or Brave New World?” AER 2019
13. 10 Nov 25	<i>Guest Lecture</i>	