

History and Cultural Identity in the Pacific and Asia

This cluster will examine the uses of history in the establishment of modern identities. The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has argued that while culture is historical (subject to change over time), history itself is a culturally specific way of viewing the past. It is very modern, and it is entangled in modern problems of nation-building and national identity. The interplay between culture and history is manifested differently, and carries different significance, in different social and political contexts. It involves not only relations between nations and civilizations, but social (class, gender, ethnic) relations within them. The past is not merely given. It is also constructed in the course of struggles over identity.

The research projects for this course will be designed to bring out problems of culture and history both as universal problems of modernity, and in their particular manifestations in different historical and social circumstances. We hope to give special attention to the uses of history and culture in struggles against oppression and injustice. Students will be free, in consultation with the instructor, to choose for their research projects any societies around the Pacific Basin, and across Asia, including Western Asia.