Module Overview

GE2202
ECONOMY & SPACE

2017/2018, Semester 2
Arts & Social Sciences (Geography)
Modular Credits: 4
Class Size: 7
Tags: Capitalism, Chains, Clusters, Commodity, Consumption, Development, Economic, Ethnicity, Finance, Gender, Geography, Labour, Retailing, Space, State, Technology, TNCs

Quick Access to Active Tools

- Announcement 0
- Files ECONOMY & SPACE
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Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites because this is an introductory module for those of you who are interested in Economic Geography. Just make sure you are sufficiently curious (or confused!) about what geographers have to say about the "economy".

Learning Outcomes

This module is an introductory course in Economic Geography that explores the contemporary insights provided by geographers researching various dimensions of economy and space. The module will present a case for the importance of geographical insights, in which economic processes are seen as embedded in particular places, in which patterns and flows of economic activity across space are recognised and explained, and in which economic spaces and scales are themselves treated as representations and social constructions. These distinctively geographical sensibilities stand in stark contrast to the popular conceptions and assumptions in economic thinking that often distort our understandings of economic lives and landscapes. You will thus be introduced to Economic Geography not as a dry discipline but as a vibrant and distinctive collection of insights into the real world around you. Based on a highly acclaimed textbook written by current and past NUS geographers, the module is designed to appeal to students who are coming to Economic Geography for the first time, while also offering depth to those more familiar with the field.

In terms of style, each lecture will:
1. Be structured around debating a single question designed to stimulate your interest and curiosity;
2. Make a clear argument as to the particular insight brought to the topic in question from an economic-geographical perspective;
3. Engage with theoretical ideas and concepts;
4. Illustrate these ideas with examples, vignettes, and case studies drawn from around the world, and from a variety of economic sectors.

Teaching Modes

Lectures, tutorial sessions, group presentation, research paper, and examination.

Schedule

Lecturer: Professor Henry Yeung
(Room: AS2 03-04; Tel: 6516 6810; E-mail: henryyeung@nus.edu.sg)
Homepage: http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/geoywc/henry.htm

Lecture venue: LT12
Lecture Time: Thursday 2-4pm (Starting 18 January 2018)
Module tutor(s): To be confirmed.

Tutorial time and venue:
Monday 12-2pm (Earth Lab AS2 #02-04)
Monday 2-4pm (Earth Lab AS2 #02-04)
Thursday 10-12pm (Earth Lab AS2 #02-04)

Consultation Hour: Thursday 4-5:30pm
Examination: To be confirmed.

Synopsis

Lecture Topics

Part One: Conceptual foundations
1. Thinking geographically: what does the economy mean? (18 January 2018)
2. Capitalism in motion: why is economic growth so uneven? (25 January 2018)

Part Two: Making the (spatial) economy
3. The state: who runs the economy? (1 February 2018)
4. Labour power: can workers shape economic geographies? (8 February 2018)
5. Making money: why has finance become so powerful? (15 February 2018 - Chinese New Year Eve)

Part Three: Organizing economic space
6. Commodity chains: where does your breakfast come from? (22 February 2018)
7. Technological change: is the world getting smaller? (8 March 2018)
8. The transnational corporation: how does the global firm keep it all together? (15 March 2018)
9. Spaces of consumption: how and where do we shop? (22 March 2018)

Part Four: People, identities, and economic life
12. Conclusion and revisions (19 April 2018)

Syllabus

Part One: Conceptual foundations

This section introduces the basic building blocks of geographical analysis and our understanding of the economy. These are brought together in a geographical understanding of the dynamics of the capitalist system. Lecture 1 examines location, territory, place, and scale as core geographical concepts, while explores where the idea of ‘the economy’ comes from historically and some of the common concepts used in economic analysis such as demand, supply, production, markets, and firms. Lecture 2 then mobilizes these geographical and economic concepts into a dynamic and structural account of uneven development in a capitalist economy.

1. Thinking geographically: what does the economy mean?

The economy seems to be the key analytical preoccupation in economics and economic geography. We often discuss ‘the economy’ as if it were an entity, or even an organism, separate from the rest of our society. Yet this notion is relatively recent in the history of human thought. In this lecture, I explore how the economy is constructed and how economic geographers have deconstructed the categories and vocabularies used to understand economy and space. This provides an important unpacking of the basic category that economists and economic geographers study, and shows that the delineation of a distinctive and separate system is rather arbitrary. The lecture provides the basis for the module’s exploration of the intersection of economic and non-economic processes. In this introductory lecture, I lay out the approaches and insights that geographers can contribute using their distinctive sensitivity to location, space, scale and place, namely:

a) An attention to the fundamental spatiality of economic processes is essential to understanding the changing economic landscapes we see around us;

b) A consideration of scale permits economic systems to be seen as ‘open’ and simultaneously driven by a multitude of processes from the individual/household scale up to the global scale;

c) A grounded concern for specific places allows us to explore how economic processes are embedded inextricably in social, cultural, institutional and political contexts.

Key themes and concepts: space, scale, place, representation, (economic-)geographical imagination.
2. Capitalism in motion: why is economic growth so uneven?
Uneven development at regional, national and global scales is a constant of life in a capitalist system. In this lecture, I examine how geographers have explained the systemic need for constant economic restructuring and how this process becomes inscribed in social spaces and physical landscapes. De-naturalising processes of uneven resource allocation across space and the resulting patterns of wealth and poverty is one of the most significant insights that economic geography offers. This lecture will analyse how globalisation contributes to and reshapes uneven spatial development, and how we can understand global shifts in economic and social landscapes through different periods of capitalist development.

Key themes and concepts: uneven development, globalisation, regulation theory, Fordism, post-Fordism, spatial divisions of labour, new international division of labour

Part Two: Making the (spatial) economy
Having explained the dynamics of capitalism, I now introduce the inputs and actors, besides capitalists, that make the system work: the state, labour, and finance capital. Lecture 3 discusses the state in its varied manifestations and the ways in which it shapes economic activity. Lecture 4 considers labour as a factor of production, but more particularly as an active agent in shaping the economic landscape. Lecture 5 looks at the financial system both as a source of productive capital and an economic sector in its own right.

3. The state: who runs the economy?
A fundamental concern in a globalising world is where and by whom is power over economies being wielded. Do national states still have any control over their economies? Do transnational corporations rule the world? What role do supra-state organisations such as the WTO, EU, APEC and NAFTA play in shaping economic policy? This lecture will discuss these issues and locate them in broader debates concerning the role of regulatory institutions in economic life.

Key themes and concepts: state theory, institutional theory, neoliberalism, developmental state

4. Labour power: can workers shape economic geographies?
Economic activity is often assumed to be defined by the decisions of firms. But to be a worker or employee is also to be an active player in economic processes. In recent years, geographers have been examining the agency of organised labour. A key research question that has emerged is the appropriate scale at which labour should be organized and the ways in which labour control regimes are constructed at various scales. There are many rich case studies that can be used to show the ways in which labour is an active player in capitalist economic processes as well as the various ways in which labour is regulated and controlled.

Key themes and concepts: regulation, industrial restructuring, labour unions, brain drain or brain circulation, alternative or non-capitalist labour, geographies of labour, labour geographies

5. Making money: why has finance become so powerful?
Even as money has become an increasingly intangible commodity, freely exchanged within national boundaries and in internationally markets, particular localities remain critical to the workings of global finance and these uneven geographies of finance have specific impacts on places. Does the rise of international finance mean the end of the nation-state? How do states regulate their own national economic spaces and financial flows within a global economy? If capital is truly global, why are particular places important as international financial centres or offshore financial centres? The lecture will also explore how the economy is becoming increasingly "financialised", with the circulation of capital largely divorced from its production allocation, and how that could explain the 2008 financial crisis.

Key themes and concepts: Bretton Woods, financial innovation, financial deregulation, international financial centres, offshore financial centres, financialisation, financial crises.

Part Three: Organizing economic space
Here we explore the ways in which economic relationships across space are established, organized and maintained. Lecture 6 introduces the commodity chain concept, which provides the overall framework for this part of the book, and we will ask how we might seek to regulate and control the production processes behind the commodities we consume. The commodity chain is fundamentally shaped by technologies of movement, communication and product innovation that are examined in Lecture 7. The role of transnational corporations in organizing global production networks is explored in Lecture 8, while Chapter 9 focuses on restructuring in the retail business as the end point of the commodity chain and our consumption behaviour.

6. Commodity chains: where does your breakfast come from?
Karl Marx posed this simple question but its answer lies in a complex story of commodity chains linking producers and environments with the consumers of finished products. Are consumers ethically responsible for the distant strangers who produce their products and services. What alternative ‘ethical’ forms of consumption are emerging that seek to establish this linkage between consumer and producer more directly? And how does commodity chain analysis help us to understand the effects of our consumption decisions on environments – for example through the industrialisation of the food chain? By examining retailing environments and landscapes, and by tracing commodity chains back to the producers and the environment of their production, we can develop a far more informed sense of our place in the economic world and our impact on the environment. Important questions are raised concerning the extent to which we as consumers are in control of our own decisions, and regarding the ethical responsibilities we have towards the distant strangers and places (including the
ways, so too do ethnic identities. This point has been explored in several different ways by economic geographers: which in turn also (re)produce gender relations. Just as gendered identities intersect with economic processes in important

Key themes and concepts: spatial proximity, agglomeration, clusters, traded and untraded interdependencies

8. The transnational corporation: how does the global firm keep it all together?
Firms organise their economic activities across space in a variety of different ways, with important implications for the places that ‘plug in’ to these corporate networks. In this lecture, I will explain the internal and external divisions of labour in firms that lead to these different forms of spatial organisation. Through empirical examples from different parts of the global economy, I will show how places are differentially articulated into the productive activities of transnational corporations (TNCs). By the end of the lecture, you should be able to understand how Nike and their various subcontractors are responsible for your pair of Nike shoes – Nike as the designer and marketer, with the subcontractors performing the actual manufacturing all over Asia. However, there are still limits to the reach of TNCs such as the friction of time and distance and the problems of localisation.

Key themes and concepts: post-Fordism, flexible specialisation, new industrial spaces, the learning region, tacit knowledge

9. Spaces of consumption: how and where do we shop?
Retailing is a necessarily geographically more extensive activity than production. Our everyday experience illustrates the growing influence of large transnational retailers on the range of products we buy, and where we are able to buy them. It reveals how this power is in part based upon access to highly detailed information about how and where we shop. It speaks to processes of retailer globalization and the development of similar retail experiences in many countries around the world. And yet, our retail experience remains highly geographically variable, even between the stores of the same corporation in the same city. Retail spaces such as supermarkets are shaped by the economic, social and cultural spaces of which they are part, and retailers must respond to these geographical variations in order to be successful. This lecture seeks to explore these geographies of retailing and also to consider the ways in which specific retail spaces are structured and organised in order to induce us to purchase commodities.

Key themes and concepts: retailing, globalization of retail activity, retail spaces, national and local regulation, consumption, place and identity

Part Four: People, identities, and economic life
This final part explores the blurred line between economic processes and the social and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Lecture 10 highlights the very social process of economic cluster formation, and the benefits of learning and innovation that result. Lecture 11 examines the role that gender plays in economic life, in reproductive work, in waged workplaces, and in entrepreneurship. Ethnicity is also the focus of this lecture, which explores how labour markets are ‘colour coded’, how ethnic entrepreneurship works, and how transnational remittance economies result from migration. In concluding the module, Lecture 12 opens up two broader issues for students interested in pursuing the subject further: understanding the intellectual development of Economic Geography as an academic discipline, and thinking about how the future economic trends may present new challenges to the field.

10. Clusters: why do proximity and place matter?
This lecture is about understanding the tendency of certain kinds of economic activities to cluster together in particular places. Clustering is not specific to, say, Silicon Valley or the high tech industry; rather it is a generic characteristic of the capitalist economy and is seen in all sectors and places. We explore the need to move beyond the intra-firm factors considered in traditional location theory models and incorporate relationships external to the firm in explaining location decisions. We then look at the various contractual connections between firms that may bind them together in a cluster. We broaden our canvas to look at a range of socio-cultural forces that may also provide the ‘glue’ holding a cluster together. As part of this analysis, we will look at how regional cultures may build up over time as a result of long-standing patterns of intense interaction. Finally, we start to question the notion of clusters by thinking about how much economic activity is actually undertaken through complex combinations of face-to-face contact and technologically-mediated interaction.

Key themes and concepts: spatial proximity, agglomeration, clusters, traded and untraded interdependencies

11. Gendered and ethnic economies: do gender and cultures shape economic lives?
Economic processes are not blind to gender differences. ‘Non-economic’ identities based on gender, sexuality, age and ethnicity become incorporated into workplace labour processes and labour market segmentation. In this lecture, I examine how notions of ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ work identities or attributes shape gender relations in workplaces, households and localities, which in turn also (re)produce gender relations. Just as gendered identities intersect with economic processes in important ways, so too do ethnic identities. This point has been explored in several different ways by economic geographers: transnational networks of ethnicity have been shown to facilitate business linkages across global space; ethnic networks and
economic enclaves are also significant in many of the world's larger urban centres; and, labour markets have been shown to differentiate on the basis of ethnicity.

Key themes and concepts: performativity, gender/sexual inequalities and discrimination, the embodied worker, public/private spaces; network embeddedness, transnational communities, ethnic enclaves, flexible citizenship.

12. Economic Geography: intellectual journeys and future horizons (no lecture)
The ideas of economic geographers have never been as influential as those of famous economists such as John Maynard Keynes, but we can certainly see the ways in which the development of concepts has reflected the times in which scholars were working and the challenges to which they applied themselves. For the most part, this module has explored the work of economic geographers without making specific reference to the debates and ideas that have driven the intellectual journey of the discipline. But it is possible to see many of the ideas presented in this module as part of an intellectual journey that Economic Geography has taken over the last half century. In this concluding lecture, we will review the ways in the field has changed, to reflect the different circumstances and contexts (both intellectual and worldly) in which it was working. We will then look to the future to see what challenges lying on the horizon will likely shape the future of Economic Geography.

Key themes and concepts: development of ideas, social and intellectual context, future agendas

Practical Work

TUTORIAL SESSIONS
There will be a total of FOUR tutorial sessions (2 hours each) for the semester. In groups of TWO, each of you will be giving ONE tutorial presentation (starting T2) that will contribute to 10% of your final module score. The first tutorial session will begin during Even Week 6 starting on Monday 5 February 2018.

Topic Week
T1. An economic-geographical perspective (Week 4: 5 and 8 February 2018)
T2. Making the spatial economy (Week 6: 19 and 22 February 2018)
T3. Commodity chains and consumption (Week 8: 12 and 15 March 2018)

Assessment

ASSIGNMENT WORK
You will be required to submit ONE individual research essay for the semester that will contribute to 30% of your final module score. The report should not exceed 1,800 words (excluding references and tables). All essays should be deposited into GE2202 mailbox in the Department of Geography (near the General Office) by 5p.m. on Thursday 29 March 2018 (absolutely no extension). The penalty for late submission is one sub-grade per day (i.e. one grade every three days).

The topic for your research essay is:
Pick ONE concept from the following list and explain how it helps you understand ONE economic-geographical phenomenon that occurs in Singapore or elsewhere in Asia between 1 July 2017 and 1 March 2018.
(1) Spatial divisions of labour
(2) Financialization
(3) Global production networks
(4) Agglomeration and clusters

Your research essay will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Originality of arguments: Your essay must go beyond descriptions and you should discuss critically the geographical concept of your choice in relation to your chosen empirical phenomenon. If relevant, you should also critically evaluate arguments proposed by other scholars and researchers in explaining similar phenomenon.

2. Originality of research: You must NOT copy blindly from any (news) article per se. You should discuss your data/evidence in order to support your arguments. These data can be collected from personal interviews/surveys AND/OR from published sources (e.g. statistics by governments and research organizations).

Your essay should:
1. Be typed, single sided with 1.5 or double spacing, leaving generous margins for comments to be written.
2. Identify clearly the particular economic-geographical phenomenon reported in the media (e.g. The Straits Times or The Business Times) and attach the new printout as an appendix.
3. Commence with an introduction that explains the scope and structure of your critical arguments to be presented. Please also explain the nature/kind of data/evidence to be used in support of your argument(s).
4. BEFORE your empirical analysis, you need to explain briefly the concept you have chosen. In the main section of your paper, explain systematically how the chosen concept can help you understand your empirical phenomenon.
5. Be written in short paragraphs and divided into several sections with sub headings.
6. Conclude with a short summary of the main arguments presented.
7. Include a reference list of all sources cited in the text. Follow the Harvard reference system – author and date given in the text, with the reference in full in a bibliography (follow my reading list style) – that means footnotes are avoided. The sources for the tables, diagrams and maps are required.
8. Include your tutorial group number on the front sheet of the paper as well as your name, course and report title. Please provide a word count at the end of the report.

**Assessment**

All project and tutorial presentations will be graded. Together, these will contribute to 40% of your final grade. The remainder 60% will come from the 2-hour examination to be held on XXX (TBC).

**Prelusions**

NIL

**Workload**

2-1-0-2-5

Workload Components: A-B-C-D-E
A: no. of lecture hours per week
B: no. of tutorial hours per week
C: no. of lab hours per week
D: no. of hours for projects, assignments, fieldwork etc per week
E: no. of hours for preparatory work by a student per week
Library Guides

- NUS Libraries’ Guide to Geography information sources (http://libguides.nus.edu.sg/geography)
- Citation Styles Guide by NUS Libraries (http://libguides.nus.edu.sg/citation)


Course textbook:


In addition, a list of relevant readings tailored to the specific lectures has been compiled.

Key collections and reference books for this module:

Reading List

1. Thinking geographically: what does the economy mean?

* Barnes, Trevor, Peck, Jamie and Sheppard, Eric (eds.) (2012), The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Economic Geography, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp.1-24 and Chapter 1 by Gibson-Graham: Book: AVAILABLE, HFI1025 W12.5, CL RBR (Loans Desk 1) http://nus.summon.serialsolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/reLVhmymy2bQANMyNghol5SY16aGuJnJyDl6jzv11dwxSQu6jDpWYl4ip2czKjIjF29aQOZ5m33aam10xRBBx31x8n09280uJ46BhG6jKx6EdusA0G3lbAMAwXpwA1vRslYjgi or eBook: Full Text Online (http://nus.summon.serialsolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/reLVhmymy2bQANMyNghol5SY16aGuJnJyDl6jzv11dwxSQu6jDpWYl4ip2czKjIjF29aQOZ5m33aam10xRBBx31x8n09280uJ46BhG6jKx6EdusA0G3lbAMAwXpwA1vRslYjgi

2. Capitalism in motion: why is economic growth so uneven?

* Coe, Kelly and Yeung (2013), Economic Geography, Chapter 3.


Lim, Kean Fan (2014), ‘Socialism with Chinese characteristics’ Uneven development, variegated neoliberalization and the dialectical differentiation of state spatiality, Progress in Human Geography, 38(2), 221-247.


3. The state: who runs the economy?

* Coe, Kelly and Yeung (2013), Economic Geography, Chapter 4.


4. Labour power: can workers shape economic geographies?

* Coe, Kelly and Yeung (2013), Economic Geography, Chapter 6.


5. Making money: why has finance become so powerful?

* Coe, Kelly and Yeung (2013), Economic Geography, Chapter 7.


Part Three: Organizing economic space

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10. Clusters: why do proximity and place matter?


11. Gendered and ethnic economies: do gender and cultures shape economic lives?


12. Economic Geography: intellectual journeys and future horizons