International Political Economy of the Asia Pacific (POLS7408)

It has become somewhat of a cliche to describe the twenty-first century as the ‘Pacific century’. This is a reflection of the historically unparalleled transformation of the Asia-Pacific region, especially East Asia. An economic backwater only half a century ago, the region has since become the world’s most dynamic centre of production, trade and investment, home to the powerhouse economies of China, Japan and South Korea, and to the global financial hubs of Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai. East Asia’s state-led economic growth model is often seen to challenge the dominance of Anglo-American, market-led development models, with states in Africa and Latin America increasingly seeking to emulate Asia’s developmental states in pursuit of sustained growth. The Asia-Pacific has not been free of economic turmoil, however. The Asian financial crisis of the 1990s rattled the region and while its major economies seemed to have weathered the global financial crisis, recent signs, such as China’s mounting internal debt problem, suggest that serious problems are perhaps in the offing. Furthermore, longer term problems, such as the rise of precarious employment in Japan and Korea, increasingly undermine these countries’ postwar social contract, as well as East Asia’s reputation for relatively equitable development. This course will interrogate the forces that have shaped the international political economy of the Asia-Pacific region. It will examine the factors that have driven the region’s rapid economic development in the post-World War II era, focusing on the historical evolution of the region’s ‘developmental’ states. It will examine changing regional economic relations, especially the nature of trade, production processes, and financial flows. The course will investigate the role and power of lead states, such as China and Japan, the regions economic relations with western economies and new emerging market economies, and its responses to the Asian and global financial crises.