

HIST 208: Introduction to East Asian History

Fall 2023

Lectures: Mon/Wed 16:35-17:25 in Duff Theater
Conferences: Fridays at 13:35, 14:35, 15:35, or 16:35
McGill University

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. David Porter

Office: 680 Sherbrooke, Room 251

Office Hours: Monday 11-12 (these are group office hours in person, individual appointments can be scheduled separately to meet either in person or over Zoom)

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TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Ruoxuan Wen

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OVERVIEW

This course introduces the history of East Asia – China and its Inner Asian frontiers, Japan, and Korea – from ancient times to about the year 1600. You will learn about the origins and development of complex states in a variety of core regions; about the development and spread of important ideologies and religious ideas like Confucianism and Buddhism; about the processes of conquest, imperial expansion, diplomacy, and trade that led to cultural contact and conflict both within and across the boundaries of the region's modern day nation states; about the changing dynamics of gender relations and family structures across time; and much more. Regardless of your level of past exposure to East Asian history, you should learn a lot from this course, which is focused less on memorizing names and dates than on gaining an understanding of the basic structures and processes that shaped politics, society, culture, and everyday life.

COURSE GOALS

You will leave this course with a strong foundation in the basic outline of pre-modern East Asian history, which will leave you well prepared to take higher level courses about East Asia during the rest of your time at McGill and to have more rewarding engagement with East Asia and East Asian culture in your everyday life. This will include developing a sense of the importance of pre-modern history to present-day East Asian societies, in particular why and how history takes on political significance in the present. Just as importantly, you will develop some of the basic skills associated with the study of history, from analyzing primary sources as a means to develop

new knowledge about the past to understanding and responding to complex argument about the past made by professional historians.

PREREQUISITE

None

COURSE STRUCTURE

We will meet three days per week. Mondays and Wednesdays (and the first two Fridays, prior to add/drop) will be lecture-based.

On Fridays (except in Weeks 1-2), we will divide into conferences of approximately 18 students each that will be discussion-based, centered on a set of sources (available on our MyCourses page – discussion will not focus on the textbook readings), which you should have read prior to the meeting. Your participation in discussion will be the basis of your participation grade for the course. Sign-up for conferences will be made available shortly – I ask that students who can attend a time other than our schedule course time (16:35-17:25) sign up for a conference outside that time slot, in order to leave it open for students who may have conflicts at other times. Each TA will teach three conferences, while I will teach either one or two (depending on enrolment).

Conference schedule, all Friday:

Time	Instructor	Room
13:35-14:25	Jiarui Xue	Birks 004A
14:35-15:25	Ruoxuan Wen	Birks 105
14:35-15:25	Jiarui Xue	Birks 017
15:35-16:25	Ruoxuan Wen	Birks 004A
15:35-16:25 (may not be offered)	David Porter	Birks 104
16:35-17:25	Ruoxuan Wen	Birks 004A
16:35-17:25	Jiarui Xue	Birks 017
16:35-17:25	David Porter	Birks 104

READINGS

Textbook: Charles Holcombe, *A History of East Asia: From the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd Edition. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Students must acquire copies of the above book, which can be purchased either online or at Le James – any format is acceptable (that is, feel free to purchase either an ebook or a physical copy, as you prefer):

Additional readings will be supplied on the MyCourses page.

ASSESSMENT

Quizzes (10%)

You will take two brief quizzes, one on the basic geography of East Asia and one on the basic chronology of pre-modern East Asian history. Guides to what you need to learn for each quiz will be released via MyCourses one week in advance of the quiz.

Short essays (40%)

You will write 4 short essays (of about 500 words each) over the course of the semester, focused on assigned readings. Topics for these essays will be released one week in advance of the due date for each.

Midterms (40%)

You will take two in-class midterms, one on October 16 and one on November 20. In each midterm, you will be expected to write identifications of 5 terms (which you will choose from a group of 8 possibilities).

ID terms will be taken from both lecture and readings. You are expected to write 1-2 paragraphs about each term, demonstrating BOTH that you have a grasp of basic factual information about the person/thing being discussed AND (more importantly) their significance. That is, tell me not just who or what the term refers to, but why they/it matter. The best answers will relate the term to broader themes in the course: how does understanding the term shape our understanding of the history of premodern East Asia?

Attendance and Class Participation (10%)

You will be expected to make thoughtful contributions to conference discussions that show clear evidence of having done the required readings. Your contributions should be responsive to your classmates' comments and should always be respectful to everyone else in the room. Quality is more important than quantity – of course, if you don't say anything, you aren't participating – but one or two excellent comments will impress your TA far more than dominating the conversation with ideas that suggest that you haven't actually done the reading. Attendance is not graded explicitly, but since it is impossible to participate without being present, you will receive no credit for participation if you are absent from a conference without a valid excuse.

Note: lecture attendance is not graded – this portion of your grade is based entirely on conferences.

COURSE POLICIES

Absences and Late Work

You are expected to attend all class meetings and to submit all work on time. Missed class will result in failing to learn the material covered (which can affect your success in other assignments). Missed conferences are particularly problematic, as they will result in a failure to participate in discussion, directly lowering your participation grade. I recognize that there will be

situations that make it impossible (or unwise) for you to attend class or to submit a paper on time, including illnesses (if you're sick, please rest and recover; don't come to class).

If you are unable to attend a lecture class, please try to get notes from one of your classmates (Since lecture attendance is not graded, you do not need to write to me to request that your absence from lecture be excused). If you cannot attend a conference due to illness or other legitimate excuse, please write to your TA (or me, if you're in my conference) to request that your absence be excused (if you will miss a quiz for this reason, and your TA excuses your absence, you will need to arrange a time to take a make-up quiz with your TA). If you cannot turn in an assignment on time due to illness or other legitimate excuse, please write to your TA to request an extension.

Your TA will be permitted to set their own policies for granting excused absences/extensions, and these policies will be communicated to you by them. If you do not like their decision in response to a particular request, I will not overturn it unless it seems egregiously unfair.

If you will miss a midterm exam, you must communicate with me ASAP to arrange a possible makeup.

Office Hours

I will hold regular office hours on Mondays from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM in my office at 680 Sherbrooke, Room 251. These will be group office hours – that is, my door will be open and I will not be holding private one-on-one meetings. This hour is dedicated entirely to this course, and I will be happy to answer any general questions about course content or logistics or to discuss other topics related to East Asian history. If you have questions specific to you, whether about a grade you have received, an essay you are currently writing, etc., you should meet with your TA during their office hours (I will have separate office hours reserved for the conference(s) that I teach).

Basically, if you have a question or topic you want to discuss that is potentially of interest/relevant to other members of the class, you should come to Monday office hours. If you have a question about your work for the class, you should meet with your conference leader during their office hours. If you have a question that is specific to you but cannot be dealt with by your TA, you may write to me to set up a one-on-one appointment.

Academic Integrity

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).” (See McGill's [guide to academic honesty](#) for more information.)

« L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples

renseignements, veuillez consulter le [guide pour l'honnêteté académique de McGill](#).»

Language of Submission

“In accord with McGill University’s [Charter of Student Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.”

« Conformément à [la Charte des droits de l'étudiant](#) de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté. »

STUDENT FEEDBACK

I encourage you to complete a Mercury evaluation for this course upon its conclusion. Your experiences and observations will help me make this class, and all classes I teach, better for future students.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you are a student with a disability that requires accommodation, please register with the Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>) and inform me of the accommodations you require during the first week of class (or the first week after the disability arises). Anything you tell me will be kept confidential.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Note: “Holcombe” refers to the course textbook (*A History of East Asia*)

All readings other than those from the textbook are available digitally on the course website (MyCourses page)

Week 1

August 30 – Course Introduction

No reading

September 1 – What is East Asia?

Reading: Holcombe, “Introduction: What is East Asia,” pp. 1-11

Week 2

September 4 – NO CLASS, LABOR DAY

September 6 – Pre-history and the Origins of East Asian Cultures

Reading: Holcombe, Ch.1, “The Origins of Civilization in East Asia,” first two sections (“Out of Africa” and “East Asian Languages and Writing Systems”), pp. 12-25

September 8 – The Beginnings of Chinese History: The Bronze Age

Reading: Holcombe, Ch.1, “The Origins of Civilization in East Asia,” final section (“Bronze Age China”), pp. 25-30.

David N. Keightley, selection from “The Shang: China’s First Historical Dynasty,” in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*. Read pages 232-247, paying particular attention to the oracle bone inscriptions. Note that you need not spend any time focusing on the list of kings (figure 4.1, pp. 234-235) or the table of diviners (table 4.1, pp. 240-241). But you should read the actual oracle bone inscriptions and look at the physical form of the oracle bones (figures 4.2 to 4.6, including their captions).

Week 3

September 11 – The Zhou Dynasty and the Birth of Chinese Philosophy

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 2, “The Formative Era,” first section (“The Age of the Classics”), pp. 31-45.

September 13 – The First Chinese Empire

Guest Lecture: Ruoxuan Wen

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 2, “The Formative Era,” second section (“First Empire”), pp. 45-49.

Shang Yang, *The Book of Lord Shang* 1. “Revising the Laws,” 6. “Calculating the Land,” and 13. “Making Orders Strict,” pp. 107-110, 145-153, 176-180.

September 15 – Conference #1

Reading: From *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*: Mengzi (Mencius), Intro+ Book 1, 2A6, 5A2, 7A35, pp. 115-125, 129-130, 142-143, 153-154; Xunzi, Intro+Ch.1 “An Exhortation to Learning,” Ch. 23 “Human Nature is Bad,” pp. 255-261, 298-306; Han Feizi, Intro+Ch. 49, “The Five Vermin,” pp. 311-314, 339-351.

MAP QUIZ (In Class Sep. 15)

Week 4

September 18 – The Han Dynasty and the Xiongnu

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 2, “The Formative Era,” third section (“The Han Empire”), pp. 49-58

September 20 – Divided China and the Rise of Buddhism

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 3, “The Age of Cosmopolitanism,” first two sections (“China in Division” and “Buddhism Comes to East Asia”), pp. 60-81.

September 22 – Conference #2

Reading: Ban Gu, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, 162 B.C., 133 B.C., 111 B.C. (three short passages totaling 4 pages); Sima Qian, *Shiji* 110, “Account of the Xiongnu,” pp. 155-156, 160-163, 164-165, 170-172, 173-175; Mouzi, *Disposing of Error in Sources of Chinese Tradition*, pp. 421-426; Han Yu, “Memorial on the Bone of the Buddha,” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, pp. 583-585.

FIRST ESSAY DUE SEPTEMBER 22 PRIOR TO START OF YOUR CONFERENCE

Week 5

September 25 – Early Korea

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 3, “The Age of Cosmopolitanism,” third section (“The Emergence of Korean Kingdoms”), pp. 81-88

Reading: Sarah M. Nelson, “The politics of ethnicity in prehistoric Korea,” ch. 13 in Philip Kohl, ed. *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology*, pp. 218-231.

September 27 – Early Japan

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 3, “The Age of Cosmopolitanism,” fourth section (“Yamato Japan”), pp. 88-92.

Mark Teeuwen, “What Used to be Called Shinto: The Question of Japan’s Indigenous Religion,” in Karl Friday, ed., *Japan Emerging: Premodern History to 1850*, pp. 66-75.

September 29 – Conference #3

Reading: Selections from “Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories” (*History of the Kingdom of Wei and History of the Sui Dynasty*), “The Earliest Japanese Chronicles,” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, pp. 5-8, 10-11, 13-16.

“The Foundation Myth” and “Korea in the Chinese Dynastic Histories,” in *Sources of Korean Tradition*, pp. 4-13.

CHRONOLOGY QUIZ (In Class Sep. 29)

Week 6

October 2 – Sui and Tang Dynasties

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 4, “The Creation of a Community,” first section (“Chinese Imperial Restoration”), pp. 95-114

October 4 – The Tang and Inner Asia

Reading: Shao-yun Yang, “Early Tang China and the World, 618-750 CE,” pp. 1-2, 7-43, 62-68.

October 6 – NO CLASS, FALL READING BREAK

Week 7 –

October 9 – NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING

October 11 – NO CLASS, FALL READING BREAK

October 13 – Conference #4

Reading: E. Denison Ross and Vilhelm Thomsen, “The Orkhon Inscriptions: Being a Translation of Professor Vilhelm Thomsen’s Final Danish Rendering,” pp. 861-868;
Stephen Owen, “Tang Literature of the Frontier” in *Anthology of Chinese Literature* – read the introduction (pp. 459-460) and the following poems:

1. Li Bo, “The Turks Are Gone!” p. 465
2. Wang Chang-ling, “Variation on ‘Hard Traveling’” pp. 465-466
3. Wang Chang-ling, “By the Passes: A Song (second of a set)” p. 466
4. Cen Shen, “Song of White Snow: Sending Off Assistant Wu on His Return to the Capital” pp. 466-467
5. Wang Jian, “With the Army: A Ballad” p. 470

Week 8

October 16 – MIDTERM #1

October 18 – Heian Japan

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 4 “The Creation of a Community,” third section (“Imperial Japan”), pp. 120-129.

October 20 – Conference #5

Reading: Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*. Abridged. Translated by Royall Tyler. New York: Penguin Classics, 2001, 2006. “Introduction,” “Prologue,” “The Paulownia Pavilion,” “The Broom Tree,” pp. ix-xx, 1-53.

SECOND ESSAY DUE OCTOBER 20 PRIOR TO START OF YOUR CONFERENCE

Week 9

October 23 – Silla

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 4 “The Creation of a Community,” second section (“The Birth of Korea”), pp. 114-120

Sarah Nelson, *Shamans, Queens, and Figurines: The Development of Gender Archaeology*, ch. 3 “The Statuses of Women in Ko-Shilla: Evidence from Archaeology and Historic Documents,” pp. 79-85.

October 25 – Song China and Neo-Confucianism

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 5 “Mature Independent Trajectories,” selection from the first section (“Late Imperial China”) – read the subsections titled “The Song Dynasty Situation,” “Economic and Social Change,” and “Neo-Confucianism,” pp. 132-141.

October 27 – Conference #6

Reading/viewing: The Qingming scroll (*Qingming shanghe tu*):

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/song-scroll/song.html>. Note that the scroll should be viewed from right to left and that it is possible (and necessary) to zoom in, ideally quite a lot. For viewing this artwork, you may also find the following article useful, which divides the scroll into sections and provides captions for each: Valerie Hansen, “The Beijing Qingming Scroll and Its Significance for the Study of Chinese History.” Note that the images in the article are in black and white, so you will still probably want to look at the scroll in the link. Your goal is to get a sense of what we can learn about Song society from this piece of artwork, a topic that will be the focus of conferences.

Valerie Hansen, “The Mystery of the Qingming Scroll and Its Subject: the Case Against Kaifeng,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 26, pp. 183-200.

Week 10

October 30 – Liao, Jin, and Xixia

Reading: Wittfogel and Feng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao*, pp. 1-24.

November 1 – The Mongol Empire

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 5 “Mature Independent Trajectories,” selection from the first section (“Late Imperial China”) – read the subsections titled “Mongol Tempest” and “The Yuan Dynasty,” pp. 141-147.

Bettine Birge, “Women and Confucianism from Song to Ming: The Institutionalization of Patrilineality,” in Smith and von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, pp. 212-240

November 3 – Conference #7

Reading: *The History of the Liao*, “Northern Region” (1-6 and the list of official titles), “Southern Region” (1-5), and “Selection of Officials” (1-16), pp. 470-473, 482-485, 490-493.

Igor de Rachewiltz, trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols* chapter 11, §248-255, 260 (pp. 176-188, 192-194). For explanations of terms that may be unfamiliar, see the commentaries in volume 2 of the translation, pp. 896-937, 950-957. Note that you are not expected to read the full commentary – just use it as a reference when you are confused.

Week 11

November 6 – Koryō

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 5 “Mature Independent Trajectories,” selection from the second section (“Confucian Korea”) – read the subsections titled “Koryō,” and “The Era of Mongol Domination,” pp. 149-152

November 8 – Chosŏn

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 5 “Mature Independent Trajectories,” selection from the second section (“Confucian Korea”) – read the subsection titled “Early Chosŏn,” pp. 152-154 and the first 5 paragraphs of the section titled “The Hermit Kingdom” in Ch. 6 (“Early Modern East Asia”), pp. 183-184.

Sixiang Wang, “Chosŏn’s Office of Interpreters: The Apt Response and the Knowledge Culture of Diplomacy,” *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1.1 (2020), pp. 1-15.

November 10 – Conference #8

Reading: Remco Breuker, “Forging the Truth,” *East Asian History* 35 (June 2008), intro, “The Ten Injunctions,” injunctions 2-4+8, “Forging New Truths,” “The Men Behind the Myth,” and “Conclusion,” pp. 1-12, 15-36, 48-57, 63-73.

THIRD ESSAY DUE NOVEMBER 10 PRIOR TO START OF YOUR CONFERENCE

Week 12

November 13 – Kamakura

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 5 “Mature Independent Trajectories,” selection from the third section (“Warrior Japan”) – read the subsections titled “The Rise of the Warriors,” “The Gempei War,” and “The Kamakura Shogunate,” pp. 154-161.

Andrew Goble, “The Kamakura Shogunate and the Beginnings of Warrior Power,” in *Japan Emerging*, pp. 189-199

November 15 – Muromachi

Holcombe, Ch. 5 “Mature Independent Trajectories,” selection from the third section (“Warrior Japan”) – read the subsection titled “Muromachi,” pp. 161-164.

Hitoni Tonomura, “Gender Relations in the Age of Violence,” in *Japan Emerging*, pp. 267-277.

November 17 – Conference #9

Reading: “The Way of the Warrior”: introduction, “The Tale of the Heike,” “The Mongol Invasions of Japan,” and “Chronicle of Great Peace” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, pp. 265-269, 276-291

Week 13 –

November 20 – MIDTERM #2

November 22 – The Ming

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 5 “Mature Independent Trajectories,” selection from the first section (“Late Imperial China”) – read the subsection titled “The Early Ming,” pp. 147-149 and Ch. 6 “Early Modern East Asia,” selection from the first section (“Late Ming and Qing Dynasty China”), read the subsection titled “Late Ming Consumer Culture,” pp. 167-174.

November 24 – Conference #10

Reading: “Commercial Activities,” “What the Weaver Said,” and “Tenants,” from *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*, pp. 213-225.

Week 14 –

November 27 – The Late Imperial Examination System

Reading: Benjamin Elman, “Political, Social, and Cultural Reproduction via Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 50.1 (February 1991), p. 7-28.

November 29 – Ming, Mongols, and the Great Wall

Julia Lovell, *The Great Wall: China Against the World 1000 BC- AD 2000*, ch. 8 “A Case of Open and Shut: The Early Ming Frontier” (26 pdf pages).

November 30 – MONDAY SCHEDULE – OUR CLASS WILL MEET – The Reunification of Japan

Reading: Holcombe, Ch. 6 “Early Modern East Asia,” selection from the third section (“The Reunification of Japan and the Tokugawa Shogunate”), read the subsection titled “Three Reunifiers,” pp. 187-190.

December 1 – Conference #11

Reading: “*The Scholars: “Fan Jin Passes the Juren Examination,”* in *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection*, pp. 54-63.

Arthur Waldron, “The Problem of the Great Wall of China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43.2 (December 1983), pp. 643-663.

FOURTH ESSAY DUE DECEMBER 1 PRIOR TO START OF YOUR CONFERENCE

Week 15 –

December 4 – Reflections on Pre-Modern East Asia

No reading assigned