History of Pre-Modern East Asia

HIST 493 (38180)
Fall 2026, MWF 2:00 pm-2:50 pm
Burkhart Building 309

Instructor Shiau-Yun Chen
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Ways to see Professor Chen:

- Zoom "Drop-In," Office Hours: Monday and Wednesdays, 3:00-3:50pm
- If none of those times work for you, email with your available times to make an appointment.

Course Description

Survey of East Asian history from antiquity to around 1800. Substantive emphasis on areas of experience or practice common across East Asia, such as the shared Sinic world and chopsticks cultural sphere, classical philosophical traditions, and international order, and on interactions and challenges that vary among different societies, such as multi-state diplomacy, Buddhism as a pan-East Asian network, the Mongol conquests, maritime trade, and diplomatic exchange in the early modern era. The primary purpose is to provide students with basic literacy in East Asian history and cultures. The course emphasizes constructing and substantiating historical arguments and analyzing primary and secondary sources through class discussion, group presentations, and short writing assignments.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to

- question stereotypes about East Asian culture and how such ideas might dictate the ways in which we evaluate and judge the world in which we live.
- decenter the image of civilization that is modeled by Europe-centered experience.
- analyze the political, religious, and commercial networks — tributary diplomacy, Buddhism, and maritime trade — that connected societies across the East Asian region.
- ask critical and engaging questions regarding primary and secondary sources.
- recognize the ways in which discourses are always mediated and framed.
- evaluate pieces of information that scholars use to support their arguments
- communicate historical analysis clearly in both written assignments and collaborative oral presentations

Skill Infusion

By achieving the course learning outcomes, you will simultaneously develop numerous career readiness competencies recommended by NACE (the National Association of Colleges and Employers)

Course Outcomes	NACE Workplace Competencies
1. distinguish the differences between sex, gender, and sexuality.	* Critical Thinking * Equity & Inclusion
2. recognize and analyze the ways in which race, status, gender, and sexuality are linked and how such intersections have been articulated in various social, cultural, and historical contexts.	* Career & Self Development * Critical Thinking * Equity and Inclusion * Leadership * Professionalism * Teamwork
3. articulate their thoughts and communicate concisely and analytically through in-class group discussions and group-oriented assignments.	* Communication * Critical Thinking * Equity and Inclusion * Leadership * Professionalism * Teamwork
4. ask their own critical and engaging questions as active learners.	* Career and Self Development * Communication * Critical Thinking * Equity and Inclusion

NACE Recommends that Students Develop These Competencies.

Career & Self Development
Proactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, navigation of career opportunities, and networking to build relationships within and without one's organization.

Communication
Clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives with persons inside and outside of an organization.

Critical Thinking
Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.

Equity & Inclusion
Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures. Engage in anti-racist practices that actively challenge the systems, structures, and policies of racism.

Leadership
Recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.

Professionalism
Knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.

Teamwork
Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.

Technology
Understand and leverage technologies ethically to enhance efficiencies, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.

Workload and Expectations

This is a three-credit-hour course, delivered over 15 weeks. Students are expected to spend quality time online and in-class working collectively with their classmates and instructor. You will need to log in to Canvas and read assigned readings regularly, keep track of assignments and deadlines, and inform the professor immediately if you have questions or issues that you need help resolving.

Weekly Assignments and class activities are designed to create a collective and group learning experience. Therefore, you are expected to listen attentively and contribute to the dialogue during in-class discussions. **Consistently sitting aside and refusing to join the discussion will result in 0% for the entire attendance and participation grade.**

This is not an online class. Attending class lectures and discussions is essential to students' learning experience in this class. Students will receive a grade **of F if the semester attendance rate is less than 70%.**

Late work will only be accepted with permission of the professor and only in the event of extraordinary and documented circumstances that are reported before the assignment deadline. If you cannot attend class because of illness or for other pressing reasons, let me know, if possible in advance. If you miss a class, be sure to get copies of notes from a classmate and check Canvas for the posting of lecture outlines, slides, and suggested readings.

Evaluation

Please be aware that the pedagogical philosophy behind the course design **emphasizes the importance of constant practice instead of last-minute effort.** Your grade is based on the weekly effort you put into this class. Every week, spend some quality time studying the course readings and feel empowered after class lectures and discussions.

This is an in-person class. Class attendance is necessary. You will receive a grade of FN if you never attend a course, of FS if you stop attending the class, and of **F if the semester attendance rate is less than 70%.**

You are expected to follow directions, meet deadlines, and especially talk to the professor about concerns over assignment grades before they are posted!

Grades will be based on points you earn from class attendance and participation, and each assignment you complete.

- Attendance (15 %)
- Weekly Social Annotation (40%)
- Group Presentation (20%)
- Semester Project (25%)

Attendance and Participation (15%)

- Students are required to attend Monday, Wednesday, and Friday classes every week. Students are expected to finish the weekly assigned readings before attending Wednesday and Friday discussions, review their notes before the class, and actively participate in class discussions.

- Weekly Assignments and class activities are designed to create a collective and group learning experience. Therefore, you are expected to listen attentively and contribute to the dialogue during in-class small-group discussions. **Consistently sitting aside and refusing to join the weekly discussion will result in 0% for the entire attendance and participation grade.**

- This is an in-person course; attendance at lectures and participation in discussions are integral to the learning experience. **Attendance will be recorded from Sep 3 to Nov 22.** Students with a semester attendance rate below 70% will receive a failing grade (F).

- While attendance and participation are essential, there is room for flexibility. Students can miss **FOUR** classes without penalty. Use them for mild symptoms of discomfort or personal affairs. If you need to miss more than **FOUR** classes, such an extensive absence will be accepted without penalty only in the event of extraordinary and documented circumstances. See university policy for such events. (https://www.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/vice-provost/student-services/attendance-policies#accordion_medicalissuesandillness)

Weekly Social Annotation (40%)

- Social annotation assignments are designed for students to read, comment on, and discuss course material collaboratively with their classmates through an online annotation platform. Each assignment is due by noon on its assigned class day (Wednesday or Friday, as scheduled).

Group Presentation (20%)

Each of the four units in the course includes one group presentation. In groups of 5, students will lead a 7-minute presentation for the class.

Summarize the assigned part of the article. Identify the author's central research question, key evidence, and how the argument is organized, so classmates who read it can quickly recall its content.

Discuss the argument in detail. Walk through the author's thesis and supporting evidence step by step, and evaluate its strengths, limitations, and significance in relation to the unit's broader theme.

Propose discussion questions. Develop two to three open-ended questions that connect the reading to the unit's themes, and send them to the instructor at least one hour before class.

Post your group's summary and analysis of the article (part 1-2) to the Canvas discussion board after the class discussion (by the end of Sunday of the presentation week)

Guidelines and grading rubric for the presentation will be posted on Canvas.

Late Work Policy

- Late work will be accepted only with the professor's permission and only in the event of extraordinary, documented circumstances reported before the assignment deadline.
    - If circumstances are reported after the deadline, the following grade reductions will apply:
        - Reported within 1 week: 10% deduction
        - Reported within 2 weeks: 25% deduction
        - Reported within 4 weeks: 50% deduction
- **Late work will not be accepted if reported more than one month after the deadline.**
- **No submission will be accepted after 11:59 pm on November 30.**

Semester Project: 25 %

- This is your chance to reflect on lectures and class discussions. By writing a historical-analysis essay, a creative-writing essay, or creating a creative historical project, you demonstrate what you have learned about topics/ideas/concepts of premodern East Asia over the semester.
- The semester project includes five portions: (1) participating in the final project in-class workshop (2) class presentation (3) participating in all your classmates' project presentations (4) giving constructive comments/questions/suggestions to at least 3 different projects your classmates presented (5) submitting your project and a reflection form.
    - (1) will be arranged in the class time between 11/16 – 11/20.
    - (2) (3) and (4) will be arranged in the class time between 11/30 – 12/7.
    - (5) is due by 11:59 pm, December 14 th.

- Late submission of (5) will result in a reduction of one third of the letter grade each day (or part of the day) the assignment is late. The submission won't be accepted after the end of December 14th.

Each assignment will be presented with clearly defined expectations based on course objectives. Your work will be evaluated on how well you have met those expectations, not on a curve. You are expected to follow directions, meet deadlines, and especially to talk to professors about concerns over grades well before the grades have posted! Final grades will be based on the following scale (NOTE: I do not "round up").

Letter Grade	Range
A	100% - 94%
A-	<94% - 90%
B+	<90% - 87%
B	<87% - 84%
B-	<84% - 80%
C+	<80% - 77%
C	<77% - 74%
C-	<74% - 70%
D+	<70% - 67%
D	<67% - 64%
D-	<64% - 61%
F	<61% - 0%

All classroom behavior should be characterized by civility, attentiveness, and respect. All coursework should be performed with integrity. Written assignments should structure the development of your own ideas and writing skills. You must cite your sources when you refer to or quote others' ideas, even if you arrived at similar ideas on your own. Violation of the **Academic Ethics Policy and Plagiarism Policy** (see University Policies below) will result in an F and will be reported to the dean, possibly resulting in further penalties.

AI Use Policy

At Ball State, we use GenAI to elevate human potential, not replace it. To succeed in an AI-infused world, students must balance technical skills with durable skills, lifelong abilities such as critical thinking, ethical judgment, communication, accountability, and responsible decision-making that define a Ball State graduate. Developing these durable skills requires you as students to think carefully about:

- when AI should and should not be used;
- how to use AI responsibly;
- how to verify AI-generated information; and
- and how to remain accountable for final work.

You may use GenAI tools for some work submitted in this course. You will be informed as to when, where, and how these tools are permitted to be used, along with guidance for attribution. Any use outside of this permission constitutes a violation of Ball State University's Student Academic Ethics Policy.

When in doubt, please ask me before using GenAI. You, the student, are always responsible for the content you submit, publish, share, or act upon, regardless of whether GenAI tools assisted in the process. For data security reasons, please use BSU-approved GenAI tools (e.g., BSU Gemini, NotebookLM), which support single sign-on (SSO) with BSU ID and password. Commonly used public GenAI tools carry a higher risk of data being shared externally. In contrast, when using BSU-approved GenAI tools, any data you input is protected within the BSU system. Instructors do not have access to BSU IT Center logs of AI tool usage, so student data shared through BSU-approved GenAI tools remain private.

Note: No more than 25% of an assignment should be created with AI.

How to cite AI: https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

University Statement

We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse.

Disability Statement

If you need accommodations due to a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. Ball State's Disability Services office coordinates services for students with disabilities. Documentation must be on file with Disability Services before accommodations can be provided. Contact Disability Services at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu

Freedom of Expression

In this course, we are committed to fostering a learning environment that values intellectual diversity, encourages free expression, and promotes open inquiry. As members of the Ball State Community, we treat each person in the Ball State community with civility, courtesy, compassion, and dignity and respect and learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions. Please review Ball State University's **Statement on Freedom of Expression**, the resources on Ball State's **Freedom of Expression webpage**, and **Ball State's Beneficence Pledge.**

Title IX/Sex Discrimination

Ball State University is committed to maintaining an educational environment free from sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, and stalking. Students who experience or witness conduct that may violate University policy are encouraged to seek support and assistance. The Title IX Office can provide information about reporting options, supportive measures, and available resources. Contact the Title IX Office at 765-285-1545 or titleix@bsu.edu.

Please Note: As your instructor, I am a mandatory reporter. If you disclose information to me about conduct that may constitute sex discrimination or sexual misconduct, I am required to notify the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Office will reach out to discuss available resources, supportive measures, and reporting options. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, you may contact the Counseling Center or the Center for Survivor Support.

University Grade Appeal Policy

If you believe you received a final course grade that does not reflect your performance due to fairness or a procedural issue, you have the right to file an appeal within 5 school days after final grades are posted by the Office of the Registrar. Review the **University Grade Appeal Policy and Process**.

Student Academic Ethics Policy

Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the university community. Academic dishonesty and other forms of academic misconduct threaten the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and will not be tolerated. To maintain its credibility and reputation, and to equitably assign evaluations of scholastic and creative performance, Ball State University is committed to maintaining a climate that upholds and values the highest standards of academic integrity. Visit the VPAA's **academic integrity website** (Students tab) for resources on understanding academic integrity, citing sources properly, and avoiding inadvertent academic dishonesty. To learn about BSU's academic integrity expectations and students' rights, please read the University **Student Academic Ethics Policy**.

Academic integrity violations include giving or receiving an unfair academic advantage (cheating), presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own (plagiarism), and falsifying academic records. Unless otherwise indicated, you must work independently by yourself. Check with me if you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of academic integrity violations include but are not limited to:

- Using resources not authorized by the faculty member (including devices, AI tools, hidden notes, and open books)
- Using a generative AI system or a person to complete academic assignments such as response papers, discussion posts, essays, or any other assignment when such use is not explicitly permitted by the assignment instructions or the instructor.
- Utilizing another person or a generative AI system to take a quiz, examination, or similar evaluation in place of oneself.
- Using a generative AI system for research, creative work, theses/dissertations, grant proposals, IRB-regulated work, or publication-bound work in violation of university AI policies, funder/publisher rules, IRB requirements, or discipline-specific standards.
- Using generative AI systems to analyze data, conduct research, or generate content that is included in an assignment (images, graphs, charts, tables, etc.) without proper documentation, citation, and attribution of this AI use.
- Using commercial study websites to find answers to graded assignments (Chegg, Course Hero, StudyPool, OneClass, etc.).

- Without the instructor's written permission, giving away, buying, or selling graded assignments class notes, exams, study guides, or other course materials to other students or to third-party vendors (Course Hero, Chegg, 24HourAnswers, etc.).
- Working with another person on any assignment other than authorized group projects.
- Sharing or allowing others to access your files, whether done with permission or not.
- Reusing your own work from another semester, course, or section.
- Sharing answers with others during exams (passing notes, texting, whispering, gesturing)
- Discussing exam questions and answers with students who have not taken the exam.
- Soliciting others to complete work for you.

Resources on Campus

Student Services

- Counseling Center
- Career Center
- The Basic Needs Hub
- The Speaking Center

Academic Resources

- Writing Center
- Learning Center
- The Speaking Center

Communication and Etiquette

Canvas: Assignments and other information will be posted on Canvas. If you were not automatically enrolled on the site through pre-registration, contact an instructor to enroll you. All the writing assignments should be submitted through Canvas.

Email: You will receive course announcements by email through Canvas and therefore through your Ball State email account. Be sure to check your BSU email regularly.

When you post to a Canvas Discussion Board, submit an assignment, or send an email to the professor you should make sure it represents your professionalism. Be mindful not to use language that could be considered offensive. Edit your writing so that it stays on topic, is free from grammatical or typographic errors, and clearly conveys your intended message succinctly.

When you send an email to the professor, you must use your BSU email account and include the course number, a subject heading, greeting, courteous message, and complete signature. You should refer to professors according to their professional title (Dr. or Prof. Chen, for example, not Ms. or Mrs.). Emails that are overly informal may be overlooked.

I check my emails twice during the workday at 11:30 am and 3:30 pm. You can expect to receive a response to an email within 48 hours, longer if you send your email during the weekend. I encourage **reading the syllabus or Canvas information page first** before emailing the professor.

Course Readings

Open Access Textbook

- 🕮 Sarah Schneewind, *An Outline History of East Asia to 1200*, 3rd ed. (San Diego: eScholarship, University of California, 2022), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9d699767.

- 🕮 All the readings are available electronically through Canvas.

Recommended Textbook

Charles Holcombe, *A History of East Asia: From the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-First Century*, 3es ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025).
Note: The first edition published in 2017 is available through Internet Archive:
https://archive.org/details/historyofeastasi0000holc

Course Schedule and Weekly Assigned Readings

Please note that the schedule and the assigned readings are tentative and are subject to change based on students' course discussions.

I. What Is East Asia

Week 1 8/24 — 8/30 *Syllabus and Introduction*

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Anne Prescott, "Introducing East Asia," in *East Asia in the World: An Introduction*, ed. Anne Prescott (New York: Routledge, 2015)

Week 2 8/31—9/6 *East Asia or Sinic World*

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Charles Holcombe, "Rethinking Early East Asian History," *Education About Asia* 11, no. 2 (2006): 9-13, http://aas2.asian-studies.org/EAA/EAA-Archives/11/2/653.pdf.

- 🕮 Joshua A. Fogel, "the Sinic World," Asia in Western and World History: A Guide for Teaching, eds. Ainslie Thomas Embree and Carol Gluck (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 683-689.

Week 3 9/7—9/13 *Chopsticks Sphere*

Sep 7 Labor Day no class

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Edward Q. Wang, "Forming a Chopsticks Cultural Sphere: Vietnam, Japan, Korea and Beyond," In *Chopsticks: A Cultural and Culinary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 67-92. **(Group Presentation)**

II. Formative Era

Week 4 9/14—9/20 *Philosophical Formations*

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Anne Walthall, "Philosophers and Warring States During the Eastern Zhou Period (770–256 b.c.e.)," in *Pre-Modern East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History, Volume I: To 1800*, 3 edition (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2013), 20–35

- 🕮 Theodore Wm De Bary, ed., Sources of East Asian Tradition, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 41-125 (note: students will be assigned to read a specific part of this reading).

Week 5 9/21—9/27 *Empire Building: Confucianism, Law, Cosmology*

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Charles Holcombe, "The First Empire; the Han Empire," in *A History of East Asia*, 2nd ed. (2017), 45–59.
- 🕮 Nicola Di Cosmo*, Ancient China and Its Enemies* (2002), ch. 6, excerpt (Han–Xiongnu relations and the making of the tribute framework). **(Group Presentation)**
- 🕮 Primary source: Sima Qian, "Account of the Xiongnu," *Shiji*, excerpts in English (Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian*, or the corresponding selections in Ebrey's sourcebook).

Week 6 9/28—10/4 *Film Analysis*

Hero, directed by Zhang Yimou (2002; Beijing: Beijing New Picture Film Co., Elite Group Enterprises, and Sil-Metropole Organisation, in association with Miramax Films, 2004), DVD.

III. Exchange and Interaction

Week 7 10/5—10/11 *The Sui-Tang International Order: "All-Under-Heaven"*

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Sarah Schneewind, "Tang and Silla," in *An Outline History of East Asia to 1200*.
- 🕮 Wang Zhenping, *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals* (2005), ch. 1, excerpt (the basic structure of Sui-Tang–Japan diplomacy).
- 🕮 Primary source: Ennin's diary of his travels in Tang China, excerpts (Edwin O. Reischauer, trans., *Ennin's Diary*).

Week 8 10/12—10/18 *Buddhism: Pan–East Asian Network*
(no class Oct 12, Fall Break)

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Tansen Sen, "The Spread of Buddhism," in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 5 (2015). **(Group Presentation)**

Week 9 10/19—10/25 *A Multi-State System: Song, Liao, Jin, and a "China Among Equals"*

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Background: Schneewind, "The Commercial Revolution"
- 🕮 Morris Rossabi, "Introduction," in *China Among Equals* (1983).
- 🕮 Tao Jing-shen, "Barbarians or Northerners: Northern Sung Images of the Khitans," in *China Among Equals*
- 🕮 Primary sources: the Chanyuan covenant oath and selected Song–Liao state letters in translation (excerpts from Franke and others).

IV. Challenges and Reordering

Week 10 10/26—11/1 *The Mongol Moment: Eurasian Integration*

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Holcombe, *A History of East Asia*, "Mature Independent Trajectories," 132–147 (the Mongol conquests and East Asia).
- 🕮 David M. Robinson, *In the Shadow of the Mongol Empire* (2020), Introduction, excerpt.
- 🕮 Kim Hodong, "The Unity of the Mongol Empire and Continental Exchanges over Eurasia,"

Week 11 11/2—11/8 *Maritime East Asia*

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Angela Schottenhammer, "The 'China Seas' in World History," *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 1 (2012), excerpt.
- 🕮 Peter Shapinsky, *Lords of the Sea* (2014), Introduction (sea lords and border-crossing identities).
- 🕮 Primary sources: Ming documents on the "wakō" and short selections from the Ryukyuan *Lidai baoan* in translation

Week 12 11/9—11/15 Exchange under "Seclusion"

Assigned Readings

- 🕮 Rebekah Clements, "Brush Talk as the 'Lingua Franca' of Diplomacy in Japanese–Korean Encounters, c. 1600–1868," *The Historical Journal* 62.2 (2019): 289–309. **(Group Presentation)**
- 🕮 Primary source: selections from Korean embassy brush-talk exchanges with Japanese scholars, in translation.

Week 13 11/16—11/22 Final Project Workshop

Final Semester Project

Week 14 11/23—11/29 Review Section

(no class Nov 25 & Nov 27, Thanksgiving)

11/23, Review Section

Week 15 11/30—12/6 Project Presentation

Week 16 12/7 Project Presentation / Wrap-up

Dec 11 Final Project Submission