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Course overview

This course, a seminar for advanced undergraduates and M.A. students, explores themes in the intellectual history of modern East Asia (mainly China and Japan), with an emphasis on political thought. It focuses on the period from the 1870s to the 1960s. A core question for this course concerns the way East Asian thinkers dealt with the incorporation of their societies within a Western-dominated globalization process at the end of the 19th century. The Eurocentric narrative of East Asia’s “response to the West” has been profoundly qualified over the past decades: the intellectual endeavors of modern Chinese and Japanese thinkers must be considered on their own terms, not as mere reactions to an external impulse. However, there is no denying that the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked an epochal transformation of the questions they felt compelled to answer, of the intellectual tools at their disposal, and of the global context they had to come to terms with. The 1860s-1870s will therefore be our starting point. East Asian thinkers faced these challenges in very different ways, by tapping into and adapting rich and diverse intellectual traditions, and by creating new, indigenous lineages of thought over the decades. This process took shape through domestic and cross-Asian discussions as much as through a dialogue with the West – itself a heterogeneous entity.

The course is built around a number of political problems East Asian thinkers grappled with in the modern era, and around the competing solutions they proposed. Four major topics will be addressed in particular: debates over the definition and value of modernity; debates over the continued relevance of East Asian intellectual traditions (mainly through the case of Confucianism); the introduction and uses of Marxism, in social science and political action; China’s and Japan’s redefined places in a world of nations.

Course goals

Given the economic and political significance of East Asian countries, and their intellectual pluralism (even under authoritarian conditions), a basic knowledge of their recent intellectual past is crucial in making sense of today’s world. This course aims at providing the students with such knowledge. Rather than seeking to provide an exhaustive overview, it focuses on selected, key authors and questions, and should be considered an introduction. Students will also be familiarized with the discussions surrounding the nature and method of intellectual history, particularly of transnational and global intellectual history, and will develop their critical reading and argumentative writing skills.


Course Policies

- Attendance and participation
Attendance is compulsory. If a student finds it necessary to miss one class for exceptional reasons, she or he must discuss it with the instructor beforehand.

Since this is a seminar course, it is indispensable that students read the texts assigned each week and participate actively in class discussions, which will be based on the readings.

- **Disability Accommodation**

Students with disabilities are entitled to receive reasonable accommodations necessary for their full participation in the course and all of its requirements. If you are a student with a disability and have a DS-certified ‘Accommodation Letter’ please come to my office hours to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation, you should contact Disability Services at 212-854-2388 and disability@columbia.edu. For more information about accommodations and the process for acquiring them please see the following website: http://www.college.columbia.edu/rightsandresponsibilities.

- **Academic Integrity**

The academic integrity standards applied to this course will mirror those outlined in the University’s official policy statements regarding intellectual honesty. These policies are listed here: http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity-statement. Any violations will be reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs and Community Standards.

**Requirements and grading**

1) **24 hours before each class**, every student will upload on Canvas a short post (300-500 words) summarizing the main takeaways of the week’s readings. Posts will be used by the students and myself to help prepare for discussion. Each week, one or two students (depending on the size of the group) will also present the compulsory readings and start the discussion. Oral participation, presentations and weekly posts will make up **35% of the final grade**.

2) Each student will write a **critical book review** (ca. 1500 words), due on week 8. The book will be agreed on with the lecturer by week 5. A list of suggested works will be provided on the first day, but students are free to come forward with other ideas. The review should synthetize briefly the book’s argument(s) and compare it with divergent views, as well as discuss its contribution to the field as well as any limitations **(20% of the final grade)**.

3) Each student will write a **research paper**, due on week 13. The paper will address a question of the student’s choice after approval by the lecturer. A list of suggested topics will be provided on the first day. Students are welcome to make other suggestions. The research paper should tackle a specific historical question based on diversified and up to date scholarship. Students are expected to confront points of view and defend their own position in a balanced, well-argued and organized manner. A bibliography must be included, as well as detailed references to the works used and cited. Using primary sources (historical documents) is welcome but not required. The expected length of the paper is 12-15 pages for undergraduate students and 15-20 pages for MA students (Times New Roman 12, double spaced). The topic must be set by week 5, a bibliography provided by week 7 and a first draft (at least half the length of the
The research paper accounts for 45% of the final grade.

- Deadlines and extensions

Late work will be sanctioned (minus 5% for each day). Extensions will be granted only in exceptional cases, and only if requested at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline.

SCHEDULE AND WEEKLY READINGS

All the readings listed below are required unless otherwise indicated. The texts that can be accessed online via CLIO are followed by “(CLIO)”. The others will be uploaded on Canvas.

Week 1: Introduction and course administration

Week 2: How do we write (global) intellectual history?


Week 3: Translation, appropriation and power in the making of a global lexicon

Douglas Howland, Translating the West : Language and Political Reason in Nineteenth Century Japan (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), pages 31-152.


Week 4 (February 6): Modernity as ideology in late 19th century Japan


Week 5: The question of Chinese tradition 1: the thesis of obsolescence


Deadline for choosing a research paper topic and a book to review (on day of class)

Week 6: The question of Chinese tradition 2: conservative and radical alternatives


Week 7: The question of Chinese tradition 3: the Neo-Confucian path


Research paper bibliography due on day of class

Week 8: Marxism and social science in Japan


Book review due on day of class
SPRING RECESS

Week 9: Marxism and revolution in China


Prospectus and bibliography due on day of class

Week 10: Overcoming (Western) modernity in Japan


Week 11: The question of colonial modernity in Korea


Draft of research paper due on day of class

Week 12: Postwar modernism in Japan


**Week 13: Debating Politics in Post-revolutionary China**


**Week 14: Locating Japan**


Research paper due on day of class