

Purdue University, Department of History

HISTORY 379

THE CORPORATION IN THE HISTORY OF EAST ASIA, 1700-2003

PLACE AND TIME

Dates: Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 12th January – 8th May 2026

Location: WALC 217

Office Hours: Online, by request

Zoom room: <https://purdue-edu.zoom.us/j/6898881530>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the rise of major corporations in modern East Asia, including China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam, from the 17th to the 20th century. Students will develop skills in contextualising primary sources and scholarly works to form their own insights into the interactions between corporations, society, and the state. Topics include the origins of major corporations, their roles in colonial economies, and their interactions with changing political regimes. Using historical case studies of prominent corporations, ranging from the East India Company through modern powerhouses including Toyota and Samsung, students will chart, select and interpret primary sources. By critically analysing primary sources and scholarly works, students will gain advanced source evaluation, analytical, and writing skills, essential for understanding and interpreting historical narratives.

Students will develop a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics between corporations, society, and state in East Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam). This course provides invaluable insights into the intersections of economic power, political authority, and social change in the modern era.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Examine case studies of major East Asian corporations, to understand their role in shaping regional economies and global markets.
- Analyse the historical trajectory of corporations, their socio-economic impact and political ramifications in East Asia from 1700 to 2003.
- Critically evaluate the complex relationships between corporations, society, and state in East Asia, considering factors such as industrialization, colonialism, and globalisation.
- Develop advanced skills in source evaluation, analytical thinking, and academic writing through choosing appropriate primary sources and scholarly literature.

Previous study of East Asian history, culture, or languages is not required for this course.

Please notify me if you have a learning disability or have physical limitations that require accommodation. We will work together to develop a plan that suits your needs.

REQUIRED TEXTS

[**Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, and Anne Walthall. *Modern East Asia From 1600: A Cultural, Social, and***](#)

[Political History. 3rd ed. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2014.](#)

You do not need to buy any other texts for this class. Readings will be provided in PDF form and will be accessible to all students via an online platform; alternatively, links will be provided, at which you can access the documents.

CONTACT

I can be reached at swijeyer@purdue.edu. Please note that if I receive messages after 1800 I may not be able to reply until after 0900 the next day. Notification of absence or requests for extensions should be communicated as soon as possible; messaging immediately before the deadline is generally unacceptable except under extenuating circumstances.

Please take advantage of my office hours; I want to get to know you and I'm there to help. You may also email if you have questions or concerns, but I may not be able to respond to all emails. If it is important, please speak with me in person.

Emails exchanged between us will be professional communications and should therefore be composed politely and properly. This includes addressing them to me by my title and surname. Please do not message me as if composing a text to a friend. Explanations should be clear and concise. You will be expected to be polite and respectful of others in class.

COURSEWORK

- **Textbook readings**
 - The purpose of the textbook readings is to provide you with an overview of the major changes in the period identified. You need not know every date and name from them, but you must have a sense of:
 - The major changes that occurred in each period
 - The definitions of major concepts
 - Enough detail to be able to explain to someone precisely *what* changed and *why*.
 - If you are stuck regarding what trends, etc., to keep an eye on, use the weekly questions as a guide.
- **In-class readings and discussions.**
 - The purpose of these is to focus on one particular area of the period identified. For example, within the broader issue of European colonialism, the secondary reading will focus on the economic impact of British imperialism in India.
 - Read these documents with a view to getting a sense of:
 - What the big trends identified in the textbook look like at a more regional level
 - What debates are happening about this particular period and its changes *within* the historical community
- **Sectional Videos [3 x 20%]**
 - After every section, you must submit a short video of between **3 and 4 minutes**.
 - Videos outside of this time limit will be penalised 5% for every extra/lacking minute.
 - Please select **ONE** of the Video Questions listed at the end of every section to answer. Your video should answer the question you have chosen.
 - You **MUST** use the textbooks and primary sources provided for that week.

- Please title the videos as follows: SURNAME, FIRST NAME, Section X - e.g., SMITH, JOHN, Section I.
- **Final essay [2 x 20%]**
 - For your final essay, **please discuss and confirm your topic with me before beginning.**
 - Half of the grade will be given for a rigorous **plan and thesis**.
 - The other half will be for your **completed essay**.
 - Your final essay must be between **1350 and 1650 words long**.
 - Submissions outside of this time limit will be penalised 5% for every extra/lacking 100 words.
 - You **MUST** use at least **four** primary sources in your essay. The sources can be from any section.
 - **Make sure you read the formatting guidance for essays provided below.** Essays that are not formatted, footnoted, or properly grammatical will be penalised at the instructors' discretion.

Make sure you read the guidance linked [here](#) for essays.

Essays that are not formatted, footnoted, or properly grammatical will be penalised at the instructors' discretion.

- Students unable to complete an assignment by the due date should consult their instructor as early as possible to discuss an extension.
- Extensions are not normally granted for reasons of work due in other courses or extra-curricular activities, but may be granted for reasons of illness or a death in the family. Any extension granted must be confirmed by email from the instructor. In no case will an extension of more than one week be granted. Students submitting written assignments late without an extension are penalised at the rate of one grade per day of lateness.

PARTICIPATION AND IN-CLASS BEHAVIOUR

I will try my level best not to make this class boring, but in return I expect you to pay attention and engage with the subject matter.

- Students who sleep, are consistently tardy, do not read the materials, and/or are otherwise not paying attention in class will see their behaviour impacting this mark.
- Please familiarise yourself with the university's policies on:
 - [Academic honesty](#) (www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academic-integrity/index.html)
 - [Use of copyrighted materials](#) (www.purdue.edu/policies/academic-research-affairs/ia3.html)
 - [Attendance and other regulations](#)
(www.purdue.edu/studentregulations/regulations_procedures/classes.html)
- Please turn off all cell phones and pagers. E-mailing or web-surfing via your laptop is also not appropriate. Such distractions will affect your participation grade.
- Depending on the location, you may be allowed to eat or drink in the classroom, but please do not distract other students; if you do, your participation will be affected.
- All work, including readings and web postings, missed due to absence must be made up before the next scheduled class meeting.
- **Attendance is not optional**, but with prior notice you may miss one class without incurring any penalty. Except in the case of genuine and documented emergencies, such absences must be

confirmed with me via email before class begins.

- **Students with more than 3 unexcused absences will receive a -5% penalty to their score.**

Lectures and classroom discussions may not be recorded in any medium other than notes.

COURSE GUIDE

Items in red designate items that must be prepared before you come to class; failure to do so will affect your participation score.

Items in bold red are graded items that must be finished by the date indicated in order to receive points.

ALL READINGS FOR THE COURSE CAN BE FOUND HERE
PLEASE DO ALL OF YOUR WRITTEN WORK IN THIS FOLDER

Week 1: Basic Historical Theory (Mon 12/01, Wed 14/01, Fri 16/01)

- **Introduction**
 - [TL;DR](#)
 - [Slides on key historical concepts](#)
 - [Essay guidelines](#)
- **Secondary reading/watching**
 - [Birkbeck Explains: What is Global History?](#)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3upKyJsaRI>)
 - [The School of Life: History of Ideas - Modernity](#)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIdflecvQG8>)
- **Discussions**
 - What are the key differences between the historical visions of Karl Marx and Max Weber?
 - What are the key differences between Friedrich Hegel's viewpoint and that of Michel Foucault?
 - If you had to choose just two of these concepts to teach someone else, what would they be, and why?

Week 2: China, 1644-1860 (Mon 19/01, Wed 21/01, Fri 23/01)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 16, 18
- **In-class:**
 - Sources: Week 2 sources
 - Discussion question: What were the main economic challenges facing China in the 19th century, and what caused them?

Week 3: Japan, 1600-1867 (Mon 26/01, Wed 28/01, Fri 30/01)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 19
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 3, Howell
 - **Discussion question:** What specific circumstances encouraged the emergence of large trading houses in Edo period Japan?
 - **Video 1 due**

Week 4: Korea and Vietnam, 1800-1910 (Mon 02/02, Wed 04/02, Fri 06/02)

- **Lecture**

- **Textbook reading:** ch. 21, 23
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 4 sources
 - **Discussion:** How did Korea and Vietnam each respond to rising external pressures in the 19th century, and what do these responses reveal about the political and economic conditions that shaped their ability—or inability—to develop large corporate or commercial institutions before colonial rule?

Week 5: Japan's Early Corporations, 1867-1905 (Mon 09/02, Wed 11/02, Fri 13/02)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 20
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 5, Ozaki
 - **Discussion question:** How did Japan's early industrial corporations transform Tokugawa-era commercial institutions, and what does this continuity or rupture suggest about the Meiji state's strategy for economic modernisation?

Week 6: Reform and Capital in China, 1860-1912 (Mon 16/02, Wed 18/02, Fri 20/02)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 24
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 6 sources, Elman
 - **Discussion question:** To what extent were late Qing industrial reforms genuine attempts to build modern corporate institutions, and how far were they limited by the political and social structures of the dynasty?
 - **Video 2 due**

Week 7: Corporations and Industry in the Japanese Empire, 1895-1945 (Mon 23/02, Wed 25/02, Fri 27/02)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 22
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 7 sources, Nishiyama
 - **Discussion question:** How did incorporation into the Japanese empire reshape the goals, organisation, and behaviour of Japanese industrial firms, and what does this reveal about the relationship between empire and corporate expansion?

Week 8: Corporations and the Colonies – Taiwan and Korea, 1895-1945 (Mon 02/03, Wed 04/03, Fri 06/03)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 23
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 8 sources, Roy

- **Discussion question:** In what ways did colonial conditions in Taiwan and Korea alter the balance of power between corporations, local societies, and the Japanese state, and how did these dynamics differ across the two colonies?

Week 9: Corporations, Communism, and China, 1912-1973 (Mon 09/03, Wed 11/03, Fri 13/03)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 25, 27
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 9, Duara
 - **Discussion question:** How did successive Chinese governments—from the Republic to the early PRC—reinterpret the role of corporations in society, and what does this tell us about how political ideology shapes economic organisation?
 - **Video 3 due**

Week 10: HALF TERM BREAK (Mon 16/03, Wed 18/03, Fri 20/03)

Week 11: The *keiretsu* and the Japanese Miracle, 1945-1993 (Mon 23/03, Wed 25/03, Fri 27/03)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 26
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 11, Spear and Bowen
 - **Discussion question:** How did the keiretsu system enable Japan's postwar "economic miracle," and what structural weaknesses or contradictions did this model contain beneath its apparent success?
 - **Response Paper (thesis and plan)**

Week 12: The Miracle on the River Han, 1970-2003 (Mon 30/03, Wed 01/04, Fri 03/04)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 28
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 12
 - **Discussion question:** How did Korea's chaebol system balance state direction with entrepreneurial autonomy, and why did this combination prove so effective for rapid industrialisation?
 - **Response Paper (thesis and plan)**

Week 13: Corporations and the Chinese Miracle, 1973-2003 (Mon 06/04, Wed 08/04, Fri 10/04)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 30
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 13, Su
 - **Discussion question:** What distinguishes the corporate landscape of post-1973 China from both the earlier socialist period and the Japanese and Korean models, and how did these

differences shape China's rise?

- **Response Paper (peer editing first draft)**

Week 14: NO CLASSES (Mon 13/04, Wed 15/04, Fri 17/04)

Week 15: The Marketing of Culture in Japan, 1953-2003 (Mon 20/04, Wed 22/04, Fri 24/04)

- **Lecture**
- **Textbook reading:** ch. 29
- **In-class:**
 - **Sources:** Week 15, Hein
 - **Discussion question:** How does Japan's postwar cultural economy illustrate the intersection of corporate strategy, national identity, and global consumer markets, and what can this tell us about the role of culture in late-20th-century capitalism?
 - **Response Paper (peer editing first draft)**

Week 16: Picnic with dogs (Mon 27/04, Wed 29/04, Fri 01/05)

- **Response Paper (peer editing first draft) due 8th May**