

GENDER IN EAST ASIAN HISTORY

MWF 12:30, 3 credits



Purposes of the Course: To “see” relations of power in everyday life; to understand the concept of gender and how it has played out in the societies of China, Japan, and Korea; to instill an appreciation of other cultures; and to create an understanding of historical methods.

Important themes in this course

- The impact of ideologies such as Confucianism on family life and gender roles within the family, as well as the possibility of marriage, divorce, and motherhood, as well as life courses, such as boyhood and girlhood to the elderly
- The influence of imperialism and industrialization: labor within the household and outside homes
- The impact of the consumer revolution: purchasing power, and marketing toward women

- The impact of the Pacific War: the contribution of women to the military, forced or unforced conscription and rape and/or sexual service such as through comfort women, the effect of war on home front

HUM-FLO Skills

1. Recognize and describe humanistic, historical, or artistic works or problems and patterns of the human experience.
 - Outline some basic historical patterns in East Asia (with reference to the themes of the course)
 - Recognize the way that gendered expectations and experiences differ across East Asia and from the 19th century to the present
2. Apply disciplinary methodologies, epistemologies, and traditions of the humanities and the arts, specifically:
 - Identifying gendered (male and female) as well as generational gaze
 - Deconstruct arguments
 - Understand how evidence is used in building arguments
3. Analyze and evaluate texts, works, objects, events, or ideas in their cultural, intellectual, or historical contexts.
4. Create, interpret, or reinterpret artistic and/or humanistic works through performance, analysis, or criticism.
 - Select and pair illustrations and film with text
 - Explain how and why certain images are specific to particular “gender regimes”
 - Construct an online exhibit that synthesizes information
5. Analyze diverse narratives and evidence in order to explore the complexity of human experience across space and time, specifically across East Asia from the 19th century to the postwar period.
 - Identify the ideologies that influence the gendered way that people in East Asia have organized families or economies.
6. Describe the history, literature, languages, arts, philosophy, religion, or traditions of other world cultures, specifically East Asia.

Learning Outcomes

1. Identify key themes in East Asian cultural history.
2. Explain primary sources, such as texts, advertisements, and film, from the lens of gender and generational analysis.
3. Discuss scholarly arguments in relation to primary sources; deconstruct those arguments and evaluate them in light of their use of primary sources.
4. Synthesize information, based on key themes, by connecting primary and secondary sources.
5. Construct evidence-based interpretations of important questions in East Asian cultural history

COURSE ELEMENTS

1. **Participation** includes attendance, discussion online and in small groups, and general engagement. 10%
2. **Pre-Workshop assignments.** (25%) These assignments are due **before** class. Everyone must do them even if they are absent from class; late assignments will only be accepted if it is a situation in which the student needs to miss the workshop.
 - Stranger in the Shogun's City
 - Masculinity from the Tokugawa to the Meiji
 - Selling Shisedo
 - Joseon Korea
 - Picturing Colonial Japan
 - Linglong Magazine
 - Wartime Chongqing
 - Comfort Women
3. **Workshop worksheets, in-class writing and discussion.** (30%) Together with your small group partners, fill out the worksheets by writing paragraphs. These worksheets are meant to help you build skills and to think about methods. They are graded on a pass-fail basis.
 - Stranger in the Shogun's City
 - Masculinity from the Tokugawa to the Meiji
 - Joseon Korea and Sweet
 - Picturing Colonial Japan
 - **Footnotes and primary sources**
 - Selling Shisedo
 - Linglong Magazine
 - Wartime Chongqing
 - Comfort Women
 - **Additional in-class writing**
4. **Film assignment.** 15% Select a scene from one of the assigned films. Write 100 words describing the portrayal of gender in the film.
 - "Sweet Dream"
 - "Goddess"
 - "Playthings"
 - "Shusenjo"
 - "The Insect Woman"

*For ***one*** of the assignments, read an optional book chapter or article to reference in your response; the recommended readings are listed on the syllabus next to the dates that we are watching these films. This film assignment is worth more at 10%*

5. **Capstone Assignment.** 15% Over the course of the semester, you will be practicing textual, film, and image analysis, and what happens when you deconstruct or juxtapose those elements together. In the final assignment, you will create an online exhibit through

storymaps. (Don't worry about the technology, which is easy to use; if you have a lot of trouble with it, you can always do a PowerPoint instead.) As part of this online exhibit, you will:

- a. Select a title which reflects your theme and topic
 - b. Create an opening page to introduce your exhibit
 - c. Select at least one film clip from the course and read an additional article about the film to incorporate into your depiction of it
 - d. Select at least 4 images from our class workshops and 4 additional images and/or film clips that you find
 - e. Find and read two additional journal articles
 - f. Caption all of the materials in your exhibit
 - g. Include a map of where your materials are situated
 - h. Create a bibliography of all materials used in your exhibit
 - i. Write a reflection on what you learned from the process of putting the exhibit together.
- 6. Final Presentation.** 5% If you are unable to attend in person, you can zoom with the class and/or present a video.

Attendance policy: Confucius said that you need to preserve your health, which is a gift from your parents. If you are ill, stay home and take care of yourself. But to be excused, you need to (1) email me to let me know; (2) do the equivalent of what we've done in class for submission within a week of your absence; *there are instructions in the syllabus as to how to do this.*

Assignments: Please check BrightSpace for information on readings and assignments. Please note that your final grade incorporates assignments that you will be turning in during class time, and thus your final grade may not be accurately reflected on BrightSpace.

Required readings (for purchase):

[Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun's City*](#)

Min Jin Lee, *Pachinko*

Rao Pingru, *Our Story*

**Additional articles on BrightSpace*

LECTURES, DISCUSSIONS, AND READINGS

Week 1

M 8/25 Introduction to gender and East Asia: Vocabulary and Methods

W 8/27 Do robots have gender?

Read: Robertson, Jennifer. "Gendering Humanoid Robots: Robo-Sexism in Japan." *Body & Society* 16, no. 2 (2010): 1–36. doi:10.1177/1357034X10364767.

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please email the instructor the reason for your absence and a paragraph response to this question, based on your reading of this article.

F 8/29 Confucianism and the Tokugawa (Lecture and discussion)

Read Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun's City* (19th century), chapters 1-3

Please note that if you attend class, you do not have to finish the reading on this day.

As you are reading, think about the following questions:

- What most surprised you?
- What most moved you?
- What did you learn about Tokugawa Japan that you did not know before?

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please look at the powerpoint on BrightSpace; do the reading; email the instructor the reason for your absence and also a paragraph response to one of these questions.

Due on midnight on Friday: Self-Introduction (BrightSpace Discussion Board)

Week 2

M 9/1 **Labor Day, no school**

W 9/3 Lecture: What factors allowed for women's mobility in Tokugawa Japan?

Read Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun's City*, chapters 4-6

As you are reading, think about the following questions:

- What most surprised you?
- What most moved you?
- What did you learn about Tokugawa Japan that you did not know before?

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please email the instructor the reason for your absence and a paragraph response to these questions.

Thu 9/4 Assignment (due at noon on BrightSpace): Select a passage from the *Stranger in the Shogun's City* and one among a database of [Japanese woodcuts](#) (Ronin Gallery). Pair the two together

in a way that makes sense to you. Upload this image and passage to the BrightSpace discussion board.

F 9/5: Read Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun's City*, chapters 6-9

As you are reading, think about the following questions:

- What most surprised you?
- What most moved you?
- What did you learn about Tokugawa Japan that you did not know before?

Panel discussion: Present your assignment to your partners in class. Explain why or how the text and image resonate with each other. Work together to publish an illustrated summary of part of the book. Why were these parts especially interesting, surprising, or representative?

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to these questions, and publish an illustrated and annotated summary of part of the book.

Week 3

M 9/8 Discuss: How did social expectations differ for Japanese in the Tokugawa, based on gender, status (and other factors)? Compare Roberts with what you have learned from Stanley.

- Read Luke Roberts, ["Growing up Manly: Male Samurai Childhood"](#)

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the class reading.

W 9/10 Discuss: How did constructions of masculinity change as peasants were drafted into the military for the first time in Japan?

Read Cook, Theodore F., Jr. "Making 'Soldiers': The Imperial Army and the Japanese Man in Meiji Society and State." In Molony, Barbara and Kathleen Uno. Editors. *Gendering Modern Japanese History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the class reading.

Th 9/12 **Assignment (due at noon on BrightSpace):** Find an image of a soldier from the MIT Visualizing Cultures database and a second image of a samurai from the Japanese woodcuts in the MIT Visualizing Cultures, ["Throwing off Asia"](#).

F 9/12 **Panel discussion:** Share your assignment with your partners. How did each of you make your selections? Given what you know from Roberts and Cook, how has your knowledge of history informed the way that you see these images? If you were to put together a virtual exhibit about Japanese masculinity, how would you organize it? How would you introduce the exhibit and caption the materials?

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to these questions.

Week 4

M 9/15 Wrap up on Japan; lecture on Confucianism in Chosŏn Korea

Optional reading **if you need to miss class**, or if you are confused by lecture: “Propagating Female Virtues in Chosŏn Korea,” Ch. 6, [*Women and Confucian Cultures*](#)

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the reading above; use page numbers and show that you have done the reading.

W 9/17 Discussion: How did Lady Hyegyong contend with Confucian expectations?

- Read [*The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong*](#) (Intro, Memoir of 1795 and Memoir of 1805)

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the class reading.

Thu 9/18 Can you find an image that speaks to the material culture surrounding Lady Hyegyong? Find one image and explain how or why it fits or does not.

- [The Korean Collection at the Smithsonian](#)
- [The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (keyword “Joseon”)
- [Harvard Art Museum](#) (keyword “Korea”)

F 9/19 **No class meeting. Watch** [“Sweet Dream” \(Mimong, aka Death’s Lullaby, dir. Yang Ju-nam, 1936\)](#)

Assignment due on Monday: Select a scene from “Sweet Dream.” How is gender portrayed in the film? How would you compare that depiction of gender with what you know of Lady Hyegyong and female virtue in Chosŏn Korea?

Optional reading: [Taylor-Jones, “Shopping, Sex, and Lies”](#)

Week 5

M 9/29 Discussion of “Sweet Dream” and the “gendered lens” ; material culture

W 10/1 Read *Pachinko*, Introduction and Book 1 (1910-1933)

As you are reading, think about the following questions:

- What most surprised you?
- What most moved you?
- **How does genre impact this story? How is it different from the memoirs of Lady Hyegyong?**

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to the question in bold based on the class reading.

F 10/3 Read *Pachinko*, Book 2 (1939-1962)

As you are reading, think about the following questions:

- What most surprised you?
- What most moved you?
- What did you learn about Korea's relationship to Japan that you did not know before?

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to the question in bold based on the class reading.

Week 6

M 9/29 Discussion: How and why was Japan a place for new ideas in East Asia?

Read Peter Zarrow, "He Zhen."

As you are reading, consider the following:

- What made He Zhen different or unique among her community?
- How did He Zhen's gender influence her political views?
- What is the purpose of learning about individuals who are not representative?

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the class reading.

W 10/1 Can men speak for women? How and why would they want to?

In-class workshop on footnotes and primary sources

- Read He Yin Zhen, "[Feminist Manifesto](#)"
- Optional reading: Ye Shengtao, "[Is this also a Human Being?](#)"
- Optional reading: Chen Wangdao, "[The Incident of Miss Xi](#)"

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please find the worksheet on BrightSpace and fill it out.

Thu 10/2 Picturing Colonial Japan/East Asia

Find an image of a colonized space in one of these databases. What marks it as a colonized space?

OR: How does it connect to one of the passages/texts we've read in this class?

- [Lafayette East Asia Image Collection](#)
- [Virtual Cities](#)

F 10/3 Film: "Goddess"

Film Assignment: Select one scene from the film. How is gender portrayed in the film? Select one reading from the course to help illuminate or inform your understanding. (Due Monday)

Optional reading: [Harris, "Goddess"](#)

Week 7

M 10/6 Discussion of “Goddess” / Workshop on Picturing Colonial Spaces

W 10/8 Discussion: What is potentially liberatory (or not) about consumerism?

Read Barbara Sato, “Contesting Consumerisms in Mass Women’s Magazines”

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the class reading.

Thu 10/9 **Assignment due on BrightSpace:** Select an image from the MIT Visualizing Cultures database, “Selling Shisedo.” What type of image is it? What was its function? When was it printed? How would you use this image to help explain Sato’s article? Write a short, 100-word synopsis response to these questions and share with your partners on BrightSpace.

F 10/10 **Panel Discussion:** Compare images with your partners. How does Sato’s article help to explain these images? If you were to make an online exhibit about female consumerism, where would these materials appear?

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please connect via zoom to your partners in class.

Week 8

10/13: No school

10/15: Discuss: How/is homosexuality different from other gendered patterns we’ve studied in class?

- Read Gary Wang, “Opposite Love”

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the class reading.

10/16: **Assignment:** Select an image from [Ling long women’s magazine](#). What type of image is it? What was its function? When was it printed? How would you use this image to help explain Sato’s article? Write a short, 100-word response to these questions and share with your partner.

10/17: **Panel discussion:** Compare images with your partners. How does Sato’s article help to explain these images? If you were to make an online exhibit about female consumerism, where would these materials appear?

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please connect via zoom to your partners in class.

Week 9

10/20: Catch up Day

10/22: **Gender, Labor Markets and the Economy in the Interwar Era**

Read *Our Story*, “Our Childhood Years”

10/24: No class meeting. Watch: [“Playthings”](#)

Film Assignment due Monday: Select one scene from the film. How is gender portrayed in the film? Select one reading from the course to help illuminate or inform your understanding. (Due Monday)

Optional reading: Jones, "[Playthings of History](#)"

Week 10

10/27: Discussion of "Playthings"/images of children in wartime

10/29: World War II

Read *Our Story*, "I go to War"; "A Dab of Red Lipstick"; "Journeying Side by Side"

10/30: **Assignment due:** Select a woman from [Echoes of Wartime Chongqing](#) to profile. Before class, submit to BrightSpace your worksheet response.

10/31: Workshop: How did war affect women and children?

Panel presentation: Present information about the woman you profiled. What surprised you about her story or the conditions under which she lived?

Week 11

11/3: Lecture: The Rape of Nanjing and the Institutionalization of Comfort Women

11/5: Discuss: How did war affect women and children in Japan?

Read Fruhstruck, "Children and the War of Emotions" [BS]

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the class reading.

11/7: Discuss: How did war affect everyday life?

Read *Our Story*, "Crossroads"; "You Ask Me When I will Return"

Week 12

11/10: No class meeting. Watch: [Shushenjo](#) (2018)

Due 11/11: Select an image from the Rowe collection or from online:
<https://guides.library.duke.edu/comfortwomen/primary> or another online database.

11/12: Discussion of "Shushenjo" and Comfort Women: How and why are images collected or destroyed?

11/14: How did demographic change benefit Korea and Japan?

Read Pachinko, Book 3 (1962-1989)

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the class reading.

Week 13

11/17: How did reforms shape the Chinese family?

Read *Our Story*, “Now You Are Gone,” “The Passing of the Seasons”

If you are ill and unable to attend the class meeting, please write out a paragraph response to this question based on the class reading.

11/19: **No class meeting.** Watch: “The Insect Woman” (1963) on Kanopy.

Film Assignment: Select one scene from the film. How is gender portrayed in the film? Select one reading from the course to help illuminate or inform your understanding. (Due Monday)

Optional Reading: Raine, “The Insect Woman, or: The Female Art of Failure” [see BS]

11/21: Discussion of “The Insect Woman” and postwar East Asian families

Week 14: Thanksgiving

Monday: Optional online office hours

Week 15: Independent Work

M-F: Instructor will be in the classroom for optional consultation on final projects

12/5: Final project due at midnight

Week 16: Final Panel Presentations

**Syllabus subject to change.*

Updated August 1, 2025

Some additional readings if you are interested:

[Iron Girls](#)

Daughters of the Bear

“The Good Wife of Tokyo”

Reisel, Mary. "Girl Power, Transgression and the Embodiment of the Image: The Rise of Enjo-Kōsai and Hyper-Sexual Economy in Post-Bubble Japan." *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 3, no. 1 (2017): 23–37. doi:10.1386/eapc.3.1.23_1.