

COURSE OUTLINE  
Cultural History of Medieval and Early Modern Korea

In this course, we will examine key topics in the cultural history of Korea between 1000 and 1800, including collective identity, technologies of knowledge production and dissemination, and engagements with the outside world. Most assigned readings are provided in translation. Graduate students are expected to contribute translations from original language sources. Students will receive training in historical methods for interpreting past cultures.

Topic A. Nativism: How Koreans Conceived of Themselves  
medieval invention of native antiquity

collective identity: Three Han 三韓, Eastern Kingdom 東國, the East 東方, “our country” 我邦  
“miniature of Sinitic civilization” discourse 小中華論: Koryŏ origins, post-Ming politicization  
Neo-Classicism: essays about collective self-reliance, expansion of literary audience  
comparisons with modern nationalism: Remco Breuker, Benedict Anderson, David Bell

Topic B. Books: How Koreans Wrote Themselves  
manuscript culture, calligraphy, pedagogic texts  
introduction and proliferation of print technologies

the carving of *Tripitaka Koreana* in Koryŏ  
movable types: high quality metal types at court, itinerant printer-peddlers in the countryside  
book markets: Yellow Sea trade in Koryŏ, geographic constraints in Chosŏn  
reading practices: breadth, intensity, contemplation, silent, aloud, recitation

Topic C. Western Learning: What Koreans Learned From Others

encounters with European knowledge: astronomy, geography, calendrical science  
religious conversion: begins spontaneously in the absence of missionaries and priests  
Catholicism for moral self-cultivation: Donald Baker on Tasan’s Neo-Confucian theism  
persecution begins: court politics, spread of late-Ming trends, challenges to state hegemony  
communities in exile: potters, underground mass  
from Western Learning to Eastern Learning: how Catholicism contributed to Tonghak 東學

Topic D. Travel: What Koreans Wrote About Others

middle Koryŏ: competition with continental powers, commercial activities in Song  
Mongol rule: accounts of Dadu, Yi Chehyŏn’s travels in Tibet  
the Jurchen question: colonization of Hamgyŏng region, regional stereotypes  
romanticization of the provinces: excursions of later-Chosŏn courtiers, landscape paintings  
tributary missions: Jehol Diaries, desire for exotic items, translator-traders  
maps: familiar world, mythical lands, the West, borderlands  
Japan: Haedong chegguk ki 海東諸國紀 (1443), ‘dream journey’ narratives 夢遊錄

Methodology

early Annales school: Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel, historical temporalities  
*histoire des mentalités*: Jacques LeGoff (medieval), Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (early modern)  
sociocultural history: Roger Chartier, Peter Burke, Robert Darnton, Lynn Hunt  
do French historical methods apply to the study of Korea?