

COURSE OUTLINE  
History of the Korean Civilization: Early Times to 1800

This course surveys the history of the Korean civilization from the early times to 1800. We will explore the ebb and flow of preindustrial Korea while reading closely a selection of important primary sources. Students will be trained to think critically and constructively about the dominant historiographical positions, both traditional and modern, that has informed the field.

Historiography

traditional interpretations: foundation myths, dynastic genealogies, unofficial histories  
colonial stagnation theory and nationalist historiography  
modernization paradigms: internal development theory, aristocratic/bureaucratic balance thesis  
new modes of research: the cultural turn, transnational perspectives, court/province relations

Module 1: Early Korea in Continental Contexts

“antiquity”: as a medieval construction, as a twentieth-century reinvention  
early settlements: the spread of agriculture, storage practices  
state formation: eastern expansion of imperial China, Han Commanderies  
“three kingdoms” era: Kaya, Paekche, and Silla; the imperial structure of Koguryŏ

Module 2: Middle and Late Silla: Peninsular Society and Maritime Exchange

a segregated society: bone-rank aristocratic order, capital/outer territories divide  
diplomacy and Tang hegemony: Yellow Sea trade, extraterritorial enclaves in Shandong  
Buddhism: reception, spread, and Hwaŏm synthesis

Module 3: Early Koryŏ: Institutional Experiments and Multistate Order

institutional instability: hostage system, ennoblement, feudal estates, military protectorates  
trilateral diplomacy: Liao/Northern Song/Koryŏ deadlock  
Yellow Sea trade: Koryŏ as middleman, books, espionage, celadon production

Module 4: “The Civilizing Projects”

first wave of Neo-Classicism: Ŭich’ŏn witnesses New Policies, reform proposals  
the Jurchen question: the ethnic other, important impetus for instigating institutional changes  
second wave of Neo-Classicism: normalization of Jin/Southern Song/Koryŏ, as court culture  
Mongol rule: tripartite division of Koryŏ, Neo-Classicism/Neo-Confucianism synthesis in Dadu  
dynastic change: a coup from the northeast, incorporation of Mongol-era bureaucratic families  
a new diplomatic order: Ming imperial hegemony, exclusion from Yellow Sea trade

Module 5: The High Chosŏn Conundrum

two modes of social organization: bureaucratic 郡縣 and communitarian 封建 orders  
saturation of court membership: prohibition of patronage, failed strategies of inclusion  
state intrusion: the spread of community compacts, growth of functionaries and sinecure officials  
local backlash: Neo-Confucianism, private academies, militia groups, righteous armies  
Neo-Confucianism: inspiration from Learning of the Mind, *sijo*, four masters  
Imjin War and Manchu invasions: diplomatic significance, politicization of Ming loyalism  
alienation of the provinces: urban/provincial stereotypes, state-resistant local organizations