



# Introduction to Asian Studies

Block 4

Colorado College

2025

# PA111 Introduction to Asian Studies

This course begins from the premise that “Asia” is not a fixed geography on a map, but a fluid and contested entity with porous borders and vibrant lines of intersection. As an introductory course, it opens multiple pathways for studying Asia—across disciplines, national borders, and historical periods. We draw on methods from anthropology, history, politics, cultural studies, and beyond. Moving from K-pop to shamanic rituals, from nation-building projects to environmental struggles and everyday acts of care, we work with a wide range of materials: visual and textual sources, museum objects and archival documents, maps, films, literature, and lived experiences. We trace how “Asia,” in all its diverse yet deeply interconnected parts, has come to be shaped by empire and war, trade and migration, religious encounters, gendered and sexual politics, popular culture, and global capitalism. Grounding our learning in specific local contexts, we unsettle simple West–Rest binaries and cultivate cross-cultural curiosity and accountability. Throughout the block, we approach Asian Studies as a field that must continually reflect on its own role in producing knowledge and power and as an exciting, evolving discipline undergoing self-renovation for the new global era we inhabit.

**Instructor:** Mengqi “Mercy” An, Ph.D.

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**Regular class meetings:** 9:30 AM - 12:00 PM, Armstrong Hall 259B

**Office hours:** Tue & Wed, 1:30 - 3:00 PM, Interdisciplinary House, Room 201

## Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate a grounded understanding of Asia as a fluid, interconnected, and historically shaped region through learning cultural traditions, historical transformations, literary and visual forms, and contemporary issues.
- Identify and critically engage with major debates in Asian Studies, including questions of representation, power, empire, migration, gender, popular culture, and the politics of knowledge production.
- Practice close reading and close watching, using both critical and creative methods to analyze meaning, style, form, performance, and context across texts, films, maps, museum objects, and other materials.
- Reflect on how power, equity, and positionality shape knowledge, especially as they intersect with gender, colonialism, nationalism, race, and East–West dynamics and articulate your own place within these conversations.

- Connect global questions to local contexts, showing how Asian histories and cultural practices intersect with lived experiences, communities, and institutions (including right here in Colorado).
- Develop interdisciplinary thinking, drawing on tools from anthropology, history, literature, politics, and cultural studies to interpret complex cultural phenomena.
- Write down your own learning goals for this block. What do you hope to gain from this course that will support your learning journey and personal growth at Colorado College and beyond?

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## *Policy*

### Student Wellness

**Your well-being in learning is my priority.** One of the main goals of this course is to cultivate curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking—and all of these seeds need well-cared-for mental space to grow. To honor wellness practices, I have built one wellness day into our class schedule. On this day, you are not expected to do coursework and should instead focus on caring for yourself in ways that work best for you. If you would prefer to take your wellness day on a different date, please reach out to me in advance. I will assign you the tasks scheduled for the built-in wellness day so you can take your chosen day off instead—no questions asked, no documentation required.

**We often need more support than we ask for.** If you or someone you know is struggling, please make use of supportive campus and community resources at Colorado College Mental Health Promotion. The Wellness Resource Center also provides support for you.

### Attendance

Attendance is essential in this course. Both class meetings, the field trip and the film screening are mandatory.

If a class meeting or major deadline conflicts with your predictable religious or cultural observances, please let me know by the first Wednesday so that we can make an arrangement that is both supportive and meaningful.

Unexcused absences will negatively impact your attendance grade. However, I value communication, sincerity, and your effort to learn, and I am open to negotiating meaningful accommodations for unpredictable emergent issues that support your well-being and schedule.

How to request an excused absence: If you cannot attend class due to an unexpected illness or personal circumstance (e.g., family emergency, mental health needs), please email me **before** class. Your message must include **supporting documentation**—such as a doctor’s note, an athletic training schedule, evidence of attempts to reschedule, or relevant correspondence related to the emergency. I trust your integrity, but I require clear evidence to **ensure fairness and consistency** for everyone in the class.

## Artificial Intelligence

Yes, AI is here to stay. As an educator, I see the ability to engage it critically as a core competence for the future workforce and society, and it is part of our collective responsibility as members of a civil society to assess and shape its use, rather than shy away from it. But in the context of higher education, you do not want to give away your own original and critical thinking, nor the hard-earned opportunity to study at Colorado College. I urge you to make your choices about AI deliberately.

This class gives you the option to choose: to use or not to use, *that is the question*.

If you choose to use AI, you are required to do additional intellectual work and submit a three-page reflective essay on AI use at the end of the block, due Wednesday of Week 4 at noon. You will reflect on your interactions with it, explain how it improves your efficiency and learning, and critically examine its role and presence in your life and by extension, the broader CC community. No AI may be involved in writing these reflective reports.

AI use is defined as using any part of an AI-generated response in your submitted work, including discussion board posts and oral presentations.

What does *not* count as AI usage: If you ask AI to *summarize* a reading and you only read the summary without using any of its wording, ideas, or structure in your own writing or oral presentation, this is considered *consuming* AI content (similar to consuming an scholarly article) and does not count as AI usage.

What *does* count as AI usage: If you use any part of the AI’s phrasing, edits, structure, organization, or bibliography in your submission, that counts as AI usage. This includes:

- Using AI-generated sentences or ideas in your writing
- Using AI-suggested edits, rewordings, or structural changes
- Using AI-generated bibliographies or citations
- Using AI to check grammar, flow, or clarity *and* incorporating those changes into your final submitted work

You will *not* be penalized for using AI and your work will be evaluated solely on its quality. But if AI plays a role beyond your control, trust me, the quality of your papers will suffer. Failure to attribute AI usage to the best of your ability and in good faith *is* plagiarism.

**Please email me your AI choice by the end of the first Monday.** Whichever option you choose, I support you and I want you to trust yourself in this learning journey and claim the chance for your own growth. You are the one who does the reading, comes to class discussions, and lives through the questions that matter to you in flesh and blood. You are taking this learning experience to *your* future.

## Honor Code

Using the ideas of another person—be it a professional writer, speaker, or a classmate or friend—without proper acknowledgment constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is a particularly significant issue in this course, because you will collect some of your data in groups, and you will be citing others' work in your research articles. All of your papers, including the group paper, must be your own. Do not take this issue lightly. You are responsible for reading, understanding, and adhering to the guidelines for acknowledging the work of others as outlined in *MLA Handbook on plagiarism and academic dishonesty*: <https://style.mla.org/plagiarism-and-academic-dishonesty/>. In addition, please see the *Pathfinder* for information on the Honor Code and CC's policies on academic theft. Even when it is unintended, plagiarism carries with it significant disciplinary action. Ignorance of the guidelines is not an acceptable excuse for violations of the Honor Code.

## Technology

Laptops are allowed in class when used for accessing readings or class materials. Please be mindful that screens create physical obstructions which have mental effects that often discourage fully engaged communication. When actively listening in class, please fold or half-fold your laptop screen. For jotting down notes, consider using paper or a tablet so the screen isn't up all the time.

Please do not message or text during class meeting time.

## Accessibility

I am committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you anticipate or experience any disability-related barriers to learning in this course, please discuss your concerns and/or approved accommodation with me. I would like us to discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course.

Additionally, if you have not already done so, please connect with Accessibility Resources, the office responsible for coordinating accommodations and services for students with disabilities: [accessibilityresources@coloradocollege.edu](mailto:accessibilityresources@coloradocollege.edu), 719-227-8285, Armstrong 219.

## Participation and Community Building

You are expected to participate actively, frequently, and bravely in class. Everyone should aim to speak at least once each session. Meaningful participation involves interacting not only with me but also with your peers and contributing to the building of a class learning community. Try your best to encourage yourself and others to contribute—by paraphrasing, building on ideas, making connections, and initiating points that invite others to engage. Our goal is to make communication and collaboration part of how we think, not just what we say.

Sharing your thoughts with a group of people takes courage. Making a genuine point is always risky while saying a cliché is safe. Give yourself and others credit for speaking, no matter how much you agree or disagree. People often start by saying, thinking, or writing something imperfect or confusing. Uncertainty and confusion are part of learning. In discussion as well as in writing, focus on expressing, not impressing. Ugly is okay. Confusing is okay. Silence is not.

Ongoing questions to think about in terms of participation are: How do we bridge perspectives and make them mutually enriching rather than divisive? How do we create discussion guidelines that make speaking up a rewarding experience, even when it feels risky? How do we move from personal preferences toward a collective process of intellectual inquiry?

# Daily Schedule

This schedule is designed to help you manage your time and move steadily through the block. Pay close attention to the afternoon “to-do” items as they prepare you for the next day’s class. How you plan and use your afternoons and evenings is just as important as your participation each morning. I’ve included page counts to help you budget your reading time, so please plan ahead. No additional purchases are required; all materials are available on Canvas.

The schedule is subject to change. Stay attuned to emails and updates on Canvas.

## Week 1

### Mon 11/17 Class Orientation

- Morning: Class meets (10:30 AM - noon)
- Afternoon:
  - Read Short news article <https://www.axios.com/2025/10/29/trump-gift-crown-south-korea-no-kings>
  - Watch Trump gifted golden crown by South Korea’s leader, CNN, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-txyFyvgods> (8 min)
  - Write a 2-page reflective essay on what you think Asia is, what the study of Asia does, and how your understanding of Asia has been shaped by your personal experiences, education, and media exposure. Due: 11/17, 11:59 PM

### Tue 11/18 The Making of Asia-Pacific

- Morning: Class meeting.
- Afternoon:
  - Read “The End of Area” by Gavin Walker and Naoki Sakai, 31 pp.
  - Read “Triumphal and Tragic Narratives of the War in Asia” by John Dower, 12 pp.
  - Read <https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/exhibiting-enola-gay>

### Wed 11/19 In Search Asia

- Morning: Class meeting.
- Afternoon:
  - Work on Group Project #1 “Asian Artworks”

### Thur 11/20 Renewing Asian Studies at the End of Area

- Morning: Class meeting (10:30 AM - noon). Group presentations on Asian artworks.
- Afternoon:
  - Check out <https://www.historycolorado.org/little-saigon-memory-project>

- Watch *Reclaiming Denver's Chinatown* to learn about Asian American history in Colorado <https://www.coloradoasianpacificunited.org/projects/reclaiming-denvers-chinatown-film>

### **Fri 11/21 Asian Artworks; Asian American History in Colorado**

- Field Trip Day
  - **9:00 AM:** Departure (bus leaves promptly at 9 from **Tutt Library**)
  - 10:30–11:45 AM: Denver Art Museum: Arts of Asia
  - Lunch (TBD)
  - 1:30–3:00 PM: History Colorado Center: AAPI History in Colorado
  - 3:00–4:30 PM: Return to Colorado College

## **Week 2**

### **Mon 12/1 Reading Day**

- Morning: No class meeting.
  - Read “The Rise and Rise of K-Pop: A Pocket History” by Keith Howard, 23 pp.
  - Read *Korean Shamanism: The Cultural Paradox*: “Preface” and “Introduction,” 17 pp.
- Afternoon:
  - Film screening: *KPop Demon Hunters* (1 – 3 PM, Max Kade Theater)
  - Consider starting your discussion board posts (minimum 5 days total in Weeks 2 & 3)

### **Tue 12/2 Global K-Pop**

- Morning: Class meeting.
- Afternoon:
  - Read *Korean Shamanism: The Cultural Paradox*: Chapter 4, 52 pp.
  - Read “Unpacking K-Pop in America” by Lee, 20 pp.
  - Option for discussion board posts

### **Wed 12/3 Grounding Pop Culture**

- Morning: Class meeting.
- Afternoon:
  - Read “Broken Ring” by Shimizu Shikin, 15 pp.
  - Read “Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China” by Sarah E. Stevens, 22 pp.
  - Read *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*: “Introduction” by Seungsook Moon, 15 pp.
  - One group prepares for Group Project #3: Gendered Modernities and National Projects in Asia
  - Option for discussion board posts

### **Thur 12/4 Gendered Modernity**

- Morning: Class meeting. Group presentation: Gendered Modernities and National Projects
- Afternoon:
  - Watch *Out Run* <https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/out-run?vp=soka&frontend=kui>
  - Read “Ang babaylan nga nahimong bayot,” <https://apa.si.edu/babaylan/>
  - Option for discussion board posts

### **Fri 12/5**

- Wellness day. Take care of yourself!

## **Week 3**

### **Mon 12/8 Queering Asia**

- Morning: Class meeting.
- Afternoon:
  - Read “Meiji and Taishō Japan: An Introductory Essay” by Ethan Segal, 11 pp.
  - Read “Honda Sōichirō and the Rise of Japan’s Postwar Motor Vehicle Industry,” 15 pp.
  - Read “Settler Colonialism in the Making of Japan’s Hokkaido” by Katsuya Hirano, 12 pp.
  - Read “Russian Settler Colonialism” by Alexander Morrison, 14 pp.
  - One group prepares for Group Project #3: The Rise of Modern Japan
  - Option for discussion board posts

### **Tue 12/9 Leaving Asia, Joining Europe: Japan’s Miracle to Nightmare**

- Morning: Class meeting. Group presentation: The Rise of Modern Japan
- Afternoon:
  - Read “Citizenships in Asia,” 49 pp. (includes five short articles)
  - One group prepares for Group Project #3: Citizenships in Asia: Power, Identity and Belonging
  - Option for discussion board posts
  - You are encouraged to come to my office hours to share your research proposal ideas

### **Wed 12/10 Becoming a Citizen in Asia**

- Morning: Class meeting. Group presentation: Citizenships in Asia
- Afternoon:
  - Read “Central Asia Water and Energy Program: Working for Energy and Water Security,” by World Bank Group, 16 pp.
  - Read “The Ordination of a Tree: The Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand” by Susan M. Darlington, 14 pp.

- Read “Environing at the Margins: *Huanjing* as a Critical Practice” by Chia-ju Chang, 32 pp.
- One group prepares for Group Project #3: Environmental Challenges and Ecological Practices in Asia
- Option for discussion board posts
- You are encouraged to come to my office hours to share your research proposal ideas

#### **Thur 12/11 Asian Environmental Challenge and Culture**

- Morning: Class meeting. Group presentation: Environmental Challenges and Ecological Practices in Asia
- Afternoon:
  - Read *The King of Trees* by Ah Cheng, 53 pp.
  - Read *Zhuangzi*: “Useless Tree” and “Cook Ding,” 4 pp.
  - Option for discussion board posts
  - Start working on your research proposal

#### **Fri 12/12 China’s Cultural Revolution, Environment, and Daoism**

- Morning: Class meeting.
- Afternoon:
  - Work on your research proposal

### **Week 4**

#### **Mon 12/15 How to Do Research about Asia?**

- Morning: Class meeting. Research proposal workshop
- Afternoon:
  - Work on your research proposal

#### **Tue 12/16 Refining Your Question and Approach**

- Morning: Student presentations of research proposals
- Afternoon:
  - Work on reflective essay #2 about how this block (through both the taught sessions and your experience working on the projects) has confirmed, challenged, or reshaped your previous understandings of Asia and Asian Studies. Discuss how you plan to continue exploring topics about Asia through practices of learning and unlearning

#### **Wed 12/17**

- No class meeting. Everything is due on Canvas by 12:00 PM (noon)

# Assignments

## Discussion Board

You are expected to post regularly on the discussion board during Weeks 2 and 3 about the readings your group is not presenting on. You should post on at least five different days. You may be asked to share and talk about your post in class. Each post should be about 150-200 words and respond to one or more of the day's assigned readings. A strong post includes:

- Your takeaway: what the reading tells you, a key insight, or a question it raises
- One inspiring quote: a passage that stands out to you and why it matters

Posts are due at midnight on the day the readings are assigned. If your group is presenting on the readings, you will not post that day, but you are encouraged to read and respond to your classmates' posts. At the end of the block, please copy all of your discussion posts into a single PDF and upload it to the Canvas assignment page for grading.

## Reflective Essays

You will write two reflective essays. Each two page long (double-spaced). Reflective essays are about personal journeys and are not scholarly statements. Prioritize genuineness, courage, and growth. Let the writing show how you are thinking, questioning, and changing.

**Essay #1.** Due Monday midnight of Week 1, this first essay is your starting point. Reflect on where you are right now in terms of your knowledge, positionality, and interests related to Asia. Think honestly about what you know and what you don't know, what feels exciting and what feels troubling, your hesitations and doubts, and the experiences that may have shaped your feelings and views.

**Essay #2.** Due Wednesday at noon of Week 4, the second reflective essay is your chance to look back on your learning journey. Use this space to think about how the course materials, discussions, and activities have shifted, challenged, or expanded your understanding. Consider what you hope to learn and unlearn moving forward, and how you might resist the power dynamics of knowledge production while keeping curiosity as the fuel for your intellectual growth.

## Group Projects

**Group Project #1: Asian Artworks.** Presented on the Thursday of Week 1 in class. See separate handout.

**Group Project #2: Mapping Asia.** Date TBD. See separate handout.

**Group Project #3: Thematic Presentations.** 15 minutes, presented throughout the Block. Your group should adjust the title based on your research and interpretation. This presentation is expected to be more than a simple summary of readings one by one; it should demonstrate synthesis, flow, and your understanding of the issue based on your reading and research.

Choose a theme from the list below.

- “Gendered Modernities and National Projects in Asia”: How have women’s roles, bodies, and performances—ranging from Meiji Japan and Republican China to South Korea’s militarized citizenship and today’s K-pop industry—shaped the building of modern Asian nations?
- “The Rise of Modern Japan: State-Building, Industrialization, and Settler Colonialism”: How did Japan rise to power? Explore Japan’s transformation from the Meiji and Taishō eras to the postwar boom, focusing on political modernization, imperial expansion, settler colonialism, and rapid industrial innovation.
- “Citizenships in Asia: Power, Identity, and Belonging”: How is citizenship constructed, contested, and transformed across Asian contexts?
- “Environmental Challenges and Ecological Practices in Asia”: How do people address environmental crises across Asia?

Each group will have a group leader responsible for the following:

- Communicating with me if your group has questions, needs additional guidance, wants to update me on your progress, or is experiencing difficulties working together
- Initiating meeting times and helping set the timeline and workflow for your group
- Uploading the slides after each presentation on Canvas
- Writing a collaboration report after all group work is completed, describing each member’s contributions and how your group worked together; the report must be signed by all group members.

All group members are expected to contribute meaningfully. Everyone in the group receives the same grade unless someone reports concerns about free-riding. Group leaders do *not* receive extra credit; the role is about coordination, not hierarchy.

How to do well:

- Collaboration: Your group works as a team. The presentation reflects shared effort and genuine collaboration. Trust me, it is noticeable when groups do not collaborate.
- Content: Your presentation demonstrates that you have done thoughtful and relevant research.

- Delivery: Present information in a clear and effective way. Your slides and your spoken presentation are structured well, visually effective, and easy to follow.
- Engagement: Use your presentation to spark conversation. Ask questions, invite reflection, and respond thoughtfully to create an engaging Q&A.

In all group projects, collaboration is valued highly. Your presentation should not be a collage of separate individual parts, but a coherent piece that shows synthesis and flow. Make sure all group members have a chance to speak. It is also important to show curiosity, active listening, and engagement in the Q&A with other groups, as we are collaborating as a class.

## Research Proposal

Instead of a final exam or paper, this block will conclude with a research/grant proposal, which you may later use for opportunities such as the Gaylord Prize, Venture Grant, or for your own academic or personal record. Your topic should be tangibly related to the themes of the course.

- Presentation of your proposal: A 5-minute presentation on Tuesday of Week 4 (in class)
- Written proposal: Due Wednesday of Week 4 at noon. The proposal should be about 3 pages (double-spaced), *plus* a short bibliography. You may use either MLA or Chicago style—just be consistent. The bibliography includes at least five sources.

What goes into the proposal?

- Topic & Questions: What you plan to research and the questions that drive your curiosity.
- Preliminary Knowledge: What you already know that provides a foundation.
- Data / Sources: What materials or evidence do you plan to use or gather, and how? For example, will you work with archival materials (perhaps at the History Colorado Center), conduct interviews, analyze artworks, literary texts, films, newspapers, economic data, or legal documents?
- Methodology: How you will analyze or work with your materials or data. This is field-specific and depends on the kinds of sources you use. For example, you might conduct textual analysis of literary works, visual analysis of artworks or films, interviews and qualitative coding, archival research, ethnographic observation, discourse analysis of media, or statistical analysis of economic or demographic data.
- Product: What you will produce (paper, exhibit, podcast, public-facing project, etc.)
- Bibliography: a list of the sources you have consulted or plan to consult for your research project

How to do well:

- Originality: You pursue something you genuinely interested, don't already know and want to learn more about.
- Clarity: Your presentation and writing clearly explain what you will do and why it matters.
- Significance: The topic matters not only to you but also to a broader audience.
- Feasibility: The project can realistically be done (e.g., you don't want to propose interviewing Xi Jinping).

You are encouraged to consult a librarian and/or visit the Writing Center while developing this proposal. If you do either, please include a footnote on the first page of your submission acknowledging the person who assisted you, and your points for this assignment will receive a 5% boost.

## Evaluation

- Attendance and Participation – 15%
- Discussion Board – 10%
- Group Projects – 30%
- Reflective Essays – 15%
- Research Proposal – 30%

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
93-100	88-92	83-87	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	67-69	63-66	60-62	<60