1. Themes and Goals

The rise of nation-states is a central phenomenon of modern world history and the experience of modern Asian nations is essential to its understanding. The nation-states of Asia took shape concurrently with other modern nations of the world and in response to similar and often interrelated historical circumstances. This unit looks at the emergence of China, Japan, and Korea as modern nations in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries through such specific topics of comparative significance as “the invention of tradition,” the relationship between imperialism and the nation-state, and the question of ethnic minorities within the nation. The unit is divided into three sections that can be incorporated into a syllabus together or individually—geographically as an “East Asian” unit or topically to complement similar materials on other regions of the world.
This unit examines varieties of nationalism that have emerged in East Asia since the late nineteenth century. It examines the ways in which historical actors defined, articulated and projected nationhood while negotiating cultural categories, such as Eastern/Western, traditional/modern and national/international. Particular attention is given to the interrelationship among imperialism, nationalism, and trans-nationality. Topics include nationalism and Western imperialism, nationalism and Asian imperialism, and ethnic nationalisms within nation-states.

Although the focus of this unit is Asia, and its temporal framework often the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, each section has contemporary and comparative significance. Students should be encouraged to think about how nation-states impact our lives today. How and why do they continue to demand our allegiance? What are the internal and external “others” against which the United States, for instance, defines itself today? What are our “invented traditions?” How does the nation reconcile religious and ethnic difference? What differences does it find intolerable and why? Studying the history, origins, and ideologies of the modern nation-state, in Asia and elsewhere, helps us to historicize and understand our own lives and nations.

2. Audiences and Uses

This unit is designed to fit into courses on comparative nationalism and East Asian history/studies. The audience is undergraduate juniors or seniors.

Courses might include:
- History of Modern East Asia
- Introduction to Japanese History and Culture
- Introduction to Chinese History and Culture
- World History
- Comparative Nationalisms
- Comparative Imperialisms
- Imperialism in East Asia

A consideration of Asia will enhance any general course on comparative nationalisms by pointing out similarities such as the tendency to define national identity vis-à-vis external and internal “others,” differences that occur when nations interpret their experiences through the prisms of “East and West” or “Oriental and Occidental,” for example, and direct connections such as the relationship between Western or Asian imperialism and the articulation of national identity.

Instructors might find it useful to combine two or three of the sections listed below and incorporate them as a unit into their courses. The readings for each section are rather lengthy but can be altered to suit the level of the course.

3. Theoretical Reference Points
Important theoretical literature on the nation-state:


4. Section I: The Invention of Tradition and Useable Pasts

4A. Themes and Goals

The purpose of this section is to have students consider how nation-states have utilized “tradition” and “history” to foster national identity and unity. Through a consideration of two of the most “traditional” symbols of modern Asia—the Japanese emperor and the Great Wall of China—students will study how both were appropriated and re-invented by modernizing Japan and China in order to forge a sense of nationality over space and through time.

This section asks students to think about how the “invention of tradition” was related to the emergence of the modern nation-state in East Asia. In recent decades standard notions of “tradition” — that is durable practices and values which are communicated from one generation to the next — have undergone a serious reappraisal. This section asserts that, to a certain extent, “traditions” which many consider to be quite old are often relatively recent inventions. Many of these so-called traditions came into being in response to modern social change and the needs of increasingly centralized nation-states.

This idea of invention extends to the other purpose of this section, namely the introduction of the idea that history itself is subject to re-invention over time. This section asks students to consider how the past has been re-interpreted and re-narrated into a “usable” form suited to the needs of the modern nation-state. The creation of “usable pasts,” those which answer the needs of the present, is an ongoing process and important constituent of national identities to this day.

4B. Instructor’s Introduction

**JAPAN:**

In order to teach this section, the instructor needs to know something about the 1868 Meiji Restoration. This event marks the overthrow of the Tokugawa military regime that held power for over two hundred years, and the “restoration” of the Japanese emperor (named Meiji) to a position of putative power and authority by a group of reform-minded middle-ranking samurai. This occurred at a time of national emergency, after the nation
had been forced to sign a series of unequal treaties with the United States, Russia, Britain, France, and other European nations. The Meiji Restoration ushered in a period of national reorganization and rapid modernization. Reforms included the abolishment of samurai status and the class system, the reorganization of hundreds of semi-independent fiefs into “prefectures” under the central authority of the government in Tokyo, the creation of a national, compulsory educational system, the creation of a modern army and navy and initiation of general conscription, the creation of modern legal codes, a national constitution and national representative assembly (the Diet). The Meiji Restoration is widely considered the beginning of the “modern” period of Japanese history.

CHINA:

To teach Waldron’s essay, the instructors needs to know the main historical events in China’s search for cultural and national identity in the twentieth century. Two of the important historical events are the Republican Revolution (1911), which overthrew the Qing dynasty and established the Republic of China, and the New Culture/May Fourth Movement (c. 1915-1920s), which urged a radical break from “traditional” Chinese culture. The Republican Revolution was not simply a political upheaval, but involved complex changes in the ways in which Chinese intellectuals regarded China as a nation, a state, and a civilization.

And, according to Waldron, it was during this identity crisis that the Great Wall assumed its new positive meaning. The desires and efforts to search for a modern identity for China continued throughout the twentieth century, and the modern meanings of the Great Wall were embedded in these political and cultural struggles. The Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 70s proclaimed to destroy old ideas and culture, and Mao Zedong compared himself to the Qin Emperor who first united the Chinese empire and built the Great Wall. In this political context, the Great Wall reached a new height of greatness. This isn’t the end of the story, however, as the meaning of the Great Wall experienced another twist of fate in the post-Mao era. In the new political and cultural climate, some reform-minded Chinese intellectuals regarded the Great Wall not so much as a symbol of national greatness as of Chinese passivity and conservatism. This constitutes the immediately political background for the controversy over the film River Elegy discussed in Waldron’s paper.

KOREA:

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Choson dynasty was burdened with internal problems and repeated foreign aggression. Based on a syncretistic religion, the Tonghak Movement protested against the political establishment, championing for social reform, equality for all people, and anti-foreignism. The movement led to an uprising that sparked the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). Japan won, and China, which had regarded Korea as a protectorate, was forced to recognize Korea as an independent nation, which actually meant that Japan became the new imperialist presence in Korea. In 1895, a new Korean government, the Taehan Cheguk (the Great Han Empire), was founded, under the threatening shadow of Japanese imperialism. Schmid’s discussion of
the legend of Tan’gun and Korean nationalism can be understood in this historical context. To distance Korea from China and to resist Japan, the Korean nationalists strove to define a Korea that had been ethnically homogenous, culturally unique, spiritually independent, and politically resilient. They found the Tan’gun myth meaningful in constructing such a national narrative. Thus, the imagining of Korea as an ethnic nation involved an intellectual transition from a worldview of universal civilization (associated with Confucianism) to that of imperialism and nationalism.

4C. Instructor Readings

There are several reference works and basic textbooks that provide the basic history needed for context for this unit. Readings are marked according to the star* system:

*** Most important
** Recommended
* Optional

FOR JAPAN:

Reference works:

  


Good basic textbooks on modern Japan include:


FOR CHINA:


FOR KOREA:


4D. Student Readings

Ideally, you should use all the readings listed below. If you prefer to assign a smaller amount of reading per session, choose readings according to the star* system:

*** Most important
**  Recommended
*   Optional


Fujitani describes the “invention” of the modern Japanese monarchy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time of rapid nation-building. He discusses the creation of national holidays, monuments, and various court rituals and compares them with similar and concurrent phenomena in Europe and the United States. Fujitani shows how the Japanese emperor was made into both the repository of “tradition” and Japan’s historical past as well as the most potent symbol of the nation’s modernity.


Waldron’s essay shows how the meaning of the Great Wall as a national symbol has changed over the twentieth century. The author argues that the Great Wall had traditionally been associated with dynastic evil and that it became a symbol of national greatness only in the early twentieth century when the identity of Chinese civilization experienced a crisis. He then traces the symbolic meaning of the Great Wall from the May Fourth Movement to the post-Mao era. Waldron discusses the Great Wall as a contested symbol in the controversy over the film *River Elegy*.

This reading is an excellent choice if students are particularly interested in Korea and/or in the question of ethnicity-national identity. Schmid discusses how the nationalist discourse of ethnic lineage worked to elevate the mythic figure of Tan’gun to be the origin of Korean nationhood at the expense of other historical/mythic figures, such as Kija. In this ethnic-national narrative, rival or alternative accounts of the history of Korea were suppressed.


This film provoked heated debate in China about the history and identity of Chinese nationhood when it first appeared as a TV series in 1988. Note that students will need a rather high level of proficiency in Mandarin in order to understand the narration.

Availability:
Asian Educational Media Service ([http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/index.las](http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/index.las)) ($90)
Columbia University’s Starr East Asian Library (2 copies)

See also:

4E. Discussion Questions

What does it mean to “invent tradition”? Why are traditions important and powerful tools of the nation? Why are certain “pasts” invoked and what makes them “useable”? How was the Japanese monarchy re-invented by the Meiji state and with what effects? How has the meaning of the Great Wall changed over the 20th century and how have these changes related to shifting perceptions of Chinese-ness and the Chinese nation?

5. Section II: Nationalism and Intra-Asian Imperialism

5A. Themes and Goals

The focus of this section is Japanese imperialism and colonialism in Manchuria, Korea, and Taiwan and on the relationship between Japanese imperialism and the formation of nationalisms in these places and Japan itself.
5B. Instructor’s Introduction

Chronology of Japanese empire:

Note: Some recent scholars have argued that Japanese imperialism began with the incorporation of the northern island of “Ezo” (renamed Hokkaido) and of the southern Ryukyu islands (renamed Okinawa) into Japan’s national boundaries shortly after the Meiji Restoration in the late nineteenth century. Since these territories remained Japanese prefectures even after the nation was divested of its other colonies after the end of World War II (Okinawa was a United Nations Trust Territory between 1945-1972), this position is not universally accepted.

1894-1895: Sino-Japanese War — This war between China and Japan was fought largely in Korea over interests in Korea and resulted in China’s defeat. The Treaty of Shimonoseki which resulted stipulated that China should recognize Korea’s independence, cede Formosa (Taiwan), the Pescadores, and the Liaodong Peninsula to Japan, open more treaty ports, and pay a huge war indemnity to Japan. Although Russia, France, and Germany intervened to stop the cessation of the Liaodong Peninsula to Japan (an event called “The Triple Intervention”), the Sino-Japanese War resulted in the establishment of Japan’s first formal colony on Taiwan. Only decades after Japan had been forced to sign “unequal treaties” and open treaty ports to trade, it was now using these same methods to advance its own interests in Asia.

1904-1905: Russo-Japanese War — This war between Russia and Japan was also fought over competing interests in Korea and northeast Asia. Japan narrowly won the war and in the Treaty of Portsmouth that resulted, Japan gained a prominent position in Korea and took over Russian-leased territory in Manchuria — including the Liaodong Peninsula. Korea was established as a “protectorate” of Japan in 1905 and annexed as a colony in 1910. Japan’s defeat of Russia was recognized worldwide as the first defeat of a European power by an Asian nation.

1914-1918: World War I — Under the stipulations of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance formed in 1902, Japan entered WWI on the side of the Allies in August 1914. During the war, Japan occupied German-leased territories in China and German-owned islands in the Pacific including the Marshalls, Marianas, and Carolines. Japan had few combatant responsibilities in the war and used this time to expand interests in China — issuing its infamous “21 Demands” to Yuan Shi-kai (1859-1916) in 1915. It was an economic boom time for Japan as it produced wartime material for its Allies and goods to fill the vacuum in Asian and Indian markets left by the European combatants. The Treaty of Versailles awarded Japan the Marshalls, Marianas, and Carolines under a League of Nations mandate, as well as many of the unexpired portions of German leases in China.

1931: The “Manchurian Incident” or “Mukden Incident” — Japan long had interests in Manchuria as a source of agricultural products and a strategic buffer zone between Korea and Russia. It acquired the leased territory of the Liaodong Peninsula after the Russo-Japanese War. Thereafter the Japanese-owned South Manchurian Railway Company
quickly extended railways and railway zones through Manchuria, with the Guandong Army establishing itself in Manchuria to protect Japanese interests. In 1931, a bomb blast that damaged the Japanese railway near Shenyang (then known as Mukden) was blamed on the Chinese and used by the army as a pretext for the occupation of Manchuria, despite Japanese cabinet opposition. Renamed “Manchukuo” in 1932, and proclaimed to be an independent state headed by the Chinese emperor Pu-Yi (1906-1967), Manchuria was in fact a Japanese puppet state and an important part of its expanding empire. After an investigation conducted by the Lytton Commission, the League of Nations refused to recognize “Manchukuo” and condemned Japanese occupation of the territory. This precipitated Japan’s 1933 withdrawal from the League and marked the beginning of a new, independent phase of Japanese diplomacy.

1937-1945: Second Sino-Japanese War — A skirmish between Chinese and Japanese troops in the “Marco Polo Bridge Incident” escalated into a full-scale war in China. Japanese army planners believed the war would be over soon and quickly took over key cities throughout China. But the war gradually became a quagmire as Chinese Nationalist and Communist armies joined forces to resist Japanese aggression. In order to continue the war effort, Japan needed to secure various resources, especially after the U.S. threatened economic embargoes in response to the ongoing violence in China. Again, taking advantage of the war situation in Europe, Japan moved into French Indo-China in 1940 to expand its imperial interests and secure much needed resources. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Japan moved to occupy the Philippines, Borneo, the Malayan Peninsula, Indonesia, Singapore, Guadalcanal and other islands throughout the Pacific. At its height at the end of 1942, the Japanese empire stretched four thousand miles north to south from Sakhalin, off the coast of Russia, almost to Australia, and six thousand miles east to west from Burma, the westernmost part of Southeast Asia, to the Gilbert Islands in the Pacific Ocean.

1945: Japanese defeat — Japan lost all of the territory it had acquired since the first Sino-Japanese War. Okinawa was designated a United Nations trust territory with Japan retaining “residual sovereignty.” Full sovereignty was returned in 1972. The island of Sakhalin and the Kurile island chain, both north of Hokkaido, were awarded to the U.S.S.R. after the war. The southern half of Sakhalin had been considered Japanese territory since the end of the Russo-Japanese war, and the Kuriles had been Japanese territory since 1875. The status of these islands is still a matter of contention between Japan and Russia. Japan itself was occupied by Allied forces from 1945-1952.

5C. Instructor Readings

For basic history, consult any of these sources:


5D. Student Readings

Ideally, you should use all the readings listed below. If you prefer to assign a smaller amount of reading per session, choose readings according to the star* system:
  *** Most important
  ** Recommended
  * Optional


  Young’s introduction and first chapter serve as a great introduction to the topic of Japanese imperialism since they situate Manchuria in a longer history of Japanese imperialism. Young explores the various economic, military and cultural meanings of empire, and particularly Manchuria, to Japan so the Chinese perspective is not discussed here. But she does a great job of relating Japan’s seizure of Manchuria in 1931 to the civil unrest in China in the 1920s and 1930s.


  This selection includes the royal proclamation about the founding of Manchukuo and Japanese announcements on the Mukden Incident.


  Although Schmid’s book deals with only the first phase of Japanese colonial rule in Korea, it provides a good account of Korean nationalism in relation to Japanese and Chinese imperialism.


Though they work well independently, these two readings can also be read together. Lamley’s article provides a solid overview of Taiwan under the Japanese colonial rule. It is grounded in recent historiographic considerations of Japanese colonialism and its connection to the modernization of Taiwan and the formation of a Taiwanese identity.

The introduction to Shin and Robinson’s collected volume challenges what they call the nationalist paradigm of interpreting Japanese colonial rule. That paradigm celebrates Korean nationalist resistance by portraying Japanese colonialism as monolithic and relentlessly oppressive and exploitative. The article suggests a more nuanced reading of the history by paying attention to the diversity of colonial experience and the interactions among modernity, colonialism, and nationalism.

5E. Discussion Questions

What is the relationship between imperialism and the formation of nation-states and national identities in China, Korea, and Japan? What is Young’s approach to the study of Japanese imperialism? According to Shin and Robinson, what is the nationalist paradigm of the historiography of colonial Korea? What are its assumptions and limitations? What is the alternative historiography that Shin and Robinson propose? What were the similarities and differences between Japanese colonialism in Taiwan, Manchuria, and Korea as described in the readings?

6. Section III: Ethnic Nationalisms and “Internal Others” within the Nation-State

6A. Themes and Goals

This section deals with the question of ethnic groups within the nation-state, a problem of historical as well as contemporary significance. This section challenges notions of Chinese or Japanese homogeneity by showing that “minority” groups have been important actors in these nations’ modern histories. One issue is how these groups are often treated as “internal others” within the nation-state even as the state seeks to assimilate them through the reform of language and customs. Another is how groups define themselves and come to terms with what are often dual or competing national and ethnic identities.

6B. Instructor’s Introduction

Neither China nor Japan is a homogeneous nation. Each includes ethnic “minorities” such as the Uyghur, Hui, Tibetan, Mongolian etc. in China and the Ainu, Okinawans, resident Koreans, and recently, resident foreign workers from a variety of countries in
Japan. Generally speaking, while the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were marked by efforts to get these groups to forget their native languages and customs and to “assimilate,” in recent years, many of these groups have sought to “recover” ethnic identities, languages, and customs — a process which has also involved the “invention” of tradition as discussed for national majorities in Section I.

In Japan, national unification efforts during the Meiji period included not only the inclusion of Okinawa and Hokkaido within its national borders but also efforts to make the peoples of those places assimilate as Japanese nationals. In China, the campaign for the Republican Revolution explicitly appealed to ethnic nationalism and urged the Han Chinese majority to expel the ruling Manchu. Ironically, one of the most urgent issues that faced the newly founded Republican China was to forge a nationhood out of the multi-ethnic empire it inherited from the Qing dynasty. The new government(s) pursued a policy of Han-centered assimilation, suppressing the languages and customs of minority groups. The same principle and similar policies, with some variations, have continued in the Communist era. The process of course has never been completed. The best-known examples of ethnic nationalisms within the People’s Republic of China are those of Tibetan and Uyghur people. Continuous political and cultural oppression accounts to a great extent for minority groups’ search for national independence, but as the readings show, the reasons are complex and some of them are linked to political developments outside of China.

6C. Instructor Readings

*** Most important
** Recommended
* Optional

FOR JAPAN:


  See articles on “Hokkaido” and “Okinawa.”


6D. Student Readings

Ideally, you should use all the readings listed below. If you prefer to assign a smaller amount of reading per session, choose readings according to the star* system:

*** Most important
** Recommended
Gladney’s article is about Muslim Chinese. The case illustrates the complex pattern in which the identity, self-image, and ethnic boundaries of a minority group are defined. The article shows the diversity within the official category of Muslim Chinese and discusses what this means to Muslim and Chinese identities in People’s Republic of China.

Rudelson’s ethnographic study of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang can be used in discussion of ethnic minorities and ethnic nationalisms in contemporary China. It shows how the Uyghur identity was constructed and how different social and geographic groups of the Uyghurs identify themselves differently. Like Chinese ethnic nationalism, Uyghur ethnic nationalism also involves efforts to create a national consciousness.

This article discusses the inclusion of Hokkaido and other northern islands within Japan’s national borders in the late nineteenth century and the corresponding re-classification of the Ainu and other native peoples as citizens of the Japanese realm. The article takes the position that the incorporation of these islands was an act of colonization and uses as proof the differing conditions of citizenship between these peoples and people from “Japan proper.” Good for exploring and theorizing the fluid category of citizenship during the colonial period.

This article works well with the Morris-Suzuki piece above. It describes a similar process of incorporation but this time of the southern Ryūkyū islands which became Okinawa prefecture. This article describes how many people in Okinawa envisioned themselves as occupying a superior position vis-à-vis subjects of
Japan’s colonial empire in Taiwan or Korea, while they themselves were discriminated against within “Japan proper.” Good for thinking about how “assimilation” efforts often function to accentuate rather than erase difference.

6E. Discussion Questions

What is the relationship between the designation of “minority” groups and the making of the “majority?” Are ethnic or minority groups threatening to the nation? How do people reconcile ethnicity and nationality? According to Rudelson, who are the Uyghur people? What are the overlapping and sometimes competing identities of the Uyghurs? How do place, religion, social group, etc. interact with the Uyghur ethnic identity and Uyghur nationalism? How does Gladney explain the formation of the Hui identity or the making of an ethnic minority (as well as an ethnic majority) in contemporary China? How were the Ainu and Okinawans “made Japanese?”

7. Further Reading

7A. Section I: The Invention of Tradition and Useable Pasts


7B. Section II: Nationalism and Intra-Asian Imperialism


7C. Section III: Ethnic Nationalisms and “Internal Others” within the Nation-State


