

HIST 443/EAST 493

Age of Samurai: Japan's Tokugawa Era

Winter 2025
McGill University

INSTRUCTOR

Prof. David Porter
Office: 680 Sherbrooke, Room 251
Office Hours: Thursday 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
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OVERVIEW

This course explores the history of Japan from its post-Warring States Era unification in the late 16th Century to its period of political restructuring in the wake of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. This era, known as the Edo Period (Edo was the name at the time of Tokyo, the center of political authority) or as the Tokugawa Period (after the family name of the shoguns who ruled it), was as a time of peace and prosperity for the archipelago. Though we will begin and end our class by looking at two key moments of political transition, for most of the term we will take a thematic approach, attempting to understand politics, society, culture, and daily life in a place whose history has both clear parallels and key differences with the European and North American societies with which you may be more familiar.

READINGS

All readings will be available on MyCourses, either as links to an article or ebook (in most cases) or as a pdf.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This is a seminar, meeting once per week for three hours (with a 15-20 minute break in the middle), with most class time spent on discussion. Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings for each class session in advance in order to be well-prepared to talk about those readings during class. Note that, because it is a 400-level seminar, this course is reading intensive; expect readings to average 150 pages/week.

ASSESSMENT

Class Participation (20%)

You will be expected to make thoughtful contributions to class discussions that show clear evidence of having done the required readings. Your contributions should be responsive to your classmates' comments and should always be respectful to everyone else in the room. Quality is more important than quantity – of course, if you don't say anything, you aren't participating – but two or three excellent comments will impress me far more than dominating the conversation with ideas that suggest that you haven't actually done the reading. On occasions when the class is broken up into smaller groups to work on a particular task, you should be clearly contributing to your group's work. Attendance is not graded explicitly, but since it is impossible to participate without being present, you will receive no credit for participation if you are absent without a valid excuse.

The purpose of grading participation is to encourage and reward active engagement with readings and to help you develop your ability to productively discuss both historical scholarship and primary sources.

Discussion Leader (10%):

You will be responsible (most likely as part of a group of 2 students) for leading a creative and interactive in-class activity on the readings for a particular week, designed to take up **30-40 minutes** of class time. There is a great deal of flexibility in what approach you will take. Your activity can aim to connect all the readings for the week or focus on just one reading that you think speaks to a particularly interesting aspect of the week's theme. The goal is for you to come up with a more creative activity than a traditional discussion (this might involve role-playing, brief group presentations, concept mapping/producing some sort of visual product to share with the class, collaborative text annotation, etc). In addition to drawing on assigned course readings, you are welcome to provide your classmates with images or short primary source readings (or even invented scenarios) to work with as part of the activity. Your grade will not depend on the quality of your fellow students' participation but on how well thought out your activity/discussion was and how well it reflects your engagement with the readings.

You should submit a plan for your activity to me by 7 PM the night before our class meeting so I can decide where to fit it into our schedule for the day. In your plan, you should also provide a brief explanation (one paragraph or so) of how you think your activity will help your classmates develop a better understanding of the week's theme. If you are working in a group, you should also detail the contributions of each member of your group to the development of the activity.

Sign-ups for each week's discussion leader roles will occur during the second class meeting.

Akō Incident Paper (25%)

You will write a paper based on the primary source readings on the Akō Incident, which we will be discussing in class on February 3. The goal of this assignment is for you to improve your ability to use authentic historical sources to develop an original analytical argument, while also

learning to analyze primary sources useful to the study of early modern Japan. Details for the assignment will be distributed that day, but the paper will be a **MAXIMUM of 1500 words** and will be due on **Monday, February 17th at 5 PM.**

Final Project (total 45% for 3 components)

- 1. Proposed topic and preliminary biography (3%) – due Friday, February 28 at 2:30 PM** via MyCourses
- 2. Revised project description and draft of project part 2 (5%) – due Friday, March 21st at 2:30 PM**
- 3. Final Project (37%) – due Thursday, April 17 at 11:59PM** via MyCourses (MAXIMUM 4000 WORDS)

You will do a final project, **due on April 17**. Your project will consist of a prospectus for a research paper on a topic of your choice related to the history of Japan between the late 16th century and the late 19th century. The goal of this project is for you to learn about how to conceptualize a major research project, how to engage in sophisticated discussion of important historiographical questions, and how to connect primary source-based research to questions of historiographical significance, as well as to develop some familiarity with the primary sources available for research on early modern Japanese history. Your prospectus should consist of three elements.

1. A historiographical survey of relevant scholarship (you only need to deal with work in English, but you are welcome to talk about scholarship in other languages that you read as well) on your topic (approximately 2500 words).
2. A description of a set of primary sources that would be sufficient to enable someone to produce a journal article-length piece of scholarship on your topic (approximately 750 words). These sources can be in any language and do not have to be sources that you are currently capable of accessing or reading. That is, you are welcome to (indeed, encouraged) to describe sources that are only available in an archive in Japan, even if you are unable to read Japanese.
3. An analysis of a single primary source available in English (either originally or in translation) or in another language that you can read (approximately 500 words). You should not merely summarize the source but use it to make an argument that would be relevant to include in your project.

To ensure that you are on track to complete this project, **you are required to submit a proposed topic and preliminary bibliography by February 28**. This proposal should consist of at least a one paragraph description of your topic, a bibliography of the scholarship you will discuss in part 1 of your project (minimum FIVE books or articles) accompanied by a rationale for your selection of each work; the identity of the sources you will discuss in part 2 of your project, with a brief explanation of why you chose them; and the identity of the source you will analyze in part 3 of your project, with a brief explanation of why you think it is relevant to your project. It will be graded on the basis of on-time completion and worth 3% of your course grade.

To keep you on track with the project and to help you get feedback on your progress, you will on **March 21** submit a **revised project description and complete draft of part 2 of the project**. I will be absent from class that day to attend a conference in the US, but you will need to come to class to participate in a peer-review exercise (you will submit a brief report to me afterward to demonstrate your completion of this activity, which will take substantially less time than the full three hours). Details about what you should submit and what the activity will entail will be provided in advance of the deadline. In addition to participation in this activity during class time, all students will be required to schedule a one-on-one meeting with me earlier in the week of March 17 to discuss their projects. Your grade for this assignment (5% of your overall course grade) will be based on completion/on-time submission, participation in the peer review activity, and attending a meeting with me.

COURSE POLICIES

Absences and Late Work

You are expected to attend all class meetings and to submit all work on time. Missed class will result both in failing to learn the material covered (which can affect your success in other assignments) and in a failure to participate in discussion, directly lowering your participation grade. I recognize that there will be situations that make it impossible (or unwise) for you to attend class or to submit a paper on time, including illnesses (if you're sick, please rest and recover; don't come to class). I treat my students as responsible adults; if you are genuinely unable to come to class or submit a paper on time, I simply ask that you inform me IN ADVANCE (no extensions are offered if they are requested after an assignment's due date) and let me know the reason. **Please tell me the length of extension that you believe you require; no indefinite extensions will be granted** (though note that the actual length of extension you receive will depend on the nature of your excuse and is at my discretion). I reserve the right to request documentation of your excuse.

Unexcused late assignments will be marked down by 5% for each day late, though in no case will a paper that would otherwise receive a passing grade receive a failing grade (which is to say, you won't drop below a D), as long as it is submitted by the end of the semester. Note that I have a grading deadline – **in no case will assignments be accepted for credit after April 28**.

Students with serious extenuating circumstances may contact me about arranging a grade of K (incomplete), but these will only be granted in very rare situations, and requests must be made as far in advance as possible.

Office Hours

I will hold regular office hours on Thursdays from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM in my office in 680 Sherbrooke, Room 251. You may either make an appointment in advance (via the link on MyCourses) or simply drop by – though students with appointments will be prioritized. I will also be available for appointments outside my regular office hour times if they are incompatible with your schedule (but please do not stop by without an appointment outside of office hours). I encourage you to come by early in the semester to chat so that I can get to know you a bit better,

as well as to visit whenever you have questions about the course material or assignments or simply wish to talk about East Asian history or your academic goals.

Academic Integrity

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).” (See McGill’s [guide to academic honesty](#) for more information.)

« L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le [guide pour l'honnêteté académique de McGill](#).) »

Language of Submission

“In accord with McGill University’s [Charter of Student Rights](#), students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.”

« Conformément à [la Charte des droits de l'étudiant](#) de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté. »

Use of AI Tools

Part of the goal of this course is for you to develop your own ability to produce sophisticated analytical writing. The use of AI to generate text circumvents this process and undermines your own learning and skill development. It also does not produce the kind of original work that is expected of McGill students. For this reason, you may not use any AI tool to generate text that you intend to submit as part of an assignment. It is acceptable to use AI tools in limited fashion, as you might use a friend or classmate: to proofread, offer suggestions to make your own writing clearer, etc. But in any case, you are responsible for any errors (including plagiarism, problems of citation, and any other form of academic misconduct) generated by any use of AI, even of the limited sort that is explicitly permitted here.

Extraordinary Circumstances

As per the university’s Policy on Assessment of Student Learning, “in the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the control of McGill University, assessment tasks in a course are subject to change, provided students are sent adequate and timely communications regarding the change.”

STUDENT FEEDBACK

I encourage you to complete a Mercury evaluation for this course upon its conclusion. Your experiences and observations will help me make this class, and all classes I teach, better for future students.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you are a student with a disability that requires accommodation, please register with Student Accessibility and Achievement (<https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>) and inform me of the accommodations you require during the first week of class (or the first week after the disability arises). Anything you tell me will be kept confidential.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Introduction

I know it's the first week of class, but so that we can have a little bit to talk about in our first meeting (and thus to get a bit of a flavor of class discussion), please read the selection of primary sources that follows in advance of our meeting.

Reading:

1. "Oda Nobunaga's Road to Unification," in *Japan: A Documentary History, Volume 1: The Dawn of History to the Late Eighteenth Century*, pp. 186-189.
2. "Unification by Toyotomi Hideyoshi," in *Japan: A Documentary History, Volume 1: The Dawn of History to the Late Eighteenth Century*, pp. 189-197.

Week 2 – Japan Reunited

Reading:

1. Mary Berry, *Hideyoshi*, ch. 5, "Toyotomi Policy: Shaping the New Order," pp. 99-146.
2. Morgan Pitelka, *Spectacular Accumulation: Material Culture, Tokugawa Ieyasu, and Samurai Sociability*, ch. 3, "The Politics of Sociability" and ch. 5, "Severed Heads and Salvaged Swords," pp. 65-93, 118-142.
3. Mary Berry, "Public Peace and Private Attachment: The Goals and Conduct of Power in Early Modern Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12.2 (1986), pp. 237-271
4. "A Foreigner's View of the Battle of Osaka," in *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life during the Age of the Shoguns*, ch. 11, pp. 55-59.
5. "Methods of Rural Control" in *Japan: A Documentary History, Volume 1: The Dawn of History to the Late Eighteenth Century*, pp. 208-215.
6. "Weapons Control in Japanese Society" in *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life during the Age of the Shoguns*, ch. 14, pp. 70-74.

Week 3 – The Bakuhan System

Reading:

1. Mark Ravina, *Land and Lordship in Early Modern Japan* (Stanford, 1999), ch. 5 "Markets and Mercantilism: Political Economy in Tokushima," pp. 154-186 (you can skip the final few pages of the chapter).
2. Ronald P. Toby, "Rescuing the Nation from History: The State of the State in Early Modern Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 56.2 (2001), pp. 197-237.
3. Luke S. Roberts, *Performing the Great Peace: Political Space and Open Secrets in Tokugawa Japan* (Hawai'i, 2012), "Introduction" and ch. 1 "The Geography of Politics,"

pp. 1-52 (if you find the opening anecdote in the introduction particularly interesting, you may, optionally, want to read ch. 3 as well).

4. "Forging Political Order," in *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life during the Age of the Shoguns*, ch. 12, pp. 60-65.
5. "The Emperor and the Kyoto Aristocracy," in *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life during the Age of the Shoguns*, ch. 13, pp. 66-69.

Week 4 – The Status System

Reading:

1. David L. Howell, *Geographies of Identity in Nineteenth Century Japan* (UC, 2005), ch. 2 "The Geography of Status" and ch.3 "Status and the Politics of the Quotidian," pp. 20-66 (you can skip the final section of ch. 3).
2. Gerald Groemer, "The Creation of the Edo Outcaste Order." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 27:2 (Summer 2001), pp. 263-93.
3. Maren Ehlers, *Give and Take: Poverty and the Status Order in Early Modern Japan*, ch. 4, "The Guilds of the Blind," pp. 161-200.
4. Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice: Class, Status, Power, Law*, Appendix 3, "Goningumi Rules, 1662" and Appendix 5, "Regulations for Outcastes in Various Jurisdictions in Shinano," pp. 356-362 and 374-376

Week 5 – Samurai and the Akō Incident

Reading:

1. Douglas Howland, "Samurai Status, Class, and Bureaucracy: A Historiographical Essay," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60.2 (May, 2001), pp. 353-380.
2. Constantine Nomikos Vaporis, *Tour of Duty: Samurai, Military Service in Edo, and the Culture of Early Modern Japan*, "Introduction" and ch. 4, "Assignment: Edo," pp. 1-10, 102-127.
3. "Control of Vassals," in *Japan: A Documentary History*, pp. 204-208.
4. Motoori Norinaga, "The Story of the Loyal Samurai of Akō," trans. Federico Marcon, *Monumenta Nipponica* 58.4 (Winter, 2003), pp. 467-493
5. "The Way of the Warrior II," ch. 31 of *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume 2: 1600-2000, Part One: 1600-1868*, pp. 437-480.

Week 6 – Edo, Urban Life, and Law

Reading:

1. Katō Takashi, “Governing Edo,” in *Edo and Paris: Urban Life and the State in the Early Modern Era*, ch. 2, pp. 41-67.
2. William Kelly, “Incendiary Actions,” in *Edo and Paris: Urban Life and the State in the Early Modern Era*, ch. 13, pp. 310-331.
3. Takeuchi Makoto, “Festivals and Fights: The Law and the People of Edo,” in *Edo and Paris: Urban Life and the State in the Early Modern Era*, ch. 16, pp. 384-406.
4. James L. McClain, “Castle Towns and Daimyo Authority: Kanazawa in the Years 1583-1630,” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 6.2 (Summer, 1980), pp. 267-299.
5. Daniel Botsman, *Punishment and Power in the Making of Modern Japan*, ch. 1, “Signs of Order: Punishment and Power in the Shogun’s Capital,” pp. 14-40.
6. David L. Howell, “Fecal Matters: Prolegomenon to a History of Shit in Japan,” in *Japan at Nature’s Edge: The Environmental Context of a Global Power*, ch. 7, pp. 137-151
7. Buyō Inshi, *Matters of the World: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard*, published as Mark Teeuwen and Kate Wildman Nakai, eds., *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard, By an Edo Samurai*, selection from ch. 5 (sections titled “Edo Merchants,” and “Merchants’ Extravagance”), pp. 251-263.

Week 7 – Religion and Pilgrimage

AKŌ INCIDENT PAPER DUE – Monday, February 17 at 5PM

Reading:

1. Sarah Thal, *Rearranging the Landscape of the Gods: The Politics of a Pilgrimage Site in Japan, 1573-1912*, “Introduction,” ch. 1, “Konpira: Site of the Gods,” ch. 4, “God of the Market (1688-1760),” ch. 5, “Culture of the Gods (1744-1867),” pp. 1-37, 71-126.
2. Barbara Ambros, *Emplacing a Pilgrimage: The Ōyama Cult and Regional Religion in Early Modern Japan*, ch. 5, “The Emergence of a Regional Pilgrimage,” pp. 143-174.
3. Wai-Ming Ng, “The Shintoization of Mazu in Tokugawa Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 47.2 (2020), pp. 225-246.
4. “Control of Buddhist Temples” in *Japan: A Documentary History*, pp. 219-220.
5. “Japan’s Christian Century,” in *Japan: A Documentary History*, pp. 197-201.

Week 8 – Sakoku and Early Modern Japan’s Foreign Relations

Proposed Paper Topic and Preliminary Bibliography due February 28 at 2:30 PM

Reading:

1. Adam Clulow, “From Global Entrepôt to Early Modern Domain: Hirado, 1609-1641,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 65.1 (Summer, 2010), pp. 1-35.
2. Ronald Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan*, ch. 1, “Introduction,” pp. 3-22.
3. Robert Hellyer, *Defining Engagement: Japan and Global Contexts, 1640-1868*, ch. 2, “The Reaction against Globalization,” pp. 49-72.

4. Mark Ravina, "Tokugawa, Romanov, and Khmer: The Politics of Trade and Diplomacy in Eighteenth-Century East Asia," *Journal of World History* 26.2 (June 2015), pp. 269-294.
5. Luke Roberts, "Shipwrecks and Flotsam: The Foreign World in Edo-Period Tosa." *Monumenta Nipponica* 70.1 (2015), pp. 83-122.
6. "Regulating Foreign Relations," in *Voices of Early Modern Japan: Contemporary Accounts of Daily Life during the Age of the Shoguns*, ch. 17, pp. 87-92.

WINTER READING BREAK, March 3 – March 7

Week 9 – Gender and Sexuality

Reading:

1. Anne Walthall, "The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan," in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ch. 2, pp. 42-70.
2. Marcia Yonemoto, *The Problem of Women in Early Modern Japan*, ch. 3, "Marriage," pp. 92-123.
3. Amy Stanley, *Selling Women: Prostitution, Markets, and the Household in Early Modern Japan*, ch. 4, "From Household to Market: Child Sellers, 'Widows,' and Other Shameless People," pp. 111-133.
4. Gregory Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950*, ch. 2, "Policing the Perisexual: Male-Male Sexuality in Edo-Period Legal Discourse," pp. 97-145.
5. Ihara Saikaku, "Gengobei, the Mountain of Love," in *Five Women Who Loved Love: Amorous Tales from 17th Century Japan*, ch. 5, pp. 197-229.
6. Ōgimachi Machiko, *In the Shelter of the Pine: A Memoir of Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu and Tokugawa Japan*, trans. G.G. Rowley, ch. 15, "Hills and Streams: Winter 1702 to Spring 1703," pp. 95-101.

Week 10 – Projects

Revised project description and complete draft of part 2 of the final project due Friday, March 21 by 2:30 PM.

I will be absent to attend a conference in the US: you will need to sign up for a mandatory one-on-one meeting with me on March 17/18 to discuss your final project. You will meet during class time (for less than the full three hours) to participate in a peer review activity on the preliminary assignment for your final assignment that is due that day.

Week 11 – The Japanese Family

Reading:

1. Fabian Drixler, *Mabiki: Infanticide and Population Growth in Eastern Japan, 1660-1950* (University of California Press, 2013), Chapter 2 “Three Cultures of Family Planning,” Chapter 5 “The Material and Moral Economy of Infanticide,” and Chapter 6 “The Logic of Infant Selection,” pp. 25-46, 69-108.
2. Maren Ehlers, “Outcastes and Ie: The Case of Two Beggar Boss Associations,” in Mary Elizabeth Berry and Marcia Yonemoto, eds., *What is a Family? Answers from Early Modern Japan* (University of California Press, 2019), ch. 5, pp. 126-145.
3. Luke Roberts, “Governing the Samurai Family in the Late Edo Period,” in Mary Elizabeth Berry and Marcia Yonemoto, eds., *What is a Family? Answers from Early Modern Japan*, ch. 6, pp. 149-173.
4. Amy Stanley, “Fashioning the Family: A Temple, a Daughter, and a Wardrobe,” in Mary Elizabeth Berry and Marcia Yonemoto, eds., *What is a Family? Answers from Early Modern Japan*, ch. 7, pp. 174-194.
5. David Atherton, “Ideal Families in Crisis: Official and Fictional Archetypes at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” in Mary Elizabeth Berry and Marcia Yonemoto, eds., *What is a Family? Answers from Early Modern Japan*, ch. 10, pp. 239-260.

Week 12 – The Foreign Challenge

Reading:

1. Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early-Modern Japan*, ch. 3, “Knowledge and Hatred of the West,” and a selection from the translation of the New Theses – read the sections titled “Prefatory Remarks,” “World Affairs,” and “The Barbarians’ Nature,” pp. 58-99, 149-151, 193-213.
2. Fuyuko Matsukata and Adam Clulow, “King Willem II’s 1844 Letter to the Shogun: ‘Recommendation to Open the Country,’” *Monumenta Nipponica* 66.1 (2011), pp. 99-120.
3. Michael R. Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism: The Unequal Treaties and the Culture of Japanese Diplomacy*, Introduction and ch. 2, “Negotiating Space: The Meaning of Yokohama,” pp. 1-10 and 34-60.
4. D. Colin Jaundrill, *Samurai to Soldier: Remaking Military Service in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, ch. 2, “Rising Tensions and Renewed Reform, 1860-1866,” pp. 47-72.
5. “Knowledge of the West,” in *Japan: A Documentary History, Volume 1: The Dawn of History to the Late Eighteenth Century*, pp. 263-266.

Week 13 – The Meiji Restoration

Reading:

1. Anne Walthall, “Off With Their Heads: The Hirata Disciples and the Ashikaga Shoguns,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 50.2 (1995), pp. 137-170.
2. Mark Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations of the World: Japan’s Meiji Restoration in World History*, ch. 3, “Reform and Revolution,” and ch. 4, “A Newly Ancient Japan,” pp. 83-135.
3. D. Colin Jaundrill, *Samurai to Soldier: Remaking Military Service in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, ch. 5, “Dress Rehearsal: The Satsuma Rebellion, 1877,” pp. 131-155.
4. Richard Devine, “The Way of the King: An Early Meiji Essay on Government,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 34.1 (Spring, 1979), pp. 49-72.
5. “Reform Proposals of Sakamoto Ryōma, Saigō Takamori, and Ōkubo Toshimichi,” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume 2: 1600-2000, Part One: 1600-1868*, pp. 563-565.
6. “The Charter Oath,” “The Constitution of 1868,” “Memorial on the Proposal to Return the Registers,” and “Imperial Rescript on the Abolition of the han.” In *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Volume II: 1600 to 2000, Part Two: 1868-2000*, pp. 671-676.

FINAL PROJECT DUE – April 17, 11:59 PM