George Mason University

Current Issues in East Asia, Fall 2020
Schar School of Policy and Government
Department of History and Art History

CRN: 82099  POGO 750-019 and HIST 555-001

Instructor: Gerrit van der Wees (gvanderw@gmu.edu)
Location & time: Robinson B120, Wednesdays, 4:30 – 7:10pm
Office hours: Robinson B359, Wednesdays, 3:30 – 4:20 pm

Course description  Current Issues in East Asia

This course will focus on several interlinked current major issues in East Asia, which due to their contingent nature are difficult to incorporate into regular curricular offerings. The course will examine how US policy towards four key players in the region, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China, has evolved during the past 30-some years, and how interactions with the other players is affecting these policies.

US policymakers responsible for these countries and diplomats from these countries will be invited as guest speaker to the class in order to elaborate on a current issue facing their respective bureaus. Students will then be asked to develop responses to these requests, and present approaches to resolve these issues through their papers and class presentations.

The course will examine the policy questions against the background of some of the overarching themes. These often don’t drive the debates on the issues of the day, but are important in the understanding of the background and the broader perspective. 1) Taiwan’s transition to democracy and its implications for today. 2) Japan’s rise as a responsible stakeholder, and its uneasy historical relations with some of its neighbors. 3) The tension between South Korea’s emergence as a regional power and its quest for unification. 4) China’s rise and its implications for the East Asia region as a whole.

Aims and Objectives

1. To cultivate an understanding of the policy choices faced by policymakers on issues related to developments in East Asia
2. To generate an understanding of the important historical, economic and political cross-linkages and divisions between Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China
3. To stimulate multi-disciplinary problem-solving approaches to issues faced by policymakers and diplomats, and
4. To demonstrate advanced analytical capabilities through writing (class papers), oral presentations and class discussions.
Course Requirements and Grading

1. Class attendance and participation (30%). The class will be a combination of lecture format (professor and guest lecturers) and in-class discussions. Students will be assigned brief questions as basis for the in-class discussions the following week. Regular class attendance and active participation in class discussions are expected of all students.

2. three 8-10 page analysis essays (40%). Professor (in cooperation with the guest speaker) will provide a question on a current policy issue facing the bureau. Students will write up their analysis, presenting their approach on how to resolve this particular issue against the background of the overarching perspective of cross-linkages of interests in the region. Papers should include footnotes of sources used and quoted. The papers will be due on the dates listed in the syllabus. The papers will be sent electronically to the professor’s email account: gvanderw@gmu.edu

3. In-class presentations (30%). In each of the four segments, students will have the opportunity to do a presentation on a selected topic, generally on how to resolve an issue presented by a policymaker or a diplomat.

Background readings:


J. Bruce Jacobs, Democratizing Taiwan, Brill Publishers, Leiden-Boston, 2012


A list of scholarly articles and commentaries will be assigned in the course of the class.

Honor Code and Plagiarism Statement:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

For details on how the honor system at GMU works, please see:
Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability, please contact the Disability Resource Center at (703) 993-2474 for assistance.

Use of Cell Phones During Class

As a courtesy to the instructor and to fellow students, please turn off your cell phones during the class or switch them to a silent mode.

Class Schedule and Assignments

For details of administrative deadlines, please consult GMU FALL 2020 Academic Calendar.

Course Calendar

Class 1: Introductions, general overview, methodology

First segment: Taiwan’s transition to democracy and its implications for today.

Class 2: Overview and timeline of Taiwan’s transition to democracy. Taiwan today. What is the US’ “One China policy”? Guest speaker from Department of State.

Class 3: Major issues facing Taiwan. Assessment of future paths for Taiwan. Alternatives for US policies.

Class 4: Strategic implications of Taiwan’s choices for the US, Japan, Korea, and China. What is the best way forward for Taiwan? (Hand in first class paper re. Taiwan)

Second segment: Japan’s rise as a responsible stakeholder, and its uneasy historical relations with some of its neighbors.

Class 5: Overview and timeline of Japan’s recent history (since late 1980s). Japan’s emergence as responsible stakeholder. Guest speaker from Department of State.

Class 6: Uneasy historical relations with S. Korea (war memories, comfort women) and China (war memories, Senkakus), but positive memories with Taiwan (“model colony”).
Class 7: Finding the right balance, politically, economically and militarily between the US and China. (Hand in second class paper re. Japan)

Third segment: The tension between South Korea emergence as a regional power and its quest for unification.

Class 8: Overview and timeline of S. Korea’s recent history (since late 1980s). Transition to democracy and emergence as a regional power. Guest speaker from Department of State.

Class 9: The legacy of the Korean War: division between North and South Korea. Alternative policies: accommodation or confrontation?

Class 10: Finding the right balance, politically, economically between the US and China: (Hand in third class paper re. Korea)

Fourth segment: China’s rise and its implications for the East Asia region.

Class 11: Overview and timeline of China’s recent history (since late 1980s). Opening up economically, but keeping political restrictions in place. How the West got China wrong. Guest speaker from a European embassy.

Class 12: China’s rise and its implications: expansion of power in the South China Sea (Nine-dashed Line), Belt and Road Initiative, AIIB, Tibet and East Turkestan.

Class 13: Alternatives for US (and West European) policies: engagement, strategic competition or confrontation. (Hand in fourth class paper re. China).

Conclusions

Class 14: Overall perspective: focus on bilateral relations or develop a broader, more regional approach? Review the important historical, economic and political cross-linkages and divisions between Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China, and how they enhance / impede solutions.

Assessment of the class.