Course Description

A great deal of human history is the history of empires. This course examines historical and contemporary empires within a comparative context wider than modern European imperialism. With a regional focus on Eurasia, the class explores key aspects of empire building: military expansion, indirect rule, unequal exchange, environmental impact, ideological hegemony, colonial policies, and ruling strategies towards heterogeneous regions, religions, races, and ethnic groups. Though most empires perished in the twentieth century, we will discuss how, where, and why their political, economic, and cultural legacies persist in the post-colonial period. This course also proposes empire as an important lens for understanding contemporary global powers—which inherit, incorporate, and invent imperial institutions, identities, and strategies.

Empire is not a historical relic; it is alive somewhere or about to revive elsewhere. Throughout the course, we will track three contemporary powers that still exert enormous influence on global politics, security, and economy: America, Russia, and China. By revealing the logic behind their decisions and behaviors, and by situating them in comparison to their precedents, counterparts, or competitors—Britain, Japan, and Rome—this course offers students the analytic tools to engage in pressing debates in domestic and international politics.

The contemporary relevance of empire compels us to reconsider some conventional narratives in the social sciences, such as the empire-nation transition and the dominance of nation-states since the late eighteenth century. Empire and nation-state are not discontinuous dichotomies nor is the transition from empire to nation-state a linear, irreversible process. Instead, this class emphasizes how empire and state intertwine to form hybrid complexes and how powerful empires can shape broader contexts and political possibilities of other states. Finally, this course hopes to inform political imagination in an age of interconnected world and imminent global challenges.

Designed for graduate students with diverse background, this seminar includes readings from comparative historical sociology, imperial and global history, historical international relations, critical geography, historical anthropology, post-colonial studies, and comparative politics. Through such combination of readings, the course will facilitate inter-disciplinary conversations and familiar students with different perspectives on empire and imperialism.
Assignment and Assessment

1. Class Attendance (10%)
2. Class Participation (10%)
3. Five Response Memos (10%)
4. Writing Assignments: Three Essays (70%)
   a) Essay I (15%): 4-page *Topic Overview*.
   b) Essay II (20%): 6-page *Comparative Review*.

Textbook


Course Schedule

Introduction

8/31 Week 1—Introduction: Is Empire Still Alive? Why Study Empire?

9/7 Week 2—Conceptualizing Empire and Imperialism

Supplementary readings:


**Part I Pre-Modern Empires in Eurasia**

**9/14 Week 3—Classical Empires: Rome and China**


**Supplementary readings:**


**9/21 Week 4—Central Eurasian Empires and the Mongols**


**Supplementary readings:**


9/28 Week 5—Early Modern Territorial Empires

Supplementary readings:

Essay I is due via e-mail by 9/30 (Friday).

Part II Modern Empires and Imperialism

10/5 Week 6—European Imperialism
Supplementary readings:

10/12 Week 7—Hegemonic Empire: The British Empire

Supplementary readings:

10/19 Week 8—Non-European Empires: America and Japan


Supplementary readings:


Part III How Empires End

10/26  Week 9—Empire to Nations in the 19th Century?


Supplementary readings:


11/2  Week 10—Empire, War, and Revolution

Supplementary readings:

Essay 2 is due via e-mail by 11/4 (Friday).

11/9 Week 11—Decolonization in the 20th Century

Supplementary readings:


**Part IV Colonial Legacies and Imperial Revival**

11/16 **Week 12—Colonial Legacies and Post-Colonial Critiques**


**Supplementary readings:**


11/23 **No Class (Thanksgiving)**

11/30 **Week 13—The American Empire in the New Century**


**Supplementary readings:**

12/7 **Week 14—A New Chinese Empire?**

**Supplementary readings:**
Mullaney, Thomas S. 2012. *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*. Stanford University Press.

**Essay III is due via e-mail by 12/9 (Friday).**