Histories of the East Asian countries – China, Korea, and Japan – have been deeply intertwined with one another, whether politically or culturally. Today, all three countries are members of the G-20. But each country’s modern fate in the 19th-20th century was anything but similar. China, which had long been the center of the East Asian world, had to experience a century-long humiliation of foreign interventions before it finally became a socialist country. Japan swiftly transformed itself from a loosely united feudal society into a modern industrial nation-state and eventually imperialistic superpower, colonized Korea, and invaded China. Korea’s road to modernity was thwarted as well as informed by the Japanese colonial rule. What accounts for these markedly different paths the three countries walked?

This course aims to introduce students to the historical backgrounds of modern trajectories of the three East Asian countries. Besides basic political histories of each country, issues of their social structures, traditional thoughts and beliefs, and indigenous efforts to modernize themselves will be examined as well.