

**HIST 250**  
***HISTORY OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION***

**Spring Semester 2023**  
Tuesday & Friday, 12:55–2:10 p.m.  
Kerwin 6

**Instructor:** Justin M. Jacobs  
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**Office Hours:** Monday & Tuesday, 3:30-4:30 p.m.



**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course provides an introduction to the history of Chinese civilization, from prehistoric times through the end of the imperial era. We will approach the history of the East Asian mainland by means of broad chronological and thematic topics. These include politics, religion, culture, gender, geography, architecture, economy, philosophy, and education, among others. By the end of this course, you will have a much better understanding of the rich and diverse elements of Chinese civilization, along with an acute appreciation of the fundamental changes that have occurred over the millennia.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

There are no required texts to purchase. All readings, audio files, and videos are available on Canvas or on the instructor's course website ([edspace.american.edu/cave17/](https://edspace.american.edu/cave17/)).

**CLASS STRUCTURE:**

All students are expected to come to class having already completed all assignments for that day, which are listed in the course schedule below. The assignments consist of a course textbook written by your instructor for this course, Youtube videos and podcasts produced by your instructor, primary sources, and other documentary videos. All assigned readings and videos have been selected to familiarize you with the subject matter before coming to class, so that we can use class time to clarify, reinforce, and expand upon the material that you have already encountered in introductory form. Similarly, they can also serve as handy references for you to consult after class while you study for the exams—or perhaps out of the sheer love of learning.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

***IN-CLASS EXAMS. FEBRUARY 17, MARCH 28, & APRIL 28.***

Each student will complete **three (3) in-class exams**, each of which is noted in the course schedule below in **yellow highlighting**. These exams will include a range of identifications, short essay questions, primary source quotations, and visual records based on material derived from the lectures given in class by the instructor. In grading these exams, I will be

looking for evidence that you have incorporated insights and interpretations presented during our lectures—not whatever you may find about the “the Great Southern Migration” or “oracle bones” on Wikipedia or other internet sites. Even if such answers are not, strictly speaking, factually incorrect, they do not demonstrate your understanding of the instructor’s value-added analysis of the material under examination and will thus receive a much lower grade. Needless to say, in order to do well on these exams, you must attend every class, pay close attention to the lectures, and take notes—there is simply no substitute for the in-class experience. For each exam, I will provide a study guide on the day of the previous class session. This study guide will include 2-3 times as much material as will actually appear on the exam—but you can rest assured that nothing will appear on the exam that was not also on the study guide. So students who use the study guide to prepare diligently will not encounter any surprises on the actual exams.

***MUSEUM SCAVENGER HUNT REPORT. DUE FEBRUARY 10.***

All students are expected to visit the Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art (formerly the Freer and Sackler Galleries) at some point during the first four weeks of the course and familiarize themselves with their exhibits on East Asian art. Admission to the galleries is free. In order to enhance your experience of the museum exhibits and ensure that you are fully exposed to the breadth and diversity of the artifacts on display, each student will be required to complete a “Museum Scavenger Hunt Report” (available on Canvas) designed by your instructor. In planning your trip, you should expect to spend a minimum of 1-2 hours at the museum in order to complete the scavenger hunt. Once there, you will likely want to spend many more hours perusing the exhibits.

***CHINESE HELL SCROLL PRESENTATIONS. DUE APRIL 21.***

During our session on religion, we will encounter an example of a Chinese “hell scroll”: artistic representations of the ten courts of hell, with depictions of the punishments doled out to people who have committed various sins during their lives, along with rewards given to those who have done good deeds. As we will learn, the definition of what constitutes a good or evil deed is culturally and chronologically specific. The hell scrolls we will study are syncretic representations of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist moral strictures, and they were often displayed in public viewing areas as moral guidance to the masses. For this assignment, you and several other randomly assigned classmates (total numbers will be determined by class enrollments) will produce your own Chinese hell scroll, either in digital or physical format. You and your other group members must decide which dynasty your hell scroll was produced in and then depict warnings designed to protect the values of that particular type of dynasty (e.g., the agenda of a Yuan dynasty hell scroll would be different from that of a Ming or Song dynasty scroll). At a minimum, you must depict at least ten (10) punishments that reflect distinct values encountered during this course; of those, a maximum of three (3) can be copied from the Chinese hell scroll shown in class. On April 21, each group will present its completed hell scroll in front of the class and explain the various components depicted therein. Though artistic creativity is encouraged, you will not be graded on the aesthetics of your hell scroll, but rather according to how well you have accurately represented the belief systems and moral barometers of the various peoples we have encountered in this course. Your grade for this project will be determined both by your presentation to the class and your instructor’s close analysis of the completed hell scroll itself.

## **GRADES:**

The breakdown of your final grade will be as follows:

Museum Scavenger Hunt:	10 pts. (10%)
Exam #1:	25 pts. (25%)
Exam #2:	25 pts. (25%)
Exam #3:	25 pts. (25%)
Chinese Hell Scroll	15 pts. (15%)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100 pts. (100%)</b>

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This course is designed to foster the following skills of the historical trade:

- 1. Historical Literacy:** Students will gain an understanding of the scope, breadth, and richness of historical studies.
- 2. Critical Thinking:** Students will learn to apply historical methods to critically evaluate the record of the past and how historians and others have interpreted it.
- 3. Communication Skills:** Students will learn to organize and express their thoughts clearly and coherently both in writing and orally.

*This course is also designed to facilitate the following General Education Learning Outcomes and Area Three Objectives:*

- 1. Aesthetic Sensibilities:** Critical reflections on the nature and history of beauty and art.
- 2. Critical Inquiry:** Systematic questioning and analysis of problems, issues, and claims.
- 3. Diverse Perspectives and Experiences:** Acquiring knowledge and analytical skills to understand a wide variety of perspectives and experiences, including those that have emerged from the scholarship on age, disability, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social class.
- 4. The Global and Cross-Cultural Experience (GenEd Area Three Objectives):**
  - explore those habits of thoughts and feeling that distinguish regions, countries, and cultures from one another
  - discuss, in comparative and cross-cultural perspective, the concepts, patterns, and trends that characterize contemporary global politics
  - develop your capacity to critically analyze major issues in international and intercultural relations, especially how categories of difference are organized within and across cultures and how they affect political systems

## **STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the University's Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code and are obligated to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary actions will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to the particular requirements for this course. The code is available online at <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/index.htm>.

# COURSE SCHEDULE

## WEEK 1

### **January 17: Introduction**

### **January 20: China before China**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 1–7 (“The Ruins of Yin”)
2. **WATCH:** “Oracle Bones and the Earliest Chinese States, 1250-750 BC” (20:13)
3. **WATCH:** “Human Sacrifice” (2:35)
4. **WATCH:** “Oracle Bones” (5:05)

## WEEK 2

### **January 24: Religion in Chinese History**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 8–10 (“Religion in Chinese History”)
2. **WATCH:** “Ancient Lady Dai: The Most Perfectly Preserved Mummy Ever Discovered” (49:47)
3. **READ:** “Di Weiqian”
4. **READ:** “Tang Xuan”

### **January 27: Speech and Script in East Asia**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 11–16 (“Speech and Script in East Asia”)
2. **READ:** Mi Fu, “On Calligraphy”
3. **READ:** “Ch’oe Malli’s Opposition to the Korean Alphabet”

## WEEK 3

### **January 31: The Zhou Dynasty and the Book of Odes**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 17–20 (“From a Unipolar to Multipolar World”)
2. **READ:** “The Odes” (read 10-15 poems)

### **February 3: The Classical Philosophers, pt. 1—Confucianism vs. Mohism**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 21–23 (“Confucius, Confucianism, and the Confucian Classics”)
2. **READ:** “Encouragement of a Filial Son and Punishment of an Unfilial Son”
3. **WATCH:** “Mencius and Command Moralism” (15:48)
4. **WATCH:** “Mozi and Universal Love: An Alternative to Filial Piety” (12:29)
5. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 24–26 (“Warfare during the Warring States Era”)
6. **READ:** Mozi, “Against Offensive Warfare”

## WEEK 4

### **February 7: The Classical Philosophers, pt. 2—Zhuangzi vs. Xunzi**

1. **WATCH:** “Zhuangzi and Philosophical Daoism” (16:11)
2. **READ:** Zhuangzi, “Discussion on Making All Things Equal”
3. **WATCH:** “Xunzi and the Transformation of Evil Men” (18:41)
4. **READ:** Xunzi, “A Discussion of Rites”

## February 10: Han Feizi and the First Empires

1. **WATCH:** “Han Feizi and the Legalists” (14:09)
2. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 27–29 (“Legalism and the Qin State”)
3. **READ:** Han Feizi, “The Two Handles”
4. **READ:** “Types of Punishments and Associated Crimes in the Zhangjiashan Legal Texts”
  1. **Note:** This is a list of legal punishments on bamboo slips that were written down during the early Han Empire in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC. Recorded just a few decades after the fall of the Qin Empire in 206 BC, they almost certainly reflect the Han adoption and adaptation of Qin laws that were so representative of Legalist influence during Han Feizi’s time. Browse through this list of punishments and be ready to highlight one or two in class that strikes you as particularly interesting.
5. **\*\*\* MUSEUM SCAVENGER HUNT REPORT DUE TODAY \*\*\***

## WEEK 5

### February 14: The Great Wall—China’s Greatest Myth

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 30–36 (“The Great Wall of China”)
2. **Study Guide for Exam #1 uploaded to Canvas today**

February 17: **\*\*\* EXAM #1 \*\*\***

## WEEK 6

### February 21: Museum Scavenger Hunt Post-Mortem

1. Today we will take a virtual tour (via slides) of the Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art and retrace the path of the scavenger hunt that you have already completed. Along the way, we will discuss each item highlighted on the scavenger hunt in greater detail and place it within the larger context of Chinese history.

### February 24: Chinese Imperial Law

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 37–40 (“Chinese Imperial Law”)
2. **READ:** “A Cunning Scribe Solves a Robbery and Attempted Murder”
3. **READ:** “A Scribe of the Commandant of the Court Overturns a Sentence for Illicit Intercourse”
4. **READ:** “Tokugawa Justice under Confucian Precepts”
5. **READ:** “Lan Dingyuan’s Casebook”

## WEEK 7

### February 28: Women and the Family

1. **LISTEN:** “Chinese Women and the Family” (70:32)
2. **READ:** “Empresses of the Ming Dynasty”
  - a. This primary source was written by Confucian men to praise what they regarded as the ideal qualities of women—and criticize what they saw as less than ideal qualities. While reading this document, try to identify the specific

sorts of traits and behavior of Chinese women in the imperial household that are singled out by Confucian men for praise or criticism.

3. **READ:** “Prohibition Against Remarriage of Women”
4. **READ:** “The Female Slave of Li Fu”

### **March 3: The Great Southern Migration**

1. **WATCH:** “The Great Southern Migration, 200–1000 AD” (15:49)
2. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 41–42 (“The Great Southern Migration”)
3. **READ:** “Cultural Differences Between the North and South”

## **WEEK 8**

### **March 7: Islam in China \*\*\* VIRTUAL ZOOM SESSION \*\*\***

1. **LISTEN:** “Islam in China” (39:47)
2. **READ:** “Seven Documents on Islam in China”
3. **READ:** “Devilish Teachings: Spreading Devilish Faith at a Lotus Hall”
4. **PLEASE NOTE:** Due to anticipated travel plans, we will not meet in person on campus for today’s session. Instead, I will arrange a separate Zoom session at some point in the days before or after today’s class (I’ll send details a week or two before class). If you can attend the live Zoom session, great! If not, I will record it so you can watch it at your own convenience.

### **March 10: Sacred Peaks of China—Mt. Tai and Mt. Emei**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 43–48 (“Sacred Mountains of China”)
2. **WATCH:** “Mount Taishan: The Place Where Chinese Emperors Reported Their Work to Heaven” (22:03)
3. **WATCH:** “Mount Emei and Leshan Giant Buddha” (31:07)

## **WEEK 9**

**March 14: SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS**

**March 17: SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS**

## **WEEK 10**

### **March 21: Ethnic Identity in Chinese History**

1. **READ:** *Classified: The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America*, pp. 141–43, 169–84
  - a. **Note:** The point of reading these excerpts is to provide you with a succinct account of the inherent artificiality and arbitrariness of what we think of today as “racial” or “ethnic” identities. The lesson is the same in any time and place throughout history: what appears to be an objective, natural description of biological differences among different human groups is in fact the product of endless subconscious creativity beholden to constantly evolving political agendas. This reading provides a great, efficient overview of this lesson in the context of modern American society, a phenomenon that many of us are quite familiar with—I want you to keep these conclusions in mind when we talk about the application of similar themes in ancient China.
2. **READ:** “The Chinese Heart”

3. **READ:** “Announcement on Drawing the Barbarians Inward”
4. **OPTIONAL LISTENING:** “Hu Are the Han?” (55:46)

**March 24: The Mogao Grottoes—Buddhist Art Gallery in the Desert**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 49–55 (“The Mogao Grottoes”)
2. **WATCH:** “The Silk Road: The Art Gallery in the Desert” (47:22)
3. **Study Guide for Exam #2 uploaded to Canvas today**

**WEEK 11**

**March 28: \*\*\* EXAM #2 \*\*\***

**March 31: Northern Hybrid States**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 56–59 (“Northern Hybrid States”)
2. **READ:** “Ethnic Affiliations and Geographic Backgrounds of Chinese Dynasties”
  - a. **Note:** I want you to browse through this list with an eye toward seeing just how often the ruling house of any particular dynasty in Chinese history was actually anything but “Chinese” (or “Sinitic,” as the compiler has labeled it).
3. **READ:** “A Mongol Governor”

**WEEK 12**

**April 4: Sacred Sites of Tibet—The Jokhang Temple and Potala Palace**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 60–66 (“Sacred Sites of Tibet”)
2. **WATCH:** “Potala Palace: UNESCO World Heritage Sites in China” (27:34)

**April 7: Education and the Civil Service Exams**

1. **WATCH:** “The Civil Service Examination System, 1000–1905 AD” (16:34)
2. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 67–70 (“Late Imperial Officialdom”)
3. **READ:** “On Being Inadmissible to the Examinations”
4. **READ:** “Examination Officials Are Sued by Scholars for Favoritism and Fraud”
5. **READ:** “Two Model Essays for the Civil Service Exam”

**WEEK 13**

**April 11: The Role of Eunuchs in Chinese History**

1. **READ:** “The Fate of Yakoob Beg’s Descendants”
2. **READ:** “Letters from the Kangxi Emperor to His Most Trusted Eunuch”
  1. **Note:** You should read these letters with an eye toward thinking about why the emperor is writing about such topics with a eunuch. Do you think he would write about such things to a county magistrate or the director of the Board of Rites? What about his mother or a concubine? His brother?

**April 14: The Forbidden City**

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 71–81 (“The Forbidden City” and “Late Imperial Government”)
2. **WATCH:** “Inside the Forbidden City”

## WEEK 14

### **April 18: Zheng He and the Maritime World**

1. **WATCH:** “The Maritime Voyages of Zheng He, 1405-1433” (18:07)
2. **READ:** “Historical Accounts of Zheng He”
  - a. This is a dense primary source, but I want you to browse through it looking for evidence of what sort of activities Zheng He’s fleet undertook in various places throughout Southeast and South Asia. Did his agenda appear to be peaceful?

### **April 21: \*\*\* CHINESE HELL SCROLL PRESENTATIONS \*\*\***

1. **Note:** Make sure your group has sent me a digital JPEG file of your completed hell scroll so that I can project it on the screen during class. Depending on the number of groups, you will have anywhere 10 to 15 minutes to explicate your choices to the class and take questions. It is also fine to draw or paint a hell scroll on large sheets of paper, then take a digital photo of it and project that onto the screen.

## WEEK 15

### **April 25: History of Chinese Architecture**

1. **Study Guide for Exam #3 uploaded to Canvas today**

### **April 28: \*\*\* EXAM #3 \*\*\***