

HIST 250
HISTORY OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION

Fall Semester 2024

Tuesday & Friday, 9:45–11:00 a.m.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a broad overview of 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 either on Canvas or on the instructor's course website (edspace.american.edu/cave17/).

CLASS STRUCTURE:

All students are expected to come to class having already completed all readings and videos for that day, which are listed in the course schedule below. These materials consist of a course textbook written by your instructor, 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. SEPTEMBER 27, NOVEMBER 1, DECEMBER 3.

Each student will complete **three (3) in-class exams**, all of which are 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 class sessions—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, complete all the readings, watch all the videos, 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 SEPTEMBER 20.

All students are expected to visit the Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art (formerly known as 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 museum 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.

TEN KINGS UNDERWORLD MURAL PRESENTATIONS. DUE DECEMBER 6.

During our session on religion—deliberately scheduled early in the semester—we will encounter examples of the popular “Ten Kings” underworld: artistic representations of the ten courts of a Chinese-Buddhist 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 Ten Kings paintings 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 Ten Kings Underworld Mural, either in digital or physical format. You and your other group members must decide which dynasty (from Han onward) your Ten Kings Hell Mural 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, though certain values would have persisted through all three dynasties). 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 adapted from the Ten Kings Underworld Mural shown in class. On December 6, each group will present its completed mural in front of the class and explain the various components depicted therein. Though artistic creativity is encouraged and will be appreciated, you will not be graded on the aesthetics of your mural, 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 mural itself. Examples of murals presented by students who have taken this course

in prior years can be found in the slides for our “Introduction” session, which are posted on Canvas.

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%)
<u>Ten Kings Mural</u>	<u>15 pts. (15%)</u>
Total:	100 pts. (100%)

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

August 27: 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)

August 30: INTRODUCTION * ZOOM SESSION *****

1. **NOTE:** Today’s session will be conducted remotely via Zoom—a link will be posted to Canvas in the “Announcements” section. In order to maximize our time in class, I have moved the standard course introduction spiel to today rather than the first day of the course.

WEEK 2

September 3: 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”

September 6: 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

September 10: THE ZHOU DYNASTY & 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)

September 13: THE CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHERS—CONFUCIUS VS. MOZI

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

September 17: THE CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHERS—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”

September 20: 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. This is a list of legal punishments on bamboo slips that were written down during the early Han Empire in the 2nd 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 strike you as particularly interesting.

5. ***** MUSEUM SCAVENGER HUNT REPORT DUE TODAY *****

WEEK 5

September 24: 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**

September 27: ***** EXAM #1 *****

WEEK 6

October 1: CHINESE IMPERIAL LAW

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 37–40 (“Chinese Imperial Law”)
2. **READ:** “Tokugawa Justice under Confucian Precepts”
3. **READ:** “Lan Dingyuan’s Casebook”

October 4: WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

1. **LISTEN:** “Chinese Women and the Family” (70:32)
 - a. This is a recording of the lecture I used to give for this course in years past. This is the only time this semester that I want to you listen to a full lecture before coming to class, since it will allow us to carry out a different but related intellectual exercise during class that builds upon the lecture material.
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”

WEEK 7

October 8: 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”

October 11: * FALL BREAK—NO CLASS *****

WEEK 8

October 15: ISLAM IN CHINA

1. **READ:** “Seven Documents on Islam in China”
2. **READ:** “Devilish Teachings: Spreading Devilish Faith at a Lotus Hall”

October 18: SACRED PEAKS OF CHINA—MT. TAI & 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

October 22: IDENTITY POLITICS 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 during class.
2. **READ:** “The Chinese Heart”
3. **READ:** “Announcement on Drawing the Barbarians Inward”
4. **OPTIONAL LISTENING:** “Hu Are the Han?” (55:46)
 - a. Many people find the history of the evolution of ethnic and racial classification systems to be confusing, bewildering, and occasionally a paradigm shift that challenges everything you thought you knew. I know I once did. As a result, I am including a link to my old recorded lecture for this topic so that students who wish to review the major points have access to it. Though I have revised and updated this old lecture in many ways, the

fundamental points and key changes over time that it highlights are still sound.

October 25: MOGAO GROTTOS—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)

WEEK 10

October 29: CHINA AND THE NOMADS

1. **READ:** *Course textbook*, pp. 56–59 (“Northern Hybrid States”)
2. **READ:** “Ethnic Affiliations and Geographic Backgrounds of Chinese Dynasties”
 - a. 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”
4. **Study Guide for Exam #2 uploaded to Canvas today**

November 1: * EXAM #2 *****

WEEK 11

November 5: * NO CLASS—ELECTION DAY *****

November 8: INTRO TO TIBET—THE JOKHANG TEMPLE & 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)

WEEK 12

November 12: 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”

November 15: EUNUCHS IN CHINESE HISTORY

1. **READ:** “The Fate of Yakoob Beg’s Descendants” (or, “How to Make a Eunuch”—reader beware)
 - a. Both this reading and today’s lecture will treat formerly taboo topics that will include some shocking details and images. Students should be prepared to hear about the brutal realities of what it meant to become and serve as a eunuch in Chinese history.
2. **READ:** “Letters from the Kangxi Emperor to His Most Trusted Eunuch”
 - a. 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, brother, or a concubine?

WEEK 13

November 19: THE FORBIDDEN CITY

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

November 22: 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 they constitute the sole surviving written texts that describe Zheng He and his voyages that were written at the time of his voyages or soon after (*Mingshi* is the *Official History of the Ming Dynasty*). 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, aggressive, or something in between?

WEEK 14

November 26: HISTORY OF CHINESE ARCHITECTURE * ZOOM SESSION *****

1. **NOTE:** Due to the Thanksgiving holiday this week, today’s session will be held online. A Zoom link for this session will be posted to the “Announcements” section of Canvas. I have purposely chosen to select this topic for Zoom delivery since it will be illustrated by copious slides and I have not yet found a worthy primary source related to Chinese architecture that would be useful to discuss in class.
2. **Study Guide for Exam #3 uploaded to Canvas today**

November 29: * THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY—NO CLASS *****

WEEK 15

December 3: * EXAM #3 *****

December 6: * TEN KINGS UNDERWORLD MURAL PRESENTATIONS *****

1. **Note:** Make sure your group has sent me a digital JPEG file of your completed Ten Kings Underworld Mural so that I can project it on the screen behind your group 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 mural on large sheets of paper, then take a digital photo of it and project that onto the screen. Consult the slides for our Introduction session on Canvas to see how students in previous years approached the visual element of this assignment.