



History 339: Traditional China Fall 2024 Tu/Thu 12-1:15 Beerling 1268

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Consultation: Tuesdays, 3:30-4
Also via Webex and by appointment

Course Description

China has the oldest ongoing civilization in the world. Its rich and full history offers a diverse array of topics to study. While providing an overview of premodern Chinese history (Neolithic to the Qing), this course will focus on the following themes:

- (1) Governance and empire: how did China come to have an empire, and what were the challenges in governing such a large population and geographical area?
- (2) Continuity and discontinuity: why do Chinese think they have a continuous empire? What are the philosophical thread-lines that run throughout Chinese history, especially in terms of daily life and culture? In what ways do periods of rupture challenge that vision?
- (3) Elite vs. Popular culture: What about women, children, and ethnic minorities in China?

Course Goals

1. to instill an appreciation of Chinese culture, especially through the development of historical imagination of the lived past;
2. to cultivate a historical imagination, and to understand that there were paths in history that were not taken or that were lost
3. to create an understanding of historical methods, especially context, contingency, complexity, change over time, and causality
4. to inspire an appreciation for how textual records were created, preserved, and transmitted, and how those processes affected their interpretation
5. to impart a nuanced understanding of historical processes as neither inevitable nor accidental

See BrightSpace for further information about university policies.

Textbook: Ebrey, Patricia Buckley. *China: Cambridge Illustrated History*. [The Cambridge Illustrated History of China students.pdf](#) for students without the means to purchase a copy.

Optional textbook reading: John Major and Constance Cook, *Ancient China*, free to download [here](#).

Please refer to [this timeline](#)

Additional readings are on BrightSpace. It is recommended that you read them prior to a lecture, but may also read afterwards if you need to. Sometimes, there will be an indicated reading quiz or discussion, and you will need to read before class for those days.

Assessments

Reading quizzes (x7, dropping lowest score): 30%

Participation in class, including student presentations: 10%

Tests (x2): 40%

Journals (in-class writing and short homework exercises, throughout): 20%

Extra credit is meant to introduce you to the life of the university. Write a short paragraph about your own personal response; do not merely summarize the event.

If you have accommodations, please let me know.

University policies on BrightSpace.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 (starting 8/20)

Tu Introduction to the class. Homework: Read the syllabus. Clips from "[China's Bronze Age](#)"
Ancient Heroes and Banpo; Handout.

Self-introduction due on BrightSpace

Read the syllabus; "[Golden Age](#)" *Washington Post*

Week 2 (starting 8/27)

Tu Shang Dynasty and Oracle Bones

Read "oracle bones" ; Ebrey Ch. 1

Thu Zhou conquest

Blue book writing (in class, at the end of class): What was the Mandate of Heaven, and can you offer an example of how it was interpreted?

Week 3 (starting 9/3)

Major concepts: Duke of Zhou, Mandate of Heaven, wen vs wu Read Ebrey, Chapter 2; Allan and Bagley, "Art and Meaning"

Tu Eastern Zhou

Thu Discussion of bronzes

Read Allan and Bagley

Short reading quiz 1

Student presentations in teams: presenting the ideas of Allan and Bagley

Team Allan: How does Allan understand ancient rites? How does she analyze animal imagery? How does she rely upon other scholars to help support her claims? What kind of context does she use?

Team Bagley: What techniques does Bagley use to undercut current assumptions about Chinese religion? Is

it apparent that he comes from a different discipline than Allan?

Week Four (starting 9/10)

Tu Schools of Thought

Read selections from the Analects and Dao Dejing

Thu The problem with the state of Chu

[“Defining Chu”](#); “The Battle Between Chu and Jin”; Ebrey, 55-59

Reading Quiz 2

Week Five (starting 9/17)

Tu The Qin Conquest; clip from “Hero”

Read Ebrey, Chapter Three

Thu Historiography [Sima Qian Presentation.pptx](#)

Read Ebrey, Chapter 3; Annals of [Xiang Yu.pdf](#)

Short reading quiz 3

Student presentations in teams: Were there forces beyond Xiang Yu’s control? What were they?

Team Fate: Xiang Yu claimed that Heaven must not have favored him. What were the signs that pointed in this direction? Why did he think so?

Team Strategy: What mistakes did Xiang Yu make? What strategies did others use against him?

Week 6 (starting 9/24)

Tu Overview of the Han

Read http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/debate_salt_iron.pdf

Thu Gender, Law and Society in the Late Han

Week 7 (starting 10/1)

Tu [Introduction to Romance of the Three Kingdoms](#) and the The Battle of Red Cliff (AD 208–209); Clips & [Discussion](#)

Read “To My Wine”: <https://kongming.net/poetry/caocao/>

Read Ebrey, Chapter 4

Thu Buddhism

Read http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/hanyu_bone_of_buddha.pdf

http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/emperor_wuzong_suppress_buddhism.pdf

In-class writing

Week 8 (starting 10/8)

Tu No class; Indigenous People Day

Thu Optional Review (virtual)

Week 9 (starting 10/15)

Tu Test 1

Thu Tang: A Taste of Empire

Read Ebrey, chapter 5

In-class “response” in a **blue-book** (to be collected and re-distributed). One sentence rumination on the following:

(1) Why do Ebrey and other scholars think that the Tang especially cosmopolitan or “open”?

(2) What did Chinese people appreciate about Central Asians?

According to Valarie Hansen, what was the “Silk Road” like?

Week 10 (starting 10/22):

Tu: Late Tang (powerpoint)

In-class “response” in a **blue-book** (to be collected and re-distributed). One sentence rumination on the following:

(1) What was the effect of Empress Wu on the way Chinese saw Buddhism?

(2) What was the effect of An Lushan on the way Chinese saw Central Asians?

Thu: Discussion of Linda Rui Feng.

Linda Rui Feng. *City of Marvel and Transformation : Changan and Narratives of Experience in Tang Dynasty China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016. ISBN 9780824841065:

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=1284714&site=ehost-live>. This chapter is about examination candidates who travelled to the capital, Chang’an, during the Tang dynasty

On BrightSpace: **Creative Assignment**

Take one person or example from *City of Marvel*. Imagine that you are that person, and translate their situation into the present day through a resume, series of tweets, Instagram or TikTok.

In class, be prepared to discuss the chapter as well as your responses to the assignment: How were temples in Chang’an different from the internet now? What do you see as most distinct or different in that day and age? How would you go about making a name for yourself today.

Week 11 (starting 10/29)

Tu Five dynasties and Song conquest

Read Ebrey

Thu Discussion of *Monkey King*

Short reading quiz 4.

Read chapters 1 (pp. 1-9); 9-12 (pp 81-132) available at [Purdue University Library](#).

Think about the following:

- (1) Was there something that surprised you in the reading?
- (2) Was there a story that you found funny, and why?
- (3) Do you identify with any of the characters, and why?

Week 12 (starting 11/5):

Tu Song: urban life and military

Read: [The Gunpowder Epic](#)

In-class writing: How was the Song a technologically “advanced” society? Select either medicine, agriculture, industry or military technology (thinking about class from Monday) as a focus for your answer.

Thu Discussion of *Mulan* (readings)

Short reading quiz 5.

As you read, think about the following:

- (1) What surprised you about these versions?
- (2) What is appealing about the story of Mulan?

Week 13 (starting 11/12):

Tu Optional Review Session

Thu **Test 2**

Week 14 (starting 11/19)

Tu Yuan Conquest; [339 Yuan revised.docx](#)

Includes clip from The Quest for Genghis Kahn’s Lost Tomb

Read Ebrey, Ch. 7; Hoyt Tillman, “Disorder as Trauma.”

Short reading quiz 6.

Thu [339 Ming Beginnings.docx](#) (Handouts)

Clips of Sarah Schneewind, “The Dark World of the Dead in the Founding of the Ming

Week 15 (starting 11/26) : Thanksgiving; no class

Week 16 (starting 12/3)

Tu Ming dynasty

Ready Ebrey, Chapter 8; Ray Huang, “Wanli,” *Significance*.

Short reading quiz 7

Thu Qing conquest

Self-assessment due