From village to empire – the Origins of the Chinese Civilisation

IEEL014 5 credit module (equivalent to 2.5 ECTS)

1. Module Leader

Marvin Demicoli

**Biography.** Ph.D. student in archaeology at the University of Liverpool, specialising in archaeobotany with a focus on human-vegetation interactions in Neolithic China. I have worked on research archaeological projects in China, UK, Malta, Italy and Iraq. I have previously also worked as a professional contract archaeologist in the UK and Malta since 2009.

2. Module Description

This module will provide an overview of the archaeology of China from the Palaeolithic (2,000,000 BP) to up to the early Imperial age (Qin Dynasty 206 BCE). Every two-hour session will comprise a lecture followed by a discussion. Students will learn how to engage with different types of evidence written sources, archaeology and environmental records. Students will also learn about the origins of the Chinese civilisation during this early formative period of the Chinese culture.

3. Module Aims

This module aims to:

- Build students’ confidence in understanding, discussing and communicating complex ideas, both in written and spoken language.
- Develop skills in research, collaborative learning and in preparing and delivering a group presentation.
- To provide an overview of the development of the Chinese culture from early prehistory to the Qin dynasty (206 BCE).

4. Content

The following topics will be considered on the module:

- Methods of research: archaeology vs texts
- Geographic, environmental and ecological setting of China
- Pleistocene and early Holocene – early humans in China
- Early Neolithic – the rise of agriculture
- Middle and late Neolithic – from villages to cities
- The mythical Xia and the Shang Dynasty – Early state formation and first writing
- Western and Eastern Zhou Dynasties – War and Religions
- Qin Dynasty – the unification of China and the first empire (terracotta army exhibition visit)

5. Module structure

The module will be delivered over a three week period in six two-hour sessions (four hours per week, total 12 hours contact time). The final block will be an assessment session.

Each session will take the form of an interactive lecture, seminar or workshop. The teachers will introduce the key themes and principles in Chinese archaeology.
and students will have a number of opportunities to put what they are learning into practice with their classmates. Students will be expected to participate fully and actively throughout the sessions.

In addition, it is expected that students will spend 38 study hours outside of the classroom contact hours on activities including assigned reading, optional reading of areas of personal interest, homework tasks, web research and preparation for assessment. The ‘flipped classroom’ approach will be used, requiring students to prepare in advance for the sessions, and so students should be aware that in order to fully benefit from the face-to-face classroom sessions, they will need to have done the preparation work assigned beforehand.

6. Teaching methods

The teaching approach will include the following:
- Taught sessions
- Flipped classroom – preparation work
- Small group working
- Group discussions
- Presentations
- Online learning
- Workshops

7. Assessment:

Assessment will be by:
- Group presentation (worth 25% of the overall mark)
- Written essay/reflection of 750-850 words (worth 75% of the overall mark)

Standard University policies apply with regard to late submission of assessments. There is no re-assessment opportunity.

8. Course structure:

The Indicative schedule is as follows:

The course will be taught and practical in nature, with the sessions divided between taught, lecture style parts, and class discussion exercises.

Session One:
*Introduction to Chinese archaeology and Pre-Neolithic China*
The students will be given some general information about the module, including the aims and assessment. The course will then begin with an introduction to archaeological methods and research. Students will be given a brief overview of the development of Chinese archaeology and archaeological techniques. The lecture will then proceed to introduce the Chinese landscape and environmental setting before looking at the earliest evidence of humans in China and discussing hunter gatherer societies.

Session Two:
*The Neolithic period – agriculture, villages and cities*
This session will introduce students to the main cultures of the Chinese Neolithic. It will discuss the move of sedentism, formation of villages and eventually larger walled cities in the late Neolithic. This session will also review the current knowledge of the separate development of rice and millet agriculture in China during the Neolithic period.
Session Three:  
*The mythical Xia and the Shang Dynasty – Early state formation and the first writing*

Students will learn about the early bronze age cultures of Xia and Shang and their evidence in the archaeological record. Discussion will focus on the development of writing, its implications and its relation to archaeological evidence.

Session Four:  
*Western and Eastern Zhou Dynasties – War and Religions*

This session will focus on the Middle and Late Bronze age Zhou Dynasty period. Students will learn about the different events happening in this period and discuss the differences between the major belief systems that were developed at this period: Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.

Session Five:  
*Terracotta Army exhibition visit*

Students will visit the terracotta army exhibition at the Liverpool World Museum. This session will focus on the Qin Dynasty and the rise of the first empire.

Session Six:  
*Group Presentation*

In this final session the students will give a short presentation about their chosen theme.

9. **Learning outcomes**

On completion of this module, students will be able to:

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<tr>
<th>Learning outcome</th>
<th>Assessment component which assesses this learning outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better understand and communicate complex ideas in written and spoken language</td>
<td>Written essay/reflection</td>
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<td>Group presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research a topic and work collaboratively to produce a written essay/reflection</td>
<td>Written essay/reflection</td>
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<td>and a group presentation</td>
<td>Group presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrate a general understanding of the prehistory and early history of China</td>
<td>Written essay/reflection</td>
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<td>Group presentation</td>
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10. **Skills**

Key skills that will be developed:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>How this skill is developed</th>
<th>Mode of assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Group discussion, group research, group presentation</td>
<td>Group presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Orally in class discussion and group presentation; in writing by production of assessed assignment</td>
<td>Group presentation; Written essay/reflection</td>
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11. Books

The University Website at [www.liv.ac.uk/library](http://www.liv.ac.uk/library) provides access to many relevant books and electronic books, as well as academic journals and databases.

**Recommended Pre-Course Reading**

Liu Li and Chen Xingchan 2012 *The Archaeology of China. From Late Paleolithic to the early Bronze Age*. Cambridge University Press


**Core Texts**


Li Liu & Xingcan Chen 2003 *State formation in early China* Duckworth

Li Liu and Chen Xingchan 2012 *The Archaeology of China. From Late Paleolithic to the early Bronze Age*. Cambridge University Press


Yao, Alice, 2016. The Ancient Highlands of Southwest China: From the Bronze Age to the Han Empire. Oxford: Oxford University Press