



ARCL0155: Social Complexity in Early China: From the Neolithic to Bronze Age

2023-2024, Term 2

Optional module for MA in Archaeology and Heritage of Asia, 15 credits

Tuesday, 9-11am, Room B13

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Office: room 106; office hours: Thursday 2-4pm

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING ASSESSMENTS:

The **coursework coversheet** is available on the course Moodle pages and here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/current-students> under “Policies, Forms and Guidelines”.

Please enter **your five-digit candidate code on the coversheet and in the subject line** when you upload your work in Moodle.

Please use **your five-digit candidate code as the name of the file** you submit.

Please refer to <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/current-students/ioa-student-handbook/13-information-assessment>
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/current-students/ioa-study-skills-guide/referencing-effectively-and-ioa-guidelines>
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/academic-integrity>
<https://library-guides.ucl.ac.uk/referencing-plagiarism/acknowledging-AI>

for instructions on coursework submission, IoA referencing guidelines and marking criteria, as well as UCL policies on penalties for late submission, over-length work, the use of text generation software (AI) and academic misconduct.

The use of software to generate research and content is not allowed for marked assessments for this course and will be penalised; the use of software for language and writing review and improvement is permitted, and the software and the way it has been used must be indicated in the relevant boxes on the coursework coversheet. UCL defines language and writing review as checking "areas of academic writing such as structure, fluency, presentation, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and language translation"

1 MODULE OVERVIEW

Module description

This module will explore key issues in the archaeology of Prehistoric and Early Historic China, with a particular focus on the understanding of changing patterns of social complexity as revealed through archaeological evidence from excavations and artefacts. The periods covered will range from the last hunter-gatherers to the First Empire of China. The module will present an overview of the major categories of material cultures, including ceramics, jades and bronzes in terms of their production, stylistic patterning and exchange networks. Students will explore recent debates concerning how such artefacts are related to the creation of Chinese hierarchical societies, materiality, regional diversity, and other themes as revealed through archaeology. Sessions will combine lecture and seminar discussion. Students will also contribute by preparing presentations for a student-led discussion.

Module aims

To develop knowledge of the basic chronological frameworks for China's major regions from the Early Holocene up to the Bronze Age and an understanding of environmental constraints on cultural development. Themes covered will include in particular:

- Differing pathways to agriculture and sedentism across Chinese regions
- Differing regional discourses of craft production, trade and evidence for social hierarchy
- Varied trajectories to complex societies and hypotheses of state formation
- Processes of initial urbanization in China and how it has been defined and recognized
- Differing regional chronologies of technological innovations, including agriculture, bronze metallurgy, jade carving, porcelain production, writing, horses and chariots, iron working

Learning outcomes

On successful completion of the module students should be able to have developed:

- critical reflection of Western theoretical archaeological approaches to Chinese archaeology
- a basic knowledge of the data
- the ability to write an essay on selected topic
- the ability to compare the knowledge acquired during the course with other cultures

Methods of assessment

Method of Assessment	Credit value/ Percentage weighting	To be passed in order to progress Y/N	Examination Length or coursework word count
Powerpoint presentation and essay	33%	Y	1000
Essay	67%	Y	2000

Communications

- **Moodle is the main hub** for this course.
- Important information will be posted by staff in the **Announcements section** of the Moodle page and you will automatically receive an email notification for these.
- Please post any general queries relating to module content, assessments and administration **in the Moodle Q&A or via email**.
- For personal queries, please contact the co-ordinator by email.

Week-by-week summary

Date and week	Topic
Week 1 January 9 th	The first villages

Week 2 January 16 th	From villages to cities and in-between
Week 3 January 23 rd	Death and social complexity
Week 4 January 30 th	Labour organisation and social complexity
Week 5 February 6 th	Diet and social complexity: Cooking and eating
Week 6	READING WEEK
Week 7 February 20 th and 21 st	Student powerpoint presentation
Week 8 February 27 th	Diet and social complexity: drinking
Week 9 March 5 th	Material and social complexity: jade
Week 10 March 12 th	Material and social complexity: bronzes
Week 11 March 19 th	Material and social complexity: pottery

Weekly Module Plan

The module consists of 10 x 2-hour sessions. It is taught by a mixture of lectures by the instructor and seminar discussions, with presentations by students.

Workload

This is a 15-credit module which equates to 150 hours of learning time including session preparation, background reading, and researching and writing your assignments. With that in mind you should expect to organise your time in roughly this way:

20 hours	<i>Staff-led teaching sessions (lectures and discussion-board sessions)</i>
70 hours	<i>Self-guided session preparation (reading, listening, note-taking)</i>
25 hours	<i>Reading for, and writing, essay one</i>
35 hours	<i>Reading for, and writing, essay two</i>

2 ASSESSMENT

Each assignment and possible approaches to it will be discussed in class, in advance of the submission deadline. If students are unclear about the nature of an assignment, they should discuss this with the module co-ordinator in advance (via office hours or class Moodle forum). You will receive feedback on your written coursework via Moodle, and have the opportunity to discuss your marks and feedback with the co-ordinator in their office hours.

For more details see the ‘Assessment’ section on Moodle. The coursework coversheet is available on the course Moodle pages and here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/current-students> under “Policies, Forms and Guidelines”.

Please make sure you enter your five-digit candidate code on the coversheet and in the subject line when you upload your work in Moodle.

Please use your five-digit candidate code as the name of the file you submit.

The [IoA marking criteria](#) can be found in the IoA Student Handbook (Section 13: Information on assessment). The [IoA Study Skills Guide](#) provides useful guidance on writing different types of assignment.

Please note that **late submission, exceeding the maximum word count and academic misconduct (unacknowledged use of text generation software and plagiarism)** will be penalized and can significantly reduce the mark awarded for the assignment and/or overall module result. Please do consult

- <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/current-students/ioa-student-handbook/13-information-assessment> with sections 13.7–13.8: coursework submission, 13.10: word count, 13.12–14: academic integrity
- <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/academic-integrity> for UCL’s guidance on academic integrity

- <https://library-guides.ucl.ac.uk/referencing-plagiarism/acknowledging-AI> for UCL's guidance on how to acknowledge the use of text generation software.

(1) Assessment one powerpoint presentation and essay of 1000 words, 33% of the final mark of the module.

Instructions on the preparation and submission of the powerpoint presentation and essay: the powerpoint is to be presented on **20th and 21st February 2024**, and the pdf version of your powerpoint and your essay for the presentation to be handed in for marking (**DUE DATE: 27th February 2024**).

Powerpoint should be around 10-12 slides, lasting max 12 minutes (excluding additional slides of references/bibliography). The presentation should be a combination of your perspective on different scholarships and approaches to the research of your selected topic, and your archaeological examples of specific regions and specific archaeological cultures. It should resemble the structure of an essay and summarise the background, questions, methods/approaches, and conclusions of the chosen topic. You should consult with the coordinator before starting work on a presentation that goes significantly beyond the topic suggested.

The assessment will be purely based on the content of the presentation and essay and will be marked according to the standard criteria set up by the institute (see the blue coversheet). **Your presentational style will not be assessed**, but suggestions of how to further improve your presentation style will be provided when necessary during the presentation.

You might conduct a topic of your own choice. However, you should consult with me before starting work on a presentation.

Essay topics:

1. First villages and their subsistence strategies
2. Urbanism and its economic, cultural and social foundations
3. State formation: processes and trajectories
4. Craft production in Neolithic China and its social implications
5. Shang chariots and their social and cultural significances

This coursework will be marked and returned by **26th March 2024**.

(2): one essay of 2000 words, which will constitute 60% of the final grade for the course. The essay is due on **30th April 2024**.

Students are not permitted to re-write and re-submit essays in order to try to improve their marks. However, students may be permitted, in advance of the deadline for a given assignment, to submit for comment a brief outline of the assignment.

The Course Co-ordinator is willing to discuss an outline of the student's approach to the assignment, provided this is planned suitably in advance of the submission date.

Essay topics:

1. Grave analysis and social complexity: Yangshao and Longshan periods.
2. Compare jade artefacts from different Neolithic cultures and their social implications.
3. Agricultural intensification and social complexity (use examples from Hemudu, Longshan or other periods and regions).
4. Metallurgy, bronze vessel and social roles during the Shang period.

This coursework will be marked and returned by **29th May 2024**

3 RESOURCES AND PREPARATION FOR CLASS

Preparation for class

You are expected to read the two/three essential readings each week. Completing the readings is essential for your effective participation in the discussions and it will greatly enhance your understanding of the material covered. Further readings are provided via online-reading list for you to get a sense of the range of current work on a given topic and for you to draw upon for your assessments.

Recommended basic readings

- Campbell, R. 2014. *Archaeology of the Chinese Bronze Age: From Erlitou to Anyang*. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvdjrr9r>
- Campbell, R. 2018. *Violence, Kinship and the Early Chinese State: The Shang and Their World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/violence-kinship-and-the-early-chinese-state/36E207B5B3ED9E478DDDAC7A8209702D>
- Liu, L. 2004. *The Chinese Neolithic: The Trajectories to Early States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/chinese-neolithic/655234F7B8AC8B405462FCD5E5E03C0F>
- Liu, L. & X.C., Chen. 2012. *The Archaeology of China: From the Late Paleolithic to the Early Bronze Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/archaeology-of-china/E6A914976791CED133661146FD88E467>
- Li, F. 2013. *Early China: A Social and Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/early-china/9AF8230B2EBD2CCA736C76ED14AC26FD>
- Shelach-Lavi, G. 2015. *The Archaeology of Early China: From Prehistory to the Han Dynasty*. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/archaeology-of-early-china/64AC692B32A8FFEFF2F6A8A2E2C78868>
- Thorp, R.L. 2006. *China in the Early Bronze Age: Shang Civilization*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhxmw>
- Underhill, A.P. (ed.) *A Companion to Chinese Archaeology*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/book/10.1002/9781118325698>

More readings can be found in online reading list: <https://rl.talis.com/3/ucl/lists/7C2792A9-81C1-2F6A-9DE5-F9D999B0EA27.html?lang=en&login=1>

4 SYLLABUS

Week 1. The first villages

This lecture will deal with two fundamental topics: the so-called Palaeolithic-Neolithic transition and the emergence of first villages. Did much of China witness a homogeneous transition from the palaeolithic to the Neolithic? How did it take for the first village to emerge? And what are the social implications of these changes? These issues will be discussed in light of recent archaeological data.

Essential readings

- Kuzmin, Y. Chronology of the earliest pottery in East Asia: progress and pitfalls. *Antiquity* 80: 362-371.
- Liu, L. & X.C., Chen. 2012. *The Archaeology of China: From the Late Paleolithic to the Early Bronze Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 6.
- Shelach, G. 2000. The Earliest Neolithic cultures of Northeast China: Recent discoveries and new perspectives on the beginning of agriculture. *Journal of World Prehistory* 14: 363 – 413.
- Wang, J. 2023. A posthumanist approach to the origins of rice agriculture in Southern China. *Current Anthropology*, 64: 242-268.

Week 2. From villages to cities and in-between

This lecture will draw on the corpus of archaeological discoveries of the Yangshao, Longshan and contemporary cultures and illustrates the trajectories of the emergence of late-Neolithic walled town, urban centers and states. Students will be asked to discuss theories on early state formation.

Essential readings

- Lee, Y.K. 2007. Centripetal settlement and segmentary social formation of the Banpo tradition. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 26: 630-675.
- Liu, L. 2009. State emergence in early China. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 38:217-232.
- Owlett, T.E., Liu, L., and Underhill, A.P. 2017. Emerging approaches to the development of urbanization in early China. *Archaeological Research in Asia*, online first.
- Peterson, C, and Shelach G. 2012. Jiangzhai: Social and economic organization of a Middle Neolithic Chinese village. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 31: 265 – 301.
- Jaffe, Y, et al. Shimao and the rise of states in China: Archaeology, Historiography, and Myth. *Current Anthropology*, 63: 95-117.

Week 3. Death and social complexity

This lecture will focus on cemetery data discovered in the Yangshao, Dawenkou and Longshan cultures and discuss how these different mortuary practices could inform us the social stratification and complexity within a wider regional context.

Essential readings

- Dong, Y. et al. 2019. Mortuary ritual and social identities during the late Dawenkou period in China. *Antiquity*, 93: 378-392.
- Luan, F.S. 2013. The Dawenkou culture in the Lower Yellow River and Huai River Basin Area. In Underhill, A.P. (ed.) *A Companion to Chinese Archaeology*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Underhill, A.P. 2000. An analysis of mortuary ritual at the Dawenkou site, Shandong, China. *Journal of East Asian Archaeology*, vol. 2: 93-127.
- Zhang, H., A., Bevan. & D.S., Guo. 2012. The Neolithic Ceremonial Complex at Niheliang and Wider Hongshan Landscapes in Northeastern China. *Journal of World Prehistory*, vol. 26: 1-24.

Week 4 Labour organisation and social complexity

This lecture will begin with a critical reflection on the classical theories of labour, power and society in China and beyond. This will be followed by a few recent studies on the architectural energetics and technologies which demonstrate different models of labour organisation in prehistoric China. These examples will be used to challenge the conventionally simplistic treatment of labour organisation, power acquisition and social structure in ancient China.

Essential readings

- Liu B. et al. 2017. The earliest hydraulic enterprise in China, 5100 years ago. *PNAS*, 114: 13637-13642.
- Li C. et al. 2023. Earliest ceramic drainage system and the formation of hydro-sociality in monsoonal East Asia. *Nature Water*, 1: 694-704.
- Wang N. et al. 2020. Letting the stones speak: An interdisciplinary survey of stone collection and construction at Liangzhu City, prehistoric Lower Yangtze River. *Geoarchaeology: An International Journal*, 35:625-643.
- Xie, L. et al. 2021. Architectural energetics for rammed-earth compaction in the context of Neolithic to early Bronze Age urban sites in Middle Yellow River Valley, China. *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 126: 105303.

Week 5. Diet and social complexity: cooking and eating

This lecture will first examine how the scale and configuration of prehistoric economies changed through time with population expansion, technological advancements and increasing regional interactions. It will then discuss cooking and food preparation technologies and eating traditions that cut cross and transcend through different domains.

Essential readings

- Fuller, D.Q & M., Rowlands. 2011. Ingestion and Food Technologies: Maintaining differences over the long-term in West, South and East Asia. In Bennet, J., Sherratt, S., Wilkinson, T. C. (eds.). *Interweaving Worlds - systematic interactions in Eurasia, 7th to 1st millennia BC. Essays from a conference in memory of Professor Andrew Sherratt* (pp.37-60). Oxford: Oxbow Books Ltd.
- Reinhart, K. 2015. Ritual feasting and empowerment at Yanshi Shangcheng. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 39: 76-109
- Shelach, G. 2017. Food, pots and socio-economic transformation: The beginning and intensification of pottery production in North China. *Archaeological Research in Asia*, online first.
- Yuan, J., R. Flad, & Y.B., Luo. 2005. Meat-acquisition patterns in the Neolithic Yangzi River valley, China. *Antiquity*, vol. 82: 351-366

Week 7. Student presentations

Week 8. Diet and social complexity: drinking

Continuing lecture 5 on food preparation and eating, this lecture will explore another prominent characteristic of diet in ancient China: drinking. Archaeological evidence associated with technologies of drink preparation and cultural and social contexts of drinking will be discussed in this lecture.

Essential reading

- Fung, C. 2000. The drinks are on us: Ritual, social status, and practice in Dawenkou burials, North China. *Journal of East Asian Archaeology*, 2: 67-92.
- He, Y. et al. 2021. "Proposing a toast" from the first urban center in the north Loess Plateau, China: Alcoholic beverages at Shimao. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 64: 101352.
- Liu, L. 2021. Communal drinking rituals and social formations in the Yellow River valley of Neolithic China. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 63: 101310.
- Underhill, A.P. 2017. Urbanization and new social contexts for consumption of food and drink in northern China. *Archaeological Research in Asia*, 14: 7-19.

Week 9. Material and social complexity: jade

The common use of jade in mortuary practices and ritual ceremonies is one of the most salient cultural characteristics in China. This lecture discusses the formation of different jade traditions in the Hongshan, Liangzhu and other Neolithic cultures within their archaeological contexts.

Essential readings

- Barnes, G. L., & D.S., Guo. 1996. The ritual landscape of 'Boar Mountain' Basin: The Niuheliang site complex of northeastern China. *World Archaeology*, vol. 28: 209-219.
- Fang, X. 2022. *Fanshan Royal Cemetery: Pyramid of the East*. Singapore: Springer.
- Drenna, R.D., Lu, X., and Peterson, C.E. 2017. A place of pilgrimage? Niuheliang and its role in Hongshan society. *Antiquity*, 91: 43-56.
- Qin, L. 2013. The Liangzhu culture. In Underhill, A.P. (ed.) *A Companion to Chinese Archaeology*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.

Week 10. Material and social complexity: bronzes

As a borrowed technology, metallurgy was taken by the ancient Chinese to a completely different direction, that is, to be used to cast ritual vessels. This lecture explores how this process was developed and the socio-economic institutions and technological inventions behind this process. Two types of bronze objects, ritual vessels and chariot furnishing, will be particularly emphasized.

Essential readings

- Campbell, R.B. 2009. Toward a networks and boundaries approach to early complex polities: The Late Shang case. *Current Anthropology*, vol. 50: 821-848.

- Stoltman, J. et al. 2017. New insights into the composition and microstructure of ceramic artifacts associated with the production of Chinese bronzes at Yinxu, the last capital of the Shang dynasty. *Archaeological Research in Asia*, online first.
- Jing, Z.C., J.G., Tang, G. Rapp, & J. Stoltman. 2013. Recent discoveries and some thoughts on early urbanization at Anyang. In Underhill, A.P. (ed.) *A Companion to Chinese Archaeology*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- So, J. 2019. Connecting friend and foe: Western Zhou personal regalia in jade and colored stones. *Archaeological Research in Asia*, 19: 100108.

Week 11. Material and social complexity: pottery

As one of the earliest center for pottery production, prehistoric China witnessed critical stages of the development of ceramic industry. Evidence of massive scale pottery production and specialization during the late Neolithic period started to appear. This lecture will discuss recent archaeological discoveries and research on mass-produced pottery in north China and how this was associated with economic intensification, long-distance trade and social evolution.

Essential readings

- Dai, X.M. 2006. *Pottery Production, Settlement Patterns and Development of Social Complexity in the Yuanqu Basin, North Central China*. BAR series. Available online. Chapter 4.
- Guo M. et al. Use of the potter's wheel at Shimao, Shaanxi, China. *Archaeological Research in Asia*, 36: 100468.
- Hung, H. 2021. *Painted Pottery Production and Social Complexity in Neolithic Northwest China*. Oxford: BAR.
- Underhill, A.P. 2002. *Craft Production and Social Change in Northern China*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers. Chapter One.