

**HIST-233-402**

**Environmental History of China**

W 2:00-5:00  
DRLB 3W2

*\*\*\*Provisional Syllabus\*\*\**

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**COURSE OUTLINE**

The human toll, political challenges, and global impacts created by environmental degradation in contemporary China have attracted attention and concern around the world in recent years. However, because most discussions of China's environmental problems associate them to the country's post-1979 economic growth, they tend to overlook processes with deep roots in China's past. In order to gain a fuller understanding of China's contemporary environmental dilemmas, this seminar investigates key topics and themes in Chinese environmental history over the last 3000 years.

Rather than presenting a chronological overview of China's environmental history, this class will be organized thematically and historiographically. Topics covered will include philosophies of nature, deforestation, anthropogenic species extinction, water and soil management, urbanization and the "built environment," the environmental impacts of hot and cold warfare, industrial pollution and its consequences, the rise environmentalism, and the effects of globalization. Seminar discussions will tackle complex but topical questions with significant relevance to contemporary global environmental concerns.

Because the story of humanity's interactions with its surroundings encompasses not only historical events but also philosophy, ecology, culture, literature, urban planning, medicine, politics, economics, the mass media, and gender relations, among other areas, this course will be of interest and relevance to students in any field with interests in China or East Asia, as well as anyone else who is interested in environmental issues or environmental studies.

**COURSE GOALS**

Students will improve their ability to...

- 1) Comprehend the role of the natural environment as an active force in shaping the direction of human history along a variety of vectors.
- 2) Comprehend the role of human beings in drastically shaping the natural environment, often in ways and over timespans that were completely unforeseen.
- 3) Understand how such categories as "nature," "environment," and "humanity" have varied across era and place, and how definitions of these terms were created, contested, and reinvented over time.
- 4) Interrogate the processes by which humankind's relationship to the environment has shifted and transformed over time, and whose interests have been served by both environmental degradation and environmental protection.
- 5) Evaluate the historical roots of environmental dilemmas facing China and the world.

6) Critically evaluate historical arguments and environmental problems by making arguments based on evidence drawn from class readings, films, and discussions

### **COURSE FORMAT AND EXPECTATIONS**

This is a reading seminar. A seminar is a conversation, not a lecture where you sit quietly and take notes. The success of this course depends on active participation, and accordingly attendance and participation will account for a significant portion of your grade. The “reading” part means that we will have a sizeable amount of assigned reading—generally slightly more than one book per week. The good news, however, is that this amount of reading also means that we will not have a large final paper or any exams—your main work in this class will be to keep up with the assigned reading and engage in lively and thoughtful class discussions. If you do come to every class, keep up with all the reading, and participate in class discussions, you can expect to do very well in this course. The converse is of course also true.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **Class attendance and active participation in class discussions: 45%**

Attend every class on time, having carefully read the reading assigned for that class. Participate actively and enthusiastically in class discussions of readings. Carefully listen to comments made by other students and respond thoughtfully and respectfully.

You are allowed to miss one (1) class for any reason whatsoever and still receive full credit (you don’t have to inform me in advance or supply a note). All other absences must be excused with a note from a medical professional or the university in order to receive credit. If you attend every single class, you will receive a small amount of extra credit for the class you were allowed to skip.

#### **Short written assignments: 55%**

All written assignments are due **IN CLASS** at the end of class on the day that they are listed as “due.” All written assignments must be **PRINTED OUT** on paper. No emailed assignments will be accepted. It is your responsibility to allow adequate time to print out assignments before class.

#### **Types of written assignments:**

*10 reading analysis papers (approx. 2-3 double-spaced pages each): 50%*

For each week with a reading assignment, read the assigned readings and write a 2-3 page, double-spaced analytical paper.

In weeks where one of the readings is a book, your reading analysis should *primarily* focus on the book. However, if there is a secondary reading assigned, your analysis can of course also refer to that as well – it just shouldn’t be the primary focus of your paper.

For each reading analysis paper first *briefly* identify the main historical question or questions the author is asking and identify his or her main argument, as well as any important sub arguments. Your paper should **NOT summarize** the contents of the readings. You can assume I know what is in the readings. Instead, *analyze* the arguments in the reading. Second, make some sort of argument of your own that directly addresses the text of the reading. This argument is up to you and can be anything that comes to your mind. However, your main argument must be clearly stated and must be supported by quotations from the text you were assigned to read.

In total, you are asked to submit **ten (10)** reading analysis papers out of a total of 11 possible weeks with longer readings. Which week you choose to skip is entirely up to you. You may also choose to write the 11th reading analysis paper for extra credit.

Reading analysis papers are **due in class**, at the end of class, each week. Reading analysis papers must be **printed out on paper**. E-mailed analysis papers will not be accepted. Late papers will receive a maximum of half credit (50%).

Your reading analysis papers will be graded on four criteria: 1) Author's Argument, 2) Your Argument 3) Citation of Evidence, and 4) Style and Organization.

- 1) **Identify the Author's Argument** – *Briefly* identify the author's main argument, and any relevant sub arguments, typically in no more than a single paragraph or so. You may also want to point out what types of evidence the author offers to support their main argument. Then proceed to state and argue your main argument.
- 2) **Make your Argument** – You should NOT merely summarize the contents of the readings. Your essay must offer a clearly stated argument of some kind. I should be able to easily find this argument stated within your text, clearly stated enough that I could underline it with a pen while reading. Your main argument should be supported with evidence drawn from the readings, whether direct quotations or paraphrases, and should be carried throughout your paper.
- 3) **Citation of Evidence** – Wherever possible, you should cite direct quotations or paraphrases from the readings as evidence to support your main argument. You should cite the page numbers where you got these quotations or paraphrases (either inline or in footnotes – either is fine as long as you are consistent). Basic facts, *if widely known* (i.e. you can easily find such facts in other readily accessible secondary sources), need not be cited. An example is the birth year of a famous person or the date of a historical event. Everything else must be cited.
- 4) **Style and Organization** – Your analysis should be written in clear, lucid prose. Every sentence should serve a purpose, and that purpose should be to explain or support your main argument. Paragraphs should flow cleanly from one paragraph to the next and the reasoning behind the ordering and organization of your essay should be clear. Grammar and spelling should be flawless. Be sure to proofread before submitting!

*Super-mini Research Paper on the Three Gorges Dam (3-5 double spaced pages, due ): 5%*

Write a very short research paper on some aspect of the Three Gorges Dam. Consult at least three non-web sources (books and/or journal articles). Cite your sources.

Possible aspects to look at include:

- Why was the Three Gorges Dam built?
- How was the Three Gorges Dam built?
- What problems or issues complicated its construction?
- What has been the economic impact of the Dam?
- What has been the environmental impact of the Dam?
- What has been the impact on historical artifacts/archaeological sites?
- What has been the cultural or sociological impact of the Dam?

## REQUIRED TEXTS

You will be responsible for securing copies of the following texts, either from the bookstore, the library, or by ordering online:

- ✧ Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China* (2004)
- ✧ Lillian Li, *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s* (2007)
- ✧ Robert Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China* (1998)
- ✧ Micah S. Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond, 1938-1950* (2014)
- ✧ David A. Pietz, *The Yellow River: The Problem of Water in Modern China* (2015)
- ✧ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (2001)
- ✧ Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (2004)
- ✧ Wade Sheppard, *Ghost Cities of China* (2015)
- ✧ Robert P. Weller, *Discovering Nature: Globalization and Environmental Culture in China and Taiwan* (2006)

All other readings will be posted on the course website.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### January 20 – Introductory Discussion: What is “Environmental History”?

No reading analysis paper due.

### January 27 – Chinese Ideas of Nature

Robert Weller and Peter Bol, “From Heaven-and-Earth to Nature: Chinese Conceptions of the Environment and their Influence on Policy Implementation,” in Mary Evelyn Tucker and John H. Berthrong, eds., *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans* (1998), 313-42

Helen Dunstan, “Official Thinking on Environmental Issues and the State’s Environmental Roles in Eighteenth-Century China.” In Elvin and Liu, *Sediments of Time*, pp. 585-614.

Elvin, *Retreat of the Elephants*, Chs. 10 & 12

Peter C. Perdue, “Is There a Chinese View of Technology and Nature?” In Martin Reuss and Stephen H. Cutcliffe, eds. *The Illusory Boundary: Environment and Technology in History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), pp. 101-119.

DUE: reading analysis paper

### February 3 – Seeing Forests for the Trees

Elvin, *Retreat of the Elephants*, Chs. 3-4

Nicholas Menzies, *Forest and Land Management in Late Imperial China* (1994), ALL

DUE: reading analysis paper

**February 10 – Man vs. Animals**

Elvin, *Retreat of the Elephants*, Ch. 2

Richard Ellis, *Tiger Bone & Rhino Horn: The Destruction of Wildlife for Traditional Chinese Medicine* (2006), ALL

DUE: reading analysis paper

**February 17 – Humans, Water, and the Land**

Elvin, *Retreat of the Elephants*, Ch. 6

David A. Pietz, *The Yellow River: The Problem of Water in Modern China*, ALL

DUE: reading analysis paper

**February 24 – The Great Divergence**

Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*, ALL

DUE: reading analysis paper

**March 2 – The Environment and the Economy in South China**

Robert Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt: Environment and Economy in Late Imperial South China*, ALL

DUE: reading analysis paper

**March 9 – Spring Break!**

**March 16 – Environmental Degradation, Famine, and the State in North China**

Lillian Li, *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s* (2007), ALL

DUE: reading analysis paper

**March 23 – Disease, Hygiene, and Empire**

Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China*, ALL

DUE: reading analysis paper

**March 30 – War, Revolution, and Nature**

Elvin, *Retreat of the Elephants*, Ch. 5

Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (2001), Ch. 2

Micah S. Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond, 1938-1950*, ALL

DUE: reading analysis paper

**April 6 – The Built Environment**

Wade Sheppard, *Ghost Cities of China*, ALL

Film: “Living in a Bubble” (2013)

DUE: reading analysis paper

**April 13 – The Three Gorges Dam**

Film: “Still Life” (2006)

DUE: Super-mini research paper on the Three Gorges Dam

**April 20 – China’s Environmental Crisis**

Judith Shapiro, *China’s Environmental Challenges* (2012), ALL

Film: “Under the Dome” (2015)

DUE: reading analysis paper

**April 27 – Environmentalism as Globalization**

Robert P. Weller, *Discovering Nature: Globalization and Environmental Culture in China and Taiwan*, ALL

Guobin YANG and Craig J. Calhoun, “Media, Civil Society, and the Rise of a Green Public Sphere in China,” *China Information* 21:2 (2007), pp. 211-236.

DUE: reading analysis paper