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TRISTAN

BROWN:

This isn't really the official start of class, but I just thought I wanted to start with this new big game that just dropped. And it's making waves, I guess, in video game communities across the world. And this game-- if you haven't heard of it, that's totally fine. The main character is Sun Wukong. And the game is based loosely on this great Chinese novel of the 16th century, *Journey to the West*, COG.

And the thing is-- so have you heard of the Monkey King or Sun Wukong? Some of you have heard of him. Some of you may have not have heard of him. That's OK. He's a real iconic figure in Chinese culture, you could say literature. He's not a historical character, although the Journey to the West is a historical journey taken during the Tang dynasty, to India, to retrieve Buddhist sutras and all of that.

But starting in like the Southern Song dynasty-- don't worry. You'll know all of these dynasties pretty soon. We cover all of them this semester. Starting in about, I'd say, the 11th century, this figure of a monkey, as kind of the company of this main monk character came to the foreground. And his character evolved over the centuries. And I think one of the reasons why he's so beloved in China is he's this fearless person. He laughs in the face of danger because he's a monkey. So it makes him very beloved and makes him very interesting.

He's also kind of a force of chaos in a sense, is that he literally makes a mess of heaven, even. He gets in trouble with the Jade Emperor, all of these really great stories. But in his causing chaos where he goes, he forces truth to come to the surface. He's got the power to see evil where evil is latently present.

So you can see here-- I just thought I'd say a few words about him. There's a big debate in Chinese history about where Monkey comes from, so where the character of Sun Wukong comes from. Hu Shih, the great early 20th century intellectual-- you don't have to know him exactly. But he's a big name. He actually envisioned that monkey may have come from the Ramayana, from the character of Hanuman, the protector of King Rama. And there is a serious theory that that is actually the origin of his character.

Lu Xun disagreed with that theory, actually. The other big 20th century great writer of Chinese history had another theory. You can see over the centuries. This is from a very early edition of the novel. This is from the Summer Palace in Beijing, so literally depictions from the novel, suffused, big artistic scenes in late imperial China. This is from a temple in Vietnam. And you can see here, this is Monkey in shrines. So he enters religion, popular religion, and of course, big opera, opera performances of *Journey to the West*, the character of Monkey and all of that.

So I thought that I would just say, just really, if you've been thinking about this video game, or you want to go check out this video game at the beginning here, he's been beloved across generations. Every era re-envision him. This is Princess Iron Fan. This is a story from *Journey to the West*, incredible. This is China's first animated film, 1941, made in Shanghai during World War II. And it's kind of like Monkey at that time. You think about the war of resistance against Japan, all of the symbolism with that.

Somebody mentioned that they saw the 1986-- oh, where's my 1986? There's my 1986 *Journey to the West*. This is a big TV series. You can get it all on YouTube for free, really fun. This actor who plays monkey is really incredible. He comes from an operatic tradition. He really carries that forth. Late editions of monkey, recent editions of monkey, have shown him to be hyper masculine and muscular and everything like that. It's actually not necessarily how he's been portrayed historically. But again, it tells us something about how his character evolves over time.

That is the prelude. Now, let's actually get into dynastic China. This is probably how you thought I would begin the class, which makes total sense, Forbidden City. Some of you went to Beijing this summer. Some of you have been to Beijing, I'm sure. The tragedy with the Forbidden City is once you see this palace, you can't go visit any other palace. They all just look so silly in comparison to this. Versailles-- forget about it. It looks like a house.

I mean, seriously. It's the largest palace structure in the world. I've visited probably five times over my lifetime. And every time, it's different. When you go in the summer, there's not a lot of shade. You get killed by the sun and the crowds. I went with an academic delegation this summer, so we went to all these secret places. And that was really, really fun. This is a place you absolutely have to visit. There's so much of Chinese history in this palace in the center of Beijing.

And I'll just say, actually, one funny thing about it is this palace was so nice that when the Manchus invaded China in the 17th century, they said, we'll keep the palace. They moved right in. How often does that happen, when somebody invades, say, we'll keep the White House. No, no, we can do better than the White House. They kept this one. So this is actually a Ming dynasty palace that was used right up until the early 20th century, today, a museum.

I was thinking about how do you even introduce this subject? I love this subject. I'm sure you got that from my email. I'm so excited to share about this subject with you. And I realize there's never a good way to get into this subject because it's so big. It's so much to cover. But I'll just say, let's look at a map right here. This is, as you could imagine, Beijing. This is the Forbidden City. This is the palace. I think this map is from about the 1950s or something like that. And there's these three, quote, unquote, "hai" to the left, to the western side of the Forbidden City.

Anybody know what those three "hai" are, those three lakes? Anybody visited? Have you been to Beihai Park? It's OK. It's OK. Let me just tell you, there are three lakes there. The top lake is the northern lake. That was an imperial garden. And that is today a public park. You can access that one.

The second one and the last one are the middle lake and the southern lake. That's Zhongnanhai. Have you. Have you ever heard of Zhongnanhai? That's where the head of the Communist Party is. That's basically where the nominally, the Xi Jinping lives and everything like that. It's kind of like the White House and the Kremlin together, very, very big place. Those two lakes are not open to the public. That area is like the compound of, I think, the center of the party's power structure, basically.

So there's so much, just in this little-- how many kilometers of space? History from hundreds of years ago, all the way up to history going on today. So the thing I love about this term is that the word means sea, ocean, or lake. In Mongol, actually, this distinction-- you can imagine why-- is not really made between ocean and a big body of water. And some Chinese dialects over the centuries adopted that or also had that.

So you can see here, I think-- and I know this might be a little corny to say, but I want to just say it here at the very beginning, and I'll just say it once. Chinese history is like a sea or an ocean. It's big. It's-- how do I say it? It's vast. It's beautiful. And it's difficult. It can be dangerous, of course. I'll talk about how history can be dangerous in just a second. But it's not like, perhaps, other kinds of history you've studied thus far. I'll just say that I started studying however many, like almost 20 years ago. I will be a student of it for the rest of my life. I'll never be able to master this. It's not something you master. It's just too much stuff.

But that's the thing. This class, what I can do is I'll take you to the ocean. And I'll say, and that first time you see the ocean, think about that. Think about where you were, especially if you didn't grow up near the sea. The first time you saw the ocean, you said, wow, that's a beautiful sight or wow, that's so interesting. Look at the waves, whatever, whatever, whatever. That's what this class can do.

It's like I'm going to show you across time, from the Zhou dynasty, from the origins of writing in China, which is Shang dynasty, but whatever, Han dynasty, the medieval period, all the way up to the early modern era. I'll show you something about every era that I think is interesting that I think you'll appreciate. And then it's up to you to go from there. So I'll take you to the sea. You can swim however you want to-- however far you want to swim. I'm still swimming. So that's what we're going to do. This is Dynastic China, 2024.

So let me say something at the outset here. What I'll do today is I'll introduce Chinese history in the broadest possible terms. How do we think about it? Some key terms. We'll go over the syllabus, the requirements for the class. And then I'll give you a geographical tour of China, which is really fun, actually. It's really fun just to go talk about food. And here's this province, and here's this province. The rest of the class won't be like that. But you do need to know the geography of China. There will be a quiz in a couple of weeks.

This is the Forbidden City that we were just talking about. And you can see here, this is, I think, the largest single hall within the palace complex, this Tai He Dian, the Hall of Supreme Harmony. This is a Ming dynasty structure. Don't get overwhelmed. That's, let's say, a 15th century structure. And this is basically where the emperor had major audiences. Weddings were held here. Enthronements were held here. And you can see, it's right here. It's kind of like in the almost looks like the center. It's like right in that central axis. That's where it is.

There's another place. And it's not a famous place, the place of everlasting spring, this Changchungong. It's in the back. It's right over there. I highlighted it right there. I bring out these two parts of the palace to you, because in a way, they kind of represent two tides of Chinese history or two ways of thinking about Chinese history.

There's Zhengshi, official history. What is official history? Now, when you think about history in China, don't just think, oh, I'm sitting down. I'm thinking about history. Oh, that's so fun. No. "Shi" refers to a kind of writing. It's a genre of writing. There are officially 24 official histories that were written across China, Chinese history.

The dynasty that follows the previous dynasty writes the official history of its predecessor. Ironically, we do not yet have an official history of the Qing dynasty, the last dynasty. That's an ongoing big football project, a game of tension within China today, how to write that history of the last dynasty. But, quote, unquote, "We have 24." That's this official history, emperors, dynasties, battles, natural disasters, recorded by state authorities.

But then there's something else. That's not all we look at. That's not all we talk about. There's also this kind of idea in Chinese of Yeshi, wild history, history that's outside, things that happened in the past that are not in those official histories but are still worthy of talking about, that are still worthy of remembering. And that's like folklore, families, women, popular tales not recorded by state authorities.

And so one way you can think about Chinese history is that it's the tension between these two things. It's like also going back to the sea metaphor, high tide and low tide, whatever you want to say. There's the stuff that's officially recorded. On this day, the emperor said this. But then there's all this unofficial stuff that we pieced together and say what was really going on. What is so great about Chinese history is that you actually don't need a textbook. There are so many sources. There's art. There's so much writing. There's private writing. There's writing by scholars. There's debates. There's so much you can look into.

But take a look at, again, that palace. What I said is that looking at itself, at the palace, it tells you a story about Chinese history. This is that Zhengshi type of place. The things that happened in the Hall of Supreme Harmony are recorded in official type histories. But the stuff that happens in the rear of the palace, this is the hougong. That's where the imperial family lived. That's actually where they lived. They didn't live in the front of the palace. That's an expression in Chinese, hougong, the back of the palace. That's the imperial family. That's where they actually lived.

And that's where all-- by the way, if you watch Chinese dramas, family dramas, they're all about that. Nobody really cares about this. But they're all about that. What's going on with the romance? All this stuff. Yes, history, has a lot more to it than just that. I'm not endorsing any drama, by the way. But it's a way to think about it.

This is an incredible hall. We will return to it in the last class of this semester, because in this palace of everlasting spring and the rear of the palace, on its walls are depicted murals of probably the greatest novel of Chinese history, *Honglou Meng, A Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Images from that novel were painted on the walls of this kind of residential complex for the imperial family, one of the consorts, in the 19th century. Those scenes or that novel is all about a family in decline. So it's actually, I've always thought it's extremely moving and thought-provoking to think that the emperor, that the imperial family, has these images on that wall.

So let's talk about, why would you even take this class? Why talk about dynastic history? Why get into it? Well, the answer could be because China's a really important place today. I think it's going to have the largest economy in the world, whatever. It has the second largest population. It's an important place. There's a lot of interesting technological developments going on with that, all of that stuff, my favorite of which are these robots, that I'm sure if you've been to China recently, I'm sure you've encountered these.

If you stay in a hotel, and you get takeout, somebody brings it to the hotel front desk. And then this jiqiren, this robot, sends it to your room so you don't have to actually talk to any human beings. This was a thing that came in during COVID, I think. And now, it's just standard across the country. So you could get medicine, you get all this stuff like that.

But it was like my first night in China, this summer, I arrived at 1:00 AM for a conference. And then I got a phone call. And it was a robotic voice. And it said, I'm here. And I'm like, what's going on? And then it said, please open the door. And I opened the door. It's one of these. And they go, please press this button. And I pressed the button.

And then it's like-- and then there was this rice and all this food. And it's like they're walking all over these hotels. And they even say, please excuse me. I need to get to the elevator. So I don't know why we don't have them yet. And if any budding anthropologist's in the room, there's so much to study about these robots, about how humans interact with them and such like that, but yes.

So I understand the current scene of China is worth paying attention to. It's relevance is important. But then we get back to this question, why study dynastic China? One reason is that if you spend time in China, and you talk to people in China, people in China talk about their history all the time, from the top leadership all the way down to everyday people, people driving cabs that you'll meet just in day-to-day life.

History really matters in this place. It's the way that people talk about issues in the present. It also is really contentious. I just mentioned to you this kind of question of the official Qing history. There's been an ongoing project to write the official Qing history, in theory, since the days of like Mao and Zhou Enlai. It started, and then it stopped because of the Cultural Revolution. And then it got started again in recent years. And now, it's kind of, again, controversial. How do you officially record that history?

That should tell you something. There's all of these debates. There's all these tensions that go on within China about how to understand what happened in dynastic China. We don't pay attention to what. Well, *The Wall Street Journal* did a cover of it. But that kind of signals its importance. So I do not think in any way that this class, Dynastic China, is less relevant or less practical than modern China. I'd say if you had to pick, take this one. Forget about modern China. The 20th century, it's a tough century. We cover a lot more centuries here. So you get more bang for your buck. But they're both good. Take it. Take it in 2026.

So now, let me tell you, another reason, kind of building on what I was just talking about, is that people in China like to talk about their history. There's a long recorded history in China. So that means there's a lot to talk about. There's a lot to debate. And there's a lot to analyze. I'm sure many of you may be familiar with this opening sentence.

Has anybody read *Sanguo Yanyi, Romance of the Three Kingdoms*? I think Professor Teng has a class on *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Some of you might be taking it or want to take it. You should take it. It's an interesting-- this is another one of those great novels. We talked about *Journey to the West* a little bit earlier. This is *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. And the opening lines of it, this "[Chinese] hua shuo tian xia da shi, fen jiu bi he, he jiu bi fen."

--writes, "There's a saying in our country, long divided must unite, long united, it must divide." Think about that for just a second. And then let me show you this quote by Mark Elvin in 1973. "The Chinese Empire is the major exception in the pre-modern world to what would appear to be the rule that units of territorial and demographic extent comparable to China are not stable entities over long periods of time."

So one of the things where you say, why look at it? Why study it? Why think about it? Is because, actually, this kind of does seem to happen, that there are periods of division where everything falls apart. And it looks like this is going to be Italy, and this is going to be France, and this is going to be Switzerland. And then all of a sudden, it comes back. Rome comes back. Rome comes back. And it keeps coming back. And you're like, why? Why? What's going on?

And people across the centuries notice this. It was like a thing they noticed and talked about it or even anticipated. That's not to overstate continuity in Chinese history. I don't want you to think, oh yeah, 2,000 years ago, that was China and China today. It's not the same. It's very different. Tons of things happen. Tons of things change. But this conversation that we're talking about right here is very old.

So I think Chinese history is good for training your mind about how to think about big, difficult questions. You have a ton of data. You have a ton of information. You can think on different scales. When people do climate history, what's the first place they look? Do they look to China? Because China wrote about its climate-- people in China wrote about climate for at least 2,000 plus years. All meteorological phenomenon, comets, et cetera, all of these records are in those histories that I was talking about.

So it's really, really great to think about history. If you haven't taken another history course here before, this is a great introduction. Even if you don't want to continue with China, you want to go and do England, take this class and then go think about England. Take this class and then go think about India. You can do all of that stuff.

History is ancient, but it's an ongoing conversation and really filled with nearly endless perspectives. And here's the key point. This class is about eavesdropping into that conversation. This goes back to that image that I was giving to you. I take you to the ocean, you swim. You eavesdrop into the conversation. This is a huge conversation. Lots of people are going to say stuff. You're going to have Taoists. You're going to have Buddhists. You're going to have Confucians. You're going to have Confucians who hate other Confucians.

You're going to have terrible emperors. You're going to have some decent emperors, but really bad emperors too. You have everything. And it all comes together as people over the centuries try to make sense of it. And that's that ongoing conversation. That conversation continues in China to today. So you get a little in this class. You get to eavesdrop on it. Think about it a little bit.

So here are the class goals and aspirations. First of all, let me tell you what the game plan is. And it's a really intimidating slide, so just buckle up. There you go. So basically, that's the game plan, not this part, so this part is modern China. So that's the thing. I take two classes. One does this, and then one does this.

So look, what I can tell you is I'm a historian primarily of this era, the Ming and Qing dynasties, the last two imperial dynasties. That's my specialty. That's what I love. But the thing is, is that because this is the class you're taking at MIT that is dynastic Chinese history, I feel I have to give every era its due. So I really try. I really go out of my way, even though I'm not the biggest fan of the Han dynasty. I love the Tang dynasty as a historian who works on another period. But I will give you what I think is the essentials to know about that era.

Every period that we cover, I try to get you those kernels that say, oh, wow, that's really interesting. I didn't know that before, so that when you look at this, by the end of the semester, you'll say, I know what happened pretty much across this whole time span. I know something. I can say something about it. And then that way, you go off on your winter holiday, and you can have great conversations with your parents or friends. Or you can travel, and you can visit places and say, I know what that is. I know when that was built. I know what I know what's going on here.

So class goals and aspirations-- learn something about China, 20% of humanity. This is a good aspiration. We should learn something about China, especially in the United States. It's incredible. I have to say it. Learn something about history-- so there's two things here. This is a class about China. It's also a class about history. Of course, these things can overlap. But history is a discipline. It's a way of thinking. We have certain ideas in history, primary sources, secondary sources.

This is a secondary source. This is a secondary source. These are not primary sources. Primary source is referring to the original sources that were written in the original language by people at the time. Those are the premiums in history. But of course, we, as historians, we write textbooks. We write books. So just realize history is not in a textbook. Textbooks are the least-- historians look down on textbooks. We don't like textbooks because with textbooks, you have to edit. You have to take out. You have to-- go back to the originals. Make your own textbook. That's what we're going to do in this class. So that's what I want you to think about history.

I don't want it to turn you into a walking encyclopedia-- sort of I do, actually. That would be nice-- but to equip you to approach-related issues. One of the things I say, and I'll just tell you right up here, yeah, it's a content-heavy class because I don't know if it's old-fashioned or what, but I think you just need to know it. I think you need to know it. You need to leave this class in command of knowledge.

And one of the things that you will realize, you might think, oh, this is a lot. Why do we have to know all this stuff? When you go to China, you will realize that people that you encounter in everyday life know so much about history. They will blow away the average American about what they can say about history that happened 2,000 years ago, even if it's wrong, even if it's wrong, even if it's just kind of romanticized or whatever. But they talk about it. They know it. So you got to know it. That's the thing.

And let me just emphasize here why you should take it, why I think you should take this class, why I think maybe this weekend you should convince your friends to take this class, is that it's not something you can just pick up, like with a book, like so many people think with history. Oh, yeah, over the summer, I'll read a book and catch up. No. No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

With computer science, with physics, you don't just read a book over the weekend and become an expert. Chinese history is one of those fields where you got to take a class in it. You got to drill it. You got to know it. You got to think about it from all these different angles. And then you can say you know something about it. It's not actually something that you just pick up with osmosis or what you can pick up by osmosis by reading Wikipedia and bad history. But that's what we're going to try-- we're going to try to do something better than that in this class.

And this knowledge will stay with you. I always say that. I always say that. 50 years from now, let's say, 30, you graduate from MIT, you're talking to your relatives or your children or whatever it is, what are you going to talk to them about? You're going to talk to them about this class. You're going to say, hey, the Three Kingdoms, I know something about that because this is the type of thing that people want to talk about, not whatever, Python or whatever. It's not a table conversation. This is. This is. I guarantee you a holiday break of great conversations after this class, at minimum.

So why do I like Chinese history? Oh, wow, where to begin? Well, I went to China for the first time in right before the Beijing Olympics. And that was me many years ago. I changed a little bit, maybe a little bit. That's me, maybe in Taiwan. I think I'm in a "[CHINESE] yong he da wang," which is like a breakfast place. And I love it.

You get the doujiang. It's soybean, sort of a milk substance, with youtiao, this fried donut. It's like heaven, you know what I mean? It costs like \$2. And it's incredible, huge lines. So that was me and food. So it's not just about the food. But we can talk about food. I don't think I have to convince most of you, China's got really good food. It's got a ton of different types of food. US Chinese food has gotten better in my lifetime. But it's starting at zero.

So the thing is, is that it is better, but good Chinese food in the US tends to be expensive. In China, you just get so much. You have so many options, everything like that. We can talk about food. I have another class, called Nature and Environment in China. We do a whole week on food. So if you really want to talk about food, maybe consider that class. But we'll do a little bit of food here. And then this is me playing mahjong.

So what I'm trying to say, what I'm trying to say, is that you get in. When you go to a place-- and maybe it won't be China for you. It could be Japan. Or it could be Mongolia. It could be Russia. It could be Italy. Something's going to grab you. It might not be the Colosseum. It might be just everyday life, drinking espresso on a Florentine afternoon. And you go, I just love this. I really love this.

And then you go, I want to learn the language. And I want to understand what happened here. And I want to understand what happened in the 19th century. I to understand what happened here 2,000 years ago. I want this to happen to you. It doesn't have to be China. It can be. It could be Mexico. It could be any place, but some place that you weren't born in, and then you go there, and you go, wow. I really want to understand this place. That's a wonderful part of the human experience. I hope you all have it.

But that kind of happened to me in China. And it wasn't one moment. It was many meals. It was many gambling sessions. This is me the many years ago, probably going to Tibet. I can't remember. But it was on one of those sleeper trains, back in the day. I have to say, I have become a middle-aged Chinese person, in the sense of-- because I've been in China now for the past 20 years. And I've seen all this change.

So I remember the green trains that went super slow, and you had to stay on them for overnight. I took the train from Beijing to Shanghai. The first time I took it, I was standing. It was I was eating instant noodles, praying that they wouldn't tip over in a very crowded car because we didn't even have-- there weren't even tickets left for a bed.

And now, it's like, oh, it's business class, high-speed rail all the way. It takes, what, five hours? Five hours, five hours now. It's totally changed. But there were a lot of fun experiences on Chinese trains back in the day. You talk to Chinese parents, or you talk to people of a certain generation, they will have stories for you about taking long, long train rides in China. And the whole generation who grew up in the Cultural Revolution have these especially.

And then I've gone back. Oh, yeah, I wrote a book. I was there this summer, talking about my book. And then, oh, yeah, the last thing I want to say-- so I got into it. I continued to go back. I can't tell you the number of times I've been there. I probably lived there for a few years overall. But it's like more every year. I go for a few months. This summer I went for a month and a half or something like that.

The one thing that I say that really, really has struck me in terms of changes, when I first went to China-- hey, how are you doing? When I first went to China, the coffee was terrible. And for somebody addicted to caffeine, it was brutal. And I had to drink a ton of tea to make up for it. And it's just too much tea, you know what I'm saying? But I love tea, don't get me wrong. Coffee is now way better. Coffee-- and I actually tweeted about this when I got back. Coffee in China is now better than coffee than the United States. I come back here, and I'm like, I'm just so disappointed.

The thing is that what China has actually accidentally perfected-- and you can also find this in Thailand. You also find this now in Korean cafes-- is non-dairy espresso drinks. And it's a world that Starbucks is just out to lunch. They're not getting this. You take espresso, you create an Americano with sparkling water, and you add lemon, incredible, grapefruit, incredible, lychee, whatever.

All of these, like, tangli kafei, tangli meishi kafei, like creative Americanos-- and I say, why don't you take this global? This is the next thing. This is the next bubble tea, for sure. I think that there's an interesting thing of they feel like, oh, but maybe we're not doing it right, like the Italians. Enough with the Italians. Enough with the cappuccinos. We got to go to the next phase. It's all these milky drinks. It tires you out. This is the absolute pickup, low-calorie too, love it. So check out coffee in China next time you're there. That's been an interesting change.

Let's talk about syllabus. So I just have a bunch of-- I used to do a printout syllabus. But then MIT students told me that nobody does that anymore. So then I felt like a historian, but in a bad way. So I said, let's just put it all online. So no prerequisites. You're all welcome to enroll. You can bring guests. Just let me know. You can bring your parents. Some people bring their parents, if they're visiting. They want to-- again, what are you going to bring them to, your computer science classes? Come on. You want to bring them here. That's fine. Just let me know that they're coming.

Chinese is not a prerequisite. Some of you are doing a Chinese minor. That's fine. And for all of the primary sources that I give you this semester, I'll try to give you the Chinese original, if you want to look at it. If you're learning Chinese, challenge yourself. Take a look at it. You don't have to look at it, but you can. So that's an option. If you want to do the minor for this class, you should be looking at those.

So that looks good. Study guides-- so the thing is, is that when I first taught this class, it was essays. And then I was like, I'm done with essays. I had a historical evolution at MIT. And I realized if you teach a class on Chinese history, you got to offer an exam. And for those of you who know about Chinese history, you know how important exams are in Chinese history, you realize, yeah, you need an exam. So I just do midterm. We're going to have a final. Don't worry. The average of the midterm last year, about every year, tends to be about a 90.

Most of the students who take the class-- let's just be Frank here. Modern China, we get 40 or 50, maybe. Many, many people get A's, A minuses, A pluses, whatever. Some people will get B's, the occasional C. If you get below a B, you're trying. If you get in the B range-- what I mean to say here is if you put the work in, you put the effort in, there shouldn't be a huge issue with getting the grade that you want.

It is a challenge. You do have to study. You do have to study. And some people will bomb the midterms, some people and everything like that. And that's OK. It's not the end of the world. We'll figure it out. I'll show you-- here's the grading rubric. We'll talk about this. So first things, attendance-- let me say something about attendance right up at the front. There are two excused absences over the course of the semester. You come in, you scan the QR code. That's how we know that you're in class. You have two excused absences. Just let us know.

I realize some of you want to take this class, and you have a conflict with another class. That's a partial conflict, not a complete conflict, but a partial conflict. If you have a partial conflict, and you can come to 50% of these classes, then the Linda, the TA, and I will make an arrangement for you. You can come.

We will not take you down if you have a class conflict that you show us your schedule, and you show us I have this conflict at this time, and we'll give you two extra writing assignments over the course of the semester. And that way, we just take the question off the table. So you can. But if you want that arrangement, you got to let us in the next week or so because we need to know that. So we're happy to accommodate. But otherwise, we're really hoping everybody will be here most of the time.

So in terms of writing, the major writing that you will do over the course of the semester is your discussion responses. I'll tell you about what I expect from those discussion responses in just a second. There are 10 of them. Each of them is worth 2 points. If you do a decent job on them, you get the 2 points. That's as simple as that. You can do it late. It's worth 1 point if it's late. It's just every time, every semester, somebody comes and says, I didn't do any of them. I didn't know that they were required or something like that. Just letting you know, we will accept it late. That's what it's worth if it's late.

There's a geography quiz. All of the quizzes and the tests, with the exception of the final, there will be a retake. And it's open to everybody. So what that means is you come in, you do the geography quiz. If it didn't go well, you can take it again. And I'll just take the highest score. If you can't make it the day of the geography quiz because you have to take an absence or you have one of those conflicts that I just mentioned, that's fine. There will be one retake.

Same with the classical text quiz, where I quiz you on what Confucius and the Taoists and all that, one retake offered, a midterm. We do a one retake offer for the midterm too. It's a new exam. Some people like, literally, take everything twice because they just like the challenge. I've had that. MIT students are incredible. It's like you took this midterm, you got a 95. I want to take it again. All right. We're going for that 5 points. I got it.

So there is a timeline project. It's not bad. You just propose a topic. This is where you can follow your own interests. If you want to do the history of a certain type of fashion in China, a certain type of Chinese food, you can follow that over time. You just create a timeline. I give you all the-- how do you create the timeline? It's not bad. And then the final exam, and then that's the final grade.

One thing that we do-- and I just want to say we're really excited this semester. We have a TA from the HASTS program, Linda Ridzuan, who's wonderful, to join us. Anthro-- historian, history, a historian of nuclear energy, so really, really excited to have Linda. And Linda does know Chinese history fairly well, so definitely correspond with me. Correspond with Linda. During the semester, as I try to do in all my classes, we'll do one-- it's like a required office hour mid-semester.

So you come to my office. Linda and I will greet you. And we talk for 10 minutes about whatever you want to talk about, typically about what confuses you in Chinese history or questions about the midterm or questions about whatever. So everybody does that. And that's also part of the grade. So you do have to do that once. Happy to answer questions at any time. But that's what we do expect.

So let me just say something, final point about the discussion posts. So discussion posts-- yes. I changed this. I'll do Wednesday. I'll give it to you Wednesday before 3:30. I'll give you a little bit extra time than Tuesday. So get them in before that time, the Wednesday class. Basically what you have to do is you have to look at the readings, and you have to answer a question. I'll give you an example for next week's discussion post in just a second.

You write two paragraphs. And the two paragraphs, I'll tell you exactly how we want the structure of these paragraphs to look like. You have some agency and creativity in it. Don't worry. But I'll tell you about what we're looking for. So the thing I want to just remind you all, facts, inferences, judgments, and opinions, how you separate out those things. Facts, things that we know to be true based on evidence. Bees make honey. Inferences, statements of the unknown based on the known, derived from reason, judgments, and then all the way to opinions, like I like whatever ice cream.

When you write a post, I don't want just opinion. I hate Confucius. So congratulations. But that's not a post. We want a combo. You can give me the opinion at the end, in the second paragraph. The first paragraph, we want you to focus on facts and inferences, based on the primary sources of that week's reading. So you look at the question. You try to answer based on the primary sources. And then in the second paragraph, you can expand into judgments and opinion. So that way, you know what we expect. You know how to do it. So I laid it out, I think, really just clearly and nicely for you there.

Let's take a look at what we're doing next week. I have to tell you-- this is just to give you an example for next week. So next week on Monday, you come in. I'm going to rush you through the rise of agriculture, the origins of state formation in China. And we end up on next Monday with, I think, one of my favorite lectures of the whole semester, the rise of writing in China. And writing is super fascinating. This is a technology. And China was a very early place to have it.

So what is writing? What counts as writing? One of the questions I think we have are, are emojis writing? What counts as it? You can answer that question if you'd like next week. So this is what we're kind of doing. So you look at it, you'll notice up here, every week, you'll see, wow, it looks like there's a lot of reading. There's not that much reading. You just have to break it down.

The primary sources are what you really need to focus on. That is the original right translation of oracle bone inscriptions, something like that, translations of Zhou bronzes. You'll see those are primary sources. That's what you focus on. But if you're like, I don't really understand what this is, then you go to secondary source, which for the beginning part of this class will be Li Feng's *Early China*, very nice book. I've given you selections from it. I've uploaded them. This is a pretty sophisticated book of early Chinese history. It's really good. It's fairly comprehensive.

And then if you're like, I took a look at this, and I still don't know what's going on, we have the textbook big picture. So this is the optional textbook. I provide you with three different ways to break down eras writing or eras sources, the primary sources, secondary sources, and a textbook. The secondary sources and the textbook are optional for you. If you want to read it, you can read it. If you feel you need it-- some ears you might feel, I know three kingdoms. I don't need it. I know Tang dynasty. I don't need it this week. I'll just do primary.

But some eras, you might be like oh, North-South division, I want to read the textbook. So it's there if you need it. So it's not as much as it looks. And then I got the dynastic China geography quiz study guide. I put up all the study guides. Don't worry. questions? How's it sound? Interesting, compared to your other classes? Yeah, pretty good. Yeah. Let me know. Let me know. You know what I mean?

So let's talk about how we talk about Chinese history, periodization. There are ways-- this is just getting you into foot in the door, foot in the door. Remember that long list, that chronology I gave you of all those reigns, dynasties, whatever? Here's how we break it down. First, pre-modern China-- pre-modern China, it's a loaded word. When does modernity begin? It's kind of a useless phrase because 50 years from now, it's like they'll be like, was the 20th century modern? It looks pretty old to us.

But for the sake of conversation, for the sake of dialogue, you should know that in China, officially, in Chinese textbooks, in China today, modernity begins with the very actually Western-centric notion of the opium wars, middle of the 19th century, basically. So you have modern history, pre-modern history-- coming back. Good. Thank you. I said to the computer, thank you. So pre-modern, sometimes we could also say traditional. So this is just like I'm not endorsing these terms. I'm just letting you know these the terms you may encounter.

So when we say Imperial China, Imperial China, that has a very, very fixed beginning and end date. That is not open to interpretation. Imperial China begins in 221 BCE, or BC, whatever have you. It begins when Qin Shi Huang proclaims himself to be the first emperor. He was the first person to do it. Realize, writing was invented in China approximately in 1200 BC. China has got 1,000 years of recorded history before there were any emperors, before there were any. So this is the amazing thing about thinking about scale in terms of Chinese history. When Confucius was alive, he was already thinking about the deep past in antiquity.

We think of Confucius, and we go, wow, that guy lived a long time ago. He was thinking of other people thinking of living a long time ago, 600 years ago. So this is just Imperial China begins with the proclamation of the first emperor, which was a new form of royal kingship that superseded everything that came before it.

That imperial system remains, basically, the primary form of governance in China until 1912. Well, this is another thing of, when does it end? 1911. The Xinhai revolution-- many of you have been familiar with it, might have heard of it-- broke out in 1911. The emperor abdicated in early 1912. So as a historian of late Imperial China, I insist on 1912. But you will sometimes see 1911. It's not-- what are we talking? We're talking about a couple of months here. I won't mark you down if you say 1911. It's when China had an emperor. That's what we're talking about.

We also have a few periods, periodizations, that we can say, now, think about history that you might have encountered in AP World. I haven't taken AP World in like a million years. So I don't know-- I heard now, it's starting in like 1500. Is that right?

AUDIENCE: 1300.

TRISTAN

BROWN:

1300 is still way, way too late. What a tragedy. But whatever it is, so you basically start in the late medieval period or medieval. We have early China. This is, again, really good book on early China. What is early China? Early China basically means the origin of whatever we can talk about when it happened to basically the end of the Han dynasty, about 200 Common Era, 200 AD, approximately like that, roughly.

Then we enter-- we can talk about another era called the Middle Period or Medieval China. And that's from that end of the Han-- that's a great way-- I know everybody here will-- this is a better way to think about it, the Three Kingdoms period. The Three Kingdoms period is like the end of early China, you can think about. We're entering a new era at that point.

So you can say, that's approximately medieval China, which, you go, when does, quote, unquote, "medieval" or middle period China end? Some people say, do you put it before the Mongols? Do you put it after the Mongols? Is it about a 1000? I'm just doing really, really traditional reign dates here, founding of the Ming dynasty. You don't have to-- it's approximate.

And then the last two dynasties are something like Late Imperial China. Sometimes you'll also hear this Early Modern China. It all depends on what type of historian you're talking to. If you're talking to a European historian, you might say early modern because that's how they talk. Late Imperial China is how if the Chinese historians are together in a bus, that's how we go, oh, Late Imperial because we all know what that means. So either one is fine. But just realize, this is how you break it down, this very long periods of history.

Usually-- should we look at this? I don't know. Nah. Yeah? No. The computer answered the question. Well, we'll take a peek. This is like, there's really like-- huh? Let's see. Is it going to go?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

This very foreboding music-- oh, no. Then it just-- let me try it one more time. Let me try it one more time, if it goes. This is a kind of fun-- is it going to go? I'm losing patience with it. So basically, that was the-- it's like looking at the borders of Chinese reigns over time. I can show it to you. I'll put a link online.

So we're going to get now, maybe for the last half hour of class, I'm going to talk about a few more big questions, big ways to think about Chinese history. And then we'll do a tour of China, which is always, again, really fun.

So let's talk about Chinese history hack. North and south, east and west, These are just cardinal directions. So we have a Western Zhou, and we have an Eastern Zhou. We have a Western Han, and we have an Eastern Han. That basically means in the early period of China, in early China, basically we have Western capitals and Eastern capitals.

As time goes on, this changes. This shifts. The Tang dynasty in medieval China, seventh century, eighth century, ninth century, approximately around here, there's still a western capital and still an eastern capital at Xi'an and Luoyang. But once you get to about the year 1000, this shifts. And now, we don't have western and eastern capitals. We have northern and southern capitals. And that's Beijing and Nanjing, Beijing, northern capital, Nanjing, southern capital.

So what's going on? Well, what you have to realize is that over a very, very long period of time, the Chinese people migrated south. There was a major migration of people from the North China Plain to the south, as the south is basically filled in with rice agriculture. The south, that area South of the Yangtze River-- don't worry. I'll show you where the Yangtze River is in just a second-- it was really swamp and marshland. The population-- as early as the Han dynasty, as early as around the year 0, there were people moving down there that picked up over the first 1,000 years of this era. So from the year 0 to about the year 1,000, the population moves south.

And then by the time you get to that medieval era, sometime in the medieval era, most of the people, most of the population of China lives in the south. And the south actually ends up becoming rather wealthy because they grow rice. They have surpluses. They pay taxes. Where do they pay taxes to? The North. So this is a very interesting dynamic. So basically, let me just read it to you this way. You look at it over here. That's Dayan Ta, Big Goose Pagoda. You'll recognize that in a few weeks from now. That's Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi Province. It's a very, very historic city. It's basically a great number of the early imperial capitals are located there.

This is kind of what you might think of South China looking like, mountainous, green, water, humid, and rice. So that's South China in a nutshell. So then we go back to-- that's our map. This is the Mongol Empire, Mongol Empire. The Mongols create, once their reign in China is established, they start they move their capital to Dadu, the great capital, which is Beijing. They are kind of the ones who actually move it to Beijing. So Beijing actually gets its start, not as a Han Chinese capital. It was actually the northern peoples, non-Han peoples who started it.

So after the Mongol period, you get that Nanjing and Beijing mix. That's in the last two dynasties, southern capital and northern capital. And what you can say, even to this day, is that the economic heart of the country, the most, basically, profitable part of the country, highest incomes, are in that greater Shanghai area, also in Guangdong, Pearl River Delta area, those southern hubs. Those are the economic engines of the country.

The political center of the country is in the North. And that's basically been that way for a few centuries, actually, quite a number of centuries. And that's the southern-- The southerners end up paying for defense. The northerners handle frontier defense. When you see where Beijing is on a map, and you see where historical Mongolia was, Beijing is almost not in China. That's why it has all those sandstorms. It's almost in-- what is it, the Gobi Desert? Or whatever it is. It's really far up north, actually. So that's a Chinese history hack. Think of north, south, east, west. That tells you a lot about what era you're in. It tells you a lot about the geography and the geography of power of the era.

Talk about North and South. Some of you will-- if you've taken a class with me before, you might have seen this slide before. Let's talk about north and south. What is north China? What is south China? Well, let me just pause here for a minute. What is the northern United States? Is Maryland north? Is it south? It's north. Why do you say it's north?

AUDIENCE: Political geography.

TRISTAN BROWN: Right. So you've answered this question by referring to a historical political geography. And that's great because there is no real objective answer to this question, aside from doing that. The same is true in China. Basically, in the 20th century, there was a line drawn, and it was like, this is the Qinling Mountains over here in the Huaihe, the Huai River. Draw a line. If you're to the north, that's the North. If you're to the south, that's the South.

And the joke I've always made is that in the, I think, 1950s-- I think we went over this 1950s, Zhou Enlai, basically made it so that if you're above that line, you got free, subsidized or free, central heating from the state. And if you're below that line, you froze because the South was generally warmer. But this is the whole thing. It's one of those things where it's like, how do I describe it?

I once did a Chinese New Year Spring Festival in Guangyuan, which is in the northern part of Sichuan Province. You could imagine how frozen I was. That's pretty far north, but staying South. That's one of those border places. I went to bed at night with eight blankets over me. I shared a bed with a 60-year-old man for days. And there were so many blankets over me, I couldn't move. So when I woke up, I was just like, I'm up. And then somebody came and took off the blankets. It was just incredible.

I don't want to say that-- there are many warm parts of the South, don't get me wrong. If you're in Guangdong or Hong Kong, that's warm. That's a nice place to be in the winter. But just to know, this is a very large area with a very diverse climate. So that can be really cold. So this is a Mason-Dixon line. This is kind of like this kind of idea. But there are cultural traits that we associate with Northerners. There are cultural traits we associate with Southerners. Again, nothing is ever absolute. But we can talk about that when we get into more specific geographies.

Political jurisdictions of the PRC today-- I realize this is a dynastic Chinese history class. So you might be kind of like, why do we need to know this? And I think the reason you have to know this is because, well, you do need to know the geography of China today to appreciate where things are happening, to be able to have a conversation about it.

Just realize there are 34 total units, 23 provinces. There are also these autonomous regions. Tibet is today recognized as an autonomous region, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. So there's also special zones, Shanghai, Chongqing, and so forth. So we can talk more about-- I have the whole geography quiz for you. And I have the study guide to tell you what exactly you need to know.

One other way to think about Chinese geography is this line. This is called the Heihe-Tengchong Line. And it was so interesting. This summer, I finally got a chance to visit Tengchong. And you see, you might not find that impressive. But actually, Tengchong is not a particularly famous place. The only reason why Chinese people across the country know about it is because of this line. But it's actually a great place. And it's a really fun part. It's in Yunnan province. I have some photos when we go through the tour here.

But the key is that, basically, this is 64% of the area of the country. And in 1934, it had 4% of the population. And this is, in 2015, it had 6% of the population. So this is actually something that hasn't changed all that much. Most Chinese people live in the red zone. They live in this area, this very high density area, the big cities. A city with 2 million people doesn't count as anything in China. This is all that. Over here, Tibet, Xinjiang, lots of land, not so many people. So that's a big way to do it.

So I was going to do-- let me just say pronunciation. Should I say this? Let me do it really, really quickly so that you know-- I know many of you probably know Chinese. Many of you speak Chinese. You know Chinese is tonal. That means that it's very hard to be a beginner in this language because you're constantly asking for-- you're constantly saying, horse, I miss you, but it's really your mom. There's all these-- it's tricky when you're getting into it because the tone makes the difference.

Just realize that, maybe just going through a few things here, the Z and the Z-H, Z-H is like a hard-- but these are words that I encounter in research. Xia-- X, you see X. It's like an S-H, xia, bixia, something like this. So just know, this is how the pronunciation works.

What do I got? Let's start talking about China's geography. We got 20 minutes left. Cover the country. I'm going to start purely, for no apparent reason, in Sichuan province. It's just because this is what my PowerPoint told me to do. I opened it up, and I was like, we got to start somewhere. Let's start over there.

You have probably encountered Sichuan province before. It's actually a pretty famous province. Compared to other Chinese provinces, it's got a lot of international cachet, in part because look at all the Sichuan restaurants all over the Cambridge Boston area. When Chinese food traveled, Sichuan, Shanghai was a kind of cuisine that just traveled. A lot of times, the restaurants are not owned or operated by people from Sichuan. But they just created Sichuan restaurant. I don't know why. But it was like, there it is.

You also sometimes see Szechuan. That's, again, that older transliteration system. Same thing, it refers to that province. There it is in Western China. Sichuan is famous for spicy food. A lot of parts of China today have spicy food, to be frank. It's also famous for hot pot. Sichuan is where hot pot, Chongqing.

Now, again, I'm sort of biased here. Because I'm a historian of the Imperial period, I take Chongqing and Sichuan together. Culturally, they are together. They all speak a very similar kind of Mandarin dialect. But Chongqing was siphoned off from Sichuan in the 1990s. And now, it's its own-- it's a separate political entity today. But you can see Chongqing and Sichuan, culturally, they're-- this is Chongqing right here, right there.

It's also home to-- let me just say one thing about hot pot. The problem, I feel, about talking about Chinese food today is that now, China has become so flattened. And in a sense, it's a good thing. It's part of the progress of the country. It's part of the wealth of the country. But now, every place has hot pot. It's not like you're going to go, and oh, I got to go to Sichuan. I got to go try the hotpot. It's like you're going to get hot pot in Kunming and Yunnan.

You're going to get hot pot in Beijing, whatever. I realize they have a Beijing hot pot. It's different, I get it. But the point is, nowadays, if you're in a provincial capital, you can pretty much get the food of all the other parts of China. It might not be good. But they will have it. So it's kind of like Mexican in the US. Massachusetts has it. If you want to eat it, they have it. Is it as good as Arizona? I don't know. But you get what I'm saying.

So it's also home the panda, Sichuan's most famous export, besides the peppercorns. And the panda, we talk a lot about the panda. Just realize something about the panda. Just realize it is not important in Chinese history. I'm not breaking any hearts here. It's a very, very lovable vegetarian bear. It fits so well with so many of the aesthetics of modernity in so many ways. It is sort of friendly, vegetarian, and a bear.

How do you get that combination? It's like evolution. It is actually a bear. So it is related to the Russian brown bear and all of that stuff. How did this happen? Well, I don't know how many years ago, a bear moved to Sichuan, and said, I like it, and then just said, I'm just going to eat bamboo all the time. And so basically, you ended up with that.

The panda became a symbol in, actually, really, the Communist era because the panda was not associated with imperial symbols. The dragon is an Imperial symbol. The tiger is a very ancient symbol. The elephant even is an ancient symbol. All of these things are fair game. You can see them in Imperial history. You can see them in ancient history.

But nobody talked about the panda. Nobody was impressed by the panda. But then that's why, perfect, we're having a Communist revolution. We're throwing out all the old. We got a new animal right here. It's the panda. And it worked. You just got to say it worked. It was incredible marketing. And now, it's on the World Wildlife Foundation's-- it's their emblem. It's the most famous bear in the world, let's face it.

And then the other thing is with Sichuan, you get this great culture of tea houses that go back to the 20th century. Sichuan also had a great number of mafias. We could talk about mafias in China. The South was loaded with them. And they would hang out in the tea houses. And there were so many interesting things that happened there.

It's got a great lifestyle. The way that people talk about life in Sichuan, they say it's "[CHINESE] hen an yi." It's easygoing, an easy life. There's even this expression. "When you're young, don't go to Sichuan. When you're old, don't leave it." There's expressions in China for everything that give you advice. And this is one of those advices. So I didn't listen to this expression. I went. And you can see, what am I doing now? So it continued.

One interesting thing about Sichuan is that it is a basin. It is a geological basin. What that means is that it is surrounded on, basically, all sides. To get into Sichuan is difficult. To get out, there is one really easy way to get out, which is through the Yangtze River. But it only flows in one direction. So you can send rice out of Sichuan. You can send people out of Sichuan. But getting into Sichuan is rather difficult. That is actually why, across Chinese history, it's been a place to flee to.

So during the Tang dynasty, we're going to have a really, really big rebellion, called the An Lushan Rebellion. It's one of the most famous, devastating civil wars, rebellions, of Chinese history. The emperor will go from Xi'an. He will go from Chang'an. Don't worry. You will memorize all these places. You will know what I'm talking about. And he will flee into Sichuan.

And actually, this actually happened in the 20th century as well. Some of you will know this. Chiang Kai-Shek's government, Jiang Jieshi's government, when Japan invaded from the east, and Nanjing fell, the government basically had to move to the West, and it moved to Chongqing, which is, again, basically the Sichuan region. So that's where they held out for the war, more or less. So just realize this is a big part of the geography of Sichuan that gives it its interesting flavor.

This is another expression that I love here. "When China has yet to fall into chaos, Sichuan is the first to fall. When China has yet to been pacified, Sichuan has yet to been pacified," again, because it's hard to get to. So that gives it a unique culture in a way, really interesting.

Now, we continue on with our tour, and let's go-- we're going to go from Sichuan. You can see where Sichuan is right here. That's Chongqing. Now, we're going to go to the Northeast. We're going to go to Shaanxi province. Now Shaanxi province is, if you love history, you take this class, this is the province you really got to go to. It's loaded with history. You basically cross the Qinling Mountains down here in the Southern part of the province. You get right up here. It's called the Guanzhong Region. Don't worry about it, but Xi'an, Western Peace, literally-- or Chang'an was its older medieval name-- that's the capital of the province.

That tower that you see right there, that was built a very long time ago. That was built in the medieval period. It is not very common across China to see towers that are that old. It's an incredibly impressive piece of architecture. You probably know this place because, of course, the Terracotta Warriors are here, more or less. This is where you would go if you're going to go see them. And that's certainly something to go see. We, of course, will cover them in probably a few weeks. So we will cover all of this.

Let's talk a little bit about local food, again, the caveat being, nowadays in Xi'an, you can get whatever fish you want. You can get hot pot, whatever. So again, it's all flattened. But there are still local tastes. And there are still local specialties. Northerners, in general, eat wheat. They eat not as rice heavy. So that's a noodle-eating culture. Most of North China eats noodles. And Xi'an is famous for its all different types of noodles and noodle type dishes.

This is a saozhi mian, a Qishan saozhi mian. So saozhi mian is from a county. It's very nice. It's got a vinegar taste. It's a little spicy. It's a noodle dish. This is-- does anybody know what this? Yeah, paomo, yangrou paomo. This is a lamb. It looks like a naan bread. And you destroy your hands by cutting it up into a million little pieces. And then they pour a soup in it with lamb. It's delicious. It's super heavy. So when you eat this, you don't eat anything else for the rest of the day. So it's fun. It's really good.

Now, let me just tell you, when you're learning Chinese history for the first time, you're learning Chinese geography for the first time, you will say, how is this true? This is totally not fair. The province right next to Shaanxi province is called Shanxi province. Are you kidding me? You say, couldn't they put it in another place? Yeah, listen, you just got to learn it. You just got to learn it. In English, this will be transliterated.

The one that I was talking about, the ancient capital with the Terracotta Warriors and all that stuff, two A's. There will always be two A's, Shaanxi. It's in the third tone. It's another tone. If you come over to this one, you go east, it's the first tone, one A, Shanxi. So for a Chinese person, these don't sound alike.

But when you're in the US, and you're like, what's going on? You're like, seriously? I have to learn this. Yes, you have to learn it. So not the same. It actually will make it easy for the geography quiz because you'll know that approximately in this area, there's a place and it's approximately spelled the same way.

Shanxi Province, really great place, lots of interesting stuff, lots of great Taoist temples, old temples to visit, also noodles. Dao xiao mian I believe is from here. This is a knife-cut noodle. It's famous from this region. The hanging temple's over there. That's really fun.

Continue on-- let's go. I think our next one-- let's go. That's coming. Beijing, the Imperial capital, Beijing-- so if you look over here, we went from Sichuan, and we're going to the Northeast, we went through Shaanxi. We went through Shanxi. I cut through Heibei. And then now, we're here in Beijing. How many of you have been to Beijing? You've been there. You've been there. You've been there. How was it? What do you remember?

AUDIENCE: It was kind of smoggy.

TRISTAN It was kind of smoggy. What do you remember?

BROWN:

AUDIENCE: The palace.

TRISTAN Yeah, the palace is incredible. Yeah. What else do I remember? The weather is terrible. Look, you just gotta say,

BROWN: the weather, it's hot. And then all of a sudden, it rains. And it's not a nice rain. It's a killer rain. And it's like, I don't have an umbrella big enough to handle this. And then there's tons of traffic.

I realized, just being there this summer, even though all the cars, many cars are now electric, and there's great public transit everywhere, the traffic in Beijing is still really bad. So it's like whenever we were like, I'll be there in a half hour, it's like, no, just say an hour. But it's loaded with historical sites. It's an incredible place. I've been there probably a dozen times in my life, over the years. And you don't see everything. You can always go back and see something new there. So it's really, really fun.

Of course, many people who go to see the Great Wall will go to Beijing to see it. You actually don't need to be in Beijing to see it. There's Great Wall in Gansu Province out West. There's Great Wall in other provinces. But Beijing has the most famous ones. Like the panda, I just realized that this quote, unquote, "Great Wall" was oftentimes not very important. It was a little bit more important than the panda. It was important in certain periods of time in history. And other periods of time, just nobody cared. It just depended who was controlling Beijing at the time. We'll get into all of this. But just realize.

I will say one thing here. I was going to say, I have a little video here I'll show you about Dongbei. Has anybody ever been to Dongbei? You've been to Dongbei? Why did you go to Dongbei? This is Northeast China, Manchuria. Where did you go?

AUDIENCE: I was born there.

TRISTAN Oh, no way. You were born in Jilin province. Fantastic. Fantastic. Where else? You went there?

BROWN:

AUDIENCE: I went skiing.

TRISTAN You went skiing? Oh, nice. Yeah. You went to Heilongjiang?

BROWN:

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

TRISTAN Nice. I was in Liaoning this summer. I had a very nice time, great historical place. I was going to say, so Dongbei is definitely unique. It's unique in a number of ways. So you will see, if you go up to Heilongjiang, one of the provinces, you go to Harbin, it's almost in Russia. And it does have some old Russian architecture that's around. It's very interesting to see. Manchuria is very important in the 20th century. You realize that during World War II, it's a big site of contention. Japan sets up a puppet government in Manchuria.

I guess I would say-- what would I say about it? Just realize that, first of all-- and this is, again, one of those things-- I notice over the years that people in China today associate people from Dongbei with being very funny, with being humorous. And there's all of these folks. I'll just see if my video plays. You can watch these shows on Chinese TV. It's a humorous talk show.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

- [SPEAKING CHINESE]

TRISTAN
BROWN: So she's from Dongbei. She's got Dongbei accent.

- [SPEAKING CHINESE]

[END PLAYBACK]

TRISTAN
BROWN: And there's this kind of humor. And I don't know exactly how to describe it, but it's like people just think Dongbei people are funny. I don't know what-- is there a scientific basis of this? I don't know. But just realize that that's what people will say. Do you think it's true?

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

TRISTAN
BROWN: You think it's true? You think it's true? They're a little bit funnier. I don't know. Are there parts of America where you'd say, people from that state are just funny? Do we have that? Where are people funny? I don't think Massachusetts people are that funny. I'm going to be honest with you. I'm from here. Where people are funny?

AUDIENCE: I feel like it's more that we know where people are jerks.

TRISTAN
BROWN: I see. Yeah, yeah, OK. Yeah, yeah. We know where people have attitude, yeah, yeah, attitude for sure, yeah. Yeah, humor, it's kind of an interesting question. Who's funny? Who's not? But this is one they just to throw in there. So continuing on, we don't have a ton of time left. If you go south from Dongbei from Northeastern China, in that area all around Beijing, basically the south of Beijing, mainly, you get to this North China Plain. And it's flat. This is a very, very old area.

What I mean by that is, people have been farming here for thousands of years. Very, very early Chinese history is around here in a big, big way. And this is a fascinating place, because on the one hand, it's so important. It's near, at least, the capital in the later eras. It's also where the Yellow River, it gets to the North China Plain. And this is where the Yellow River gets really violent because the North China Plain is flat. So the Yellow River, every few hundred years, changes course across the North China Plain.

And it's devastating floods, crop failures, and there's chaos. That's, in a way, one of the things you could say. This is, again, a generalization. Northerners have-- let's say, the state has been more interventionist in the North. The state kind of originates in the North, around, in some ways, the control of the Yellow River because you have to control it. In the South, very far, far away, it's less control, more laissez faire, more like "[CHINESE] tian gao huang di yuan."

Heaven's high. The emperor is far away. It's a different relationship. This is one of the ways that you can think a little bit about South-North.

Confucius is from the North China Plain. He's from Shandong province. We'll encounter him in a bit. A number of the big early Confucian philosophers are from this area. So it's got an association, you could say, with Confucianism and with ancient learning and with, again, the area around the late Imperial capitals, as I mentioned.

But it's also a place you could say of, in sometimes, like lawlessness, in rebellions, that threaten the state. It's one of those big Chinese novels, *Shui Hu Zhuan*, *Water Margin*. We've already went over, my god, just one class, we went over three of the big novels today. This takes place, you could say, in this area. It's like outlaws. So it's a very interesting location. It's a very interesting place.

Two minutes left-- By the way, I always use all of class time. I just keep talking, you know what I mean? I just can't shut up about this stuff. I apologize, but I just love it. One really, really, really, really, really fascinating thing that's important in dynastic Chinese history is this thing, North to South, the Grand Canal. This was like the superhighway of dynastic China. It is constructed, believe it or not-- you won't believe this.

But it's like when I tell you this, it's like-- where is it? Oh, go back. Go back, please. Here we go. Where's my date? No, it doesn't there. Whatever. I'll just tell you. The origins of the Grand Canal go back to the seventh century. This is one of those things in China where you're like, what? Really? What do you mean? A canal was constructed in the seventh century and then remained being used until 100 years ago? Yes, basically. Yes.

It didn't flow in exactly the same area. The origins of the Grand Canal were actually this one that you see here. It connected the Tang dynasty capital of Luoyang with the South. Then in later years, it got expanded. And eventually, in the later period, it basically connects Beijing in the South. That goes all the way down, you could say, to Nanjing, Hangzhou, that area, all the way from north.

It's like you get on there, and you can go north-south. You can transport grain. The emperor can travel it, if he's going to the South. It's a super important way that the empire was connected. Today, there's high-speed rail. At that time, there was the Grand Canal. I realize we're out of time, so go home. Tell your friends. Tell your friends. Enjoy the weekend. I'll see you on Monday. We'll finish up our tour of China and continue onward.