



A New Perspective on Ancient Chinese History

(Newly Compiled Lecture Notes)

*Dr. Decheng Jiang
(Australia)*

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A New Perspective on Ancient Chinese History

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In Chinese:

- Xu Jie, Grand Secretary of the Ming Dynasty: Political Maneuvering During the Jiajing and Longqing Periods 《大明首輔徐階：明嘉隆時期的政治博弈政治》 (Joint Publishing (H.K.) Co., Ltd. 2026)
- A Collection of Historical and Cultural Essays, The Tropic of Capricorn 《南回歸綫漫筆》 (Hong Kong Chuwen Publishing House 2024)
- A Hundred Years New History of Chinese Film Stories 《百年影蹤-中國故事電影史新撰》 (Hong Kong Chuwen Publishing House 2022)
- Xu Jie and Jia-long Politics 《徐階與嘉隆政治》 (Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House 2002). (Republished by Joint Publishing(Hong Kong) in 2026)

In English:

- Talking About Chinese Cinema (Dixic W Publishing Corporation U.S.A. 2023)

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Preface

2004 In that year, I began teaching at several universities in Melbourne. At the time, I was invited by Dr. Xu Yuzeng, the director of the “Special Course on Chinese History” at La Trobe University in Australia, to participate in and lead this course. La Trobe University is located in northern Melbourne, far from the city center. On campus, you often see those large, gray kangaroos—three or four at a time—wandering about. Surrounded by lush green trees, the campus feels isolated, like a medieval fortress set apart from the hustle and bustle of the modern world. It was there that I taught the “Special Course on Chinese History.”

This elective course is specifically designed for Chinese international students and is taught in Chinese. It has been offered for several years already. From the perspective of my own history major, the original course structure and content were not rigorous enough and did not adhere to the standards typically followed in the field of history. Moreover, I learned that most of the students enrolled in this course come from non-humanities majors such as business, electronics, and actuarial science. Therefore, I decided to completely rewrite the lecture notes, taking into account the students’ non-humanities backgrounds. Given that a one-year course simply cannot cover the entirety of Chinese history nor can it provide an exhaustive overview like a mere chronological listing, I chose to focus on ancient Chinese history—precisely the area that students from non-history majors need to understand. The course covers roughly ten major periods, from early antiquity through the Qing dynasty, with several specific topics assigned

to each period. In total, there are 32 lectures, or 32 thematic discussions, which manage to both encompass the entire span of ancient Chinese history and delve somewhat more deeply into selected historical issues. Due to time constraints, the lecture notes were almost entirely prepared concurrently with the teaching of the previous lecture—each new lecture was written immediately after the preceding one, one after another.

I took over this course starting from the second semester, and the very first lecture began directly with the Yuan Dynasty. Deep down, I was worried that without any prior groundwork, my students might find it difficult to smoothly follow the historical narrative of Genghis Khan’s Mongol conquests... When the first week’s lecture began, the classroom wasn’t very large, yet nearly twenty students attended. By the second week, the number had suddenly jumped to fifty or sixty—students even moved all the chairs from the adjacent classroom over to use them, making the room incredibly crowded. Some students even sat outside the classroom door just to listen, and eventually, they ended up sitting on the floor around me. By the third week, the student body had grown to over eighty, and right at the start of the lecture, two university administrators came in to say: “The classroom is seriously overcrowded—it’s too dangerous! We’ve already arranged for a tiered classroom.” So, everyone grandly relocated to the tiered classroom. From the third week onward, the teaching process settled into a steady, well-organized rhythm. Over the following years, the course continued to be refined and improved, eventually taking shape into the framework of ancient Chinese history narration we have today.

I remember back then, every time I’d arrive at class an hour early and spend that extra hour in the car, rehearsing the material I was going to cover several times over. When I finally made it into the classroom, I’d pull out the six or

seven pages of notes for today's lecture and say to my classmates, "I've really put a lot of thought and effort into preparing this lecture," then casually toss the notes aside and deliver the entire talk entirely from memory. Almost every time after class ended, three or five students would stay behind, lingering in the classroom to chat with me about this or that aspect of Chinese history—students who were genuinely passionate about Chinese history. One female student from Beijing once said to me, "Teacher, are you interested? My family has connections with CCTV. I can ask them to contact you. How about giving a lecture on the '100 Scholar's Forum'? Your lectures are much better than theirs!" The students' affirmation was the most precious gift for me.

In the blink of an eye, it's almost 20 For years, this course has long been in The La Trobe university is closed, but the lecture notes remain, and the framework of this historical narrative is still intact—perhaps making it particularly well-suited for teaching ancient Chinese history at higher education institutions overseas. Translating the manuscript from Chinese into English—and vice versa—is no easy task, and some imperfections are inevitable. I sincerely hope that colleagues specializing in Chinese history will review and correct these materials.

*Jiang Decheng at his residence in Melbourne's eastern suburb
April 2026 Year*



Part 1

Ancient Times 上古史

Lecture 1

Human Origins and Ancient Calendars

1, The Great Cosmic Seasons and Ancient Humans

Everyone knows that a day has six periods 六時 (dawn, morning, noon, dusk, evening, night); a month has three ten-day periods (xun 三旬 - first, middle, last, based on the lunar cycle); a year has four seasons 四季: spring, summer, autumn and winter. These are formed by the Earth's rotation, the Moon's revolution around Earth, and Earth's revolution around the Sun. They are natural changes we truly experience and endure, affecting human life. However, on a larger cosmic scale, there are also Great Cosmic Seasons, namely the periodic ice age changes on Earth. These are formed by the great cycles of galactic movements. They are things we cannot experience or endure; after all, life is too short.

We know: The Solar System takes 100,000 years to orbit our local stellar cluster. Our local cluster takes 250 million years to orbit the Milky Way galaxy. The Milky Way takes 1.2 billion years to orbit other galaxies. How do we know this? It's revealed by geology; these great orbital cycles correspond to geological ages. During these orbital cycles, Earth's climate changes accordingly. These changes layer upon layer are recorded underground. Particularly, the periodic operation of the Solar System causes periodic ice ages and deluge periods on Earth, severely impacting life on Earth. The age of the dinosaurs corresponds to the summer of the Great Cosmic Seasons. Later, Earth entered the winter of the Great Cosmic Seasons. During the ice age, dinosaurs went extinct. Subsequently, cold-resistant mammals and primates appeared and evolved, leading to the emergence of humans.