

The Harvard-Yenching Institute Training Program in Mesoamerican Archaeology

Fellowship for East Asian Scholars

(Academic Year 2018-19, Harvard University)

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In East Asia, with the exception of Japan, Archaeology has primarily been conducted by archaeologists within their own countries, and, in large part, that archaeology has been primarily focused on historical questions and questions of cultural development. Even during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, as the questions East Asian archaeologists have asked have turned to topics of social organization, cultural evolution, and developmental process, the majority of research has focused inwards. Japan remains the exception, with archaeologists who work in many parts of the world, including Western Asia, South and Central America and elsewhere. Very recently, however, the advantages of a comparative approach have increasingly become more obvious, as exemplified by major international conferences on World Archaeology and related issues being hosted by East Asian countries, and even targeted archaeological discussions focusing on the archaeology of other world regions being increasingly common. To cite just two recent examples: Sichuan University hosted a workshop on Ancient Civilizations that involved a number of experts on early Civilizations in the Near East and elsewhere brought to have dialogue with specialists on Early China, and an organization called the Shanghai Forum is convening its third international conference on World Archaeology in Shanghai this year, an event that involves prominent archaeologists from around the world in dialogue about important questions in comparative archaeology.

In order to foster the development of a truly international field of archaeology, it is imperative that nations with active archaeological research and training programs have some specialists who are competent in regional archaeologies beyond the borders of their own countries. As Mesoamerica is one world region with an impressive and extensive history of archaeology, and an area where some of the most influential theoretical and methodological developments in the field have taken place, it is an area ripe for developing the competence of East Asian Archaeologists. There is now a burgeoning interest in Mesoamerican Archaeology in East Asia broadly, which has created a need for a program that would enable graduate students and recent PhDs to obtain formal training in the subject. Growing out of a newly inaugurated program of field archaeological research at the Maya ruins of Copan by the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in collaboration with the Department of Anthropology of Harvard University, with support from the Harvard-Yenching Institute, we plan to run a second one-year graduate-level training program in Mesoamerican Archaeology, at Harvard University in the Academic Year 2018-2019 (following the first successful iteration of the program in 2016-2017): The Harvard-Yenching Institute Mesoamerican Archaeology Training Program (MATP).

The successful candidates applying for this training program would be required to take courses in Mesoamerican Archaeology and History (taught by Professors David Carrasco and William Fash), and; Maya Hieroglyphic Writing and related topics (Dr. Nicholas Carter). The specific required courses will be determined closer to the date of the program. As part of the expected coursework, the participants would be required to participate in a seminar with Professors Fash and Carrasco, with intensive readings (in English) and weekly discussions of the topics of relevance for broad comparative research on the origins, development, and decline of civilizations. Those topics include (but are not limited to): history of religions and cosmovision, landscape archaeology, the rise of urbanism, forms of social organization, political evolution, the development and meaning of artistic and architectural traditions, and the origins and uses of writing. At the end of the spring term each participant would present a final product that could take the form of a research design for prospective field, laboratory, or library research, or the analysis of a particular research topic, such as the origins of urbanism in Mesoamerica, or some other capstone that will pull together the results of the training program for that student. Each student would give a public presentation of that research project at the end of their stay that would be attended by the group and Professors, as well as other archaeologists and scholars of Mesoamerica and East Asia, at Harvard. The group may also travel to Copan, Honduras, to visit the ongoing investigations with a tour led by Bill Fash and have the opportunity to visit the best understood ancient Maya site, and / or a tour to Mexico City and surrounds could be led by David Carrasco and Bill Fash to introduce the participants to Templo Mayor in Mexico City and Teotihuacan. Details of this or a similar excursion will be worked out closer to the time of the program. In addition to the coursework specifically focused on Mesoamerica, we will also encourage the students to take available courses in Latin American society or archaeology, as available, and will consult with other faculty about the possibilities in this regard closer to the program date. Finally, participants will enroll in Spanish language training as a group during the course of the program.

MATP participants will be recruited from top archaeology programs in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. The program seeks to identify students who may be interested in seriously engaging with the archaeology of Mesoamerica in the future but lack opportunities within their home countries to pursue this direction of research. Priority will be given to students who demonstrate some competency in archaeology developed through previous coursework and / or fieldwork, but who express a genuine interest in pursuing Mesoamerican studies in depth, either in a comparative fashion or as a primary field of interest. Ideal candidates are probably those early in their course of study, perhaps MA students or students finishing an MA for whom this may be a step after an MA but before pursuing the next step in their education. Young faculty or PhD students who can convincingly demonstrate or articulate a way that they might pursue this direction in a serious fashion in light of their existing research orientation will also be strong candidates.

We would very much appreciate your kind attention to this immediate call for applicants for this program. The application deadline is Saturday, September 30, 2017. The applicants who pass screening will be interviewed by the Harvard faculty advisors for this program in mid-December.