21H580. From the Silk Road to the Great Game: China, Russia, and Central Eurasia

3-0-9

Fall 2003

TuThu 2:30 – 4

Peter C. Perdue

This subject examines interactions across the Eurasian continent between Russians, Chinese, Mongolian nomads, and Turkic oasis dwellers during the last millennium and a half. As empires rose and fell, religions, trade, and war flowed back and forth continuously across this vast space. Today, the fall of the Soviet Union and China’s reforms have opened up new opportunities for cultural interaction. Topics include the religious traditions of Central Asian Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Confucianism; caravans and travelers like Marco Polo and Rabban Sauma [the first Chinese to travel to the West]; nomadic conquest and imperialist competition, past and present. Source materials include primary documents, travelogues, films, and music.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This will be a lecture and discussion course. Come to class having done the reading for the week, and be prepared to discuss questions raised in the reading and lectures. There will be one hour exam at midterm, with a map quiz, ID questions, and a short essay.

Much of the information we have about this region comes from travelers’ reports. These are both useful sources and fun to read. Each of you will have to read one, or part of one, traveler’s account and give a short report on it in class. I will provide suggestions and bibliography later on.

One 10-15 page paper is due BEFORE the last class. This can be a discussion of a travel account, an art exhibit, political relations, or on a topic of your choice. I will give suggested topics and bibliography during the term.

There is NO Final Exam

READINGS

#: Available at MIT Bookstore

# Thomas Barfield, The Perilous Frontier
# Judy Bonavia, The Silk Road
Daniel R. Brower, Edward Lazzerini, eds., Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917 [On Reserve]
Richard Foltz, Religions of the Silk Road [On Hayden Reserve]
# Peter Hopkirk, The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia
# Rudyard Kipling, Kim
# Liu Xinru, The Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Interaction
# Marco Polo, The Book of Marco Polo
# Morris Rossabi, Kubilai Khan: His Life and Times
# Justin Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*
# Susan Whitfield, *Life along the Silk Road*

**TOPICS AND SCHEDULE**

1. **Sep. 4** Big Questions: World Systems and Civilizations; The Pivotal Role of Central Eurasia.  
   **READING:** Study Maps in Reader

2. **Sep. 9, 11** Corpses and Chariots: Mummies, Horses and the rise of Nomadism  
   **READING:** Articles #2,3,4,5 in reader (Mair, Anthony, et.al); Barfield p. 1-31

3. **Sep. 16, 18** The Rise of the Silk Route Trade; Han, Xiongnu, and Roman Empires  
   **READING:** Liu Xinru; Articles #6, 7 in Reader (Creel and Perdue); Barfield 33-80

4. **Sep. 23, Sep. 25** Religions along the Silk Routes: Islam, Christianity, Manicheanism, Judaism, Buddhism.  
   **READING:** Foltz, p.37-144, in reader and on Reserve

5. **Sep. 30, Oct. 2** Cave Paintings and Sculpture: Dunhuang and others  
   **READING:** Whitfield; Article #8 (Mair) in reader; Barfield 131-163

6. **Oct. 7, 9** Caravans and Conquest: Marco Polo, Rabban Sauma, and Kublai Khan  
   **READING:** Article #9 (Fletcher) in Reader; Marco Polo; Rossabi

   **READING:** Barfield 229-65; Article #10 in reader (Rossabi); Khodarkovsky, “Ignoble Savages” in Brower and Lazzerini, p.9-26 [in reader]

8. **Oct. 21, Oct. 23** Manchu conquest of Central Asia, Russian and Mongolian negotiations  
   **READING:** Perdue, “Three Qing Emperors and the Northwest” [in course locker]  
   Barfield 266-303; Slezkine, “Naturalists vs. Nations,” in Brower & Lazzerini, p.27-57

   Oct. 28 and Oct. 30: I will be out of town. There will be a film shown during class time on Oct. 28. It is NOT optional: You will have to write a 1-2 page commentary on it. I will arrange for someone to administer the Midterm Exam on Oct. 30.

   **Oct. 30 MIDTERM EXAM**

9. **Nov. 4, Nov. 6** Tibet and Xinjiang’s Role in Central Asian Politics  
   **READING:** Bonavia, *The Silk Road*

10. **Nov. 13, 18** The Nineteenth Century Great Game: Britain, Russia, and China  

11. **Nov. 20** Twentieth Century Explorers and Looters: Aurel Stein, et.al.  
12. Nov. 25 Soviet Rule in Central Asia: From Revolution to Environmental Catastrophe
   Nov. 27 THANKSGIVING: NO CLASS
13. Dec. 2, 4 Post-Soviet developments in Central Asia and Xinjiang
14. Dec. 9 Intercultural Contacts from Amsterdam to Japan: Yo-yo Ma and the Silk Road Project; The Dalai Lama in the Modern World; Richard Feynman “goes” to Tuva.
Readers with articles available at Hayden Reserve:

21H.580 Reader: Vol. 1

1. Maps of Central Eurasia
7. Peter C. Perdue, “The Economy of the Silk Road”
**21H.580 Reader: Vol. 2**

9. Xavier Crombe, “Tibet between Tibetans and Chinese migrants”

**21H.580 Reader: Vol. 3**

Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, excerpts
Brower and Lazzarini, *Russia’s Orient*, excerpts

**Internet Sources**

www.depts.washington.edu/uwch/silkroad: Silk road project with texts, art, maps:
~/texts/texts.html: excerpts from writings about Silk Road [NB Sogdian letters].

www.wlc.com/oxus/cahist1.htm “Major Events Relevant to Central Asian History”
Please feel free to search for other sources, and let me know what you find!