21H.580 From the Silk Road to the Great Game:
China, Russia, and Central Eurasia

This subject examines interactions across the Eurasian continent between Russians, Chinese, Mongolian nomads, and oasis dwellers during the last millennium and a half as empires rose and religions, trade, and war flowed forth continuously across this vast space. Britain and Russia competed for power over Eurasia in the "Great Game" of geopolitics in the 19th century, just as China, Russia, and others did in the 20th century. 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 Polo and Rabban Sauma [the first Chinese to travel to the West]; and nomadic conquest and imperialist competition, past and present. Source materials include primary documents, travelogues, films, and music.

Requirements

* **Enjoy the ride**
  What’s more painful—three months on a flea-infested camel, or a pile of readings and assignments? Think of it this way: take in desert vistas and court intrigues, without the risk of sunstroke or disembowelment. A good deal?

* **Class participation (30%)**
  Do the readings, come to class, join the debate.

* **Forum postings (15%)**
  In lieu of independent response papers on readings, I will ask you each to contribute to a weekly online discussion on the readings and related issues (not required in weeks of assignments or tests). This will be in the Forum section of the course website. Each person should make at least one substantial and formally composed contribution (of, say, around three paragraphs), _before the day on which a reading is discussed_. You may also contribute shorter, more informal comments as the discussion gets rolling.

* **Mid-term and final tests (20%)**
  There will be 2 short tests during class on basic geography, persons, and events.

* **Final paper project (35%)**
  Grade includes bibliography and outline (5%, due 10/16), oral presentation, and the paper itself (25%, due 12/8).

A Note on Plagiarism: Using someone else's work without acknowledgment is plagiarism. If you are guilty of this, you will at the least get a failing grade on the paper, and at worst fail the course and be taken to the Committee on Discipline. Later, I will give you more detailed instructions on how to cite sources and how to avoid unintentional plagiarism.
Readings

At the MIT Bookstore and on Reserve


On course website

see list at end of syllabus

Schedule

1: Introduction: Central Eurasia in World Systems and Civilizations

Sep 3 (Wed.)

Introduction and discussion.

2. Corpses and Chariots: Mummies, Horses and the rise of Nomadism

Sep. 8 (Mon.)

Victor H. Mair. "Mummies of the Tarim Basin" 28-35 (course website)

Anthony, Telegin and Brown, "The Origin of Horseback Riding" (course website)

Anthony and Vinogradov, "Birth of the Chariot" 36-41 (course website)

Sep. 10 (Wed.)

David W. Anthony, "Shards of Speech" (course website)

Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 1-31

3. The Rise of the Silk Route Trade; Han, Xiongnu, and Roman Empires

Sep. 15 (Mon.)

Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Interaction*
Herrlee G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History" 160-186 (course website)
Peter C. Perdue, "The Economy of the Silk Road" 491-493 (course website)

Sep. 17 (Wed.)
Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 32-84
Boulnois, *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants on the Silk Road*, 33-97

[Sep. 22 (Mon.): Holiday]

4. Religions along the Silk Routes: Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Shamanism

Sep. 24 (Wed.)
Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 37-109 (course website, and on Reserve)

Sep. 29 (Mon.)
Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 111-144 (course website, and on Reserve)
Boulnois, *Silk Road*, 209-34

5. Life and Art on the Silk Road: Dunhuang and other oasis caches

Oct. 1 (Wed.)
Roderick Whitfield et al, *Cave Temples of Mogao*
Susan Whitfield, *Life along the Silk Road*, 1-75

Oct. 6 (Mon.)
Susan Whitfield, *Life along the Silk Road*, 75-154
Victor H. Mair, “Dunhuang as a Funnel for Central Asian Nomads into China” 143-163
Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 131-163

6. Caravans and Conquest: Kubilai Khan, Marco Polo, Rabban Sauma

Oct. 8 (Wed.)
Joseph Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives," 11-50 (course website)
Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life And Times*: 115-205

[Oct. 13 (Mon.): Holiday]

Oct. 15 (Wed.)
Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*: ch. 18-71: 45-248

7. Ming China and the Rise of Muscovy

Oct. 20 (Mon.)
Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, 229-65
MID-TERM TEST

Oct. 22 (Wed.)
Morris Rossabi, "The ‘Decline’ of the Central Asian Caravan Trade,” 81-102 (course website).
Khodarkovsky, “Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects,” in Brower and Lazzerini, 9-26 (course website)

8. Manchu conquest of Central Asia; Russian and Mongolian negotiations

Oct. 27 (Mon.)
Peter Perdue, “Fate and Fortune in Central Eurasian Warfare: Three Qing Emperors and their Mongol Rivals” (course website)

Oct. 29 (Wed.)
Barfield, The Perilous Frontier, 266-303

Film, Museum visit

Nov. 3 (Mon.)
Film: The Silk Road

Paper proposal due

Nov. 7 (Fri.)?
Visit to Boston MFA (time and day to be discussed)

[Nov. 10 (Mon): holiday]

9. The Nineteenth Century Great Game: Britain, Russia, and China

Nov. 12 (Wed.)

Nov. 17 (Mon.)
Brower, “Islam and Ethnicity,” in Brower and Lazzerini, 115-137 (course website)
Kipling, Kim

10. Twentieth Century Explorers and Looters: Aurel Stein, et. al.

Nov. 19 (Wed.)
Bonavia, The Silk Road (course website)
Boulnois, Silk Road: Monks, Warriors and Merchants on the Silk Road, 399-423.
Nov. 24 (Mon.)  
Work-in-progress research presentations

11. Soviet Rule in Central Asia; Mongolia From Communism to Reform  
Nov. 26 (Wed.)  
Rossabi, Modern Mongolia: 1-80  
McNeill, Something New Under the Sun, 162-66 (course website)

12. Xinjiang and Islam in China  
Dec. 1 (Mon.)  
Rudelson, Oasis Identities (also on course website): Introduction, Chs. 4, 6, 7  
Gladney, Muslim Chinese (course website), Chs. 1, 3, 4

Dec. 3 (Wed.)  
Starr, ed., Xinjiang, chs. 3, 4, 12 (course website)  
Nicolas Becquelin, "Chinese Hold on Xinjiang: Means and Strengths" (course website)

FINAL TEST (in class)

13. Central Asia in the contemporary cultural imagination  
Dec. 8 (Mon.)  
Levin, The Hundred Thousand Fools of God, 85-130, 260-87 (course website)  

Dec. 10 (Wed.)  
Goodman, "The politics of the West: equality, nation-building, and colonisation" (course website)  
Crombe, "Tibet between Tibetans and Chinese migrants" (course website)

FINAL PAPER due FRI. DEC. 12

COURSE WEBSITE READINGS


Olivier Roy, The New Central Asia, pp. 25-84, 161-200


Richard Foltz, Religions of the Silk Road, 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]
http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/toc/index.html: Silkroad Foundation: maps, articles, etc.
http://www.oxuscom.com/cahist1.htm: “Major Events Relevant to Central Asian History”
Please feel to search for other sources, and let me know what you find!