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21H.580 From the Silk Road to the Great Game: China, Russia, and Central
Eurasia
Fall 2003

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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 Lazzarini, 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, *Khubilai 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
7. Oct. 14, Oct. 16 Ming China and the Rise of Muscovy
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*
Nov. 11 HOLIDAY: NO CLASS
10. Nov. 13, 18 The Nineteenth Century Great Game: Britain, Russia, and China
READING: Hopkirk 57-68, 77-108, 165-87, 295-338, 430-64, 502-24; Brower, "Islam and Ethnicity," in Brower and Lazzerini, p. 115-137; Kipling, *Kim*
11. Nov. 20 Twentieth Century Explorers and Looters: Aurel Stein, et.al.
READING: Bonavia, *The Silk Road*, 94-112, 150-8, 226-41, 248-54, 284-89, 300-05, 313.

12. Nov. 25 Soviet Rule in Central Asia: From Revolution to Environmental Catastrophe
READING: Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia* [in reader Vol.2]; McNeill on the Aral Sea [in reader Vol.2]
Nov. 27 THANKSGIVING: NO CLASS
13. Dec. 2, 4 Post-Soviet developments in Central Asia and Xinjiang
READING: Rudelson, *Oasis Identities* ; Gladney, *Muslim Chinese* [in reader, Vol.2]; Becquelin [in reader, Vol.2] **FINAL PAPER DUE**
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.
READING: Levin, *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God* [in reader, vol.2]; Schell, *Virtual Tibet* [in reader, vol.2]; Goodman [in reader, vol.2]; Crombe [in reader, vol.2] PAPERS RETURNED.

Readers with articles available at Hayden Reserve:

21H.580 Reader: Vol. 1

1. Maps of Central Eurasia
2. Victor H. Mair, "Mummies of the Tarim Basin" *Archaeology*, 1995, vol.48, no.2, p. 28-35
3. David Anthony, Dimitri Y. Telegin, Dorcas Brown. "The origin of horseback riding" . *Scientific American* vol. 265 no.6, December 1991.
4. David W. Anthony, Nikolai B. Vinogradov. "Birth of the Chariot." *Archaeology* 1995 March-April , 36-41.
5. David W. Anthony, "Shards of Speech". *The Sciences*, 1996.
6. Herrlee G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History", in Creel, *What is Taoism: and Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History*, p.160-186. Chicago , 1970
7. Peter C. Perdue, "The Economy of the Silk Road"
8. Victor H. Mair, "Dunhuang as a Funnel for Central Asian Nomads into China", in Gary Seaman, ed., *Ecology and Empire: Nomads in the Cultural Evolution of the Old World*, 143-163
9. Joseph Fletcher. "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, June 1986, p. 11-50
10. Morris Rossabi, "The "Decline" of the Central Asian Caravan Trade", in Gary Seaman, ed., *Ecology and Empire: Nomads in the Cultural Evolution of the Old World* p.81-102.
11. Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, p. 1-84

21H.580 Reader: Vol. 2

1. Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 25-84, 161-200
2. John R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World*, p.162-66
3. “Then Came the Locusts: A Chinese Region Reels”, *New York Times*, September 25, 2001.
4. Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic*, p. 1-63, 117-201
5. Nicolas Becquelin, “Chinese Hold on Xinjiang: Means and Limits”
6. Theodore Levin, *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia* (and Queens, New York), p. 85-130, 260-87
7. Orville Schell, *Virtual Tibet: Searching for Shangri-La from the Himalayas to Hollywood*, p. 31-84, 137-161, 182-221, 241-48, 284-316
8. David S.G. Goodman, “The politics of the West: equality, nation-building, and colonisation”
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.ecai.org: Berkeley Electronic Cultural Atlas: animated maps, etc.

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!