



Introduction to Central Asia *Fall 2021*

Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures 26
Geography 55

Course Information

Instructor: Sanjyot Mehendale
Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures
Office Hours: Tu/Th 1:15 – 2:00 pm
294 Barrows Hall

Class Day/Time: Tu/Th 11:00 - 12:29 pm
Etcheverry 3106
Email: sanjyotm@berkeley.edu

Course Description

In both public imagination and academic focus, Central Asia¹ has long been marginalized as a region land-locked between, and dominated by, the ancient "great" civilizations of China, India, Persia and Rome, and the modern powers of Asia and Europe. Most of the attention garnered by the region has rested on its value as a transit zone -- the so-called ancient Silk Road -- and store of natural resources for these other dominant civilizations. Relatively few scholars have devoted attention to the region as anything but an adjunct, and the study of Central Asia is still only rarely included in the academic curriculum of American universities. The long night of Cold War politics, which restricted international research in the region and limited Western access to Soviet and Central Asian sources, reinforced this conceptual marginalization.

At the end of Soviet hegemony in Central Asia in 1991, several newly independent nation-states (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan)

¹ The term *Central Asia* in this semester refers to the five former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. At times, reference will be made to regions across the border such as in Afghanistan, China, and Russia.

emerged on the geopolitical map. These states that had their formal beginnings as artificial creations of Stalin's policy of "National Delimitation," struggled with the conundrums of national identity amidst competing ethnic and religious affiliations. The post-Soviet transitional stage offered a number of significant issues for attention by scholars of both modern and ancient Central Asia: the governmental forms that succeeded local and transnational Soviet structures; the role of Islam and ethnicity in post-Communist social and cultural constructions; the impact of the disintegration of Soviet control on the economies, infrastructure and environments of the independent republics; and the effect of emerging ideologies on the uses of the region's history and on the direction of scholarship pertaining to ancient Central Asia.

The fall of the Soviet Union also brought renewed scholarly and public policy interest in the newly independent states of Central Asia, as well as neighboring Mongolia, Xinjiang province (China), and Afghanistan. Since 11 September 2001, the region has witnessed even greater international attention and a dramatic increase in the presence of external actors, particularly the United States.

This course addresses the cultural complexities of ancient and the geo-politics of modern Central Asia, creating an opportunity to view Central Asian cultures and societies as specific and dynamic, rather than merely as recipients of and conduits for external forces.

Course Structure

Lectures and Discussion

Originally designed as a lecture course, this semester the course will have a slightly tailored format starting week 3 when Tuesday lectures will be followed by Thursday discussion in which students working in groups will discuss with the class their ideas regarding specific issues relating to the material assigned that week.

Thursday discussions will allow groups of five students 10 minutes each week to have their say. Given that there are 60 students in the class, we can only accommodate a certain number of groups each Thursday. 6 groups of five will have their say one week (roughly 60 minutes) with the remainder of the time that day opening the class up for comments. The other 6 groups will have their say the week after etc. Note: you have until week 3 to put together your own group or the instructor will randomly assign students. It is hoped that collaboration to gather your thoughts will precede the discussion but, if not, breaking up the class into smaller groups will allow the instructor to engage with students more effectively.

Readings

Students are assigned material each week. Readings will be available on BCOURSES (under "files") or accessible via JSTOR and PROQUEST EBOOK CENTRAL. Additional materials, such as videos or news items, will be available online.

Assignments and Grading

1. **(40%) Written Responses.** At the end of each week (weeks 3 to 13), students are required to complete a 1-2 page (single-spaced) written response to be handed in by the following Monday as an attachment
Each weekly entry should include a synopsis of the lecture and your thoughts on what was covered and discussed in class and assigned during that week.
2. **(20%) Class presence and participation in discussion.** Students are required to engage in classroom discussions. They are also required to attend each discussion section (whether it's your group's turn or not) and **to inform the instructor beforehand of their absence.** Unexplained absences will result in a failing grade.
3. **(40%) Final Essay.** 10-15 pages (double-spaced) due Monday, December 13 by 11:59 pm. Students are required to complete a persuasive essay on any topic pertaining to Central Asia using logic and reason to argue a point of view based on facts, examples, and expert scholarly work (include citations).
4. **NOTE: NO FINAL EXAM**

Office Hours

Office hours are provisionally scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1-2:00 pm via zoom. Students are encouraged to join office hours early in the course for an introductory discussion, which may allow the instructor to get a sense of students' expectations and backgrounds, and may provide an opportunity for students to ask specific questions about the direction of the course.

The instructor can also be reached by email (sanjyotm@berkeley.edu) to schedule an appointment outside regular office hours. Email messages should not include requests to repeat lecture segments or to answer questions about course materials. Students are expected to come to join office hours to discuss in person any problems they might be experiencing with the course materials.

Course Goals and Objectives

- Acquiring specialized knowledge of the region defined as Central Asia
- Assessing the history of Central Asia through scholarly and historical sources, as well as a variety of media (newspapers, film, documentaries etc.)
- Understanding the ways in which parts of Central Asia are linked historically, culturally and politically with South Asia, the Near East, Europe and East Asia
- Developing a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the region
- Developing critical thinking skills to be reflected in written responses to individual lectures and the writing of an essay.

Class Schedule and Topics

Week 1 (Th August 26)

Introduction: Where, What, Why, and How?

Required Reading

Keller, Shoshana. "Introduction." *Russia and Central Asia: Coexistence, Conquest, Convergence*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019, pp. 1-20 **(PROQUEST EBOOK)**

Recommended Reading

Heathershaw, John, and Megoran, Nick. "Contesting Danger: A New Agenda for Policy and Scholarship on Central Asia." *International Affairs* 87.3 (2011):589–612. **(BCOURSES)**

Week 2 (Tu August 31 – Th September 02) -

A Bit of Background

Required Readings

Central Asia Atlas of Natural Resources. Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management. Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2010, pp. 1-48; 142-149. **(BCOURSES)**

Levi, Scott. "Turks and Tajiks in Central Asian History." *Everyday Life in Central Asia*. Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca (Eds.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007, pp. 15-31. **(PROQUEST EBOOK)**

Week 3 (Tu September 07 – Th September 09)

Nomad: The Ecology of Mobile Pastoralism

Required Readings/Viewing

Honeychurch, William, and Makarewicz, Cheryl A. "The Archaeology of Pastoral Nomadism." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45 (2016): 341-359. **(BCOURSES)**

Frachetti, Michael D. et al. "Nomad Ecology Shaped the Highland Geography of Asia's Silk Roads." *Nature* 543 (March 9, 2017): 193-206. **(BCOURSES)**

Rozwadowski, Andrzej. "Shamanism in Indigenous Context: Understanding Siberian Rock Art." *A Companion to Rock Art*, edited by Jo McDonald, and Peter Veth, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3058748>. **(BCOURSES)**

Videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuBvtr2l8Xk>

Written Assignment 1: Response on lectures and readings (due by Monday, September 13)

Week 4 (Tu September 14 – Th September 16)

Mobile Pastoralism and Identity

Required Readings/Viewing

Myadar, Orhon. "Imaginary Nomads: Deconstructing the Representation of Mongolia as a Land of Nomads." *Inner Asia* 13.2 (2011): 335-362 (BCOURSES)

Rancier, Megan. "Resurrecting the Nomads: Historical Nostalgia and Modern Nationalism in Contemporary Kazakh Popular Music Videos." *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2009, pp. 387-405. (BCOURSES)

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbS4Fw2uw1Q>

Written Assignment 2: Response on lecture and readings (due by Monday, September 20)

Week 5 (Tu September 21 -Th September 23)

Silk Road Oases, Trade, and the Spread of Religion

Required Readings

Ball, Warwick. "Following the mythical road." *Geographical* 70.3 (March 1998): 18(6). (BCOURSES)

Xinru Liu. "A Silk Road Legacy: The Spread of Buddhism and Islam." *Journal of World History* 22.1 (March 2011): pp. 55-81. (BCOURSES)

"Plants on the Silk Road." *Fruit from the Sands: The Silk Road Origins of the Foods We Eat*, by Robert N. Spengler, 1st ed., University of California Press, Oakland, California, 2019, pp. 12–37. (JSTOR)

Written Assignment 3: Response on lectures and readings (due by Monday, September 27)

Week 6 (Tu September 28– Th September 30)

Islam in Central Asia

Required Readings

Khalid, Adeeb. "Islam in Central Asia." *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 10-34. (PROQUEST EBOOK)

O'Dell, Emily. *The Teaching, Practice, and Political Role of Sufism in Dushanbe*. National Council for Eurasian and East European Research Working Paper, 2011 (BCOURSES)

News item: <https://eurasianet.org/s/islam-the-state-and-security-in-post-soviet-central-asia>

Written Assignment 4: Response on lecture and readings (due by Monday, October 04)

Week 7 (Tu October 05– Th October 07) – Lectures

Tēmur and the Timurids: Central Asia’s “Golden Age”

Required Readings

Kilic-Schubel, Nurten. “The Timurid Empire.” *The Encyclopedia of Empire*, First Edition. Edited by John M. MacKenzie. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2016. (BCOURSES)

Paskaleva, Elena. “Ideology in brick and tile: Timurid architecture of the 21st century.” *Central Asian Survey* 34:4 (2015): 418-439, (BCOURSES)

Written Assignment 5: Response on lectures and readings (due by Monday, October 11)

Week 8 (Tu October 12 – Th October 14) – Discussion

“Science” in Global Context

Required Reading/Viewing

Faruqi, Yasmeen Mahnaz. “Contributions of Islamic Scholars to the Scientific Enterprise.” *International Education Journal*, 2006, 7(4), 391-399. (BCOURSES)

Elshakry, Marwa. “When Science Became Western: Historiographical Reflections.” *Isis* 101.1 (March 2010): 98-109. (BCOURSES)

Video: Islam and Science (BBC) with Jim Al-Khalili - Watch Episode 1 (or more!) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOZupCYfBxg>)

Written Assignment 6: Notes on discussion and readings (due by Monday, October 18)

Week 9 (Tu October 19 – Th October 21) – Lectures

Central Asian SSRs and the Making of a Soviet “East”

Required Readings

Thibault, Hélène. “The Soviet Secularization Project in Central Asia: Accommodation and Institutional Legacies.” *Eurostudia* 10.1 (2015): 11-31. (BCOURSES)

News item: <https://eurasianet.org/s/perspectives-on-the-importance-of-being-soviet>

Benjamin, Craig. “Soviet Central Asia and the Preservation of History.” *Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2018, 8 pages. (BCOURSES) Environmental Degradation and the Impact of Climate Change Environmental Migrants and Refugees

Written Assignment 7: Response on lectures and readings (due by Monday, October 25)

Week 10 (Tu October 26 - Th October 28) – Discussion

Gender Politics in Soviet Central Asia

Required Viewing/Reading

Elizabeth Wood (MIT- History) on Gender in the Soviet Union
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQipWJinkFA>)

Behzadi, Negar Elodie. “Gender and Ethnicity in the Soviet Muslim Peripheries: a Feminist Postcolonial Geography of Women’s Work in the Tajik SSR (1950–1991).” *Central Asian Survey* 39.2 (2020): 202-219. (BCOURSES)

Written Assignment 8: Notes on discussion and readings (due by Monday, November 01)

Week 11 (Tu November 02 – Th November 04) – Lectures

***Post-Communism and Youth Culture in Central Asia
 What is going on in Kyrgyzstan?***

Required Readings

Bhat, Mohd Aslam. “Post-Communist Transition and the Dilemmas of Young People in Central Asia: A Landscape of Uzbekistan.” *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 21:2-3 (2013): 207-236 (BCOURSES)

News item: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/intergenerational-conflict-at-the-core-of-kyrgyzstans-turmoil/>

Written Assignment 9: Response on lectures and readings (due by Monday, November 08)

Week 12 (Tu November 09 - Th November 11) – Discussion

Central Asia Youth and Social Media

Required Readings

Imamova, Navbahor. “Social Media and Online Public Debate in Central Asia: A Journalist’s Perspective.” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 23:3 (2015): 359-376 (BCOURSES)

News item: <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-internet-block-spotlights-unease-among-elite>

Written Assignment 10: Notes on discussion and readings (due by Monday, November 15)

Week 13 (Tu November 16 –Th November 18) – Lectures

Rocks and Hard Places: The Environment

Required Readings

Central Asia Atlas of Natural Resources. Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management. Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2010, pp. 150-163. (BCOURSES)

Micklin, Philip. "The future Aral Sea: Hope and Despair." *Environmental Earth Sciences* 75.9 (May 2016): 1-15. (BCOURSES)

Blondin, Suzy. "Environmental Migrations in Central Asia: a Multifaceted Approach to the Issue." *Central Asian Survey* 38:2 (2019): 275-292, (BCOURSES)

Written Assignment 11: Response on lectures and readings (due by Monday, November 22)

Week 14 (Tu November 23) – on Zoom

Discussion on Final Research Paper

Week 15 (Tu November 30 – Th December 2)

The U.S. in Central Asia: The Case of Afghanistan

Readings TBD

Newspaper article: NY Times Feb. 13, 2020, "US Faces Tough Great Game. (BCOURSES)

Week 16 (Tu December 07 – Th December 09)

R/R/R

Monday, December 13: Final Essay Due (sent as an attachment to instructor by 11:59 pm)