COURSE SYLLABUS: HISTORY OF TIBET

This course surveys the history of Tibetan civilization from the iron age to the present. Following a spiral curriculum, we shall move through Tibetan history from its origins in Tibet’s geopolitical dominance during the period of the Tibetan Empire (c.620–862) through to its so-called dark age, its Buddhist-inspired renaissance, the rise of the Dalai Lamas, the intervention of foreign powers, and the Tibetan diaspora after 1959. Circling back, these periods will be investigated in turn from the vantage points of political history, social and cultural history, and the history of art and ideas.

Materials:
- Course page on history dept. website: http://www.history.ucsb.edu/courses/course.php?course_id=1377

FIRST LOOP: PREHISTORY TO THE PRESENT – THE BASICS

1ST SESSION, 30 MARCH: INTRODUCING TIBET, INTRODUCING THE COURSE
Overview of the course. Political Tibet and cultural Tibet. The politics of terminology, competing historical narratives and partial representations. Geography, topography, prehistory, and archeology.

Assignment 1: study maps of Tibet, prepare for map quiz in 2nd session.

Readings:
Maps on coursepage, maps in Kapstein.

2ND SESSION, 1 APRIL: PEOPLE AND PLACE
Geopolitical context and the Silk Road. Sources for Tibetan history. Political structure of the Tibetan Empire and the outlines of imperial history.

Map quiz at start of class.

Essay: write a response (500 to 1,000 words) to the following prompts: What is at stake in the depictions of Tibet’s history? What parties have vested interests? What are their goals? How should one go about reading and writing Tibetan history? Due at the beginning of the 3rd session.

Readings:


“Buddhism and Empire” I—IV at earlyTibet.com:
and
http://earlytibet.com/2007/10/19/sky-dharma/

3RD SESSION, 6 APRIL: THE TIBETAN EMPIRE
Tibet’s international relations, the introduction of Buddhism, global collapse ca.840.

Readings:
“The Decline of Buddhism” I—V at earlyTibet.com:
http://earlytibet.com/2008/02/28/lang-darma/
http://earlytibet.com/2008/03/13/did-lang-darma-persecute-buddhism/
http://earlytibet.com/2009/06/12/decline-of-buddhism-v/

Optional Readings:

4TH SESSION, 8 APRIL: DARK AGE AND RENAISSANCE
Proliferation of Buddhist ideals, decentralized and antinomian models. Rise of the lama ideal. Princelings and principalities. Bon, Nyingma, and the new sects. Yearning for what has been lost, (a bit on the mythologization of the empire.)

Readings:
http://earlytibet.com/2008/09/30/phagpas-arrow/

5TH SESSION, 13 APRIL: FROM THE SAKYA TO 5TH DALAI LAMA (13TH –17TH CENTURIES)
Mongols, geopolitics, lamas and charisma. Reassertion of nationalism with Phagmodru. Disunity, civil war, foreign intervention under Rinpung and the Tsangpa; the ‘patron-priest’ relationship. (A little bit on refiguring the past under DL5, replicating Phagpa and Kubilai, Dromtonpa, Tibetan kings.)

Readings:

6TH SESSION, 15 APRIL: TIBET BETWEEN REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POWERS
DL5 as kingmaker (cakravartin-maker), his role between mongols, manchus, and Chinese. The DLs from 6 onward, waxing of Qing power, ambans, Polane. Nepali incursions. Bogle, DL 13, collapse of Qing, Tibet’s aspirations for nationhood. The great game, Younghusband.

Readings:

7TH SESSION, 20 APRIL: OCCUPATION, MODERNITY, AND DIASPORA
Chinese invasion, 1959 Uprising, flight of DL to India. UN route thwarted by Britain, India, militant route aided by US. Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, refiguring Tibet in exile, coalescence of identity. Cultural revolution (a different coalescence). Revival and reform in 1980s China. Tibet as a pawn between India and China.

Assignment: Map quiz redemption, 50-100 words (details on coursepage)

Take-home mid-term: choose an essay prompt from the list distributed in class, write 1,000 words. Due before the beginning of the 11th session. (details on coursepage)

8TH SESSION, 22 APRIL: CURRENT AFFAIRS
Once again on the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. The “Tibet Card” in international relations with China. The Panchen Lama controversy, the politics of the Free Tibet movement, the riots in 2008 and the Olympic torch rally, and the politics over disaster relief in Jyekundo/Yushu in 2010.

Readings:
SECOND LOOP: THEMES AND FIGURES

9TH SESSION, 27 APRIL: MYTH AND NARRATIVE
Origin myths, civilizing myths, and kingship myths.

Readings:

Optional Readings:

10TH SESSION, 29 APRIL: AXIAL FIGURES 1 –SONGTSEN GAMPO
The development of the legend, and its uses.

Readings:

Optional Readings:

11TH SESSION, 4 MAY: TIBETAN LOCAL RELIGION
Divination, ritual, funerals, mountain cults, cosmology, gods, and demons.

Mid-term due at the start of class.

Readings:
―Buddhism and Bon‖ I—IV at earlyTibet.com:
http://earlytibet.com/2007/05/
http://earlytibet.com/2008/04/30/buddhism-and-bon-iii-what-is-yungdrung/

12TH SESSION, 6 MAY: TIBETAN BUDDHISM AND THE BON RELIGION
Brief overview of the basics of Buddhism, and its Tibetan elaborations. Overview of the four sects, their key figures. Consideration will be given to the types of religious expression and religious communities that fall within Tibet’s two main scriptural religions, Buddhism and Bon.

Readings:

13TH SESSION, 11 MAY: TIBETAN ART
From prehistoric rock art to modern art. Portraiture, statues, paintings, development of styles. Narrative paintings and religious paintings as pedagogical devices. Buddhism through art (wheel of life, Palden Lhamo, Buddhas of 3 times, 8 bodhisattvas, 16 arhats). Development of modern styles both in exile and in PRC.

Readings:
Kapstein, M. 2006. The Tibetans, 244-55.

Optional Readings:

14TH SESSION, 13 MAY: TIBETAN LITERATURE
Milarepa, life histories, religious histories, Gesar and the bardic tradition. Production of canons, circulation of books, literacy. Some background on the Tibetan language.

Readings:
http://earlytibet.com/2007/06/20/padmasambhava/
15TH SESSION, 18 MAY: AXIAL FIGURES 2 - PADMASAMBHAVA
Development of the legend, similarity with story of Shenrab, Buddha, its uses.

Readings:

Optional Readings:

THIRD LOOP: SOCIETY AND POLITICS

16TH SESSION, 20 MAY: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION
Descent and residence, house societies, clans, polyandry, livelihood, taxation.

Assignment 2: Before the next class, turn in a 50-100 word typed statement of your own opinion about the applicability of the term serf. What is at issue? What further questions should be asked about this topic?

Readings:
These are all available at the following website: http://www.case.edu/affil/tibet/tibetanSociety/social.htm http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serfdom_in_Tibet_controversy

17TH SESSION, 25 MAY: ENTERING THE DEBATE: SERFDOM
Kings, lords, subjects, class, clan, state. Tibetan economy, pastoralism, agriculturalism, trade. Clan to household. Serfdom and mobility. Centralization and regionalism, taxation, administration, gov of DLs, rank and law, ‘serfdom’.
Assignment 3: Before the next class, turn in a 50-100 word typed statement of your own position about the sovereignty (or lack thereof) of Tibet.

Readings:

18TH SESSION, 27 MAY: ENTERING THE DEBATE: SOVEREIGNTY AND SUZERAINITY
How did Tibet’s own diplomatic assumptions differ from those of China? How were each affected by the geopolitical backdrop of British imperialism? Do de-facto eventualities trump de-jure arguments?

Readings:

Optional Readings:

*The readings from Kailash and the European Bulletin of Himalayan Research may be freely downloaded from http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/

19TH SESSION, 1 JUNE: ETHNOGRAPHIC TIBET
Survey of some of the prominent themes in the ethnography of the Tibetan cultural area, particularly northern Nepal. Clans, creative dismemberment, exchange, impression management, Sanskritization, Tibetanization, modernity, etc. among the Magars, Gurungs, Thakalis, Tamangs, and “Bhote.”
Assignment 4: Before the next class, turn in a 50-100 word typed statement of your own position on the debate concerning Tibetan identity and the question of Tibetans being ‘prisoners’ of impression management both from within and from without.

Readings:

*The readings from *Himal* may be freely downloaded from http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/
The readings from the *Journal of the International Association for Tibetan Studies* may be freely downloaded from http://www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/

20TH SESSION, 3 JUNE: THE IMAGE OF TIBET
Shangri La for Chinese, the same for Westerners. Prisoners of Shangri La? Representing Tibet. The uses of history. Diasporic, transnational identity.

NB: No late assignments will be accepted (unless a very good reason is given). No work may be resubmitted.

FINAL EXAM: 9 JUNE 12-3PM