Columbia University
Understanding Modern Tibet  W4550 (Call No. 22297)

Sessions: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2.40-4pm
Lecturer: Dr. Robert Barnett
Web-readings: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/ealac/barnett/ (original syllabus)
Class size: maximum 40 students, any level; but priority will be given to graduate students if necessary

The Course

This course aims to raise questions about popular and academic descriptions of contemporary foreign societies. How do these descriptions work? Do they tell us anything about the societies they describe? Are there more effective approaches that we as foreigners could pursue in order to know something of other communities?

Our method will involve looking at contemporary Tibet. We will study some of the ways in which texts and images of Tibet are interpreted, and try to form our own interpretations in terms of the historical and cultural context of Tibet and of the wider region. In particular, we will try to look beyond the question of representation of places in foreign writings to questions of modernity and tradition, and to the role of earlier cultural and religious ideas within modern Tibet.

The course should be useful for those with general interest in the East-South-Central Asian interface, in China’s nationality policies, in Tibet, or in regional affairs and development, as well as for students with general interest in history, religion or the social sciences. It will be open to both undergraduates and graduates. Classes will consist generally of a lecture followed by a discussion, with some sessions devoted wholly to class discussions and others to films, slides or videos.

Course Description

The course is divided into five sections.

Part I: Representations of Tibet. This looks at some of the ways in which both foreigners and Tibetans have depicted themselves, and in particular at key ideas of their history.

Part II: The Question of Modernity and Tradition: Tibet Before 1950 Was the 1950 arrival of the Chinese army and administration in Tibet the beginning of modern Tibet, or were there already signs of a "modern" society there?

Part III: Problems in Tibetan History Since 1950 - looking at some of the choices and controversies faced by China's leaders in their Tibet policies since 1950, and especially at the ways in which Tibetan leaders responded to these policies

Part IV: Conflict and Resistance - using original documentation and visual images to look at questions surrounding political protest in the 1980s and 1990s, and studying in particular the role of women in this movement

Part V: Contemporary Culture and Identity - "identity", like culture, can be formed from outside as well as from inside, and we look at Chinese views of Tibetans, and at some western ideas of Tibetan Buddhism as compared with actual religious practices. Are modern literature, popular writings, music, art, and film signs of a modern Tibetan culture? And what places and which people are included in this modern Tibet? Are the exile communities part of "modern Tibet"? And finally, what kinds of development options are being offered to Tibetans, and are there any indications in writing or in films as to the futures Tibetans themselves are considering?

Course Requirements

Students should attend classes regularly and participate in class sessions. Non-attendance or repeated late attendance will affect grades. You will be expected to complete all required readings before the classes, and to read or look briefly at optional pieces wherever possible. Most of the reading materials will be included in course packs, since some of them are hard to find. There will be a bulletin board for students to post comments and thoughts about the readings and the lectures; by each Monday evening students will be required to post a brief comment on one or other of the required readings for the coming Tuesday's class. You will be asked to complete one essay and an assignment by mid-term and to submit a second essay by the end of the term.

Assignments

1. Post your responses to one or more of the readings for the Tuesday class on the class discussion board, at least two paragraphs in length
2. During the term, each student will be asked in turn to give at least one 5-10 minute class presentation of their summary of and comments on an optional reading for that class.

3. There will be one take-home examination at mid-term.

4. One month before the end of the term, each student will submit a one page proposal for their research paper, due at the end of the term, and will meet individually with Dr Barnett to discuss their research topic and plan.

5. The final examination will be a take-home paper requiring some basic library or similar research. You will chose the subject of your research paper.

Reading List - Books

Required Texts

Optional Texts:

Readings which are out of print or difficult to obtain will be available in photocopy in the course packs or as files which you can access on the Columbia course website. Copies of the reading packs will be held on reserve at the East Asian Library. The correct, updated version of the syllabus and the web-readings are on the courseworks site.

Readings and Syllabus for each Session

The course consists of two sessions per week for 13 weeks, each lasting one and a half hours. Some optional texts are listed here for reference only; you should treat this as a bibliography in case you want to further research in the future.

\[ U \] means that this reading is required for undergraduate and graduate students.

\[ G \] means that this reading is required for graduate students, but should be read by undergraduates also.

You should try to read at least one other reading and to skim the others wherever possible - especially the web-readings, many of which are translations of rare primary documents - even if you don't have time to read them in full.

Introduction

Session 1: Background to the course and the subject
Briefing papers on background information will be handed out, including notes on pronunciation, chronology and geography.

Session 2: The field: is there a modern Tibet, and if so, where is it? The slow and contested emergence of modern Tibetan studies

Web Readings


Optional:
Part 1: Representations of Tibet

Session 3: Foreign Representations of Tibet: colonial, exotic and “fellow traveller” views

Web Readings


Optional:


Session 4: Looking at Tibet as a site of cultural exceptionality – classical and exile Tibetan representations of early Tibet

Web Readings


Optional:

- Tiley Chodag, *Tibet, The Land and the People*, New World Press, Beijing, 1988, pp. 3-21, 281-283 (see reading pack)

Session 5: The recollection of an imperial past: Tibet as an Historical Entity - the Tibetan Empire

Optional:

Web Readings


Optional:


**Session 6: The perception of a unified Tibet: the Sakya-Yuan period and the Ganden Phodrang. The construction of Tibet as a nation state and the perception of the Dalai Lamas as unifying source of leadership.**


Web Readings


Optional:


**Session 7: The China Question and Legitimation Discourse: The debate over Tibet’s status, and the merging of dynastic distinctions**


Web Readings:

1. Luciano Petech, “Foreword” (pages not numbered), “Introduction” (pp. 1-4) and “Concluding Remarks” (pp.130-142) in *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yuan-Sa-skya Period of Tibetan History*, Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed il Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) 1990 (also published as Serie Orientale, Vol. 45)

Optional:


**Session 8: The Regional Question: Tibet as Southern/Central/ Inner/Eastern Asia. Perceiving Tibet as different from its regional counterparts, and where to place it.**


**Web Readings:**


**Optional:**


**Part II: The Question of Modernity and Tradition: Tibet Before 1950**

**Session 9: Modern or Traditional? The foreign policy efforts of the 13th Dalai Lama and the nature of the bureaucracy.**


**Web Readings:**


**Optional:**


**Web Readings:**


**Session 10: Tibet Before 1950: Progressives and radicals in Tibet - Dissident voices and their sources of inspiration.**
Part III: Problems in Tibetan History Since 1950

Session 11: The United Front and the Uses of Periodisation - Controversies over ways of viewing modern Tibetan history.


Web Readings:


Optional:


Web Readings:


Optional
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Session 13: Tibetan Leaders in the Chinese Administration. Viewing history by looking at the elite; critiquing the collaboration-resistance paradigm.


Optional Web Readings:
- Robert Barnett, “The Babas are Dead: Street Talk and Contemporary Views of Leaders in Tibet” in Elliot Sperling (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, University of Indiana, Bloomington (forthcoming)

Session 14: Internal debates, nationality policy and the question of special characteristics

- G. Uradyn E. Bulag, “From Inequality to Difference: Colonial Contradictions of Class and Ethnicity in 'Socialist' China” in “Post-colonialism and Its Discontents”, special issue of *Cultural Studies*, 2000, pp.1-9, 13-18, 22-25 in the manuscript version (see reading pack).

Web Readings:

Optional:

Web Readings:

Session 15: The Frontiersman View and the Battle over History and Culture: Textual Analysis of speeches and poems of Chen Kuiyuan, 1992-2000


Web Readings:
- Chen Kuiyuan, *Lantian baixue* ('Blue Sky, White Snow'), Beijing Chubanshe, Beijing, 1999 (selections in translation)

Optional:
Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in Bonnie McDougall, Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary, Ann Arbor 1980, pp. 36-41, 53-67, 82-85 (see reading pack)

Deng Xiaoping, "Congratulatory Speech at the Fourth National Literary Representatives' Meeting"….


Web Readings:


Chen Kuiyuan's "important speech" at the 7th November 1997 forum for non-CCP patriotic personalities, entitled
"Study the spirit of the 15th National Party Congress, reinforce the patriotic front; and strive for Tibet's stability, reform, and development" from the "Tibet News" programme, Tibet People's Broadcasting Station, Lhasa, 9th November 1997, published in translation in The BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 17th November 1997

Part IV: Conflict and Resistance

Session 16: Strategies of Open Conflict: Armed Resistance, Street Movements and Samizdat Texts. Interpretations of overt protest

Tsering Shakya, The Dragon in the Land of Snow pp. 165-170, 176-204, 282-286, 343-347 (sections on the 1959 Uprising, the CIA, and Nyemo Ani)

Web Readings:


Optional:


Web Readings:


A. Tom Grunfeld, “Tibet And The United States”, paper presented at the XVIIIth IPSA World Congress, Quebec City, Quebec, August 1-5, 2000, pp. 5-27

Session 17: Women and Resistance


Web Readings:


Optional:


**Web Readings:**


Session 18: **Questionable Images: the problems of interpreting texts and images; Nuns, Prisoners and Praise of the State. Images of counter-currents** (Slide show followed by discussion)


**Optional Web Readings:**


Basang Norbu, “A Rebuttal to the Nobel Peace Prize”, *Xizang Ribao* ("Tibet Daily"), 9th December 1989 and "Summary of the internal report about the Nobel Peace Prize" (original title not certain), from *Internal Analysis*, Tibet Academy of Social Sciences, December 1989

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**Part V: Contemporary Culture and Identity**

Session 19: **Chinese Representations of Minority Culture**

**Web Readings**


**Optional:**


Ma Jian, “Show me the colour of your tongue or Fuck All” in Geremie Barmé and John Minford (eds.), *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience*, New York: Noonday, 1989”, Hill and Wang New York 1988, pp. 414-416, 432-452, including editor’s introduction (Also translated as "Stick Out the Fur on Your Tongue or It's All a Void" in Herbert Batt (ed.), *Tales Of Tibet: Sky Burials, Prayer Wheels, And Wind Horses*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2001) (see reading pack)


**Session 20: Religious revival: the question of continuity or revitalisation**


**Web Readings:**


**Optional:**


**Session 21: Modern Literature and the Dispute over Chinese Tibetan and Tibetan Tibetan**

**Web Readings:**


**Optional**


**Web Readings:**


- Tashi Dawa (Herbert Batt, translator) "The Glory of the Wind Horse" in [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/manoa/v012/12.2cover_art00.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/manoa/v012/12.2cover_art00.html)
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Yidam Tsering (Herbert Batt, translator) “Two Poems” (from Manoa, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/manoa/v012/12.2cover_art00.html: Song of the Snow Lion) (available at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/manoa/toc/man12.2.html)


Tashi Pelden (Yangdon Dhondup, translator) “Tomorrow’s Weather Will be Better” (Manoa, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/manoa/v012/12.2cover_art00.html: Song of the Snow Lion) (available at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/manoa/toc/man12.2.html)


Session 22: Modern Art: Socialist Realism and the Sweet Teahouse Group


Web Readings:

Clare Harris, In the Image of Tibet: Tibetan Painting after 1959, Reaktion Books, 2000, pp.7-15, 150-191

Optional:


Session 23: Tibetan Modernity: images, language and programming on Tibet TV

Video: extracts from Tibet TV - Discussion

Session 24: Amdo, Kham questions and the debate over identity


Web Readings:


Tsering Shakya, "Whither the Tsampa Eaters?", in Himal, Kathmandu, Vol. 6, No. 5, 1993, pp. 8-11

Optional


Justin Jon Rudelson, Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China’s Silk Road, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, pp.39-69 (see reading pack)


Web Readings:

Meg McLagan, "Mystical visions, in Manhattan: Developing Culture in the Year of Tibet", in Korom, Frank (ed.), Tibetan Culture in Diaspora, Vienna: Austrian Academy of Science, 1997, pp.69-89

**Optional:**


**Web Readings:**


**Session 26: Development and Economy**


**Web Readings:**


**Optional**


Ma Rong, "Han and Tibetan Residential Patterns in Lhasa" in *China Quarterly*, N28, December 1991, pp. 814-836 (see reading pack)


**Web Readings:**

Becquelin, Nicholas, “New Mediums of Xinjiang’s Integration by the Centre since the Emergence of Post-Soviet Central Asia,” paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies Meeting, Boston, 1999


**Session 27: Futures**

Film: Khyentse Norbu Rinpoche's *Phurpa, the Cup* or Duan Jinchuan's *No. 16, Barkhor South Street*