Global Asia Before Modernity

HIST-UH 2118
Time: MW 9:00-10:15
Fall Term Dates: Sunday Sept 6 - Dec 10 (no classes Oct 20-22, Oct 29, Dec 1-3)
Location: Com Research A2-007

Credit hours: 4. No Prerequisites.
Satisfies the pre-1800 History requirement. Global Thematic.
Counts for History Program oceans systems: Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific World

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Context

This course is about globalization as a very long-term historical process of spatially expansive human mobility, communication, exchange, and territorial transformation. Its study leads inevitably into Asian lands from the Mediterranean to the Pacific Rim and all around the Indian Ocean, where ever-expanding mobility and long-distance connectivity shaped localities, states, economies, societies, and civilizations from ancient times.

Focusing on globalization reveals Asia in new light. The Asia we are accustomed to study is composed of fixed territorial enclosures and separate cultural regions cut off from Europe, Middle East, Africa, and America. Global Asia is Asia unbound, formed by interaction, routes, travels, migrations, and mingling, an open space of dynamic spatial mobility, expanding its reach and local impact, over many centuries.

Old standard views of Asia are now archaic. They depict Asia as Europeans saw it when they entered Asia by sea after Christopher Columbus sailed the Atlantic, heading for India, but discovered America instead. Direct links to Asia had eluded Europeans since the fall of Rome, but over centuries after 1500, European seaborne empires extended Asian circuits of mobility around the globe. The Asia that Europeans described became fixed in the modern

Course Description

Global Asia defines Asia as a space of perpetual globalization and explores Asian societies, cultures, and political economies as they have been shaped by dynamic historical processes which expand human connectivity and transform territorial formations of power and authority. Pre-modern Global Asia embraced regions all around the old Silk Roads and Indian Ocean, from ancient times. In this course, we study the evolution of Asian worlds of mobility that Europeans sought to join in the fifteenth century and Asia’s spatial subsequent expansion in worlds of empire up to the onset of industrial capitalism. This course thus provides students with a long-term view of History and a broadly transnational understanding of Asian History in the development of the modern world.
INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to
● describe orally and in writing how mobility has shaped social worlds in Asia;
● effectively use concepts and methodologies for the study of globalization;
● critically interpret maps and other visual representations of historical information;
● think critically about the modern boundaries of national states and Area Studies;
● and, above all, understand contemporary globalization in Asian perspective.

TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODOLOGIES

This course adopts a seminar format. Each class will begin with a contextualization and summary of the reading – to clarify how each reading due for that meeting fits into the overall design of the course – and will end with a brief indication of how to focus reading of material for the next meeting. Significant class time will be spent in conversation developing a shared understanding of the reading, and in class presentations, based on student response papers.

We will spend substantial time interpreting maps and using other visual representations of historical information, including videos. We will visit local sites, when appropriate.

Writing assignments enable students to develop their understanding of the reading and class material. Oral presentations enable students to formulate ideas for group discussion and to seek assistance from classmates in resolving challenges they face in their own research and writing.

STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

● Three five-page papers, each 20% of the final grad, for a total of 60%.
● Five one-page response papers, each is worth 5% of the final grade, for a total of 25%
● Class participation is worth 15% of the final grade. Including 5% for class presentations.

ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES

● All papers are double spaced, 12-point font, with one inch margins, with student name and assignment number in chronological order, as listed in the syllabus, in the header.
● 3 five-page papers: due at the end of the weeks 6, 10, and 14. Paper topics are indicated on the syllabus. Papers will be judged on all aspects of quality: organized prose in a coherent sequence of paragraphs should focus clearly on the assignment and display a strong understanding of ideas and information from relevant course material.
  o Students have the option of submitting a draft of their last 5-page paper for instructor feedback and revision.
● 5 one-page papers: due at the end of weeks 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9, based on weekly readings for class discussion and student presentations. They can be revised and handed in to the instructor, in hard copy, at the end of the second class, for grading. They should present
an understanding of the reading. Asking questions and indicating doubts or confusion are appropriate in these response papers: they generate questions for discussion in class.

- **Classroom participation.** This grade is based on levels of personal participation in the course as a whole. Minimally, students should always show they are paying attention and never get distracted by computers, phones, doodling, daydreams, jinn, or chit chat. They should ask all questions in class, rather than privately. They should engage conversations. They should respond intelligently when the instructor asks, “What do you think about this?” Students will be also lead discussions of course material with short presentations. An evaluation of presentations counts for one-third of participation grade.

**Concerns about class participation.**

Students who are concerned for any reason about their ability to participate in the classroom discussion should contact the professor as early as possible to work out a solution.

**NYU MOSES CENTER FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. CSD works with NYU students to determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations that support equal access to a world-class education. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance. Disability-related information is never disclosed without student permission.  
[https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/students-with-disabilities.html](https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/students-with-disabilities.html). Contact: mosescsd@nyu.edu

**RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

Students need to make sure they are familiar with the provisions and obligations of The University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays, which states, in part: “Students who anticipate being absent because of any religious observance should, whenever possible, notify faculty in advance of such anticipated absence.”

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

NYU Abu Dhabi expects its students to adhere to the highest possible standards of scholarship and academic conduct. Students should be aware that engaging in behaviors that violate the standards of academic integrity will be subject to review and may face the imposition of penalties in accordance with the procedures set out in the NYUAD policy. [Here is the link to the NYUAD policy statement](#).
**Reading:** All required reading is online and averages about 100 pages per week.

- Listed page lengths are estimates for *Online Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* and some other online readings.
- Many online readings require access through NYUHome. Lists of Reference Readings will be expanded online and are designed to enable students to pursue research on each weekly topic.

**Course Organization:**

- Each week consists of two class meetings.
  - The first meeting is a lecture on the weekly theme to supplement course reading.
  - The second meeting is for Q&A discussion and student presentations based on paper prompts.
- This course is part of a two-part Global Asia sequence. These two courses overlap chronologically, but their content is distinct. Each course can be taken separately.

**Chronological Outline:**

**300BCE-600CE.** An Asian Circulatory System emerged in travels by land and sea connecting empires across Asia and around the Mediterranean.

**600-900.** Nomadic horse warrior steppe migrations broke up old imperial territories in East, South, and West Asia. Routes of trade and travel connected Byzantium, Islamic Caliphates, and Turkic warrior domains with Tang China and peninsular India.

**900-1200.** Tropical economic development produced new routes of opportunity connecting the Indian Ocean and Central Asia through India. Trade and imperial power expanded in South India and Southeast Asia, increasing connectivity around the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, East Africa, and Persian Gulf.

**1200-1300.** Turko-Mongol conquest and migration further integrated the Asian Circulatory System, pushing it around the Black Sea into Russia and Europe.

**1300-1500.** Post-Mongol empires focused military support for commercial investments in more concentrated connected imperial territories. Increasing Asian wealth stimulated increasing investments in seaborne military mobility among Europeans who were blocked from direct access to Asia by imperial Ottomans.

**1500-1800.** Asia's largest ever empires generated massive wealth and coastal regions sustained expansive European military commercialism. A global economy of seaborne networks anchored in port-cities around the world enriched Asian territories where European imperial power slowly increased its ability to control coastal regions around colonial port cities.
PART ONE
THE LONG FIRST MILLENIUM

Act One
Elements of a Circulatory System

Week 1. Sept 7-9

Introduction to the course and the ENVIRONMENTS
Theme: Mapping Space in Motion

Reading:


Reference:


Oleksandr Symonenko, "Warfare and Arms of the Early Iron Age Steppe Nomads," (OREAH) (15pp)


The Centrality of Central Asia, by Andre Gunder Frank.


Week 2. Sept 14-16. **MOBILITY**

**Nomad Space, Empires, and “Silk Roads”: Migration, Routes, Oases, and Cities.**

Themes: Migratory Nomads are the driving force for mobility all across inland Afro-Eurasia. Trade drives travels on monsoon winds around the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Eastern and Western circuits on land and sea well-established but minimally connected by 600CE.

**Reading:**


Nicolai Kradin, “Ancient Nomad Steppe Societies,” (OREAH) (10pp)

**Study:** [Nomadic Peoples of Central Asia](#)

**Reference:** Nomadic Peoples of Central Asia, Silk Road Cities GoogleMap, University of WASHINGTON SILK ROAD SITE, Silk Road Central GoogleEarth Project


Nicola Di Cosmo, “State Formation and Periodization in Inner Asian History,” *Journal of World History*, 10,1, 1999 (online PDF) 41pp, and “The Northern Frontier in Pre-Imperial China,” Chapter 13 in the *Cambridge History of Ancient China* (PDF online) 82 pp.


Thomas Noonan, “Rus’, Pechenegs, and Polovtsky: Economic Interaction along the Stepper Frontier in the Pre-Mongol Era,” Russian History, 19, 1-4, 1992, 301-27. (online PDF), and “The Fur Road and the Silk Road: The relations between Central Asia and Northern Russia in the Early Middle Ages,” (online PDF) 15pp.

Khodadad Rezakhani, “The Road that Never Was: The Silk Road and Trans-Eurasian Exchange,” Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, 20, 3, 2010, 420-433. (online PDF)


Assignment 1. One-page paper#1: What was The Silk Road?

Week 3. Sept 21-23 EMPIRE

Connected Empires, c.300BCE-600CE: Rome, Persia, India, and China.

Theme: Empires form territory in spaces of mobility.

Reading:


Richard Davis, Global India circa 100CE, pp. 6-44.


Reference:


Yuri Pines, “Chinas Imperial Institution” (OREAH) (10pp)
Armin Selbitschka, “The Early Silk Road(s)” (OREAH).


Assignment 2. One-page paper#2: How were ancient empires interconnected?

Act Two.
Forging Connectivity

Week 4. Sept 28-30.MIGRATION

Migration and Imperial Territory, c.600-900: Huns, Turks, Arabs, Byzantium, and Caliphates, and Tang China.

Theme: Major migrations expand mobile space and struggles for territorial control.

Reading:


Michael R. Drompp, "The Kök Türk Empires," OREAH. (10pp.)

Timothy May, "Nomadic Warfare Before Firearms," OREAH. (10pp)


Michael R. Drompp, "The Uyghur Empire (744-840)," OREAH. (10pp.)

Met Heilbrun Timeline of Art history, The Art of the Abbasid Period (750-1258).


**Climate Change major event timeline.**

**Assignment 3: 1page paper#3: Discuss the spatial dynamics of nomad empires. Use specific examples.** [FYI: it turns out, to my surprise, this is a useful site for access to good material on the subject.]

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**Week 5. Oct 5-7. PATRONAGE**

**Travels of Buddhism: c.500BCE-1500CE.**

**Theme: Cultural mobility, transmission, dispersion, domestication, transformation.**

**Reading:**

Liu Xin Ru, “Early Buddhism,” (OREAH) (10pp)

Jason Emmanuel Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange Within and Beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*. Brill, 2010. ([online PDF](#)).

Natasha Heller, “Buddhist Religious Practice in Imperial China,” (OREAH) (12pp)

Max Deeg, "Chinese Buddhist Travelers" (OREAH) (12pp)

Tansen Sen, "Buddhism and the Maritime Crossings." (16pp)


**Study:** *MetMuseum Heilbrun essay on Buddhist Art*.  
Faxian travel map.  
Buddhism in Korea, at the Met.  
Brown Library Tibetan Buddhism Website.  
Tree and Serpent: Early Buddhist Art in India, 200BCE-400CE
Reference:


The Rubin Museum, “*Faith and Empire: Art and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism*.”


Llewelyn Morgan, *The Buddhas of Bamiyan*. Harvard University Press, 2102


Natasha Heller, “*Buddhist Religious Practice in Imperial China*,” (OREAH) (12pp)*Bagan and the World*, Edited by Goh Geok Yian, J


*2500 Years of Buddhism*, P.V.Bagat, New Delhi, 1956

The Rubin Museum, “*Faith and Empire: Art and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism*.”


*Buddhism and Gnosticism: The Gnostic Apostle Thomas, “Twin of Jesus”*

Assignment 4. One-page paper#4. Write a synopsis for your five-page paper#1, DUE NEXT WEEK. Please focus on using course material, though you can use other sources that you clear in advance with the instructor. Remember: travels of Buddhism are about much more than religion.

Act Three
The Medieval Warm Period

Week 6. Oct 12-14. PRODUCTIVITY


Reading:


“Chinese Ceramic Production and Trade" (OREAH) and Tamara Bently, "Trade in the East and South China Seas." (OREAH) (20pp)
Reference:


Ronald Edwards, "Redefining Industrial Revolution.", in economicdynamics.org. (48pp.)

James Anderson, *China's Southwestern Silk Road in World History.*


Ranabir Chakravarti, *Sindbad and India*.

S.Goiten, *Genizah Letters*.

Cambridge University Digital Library, *Cairo Genizah*.

*Fatimid Art and Cairo*.

Alpers, E., & Goswami, C. (Eds.), *Transregional Trade and Traders: Situating Gujarat in the Indian Ocean from Early Times to 1900*. : Oxford University Press.

Assignment 5: Five Page Paper #1 Due next week: Explain the spatial logics of Buddhist travels and its territorial transformations, using specific examples. Please focus on using course material, though you can use other sources that you clear in advance with the instructor. Remember: travels of Buddhism are about much more than religion.
Week 7. Oct 19-21. TRADE

Imperial Expansion and Indian Ocean Worlds: Connected Coasts and Monsoon Tropics

Theme: Monsoons form the time/space of commercial mobility and coastal territory knitted together by imperial trade expansion.

Reading:


Eva-Marie Knoll, “The Maldives as an Indian Ocean Crossroads,” ([OREAH]) (12pp)

Atholl Anderson, "The Peopling of Madagascar" ([OREAH]). (12pp)

Himanshu Prabha Ray, "Maritime Archaeology of the Indian Ocean" ([OREAH]) (12pp), and “History of Fishing and Sailing Communities in the Western Indian Ocean.” ([OREAH]) (12pp)


Reference:

Johan Elverskog. *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. ([PDF online])


**Primary Sources:** *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*.

Assignment 5: Five Page Paper #1 Due this week.

**PART TWO**

**EURASIAN INTEGRATION**


**Act 4. Military Commercialism**

**Week 8. Oct 26 - 28 MONGOLS**

Chinggis Khan’s Family Empire, 1162-1294. ([Timeline PDF](#)) ([timeline1](#)) ([timeline2](#))

Theme: Mongols expand across and beyond old nomad territorial domains using old techniques with innovative efficiency.

**Reading:**


Michal Biran, "The Mongol Empire and inter-civilizational exchange" (PDF), Chapter 20 in *The Cambridge World History*, pp.534-558 ([Cambridge Core Link](#)).


**Primary Source:** *The Secret History of the Mongols.*

**Viewing:** "The Mongol Empire and Kublai Khan," History Channel, 47:18.

The Mongol Invasion of Japan, 1274 and 1281. (online slideshow)
Reference:

Columbia University Mongols in World History Website.


Mongols in World History (Columbia University Website).


Michael Brose, "Medieval Uyghurs from the 8th to 14th Century," (OREAH).

Mongol Timeline.

Morris Rossabi, Eurasian Influences in Yuan China.

The Secret History of the Mongols.

China Under Mongol Rule, edited by John D. Langlois.

Week 9. Nov 2 - 4. EURASIA

Chinggisid Turko-Mongol Imperial Territory.

Theme: Military mobility promotes commercial expansion and accumulation.

Reading:


Pavel Osinsky, "The Rise and Fall of the Nomad-Dominated Empires of Eurasia," March 2020, Sociological Inquiry (PDF online), (26pp, but especially pp. 11-18)

Peter Bozian, "The Role of Ortoy Merchants in the Mongolian Court: From the Rise of the Mongol Empire to the Fall of the Yuan Dynasty," in Emory Endeavors in World History, Volume 6, pp.90-106.


Berkeley ORIAS, The Travels of Ibn Battuta, (est. 10pp.)

Reference:


John Chaffee, “Cultural Transmission by Sea: Maritime Trade Routes in Yuan China” in Eurasian Influences on Yuan China, edited by Morris Rossabi, pp. 41-59


In the Service of the Khans: Elites in Transition in Mongol Eurasia, Edited by Michal Biran, Asiatische Studien, 71, 4, 2017, Editor’s Introduction, pp. 1051-1057 (Each chapter is a case study.)


Prajakti Kalra, The Silk Road and the Political Economy of the Mongol Empire, (Ebook; University of Toronto Press, 2016).


Michael Hope, "Bukhara under the Mongols," *(OREAH).*


**Primary Sources**: *The Travels of Marco Polo* (1907John Masefield Translation on the Internet Archive)


**Assignment 6. One-page paper#5: Write a short synopsis of Five-Page Pager#2, DUE NEXT WEEK.** Summarize the novelty and traditionalism of the Mongol Empire, using specific examples.
Week 10. Nov 9 - 11 Islam

Territorial transformations, mobile Islamic cultural space, and Southeast Asia

Themes: Islam diversifies as merchants, sufis, texts, and warriors travel, settle, mingle, merge and domesticate all across Asia. Turko-Mongol imperial expansion fosters the mobility and diversification of Arabic and Persian cultures east of Iran and all around the Indian Ocean.

Reading:

Johan Elverskog, "Buddhist and Muslim Interaction in Asian History," (OREAH). (10pp)
On Tasawwuf in Encyclopedia of Islam. (est.5pp)
“From Mongols to Safavids,” Encyclopedia Iranica.
Randal L. Pouwels, “Ibn Battuta in Africa and Asia,” (OREAH) (12pp.)


Reference:

Barbara Watson Andaya, “Negotiating Ambiguities: Female Rule in Muslim Asia during the Early Modern Period.”

and Rila Mukherjee, “The Bay and the Straits: The Melaka Era (1402-1641) in the Bengal Region.”

in Southeast Asia in World History: Art, Ethnicity, Gender, Identity, Modernity, and Trade


Assignment 7. Five-Page Paper#2 Due this Week. See assignment in Week9

Week 11. Nov 16 - 18. RENAISSANCE

Eurasian Connectivity: From Crusades to the Renaissance, c.1100-1500.

Theme: Chinggisid and post-Mongol regimes produce more expansive, influential, profitable connections all across Eurasia.

Reading:


Matthew Romaniello, “Transregional Trade in Early Modern Eurasia,” *OREAH*. (12pp)


Reference:


Elizabeth Lambourn, “Towards a connected History of Equine Cultures in South Asia: Bahri (Sea) Horses and ‘Horsemamia’ in Thirteenth Century South India,” *The Medieval Globe*, 2, 1, 2016, in pp.57-100 (PDF online)

Week 12. Nov 23 - 25. MONUMENTS

Connected Empires, 1300-1800: Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals, Russia, Ming-Qing.

**Theme:** Productive power in Great Asian Empires lay foundations for modernity.

**Reading:**

Beatrice Manz, "Tamerlane and the Timurids" (OREAH). (12pp)


Peter Perdue, “The Expansion of the Qing Dynasty and the Zunghar Mongol State,” (OREAH). (12pp)


**YouTube:** [Taisu Zhang on the Economics of Confucianism](#).

**Reference:**


Define topics of student choice for final 5-page paper in class conversations.

Act 5. Commercial Militarism

Week 13. Nov 30-Dec 2. PORTS

European Merchant Warriors: 1500-1700.

Theme: Europeans acquire direct territorial control over mobile Asian assets.
Reading: VIEWING: "Sultanates of the Spice Route".


A.C.S. Peacock, “The Ottoman Empire and the Indian Ocean,” (10pp)

Peter Perdue, “The Rise and Fall of the Canton Trade System -1: China in the World (1790s-1860s)” (5pp)


Reference:


Michael Charney, "Warfare in Pre-Modern Southeast Asia." (OREAH).

Rudranghsu Mukherjee, "What Made The East India Company so Successful?" *The India Forum*, (3pp)

**AMERASIA: An inquiry into early-modern imaginative geography**

Final paper drafts (optional).
Week 14. Dec 7-9. CAPITALISM

Seaborne Globalization: 1500-1800

Theme: Mobility at sea connecting imperial territories along coasts around the world creates global space for capitalist modernity.

Reading:


Tirthankar Roy, "Origins of British India." *(OREAH)*. (10pp)

Kris Manjapra, Chapter 4,“Port.” In *Colonialism in Global Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 100-124. ([online PDF](#)).


M. van Rossum, "The Dutch East India Company and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago Worlds, 1602-1795" *(OREAH)*. (12pp)


Reference:

Johan Mathew, “*Trafficking Labor.*” Chapter Two in *Margins of the Market: Trafficking and Capitalism across the Arabian Sea*, University of California Press, Oakland, California, 2016, pp. 52–81. ([online PDF](#))


Assignment 8. Five-page Paper#3 due in last class. TOPIC TBA