

**«Central Asian Studies World Wide»
Course Syllabi for the Study of Central Eurasia
www.fas.harvard.edu/~casww/CASWW_Syllabi.html**

**Heleanor Beth Feltham
Along the Silk Road
Syllabus for the course offered in 2001
Sydney University
Centre for Continuing Education**

Heleanor Beth Feltham
Sydney University Centre for Continuing Education
Australia
heleanor@phm.gov.au

Syllabus - Adult education course:

Sydney University Centre for Continuing Education.

Heleanor Beth Feltham
610/361 Sussex Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Phone: Work: 9217 0310 Home: 9269 0769
Fax: 9217 0441 Mobile: 0417 068 986
e-mail address heleanor@phm.gov.au

Outline for continuing education course - 20 two-hour sessions with notes, reading lists, slides etc. etc. over two semesters

Part 1: Along the Silk Road: Central Asia; Prehistory to 750 ad.**Course description:**

Central Asia traditionally sustained two very different modes of life. Pastoral nomads and oasis settlers existed in a delicate balance sustained by trade, both mutual and across the region from the Mediterranean to China. The early historical period saw the Silk Road develop, and the penetration into the region of Chinese, Iranian and Greek cultures. It also saw cyclic waves of nomads impact on the great civilizations beyond the centre.

Course outline:

Meeting one: Introduction to the geography and prehistory of Central Asia. Steppes, mountains, oases and deserts and the strategies which people developed in order to live in this harsh and beautiful region. The importance of wood and water, and the distinctive species which contributed to the arts and beliefs of the people of Central Asia.

Meeting two: Horses: from meal to mount. The rise of nomadism and the use of the horse in life-style, trade and battle, in the areas that became Ferghana and Mongolia.

Meeting three: Screening of Grass and discussion of nomadism. An amazing silent documentary from the 1920s made by a group of cinematographers who traveled with the Iranian Bactiari tribe on their annual migration in search of pasturelands.

Meeting four: Greeks, Persians and Scythians. From the arrival of the Scythians in the Black Sea region, this powerful nomad culture acted as a buffer between the two great Classical powers absorbing and transforming elements of both cultures and transmitting trade goods and ideas back across Central Asia.

Meeting five: The Great Wall and the Silk Road. Chinese interactions with the nomadic Hsiung Nu led first to the building of the Great Wall of China as a means of defence, then to the Han

dynasty expeditions to find a better war-horse, and finally to the annexation of the oasis trade cities of Central Asia and the formal establishment of the trade route from China to Iran.

Meeting six: Hellenism travelling East. Alexander the Great's conquests through Iran, Afghanistan and North India and the establishment of Hellenistic kingdoms here and around the Black Sea, created new outlets for Greek style and culture to travel eastward both along the Silk Road and among the nomads.

Meeting seven: Buddhism on the Silk Road. Buddhism originated in North India, and established its iconography in Gandhara. Kushan Indian monks brought it to China in the Han Dynasty, and monks and merchants continued to spread its beliefs and values along the Central Asian trade routes.

Meeting eight Sassanian Iran, Tang China: Imperial artisans and merchants. The second great age of trade from the fourth to the eighth centuries AD saw silks and slaves, glass and coral, chess, polo and stringed instruments in an exchange of wealth that linked the Shoso-In of Buddhist Nara Japan with the cathedrals of Carolignian Europe.

Meeting nine: The lions of God. A case study in travelling images. Asiatic lions, found in Greece, Anatolia, Iran, Afghanistan and North India, became associated with the iconography of all the major religions of the region, including Judaism and Christianity, travelling well beyond their geographic distribution to inform the arts and ceremonies of places as distant as China and Japan.

Meeting ten: Byzantium and Islam. The Roman Empire's last, Eastern outpost, its role in international trade and diplomacy and its relationship with the growing Turkic powers in the Black Sea region. The rapid rise of Islam, and its definitive battle for Central Asia at the Talas river in the mid eighth century brought dramatic changes to Central Asian life and society, and to the ease of east/west trade.

Part 2. Further Along the Silk Road: Central Asia 750 to 1750

Course description: 750 ad saw the triumph of the Arab armies in Central Asia and the beginnings of an Islamisation that would gradually take over the oasis cities of the Silk Road. The next several centuries would see the rise of Turkic peoples, culminating in the fall of Constantinople, and the creation of the world's largest empire, that of Gengis Khan's Mongols. The period from the withdrawal of Tang China from Central Asia to the flowering of the Timurid cities such as Samarkand created the myth of the golden road and its conquerors and adventurers.

Course notes will be supplied.

Meeting one: Silk Road traders: from Byzantium to Japan. An outline of the Silk Road at its height in the C8th when textiles and other trade goods could be found in places as distant as Nara Japan and the cathedrals of Europe.

Meeting two: Tibet and Xinjiang: the emergence of Vajrayana Buddhism. In the seventh century the invasion of the Tarim Basin by Tibetan forces led to the development of the third main form of Buddhism, Vajrayana. Like Mahayana before it, Vajrayana followed the Silk Roads to China and Japan and had a continuing influence on Mongol and Manchu culture.

Meeting three: Abbasid Islam. The growing Islamic Empire of the 8th to 12th centuries and its role in Central Asia. Changing demography of the Turkic tribes and their impact on Central Asia, Iran and Byzantium.

Meeting four: Traders and Crusaders. Conflict with the new dynasties of Islam, the rising power of Venice, the schism between Eastern and Western churches and the desire for land and trade opportunities led to the period of the Crusades and an ideological hardening.

Meeting five: The Mongols, Yuan China and Ilkhan Iran. The rise of a new Central Asian power and the distinctive culture that grew with it. The age of destruction in Central Asia and the long-term results of Mongol conquest. Two very distinctive cultures arose at each end of the Silk Road following the splitting of the Mongol Empire. Where Yuan China took on traditional Buddhist and Confucian values, Central Asian Mongols combined Vajrayana with Shamanism and the Ilkhans of Iran embraced Islam.

Meeting six: The world of Marco Polo. Well, could you possibly run a course on the Silk Road without him?

Meeting seven: The Ottomans and the fall of Byzantium. The waning power of Byzantium following the Crusader sacking of Constantinople and the growing power of the Ottoman Turks, the westernmost of the Central Asian Turkic people.

Meeting eight: Tamerlane the Great and the Timurid cities. The development of the distinctive art and architecture of the Timurids and the flowering of Herat, Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. European fascination with the Central Asian world from Christopher Marlowe to Flecknoe's Hassan.

Meeting nine: The Turks at the gates of Vienna. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, Turkic people - Ottomans, Uzbeks, Turkomen, Uighurs and others - could be found from the borders of China to the heartland of Europe. Western culture, military, technical and even aesthetic was deeply influenced by contacts and conflicts with them.

Meeting ten: Emirates and Khanates. The Silk Road was effectively put out of business by the European development of sea trade routes to the east. However the oasis cities developed an identity as independent petty kingdoms, and the trade in carpets kept Central Asian merchants in business. By the nineteenth century the conflict between Russia and Britain brought the region into focus as the centre for the Great Game - political maneuvering and spying, often disguised as archaeology, anthropology or zoology.