

ASIAN ENVIRONMENTS

A GRADUATE SEMINAR IN GENERAL EDUCATION

Weds. 2-4pm | CGIS South S153

Co-taught by:

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COURSE INTRODUCTION:

This class uses the history of Asia, the world's most populous and economically dynamic region, to illuminate the most urgent environmental issues of our time. Through shared research, in-class debate, and individual inquiry we will explore Asia's vexed environmental history, from South and Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia and the receding edge of the Arctic sea ice. Our particular focus in this special Graduate Seminar in General Education will be the nexus between teaching and research; our shared goal is to design a new General Education course on Asian environmental history. By the end of the term you will be ready to create your own course on world environmental history or on the environmental history of Asia. To a certain degree, the graduate course will be tailored to shared interests: specific sites and topics of inquiry will be developed in conversation as the semester develops. Students from all areas and disciplines are welcome. There will be no chronological limits to our explorations; our ethical concerns reside in the present, but the scope of our historical vision may range far and wide. Projects rooted in Asia but connected to other parts of the world are also fair game. Undergraduates may enroll with the express permission of the teaching staff.

We have chosen to focus on Asia because it will play an important role in our students' lives and because the region has played such a crucial—and often poorly understood—part in shaping the present environmental moment. The environmental crisis is a product of human history, and much of that history is rooted in the cities, fields, and factories of Asia, places that may feel quite distant for some of our undergraduates. Using a series of carefully selected and “site visits,” the

undergraduate version of *Asian Environments* will endeavor to put students “on the ground” at key moments in Asia’s environmental past. Our goal is a sense of immediacy. Once there, they will be asked to draw on the full range of their skills—we encourage the use of techniques from other disciplines, from art practice and storytelling to engineering and the sciences—to make sense of the scene and to propose counter-factual actions. In many contexts historians hesitate to deploy our knowledge in instrumental ways, but this course is meant to make the past useful to students. We are going to ask them to use their historical imaginations to answer problems that arose in the lived past.

The creation of “site plans” for possible use in the undergraduate course is one of our main tasks in the Graduate Seminar. In consultation with teaching staff, you will identify a promising “site” and create a teaching module based on that choice. You are welcome to focus on places and issues identified in your own research. Our hope is that the focus on the relationship between teaching and research reflects the realities of academic life more accurately than most graduate seminars. Each of your professors has seen teaching open new avenues in our own research and interpretation; we are eager to spur that catalysis in your work. Our intent is to identify the most effective ways of teaching in the relatively young and increasingly important fields of environmental history, environmental humanities, and environmental studies. By the end of the course you should have a sense for the key debates in the academic field as well as experience with cutting edge teaching methods, technologies, and approaches in the classroom.

EVALUATION AND REQUIREMENTS:

In-class participation and attendance:	25%
Contribution to shared “site plan”:	10%
Weekly assignments (5 total; 6% each):	30%
Final project:	35%

Every week we will convene to discuss readings, meet with experts, and share ideas and research results. Active participation is the crux of the class—this is a collaborative endeavor. We assume that you will complete all of the assign readings and come to class primed to contribute.

Your final project for the course will be the creation of your own “site plan,” a teaching module designed for use in an undergraduate General Education course on “Asian Environments.” Your module will be focused on a single site—a particular place and a particular time. The specific content and form of your module should be determined in *explicit* consultation with the teaching faculty, but it might include:

- a) the selection of course materials;
- b) ways to teach the material (e.g. outlines of lecture content and/or considerations of materials to be used in lieu of lecture);
- c) at least one assignment for students related to the topic (e.g. a mock op-ed or a guided research exercise);
- d) consideration of section time and guidelines for future Teaching Fellows (e.g. a page of discussion questions or activities);

- e) a curated list of supporting materials (e.g. websites or contextual readings for curious students or needy teachers or TFs to consult; links to courses that use similar approaches).

Please meet with at least one (and why not all three?) of your professors on or before Mar. 8 to discuss and confirm the “site” of your final project.

READINGS:

The following works will be useful points of reference throughout the course:

J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century World*. New York: W.W. Norton (2000)

Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2014)

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Fifth Assessment Report* (2014):
<http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/index.shtml>

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Week 1 (Jan. 25): A Different Kind of Course: What’s a Graduate Seminar in General Education?

Dexter Filkins, “A Bigger Problem than Isis.” *The New Yorker*, January 3 2017. Link:
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/02/a-bigger-problem-than-isis>

Liu Qin, “Damming China’s largest freshwater lake could harm fragile ecosystem.” ChinaDialogue, January 9 2017. Link: <https://chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/9536-Damming-China-s-largest-freshwater-lake-could-harm-fragile-ecosystem>

Liu Qin, “Hydro expansion will fail without energy market reform.” ChinaDialogue, January 6 2017. Link: <https://chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/9506-Hydro-expansion-will-fail-without-energy-market-reform>

Announcement: Please consider joining us at an environmental photography event with the works of Ian Teh: Monday, January 30, 4 PM to 530 PM. More information here:
<http://fairbank.fas.harvard.edu/event/traces-dark-cloud-special-one-day-photography-exhibition/>

Week 2 (Feb. 1): What is Environmental History?

Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (winter, 2009), 197-222.

William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 4 (Mar. 1992), 1347-1376

Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique." *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1), 71-83

J.R. McNeill, "Observations on the nature and Culture of Environmental History," *History and Theory*, 42 (2003), 5-43

Environment and History, Volume 10 Issue 4 (2004). Tenth Anniversary Issue on Environmental Histories of various parts of the globe.

- Students who have already read 2 or more of the assigned materials are required to submit one suggested additional reading suited to a class discussion of "What is environmental history?" These submissions should include a short (c. 50-75 words) and informal annotation on why your chosen reading is a good choice. Submit to course dropbox no later than 4pm, Jan. 31

Weekly assignment 1: Manifesto! Write a 350-750 word manifesto answering the question "What is (or isn't) environmental history?" The manifesto may take whatever form or approach you deem most useful rhetorically. Give your screed a title and tell us who your audience is at the beginning of your piece. For example, are your writing for a general reader, the Trump Administration EPA, the Sunday New York Times, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Nation*, or the *Jacobin*?

Students who have already penned such manifestoes in the past (you know who you are) may rewrite it or choose the following alternative assignment:

"Why environmental history (or humanities) matters." Address 350-750 words to Harvard president, Drew Faust arguing for the importance of environmental history or the environmental humanities to tomorrow's Harvard undergraduate curriculum. Why do our students need to know this material? What would such courses offer that students cannot get elsewhere? What skills will they develop? What would be the tangible "learning outcomes" of your (imagined...perhaps future) General Education course on these topics? Etc., as you see fit.

Due on discussion forum no later than 4pm, Jan. 31

Week 3 (Feb. 8): "Asia" and its Limits

Prasenjit Duara, "Asia Redux: Reconceptualizing a Region for our Times," *Journal of Asian Studies* (2010)

Prasenjit Duara, “Introduction” and “Sustainability and the crisis of transcendence” and “The historical logics of global modernity” in *The Crisis of Global Modernity*, 1-52, 91-118. (Skim as necessary)

Kenneth Pomeranz, “The Great Himalayan Watershed—Agrarian Crisis, Mega-Dams and the Environment.” *New Left Review* 58 July-August 2009.

Eric Tagliacozzo, Helen F. Siu, and Peter Perdue (eds.), *Asia Inside Out*, editors’ introductions to vols. 1 (“Changing Times”) (Optional) and 2 (“Connected Places”) (Skim)

Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*. Duke University Press, 2010. (Introduction: Globalization and Deimperialization; Chpt 5: Overcoming the Present Conditions of Knowledge Production)

Optional readings:

Harry Harootunian, “Tracking the Dinosaur: Area Studies in a Time of ‘Globalism,’” in *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. pp. 25-58.

Weekly assignment 2: 350-750 words on one of these questions: “What is Asia, and how does it matter in the classroom?”, “Why teach ‘Asian history’ rather than ‘world history’?” or “What value does teaching area studies still have at a time of planetary crisis?” Our hope is that your thinking on this matter will help you later in your career, when you may be asked to write a “teaching philosophy” as part of a job application. For advice on writing a teaching statement and a few samples, see:

Columbia GSAS Teaching Center: [Writing a Winning Teaching Statement](#)

Yale Center for Teaching and Learning: [Teaching Statements](#); [Crafting a Stronger Teaching Statement](#); [Sample Teaching Statements](#)

The Professor is In: [Dr. Karen’s Rules of the Research Statement](#); [The Dreaded Teaching Statement: Eight Pitfalls](#)

Week 4 (Feb. 15): Pedagogy I

Readings and in-class activities for Weeks 4 & 5 will be developed after we have a sense for your backgrounds, interests, and needs. These weeks will include classroom visits from administrators in the Program on General Education as well as from the Academic Technology Group and the Bok Center for Teaching and Learning. We may choose to do a class field trip, too...near or far.

Reading load will be broadly consistent with those outlined in Weeks 2 & 3. Assignments for these weeks will be focused on teaching method and content. Assignment length and expectation will be broadly consistent with those outlined in Weeks 2 & 3.

Weekly assignment 3: TBA

Week 5 (Feb. 22): Pedagogy II

Announcement: Please consider joining us for a Mahindra Center Environment Forum presentation from Professor Roy Scranton (University of Notre Dame, author of *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization*) on “Arctic Ghosts: Ecocruising the Death Spiral,” 6pm Tsai Auditorium, CGIS South.

Weekly assignment 4: How can technology help (or hinder) student learning in an environmental history course? Write a short piece (350-700 words) answering this question using at least one specific example. How would you use (or why not use) particular materials or tools (software, databases, presentation tools, hardware, etc.) in pursuit of a clear learning goal.

Week 6 (Mar 1): Three Sites I: Fukushima, Mumbai, and the Three Gorges Dam

In Weeks 6-8 class will break into three smaller groups, each led by one of your core faculty and each focused on a particular “site” that is close to your professor’s research and teaching expertise. These will be: the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, the city of Mumbai’s municipal water supply, and the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangzi River.

Readings and assignments will be developed together with your core faculty. Final assignments from this section will be due 4pm Mar. 20

- Please meet with at least one of your professors on or before Mar. 8 to discuss and confirm the “site” of your final project.

Announcement: Please consider joining us for a presentation from Professor Sigrid Schmalzer (UMass—Amherst): “Layer upon Layer: Experience, Ecology, Engineering, and (most of all) History in the Making of China’s Agricultural Terraces,” 4pm, rm. 050, CGIS South

Week 7 (Mar. 8): Three Sites II

Week 8: SPRING BREAK

Week 9 (Mar. 22): Site Visits

Presentation and discussion of shared site plans developed during Weeks 6 & 7.

Week 10 (Mar. 29):

Weeks 10-12 are left open for the investigation and consideration of teaching around particular thematic areas—bringing our discussions of pedagogy and the method of the “site visit” together with specific areas, tailored to the interests of the class: examples include the history of animals, climate, energy, waste, and urban spaces. These three weeks are your opportunity to come up with and to develop your own “site plans,” which will constitute your final project. To the greatest extent possible, assignments will be geared to help us all think together about shared problems and issues. We anticipate a mixture of primary source readings, method and content readings (material of the sort assigned in Weeks 2 & 3), and perhaps some items on pedagogy.

Assignments are likely (but not certain) to include the creation of annotated teaching bibliographies on your chosen site or the evaluation of textbooks and/or major collections related to your site.

Week 11 (Apr. 5):

Week 12 (Apr. 12)

Week 13 (Apr. 19): Presentations

Week 14 (Apr. 26): Presentations

Week 15 (May 3): Reading period (Possible Presentations, pending enrollment numbers)

Announcement: Please consider joining us for a special Environment Forum presentation from Professor Tiya Miles (University of Michigan), title TBA, 6pm, Tsai Auditorium, CGIS South.

We are hopeful that we’ll also find time for some kind of capstone dinner or mixer...organic, of course.