Course Overview

The most famous highway of antiquity, the Silk Road, has never lost its importance as one of the most strategic areas in the world. While many ancient cities and stops on the Silk Road no longer enjoy their days of glory, many new ones have emerged and become destinations themselves. Central Asia’s enormous reserves of oil and gas make this region more than desirable for all major world powers and as volatile as it was in the past. Though natural resources and commodities traded along this Road have changed, the importance of the heartland controlled by nomads and/or those of nomadic traditions has remained constant. “Whoever controls the Heartland controls the world” as Halford Mackinder, a founder of the so-called Geopolitics (1904, “The Heartland Theory”) stated many years ago. Since then this axiom has been adjusted and modified by others but its main message is the same: whoever controls the ancient road(s) from China, through Central Asia and the Middle East, to Europe controls the world.
This course will introduce students to this Heartland, its people and their customs, and its strategic importance in the world.

Week #1: September 23, 2014
Course information.
Eurasia: defining the region. Geopolitics.

Week #2: September 30, 2014
Defining nomadism: different land, different forms of nomadism.

Week #3: October 7, 2014

Week #4: October 14, 2014
NO CLASS

Week #5: October 21, 2014
The Hsiung-nu and their impact on the rise of China Proper. The Silk Road. Part 2.

Week #6: October 28, 2014
Monotheism, henotheism, and polytheism of the Heartland. Ancient traditions and modern delivery.

Week #7: November 4, 2014
Odds and ends: “Afghanistan is a land on everyone’s way, to someplace else” (Charles Norchi)

Suggested readings:
For introduction to geography and geopolitics of the area see:
http://asiasociety.org/countries/trade-exchange/geographical-setting-silk-roads?page=0,0

For the importance of the region in modern politics see:

For the importance of the region in politics of oil and energy see:

For understanding nomadism see:

For connecting nomads with the Silk Road and Silk Road itself see:


Interactive website about silk art -- [http://weavesilk.com/](http://weavesilk.com/)

*For religions along the Silk Road:*
