INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE HISTORY

This course explores chronologically some of the major themes in Chinese history from its beginnings to the present. The objective, however, is not to provide an overall survey; it would be impossible to do justice to over three millennia of recorded history within the span of a single semester. Rather, the course will highlight some of the most interesting, important and controversial themes in Chinese history. In doing so, it seeks to introduce students to the different political, social, economic and cultural forces that shaped the emergence of China as an identifiable entity, and asks the question of what constitutes "Chineseness" from a historical perspective. By emphasizing the processes through which Chinese civilization has been repeatedly reconfigured throughout its history, not in isolation – as is often believed – but through expansion and interaction with other groups outside its initial political and cultural borders, the objective of the course is to enable students to grasp the complexity of the forces that went into the making of this entity we call "China" today.

Requirements (subject to change) include mandatory class attendance, 3-4 short papers, a mid-term and a final exam. In addition to the textbook, most of the weekly readings are excerpts from translations of Chinese documents.

Tentative weekly schedule:
1) Geography and Language
2) What was the fuss about Confucius?
3) Was the Han Legalist (and what does that mean)?
4) How "Chinese" was the Tang?
5) Was twelfth-century China a "modern" society *avant la lettre*?
6) Who were the Mongols?
7) The Ming: an aborted global empire?
8) Were women oppressed in Chinese society?
9) The Manchus: heroes or villains?
10) Was "imperialism" good or bad for China?
11) Something wrong with Chinese culture?
12) Nationalists and Communists: fellow travelers or mortal enemies?
13) Some thoughts on Chairman Mao
14) Does Taiwan belong to China?
15) From proletarian revolution to "capitalist" China