Course title: Religion and Ecology in China  
School of Sociology & Ethnology/College of Tibetan Studies, Minzu University of China  
Council on International Educational Exchange  
Language of Instruction: English  
Course Meeting times and place: 2:00-05:00pm, Thursday; Nan-Yuan-Lou Z5-6 (南睿楼)  
Professor: Dan Smyer Yü, Ph.D.  
Office hours/location: By appointment (anthrotopia@hotmail.com)

Course Description & Objectives

This is a graduate-level course for an interdisciplinary study of the complex relations between the earth, people, and ecologically-based religious beliefs among different ethnic groups. Its emphasis is on both indigenous and indigenized ecological worldviews and practices. It is taught in the context of the current scholarly interest in re-visiting and re-interpreting the positive values and applicability of indigenous religious and ecological worldviews and practices in relation to sustainable living advocated from various social, cultural, and economic constituencies worldwide. This course, thus, is an integral part of ongoing public discourses and debates on tradition and modernity but has an applied orientation toward models of sustainable living and the preservation of indigenous cultural heritages. The primary case study of this course is sacred landscape, community, and ecological practices among Tibetans. Throughout the semester students and the instructor will work as a team to engage in critical reading of relevant historical and contemporary scholarly texts, and researching and interpreting both oral and written narratives in folklore, literary, and religious texts. The critical reading and interpretive activities of this class will draw perspectives and approaches from the disciplines of religion and ecology, religious studies, landscape studies, aesthetics, ecological anthropology, human ecology, environmental studies, and Tibetan studies. With this multidisciplinary perspective, the class is expected to identify the patterns of how natural landscapes are humanized with the performance of religious rituals and folk narratives of mythical stories which concern land-based deities and spirits; to illustrate how the religiously-conceived idea of the sacred permeates the physical landscape; and to develop models of sustainable communities derived from the Tibetan case. It is expected that through the course, students will develop familiarity with theoretical perspectives and research methods from different disciplines and learn relevant techniques to design and materialize their own future research projects.

Course bibliography

Baurer, Kenneth and Geoff and Childs “Demographics, Development, and the Environment in Tibetan Areas.” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Issue 4 — December 2008*


Dawa Tsering and John D. Farrington “Conflict between Nomadic Herders and Brown Bears in the Byang thang Region of Tibet.” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Issue 4 — December 2008*


Huber, Toni and Poul Pedersen “Meteorological Knowledge and Environmental Ideas in Traditional and Modern Societies: The Case of Tibet.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), pp. 577-597*


Ivakhiv, Adrian J. 2001 *Claiming Pilgrims and Politics at Sacred Glastonbury and*


Winkler, Daniel “The Mushrooming Fungi Market in Tibet Exemplified by *Cordyceps sinensis* and *Tricholoma matsutake*.” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Issue 4 — December 2008*

Yeh, Emily and Mark Henderson “Interpreting Urbanization in Tibet: Administrative Scales and Discourses of Modernization.” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Issue 4 — December 2008*