

HIS 340
The Snow Lion and the Dragon: Introduction to Sino-Tibetan Relations

SBC: GLO, SBS+

Tu/Thur, 3:30pm - 4:50pm

Professor Riga Shakya



Mural commemorating victory of General Zhang Yichao over the Tibetan Empire in 848. Mogao cave 156, late Tang dynasty. Wikimedia Commons.

This course introduces students to the long and often contested history of Sino-Tibetan relations, from early imperial diplomacy in the Tang dynasty to present-day debates over sovereignty, identity, and autonomy. Open to all undergraduates and requiring no prior background, the course offers a broad chronological survey alongside thematic exploration of key political, religious, and cultural dynamics.

Through a mix of primary sources in translation, scholarly interpretations, visual materials, and multimedia content, students will examine how relations between China and Tibet have been imagined, negotiated, and transformed across more than a thousand years. Topics include early state encounters, the spread of Buddhism, Qing imperial expansion, modern nationalist ideologies, and the global politics of Tibet in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The course emphasizes the development of critical historical thinking. Students will engage with competing narratives, consider how history is constructed, and reflect on the political and ethical dimensions of historical interpretation. Visual and digital sources—such as art, film, and documentary media—will complement written texts, offering additional perspectives on the representation and mediation of Sino-Tibetan history.

Assignments will focus on helping students build analytical and interpretive skills, with opportunities for discussion, reflection, and independent inquiry. By the end of the course, students will not only have a foundational understanding of Sino-Tibetan history, but also greater confidence in navigating complex historical debates.