Chinese Culture and Ethnic Minorities Seminar

ASIA3000 (3 Credits / 45 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
China: Language, Cultures and Ethnic Minorities

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

**Course Description**

In cooperation with the program’s host and sponsor, Yunnan Nationalities University, this interdisciplinary seminar explores the evolving relationship between the central Chinese State and the ethnically diverse minority populations of Yunnan. The interactions inherent in the relationship between China’s “peripheral peoples” and an arguably constructed dominant “Han” culture form a foundation upon which questions of autonomy and identity are brought to life in Yunnan and its environs. Themes in Chinese culture, both in terms of traditions and contemporary expression, are explored in the History/Religions and Social Issues components of the seminar. The Beijing Excursion puts Yunnan Province’s ethnic diversity and minority issues into historical and present-day national perspective. The unique Minority Issues component of the seminar, including extended engagement with ethnic minority communities during excursions, distinguishes this study abroad program from any other in China.

The seminar asks the following key academic questions:

- What are the ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural identities of Yunnan’s minority nationalities and how are such identities negotiated within the delicate geo-politics of China and its neighbors?

- What are the most important factors in determining how minority peoples understand and are ascribed “autonomous status” with all the challenges, privileges and limitations this word implies?

- How is the encounter between the Han majority and China’s minority groups viewed on the global stage and within China?

To examine these questions critically, students are exposed to a variety of current political and economic issues in China as well as some basic history to provide them a working knowledge base upon which to develop potential Independent Study Projects. In addition, themes of traditional and present-day cultural values intersect the seminar strategically to reveal the multi-layered process of creating a national identity in a pluralistic environment. Finally, the seminar also considers China’s development
strategy in Yunnan as another lens through which minority policies are articulated, enforced, and woven together with environmental and natural resource management agendas.

**Learning Outcomes**
Upon completion of this course, students will be expected to:

- Demonstrate a basic understanding of Chinese culture, its history, its religions and the pressing social and environmental issues this major world power confronts today and how these factors have worked to shape and sustain China’s minority communities;
- Compare and contrast Yunnan’s minority nationalities and their perceptions of autonomy within their communities and autonomous areas within China;
- Identify the shifts in social structures and cultural values of peoples in Yunnan considered to be “minority nationalities” by the State;
- Analyze China’s development strategies in Yunnan as they apply to minority areas and the rich natural resources of these geographic areas;
- Explain how minority groups in China may affect the country’s political future, both regionally and internationally.

**Language of Instruction**
This course is taught in English or in Chinese with English translation.

**Course Requirements**
The thematic seminar is arranged in the format of classroom lectures, historical and cultural site visits, discussion sessions with local experts and academics, and debriefing sessions led by the students or faculty at the end of each module or at the end of an important session.

Reading assignments are attached to each session.

The Seminar content is built around four modules: (1) History and Religion; (2) Social Issues and Arts/Humanities; (3) Beijing Excursion; (4) Minority Issues and Minority Areas Excursion

A take-home test or group presentation is scheduled at the end of each module.

**Course Schedule**

**Module I: History and Religions (21 hours)**
Module I builds the context for understanding China’s transition from a traditional society to a modern nation by examining the historical forces since the mid-19th century. The organizing themes of Nationalism and Communism provide a framework for discussing various phenomena all the way to Chinese Communist victory in 1949. The post-Mao reforms that undid China’s communist economic system will also be discussed. This module provides a basic introduction to the history and religions of China and how these historical and religious factors have shaped modern China.

**Session I: Modern Chinese history**
This first session covers both late imperial history and modern history of China. A brief look at Han, Tang, Song, Ming and Qing dynasties gives students an idea of the sophistication of China’s achievements. China’s modern history started from a forced process of integration into the international system established by the European powers. First the students study the ‘century of humiliation’ and then...
examine how the Chinese Communist Party came to power, and finally how China struggles to rise again in the world. This introduction to China’s long history, including rebellions, revolutions and reforms and their successes and failures, provides clues to the shape of China’s future and how it will affect our lives.

Part 2: Video: Under the Red Flag and debrief
Part 3: Oral history and Q&A, including viewing of video Sunrise over Tiananmen Square

Required Readings:

Session 2: Buddhism in China and Its Influence on Yunnan
As one of the main traditions of Chinese thought or religion, this session traces Buddhism’s influence in China from its historical origins to the present. Included in this discussion is the influence of Buddhism in shaping Chinese society and Chinese mentality, as well as its influence on Yunnan’s minority communities.

Lecture: Buddhism in China and Its influence on the Minority Groups in Yunnan
Day Trip: Buddhist and Daoist temples in the Western Hills (Kunming)

Required Reading:

Session 3: Hui and Muslim in China and in Yunnan
This session introduces the students to the Hui people’s unique minority status, classified by their religion—Muslim. It also examines the major issues and representative concerns from Chinese Muslim community.

Lecture: Hui and Muslims in Yunnan
Day Trip: Visit to mosque in Kunming

Required Reading:

Session 4: Christianity in China and in Yunnan
This session introduces the historical and present state of Christianity in China, especially in Yunnan, as well as its strong influence on Yunnan’s minority communities.

Day trip: visit Xiao Shuijing Miao (Hmong) Christian Village and Choir
Lecture: Christianity in China and in Yunnan

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Required Reading:

Session 5: Discussion session and test on History and Religion Module
This student-led discussion/processing session will review the material presented in the readings, lectures, activities and exercises during that seminar. Going over the essential themes and issues that have emerged, enabling students to address unresolved questions and provide input on the information they had received. This allows our academic staff to provide personal feedback and other students to respond to comments and queries.

At the end of this session students are given a take-home exam to insure that they have familiarized themselves with the material, read the assigned readings and taken adequate notes during lectures, as well as to allow them to express their opinions on key questions and issues raised in each section.

Module 2: Social Issues and Arts/Humanities (22 hours)
As China’s rapid development focuses worldwide attention on the People’s Republic, it is crucial to be able to grasp the social, cultural and political underpinnings of China’s unique trajectory and present-day situation. This module describes and discusses the major challenges to social development in China in the context of globalization, analyses and explains the newly-emerging social issues and social policy responses in China, and elaborates and reflects on the future direction of social change and social policy in China. Furthermore, students are introduced to traditional Chinese art forms and related cultural preservation issues in order to provide a wider pool of potential topics for students’ Independent Study Projects (ISP).

Session 1: China’s Economic Reform and Social Changes
This session introduces China’s Open Door Policy with particular attention on the significant impact of its implementation on Chinese society in the past 30 years. The issues and challenges arising from the country’s rapid pace of development are discussed. Special attention is paid to the current economic policy and social stratification.

Lecture: Development of China’s Economy/Analysis of Social and Cultural Changes

Required Reading:
Li Zhang, (June 2006), Contesting Spatial Modernity in Late-Socialist China, Current Anthropology, 47 (3) pp. 461-484.

Session 2: China’s HIV/AIDS Problem and Prevention, and Its Impact on Minority Communities
This session examines HIV/AIDS in China, especially the intersection of Yunnan’s HIV/AIDS issues with ethnicity and minority communities. The face-to-face dialogue between HIV patients and students is a powerful proof of the examination.

Lecture: HIV/AIDS Problems and Its Impact on Yunnan’s Minority Groups
Dialogue with HIV/AIDS patients

Required Reading:

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Session 3: Chinese Traditional Arts and Cultural Practices
This session offers a wider view of Chinese culture by introducing several typical Chinese art forms. Students are guided to learn to notice and appreciate the subtle and deep meaning of such unique art and cultural practices. The efforts put into traditional art preservation work by local communities are also introduced in order to see the continuance of the tradition. Musical instrument demonstrations and daily training in Taiji exercise are arranged along with theoretical introductions.

Part 1: Introduction to Taiji, and daily Taiji and Chinese martial arts exercise (offered throughout the semester)
Part 2: Introduction to Traditional Chinese Medicine and visit to a Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital
Part 3: Introduction to and Demonstration of Chinese Beijing Opera by local community
Part 4: Introduction and demonstration of Chinese/minority traditional music and instruments

Required Readings:

Session 4: China’s Environmental Issues
This session covers the major China’s environmental issues, including the post-Mao policies on resource use, China’s growing demand for energy, the ways in which the Chinese state has responded to environmental challenges at the local, national, and global levels, and assessing the prognosis for environmental protection and sustainable development in China.

Lecture: Environmental issues and environmental protection in China

Required Readings:

Session 5: Discussion session on gender issues
This session covers major topics and issues about Chinese women. It introduces the change and continuity of women’s identity, sexuality, marriage, and family of Chinese women throughout the 21st century, paying special attention to the impacts of the revolution and economic development. Furthermore, the course discusses gender divisions of labor in rural and urban China and the experience of rural-to-urban women migrants in the reform era in order to capture (at least partially) the change and continuity of some Chinese women’s lives under the impacts (or lack of) of development, modernization, urbanization, and globalization.

Part 1: Lecture: China’s reproductive policy and its impact on Chinese women
Part 2: Panel on China’s Gender Issues with female professors from local universities

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Required Reading:

Session 6: Discussion session and test on Social issues/Arts and humanities Module
This student-led discussion/processing session reviews the essential themes and issues emerging through the course, enabling students to address unresolved questions and provide input on the information they had received. Our academic staff provides personal feedback respond to comments and queries.

At the end of this session students are given a take-home exam to assure that they have familiarized themselves with the material, read the assigned readings and taken adequate notes during lectures, as well as to allow them to express their opinions on key questions and issues raised in each section.

Module 3: Beijing Educational Excursion—Understanding Central Government Minority Policies and their Impact on Minorities (18 hours)
Students travel to Beijing, where Yunnan Province’s great ethnic diversity is placed in both historical and contemporary perspective. Beijing affords a window into the roles played throughout China’s history by the majority Han Chinese, as well as by non-Han northern ethnic minorities, and their political, military, and cultural contributions to modern China. Through a combination of background readings, lectures, educational site visits, and guided discussions, the striking ethnic and historical contrast between Beijing and far-away Yunnan Province becomes clear.

In Beijing, students meet top Chinese academics and learn about Chinese identity and central government policies on minorities. Lecturers may include faculty drawn from Beijing’s best institutions of higher education.

Each component of the Beijing excursion is designed to enrich students’ understanding of Yunnan Province’s place in China’s history and the relationship between central government policy regarding ethnic minorities and the lived experiences of Yunnan’s minority groups. The excursion culminates with student presentations on ethnic minorities in historical and contemporary perspectives.

Session 1: Introduction to Beijing Educational Excursion
This session introduces students to the educational purposes of the program’s Beijing trip and the video/photo assignment focused on the relationship between Beijing and the ethnic minorities.

Introduction on Beijing: History of Beijing and its relationship with China’s minorities

Required Reading:

Session 2: Government Minority Policies and Relationships among China’s Ethnic Groups
This session is designed to examine China’s minority issues at the national level. It discusses the national policy regarding minority regions and the minority people’s migration wave caused by China’s rapid urbanization. Three lectures are arranged at Beijing University and Qinghua University, given by China’s top academics in the relevant fields:

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Lecture: The Dual Structures in China: City/Country; Han/Minorities
Lecture: Government Minority Policies and Relationships among China’s Ethnic Groups
Lecture: China’s Urbanization and Peasants’ Migration

Reading Assignments:

**Session 3: Ethnic Minorities in Chinese History: Beijing’s Key Sites in Historical Perspective**
Day Trip: the Great Wall-Mutianyu
Day Trip: Visit the Forbidden City
Day Trip: Visit the Capital Museum
Fieldwork Project: Student Exploration in Beijing

Required Readings:

**Session 4: Beijing and China’s Minorities Project and Presentation**
On return to Kunming from Beijing, students give individual or small-group video/photo presentations on their observations and critical reflections on the fieldwork exercise they conducted on the relationship and circumstances of minorities in Beijing. Students can choose any scenes, any people or any aspects of the city life, but will need to tell the group 1. Why you choose these pictures. 2. What kind of difference or commonalities between Beijing and Kunming did you discover from the picture, in terms of the Han/minority relationship?

**Module 4: Minority Issues and Minority Areas Field Excursions (27 Hours)**
This module introduces students to the policies and issues in China, especially those concerning Yunnan’s minority nationalities and the social representations of ethnic minorities in contemporary China. It presents lectures, activities and site visits for students to gain first-hand knowledge of the ethnic diversity and complexity of contemporary China and understanding of the everyday lives and livelihood strategies of people belonging to various ethnic minorities in Yunnan.

An educational study tour to Yunnan’s minority areas is an essential component of this module. This is a 2- to 3-week excursion, featuring rural homestays. Students engage in a Community Study Project and develop a presentation on their experiences. Through the excursion students experience and better understand the forces of tradition and assimilation at work among China and Yunnan’s many ethnic groups and peripheral peoples. This module includes the specific lectures and activities that take place during the student field excursion to the minority areas of Dali, Lijiang and Zhongdian (Shangri-La).

**Session 1: China’s Minority Nationalities**
This session introduces the great anthropological project carried out in 1950’s in China—the Minority Classification Project, and the official criteria for minority classification. It discusses the issues related to

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Lecture: China/Yunnan’s Minority Nationalities

Day Trip: Yunnan Nationalities Museum

Required Readings:

**Session 2: Weishan Yi and Hui Autonomous County and Weibaoshan Daoist Mountain**

This session takes students to Wenshan Yi and Hui minority area and Weibaoshan Daoist Mountain. Yi is the biggest ethnic group in Yunnan and Weibaoshan is one of the 14 famous Daoist Mountains in China. The interaction between Yi Local God religion and Chinese Daoism is the major focus of this area study.

Lecture: Weishan history and Yi culture
Field Visit: Daoist Mountain Temple Complex and Daoism introduction (Weibaoshan)
Field Visit: Weishan Ancient City
Field Visit: Tie-dye Factory (Weishan)

Required Reading:

**Session 3: Dali Ancient City, Shaxi Ancient Market Town and concurrent Rural Homestay with Bai residents**

This session takes students to Dali Bai Prefecture, where students learn about Bai minority culture through living with Bai minority homestay families. The powerful Nanzhao Kingdom, the indigenous religion, the 1200 years old grottos, and the historical Tea and Horse Caravan Route provide rich resources for students’ Community Study Project.

Field Visit:Dali Museum, with introduction to The Nanzhao Kingdom
Lecture: Introduction to Shaxi Rehabilitation Project
Field Visit: Tea and Horse Caravan Route Museum (Shaxi)
Field Visit: Bai Music and Dance (Shaxi)
Field Visit: Shilong Bai Village Elementary School (Shibaoshan)
Field Visit: Shibaoshan Rock Cave temples (Jianchuan)

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Required Readings:

Session 4: Lijiang UNESCO World Heritage Site and the Naxi People
This session brings students to the World Heritage site—Lijiang to witness the great impact that the rapid developing mass tourism has had on Lijiang's development and preservation, as well as on the traditional Naxi culture.

Lecture: Lijiang's Development and Preservation
Lecture: Dongba Culture: Oracles and Scripture
Lecture: A Naxi Musician's Past and Present
Field Visit: Naxi Traditional Orchestra: Dayan Naxi Music Ensemble (Lijiang)
Field Visit: Dongba Religious Ceremony (Lijiang)

Required Readings:

Session 5: Gyalthang Old Town and the Tibetans
This session introduces the unique Tibetan culture including Tibetan Buddhism to students and discusses the important issues related to Tibetan culture preservation and assimilation. The major learning resources are from local cultural preservation organizations, reincarnate lamas, NGO leaders and foreign experts on Tibetan issues.

Lecture: Tibetan Buddhism in Gyalthang (Chinese name: Zhongdian or Shangri-La)
Lecture: Tibetan Cultural Preservation (Gyalthang)
Introduction to Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
Field Visit: Tibetan Orphanage (Gyalthang)
Field Visit: Songzanlin Tibetan Monastery (Gyalthang)
Field Visit: Audience with Kesi, reincarnate Tibetan lama at Songzanlin monastery (Gyalthang)
Field Visit: Tibetan Song and Dance with Families (Gyalthang)
Field Visit: Eastern Tibet Training Institute (Gyalthang)

Required Readings:
Ben Hillman, (June 2003), Paradise Under Construction: Minorities, Myths and Modernity in Northwest Yunnan, Asian Ethnicity, 4 (2).

Session 6: Discussion and Debriefing on Minority Issues and Minority Areas Field Excursion
This student led discussion/processing session reviews the material presented in the readings, lectures, activities and exercises during that seminar. Going over the essential themes and issues that have

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emerged, this enables students to address unresolved questions and provide input on the information they have received. This allows our academic staff to provide personal feedback and other students to respond to comments and queries.

At the end of this session students are given a take-home exam to insure that they have familiarized themselves with the material, read the assigned readings and taken adequate notes during lectures, as well as to allow them to express their opinions on key questions and issues raised in each section.

**Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

Students are expected to prepare for, attend, and participate in all lectures, discussions, presentations and educational excursions previously listed, and complete the required readings. They are given examinations covering the major content of these lectures and readings. In addition, students are encouraged to read newspapers and periodicals in both Chinese and English.

- Exam on History/Religions Module
- Exam on Social Issues/Arts and Humanities Module
- Exam on Minority Issues/Field Excursions Module

Evaluation of student performance for the Culture and Ethnic Minorities Seminar is based on the following components:

**Participation: 10%**

Students are expected to attend all scheduled seminar activities and demonstrate engagement in lectures and excursions by active listening, note-taking and asking relevant questions.

**Discussions and presentations: 30%**

Students are required to participate in and occasionally facilitate weekly discussion sessions designed to synthesize readings and lectures and analyze information gathered in the context of the larger academic questions of the course. Students must prepare study questions for the discussions and show their understanding of readings by explaining key points to their peers. Students are required to conduct small group or individual presentations after the Beijing educational excursion and on the Community Study Project.

**Seminar Module Tests: 60%**

Three tests will be given over the course of the seminar, after each of the individual thematic modules. These tests combine short answer questions with longer more detailed descriptive answers and are evaluated on the basis of correct factual understanding, depth of critical thinking, creative and informed analysis, and correct language use.

**Grading Scale:** The grading scale for this course is as follows:

- 94-100% A
- 90-93% A-
- 87-89% B+
- 84-86% B
- 80-83% B-
- 77-79% C+
- 74-76% C
- 70-73% C-
- 67-69% D+
- 64-66% D

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Expectations and Policies

Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.

Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.

Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.

Attendance. All students are required to attend all lectures and to participate in all bi-weekly discussion and analysis sessions. All excursions are mandatory and students must discuss absences with the Academic Director before the planned departure.

Participation. Participation is not the same as attendance. All students are expected to participate fully in all aspects of the course. This means asking pertinent questions to the course’s guest lecturers, engaging in discussion and analysis during lectures, group discussions and on excursions. Students are expected to complete the required reading in a timely fashion, and to demonstrate their understanding of texts through reflection, writing, and discussion.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier given to you at Orientation.

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