

Ethnicity, Gender, and Social Change ASIA-3010 (3 credits)

Vietnam: Culture, Social Change, and Development

This syllabus is representative of a typical 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

This course explores the processes and impacts of social change in Vietnam through an interdisciplinary, critical study of ethnicity and gender in contemporary and historical frames. From traditional society to the colonial period, from high socialism to post-socialist *Doi Moi* and reform and post global pandemic, ethnicity and gender have figured centrally in the politics of social change. The course asks critical questions such as: “What does successful social change entail?”; “What kinds of current interventions related to ethnicity and gender have been implemented?”; “Where are the gaps?”; and “What is the way forward?”

Organized around a series of lectures, field site visits, readings, and group discussions, students examine these questions through a variety of current political and social issues in Vietnam. A basic introduction to Vietnam’s history and traditional culture gives students a foundation on which to understand the multilayered processes associated with gender, marriage, the family, ethnicity, and religious practices and how they are created, appropriated, and contested. Furthermore, discussions of Vietnam’s wars and revolutions, engaged from multiple perspectives, provide students an understanding of their relationship to social change today. Finally, the seminar considers Vietnam’s programs designed for ethnic minority groups as another lens through which ethnicity is articulated, enforced, and woven together with the country’s development agenda for sustainable social change. This course is designed to help students develop critical perspectives on social change in contemporary Vietnam and a foundation for Independent Study Projects.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- *Demonstrate* a basic understanding of Vietnam’s cultures, history, and religions;
- *Articulate* a foundational understanding of the Vietnam War, its aftermath, and its impact on Vietnamese society;

- *Critically consider* the impacts of colonialism, revolution and nationalism on Vietnamese culture and society and how these impacts have worked to shape and sustain different ethnic minorities groups in Vietnam;
- *Address* social issues from a comparative policy perspective, examining the crux of Vietnamese tradition and modernity, particularly in relation to gender and ethnic minority issues;
- *Gain* in-depth understanding of various institutions, norms, and practices shaping the lives of Vietnamese women and men, including romance, sexuality, marriage, parenthood, family, kinship, social relationship and statures, and treatment of society's less fortunate;
- *Understand* the nature and extent of the Vietnamese state's role in determining the policies toward ethnic minority groups;
- *Develop and apply* critical thinking skills for analyzing the underlying dynamics of gender and ethnicity in the Vietnamese context;
- *Develop* an analytical framework for addressing questions of ethnicity and gender for an Independent Study Project.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of economic ethnicity, gender, and social change through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

The thematic course activities take place in formal classroom settings, in field locations, and community engagement projects. Students are encouraged to reflect upon the dynamics of social and cultural change, supplementing lecturers with their own engaged analysis, dialogue, and group discussion. Every week, after two sessions, the class holds a discussion session on Thursday afternoon. Discussions are mainly facilitated by students. Occasionally, local college students join the discussion and share their views on the weekly topics.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Reflection Paper on Vietnamese Culture (25%)

For this paper, students are asked to reflect on their own experiences of change in Vietnamese cultural domains in relation to development processes. Integrating thematic material from lectures and readings, students write a 6-8-page paper discussing their initial understanding of several traditional cultural domains and their impacts on modern society in Vietnam and vice versa. This paper is assigned during the first three weeks of the course and the paper is due before the Mekong Delta Excursion.

2) Lead Discussion on Readings (10%)

Each student gives a 5-10-minute presentation during the term and leads class discussion after their presentation. The presentation and discussion are based on the reading for the week, but students are expected to also incorporate their own ideas. Presentations and discussions will commence in the second week of the course. Further details for this assignment will be covered in class.

3) Term Paper on Gender & Social Change (Oral History Project) (35%)

This assignment requires students to write a paper and give an oral presentation to their peers drawing on an oral history interview of a person (man or woman) who is over the age of 50. Based on the interview, students write an essay reflecting on how the person's life has changed over the past 50 years. The main purpose of this assignment is to understand gender roles and equality and social changes in Vietnam. This assignment is assigned during the one-month homestay period in Ho Chi Minh City. The written essay is due before the Central Vietnam Excursion and the in-class presentation is delivered in Hoi An Ancient Town in Central Vietnam.

4) Final Exam (20%)

The final exam consists of two essay questions (given to students one day prior to the exam) and a set of short answer questions. The goal of the exam is to give students the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of ethnicity and social change issues in Vietnam and to use the analytical skills they have developed as part of the seminar, in preparation for writing the critical independent study project. This Final Exam is conducted at the end of Grand Excursion and prior to the ISP period.

5) Participation: (10%)

This includes active involvement in lectures, readings, discussions, and excursions using the following criteria:

- **Attendance** - promptness to class and positive presence in class.
- **Active Listening** - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest and enthusiasm (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, taking notes.
- **Involvement in Class Discussions** - either in small or large groups, sharing knowledge. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don't, and also allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
- **Group Accountability** – positive participation in the group during field excursions and classes; consciousness of others; timely attendance.
- **Displaying Respect** – culturally appropriate interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, lecturers, and communities.

Assessment

Reflection Paper on Vietnamese Culture	25%
Lead Discussion on Readings	10%
Term Paper on Gender and Social Change	35%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	10%

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections, and experiences throughout the program. Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at

that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

Grading Scale

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
below 64	F

Program Expectations

All assignments should be typed and double-spaced. Spelling and grammar are part of grading criteria; careful proofreading and editing are essential parts of the writing process. I will be happy to read a rough draft of any assignment at least two days prior to the due date. Please note: description is not analysis. While there is a place for description of people, events, or organizations in your assignments, be aware that extensive description is not a substitute for critical analysis based on independent thinking and understanding. The more your writings reflect synthesis of theory observation and reflection, the more successful your work will be.

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 according 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.

Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).

Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

The course is built around three main modules: (1) History and Culture; (2) Gender and Society and (3) Ethnic Diversity.

Module 1: History and Culture (16 class hours)

This module presents an overview of the history and culture of Vietnam through comparative studies of gender and ethnicity in traditional society, colonialism, revolution, and during the wars.

Session 1: Main Features of Vietnamese History

This session presents an introduction to the module by providing a basic understanding of Vietnam past: traditional society, colonialism, revolution, and the wars of the 20th century.

Assigned Readings:

Weller Taylor, K. (2013). Introduction. In *A History of the Vietnamese*. Cambridge University Press.

Karnow, S. (1991). The Heritage of Vietnamese Nationalism. In *Vietnam: a history* (pp. 109–138). Viking.

Optional Readings:

Dutton, G., et al. (2012). *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*. Columbia University Press.
Selected readings.

Taylor, K. (1998). Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57(4), 949-978. doi:10.2307/2659300

Session 2: Cultural Domains in Vietnam

This session provides a deeper exploration of Vietnam's culture, customs, ways of life, and their cultural significance to Vietnamese people.

Assigned Readings:

Văn Huyền Nguyễn. (1995). Chapter 1: The Family Nha. In *The Ancient Civilization of Vietnam* (Ha Noi: The Gioi Moi Publishing House. 19 - 69, pp. 19–69). White Lotus.

Jamieson, N. L. (1993). *Understanding Vietnam* (pp. 1–41). University Of California Press.

Session 3: Religions and Spiritual Life in Vietnam

This session engages students in a discussion of key scholarly debates about the rich history of religions and social life in contemporary Vietnam.

Assigned Readings:

Nguyen, Van Huyen. 1995. *Ancient Vietnamese Civilization*. The Gioi Moi Pub. Pp. 234-258.

Taylor, P. (2007). *Modernity and re-enchantment: religion in post-revolutionary Vietnam* (pp. 1–56). Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Jellema, K. (2007). Returning Home: Ancestor Veneration and the Nationalism of Doi Moi Vietnam. In P. Taylor (Ed.), *Modernity and re-enchantment: religion in post-revolutionary Vietnam*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Salemink, O. (2008). Embodying the Nation: Mediumship, Ritual, and the National Imagination. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 3(3), 261–290. <https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2008.3.3.261>

Taylor, P. (2004). *Goddess on the Rise: Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam* (pp. 10–42). University of Hawaii Press.

Optional Readings:

Dutton, G., et al. (2012). *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*. Columbia University Press.
Selected readings.

Session 4: Field Visit to Truc Lam Monastery in Da lat: Buddhism in Vietnam

This field visit consists of a site-workshop and discussion to gain a deeper understanding of this popular religion at the one of the first institutions of Buddhist studies for monks and nuns in southern Vietnam.

Assigned Reading:

Soucy, A. (2012). *The Buddha Side: Gender, Power, and Buddhist Practice in Vietnam* (pp. 16–59). University of Hawaii Press.

Thich Nhat Hanh. (2017). *The Art of Living: Peace and Freedom in Here and Now*.
HarperCollins.

Session 5: Vietnam's Wars: Multiple Perspectives

This session provides a foundation on which to understand and analyze the origins, development, and consequences of war and revolution in Vietnam from the early twentieth century to the present. Students examine the lessons and legacies of the Vietnam War for both Vietnam and the United States.

Field Visits to the War Remnant Museum and Cu Chi Tunnel, and discussion with Cu Chi Veterans.

Group Discussion: The war's legacies in local peoples' minds and reference to the current war between Ukraine and Russia

Assigned Readings:

Sardesai. (2019). Roots of the Second Indochina War. In *Vietnam: Past and Present* (pp. 67–91). Routledge.

Schwenkel, C. (2009). Redemption, Reconciliation, and Salvation. In *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam* (pp. 25–49). Indiana University Press.

Wamsley, L. (2005, January 1). *The Fog of Peace*. Utne.

<https://www.utne.com/community/the-fog-of-peace/>

Optional Readings:

Nguyen, L.-H. T. (2012). *Hanoi's war: an international history of the war for peace in Vietnam*.

University Of North Carolina Press.

NinhB. (2018). *The sorrow of war: a novel of North Vietnam*. Anchor Books.

O'Brien, T. (1990). *The Things They Carried*. Houghton Mifflin.

—. (2011). *If I Die in a Combat Zone*. Crown.

Nguyen, V. T. (2015). *The Sympathizer*. Grove Press.

Module 2: Gender and Society (10 class hours)

In this module, students are exposed to a broad overview of gender issues in contemporary Vietnam. Taking a historical perspective, students examine ideologies, social institutions, and representations in these areas. Specific topics explored include traditional Confucian gender ideology, the traditional family system and marriage, sex, and sexuality. Students then explore the substance and intensity of gender relations in the context of Vietnam's recent economic growth and development.

Session 1: Gendered Society in Vietnam

This session examines the deep roots of Vietnamese culture regarding gender relations, from traditional to modern society. It presents the impacts of religions and beliefs of ancient Southeast Asian cultures, Buddhism and Confucianism on understanding of gender roles in Vietnamese society and its current status on gender equalities.

Assigned Readings:

Werner, J. (2009). *Gender, Household, and State in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam* (pp. 16- 38).
Routledge.

Earl, C. (2014). Chapter 1: Urban middle classes in postcolonial Saigon; Chapter 2: Living in twenty-first century Ho Chi Minh City. In *Vietnam's New Middle Classes*.
NIAS.

Khuat Thu Hong, Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao & Nguyen Huong Ngoc Quynh. (2015). Social Determinants of Gender Inequality in Vietnam. Technical Report. *Institute for Social Development Studies*: Hanoi.

Optional Readings:

Momsen, J. (2006) *Gender and Development* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.

Session 2: Family, Kinship and Patriarchy

This session examines historical perspectives on family values, kinship, and patriarchy from traditional society and the current shift toward nuclear families. It presents the realities of the everyday lives of Vietnamese women and men and the challenges they face regarding gender equality.

Assigned Readings:

Ngo Thi Ngan Binh. (2004). The Confucian four feminine virtues (tu duc): the old versus the new--*ke thua* versus *phat huy*. In L. Drummond & H. Rydstrøm (Eds.), *Gender practices in contemporary Vietnam*. NIAS.

Schuler, S. R., Hoang, T. A., et al. (2006). Constructions of gender in Vietnam: in pursuit of the 'Three Criteria'. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 8(5), 383–394.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050600858924>

Earl, C. (2014). Chapter 3: Social mobility in a multi-dimensional family; Chapter 4: Delaying and desiring marriage. In *Vietnam's New Middle Classes*. NIAS.

Optional Readings:

Keeping Silent is Dying - Results from the National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam. (2010). UN Women Asia Pacific.

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/05/results-from-the-national-study-on-domestic-violence-against-women-in-viet-nam>

Vu Manh Loi et al. (2010, July 1). *Gender-based violence: the case of Vietnam*. World Bank.
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/876861468761727749/Gender-based-violence-the-case-of-Vietnam>

Session 3: Sexuality in Vietnam

This session offers new insights on love and sexuality in Vietnam, including LGBT issues.

Assigned Readings:

Khuat Thu Hong, Le Bach Duong & Nguyen Ngoc Huong. (2009). *Sex, Easy to Joke About But Hard To Talk About*. Hanoi: ISDS.

Nguyen-Vo Thu-Huong. (2008). "Love in the Time of Neo-liberalism. In *Ironies of Freedom*. University of Washington.

Behind the Pleasure: Sexual Decision-Making Among High-Risk Men in Urban Vietnam. *Working Papers on HIV Prevention, Care, and Treatment in Vietnam*. 2010. FHI: Hanoi.

Session 4: Presentation of Oral History Project on Gender and Social Change

Students present the outcomes of their selected Oral History Project, reflect on their interviewing methods and fieldwork obstacles encountered.

Module 3: Ethnic Diversity (10 class hours)

Through site visits, readings, discussions, and community engagement activities in central and northern Vietnam, students develop informed understanding about Vietnam's multi-ethnic demographics and their public expressions. During the semester, and especially during this module, students explore the socio-cultural meanings of modern "Vietnamese" and examine how ethnic identity is expressed within the overarching modern national identity and gender identity in Vietnam. The focus is on a few larger ethnic groups, such as the majority Kinh, and the minority Khmer, Cham, and H'mong & Red Dao groups. During these excursions, students can identify potential ISP sites and ISP Advisors/Supporters.

Session 1: Introduction to Ethnicity in Vietnam

This session introduces ethnic groups and the regions of Vietnam. This session is held before the Mekong Delta excursion and introduces students' Khmer identities and culture in Mekong Delta and Cham ethnic groups in Central Vietnam.

Assigned Readings:

World Bank. (2009). Country Social Analysis: Ethnicity and Development in Vietnam - Summary

report. *World Bank Group*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/7d0381ec-8c13-5dbb-8aff-fba4a0b4b8d6>

Pham Quynh Phuong. (2012) Gender, Empowerment, Development: Gender Relations from perspectives of ethnic minorities in Vietnam. *Paper at the Institute of Social Studies, Economics and Environment*

Keyes.

Optional Readings:

Keyes, C. (2002). Presidential Address: "The Peoples of Asia"—Science and Politics in the Classification of Ethnic Groups in Thailand, China, and Vietnam. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61(4), 1163-1203. doi:10.2307/3096439

Sessions 2 & 3: Site Workshops in Hoi An and Hue

While visiting Hoi An Ancient Town and My Son sanctuary in central Vietnam, students learn about Cham art and music. A highlight of this excursion is visits to the imperial cities of Hue where student learn the new social change sites.

Two site-workshops in Hue and in Phong Nha- Ke Bang led by local specialists in their fields on regional culture, history, and current social change in the region.

- Workshop on History, Culture and Social Change of Hue Royal City
- Workshop on History, Culture and Ethnicity of Phong Nha in Quang Binh Province

Session 4: Ethnic minorities in Vietnam: Issues and Challenges

This session examines ethnic policies in Vietnam and how they are put into practice. Ethnic group responses to state policies are also discussed. This lecture is hosted by Hanoi National University and addresses ethnic groups in Vietnam's northern uplands; it also includes a field visit to the Ethnology Museum in Hanoi.

Assigned Readings:

Hai Anh Dang. (2010). *Vietnam: A Widening Poverty Gap for Ethnic Minorities*. Chapter 8. World Bank Report.1-35.

Nguyen Van Chinh. (2011). Representation of Ethnic Minority in Vietnamese Press. *Paper prepared with iSEE Institute: Hanoi*.

Multiple Sessions: Educational Excursion to the northern uplands of Sapa

Students experience Vietnamese indigenous cultures and observe local music, dress, embroidery, and other crafts. They learn about the cultures of Hmong, Red Dao, and Giay ethnic groups in several surrounding villages. During excursions, students may witness firsthand some activities of a Red Dao shaman and the indigo dyeing of Hmong women, and they may interact with local students there. The students examine tourist impacts on minorities groups in Sapa. These educational excursions enhance students' understanding of the regions by allowing them to directly observe the dynamics affecting ethnic minority communities in Vietnam. Students engage in Community Study Projects benefitting local NGOs, schools and H'mong villages. Through the excursion students are able to experience and better understand the forces

of tradition and assimilation at work among northern upland ethnic groups and peripheral peoples.

Assigned Readings:

Michaud, J. (2012). Hmong infrapolitics: a view from Vietnam. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(11), 1853–1873. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.615411>

Optional Readings

Michaud, J., & Turner, S. (2000). The Sa Pa marketplace, Lao Cai Province, Vietnam. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 41(1), 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8373.00108>

Baulch, R. (2008, January 1). *Ethnic Minority Underdevelopment in Vietnam: Full Research Report*. Dept for International Development; GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/ethnic-minority-underdevelopment-in-vietnam-full-research-report>

Dang, Nghiem Van. & Chu Thai Son. & Luu, Hung. (2000). *Ethnic minorities in Vietnam*. The Gioi Publishers

Final Session: Synthesis of the Course

At the end of the Grand Excursions in Hanoi, the final session is devoted to summarizing the main features of the course and highlighting lessons learned from all sessions and related educational excursions.

This session will help students prepare for the final exam.