

CET Syllabus of Record



Program: China Fieldwork Semester

Course Code/Course Title: (XZ/HIST 150) Grassroots China

Total Hours: 80

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: History / Anthropology, Asian Studies, Sociology

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description

This course is an intensive fieldwork experience in Xizhou, Yunnan Province that explores the history and anthropology of modern China from the rural perspective. Students learn about the countryside surrounding Xizhou—a center of cultural preservation along the Southwest Silk Road, and near the border with the Tibetan Plateau—through immersion in it, participating in research through collecting digital survey data related to the cultural landscape, and then analyzing, synthesizing, editing, and uploading that data into an online database and course website. The course explores local histories as counter-narratives to the history of the nation-state, environmental history and the changing cultural landscape of rural China, place formation and local identity along the ethnic and ecological frontier, and issues of economic development and sustainability in contemporary China.

Objectives

Through the Grassroots China coursework, students learn to:

- Apply research skills of data collection, oral history, interpretation of primary source texts, spatial analysis, and digital ethnography
- Analyze research data with reference to scholarly monographs and articles, discussed in seminar format
- Document, edit, and publish their research in a variety of formats: academic papers, database entries, short films, and hard copy guidebooks published in the *Xizhou Cultural Fieldguide* series
- Appreciate differences in teaching traditions through hands-on apprenticeships with local master artisans
- Work collaboratively with classmates and the people of Xizhou to document local knowledge and give voice to rural communities.

Course Requirements

Attendance requirements are outlined the CET Attendance Policy.

The course is project-oriented, with field activities and readings coordinated to address specific questions that are considered in each evening's group discussions in seminar format.

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Each student maintains a daily fieldwork journal, and groups of students collaborate to produce three documentary reports on vernacular architecture, temples, and traditional handicrafts in local rural communities.

In addition to the documentary reports, each student produces an individual final 8-10-page research project on a historical topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. The students' scholarly work is archived in the CFS online database, a ten-year longitudinal study of Xizhou, and also published in the *Xizhou Cultural Fieldguide* book series, in which each student's contribution is peer-reviewed by the group as a whole.

Methods of Evaluation

Students grades are formulated according to the following breakdown:

- Course Journal: 15%
- Participation (includes seminar discussion and fieldwork): 20%
- Documentation Report: 40%
- Final Research Project: 25%

Readings

Fairbank, John King, and Merle Goldman. *China: A New History, Second Enlarged Edition*. 2nd Revised & enlarged edition. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Eyferth, Jacob. *Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots: The Social History of a Community of Handicraft Papermakers in Rural Sichuan, 1920–2000*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009.

Eastman, Lloyd E. *Family, Fields, and Ancestors: Constancy and Change in China's Social and Economic History, 1550-1949*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Hsu, Francis L. K. *Under The Ancestors Shadow: Kinship, Personality & Social Mobility in China*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1967.

Knapp, Ronald G. *China's Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation*. Univ of Hawaii Press: 1999.

Flower, John and Pamela Leonard, *Moral Landscape in a Sichuan Village*
<http://www.sichuanvillage.org/>

Additional Resources

Additional articles as assigned.

CFS Film Series: Interdisciplinary for all CFS courses
To Live (director Zhang Yimou, 1994)
Red Sorghum (director Zhang Yimou, 1987)
The Last Emperor (director Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987)
Blue Kite (director Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1993)
Farewell My Concubine (director Chen Kaige, 1992)

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Up the Yangtze (director Yung Chang, 2009)
Old Dog (director Pema Tseden, 2011)
Tharlo (director Pema Tseden, 2015)

Outline of Course Content

Each unit comprises 2-4 weeks.

Unit 1 - **Place:** The Many Histories of China

Dali as frontier and center: On arrival in China, students participate in a two-day study tour of Beijing consisting of the Forbidden City, the National Museum, and the Temple of Heaven. Together these sites comprise the central core of Chinese History in which the nation-state is the subject and there is one monolithic, linear, and dominant narrative of “China”. This introduction frames the course by presenting the “one China” narrative that our experience in Xizhou challenges and de-centers. After arrival in our main study site of Xizhou, the first days of our course focus on the broad history of the Dali region and its relationship to the imperial center, as well as its own history as the center of the Nanzhao Kingdom. Our activities include visits to key historical sites in and around Dali, and a collective mapping of the historical changes in political topography.

Unit 2: **Dwelling**

Home: The first major fieldwork project focuses on the changing historical meanings of “home” in Xizhou, through hands-on documentation of traditional vernacular architecture. Groups document different houses in Xizhou, learning about the histories of particular families through their homes and family histories. Students conduct fieldwork with guidance from CFS staff, who help translate oral interviews. Work includes a documentary report, database entries in multimedia format, and publication of the collected reports in the *Xizhou Cultural Fieldguide* series.

Unit 3: **Belief**

Temples: The second fieldwork project focuses on the sacred landscape of Xizhou, looking at how temples constitute community centers around which local identity forms. Student groups document local “popular religion” temples as well as Buddhist temples and shrines. Work includes a documentary report, database entries in multimedia format, and publication of the collected reports in the *Xizhou Cultural Fieldguide* series.

Unit 4: **Work**

Apprenticeships: The third fieldwork project focuses on the continuities and transformations of work and exchange through a month-long apprenticeship with local craft masters. Students document local handicrafts through participant-observation of the “locations of skill” surrounding the craft, interviews, and direct learning from tie-dyers, cooks, carpenters, silversmiths, ritual musicians, wool felters, woodblock print makers, paper crafters and more, exploring how and why their work has changed. Work includes hands-on craft production, documentation in short films, a photography unit, “the intentional representation of space”, a documentary report, database entries in multimedia format, and publication of the collected reports in the *Xizhou Cultural Fieldguide* series.

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Unit 5: Diversity

Ethnicity and Identity: The fourth fieldwork project focuses on “mapping” the cultural markers that comprise the ethnic identity of minority nationalities in northwest Yunnan, including Dali, Lijiang, Gyalthang (“Shangri-la”) and Deqing. Students learn from minority nationalities their own conception of ethnic identity and also learn about the system of ethnic classification that predates the revolution to late imperial efforts to “pacify” and “standardize” non-Han Chinese. The mapping project is open-ended, and could involve trying to create a physical map of territory associated with particular minority nationalities over different historical periods, or creating representations of “cultural markers” such as articles of clothing, or timelines of important festivals.

Interconnections: Southwest Silk Road and “Ancient Tea–Horse Road”: During this unit of the course students will travel along the ancient trade routes that define this region of Southwest China. Xizhou is linked into a broader network of trade known as the “Southwest Silk Road”, connecting it with the silk and porcelain production center of Sichuan to the north and the route to Burma and the Indian Ocean to the south. Students first travel north along the Southwest Silk Road to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Shaxi, and then on to the Tibetan city of Gyalthang to study the east-west “tea for horses” trade route (chama gudao) connecting the Tibetan plateau with the rest of China. In Gyalthang, students experience and document the very different folkways of Tibetan people, comparing architecture, work, and sacred landscapes with the material gathered in Xizhou. Most importantly, students use the opportunity to visit this fragile and crucial ecology to focus on issues of sustainability and community development in contemporary China.

Unit 6: Modernity

Modernization and Urbanization: The final section of the course focuses on the processes of modernization at play in China, from urbanization to schemes of economic development. Students read about the “Western Development Policy” and dam construction, as well as the rise of the market economy in China and deep social shifts toward individualism. Students spend the last part of this unit of the course in Shanghai (where they are able to take AP exams), but students are also given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of modernization over the whole course of the program in rural Xizhou.