

# **WESTERN CHINA: The Rural and Minority Experience**

## **CHSP 350SA (2 credits)**

### **SYLLABUS**

#### **Course Objectives**

“Western China” is a course designed with two components, each with their own objectives:

1) **STUDY TOURS, READINGS AND LECTURES**

Objective: To introduce students to important aspects of life in Western China. Through study tours, lectures, readings and seminars, students will begin to understand some of the complexities of the changing patterns of urban and rural life, environmental challenges, and the minority experience in China. Weekly readings and short quizzes or presentations will provide content and assessment.

2) **LIVING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

Objective: To provide students and their host community opportunities to learn from each other. Through a commitment of at least two hours per week, students share their talents with the local community by tutoring English in a variety of venues, or volunteering for other projects in the Chengdu area. A weekly seminar provides a forum for sharing of experiences and insights as developed in short, structured essays.

#### **The Teaching-Learning Process**

No one professor can be an expert in all these fields - one would need to be a historian, sociologist, anthropologist, environmental scientist, wildlife biologist, religion scholar, arts expert, policy analyst and economist and perhaps belong to a minority community! The “teachers” for this course are your lecturers, book’s authors, even your study-tour guides, all coordinated by your PLU Site Director, who will function as your seminar leader. He or she will be reading, listening and learning alongside you as a fellow scholar as well as monitoring the quizzes or other responses to the readings and lectures, and the writing and presentation of the essays you will be writing for your “Living and Learning” component.

A book on Tibet and a packet of readings from a variety of other books will be your primary written academic sources. They will provide you with an initial glimpse into a given topic, and prepare you in advance for a lecture or a study tour so that you are prepared to understand as much as possible from the lecturers and tour guides. By reading and listening to the lectures you will also be prepared to participate actively in the seminars which will follow the lectures and study tours. Your Site Director will schedule the lectures and the seminars, working around your other Sichuan University course schedules. Usually the lectures are on Wednesday evenings, and the seminars on Sunday evenings, which allow for discussion of the lectures, readings and your Living and Learning essays. Due to scheduling challenges and availability of lecturers, the coordination of readings and lectures may not always be ideal; nonetheless, all of it will be valuable and it is your job in seminar to synthesize it and craft it into scholarly understanding.

#### **Required Readings**

*Western China Reading Packet* (or other articles assigned by the instructor)

Available through course website

## **Study Tours**

Five Study Tours of varying lengths and degrees of independence provide opportunities for travel to different areas of China, different ethnic regions and different socio-economic regions.

- 1) **August Orientation Study Tour: Beijing-Xian-Chengdu**  
10-day guided travel through three major cities by train and air provides experience in navigating cities, transportation systems and daily logistics: banking, meals, taxis, hotels, shopping and communication, as well as visiting some of the major historical and cultural sites of these three distinct cities.
- 2) **October Tibetan Experience Tour: Lhasa and Environs** (or Other Tibetan Region)  
7-day guided travel to the capital of ancient Tibet and the center of Tibetan Buddhism; visits to the Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple, Barkhor Market and other sites in and outside Lhasa. Students are advised to consider altitude sickness remedies, chemical or herbal, as the tour involves altitudes of up to 15,000 feet. *In the event that the Tibetan Autonomous Region is closed to foreigners (due to political unrest), another Tibetan region will be selected, probably northwestern Yunnan Province.*
- 3) **October Emei Mountain Tour: Religion, Wilderness, Wildlife Habitat and Tourism**  
2-day guided tour to one of China's four Buddhist sacred mountains, including the Leshan Giant Buddha- the world's largest carved rock Buddha figure. Students observe a Buddhist service, hike trails populated with wild monkeys, and witness how Chinese enjoy a day in the mountains as did their literati poet heroes of ages past.
- 4) **November Rural Sichuan Tour: Villages, Farms and Changing Rural Life**  
1-2 day exploration of a rural county outside Chengdu. The itinerary will be loose and flexible to allow spontaneity of interactions with people. Focus will be on tea or rice production, animal husbandry, village economic development, life in rural areas...
- 5) **December Shanghai Visit: The Future Global Economic Hub of Asia?**  
2-day unguided experience in one of the world's most modern and fast-growing cities. Use your Chinese to explore Shanghai on your own by subway, bus, taxi or walking: The European-built "Bund" river-front, the modernistic "Pudong" skyline with its towers and skyscrapers, and the elegant shopping districts of Nanjing Road and Huaihai Road. Fly from Shanghai to Beijing for your connecting flight home.

## **Living and Learning in China: Structured Essays**

These essays are a tool for organizing and developing your accumulating experience of and reflections upon your time in China. Specifically, they are a way for you to continually revisit your current progress toward meeting the learning objectives of the course. Four prompts encourage you to seek out and recognize learning moments when they occur and to focus your essay writing:

- 1) **CULTURAL COMPARISONS:** Identifying *things in Chinese culture* (ideas, practices, behaviors, cultural traditions, etc.) that seem different from corresponding things in your home culture, and identifying the sources (historical, cultural, ethnic, geographical, etc.) of the difference. These are things that exist in China itself. (*eg. comparing a Chinese supermarket, wedding or commonly-held opinion on something*)
- 2) **EXPERIENTIAL COMPARISONS:** Analyzing *experiences you have in China* that are different from corresponding experiences in your home culture. These are things that result from your own

- experience of China as a visitor. (*eg. comparing an interaction or conversation you had with a Chinese that surprised you, bothered you, or made you think about cultural differences*)
- 3) **LEARNING MOMENTS:** Collecting a set of “*incidents*”- special events or experiences that occurred that caused you an “*aha moment,*” and opened your eyes to a new thought or understanding. Aiming for several of these over the course of the program will ensure that you are *on the lookout* for these moments and appreciate them for their value when they occur. (*eg. a conversation about Taiwan, Tibet or the USA, a comment from a Chinese friend that made something become more clear, or a misunderstanding that taught you something*)
  - 4) **RECOGNITION OF CROSS-CULTURAL GROWTH:** Demonstrating how you learned to interact effectively and appropriately with Chinese in their culture and the experiences that led you to this ability. You may choose to write several of these entries over the course of the term as you realize you have moved significantly toward this final goal, or you may choose to wait until the end. This will be the topic of your final, somewhat extended (4-5 pages) entry, during your last week in China before returning to your home culture. This special final entry should be suitable both as an essay for a reader and as a presentation for an audience. You may have an opportunity to present these final essays back home to an audience on campus.

You will write a 2-page Living and Learning essay approximately once every two weeks (for a total of 6), to be shared in part or in whole at the weekly seminars. You will also compose a final (7<sup>th</sup>) essay of 4-5 pages during the final week in Chengdu that sums up your thoughts on the final prompt: Recognition of Cross-Cultural Growth. Each essay is sent by email to the Site Director for documentation. With permission of the student, some of these may be posted on a Program blog.

Each essay should be carefully considered, well-written, and carefully proof-read (if it is not, you can expect it to be returned to you to be re-written). Each should address one of the four prompts above. You may find yourself addressing several of them in one essay, but avoid letting the essay get too broad.

### **Course Assessment**

Assessment for this course must be of a sort that a non-expert faculty Site Director can confidently and fairly perform. It consists of three parts:

- 1) **Readings and Responses** (45%) Readings will be assigned for each Wednesday evening lecture, and used in each Sunday evening seminar. Quizzes, presentations or papers will be assigned by the instructor. Each reading should require about 1-2 hours for reading, note-taking and comprehension. Quizzes may be given to ensure comprehension of the main points, or short papers or presentations may be substituted by the instructor to serve the same purpose. These and your participation in discussions will be assessed as part of the final course grade.
- 2) **Living and Learning Essays** (45%) Six 2-page essays (due approximately once every two weeks) and one final extended essay constitute another large part of your final course grade.
- 3) **Active Participation** (10%) Attendance on all study tours, and active participation in all lectures and seminars is required unless specifically excused by the Site Director.

## TRAVEL AND LECTURE SCHEDULE

### **Study Tour 1: Entering China (August 22- Sept 2)**

August 22 Depart for China (arrive August 23 in afternoon/evening)

August 23-28 **Beijing: The Political Capital**

Visit The Great Wall, The Forbidden City, Beijing City Museum, Beijing Opera

August 29-31 **Xian: A Historical and Cultural Center**

Visit the Terracotta Warriors, The Great Wild Goose Pagoda, The Provincial Museum

September 1-3 **Chengdu: In the Heart of Western China**

Orientation to the City and Campus, Visit Temples and Shrines, City Center

LECTURES: (note: These are suggested topics, subject to change)

September Tibetan History

September Tibetan Buddhism

October Tibetan Society

### **Study Tour 2: Lhasa, Capital of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (week of October 1)**

Visit Sites in Lhasa, Gyantse, Xigatse

*(IF OPEN TO WESTERN VISITORS. Alternatives are planned if closed)*

Lectures: (in Chengdu)

October A Sichuan Tibetan Family Memoir

October Development in Sichuan

October Environmental Issues in China

October Panda and other Species/Habitat Preservation

### **Study Tour 3: Environment, Habitat, Religion and Tourism (Late October ??- ??)**

Visit a tea Museum, the Leshan Giant Buddha, Emei Mountain

Lectures: (in Chengdu)

November Life in a Village

November Other issues/topics of life in rural regions

### **Study Tour 4: The Village Experience (late November ?? - ??)**

Visit rural areas (To be determined)

Lectures: (in Chengdu)

November-December lectures TBA. These final topics change from year to year depending on speaker availability, recent issues of interest, etc.

### **Study Tour 5: Shanghai: Global Business and Financial Center**

A largely self-guided exploration of one of the world's most modern cities.

**Readings for Each Lecture** (have these read BEFORE the Wednesday evening lecture)

Selected by the Site Director and /or the lecturer either from the Western China Reading Packet or from articles or chapters available online or copied from available sources. These will be announced in the week before each lecture, along with the assignment (written responses, quiz preparation, presented reports, etc.)