

**MOUNTAIN ECOSYSTEMS OF CHINA,
THAILAND & THE TIBET BORDERLANDS:
THE CHINA PROJECT**

**Meeting Place: Los Angeles, CA
(Time & location determined later)**

April 12 – June 2, 2010

12 semester system units (equivalent to 18 quarter system units)

Program Fee \$ 2595 plus \$75 Application Fee

Thank you for your interest in the China Wildlands Studies program. This spring our team will spend 50 days exploring the mountains of northern Thailand, the river gorges of Yunnan, China, and high peaks along the eastern edge of Tibet. As you will discover, China's Himalayan frontier is a land of spectacular mountain wilderness and distinctive, indigenous culture, still little known to those from outside the area. Program activities include ecological field studies of tropical forests and alpine meadows, and excursions on foot to villages that lie several days' walk from the nearest pavement. We'll get acquainted with Thai, Chinese, and Tibetan people whose lives are far removed from the Western experience. The program culminates with a spectacular 16-day trek in the vicinity of Kawakarpo (Meili Shan), a snow mountain in far-eastern Tibet.

The Western media tends to paint China as a country that is culturally uniform and ecologically distressed. Some parts of China fit this generalization. But our program will demonstrate to you that China is a big and complicated land of contradictions. Yunnan Province, rugged, subtropical and scenically spectacular, is home to more wildlife and plant species than any other part of China. It is also culturally diverse: more than twenty distinct ethnic groups inhabit the province. For many years, this most fascinating region of Asia was largely closed to outsiders. Recent changes enable travelers like ourselves to visit places that remain extremely remote to Westerners.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Wildlands Studies program begins in Chiangmai, Thailand during *Songkran*, the “water-splashing festival.” After a brief (rather wet) orientation in Chiangmai, we'll travel north, gaining elevation through the hills of northern Thailand and the Yunnan Plateau of Southwest China, to high mountains and deep river gorges at the edge of the Tibet Plateau. Along the way, we've planned two backcountry trekking excursions (about a week each), and a five day orientation to China's urban landscapes in Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan Province. We finish the program with a spectacular 16-day trek in the vicinity of Kawakarpo, a beautifully sculpted, 22,000 foot snow mountain in far-eastern Tibet. Much of the area we'll visit is part of the Yunnan Great Rivers conservation project, in the upper reaches of the Salween, Mekong, and upper Yangzi Rivers.

The transition from Thailand to Tibet is globally outstanding. The folded hills north of Chiangmai hold large limestone caves, ancient archaeological sites, and distinctive tribal groups. Moving up into southwest China, the basin and range landscape of the Yunnan Plateau – at elevations of 6,000 to 9,000 feet – is a mosaic of intricately terraced agriculture, slip-faulted mountain ranges, and expansive freshwater lakes. A few days spent among the farming villages of Yunnan will tell us much about the lives of China's peasant farmers, who collectively make up about an eighth of the world's population. Onward towards Tibet, the mountains rise higher and the rivers cut deeper, sculpting some of the wildest topography on the planet. During the last third of

our program, we plan to delve deep into this country, trekking into remote valleys behind Kawakarpo snow mountain, along a route that is both biologically fascinating and deeply sacred to Tibetan people far and wide.

As we trek and camp, we will devote time to gathering new information about the places we are visiting. This field work may include interviews with local people, biological surveys of plant and animal species, or careful descriptions of habitat and human land-use patterns. The instructors' priority is to educate team members who are probably visiting this area for the first time. But we also hope our field work can make a modest, significant contribution to ecological understanding – a foundation for good conservation. The study sites we have chosen benchmark the transition from tropics to alpine. In each place, we hope to involve local experts who can help us understand the important ecological processes, social trends, development and conservation issues.

Most of our field sites are inhabited by people who have learned to support themselves in a rugged landscape of high biological diversity. Many of these culture groups, like the Lahu, Lisu, Yi, and Tibetans, have values and lifestyles that are fundamentally different from the dominant culture that surrounds them. Our experience among these people will teach us much about how minority groups cope with the policies of the majority, and how mountain peoples cope with change.

Nowadays our focal area, where China meets Southeast Asia and Tibet, is changing fast. Communities once isolated are discovering markets, information technology, and global culture. Governments, especially in China, are investing vast sums of money in infrastructure and social programs. On the bright side, a conservation ethic is beginning to take root in Yunnan and some people are working passionately to conserve the remaining biological and cultural diversity.

TEAM ACTIVITIES

Our orientation to Thailand takes place in the northern town of Chiangmai and coincides with the *Songkran* water-splashing festival – a time of hot weather, cold water, and great exuberance. After *Songkran*, we will visit Doi Suthep National Park, in the company of forest ecologists from Chiangmai University who are actively involved in a project to restore native forests. We will learn about the framework method of forest restoration, which has been embraced by Hmong villagers who live in Doi Suthep. Afterwards, we will travel by bus to the mountainous district of Pangmapha near the Burmese border where we will trek for several days, camping and sleeping in villager's homes.

Our journey in China starts with a flight from Chiangmai to the city of Kunming where we will enjoy a five-day orientation to China's dynamic urban landscape. Kunming is an astonishing city – colorful, hyperactive, and culturally diverse – that has been almost completely transformed over the past fifteen years of rapid economic growth. There is so much to be said about Chinese culture and society: during our time in Kunming we will try to cover some of the most critical topics. Then we'll join our Chinese colleagues and move into the field.

Our first excursion in China will be in the mountains that rise from the western part of the Yunnan Plateau. Our possible destinations include mid-elevation, Himalayan border ranges like the Ailao, Laojun, and Gaoligong mountains, which top out at elevations of 8,000 to 12,000 feet. Field work in this area may include surveys of rare plants, and an assessment of appropriate ecotourism activities for China's mountain backcountry. We may also participate in a forest restoration project based on the framework method that we learned about in Northern Thailand.

Our second field excursion in China is an extended journey into the high mountains that separate the upper reaches of the Mekong and Salween rivers and define the border between Yunnan and Tibet. Traveling on foot, we plan to explore the region that includes Yunnan's highest peak, 22,000 foot Kawakarpo. Some of the paths we'll follow have been used for centuries as pilgrimage routes, and pass through landscapes that are deeply sacred to the Tibetan people. On our Kawakarpo trek, field studies will include excursions off the main route into side valleys and other places of research interest. We also plan to recruit a group of Tibetans from a nearby village to assist us as guides and to help prepare food. Depending on environmental conditions, we'll have either ponies or porters to help carry the food and gear.

Throughout the program, team members get firsthand exposure to unfolding case studies in conservation, development, and cultural sustainability. Examples include the development of sacred landscapes for tourism, compensating villagers to quit farming steep slopes, and the dilemma of indigenous people living in protected areas. We will consider these kinds of issues in discussions amongst ourselves, with regional experts, and with local stakeholders. Learning on the program involves field work as described above, presentations by course instructors, interviews with local experts, and many days exploring the wild. Together, these activities give us a rich, broad-based educational experience and an unparalleled opportunity for intellectual and personal growth. Please note that previous field experience is not required to participate in our program. **All necessary skills to conduct our ecological fieldwork will be taught onsite in Asia, enabling all of us to participate fully.** We are confident that our seven weeks in Thailand and China region will be fascinating, adventurous and academically rewarding. We hope that you can join us.

ACADEMIC CREDIT

Students will receive 12 semester units (18 quarter units) that will be awarded through California State University Monterey Bay Extended Education. While students usually encounter no difficulties in transferring credit to their home campus, applicants should check with their advisors prior to enrolling. Our staff will be happy to explain the program in further detail to the applicant's advisor, if necessary. The China Project gives credit in three courses:

- ENVS 370, Environmental Wildlands Studies (4 semester system units)
- ENVS 371, Environmental Field Survey (4 units)
- ENVS 372, Wildlands Environment and Culture (4 units)

Letter grades (or pass/no pass, on request) are based upon the breadth of our endeavors. Grades are determined by: (1) examinations, (2) an oral presentation based on guided independent field work, (3) participation in class and field activities, (4) a simple thematic map of the project area, and (5) maintenance of standards for group safety and conduct.

Team members are expected to conduct themselves in a mature and responsible manner. The Wildlands Studies Program reserves the right to require any student to withdraw from the program if their conduct is detrimental to or incompatible with the interests, safety, or welfare of any course participants.

TEAM LOGISTICS

The Wildlands Studies Program in Thailand and China includes a vigorous mixture of backcountry trekking and exploration, as well as ecological field work in diverse natural habitats that range from tropical monsoon forests to alpine slopes.

Team members should be in reasonably good physical condition and should enjoy hiking and living outdoors. But even more important than this: team members must be able to respect and take pleasure from cultural norms and cuisines that differ significantly from the Euro-American. In fact, flexibility and cultural tolerance is probably the quality we will most value in prospective team members.

Arrangements will be available for team members to fly from Los Angeles, CA to Thailand. You can also arrange to join the group in Thailand if that works better for you. In this case, you will meet the group flight when it arrives. At the end of the program, you can decide whether you want to fly home on the scheduled date or remain on your own in Asia before using the return portion of your ticket.

Please understand that in this region of Asia travel arrangements can remain tentative until the traveling actually takes place. Weather conditions, road closures, political and bureaucratic considerations may affect our plans. Wildlands Studies has put together an innovative, unique program in China and Thailand. Group members need to be patient and prepared to adapt to changing situations. In northern Thailand, we will travel among our field sites by bus, pickup truck, or in *songtaews* (small private trucks hired by the day). In Yunnan, we'll travel in a van or small bus. To get from Thailand to China, we'll take a short (about 1.5 hour) flight from Chiangmai to Kunming, and at the end of the program we'll fly back to Chiangmai. We may also take one domestic flight within Yunnan, from Diqing (Zhongdian) to Kunming. All flights are scheduled, commercial jet routes.

PROJECT COSTS

Program Fee:	\$2595 plus \$75 Application Fee due February 1, 2010 Enrollment on a space-available basis after the fee due date until the program is full.
Estimated in-country Expenses:	\$1950 per person includes practically all group-related expenses, including meals, lodging, transportation, trekking and logistical support costs, instructor travel, group supplies and research costs. Other expenses not covered by the Program Expense Fee include a few meals during the first two days and the last two days of the program, your Indian visa cost (paid for prior to departure), a gratuity for our local staff, airport taxes, meals en route to/from Asia, and personal items like beverages, snacks, phone and internet.
Personal Spending Money:	\$450 (As described below, including Chinese visa, trekking staff gratuity, some meals, personal needs)
Airfare:	\$1600 (as of March 2009)

The In-country Expense Fee of \$1950 will cover most of your costs on the program. Specifically this Fee includes lodging, ground transportation, instructors' travel, logistical support, food for that portion of the program when we eat together in field locations (about 80% of the meals), group supplies, trekking costs, fees to host organizations, and national park entrance fees.

The Incountry Expense Fee *does not* include meals in the city where it is more convenient for team members to eat individually or in small groups (about 20% of all the meals), personal items like batteries, snacks, film, souvenirs, transportation on non program-related activities, personal communication costs (internet and phone), and visa costs. We will also ask each group member to contribute a gratuity of \$60 for our Chinese and Tibetan trekking staff who will help us on the 16-day Kawakarpo excursion. For those of us on a limited budget, personal expenses can easily be contained within the US \$6-\$8/day range, about \$300-\$400 for the Program. However, we recommend that you bring extra money to cover shopping binges and unexpected needs.

Students should inquire at the financial aid office of their home campus regarding the use of their loans or grants for this course. CSU Monterey Bay Extended Education/ Wildlands Studies are not responsible for non-refundable airline or other tickets or payments or any similar penalties that may be incurred as a result of any course cancellation or changes.

OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Before traveling abroad, you will need to have a passport that expires no earlier than December 2010. Arriving in Thailand, you get a free 30-day entry permit, so it is not necessary to get a Thai visa in advance. To enter China, you will need a Chinese tourist visa, preferably one which is valid for 60 days. This can be obtained from a Chinese consulate in the United States, or you can apply for your Chinese visa while we are in Chiangmai, Thailand. We'll provide more information about the Chinese visa in the detailed orientation packet we send this winter to team members who are enrolled in the program.

No other special documents are required to participate in this program, although we recommend you bring a second photo-ID like a driver's license, a copy of the photo page of your passport, and a card with your medical insurance information on it. If your passport is from a country other than the US or Canada, please check with Wildlands Studies because your visa rules might be different.

PRE-PROGRAM MAILINGS

Detailed information regarding gear/food, meeting plans, group expenses payment, medical recommendations and academic preparations will be sent to all team members in a subsequent logistics letter after enrollment.

PROGRAM INSTRUCTORS

Chris Carpenter works as an ecologist and conservation scientist for Wildlands Studies. Chris has conducted field studies and led natural history programs in Asia and North America for many years. Currently he teaches the Wildlands Studies programs in the Himalaya, Thailand, and China.

Thanit Kunkhajornphan. Ajan Thanit, a Chiangmai resident, has worked as a faculty member with the Payap University Research and Development Institute, specializing in the environmental and social sciences. She has consulted for non-government organizations and for the United Nations and organizes cultural exchange programs.