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Life in the Clouds

China is home to 56 different ethnic groups, each with their own special customs. One of the best places to experience some of these local cultures is in the Old Town of Lijiang, a place surrounded by high clouds and mountains. Learn about the Naxi and other groups as you walk the streets of this ancient city.

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Intermediate
1600 headwords

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Life in the Clouds

For Review Only

Before You Read

This story is about the Old Town of Lijiang and the **ethnic**¹ groups who live there. Lijiang is in Southwest China, in Yunnan **Province**,² near the borders of Tibet and Sichuan.



Lijiang, China

A. Life in the Clouds. Read the sentences. Then complete the paragraph with the correct forms of the underlined words or phrases.

Something ancient is something very old, perhaps dating back more than 1,000 years.
A group's culture is their way of life and the things that are special to that group.
To exist means to live or to be.
When something is in addition to something else, it is extra or added.
A region is an area of a country.
A valley is a low area of land between hills or mountains.

Yunnan Province, in Southwest China, is a beautiful, mountainous area. The name "Yunnan" is thought to mean "south of the colorful clouds." Of China's 56 ethnic groups, 52 can be found in Yunnan and 15 only live in the province, making it the most ethnically mixed (1) _____ in China. These groups (2) _____ in cities and towns in high mountain (3) _____. A good example of this is the city of Lijiang, a home for the Naxi and Yi peoples, (4) _____ many other ethnic groups who keep alive their own past and (5) _____. Some still live in homes or neighborhoods which have been pretty much untouched by the passing of time. As a(n) (6) _____ and colorful city surrounded by high mountains, Lijiang is full of places of cultural and historical interest, which is why its Old Town has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

¹**ethnic:** related to group characteristics, such as race, country, or origin
²**province:** one of the districts that some countries are divided into with its own local government

B. Ethnic Groups Infographic. Look at the infographic and the photos in this reader. Then answer the questions below.



Miao people, Guizhou



Lisu people, Yunnan

1. What do you think about the traditional clothing of China's ethnic minority groups?
2. What do you know about China's ethnic groups?
3. What would you like to learn about China's ethnic groups?

³**minority:** a small number or part of people in a country
⁴**autonomous:** independent, self-governing

*correct as of 2010

High up in northern Yunnan there is a small plain surrounded by mountains. By far the largest and tallest of these is Yulong Mountain to the north, which protects the plain from cold winds and heavy snows, and provides it with clear skies and a nice climate all year round. In this plain there is a small city filled with ancient buildings, bridges, and streams—Lijiang. The southern part of the city is charming but fairly modern.

However, the central part of the city is Dayan Old Town, where ancient buildings still remain dating back to the Ming **Dynasty**⁵ (1368–1644). A short distance farther north from there is Shuhe. Perhaps the oldest town in the region, it was famous for its trade in leather and fur. And a little farther north from there is the town of Baisha, which was an important market town on the Tea and Horse Road over a thousand years ago. These towns have protected their ancient architecture, ethnic cultures, and traditions. Walking down their streets, you can see life as it was hundreds of years ago, which is why these towns were added to the World Cultural Heritage List by UNESCO in 1997. Together they are known as Lijiang Old Town.

Track 1

⁵**dynasty:** a period of time when members of the same family rule a country

Lijiang first began to make its mark during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), when it became an important way station for the ancient Tea and Horse Road, which was used by **caravans**⁶ to carry tea over high mountain passes to Tibet, and then to Nepal, Myanmar, and India. In addition to tea, many other products were carried along the Tea and Horse Road, including salt and silk. While horses—and people—were used to carry tea along the road, one important item of trade were the horses themselves. By the 13th century Tibetans sometimes sent as many as 25,000 horses a year to central China in trade for tea.

⁶**caravan:** a group of people with vehicles or animals making a trip together



Main Idea

1. What is the main idea of the first paragraph on page 4?
2. Why was Lijiang so important to the Tea and Horse Road?

As a way station, Lijiang became a place where different cultures, traditions, and ethnic groups mixed together. These include the Han, Tibetans, and the Bai, in addition to about twenty other ethnic minority groups. However, the largest of these ethnic groups is the Naxi people.

Central to the Naxi culture is Dongba, which can mean many things. Among other things, Dongba is used as the name for a Naxi belief which teaches that people are half-siblings to nature. Dongba is also the name for an ancient writing system that uses both **pictographs**⁷ to provide meaning and characters to provide pronunciation. Dongba **shamans**⁸ use the system to record religious texts. The writing system is in many respects more of a way to remember the texts than anything else, as it does not directly record all the words used in the spoken language. Today, the pronunciation characters are no longer as commonly used, and Dongba shamans require special training to understand and use the pictographs. Ancient Dongba texts were listed in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2003. This writing system is thought to be more than 1,000 years old, and is still seen on buses and signs in Lijiang today. Finally, the word "Dongba" is often used today to talk about the traditional Naxi culture itself.



Dongbashaman

Example of Dongba text

⁷**pictograph:** a picture that is used as a symbol for a word

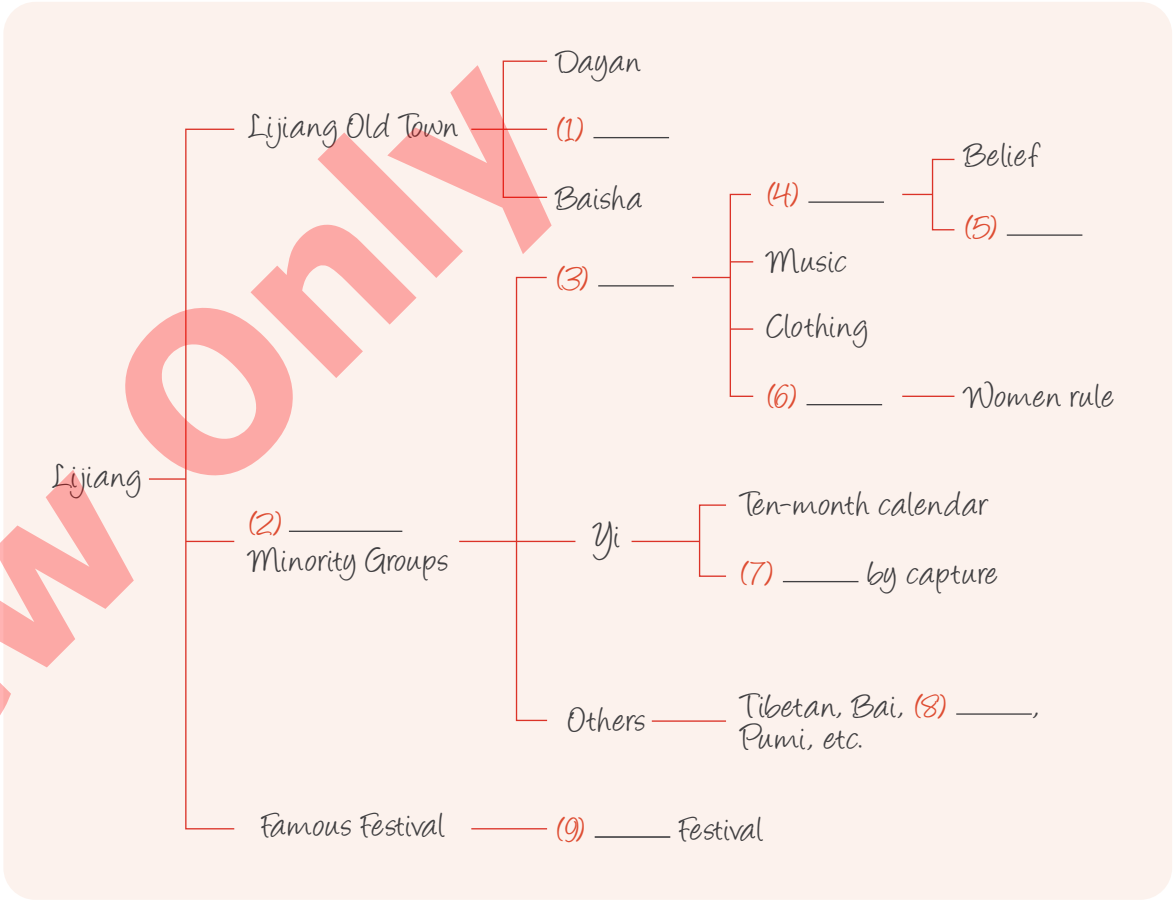
⁸**shaman:** a man who is believed to have spiritual powers to contact spirits or cure illnesses



A. Multiple Choice. Answer the questions below by choosing A, B, C, or D.

- By the 13th century, up to how many horses sent each year by Tibetans reached central China along the Tea and Horse Road?
A. 3,250,000.
B. 50,000.
C. 25,000.
D. 400,000.
- From the passage, what is NOT true about the Dongba writing system?
A. It uses pictures instead of an alphabet.
B. Naxi shamans use it to help them remember things.
C. Most Naxi people can write with it.
D. It can often be seen in Lijiang.
- From the first paragraph on page 12, we can infer that _____.
A. Mosuo men have gentle characters
B. Mosuo mothers have the most power
C. Mosuo men never see their wives and children
D. any Mosuo woman can tell a Mosuo man what to do
- In the third paragraph on page 12, what does *it* refer to?
A. Marriage by capture.
B. Marriage in general.
C. For a woman to be taken by force from her parents' home.
D. For a woman to have a man want to marry her.
- What is the most modern thing in Lijiang Old Town?
A. The streams that run through the town.
B. The things sold in its shops.
C. The restaurants with dried rib hot pot and warm buttered tea.
D. The tourists with cameras and phones.

B. Lijiang Concept Map. Complete the concept map with information from the passage.



C. Answer the Questions. Use information from the passage to answer the questions below.

- What does the Tea and Horse Road say about ancient China years ago?
- Which of the old customs mentioned in the passage seems most different from customs in your own culture? Which seems most similar?
- What about Lijiang would you like to learn more about? Why?

The Search for Shangri-La



Songzanlin Monastery

Track 2

When many people hear the name “Shangri-La,” immediately a hidden mountain paradise comes to mind, somewhere in southern China. However, the name actually comes from James Hilton’s popular 1933 novel, *Lost Horizon*, about a small group of westerners flying in the Himalayas. Their plane goes hundreds of miles off course and then crashes, and they find themselves in a beautiful valley where it seems that people never grow old, and everyone lives in perfect happiness and peace. In time, two of the men leave the valley, but then one changes his mind and decides to return. But can he find Shangri-La once he has left it? The novel ends with this mystery, along with the mystery of Shangri-La’s location.

Shangri-La has so captured the imagination of people that today a whole industry has been created in trying to find the town that served as its inspiration. The problem is that Hilton never really explained where Shangri-La was supposed to be located. Some of Hilton’s inspiration may have come from the idea of the legendary Tibetan paradise, which is called Shambala, but no one knows where Shambala is located. Some of his inspiration may have come from the writings and photography of Joseph Rock (1884–

1962), an Austrian-American explorer who traveled for years in Southwest China, including Yunnan, Sichuan, and Tibet. Rock even lived for a time in Lijiang and published a series of articles about the region from 1924 to 1935. Based upon this, the search for the true location of Shangri-La has centered on Rock’s travels. However, while Rock wrote in general about the area, he often did not say exactly which places he had visited. For this reason, a number of towns in Yunnan, Sichuan, and even Tibet have been called the true Shangri-La, as all of them seem like beautiful mountain paradises.

One of the most recent of these is Zhongdian, Yunnan, about 100 miles north of Lijiang. It fits the description of Shangri-La and it is almost certain that Rock visited the town. In 2001, officials changed the town’s name to “Shangri-La.” While it could be a place that Rock wrote about, the main reason for changing the name was to promote tourism. With so many towns in the area matching the description of Shangri-La, maybe instead of arguing which town is Shangri-La, we should agree that many of them are a sort of paradise on earth.

 **Word Count:** 401
Time: _____