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Building for the Long Term: Kaup works to keep track of fast-changing region

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Kaup works to keep track of a fast-changing region

TO DATE, KATE KAUP has taken nearly 30 trips to China. She has studied the region for two decades and lived there for four years.

She's watched a once struggling nation transform itself into the fourth largest economy in the world behind the United States, Japan and Germany.

But the scene she witnessed in Beijing in July 2008, weeks before the Summer Olympic Games, was enough to amaze even the most seasoned Asian traveler.

The normally bustling Beijing International Airport was calm and orderly. Traffic in the city, gridlocked just months before, flowed efficiently. Smog that typically choked the city and its 17 million residents had miraculously disappeared.

"It was beautiful," says Kaup. "There were flowers. The sky was blue."

The next month the country that had invested nearly \$40 billion in infrastructure upgrades and new construction hosted a nearly flawless Olympic Games.

Four months later, Kaup traveled to Beijing again. The airport noise, traffic and smog were back.

As Kaup can testify, China is a place where changes occur rapidly, and the public face is not always the real one.

Ethnic tensions and social unrest are ongoing challenges for the country's 60-year-old Communist government, says Kaup, who holds Furman's Herman N. Hipp University Professorship. The conflicts, some of them violent, often do not generate international headlines because of government secrecy and their rural location.

Kaup, in fact, was twice forced to rework portions of this fall's study abroad trip to China after disruptions broke out in both the southern and northern regions of Yunnan Province. Kaup, who traveled to China for the final seven weeks of the program, monitored both situations by telephoning and e-mailing contacts in the regions. Ultimately, she decided to take the Furman group to China's poorest province, Guizhou, to explore minority cultures, economic development and sustainability issues.

Endowed by the family of Herman N. Hipp '35, a late Greenville businessman and civic leader, the Hipp Professorship is a three-year

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appointment that supports junior faculty members of extraordinary promise. Kaup, a graduate of Princeton who earned her advanced degrees from the University of Virginia, says that the professorship funds travel and research that are crucial to helping her — and the Department of Asian Studies, which she chairs — nurture and maintain contacts in the fast-changing region.

"If you don't go to China for even a year, you quickly become outdated and your sources grow cold," says Kaup, who came to Furman in 1997 and is also a member of the political science department.

A specialist in China's treatment of ethnic minorities, Kaup served a one-year term on the Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC) in 2005. She was a co-author of an annual report to the president and Congress designed to help shape China policy.

More recently, she was one of 20 scholars selected by the National Committee on United States-China Relations to serve as a Public Intellectual Fellow. The Fellows are chosen based on their potential to become leading contributors to developing public policy and education about China.

As part of the program Kaup attended a four-day workshop in San Francisco in early October. There she delivered a talk on "Domestic Challenges to China's Peaceful Development." She also met with the director of the influential human rights organization Dui Hua and with William Perry, former Secretary of Defense, and she talked with investors about venture capitalism in China.

While traveling with the Furman group this fall, Kaup is doing research for a book that will examine the implementation of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, which guarantees many rights to Chinese minorities but is frequently applied arbitrarily by the government. Her co-author is He Zhengting, a former director of the Politics and Law Office of the Yunnan Province Ethnic Affairs Commission.

"Most policy studies of China's 55 minority groups look only at the conflicts in Tibet and Xinjiang," she says. "Instead, we'll visit four counties in Yunnan to interview minority leaders who have successfully utilized the autonomy law."

— JOHN ROBERTS