On my birthday, I usually stay away, quietly taking stock of the year and the years. So again this year on that day I took a break and contemplated, though only briefly.

Sixty-one seems a ripe age. If I were to live as long as my father, who is healthy and still active at 91, two-thirds of my life has passed. I recently began counting my days backwards, in years remaining rather than in forward calculation. Thus I may have 30 years left, if I am lucky.

But luck can be translated as fate, which holds rein over us like an invisible hand, always ready to extract a high toll on our health, well being, or even life. It holds us hostage, though at times we tend to forget it. As a minority shareholder of our life, we nonetheless can leverage or hedge ourselves, a term common to investors and the business world these days. That’s how I exercise my share, in determining my life and destiny.

It reinforces a notion. Some people are successful because they are lucky. Others are successful because they are hard working. Then there are those who succeed because they use their brains wisely, are scientific in methodology, systematic and analytical, and more importantly, execute with finesse. Rare individuals are endowed with all three of the above.

For example, in fundraising I try to think like a scientist, finding an inner system and dynamics that works towards my advantage. I look at the stock market not to invest, but to see when would be a good time to approach my supporters, and when to avoid them. The market is a reasonable gauge of when they are likely to feel generous. I study their bookshelf or magazine rack, to see which CERS project best matches their interest. After all, charity and philanthropy is at times like another type of shopping. We all like to shop for projects that deserve our support.

But the ultimate state of most professions, be it in investment, politics, or even with our work in conservation, is an art. If you are the best investor, you do it like an artist, with style, flair, and good taste. Making a profit becomes a given. Like having worthy meaning for conservation is a given and producing results should become guaranteed. To accomplish that, we have to behave like good managers of the financial support given us. The currency fluctuation of the renminbi has been on the upswing and affected our cost of operation in China. This demands even more prudent fiscal measures on our part to remain successful in producing equitable results.

We at CERS have delivered years of qualified and quantified results. Let’s now begin conducting our work as an art. I like to think like an artist, and hope that I also act like one. After all, one of my majors in college was art. That would be the final challenge for an old hand in exploration and conservation.
During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, the People’s Commune was hailed as the epitome of a society model. “People’s Commune is Good” was a political slogan that ruled the day. I came to China early enough (1974) to have visited many communes, from large ones like the Red Star Commune outside of Beijing, to small ones like the Three-Eight Commune in the countryside of rural Guangdong, deriving its name from its earlier market days of 3 and 8 of the monthly calendar.

But such exposure to the social fabric of China’s more “progressive” days has long become tiny threads of memory. Ever since Deng Xiaoping unleashed his economic reforms in 1979, and subsequent distribution of land to its tillers in the countryside, the communes have become a word of the past, existing only in history books. I thought the once-revered practice of co-operatives had disappeared altogether. That is, until I visited the most remote part of northern Tibet on a recent expedition.

When Qiren, a local official, told me China’s last remaining people’s commune was nearby, I could hardly believe my ears. When he reaffirmed his statement, corroborated by

Wong How Man
Garcho, Tibet - July 10, 2010

TOP: A nomad girl with yak hair tent.
BOTTOM: Auju, Chief of the Garcho Commune in northern Tibet.
his assistant, my eyes widened. “It is along the way where you wanted to go observe wildlife, just 60 kilometers from here,” Qiren said. My team and I were at Sheunghu, or Twin Lakes District of the Changtang plateau, deep inside the heartland of Tibet. Our next stop, quite naturally, was Garcho Commune.

“How old are you?” I asked Auju, the commune chief. “Twenty-nine,” he answered with a tone of confidence as if that was a mature age. Auju is originally from Lhasa and has been here for three years as head of the co-operative, still known by everyone as a People’s Commune. But in the corridor of this modest single-storied government building, I see a number of similar age youngsters hanging around, each wearing a name tag over a ribbon on their chest. All of them came from Lhasa, educated youth working as volunteers here. Maybe for the new generation, living and being associated with a commune carries an aura of romance, not unlike today’s Che Guevara followers who try to uphold the icon of international revolution 40 years after his death.

This is what happened at Garcho, according to Auju. Between 1980 and 1982, all of China was going through major changes. Communes were broken down as land and ownership of every production means was becoming privatized, with the exception of large-scale industry and state enterprises. Farmers received their plot of land and herders their livestock with associated grazing pastures. The impact reached far and wide into
every corner of the country, including even distant communities of Tibet.

When it was Garcho Commune’s turn, like elsewhere it went through a democratic process of a community vote for the disintegration of their previous structure. Surprisingly an overwhelming majority of the families (over 70%) voted to keep to the co-operative-based commune as it had existed since its inception on their migration into the region in 1974. As a result, Garcho stayed as a People’s Commune with the same collective and administrative structure, though by then the politically celebrated revolutionary committee was abolished, and policies and decisions were left to an elected committee, today with five representatives. This last commune, something archaic even within communist terms, was able to survive to this day. Two years ago, to fully legalize their communal existence, Garcho registered itself as an agricultural nomadic cooperative unit with their higher government political prefecture at Naqu. However within this commune few vestiges remain of its traditional political overtone.

“We have two villages, 101 households, 516 persons of whom 395 are counted as labor with average per capita income of 5,924 yuan of which 4,322 is cash, a total of 32,614 livestock, 43 students in two classes, four teachers who are all university or higher institution graduates, seven medical personnel of which three are university grads with one local traditional Tibetan doctor, and no monk,” Auju said, reciting numbers and demographics not unlike party secretaries of revolutionary committees of earlier days. He also produced charts and data of production results and collectively-owned production implements in a large black folder-like book, just to show me how records are kept and economic data tracked. I nodded dutifully as if impressed before turning my attention to other matters.

I asked Auji the most essential question: Why did the people vote to stay together as a commune? He noted that at such high elevation - an average altitude of 5,000 meters and this village standing at 4,800 meters - the climate is extreme. Everything existing is marginal. Any major upset, such as a severe ▶
snowstorm or other calamities in the summer, could wipe out the commune’s livestock and other provisions. Collectively, commune members have a much better chance of survival than do families trying to maintain single independent units. He noted it is not unusual to have some form of natural disaster in nine out of ten years.

“All the production work, and labor, reward are calculated based on a point system, similar to how communes were run in the old days throughout the country. Retirees, men at 68 and women 65, are given 500 extra points per month, redeemable as 300 renminbi. No family is considered a poor household. All medical costs are covered by the commune,” Auju explained.

He admitted that despite some obvious advantages, workers under a communal system tend to have less initiative because of the lack of economic rewards. The distribution system, though seemingly fair, cannot provide as much impetus for economic advancement and progress as a fully privatized structure can. Everything has to be collectively planned and agreed upon before implementation. “We have 100% student enrollment rate. Not only education is free, up to fourth grade, we actually pay each family an incentive for sending their kids to school,” Auju said proudly. He urged me to visit the school with 43 students, 16 of whom came from Village Two some distance away. All room and board is provided free of charge. Commune members have another unique source of pride: The village has no police or police station as all disputes can be settled through collective discussion, arbitration, and negotiation.

“Our biggest problems these days are water and power,” lamented Auju. “The huge lake near the village, it is all salty. Only seasonal streams provide fresh water we need, and in the winter we haul chunks of ice from the river to supply us. As with power, it is gradually solved as a few windmills and solar panels recently installed have replaced the diesel generator,” he added.

Seeing the satellite TV antenna outside in the courtyard, I asked whether the World Cup was a big hit here. “Not at all, no one watches soccer. We only tune into Tibet Channel One of Lhasa,” Auju said. The courtyards as well as the streets are exceptionally clean and spotless, unlike other Tibetan villages where each household has refuse and junk left in its front or back yard as well as common area.

As we drove off into the distant hills, we made a stop at a nomad’s camp with two yak-hair tents. Inside it was exceptionally orderly and clean, unlike other nomad’s tents I have visited. After visiting with two ladies tending to their sheep and yak herds, I
tried to negotiate to buy some utilitarian objects for our artifact collection. They agreed to sell a used and worn wool blanket for 130 yuan, and a hand-woven salt pouch together with a sling for driving livestock for 20 yuan. When I saw some finer blankets and two yak-hair saddle bags, the ladies did not want to sell, saying those items were communal property. No matter how I tried to persuade them by offering higher prices, they simply would not budge. It turned out they took collective ownership of material assets extremely seriously.

As I walked out of the tent, I caught a glimpse of a small Mao button attached to an old jacket hanging on a pole. At 4,800 meters elevation, Garcho is closer to heaven. And if Mao were to look down from heaven, he may have a smile on his face, knowing that his creation of the People’s Commune stood the test of time, even 35 years after his death in this most distant corner of the Tibetan plateau.
Who’s the Winner?

Song Hao Kun
Translated by Roger Yung - August 2, 2010
Ruoqiang county’s Qimantage village is situated deep inside the Arjin Mountain in Xinjiang. The area under its administration is 45,000 square kilometers, so area-wise it is the largest village in China. Its total population, however, is 18. Seven are herders and the rest are village government officials. Each of these 18 residents has a “share” of more than 2,000 square kilometers of land. This has won the village another “first” in China’s book of records.

In China, ‘village’ is the smallest administrative unit in the Government system and village chief is the lowest in the nation’s leadership hierarchy. In general, the area and population of a Chinese village range from several hundred to several thousand square kilometers and several thousand to tens of thousand respectively. If you want to have a clearer picture of how big Qimantage village is, consider a place larger than Taiwan or 40 times the size of Hong Kong. A Qimantage villager therefore has a “share” of land the size of two Hong Kongs.

For a village encompassing such vast area but having only two households is something difficult to imagine. Why in the first place China decided to establish village administration here is difficult to trace now. In the 1980s, the village area was originally part of Ruoqiang county’s Nanshan district. The place, which was more than 500 kilometers away from the Ruoqiang township and had no access roads, was then a wildlife paradise with no human settlement whatsoever. Only nine herders’ families entered the area seasonally to graze their livestock. There are two explanations behind the course of events that prompted the authorities to establish village administration in this remote grassland.

In the early ‘80s, gold sand was discovered in the region. People in Qinghai, Ganzu and Xinjiang heard this and came for the gold. In the course of gold mining, they fought each other over the control of mining spots and other resources. Alarmed by the chaos these miners created, the Ruoqiang authorities decided to establish herders settlements and village administration.

MAIN: Landscape terrain of the Arjin Mountain.
LEFT TO RIGHT: Sign of Yixikepati Reserve Station; Newly built quarters of the village; traditional mud houses of the villagers.
in the region. The aim was to end the chaos and, more importantly, to declare Ruoqiang’s role entitlement to the region’s resources to prevent covetous attempts by outsiders.

Also in the early ’80s, to protect and conserve wildlife in the Qinghai Tibetan plateau, China drew up plans to set up a natural reserve in the Arjin Mountain region. All human activities within the reserve would be prohibited. Before these plans were finalized, the leadership of the Ruoqiang Country Government promptly moved many herders into Qimantage and established village administration there. This meant the place was inhabited, and the herders could not be prevented from living there. The purpose was to pave the way for gold mining or using the place as a livestock grazing ground, in future.

Which version is true is immaterial. The fact is that, in 1983, the Ruoqiang county government appealed and mobilized its herders to move to Qimantage. Many incentives including funds for building houses or tents, were offered to help those willing to go to start a new life there. In the end 33 households went. They were together given a total of 36,000 sheep, which the Ruoqiang purchased from Golmud and Aksay. These were given to them free of charge.

After these herders settled down and the village government was set up, the Ruoqiang county authorities made some investments. From 1993
to 1995, it helped the herders put up livestock fences on 120,000 acres of land. Starting in 2001, it constructed a road to the herders’ settlement point, a village government office and a solar power station, at a cost of about 30 million yuan. In other words, it spent about 1 million yuan per household, a record amount in China’s history.

Qimantage was originally a wildlife paradise full of wild yaks, wild asses and Tibetan antelopes. The famous Shazi Spring was also situated here. But with the herders’ moving in, these animals have retreated and lost their homeland.

A wildlife paradise is not necessarily a human paradise. As a result of excessive grazing on the fenced land, the grass rapidly regressed and the number of sheep decreased. By 1996, only about 5,000 sheep were left. Herders then began to move out. Some went to Tasheshayi to cultivate dates and sweet melons, others returned to where they came from to make a living. Eventually only two households remained.

Qimatage means ‘land of grass and flowers’ in the Uygur language. It is human nature to love flowers, but picking them is a bad habit. Real flower lovers should realize they should allow the flowers to blossom and flourish in their natural state, rather than picking and owning them selfishly. Snatching wildlife’s habitat for grassland resources is just like picking flowers. To possess and use the grasslands for profit, the Ruoqiang authorities have spent more than 30 million yuan in capital outlay and also 200,000 yuan a year to finance the operation of the village government. All this money has gone to waste as the grass has regressed, and there are now only two households willing to stay on. The Ruoqiang authorities are therefore losers. The poor wildlife are also losers - they lost their habitat. No party has won and damage has been done to the environment. Let’s hope this can be prevented in future.
It was during the 2010 expedition that I came to understand the things I hate about expeditions are the things that make them so special.

Firstly, I hate flying. I don’t know why, but the more I fly, the more I dislike it. Strangely though, my job also requires me to occasionally fly in helicopters, balloons and light aircraft – and I don’t have a problem with them. In fact, I enjoy the thrill. I just hate long-haul flights on large jet planes. But if it weren’t for those flights, I wouldn’t have the opportunity to go on expedition, and a couple of days of unnerving travel by air is soon forgotten when you set out on expedition and see the beautiful China landscape flitting by your Land Rover window.

Secondly, I really don’t like waking up early. I’m more of an evening guy. My brain doesn’t function properly before 9am. But you don’t have an option of sleeping in on expedition. And the fact is, those early mornings often provide the most stunning views – a beautiful sunrise, early morning mists on mountain tops, a landscape transformed by a dusting of fresh snow soon to melt away as the sun rises. It is the perfect start to the day.

Thirdly, I hate driving along bumpy, dusty roads. The monotony of the continued bouncing up and down, coupled with the fine dust that manages to get into everything, in particular your camera gear, is all tiresome. But it takes up most of the time on expedition.

But it is these loathsome roads that promise so much. They deliver us to new pastures, arriving at places seldom visited by others, offering opportunities to explore and discover new things. You don’t get anywhere new driving on motorways. They take you to places where others have already been, and in large numbers. To explore, you need to seek out those dusty roads. They also tend to have the most stunning views.

Fourthly, I hate not achieving our objectives. This was the case this year as we were unable to reach the calving ground of the Tibetan antelope. You have to be philosophical to see the silver lining to this particular cloud, but it does mean that we have to go back next year. As disappointing as it was, it did allow us to do more exploring and see some amazing sites that we may not have otherwise seen.

Finally, I don’t like being away from home for long periods. I like my creature comforts, and the company of my family - dogs, cat and fiancé or wife, depending on when you read this.

But rare animals tend to be pretty unaccommodating, living in remote places that take some travel to reach. And after being away for so long, one always returns with a greater appreciation for what one has – be it living in Singapore, having a beautiful
woman as my partner, or having a great job that allows me the opportunity to travel and experience so many amazing things.

Inevitably, if you go on expedition you will have to do things you don’t like, even hate. Things will happen that you don’t like, even hate. But the truth is that the lower the lows, the higher the highs, and if you are game enough to suffer the hardships, then the rewards will more than make up for it. So, bring on the long flights, early mornings, bumpy dusty roads, and many days away from home. But please, let us achieve our objective next year.
Imagine a place larger in size than Taiwan, but with only two families living inside its precinct, and herds upon herds of rare wildlife roaming free. That is a very romantic image of a place on this planet. And that is essentially what the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve holds in my mind. But romance usually doesn’t last long, before reality sets in.

First we lost our Chief Scientist Bill Bleisch. Shortly after he joined our expedition for four nights camping out on the plateau, he was recalled to his job by some urgent matters. Then we evacuated three guests who joined us into the Arjin Mountain. On our first night at camp at 4,200 meters altitude, Victor, Mona and son Jeremy came down with nausea, headache, heartburn - all symptoms of altitude sickness. Despite using our compression chamber and constantly administering oxygen through a state-of-the-art air concentrator machine, only Mona had any significant improvement. As they were traveling as a family, they had to be extracted before conditions worsened as we were expecting to reach a more prohibitive elevation of 4,800 meters the following day.

Then the heavens pitched themselves against us, soaking us with rain for days. When it was not raining, it was hailing or snowing. Though it was near the end of June, night time temperatures lingered around zero and most mornings we had frost on our tents. The distant hills were all capped with snow, providing a winter-like landscape. In our attempt to get to the Tibetan Antelope calving ground which we first discovered in 1998, our vehicles got mired in the mud five times in a single morning. Had it not been for the power winch, we could have been stuck for days. We failed after several strenuous efforts in locating a new route and got the cars stuck in mud anew.

In discussions with Zhang Huibin, our collaborator and Vice-Director of the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve, we decided to abandon our plan to visit the calving ground. The decision did not come easy to Zhang as his team traveling with us had intended to begin a capturing program to secure up to two dozen young antelopes for research and experiments in raising these highly valued animals. With the trip aborted, they would have to wait another year for the next calving season.

It came as a great disappointment to everyone, especially those in our team who had never been to the calving ground before. To see several thousand antelopes converging after a long migration and giving birth is almost like watching a miracle of nature. Chris, our filmmaker, felt doubly defeated as that evening at the Reserve station he watched on TV as Germany disqualified his home team England. It seemed coincidental, but four years ago during the last World Cup, my team was also in the Arjin Mountain, just exiting the calving ground, and hunkering down in a gold miners’ roadside tent while watching Portugal defeat England.

In normal years, this high desert is rather dry and we can access the calving ground to the west of this sprawling nature reserve within three days of driving from entering the reserve. There are no roads, only tracks where other vehicles had driven through before. But this year, the excessive rain had made progress along these tracks next to impossible.

As leader of the expedition, I had to stay calm, and assured my team that we would instead focus on other wildlife, including
the Wild Yak, Wild Ass, male Antelope, and maybe even the elusive Argali Big Horn Sheep. This Plan B would salvage for us some legitimate research and filming after having made such a huge effort to get here, over two weeks on the road since departing our Zhongdian Center in Yunnan. For almost 20 years since my first arrival here in 1991, the Arjin Mountain has been a major focus for continuing wildlife research and conservation support of CERS. I have returned a total of seven times.

Heading east toward Duck Spring Reserve Station, we saw a healthy population of wildlife spread out along the way. The pasture is greener than other years, and in one valley, we saw a huge herd of Tibetan Wild Ass numbering almost 300. A herd of 25 Wild Yak was also spotted. Though no more poaching was reported in recent years, there was a substantial increase in human activities as large groups of miners began excavating and quarrying in many regions of the nature reserve. There are at least nine large geology groups overrunning the reserve in search of other minerals and potential mines. This may explain why the animals are still shy and stampede whenever they see our vehicles approaching.

Up until 10 years ago, mining activities were mainly small-time operations, with Muslim bosses of neighboring provinces contracting their kindred people to come in with hand-tractors. Today, the operators are big-time bosses, moving in huge excavation machines and hundreds of workers at each site. The damage and defacing of the landscape is phenomenal. What’s more disturbing is that both nearby nature reserves, the Kekexili Reserve in Qinghai and the Changtang Reserve of Tibet, were able to stop miners from gaining entry, whereas Xinjiang had given legal permit for miners to explore and excavate throughout the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve. Such wholesale destruction of the environment is only beneficial to a handful of newly-minted mining barons, and compromises the government’s policy on conservation as well as sacrificing the natural riches of our future generations.

While in the eastern part of the nature reserve, we were pleased to see fewer mining activities. Instead we saw many pairing Black-necked Cranes, as well as more than 10 sub-adults. Near Tufanzhi Reserve Station, we observed another herd of Wild Ass numbering over 300. The scattering of small herds of Wild Yak throughout the sand dunes above the wetland of Yakaxipati Lake was also very encouraging, giving indication of a healthy population distribution. We made plans for our scientists to return in September to study the mating behavior of the Wild Yak in this region. CERS also made another three-year pledge to support the nature reserve’s research efforts.

If mining were to be curtailed and the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve truly protected, it would have immense potential in the future. This Eden of plateau wildlife would be like the Serengeti of Asia, and future generations in China could appreciate its beauty without having to envy what African safari has to offer. These may be lofty goals for our next generation. But let’s hope the damage is not irreversible and the repairs made too late. This year, we may have been defeated in our attempt to gain access to the Antelope calving ground. Next season, heaven may bestow upon us finer weather and we will return again.

The spirit of exploration is not just about discovery and success, but the quest for knowledge and perseverance. In that sense, I trust that my team has adequately accomplished its goals during this trying summer expedition of 2010.
All was quiet inside the Assembly Hall of this faraway Tibetan monastery. It was barely 6:45am and the monks were assembled and seated just 15 minutes earlier, called to morning service by the long and low tone of the conch horn. A couple of student monks, barely six or seven years old, came in late and quick-stepped to their padded seats. Looking at the number of tiny pairs of shoes outside the hall, there must be over 40 little ones among the young monks.

The low-tone chanting led by a few senior monks started at 6:30am sharp. Thereafter tea was served in seemingly unlimited quantity as four teenage monks each carrying a kettle went up and down the aisles pouring tea into individual bowls. Following this tea-ceremony routine, some monks rolled their tsamba, or parched barley, into balls and began eating their morning meal. All this was done quietly in near darkness, with the exception of lines of butter lamps in front of the altar.

We were spending the night at Tumu Monastery, deep inside western Sichuan where years ago CERS had a project to construct dams and a retaining wall to protect this ancient monastery against the onslaught of a mudslide from the hills behind. It was most gratifying to see that the monks were inspired by our help and built more dams themselves to further safeguard their monastery. The initiation of young monks also added a lot of new life to this once almost dead and ghostly institution, known for its exquisite murals, scholarship, and practice in Tibetan medicine.

As my thoughts were carried to my first visit 20 years ago, suddenly I heard a loud and low “burp” sound coming from the line of monks. Someone must have finished a hearty meal as he interrupted the silence of the morning. This simple expression of contentment sent a signal for me to reflect on the costly and luxurious lifestyles of many high monks on the Tibetan plateau today. Thankfully, Tumu monastery is not among those fancier recipients of excessive alms whose inhabitants fall victim to decadent lifestyles.

The House of Renkang, the modest home and birthplace of the 7th Dalai Lama, is another site which shares ties with CERS. Our staff engaged in the meritorious act of repairing its leaky roof some years ago. For this humble effort, my team and I have always been treated as special guests when we pass through Litang, at an elevation of 4,000 meters. We were invited to stay...
overnight at the attached house belonging to Tashi Rinpoche, a descendent of the 7th Dalai. Over the years, we have been blessed with good fortune and opportunities to get involved in Tibetan culture and religious sites. This also prompts me to become a more critical about some undesirable developments I have seen on the plateau.

In recent years, as Tibetans acquired wealth and were able to make more substantial contributions to the monasteries or their religious gurus. Two of the most important contributors to private Tibetan wealth have been Masutake mushrooms and the Caterpillar fungus. The latter has become so crucial to the Tibetan economy that it has triggered riots as different factions fought for harvest rights across the plateau.

Renjen is a 54-year-old Tibetan living in a nomad’s tent of Nidor, the furthest village of Serta County bordering Sichuan and Qinghai province. He speaks fluent Mandarin, unlike many Tibetans of the area who can hardly understand any Chinese. He spent five years in elementary school at Serta and can speak and read a little Chinese, Renjen told me. He had a cloth bag full of Caterpillar fungus, known as congcao in Chinese, from this season’s harvest. Yesterday alone, he collected 30 pieces during a long hard day of work crawling on the ground to spot the tiny tail of this worm-like plant. Today he sold each piece for seven yuan; in the city, large, clean and dry ones fetch 30 yuan or more apiece. Thirty years ago, the same item would sell for about 10 fen each.

This year, Renjen has made about 30,000 yuan for his family of eight, he told me. Families who are luckier may make over 100,000 yuan, he added, perhaps to underscore that his fortune was rather modest. When I asked how much he gave to the monastery, he said 5,000 yuan, but said some wealthier families make much larger donations. Renjen’s donation is a good 15% of his income. No wonder the temples are growing more glamorous and the monks were getting richer.

Today it is not unusual to see monks dressed in their saffron-colored silk robes, driving the latest model Toyota or Mitsubishi four-wheel drive, and speeding along the newly paved roads throughout the plateau. Even many remote monasteries we drove past have added new edifices or gold-plated rooflines to update their formerly humble look. Behind all these facades of grace and glamour is the collective wealth of the Tibetan people.

Such affluence is also reflected in the constant flow of material goods into the Tibetan region. Motorcycles are no longer a curiosity, but a common transportation means which has replaced horses. Most bikes are colorfully bedecked and with a drum speaker behind the seat, blasting Tibetan songs while the biker cruises up and down the main street in any remote town. A notable detail concerning these bikes is that none has a license plate attached. It seems registration of bikes in the Tibetan region is a trivial matter, unlike in other parts of the country.

Tibetans are not the only ones contributing to the monasteries’ new wealth. While searching for a few Black-necked Cranes carrying satellite tracking devices we had attached to them during the last two winters, we came upon a new sort of town spread over some discrete rolling hills at the border of Baiyu and Xinlong Counties. More than 10,000 nuns and monks have descended upon this area and set up a “shanty town” in the last two years. Following time spent studying and “graduating” from the famed Buddhist Center outside of Serta, these Buddhists are allowed to converge here to further their studies. Countless monks and nuns engaged in tireless construction of new pavilions and temples.
The scene was like something out of a mass exodus or refugee camp, except every hut or make-shift building is red in color. It reflects the huge attraction and dedication of the spiritual realm for today’s China as I heard a good number were not Tibetans, but Han Chinese. It was quite surprising that the police have a minimal presence here, with one tiny blue and white building among an ocean of red.

Our last stop for the first of a three-section expedition is Kumbum (Ta’er) Monastery, for a long time it is considered one of the five most important religious centers of the Gelupa (Yellow) Sect within Tibetan Buddhism. It is only 30 kilometers south of the provincial capital of Xining in Qinghai Province. This important religious site has been transformed into a mega tourism destination. Tourists, rather than pilgrims, flooded the monastery ground on a daily basis as busloads arrived every hour, especially during the weekends. On Saturday, the first busload of noisy visitors arrived at 6:30 am, even before the monks had finished their morning prayers.

The walled premises charge 80 for entry and gray-dressed tour guides lead groups across the hillside halls and temples of the ancient monastery. From a highly solemn religious site, Kumbum has become a fully commercialized destination. I cannot help wondering whether the entry fee would go towards renovating the temples, buying oil lamps for the Buddhas, supplementing the already fattening diet of the monks, or into the pockets of the tourism bureau. One small consolation is that Tibetans are not charged for admission.

Just two days before, we had the good fortune of camping out at a remote spot not yet discovered by the tourism bureau. It was a high pass at 4,200 meters cradled among the snow-capped peaks of the Amnye Machen mountain range of Qinghai province. That evening rain fell on us as we hunkered down and were prepared for a wet and cold night. I often cherish the sound of raindrops on the tent fly, thinking it quite idyllic. But I dared not
communicate this to other team members as I realized some of the older tents in the group have begun to leak.

The following morning, we woke up at 6 am to a full view of the range as one of the main peaks, Xueshanwuduo, stood majestically in front of us. Briefly, a rainbow hung over our campground, framing us all into a perfect half halo. As the fog was coming up from the valley below us, we decamped and drove to a nearby pass. We waited for over an hour before the highest of the peaks in the Amnye Machen range began to rise through the shroud of fog.

This peak, the most sacred in the Tibetan Amdo region, was veiled in mystery for decades. Foreign explorers, including some very famous geographers, reported that its height surpassed that of Everest (8,850 meters). Many early airplane pilots perpetuated the myth. It was not until the 1950s that its true height was measured, at a meager 6,282 meters.

Perhaps like the overrated and later diminished height of this mountain, other matters on the plateau are also shifting to a more modest place. Just as the fog can lift to reveal the sun and the snow mountain, perhaps a new generation will bring light and enlightenment to the plateau’s current state, which I feel is gradually becoming blue and blurred.
WILDERNESS
HEARTLAND OF TIBET

Wong How Man
Changtang, Tibet - July 11, 2010
MAIN: New storm brewing in the Chang Tang wilderness plateau.
It is 6:30 in the morning and the sky is just starting to grow light. Last night the sun set behind the distant glaciated hills at 9 pm and it didn’t grow dark until after 10. I felt really short of air in my tent overnight and rolled around a lot, lapsing in and out of sleep. This morning I awoke with an urge to draw in a deep breath of air. But at 4,900 meters, oxygen is thin.

I yawned a few times, another symptom of a lack of oxygen. I should be used to the altitude, having been at over 4,500 meters for weeks, and two nights ago camping quite comfortably at slightly over 5,000 meters, just below the Tanggula Pass. But at high elevation, human metabolism slows, affecting anyone without notice. I simply have to slow down until I recover my energy.

A couple of my support staff are already up, and the sound of the blow-torch is loud as they use it to boil hot water for this morning’s breakfast and drinks. My tea would soon be set in front of me as I hunker inside my down vest and jacket while trying to scribble down my thoughts. Luckily this morning there was no high wind and I could use the opened back door of the Discovery 3 as a writing desk, a habit I have grown accustomed to while camping in the field.

My team and I are at the absolute heartland of the Tibetan plateau, the Changtang wilderness area called Twin Lakes Special Region. Before 1974, it was known as No-Man District. Later the government arranged for nomad families to move in with their livestock. The region is about 120,000 square kilometers in area and abuts the deep recesses of Kekezili of Qinghai and the Arjin Mountain of Xinjiang, both huge nature reserves of the plateau. In 1993, Changtang was set up as the largest inland nature reserve in the world, including large tracts of land from two neighboring counties of Tibet, Nima and Gaiji, making a total area of 298,000 square kilometers. To put it into perspective, it is about the size of Austria, Hungary and Greece combined.

Sulong Qiren has been working at the Forestry Bureau which manages the reserve since its inception in 1993. He speaks fluent Putonghua but admits to never having gone to school. He was a truck driver, so he had the opportunity to learn the language wherever he went, Qiren told me. Our interest in Changtang is its proximity to the Arjin Mountain where we have spent two decades working with plateau wildlife. Animals don’t seem to respect artificial boundaries, roaming both sides of the border. For now, I turned my interest to the Tibetan Antelope calving ground.

Qiren believed there were four calving grounds within the boundaries. One was about 280 kilometers north of our location, and I had been there twice. Tens of thousands of female antelope...
their car and the people in it, pay a fee, and receive some basic instructions of how to avoid disturbing the animals. With an average altitude of 4,800 meters, few visitors find the region physically comfortable and headaches can be a daily nuisance. Even the “locals” - those who migrated in from Kunja County to the south - find the place a bit too barren. Shi Ping is one such local and our guide on this trip. Slightly built, standing just 1.5 meters tall, with a childish face and wearing an oversized suit, he is actually a father of two. Born in 1974 when his parents first arrived here, he grew up herding sheep and shearing wool during the summer.

Today, every year during the summer, a few visitors make the drive all the way here just to appreciate the wildlife herds. The reserve management is making sure any one who enters registers converge upon it during calving season, Qiren said, but added it was difficult to get there as there are really no roads, just tracks. Still, my face lit up at the mention of the herd’s huge size.

When I asked about poaching, Qiren said there was hardly any since it was too far away for anyone to reach. There were a few cases years ago, he said, but it was mostly small-scale poaching by locals. That is far different from the situation at Kekexili and Arjin Mountain where there were many cases of documented mass killings of the Tibetan Antelope, including wholesale slaughter at the calving grounds.

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A few years ago he moved his family from distant Beicho village to Twin Lakes Township where the government is based. Two
years ago, he got lucky and was hired by the Forestry Bureau to become a staff member of the nature reserve. He was proud that he was given a motorcycle to conduct routine patrols over the vast reserve. Each year, he has to cover more than 1,500 kilometers before he can claim the modest bonus beyond his yearly salary of 3,000 yuan.

Wildlife population trumps human by at least 10 to one, and even livestock has a ratio of 40:1 against people. In an area of over 120,000 square kilometers - three and a half times the size of Taiwan, the human population is slightly over 12,000. The yearly average temperature is minus 12 degrees Centigrade, meaning even in the summer most nights are sub-zero. While there are many inland lakes, they are mostly salt lakes. Freshwater is not easily available though there are snowfields and glaciers high up the mountains.

The land’s most striking feature is the huge abundance of wildlife. Though wildlife censuses may not be accurate, the local government estimates there are between 50,000 to 70,000 Tibetan Antelope, and from 8,000 to 10,000 Wild Yak, 40,000 to 45,000 Tibetan Wild Ass, and 9,000 to 10,000 Gazelle.

We had the opportunity to drive westward for over 200 kilometers, beyond the Jialu Zangbo River near the border with Nyima County. We camped by the river where there were no fish, but a lot of brown shrimp-like crustaceans. West of the river we observed plenty of wildlife roaming freely. It was not unusual for Gazelle to graze peacefully as we drove to within 20 meters of small herds of them. Even the usually shy and alert Tibetan Antelope did not seem nervous as we got to within 100 meters of them. The Wild Ass raced our cars, crossing our path back and forth, in a customary act of defiance as if outrunning their rivals.

The frequency of sightings and abundance of herds of wildlife are the best testimony that the animals are relatively undisturbed and well protected. One evening, we had an even more unique sighting: A lone Tibetan rode up to our campsite on his horse. These days, almost all Tibetans now ride motorcycles.
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A charging Wild Yak closing in on our Land Rover; Looming storm spectacular over CERS campsite; Wild Ass visitors near camp; Tibetan nomad girl with smile of nature.

On two occasions, we had a unique encounter with a single Wild Yak. In one case, it charged our Land Rover as we got too close in search of a photo opportunity. Usually in the summer, the Wild Yak retreat much deeper and higher into the mountains. While collecting artifacts from a nomad family, I met Kelsen, head of a family of eight. At 48, Kelsen has a Jimi Hendrix fuzzy hairdo, and a lovely daughter who has a most disarming smile.

With over 1,500 sheep, 100 or so yaks and 10 horses, he is considered a man of wealth. A truck, a jeep and four motorcycles were parked in his courtyard. Last year he donated 7,000 yuan to a monastery and in return got a certificate of recognition. After much persuasion, we were able to acquire a very large yak horn used for milking livestock from him. We also came away with a more unique prize - a bagful of Wild Yak dung intended for display. In its dried form, it is much lighter in color than the domestic yak version.

I have been longing to come to the Changtang for at least 25 years, ever since I read about this wilderness wonderland. Finally my desire is satiated. The natural beauty of this remote corner of the high plateau has lived up to its fame. The sky is big and the clouds are low. Everyday the weather changes from hot summer to chill of winter several times, and at times all within a matter of minutes. Even writing inside the relative comfort of my tent, I switched from being toasted when the sun was shining above head, to being refrigerated as a cloud moved overhead and a cold breeze blew through the screens.

A patch of dark clouds over the horizon means another storm is gathering. The thunder and lightning is a bit too far away to be of concern. But suddenly another storm stealthily swept in over the hill and passed overhead, dumping hail and snow upon us. Just a moment later, the storm passed and a rainbow showed itself. It is both a wonderful and humbling experience, as I follow the rainbow of my heart in quest of exploration on the Changtang plateau.
Thaw Zin told me he had good news as he climbed the stairs to the upper deck of our riverboat: As they started the engine in the morning, the Captain saw three dolphins swimming around our boat, he said with a big grin. “I have bad news for you,” I snapped back. “I did not see them.” My tone was as chilly as the morning air. The upper deck was wet with dew as the fog was just lifting as the sun rose above the riverbank.

So began the second day of our river journey down the Irrawaddy River. Though my anxiety over seeing the dolphins was mounting, the situation was not hopeless as there was plenty of action and scenery to make up for it. Besides, I knew the best place to spot river dolphins would be near a temple just above Mandalay, a couple days downriver. Two books I brought along, written over a century ago by British explorers and surveyors, described monks feeding the almost-tame dolphins. Apparently this ancient practice is still maintained. So everyone on board our boat, the “Nadikyaw”, kept a look out for the dolphins. This boat would be our home for four days as I explored the mid-section of the Irrawaddy from Bhamo to Mandalay.

The Nadikyaw came with two makeshift cabins, a tiny bathroom, and a crew of seven, including three-year-old Aye Hay Mar. Her father Ko Myo, at 42 years of age, was the Captain. But in daily routine, Aye was the bigger Captain as any small fuss from her would get the crew’s full attention. Even her mother Ma Sein’s special cuisine was served up to Aye in advance. When Aye felt like it, she would sit on her father’s lap and steer the boat playfully.
Two of the crew was constantly busy, sitting at the bow and testing the water with two long bamboo sticks, calling out the depth while flashing the corresponding number of fingers to warn the Captain. When the depth was four to five feet, we cruised on happily. But when it got to three or less feet, the Captain would cut the engine to idle and let the current steer us through the river to avoid hitting bottom. Though not as hazardous as during flooding season, negotiating the waterway during winter dry season could also be tricky as we saw several boats stranded in the river where water was shallow. Where there were an abundance of sandbars, small motorized pilot boats with a white flag would lead the way for larger boats like ours.

The books I had brought were from 140 years ago, about the earliest journeys upriver in a steamship between 1868 and 1875. Both authors, John Anderson and Talboys Wheeler, made notes about the spectacle at the “Second Defile”, a vertical limestone massif rising 800 feet above the river bank south of Bhamo. Anderson had a black-and-white block print of the Defile and Wheeler featured it with a watercolor he drew. I compared them with the actual edifice and tried to imagine a bygone era. In fact little had changed along the river since the British colonial days. Fishing villages and rice farms dotted the riverbanks on both sides. Perhaps one noticeable difference was the boats. They are now motorized except the smallest rowboats. A sailboat like the one depicted in one of Wheeler’s watercolors was not be seen over the entire length of our river journey.

From village to village people were bathing or washing their clothes along the banks. Even drinking water came from the river as bullock carts carried drums of water from the banks to the villages high above. There were reports that in some areas the river could fluctuate from 10 to 15 meters between high and low water season. Many tiny boats were fishing with nets along the banks. We managed to purchase fresh fish and large river prawns from these fishermen everyday of our journey.
Anderson wrote in 1868 about the turbulence not only over the water, but on land as well. The Kachins were known to kidnap locals and take them into the mountains, and sometimes sold them off as slaves. During those dangerous times, villagers would move about on the edge of the water, hidden from the plain above by the high earth bank that had resulted from long years of sedimentary deposits. Today, such danger was long gone with the consolidation of control by the Burmese government throughout much of the country. Gold panning along the river, however, was still prevalent despite government restrictions. Such practices using primitive methods often discharged mercury and lead into the water.

The books also had notes on the abundant wildlife and birds. We saw many Shelducks and cormorants, both winter migrants from further north. At one ferry crossing, we saw two elephants being unloaded, and further downriver we finally had our rendezvous with the river dolphins. Monkeys were apparently still plentiful as we saw Chief Thon Kin of Thone Han village going about with his year-old pet monkey. He named her Nenta, after a famous movie star from Yangon, and she wore a colorful blouse and a skirt to match. Thon Kin said there were still a few tigers behind their village and the local shrine to honor Nat, the local spiritual deity, had a goddess riding over a fierce tiger. As we were just entering the Year of the Tiger, such a sight was a bit disheartening. Thone Han is a tiny village with about 300 people along the west bank where we moored our boat for the second night.

For hundreds of years, the Irrawaddy was essential for all traffic up and down the country. Between 1876 and 1948, the British-owned Irrawaddy Flotilla Company built up a fleet that became the largest river fleet in the world. At its height before the Second World War it had 650 steam vessels and hundreds of flats, or barges. When Japan invaded Burma in 1941, no less than 550 of these ships were scuttled and sank as a supreme act of denial to the enemy. Today, the larger riverboats we encountered still bear some resemblance to the earlier flotilla boats with shallow draft and wide berth.

From Katha on, the most frequent sights on the river were of overloaded ferries, bamboo rafts, log boats and timber barges. The bamboo rafts were floated downriver and sold as construction material. We stopped and chatted with one such rafter who had been on the river for 18 days before dismantling the raft for sale. There were also plenty of specialty boats with wooden scaffoldings on each side, making them look like trimarans. On each side were suspended logs with the main trunk submerged under water. A long line of these boats would be towed by small tugboats downriver. The barges were carrying loads of large timber downriver, likely destined for foreign markets. As I looked at the distant hills, I wondered how barren some of them must have become under the saw of the modern timber baron.
For a resource-rich country like Myanmar at the threshold of the modern age, it seems its fate is sealed like many other former resource-rich countries of Asia. They are destined for wholesale environmental destruction by unchecked exploitation and ill-managed policies hijacked by people wanting to make fast, but unsustainable money. But as an optimist, I always feel there is still hope over the horizon. One consolation was that the majority of the Burmese were simple and basic, friendly and hospitable.

The Irrawaddy is Myanmar’s most important artery. Its pulse reflects the country’s physical and sentimental dynamics. Flowing from the foothills of the Himalayas all the way to the sea, along its course it bisects the main part of the country from north to south, dividing the country into east and west. Having seen the country from Myitkyina in the north to Yangon to the south and from the Shan State in the east to the Arakan State to the west, I often dreamed of an ideal future for Myanmar. George Orwell wrote his first novel about his Burmese days after living in the country for five years as a police superintendent. After taking a native mistress like most other officers, he resigned after becoming disillusioned over the colonial system, and became a socialist (explaining his later books *Animal Farm and 1984*). After numerous trips, unlike many political and social critics from the West, my impression of Myanmar is less Orwellian.

The Myanmar people’s basic living arrangements left a strong impression on me. Despite foreign media emphasis on the country’s political situation, I saw people who are well fed and happy, even in remote parts of the country. In the Kachin and Shan States where there are insurgent and semi-independent armies, the political and military tension was hardly discernible to a casual visitor. There is also little evidence of the many vices which accompanied consumerism and modern lifestyles in other parts of Asia. In villages I visited, no one cared to close or lock their doors, nor did I see security bars on home windows. People live a rather Spartan life and have few material things, free from the stress and maladies that plague more advanced and developed nations.

While Myanmar may embrace economic reforms more slowly, it also has a chance to do it right. When the country finally takes the on-ramp to the economic highway of the world, it may enter at a point which bypasses the many pitfalls other Asian countries have experienced on their way to prosperity. With luck, it will not repeat mistakes others have made, and instead preserve some of the most important aspects of its natural, cultural and social heritage.
Grandparents often regale their grandchildren with tales of ace pilots defending the skies during World War II. Although many pilots have become popular legends, almost unheard of are the squadrons of women pilots, from ferrying squadrons of the United States and Great Britain to the female combat squadrons of Russia. Among this exclusive group of women is the Chinese-American pilot, Hazel Ying Lee.

The year is 1931. Turmoil brews in a world stricken by the Great Depression, a world that will soon erupt into war. Japanese forces’ occupation of Manchuria and the bombing of Shanghai angers Chinese all over the world. In response, the Chinese Benevolent Society of Portland, Oregon, creates the Chinese Flying Club on Swan Island to train young Chinese pilots to fight back. Into this extraordinary place, in such an extraordinary time, steps Hazel Yue Ying Lee.

Despite her mother’s protests, when Hazel, “Ah Ying” to her friends, first took to the air, she knew she had found her lifelong passion. By 1932, at the young age of 20, Hazel was one of the only two fully licensed, Chinese-American woman pilots to graduate from the Chinese Flying Club. Called the
“Flying Joan D’Arc of China” by The Oregonian, Hazel joined the Chinese Air Force, but was not allowed to fly combat sorties since she was a woman. Her duties were largely relegated to training.

Famous aviator Moon Chin recounts his first impressions of Hazel: “We met at the Shanghai YMCA in 1933, and she was based in Hangzhou and flew smaller planes. She was very tall, a bit on the tomboyish side, and she was always very cheerful.” Hazel’s younger sister, Frances, would later follow in her sister’s footsteps by working as an air hostess with the China National Aviation Corporation, or CNAC. Frances recalls a Chinese saying her mother often used to describe Hazel: “She was neither afraid of the mountains, nor the wind, nor the water.”

In 1937, after Japan bombed Canton, Hazel returned to America. She worked in New York to procure war materials for China, until she got her second shot at the skies in 1943 flying for the United States Air Force under the wings of the legendary WASP, or Women’s Airforce Service Pilots. The WASP were charged with the dangerous tasks of ferrying brand new planes from factories to the front lines, and ferrying old, war-weary planes back home. Among the 1,037 WASP, Hazel had distinguished herself as capable of flying Pursuit class - the fastest fighter planes with the greatest horsepower - of which only 132 WASP ever qualified.

On November 25, 1944, a radio malfunction caused a pilot to collide into Hazel’s plane. She suffered severe burns and later died of her injuries. She was the 38th and last member of the WASP to die before the end of the war.

Hazel Lee was not only among a select group of women to have done what, at the time, was considered unthinkable for a woman to do, but sacrificed her life in service to the allied forces and the two countries which she loved dearly. For these reasons and many more, Hazel Lee epitomizes the “Spirit of Exploration”.

From the first minute of riding in the Land Rover, climbing the rocky hills of the Tibetan plateau, I knew these two weeks with CERS would be different from my familiar laidback lifestyle in Hong Kong. Indeed, it turned out to be an astounding experience like no other.

I had no idea what to expect from the time I was to spend in Shangri-la and Hainan. I barely even knew the geography and basic information of both these places. Gradually, I began to learn the ways of an explorer and appreciate the art of conservation and exploration. One of the values that I was constantly reminded of this entire trip is that everyone is an explorer because they were all once three years old. A true explorer’s heart contains the same fervent curiosity of a three year old. This is true because as long as you have that eagerness to learn about the unknown, you already have what it takes to be an explorer.

From the films and interviews I saw, I gained more understanding of the myriad sites that CERS has constructed over the short span of 20 years. The museum exhibitions also gave me a better insight of what this non-profit organization has been striving to do. Apart from that, the museum unveils interesting historical facts such as the feats of “Hump” pilots and famous female aviators. After writing a piece about Hazel Ah Ying Lee, I realized how badly the Chinese and the female sex were discriminated against.

This summer, I visited two sites (excluding Zhongdian Center), both of which have their own unique characteristics. Shangri-la was freezing cold, to the point that wearing a down jacket was barely enough to keep warm. In Hainan, the sun scorched our skin and humidity dampened our clothes. In contrast to the traditional thatch-roofed huts of the indigenous Li people, we lived in a warm, cozy cabin by the lake during our stay at the Yak Cheese Factory.

Although these two adventures were distinctly different, I was able to experience the cultural and natural aspects of both locations. We went on two hikes at the lake
of the Yak Cheese site and two hikes in the Hainan Hongshui site. During those hikes, I felt really close to nature because I rarely hike back in Hong Kong. When I reached the third lake up on the mountains, I instantly knew that it was worth all that energy and sweat walking up the steep hill for three hours. The water was extremely still with occasional ripples and reflected the majestic Tibetan mountains as well as the emerald green trees. Camping out next to the lake was definitely an unforgettable experience. At night, stepping out from our tent, all I could see was pure darkness. But as I gazed up, there were billions of stars, glistening in the sky. I was never aware of the beauty of nature and never knew how to appreciate it until this trek.

As for the cultural aspect, the Li village of Hainan had a really individualistic culture of its own. Although most of the villagers living there now are already accustomed to the modern Chinese nation, we were lucky to find a couple of grandmas, born in the older generations, to interview. Seeing their tattooed faces was quite a sight because the value of tattoos has changed entirely overtime. Tattoos were considered as a significant sign of beauty in their culture, but nowadays, getting a tattoo is usually frowned upon. Another special feature of the Li village is their traditional thatch-roofed houses. It is amazing how CERS can maintain their traditional appearance outside, while inside they are fully equipped with modern technology.

By the end of this trip, I became fully aware of the importance of preserving culture and protecting nature. Each civilization’s culture is extremely precious and needless to say, so is their surrounding environment. I hope I will be given more opportunities to follow CERS and visit more of their sites in the future. These two weeks were truly exceptional and I’m glad I was given the chance to go.
CERS IN THE FIELD

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Catch of day left to dry;
Rainbow descends on CERS fleet; R&R moment at high camp; Sharing student interns;
Catching plateau fish in Tibet;
Teaming with student interns at CERS Zhongdian Center.
NEWS

CERS IN THE MEDIA

- Dai Ai TV, a leading Chinese satellite channel based in Taiwan, aired a half-hour interview with How Man accompanied by much field footage on the past and future of the Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve in Xinjiang.

- The Nation, a leading daily newspaper in Thailand, published a major story on CERS and How Man Wong.

- The SCMP group launched a new magazine “XXIV” featuring an interview with How Man on his perspective on time and how it impacted his life.

- Discovery, a Hong Kong based magazine on environment, conservation and the outdoor, published an interview with How Man on the future of conservation in its 10th anniversary issue.

- Chief Pilot of China National Aviation Corporation, or CNAC, flying the Hump between China and India and pioneering a new route across K2.

- The world’s second-highest peak in the Karakoram Range in northern Kashmir - to India during the War.

- Two new bilingual books, Treasures in Our Midst and Heritage on Our Mind, ninth and tenth in a series published by Commonwealth Publisher of Taiwan, were recently released.

- An expanded and updated version of How Man Wong’s book Islamic Frontiers of China, first published in the UK in 1990, will be released by IB Tauris, a major UK publisher specializing in Islamic and Middle-eastern publications.

- How Man lectured to students of Choate Rosemary Hall School in Connecticut.

- CERS hosted 17 student interns at its Zhongdian and Hainan project sites as a routine part of our summer program.

- Students of Singapore’s Nanyang Technological University debuted their documentary film and photographic exhibit on Hainan Hongshui Village at the National Library in Singapore. CERS continues to host 11 additional students from NTU to work on CERS caving activities.

- Dr Chu Hongjun, Director of Xinjiang’s Altai Prefecture Forestry Bureau, visited CERS in Yunnan. Subsequently, we discussed an agreement to expand the Society’s research of the Asiatic Beavers and Ibex of northern Xinjiang.

A new building has opened at the Zhongdian Center, specially for writers and musicians in residence. Each of the two units is decked out with a loft and fireplace. The first visitors were author Lung Yingtai and author/scholar Xiong Jingming. In future, CERS will invite writers, composers and musicians.

Senior pilot Captain Moon Chin, aged 97, visited Hong Kong and Yunnan. CERS has featured his early career as Chief Pilot of China National Aviation Corporation, or CNAC, flying the Hump between China and India and pioneering a new route across K2.

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UPPER: New house for writer/composer in residence. LOWER: Lung Yingtai at ease in writer’s suite.
Long time friend and supporter Don Conlan visited Zhongdian Center and the Yak Cheese factory.

Ester Mazzarelli and the Moritz Foundation continue their support of CERS with major funding.

The following corporations and individuals have signed on again as CERS patrons: City Developments Limited, Eu Yan Sang, Omega, Gigi Arnoux, James Chen, Barry Lam, Wendy Lee and Daniel Ng.

Denny Lord, former CERS Board Director in the US, visited CERS in Hong Kong and Yunnan, assisting us in architectural designs and drawings.

Kevin Ching joined CERS as a new patron.

Maritta and Ludwig Ruppert recently made a donation to CERS.

UPPER: CERS old friend Don Conlan at Langdu cheese site.
LOWER: CERS former director Denny Lord helps with architectural drawings.

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CERS’ MISSION:
The mission of CERS is to EXPLORE remote regions of China, conduct multi-disciplinary RESEARCH, CONSERVE nature and culture, and EDUCATE through dissemination of results in popular channels.

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