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since 1986

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
President’s Message

Education has always been one of the core missions of CERS since our modest beginning 25 years ago. Today it remains so, and has even expanded its role and importance, as we march toward our second quarter century.

We educate and share our philosophy, work method and project results through dissemination by popular channels like internet, television and print media. At the same time, we also provide many opportunities for young adults and students to participate and learn directly from being in the field with us.

In recent years, many students, in groups or as individuals, had joined us at the many CERS project sites. It has been a most gratifying experience for me and many of my colleagues to see how these young high school or college students came, got inspired, and left with much enthusiasm.

Through hands-on experience or internship, they would acquire new values and skills, and embark on their life’s journey with a new purpose. More important, they all go away with a mindset that nothing is impossible, armed with passion, dedication, a sense of responsibility, and not least the spirit of exploration and innovation that CERS is renowned for.

Through CERS’ case studies, they learn how unique and tiny projects can gradually become larger, ultimately leaving an impact of significance to our natural or cultural heritage. Such exposure allows them to create small projects of their own in the future.

It gives me great pleasure to bring to all our friends and supporters this very special issue of our newsletter, with contributions from our current student interns during the year 2012. Among them are young adults from a very diverse background. A note-worthy piece is written by one of the teachers who accompanied a group from Lawrenceville School in New Jersey.

Such stories are testimony to CERS’ continued dedication to educating our future generations.
The arduous path finally emerged from beneath the tightly woven canopy of trees. Now finally standing upon flat land, my aching calves gave out a huge sigh of relief. I leaned over and let my hands rest upon my trembling knees, trying my best to catch my breath. Yet as I stood there bent over, sweat trickling down the sides of my face, my heart ricocheting wildly inside my chest, few times in my life have I felt better. In addition to the comfort of a faint breeze brushing rhythmically across my weary body, it was hard to feel bad with my destination now under my feet.

With my breathing under control, I lifted my head up to the sight of an old Tibetan monastery. It was clear at first sight that the monastery was weathered down: muddy water trails ran past splatters of dirt on its once pristine white walls, chips of paint fluttered off its red pillars like snowflakes while the paintings etched above the main entrance were quickly fading away.
I peered in through the doorway and into the courtyard. Yet upon noticing the piles of trash and dirty dishes that littered its sides, I felt that aurora of divinity immediately vanish in front of my eyes. Directly facing the doorway sat the monastery itself, its narrow entrance covered by two plain pieces of cloth. As I looked on, they both fluttered ever so slightly, briefly revealing one lone candle behind. Its flame was faint, a weak radiance amidst a room of darkness. And with every little intruding breeze, the candle flickered wildly, seemingly treading on the fine line between life and death.

I stood there quietly as the candle clung desperately onto the reins of life. All around I could see no man, nor could I hear any of his creations. It was as if everybody had just been wiped off the face of the earth, leaving behind just me and the candle. The silence was eerie and the solitude was chilling, yet the desolation was at the same time refreshing. It truly was the first time I have felt utterly alone. I shuddered at the novelty of the situation and went round the back of the monastery.

Having only had a limited and distant view of the MingYong Glacier lower down the mountain, the higher altitude now put the glacier very much in clear sight. Looking out, it was nothing like I had pictured it to be: smooth, elegant, white as white can be. In sharp contrast, the glacier was rugged and mean. Lying between two densely forested hills, the glacier had relentlessly carved its way through. With its very top hidden well in the loose and hazy clouds, it seemed as if the glacier had descended down from the divine gates of heaven to do so. Patches of black grew larger and denser lower down the glacier, until its foot was just a sea of rough black rocks. Gazing out, it was impossible to ignore its
sheer size. In comparison to everything around, the glacier was not just colossal, but powerful and dominant. It looked out across its empire with a clear sense of superiority, while I felt utterly consumed under its shadow of inferiority. The glacier was truly the epitome of the term mighty, the exemplification of the word indestructible.

I sat down on the ground and let my tired feet hang over the edge. Stretched above me was prayer flag after prayer flag, their flamboyant colors fluttering calmly in the afternoon breeze. The birds could be heard in the surrounding forest, their sweet voices weaving in with the sound of water crashing down the rocky slopes and away from the glacier. I closed my eyes, letting the crisp smell of mountain air rush into my lungs and submerge me in a deep state of ambience. A mind so often trapped in a cell of worry and trouble was finally set free into the Garden of Eden.

Solitude. Isolation. I was there, a mere spectator, the only spectator, at Mother Nature’s show. Up on stage was the glacier, dancing away with an authority that gripped my senses and mesmerized me. It was a dance that she has performed many times in her long history. Yet now the stage was deteriorating, and her moves could no longer be as clean and swift as they used to be. Much of the audience too was not the same, often defecating on her stage and making attempts to join in on her performance.

A deafening ring of horse bells and clamorous chatter was suddenly heard. Instantly, the curtains fell down upon the stage, and the orchestra abruptly turned silent. Sweet air quickly turned into cigarette smoke, seeping into every inch of my veins against my will. In the distance, the seemingly invincible was struck down as if by kryptonite. With a deafening sound like thunder, a large chunk of the glacier fell right off, shattering into millions of tiny bits against the jagged slope. At that very moment, I could almost see the candle, its defiant little flame wobbling and quivering before finally falling to its knees in exhaustion. Nothing but memories were left in the now pitch-black room, for the purer days were now lost deep within the abyss of time.
Get Lost. These were the words of advice the commencement speaker at my high school graduation gave us before we departed for the next chapter in our lives. For some, this could mean getting lost in a good book, a new city or even a piece of music. When I heard these words sitting amongst the crowd of over eager graduates ready for university, I never imagined that my quest to heed this piece of advice would take me all over Yunnan province in Western China for four weeks.

A spur of the moment decision and a mission to “do something” with the remaining part of my gap year before attending Yale in August prompted me and my childhood best friend, Eliza, to board a plane to Hong Kong with no exact idea what we were going to be doing or where we were going to be for the next month. This is what the China Exploration and Research Society team has correctly dubbed “managing expectations” – student interns cannot have distorted expectations if they have absolutely no idea about what they will be doing. Although this meant we were a little underprepared in terms of weather appropriate attire, we were able to assume the CERS go with the flow attitude that only made the experience even more unforgettable.

One day in particular that resonates with this mantra was our first day of camera trapping with Paul. We had arrived the day before at the yak cheese site, roughly four hours from the CERS Zhongdian Center, and I was feeling rather pleased with myself for managing to avoid any symptoms of altitude sickness. Dr. Bill Bleisch had taken us on a morning hike on a relatively flat trail around the beautiful lake Wudihu. He seemed happy that we were “up for it” and I was proud with how I managed after not hiking for months. We were told that we were setting up camera traps (which are motion sensor cameras that are attached to trees to photograph passing wildlife) with Dr. Paul Buzzard the next day, but having no idea what that entailed, I was confident going into day two of hiking. All of that changed quickly.

We were dropped off at the lake at around 3900m, just like the day before. This time however, instead of going on a trail, Paul tells us that we need to hike to 4300m and sets off straight up the mountain and right into the tangled, snowy woods to set the traps. Eliza and I exchanged excited glances and as self-proclaimed “outdoorsy girls,” we eagerly followed his quick pace. With no trail, we had to climb propelling ourselves forward from tree to tree for stability and safety on the steep mountain. About an hour later out of breath, thighs burning, with branches attractively stuck in our hair and clothes but spirits still high, we arrived at the location of the first camera trap. Little did we know we were only at 4000m. As an American using the metric system, 500 vertical meters had not meant anything to me, but now I know climbing that high is no walk in the park.
For us California girls, the novelty of snow quickly wore off as we climbed higher and higher, the trees thinned and the snow deepened. Needless to say, an important lesson we learned was that aerated running shoes do not work well for hiking in snow. Not wanting to disappoint Paul, we continued up, at times on our hands and knees until we reached the rock outcropping on the steep mountain face at 4336m for our camera trap.

As we stood at the edge we could see not only the lake where we had started, way, way below, but as we looked across the valley, we could even see another lake nestled high in the mountains opposite us. Within minutes clouds rolled in, it began snowing harder and our view was obscured completely. It was such a special moment for me to be where few humans had ever been, surrounded by nature and lost in the beauty of everything.

This was just in my first week in China and the remaining time was filled with moments very different but just as important. In such a short period, I have learned more about myself as a person and a rising adult. I owe it to CERS for pushing me to go higher, hike further and accomplish things I never thought I could.
In my mind, explorers were people of centuries past; Christopher Columbus, Marco Polo, Captain James Cook. It was not until I arrived in China that I realized how wrong my perception was. The CERS team showed me how curiosity alone – in this case, about the unknown cultures and regions of China – can to this day shape the course of your life. From the start, I was introduced to valuable principles of exploration that will help me as I carry forward into four years of university.

“Plans change, so be open to anything.” Annie, a childhood friend and travel companion, and I heard this many times in our first few days. I perceived myself to possess a great ability to go with the flow; it was this flexibility that allowed me to travel to China with nearly no information regarding the future four weeks. Our first indication was in the customs line at HK airport, where we received an email saying, “...there’s snow. Be prepared.” A little late for us California girls who had brought running shorts and jeans, our version of packing for all weather types; thus, it was the crawling through snow in our mesh sneakers, cotton gloves and lightweight rain ponchos that made for the most memorable day. As a person that constantly makes mental to-do lists and likes to plan the week ahead however, it was odd to feel so uncertain about the upcoming days. We headed to Guji for a week of mapping horse trails in the area,
but to our surprise upon arrival, we discovered that there were no horses and the mountain pass was closed. While disappointed that we could not contribute these maps, it was a direct lesson in expecting the unexpected.

The CERS film that struck me the most was the Yak Cheese Project, exposing me to the second explorer principle, what I’d call *spread knowledge and the spirit of learning*. In the video, one woman says with laughter that she’d never heard of cheese before, yet here was How Man and team teaching the village step by step how to profitably utilize old dairy products. As we later toured their rather simple cheese-production facility, I marveled at how knowledge of something so basic to me can revolutionize the day-to-day activities of others. It is because of their interaction with CERS that this village is able to sell their yak cheese in Shangri-La and to travelers, like myself, passing through. I will always remember the power of this small act of education, changing their business and allowing them to share this gift with others.

The final explorer principle I leave China with is *embrace the unknown*. We were able to bid farewell to Paul as he joined the rest of the CERS team on a six-week expedition, but were left without a definitive answer regarding its purpose. Among the expeditions of finding river sources and preserving monkeys, there are also those driven solely by the idea that something’s out there worth discovering; if it were not for this mindset, perhaps yak cheese would not be making its way back to the States with me, or the mysterious hanging coffins of China would still be uninvestigated. Society pressures people to justify their actions; I too have felt the need to reason how I spend my time. Inspired by CERS, I feel confident next time to proceed without a purpose and see what justifications come about down the road.

The previous seven months I have spent traveling abroad, but it is with the special insight I have gained with CERS that I am thrilled to conclude my gap year. Now, I say explorers and think of those of China Exploration & Research Society. While I may not make the list myself, I have learned what it takes by looking through the lens of those who do. Exploration is something of the past, present and future; it takes a unique passion of learning and the previous *three principles* to open the door to new cultures and discover such treasures of China.
Before I went to the airport, my mother kept asking me “Are you sure you want to go to an exploration society?” I replied breezily; “Yes, I am pretty sure! I know what is waiting for me.” You cannot imagine how difficult it is for me, a college student already, but still growing up in a typical Chinese family, with not only a Tiger Mom but also has a Tiger Dad and Tiger Grandparents always keeping an eye on me.

“You have to do something different in your life.” These were the words I kept on telling myself. This motivated me to proceed with my studies in Macau and my lifetime experience with CERS. With my interest and curiosity in CERS, a pioneer in exploration and conservation, which I actually first encountered by chance online, and my dream of dedicating myself to research and preserving heritage, I finally persuaded my parents and became an intern with CERS.

The one-month experience can be called an exploration journey in terms of my world view and my career. Together with peers from different places, I attended a stupa opening ceremony in traditional Tibetan dress, visited a primary school where students do not even have a pen, observed Yunnan Golden Monkeys deep in the Baima Snow Mountains, participated in a rope-
climbing exercise just under our Zhongdian Centre beam, and even explored a small monastery. The most unforgettable night was the one spent around Wudi Lake, where unknown flowers surrounded us, and wooden cabins stood as if strewn about. We sat around the campfire sharing our views towards the contradiction between tradition and modernization with a gourmet barbecue. Besides, I was lucky enough to take part in a CERS cultural conservation project in a Lisu village, documenting the vulnerable collections of artifacts from this hunting tribe. This was a valuable opportunity for me, a heritage-studies undergraduate, to get in touch with real-life preservation work.

During the month, I was also inspired by various people: Dr. Bill Bleisch, Dr. Paul Buzzard and some other biologists encountered in the field who were dedicated to scientific research, even spending decades far away from their homes; Sharon who quit a highly-paid job in America to work for CERS instead, just due to her yearning for a traditional way of living. The Lisu musician who had such a talent for music, learning several instruments by himself, the founder of Kawakarlo Culture and Nature Conservation Association, which was formed by local villagers voluntarily to protect their sacred mountain; All of them are doing something they are passionate about and going all out to realize their dreams. That moved me from deep in my heart.

What I have learned most from this experience is that finding out what you are willing to pursue is just the very first step. Being brave enough to explore an undiscovered world, to know it, and then to love it for what it is are more crucial to success, just like what CERS people are doing all the time. I am so grateful that How Man offered me this valuable chance to volunteer in CERS, which encourages me to keep on pursuing my dream in the field of cultural heritage conservation and, with a brave heart, to explore the unknown future.

Finally, I would like to thank all the back-stage staff helping and caring about us. That really made our experience at CERS run smoothly.
慶香格里拉，藏語意為「吉祥如意的地方」，世界各地人尋覓已久的世外桃源！合上電腦，我們帶備了行裝，踏入了前往香格里拉的探險團，心中既是興奮又是緊張，渴望踏上這片桃源之路。

晚上10時多，搖晃著崎嶇的山路，終於踏入了這片人稱天境之域，狼狗「長毛」和「澤西」搖首擺尾，迎接著我們的到來，雄壯的「汪汪」聲為我們展開了第一天的新生活。

時光飛逝，兩星期快過去了，明天的同一時刻，我們將踏上同一機場，卻沒有同一緊張之情，只剩下對這片樂土的不捨與懷念。香格里拉，實在帶給我們太多太多的激動，太多太多的回憶了。每一天，每一次的外出，我們都「滿載而歸」，載的不是貨品，而是一生受用的經驗和感受。

坐在火爐旁邊，望著堆砌成山的木柴，當地的人還是在用木柴生火呢！但面對他們，我們並沒有身為城市人的優越感，反而是佩服他們如何在傳統中得以生活。反觀自己，沒有了科技的生活，可能連一天也活不下去。究竟是科技對我們是舉足輕重，還是佔足過重呢？

來到古城，宏偉壯觀的建築物，全都帶著古典的樸素氣味：金碧輝煌的轉經輪，我們一起順時針轉了三圈，不是為著傳說中的幸福，而是一起完成一件偉大的事——至少對我們來說。一人之力不足以使巨輪轉動，但聚沙成塔，看著大家咬緊牙關，拉扯繩繩的神情，轉輪三圈不知不覺也就被賦予意義了。

「明知山有虎，偏向虎山行」這句話形容我們走在無底湖的山實在是適合不過了。仰望就知道山的地形險峻，對我們來說或者是一項挑戰。我們毫不猶豫對困難下戰書，最後我們也在Paul的帶領和Drolma的協助下，打了場漂漂亮亮的勝仗。

不經一番寒徹骨，焉得梅花撲鼻香。雖然此句本意非此，可是又合情合理。香格里拉的夏天與香港的冬天相若，異常寒冷。在寒冷中採摘一枝花，分辨
一枝花，那種成功帶來的振奮，特別使人怡然一新。

「飲水思源」，除了是黃效文先生的豐功偉績，也是我們希望表達的感激之源。一向對這位探險英雄有著敬仰之情，意料之外的竟是這位揚名國際的英雄，願為我們百忙中抽空，促膝詳談。與他一席話，勝讀萬卷書。Howman的人生閱歷豐富，凡走過必留下痕跡，隨了他探險的每一天之外，還在我們的心中、腦海中留下不可磨滅的足跡。他的分享像是一棵大樹，在困難中扶搖我們，邁向成功。

在香港做不了的事，我們在香港格里拉都經歷了。香港格里拉，那清脆的鳥鳴、翠綠的山樹、綻放的花朵……每一樣我們都銘記在心。距離離開不到二十四小時，我們想在此對這片樂土說一聲：「再見!」

不知這片充滿色彩的世外桃源，經過了眾多遊客的洗禮，還會記得我們這群過路人嗎？
陽在朝霞的迎接中，露出了紅彤彤的面龐，霎時，萬道金光透過樹梢給美麗恬靜的米埔濕地抹上一層玫瑰色，讓人精神抖擻。我們也急不及待地帶著望遠鏡，在陽光的引領下，一同前往米埔自然保護區觀鳥。

「這……這你看！真的是東方白鸛嗎？」語氣透露著不可置信，當我們看到難得一見的東方白鸛，興奮與緊張不斷交替。根據香港觀鳥會的記錄，東方白鸛自2004年起便已在香港絕跡。而在八年的今天，我們有幸見證牠的再次到來，除了激動，我們還是激動，隻言片語根本無法表達我們的感受，時間亦突然回溯到香格里拉的動畫格，再次重播。我們在包先生的帶領下來到納帕海，進行觀鳥活動。他早前在當地覓到首見的鉤嘴鸛的分享，更是為我們打了一支強心針，陡地精神抖擻，爭先恐後用望遠鏡尋覓一種更罕見的
鳥——黑頸鶴的芳蹤。雖然觀察了幾天，也找不到一隻黑頸鶴，我們卻沒有因而氣餒，反而樂在觀察其他鳥兒的優美姿態中，透過牠們身體的特徵而找出牠們的名字，並一一記錄下來。每當我們找到一種新的鳥兒，都會樂得高呼起來。從組員臉上的笑容中，我們找到了觀鳥的意義。

然而，鳥兒數目驟減的原因除了全球暖化外，人們對濕地的保育意識亦是其一。假如保育意識不足，濕地便會遭受無意的破壞，一眾鳥類最終便會失去了安身之所。為了了解人民對濕地的保育意識，我們分別在香港和雲南中甸香格里拉古城及香港濕地公園附近訪問了一些當地居民，當中不乏居住在當地超過六年以上的人，其中八個是藏族人，有四個白族人，而有三人則屬於其他族群。訪問結果顯示，有七個人不知道納帕海是濕地，佔約47%，有十一人未曾去過納帕海，佔約73%，還有一個人未曾聽過納帕海，結果反映出香格里拉的保育意識普遍較低，竟達近在咫尺的納帕海自然保護區也不知道，甚至認為納帕海等濕地只是個旅遊景點。他們的想法令我們非常驚訝，因為雲南香格里拉享負「人間仙境」之美譽，但當地居民卻不屑其重要，只把那珍貴的「寶藏」當成搖錢樹，忽略其現時所受到的破壞。相反，香港市民的保育意識較高，當中有九位受訪者都認為香港對濕地的保育不足，並希望能從個人開始保育濕地，守護這些自然資源。我們深信只要香港市民強烈的保育意識能推廣至雲南等地，便會猶如一把金鑰匙，捅開他們心中的鎖鎖，喚起其保育意識，從而為保育濕地出一份力，繼續愛護這個「人間仙境」。

一棵小草，也許永遠不能成參天大樹，但它可以做最綠最堅強的小草；一滴水，也許永遠不能像長江大河一樣奔騰，但它可以成為所有水中最純的那一滴。一個公民，也許永遠不能改變所有人的思想，但他可以作為影響別人最深的一人。而我們則決定由個人做起，從今天起致力保護環境，再將這個想法傳揚出去，推而廣之，喚起更多人的保育意識。讓我們一起保護這個美妙的大自然吧！
As the car stopped, I looked to my right. The familiar traditional house calmed my heartbeat that had been quick-paced at the thought of having to interview a complete stranger. Despite the warmth that the house brought, I couldn’t stop myself from fiddling with the paper in my pocket that had interview questions scribbled all over it. Nervousness started to overcome me as we approached Mr. Yu’s front door.

Once inside, I found myself standing in Mr. Yu’s dining room again. He was seated on the floor by the stove next to a woman whom he introduced as his wife. He gestured for us to take a seat on the three stools next to him. It seemed they were still in the midst of having dinner, so we took our seat and positioned ourselves as comfortably as we could on the small wooden stools as we waited for Mr. Yu to finish.

Having never interviewed a stranger before, it took a little more time to warm up to the conversation. Instead of going straight into the interview questions, we casually began by asking about Mr. Yu’s family. Mr. Yu introduced his daughter and asked her to bring us some snacks, which consisted of a whole bag of local sunflower seeds.

Slowly, we began the interview. Yu, full name Yu JianHua, Lisu name Lu Zhu, forty-four years old. Although he is originally from the Lisu tribe, Yu explained that due to the location of their village, much of their Lisu lifestyle, traditions and culture had been changed and influenced by the Tibetan people surrounding their village.

As the ice started to break, Yu began telling us more. Yu was born with perfect pitch. With this talent, he was able to hear music and play it back on his instrument. He first learned to play the piano when he was still in school. The piano Mr. Yu was referring to was a small half-sized piano that sits on the floor, almost like a mini keyboard, that costs about $18. Unfortunately, after Yu finished school, he was unable to play the piano because there wasn’t a piano in TaCheng Township. Despite the lack of resources, Yu didn’t give up on his passion for music. While walking around another town one day, he spotted a full size piano in a building and got really excited. Yu went inside only to be asked to leave by the owner because Yu didn’t have any money to offer. But he wasn’t discouraged. He went back inside and begged the owner to let him play just once explaining that he was really passionate about music. The owner finally gave in to Yu’s begging and allowed him to play on the piano once. To Yu’s surprise, the owner thought he played really well and allowed him to stay to play for the many customers coming in that day. His passion and persistence rewarded him with the best day and best experience of his life. No words come close to explaining the happiness revealed on Yu’s face as he told us this story. To play on a full size piano is something that many of us, like myself, have the pleasure to do everyday. Somehow, this story touched me deeply. I managed to stop my tears in time and continued listening.
Since that day, Yu never got the chance to play on a full size piano again. Later on, on one of Yu’s trip to ZhongDian, he heard music playing on the streets and heard the Xuanzi, a traditional two-string fiddle. At the sound of the instrument, Yu thought maybe he could make this instrument by himself. That night, he went home and successfully made the instrument and began to teach himself how to play. At first, Yu struggled to play the instrument, creating really bad sounds. Eventually, he saved up enough money and bought a cellphone. With his phone, he was able to go into town to record Xuanzi music and bring it home to learn by ear.

With the little resources Yu had access to, he held on to his passion and found a way to fulfill it. How many of us would hold on to our passion despite so many obstacles in our way?

In the past, Yu would take charge of organizing the music for every festival in his village. He would also teach music and dance to his fellow villagers. For the past three years, faced with the dilemma of having to earn money for his daughter to attend college, Yu has been forced to put his passion aside for the future of his daughter. Yu dropped everything to focus on earning money. He no longer worries about whether or not he has enough to eat, whether or not he is able to smoke, and whether or not he can practice his instrument. Even with this heavy responsibility, Yu is confident and hopeful that he will continue spreading his passion for music to the next generation of Lisu villagers.

It was getting late so we started to wrap up the interview. That’s when I realized, I had not looked at the interview questions I had written, not even once. Yet the interview went smoothly and seemed to cover everything I had in mind and more. So this is what an interview is like.

We thanked Mr. Yu for giving us his time and said our goodbyes. Just as we were heading out the door, Yu stopped us. He said something that was so unexpected that all of us just stared at him, trying to process what he had just said. Yu offered to me as a gift the Xuanzi he had made. I was speechless. I couldn’t get myself to accept this precious handmade instrument, so he offered me his spare. I accepted it, feeling very honored. Yu even taught me a few basics before sending us on our way.

Yu truly touched me. Despite the many times he emphasized how poor his family was, he was still willing to give away a handmade traditional instrument to someone he knew nothing about except for the fact that we share the same passion for music. In contrast to people at home, who have so much, yet give so little, these people own so little, but are willing to give so much. This is the beauty of simplicity.
FIRST FIVE DAYS WITH CERS

by Curtis Wong
June 2012
BACKGROUND: View from the CERS Zhongdian Center. LEFT: High country. RIGHT: Alpine forest.
The hike with Dr Paul Buzzard was most inspiring. I followed him to place four camera traps in an attempt to capture the lives of musk deer. The hike up was very steep; the hike down included falling hard on my backside numerous times. Along the way we saw a multiplicity of plants, different animal feces, and breathtaking scenery. It never stopped raining on our journey. By the time we were heading down I had developed an unbearable headache. The slippery and steep terrain only made it worse.

The result of all this effort was that we had explored a large area that had not been previously studied. When night approached and dinner was in progress, even Paul, a machine-like mountain climber, admitted the hike was quite tough, especially for someone’s second day at high altitude. Then again, maybe he was just trying to make me feel better. What this hike taught me was that in order to attain the good and beautiful things in life, you have to first suffer and feel very uncomfortable. In just the same way, you cannot make money materialize from thin air. One has to go through suffering and have persistence in order to come out on top.

My experience so far has not only been a great one. Having been able to come into contact with many CERS projects, they have helped me grow and reflect on myself. Making beer on my second day was something I never thought I would be doing. I was only present for the second brew, and most of the hard work to improvise and alter the process had been done before I had arrived. Still, this experience taught me that nothing is impossible; if any person has the will to do something, they will succeed in the end.

Beer brewing required intense attention to time and detail. We worked together as a group to do this. As an individual, one may not be able to complete a task such as brewing beer, but as a group you can. This applies to all reaches of life, whenever there is the choice between working alone and working together.

On our way back to base camp in Zhong Dian, I witnessed environmental destruction that had resulted from the activities of miners and even the locals themselves. We had left early, thinking that by doing so we would avoid the mining trucks. It turned out that the truck drivers had the same idea in their minds, and we ran into even more traffic than before. This, however, gave me more opportunity to gaze at the landscape, and having Bill in my Land Rover was like having a live encyclopedia.

Bill answered any question about plants or geography without hesitation. It prompted me to reflect on the differences of nature and the city. While nature was full of diversity and mostly existed...
in harmony with other residents of the land, the city was an unforgiving, unrelenting machine that stopped for nothing. The environment of a city is also very repetitive. Each city has its paved roads, skyscrapers, extensive lighting, and never-sleeping night. Every city is built on the same mould, in the process wiping out local culture, tradition, and history. This is what I came to realize from spending time gazing into the beautiful landscape, absorbing its tranquility and harmony.

The snub-nosed monkey reserve is an example of balance that can be achieved between nature and man. Before, the monkeys were hunted relentlessly and their environment destroyed. However, through the work of CERS and others, the monkeys today have a safe habitat to reside in, and the Lisu villagers have been able to preserve their culture as well as engage in beneficial livelihoods. I previously believed that there was no way for nature and man to coexist, because man was greedy and only concerned for maximum profit. Nature was defenseless and could only watch passively as it was slowly destroyed. It is auspicious that I was wrong. There is in fact a way to create an environment where nature and man co-exist peacefully. It involves a careful balance that is a compromise between nature and man, as both cannot just have their own way.

CERS has been able to do this because of its talented team. We humans may still be able to avoid destroying our home.

This trip has given me the opportunity to reflect on my values in life, as well as a chance to appreciate the work of CERS. I was able to see many unique projects of CERS, and they have provided me with much guidance and space to gain a more mature understanding of the world.
During the first two weeks of my summer holidays I joined an internship program conducted by CERS. I have never felt so adventurous before, as I explored over the two weeks and learnt something new about myself. The CERS program has provided new skills and knowledge and helped me to understand the difference in culture between Tibetans and Han Chinese.

Most importantly, I came to learn about culture and understand how it passes on. One of my most memorable experiences was listening to stories of the Lisu people about how and why they think the golden monkeys are their ancestors. It made my heart warm as I listened to their tales.

I felt truly inspired by how CERS has helped and accomplished their mission to help different communities and ethnic groups in China.
and how CERS has helped to preserve the environment. I was also inspired by the surroundings; the beautiful blue sky, green tall trees and rocky mountain that resemble the true nature which I have never seen in Hong Kong. I could smell the sweetness coming from the trees as well, while looking at the beautiful farm fields where I stayed and enjoying the beautiful views of the amazing sacred mountain. This was the first time I camped under the heavy weather condition, which was my first experience in a truly natural environment. It felt like I was in a different world.

I will cherish this experience for the rest of my life. I want to thank CERS for giving me this opportunity and wonderful pleasant experience.
China is one of the fastest growing countries in the World. If you visit the various cities around China, it is not difficult to come across a huge sprawling metropolis. The grandeur of a fast paced, busy street side captures the amazement of tourists and locals at the same time. Although China was known as the ‘Sick man of Asia’ in the past, now it is considered to be one of the major leading economies in the world.

But what does that mean? How does this fast paced growth affect us? In the short run, the fast growing economy will bring profits and wealth to the people of China. However the lesser-known regions of China are slowly being dragged into a cultural cesspool. It is evident that the rapid growth of the economy leads to cultural progress lagging behind.

Zhongdian, a.k.a Shangri-la, has now been a tourist hub for the past ten years. From huge mainland tourist buses to keen foreign trekkers Shangri-la has become a hotspot for its mysterious and beautiful settings. No matter what the purpose is for tourists, the rustic feel of Shangri-la enchants them.

But it is evident there are changes within the community of Zhongdian, where Old Town and New Town are drastically changing. Old Town, which used to be the traditional hub of Shangri-la, is now been completely transformed by mass tourism to the region. Is tourism a driving factor for modernization?

If this destruction is still spreading non-stop, what can foreign initiatives do? There is only one solution; changes must occur through local means. By that I mean that the local community must change in order to restore the damage that has been dealt to the picturesque landscapes of Southwest China.

Another key factor that can stop the destruction is education. Educating the younger generation can help make them aware of the upcoming catastrophe. They need to understand that the pristine nature of Shangri-La must be conserved and cherished, in order for there to be a sense of cultural identity.
It has been interesting living, eating, and just being with interns from different countries and backgrounds, because I have had an opportunity to learn a lot about how other people live. Through this, I also learned that there are other ways to live aside from the life style I am used to.

At the new CERS Lisu Cultural Village site, we were able to see honey being harvested directly from a comb. Asides from the surprise I felt from seeing the honey collector wearing no protective gear whatsoever and simply using cigarette smoke to sedate the bees, it was just amazing to see the honeycomb being taken straight out of the log hive and placed in a bucket for collection. We sampled the seconds-fresh honey straight from the bucket with our fingers, and immediately joyous expressions showed on all faces.

After buying a small container of honey, I researched the benefits of raw, organic honey since I was a new, excited owner of some myself. This is when I realized that Shangri-la has brought out the inner-hippie in me. Raw honey has not only been proven to be beneficial for people with bad allergies, good for your skin and hair, and an energy boost for athletes, but it is also a natural antiseptic – you can put it directly on wounds! The day after my research on the benefits of raw honey, I put some on my face during breakfast. I may have gotten some weird looks from my table by the other interns around my table, but my skin felt great afterwards.

TOP: Liz in Tibetan costume.
BOTTOM: Tibetan monks during debate.
Through my time in Shangri-la, I also feel I have learned much about Tibetan culture, especially while at the Meixiang Cheese Factory and Ecolodge in Langdu Village. One of my favorite memories of that site is the warm, welcoming feeling I immediately feel whenever I am in the lodge’s main room. Perhaps this is because some of the people working there are actually Drolma’s relatives, so the family-like feeling is literal, but I think it is more because of the sense of community there. The Langdu site itself is even in the shape of a square with the central focal point being the beautiful, new stupa, a white dome-shaped, Buddhist memorial.

The main room of the lodge also has a central point, the traditional Tibetan black cast-iron stove. The stove is the center of all activity here: The butter tea, a very important beverage to any Tibetan, is warmed on this stove, in addition to yak cheese, grilled until it is deliciously warm with a bit of a crispy outer skin. Benches surround the stove, with a seating arrangement unknown to me until Drolma explained the unspoken rules of your appropriate seating place by the stove. This seating protocol is often connected to gender, and whether you are a respected guest.

The community feeling in Langdu continues into the evening, as a Tibetan dance circle occurs nightly. The evening circle dance, as well as the daily habit of all sitting around the stove creates a strong sense of community in Langdu, at least in the eyes of an outsider.

Even the customary practice of sitting around a table and sharing dishes of food on a Lazy-Susan style table gives off a sense of community to me. Throughout China, I believe that food also creates a sense of community and interaction.
among people. When people want to show that they care about each other, they might ask each other, “Ni chi hao le ma?” a greeting which literally means “have you eaten yet?” While eating at a Chinese meal, it is polite to serve others first before yourself; this especially applies to beverages, such as pouring tea for others.

When it comes down to it, different cultures all basically want the same things; things that any human being needs. People, as human beings, all want some of the same things: food, a place to sleep, happiness, a sense of community and interaction. It is the different ways that cultures obtain these basic needs which makes each one unique, and which makes learning about cultures so much fun. For this reason, I strongly believe in the CERS mission to preserve cultures. Not only are dying cultures fascinating and deserve to be known, but you can also gain knowledge and personal growth from learning about how other people live.
When we were born, we learned to sing and dance from the elders;” the lady next to me said. “At every festival, wedding day, birthday, or just some normal days we dance to glorify the gods and nature. Today, we sing for the Stupa and to welcome the guests like you.” I guess for them, dancing is not a performance or an exercise, but a traditional custom that represents their beliefs. They are born dancers and when they dance, I can feel their genuine excitement and happiness, which I have never seen from professional dancers on stages. Though I have been learning Chinese traditional dance for 14 years, I feel extremely incapable of dancing among them.

While dressed in the colorful chuba (the Tibetan name for the traditional outer dress), and dancing together with the local people, I have gained a new understanding of dance.

Today is a big festival for people in Langdu village because of the new Stupa blessing ceremony. As traditionally, all the Tibetan people put on typical Tibetan costume and dance for the whole day. As someone who loves dancing, I am eager to join in this special activity.

Everyone stands in a circle and holds each other’s hands. The men sing and dance first, and then the women follow their melody and steps. The
men’s movements are powerful and passionate while the ladies dance more gracefully and smoothly.

The lady next to me wears a pink and black chuba, decorated with lots of beautiful jewelry. “Just follow me and you will be fine.” She says to me with a friendly tone when I stand there looking around, obviously seeming like I don’t know what to do.

When dancing together, the villagers have an opportunity to communicate; the elders pass down the culture while the younger generations learn about their minority group’s legends, traditions and history. When dancing together, they release their emotions and talk to the gods with their hearts. When dancing together, they distinguish themselves from the outside, living in their dream world.

Dressed in this beautiful chuba, for the first time, I forget about the need for dancing skills but dance in happiness and appreciation.
Arriving in Shangri-la (formerly known as Zhongdian) in the evening, after having started our trip to China with a few days of touring Beijing, our group of 6 students and 3 teacher-chaperones spent our first full day at the CERS Zhongdian Center. Besides receiving a general orientation, the day was also designed to allow us to acclimate to the higher elevation by proceeding at a mellow pace. Wong How Man began the tour and introduction in the main entrance hall which was also our dining room, and focused our group on the central display case. Here he began his explanation of the history and mission of CERS and the voyages they have taken together. Starting with artifacts from his Yangtze River expeditions, he then progressed to the drawers that held prized first edition copies of Hilton’s Lost Horizon, as well as the original National Geographic articles penned by Joseph Rock in the 1920’s, which were most likely the source for Hilton’s novel and the basis for its mythic destination Shangri-la.

Our focus on this trip was to look at cultural change and continuity in the area, as this is a theme we apply to our study of China in our freshman cultural studies course at The Lawrenceville School. We visited the Lisu Hill tribe site, and the Meixiang Yak Cheese factory, but the CERS Centre in Shangri-la was a focal place of study. We were able to have many discussions with the staff and others about the changes that occurred locally since the name change a decade ago. Of course we could also see the changes, with the new road construction surrounding the Center as well as the developing tourism in town. I can’t say that the town matches what I considered was meant by Shangri-la, but I do think that Wong How Man’s CERS Center does.
In the center, my Shangri-la, I was inspired immediately on the first day with a list of potential research and film projects I wanted to initiate. The lectures and documentaries that were put on by the staff, the museum at the center, and the walls covered with amazing photographs of over 25 years of CERS service fed the hungry mind. Of course once I voiced my interest in finding out more about the gDor Ma, a Tibetan Buddhist religious artifact, Berry Sin was able to produce more than enough books for me to get started. Berry, like everyone else at the center, was there to help guide these discoveries and usher along our learning. Beyond quenching the intellectual thirst, the views and comfort provided inside and outside the center truly soothed the soul.

One of our goals as a group was to develop our understanding of Buddhism and to see how it was practiced in this region. In two days time we were able to visit 3 monasteries’ and one nunnery with the opportunities to have incredible interactions with head monks and nuns. Interested in the gDor Ma relics from the CERS museum, we took these along in order to ask monks what they could translate from the designs and images. We were also able to visit a local’s home and visit their personal home shrine and discuss how Buddhism was practiced within the family. Again, the sequence of events and the opportunities offered to our group allowed for incredible instruction at a very personal level.

One thing that was a common conversation we had as a group was that our 10 days with CERS was really not enough. It allowed us a chance to see 3 incredible site locations in depth, but all of us wanted more. The trip hooked us, and sparked interests we all wanted to pursue. Beyond a group trip like this, we are also interested in pushing the internship opportunities available. In a final trip discussion, our longest conversation centered around “If you had a chance to return and engage in a specific project, what would that be?”

We had an incredible time, and the learning was ongoing, both passive and active. Never did we have a moment when someone from the CERS staff wasn’t thinking about engaging us and expanding our understanding of the culture and environs. Even when we stopped at 15,000 feet on the mining road to Langdu Village to stretch our legs, within moments Dr. Bleisch was asking our students to look closely at the vegetation to see what they could discover. Incredible education and inspiration all the time.
Golden Monkeys Song

by Ingrid Ma

July 2012

Stop the shooting!
I have a family too.
Stop the shooting!
My kind is dying out.
Stop the shooting,
And save us.

Let us eat our lichens in peace,
And have a restful sleep,
Let the young ones play,
And swing on trees all day.

Stop the logging,
I need a home too.
Stop the polluting,
Our food is dying out.
Stop the shooting,
And save us.

Let us eat our lichens in peace,
And have a restful sleep.
Let the young ones play,
And swing on trees all day.

Let us regain our numbers,
And remain as Lisu ancestors.

Langdu

by Isaac Yung

Summer 2012

The chills of the wind,
The scent of summer leaves,
The sight of the meandering and graceful flow of the river,

It is all there, in a place called Langdu,
Where the pristine ancient lakes are deemed sacred,
While the wisp of the trees whisper within the forest,
The scintillating sound of the stream sends chills around my body.

Never before have I ever set foot in the midst of nature,
Where the beauty is unparalleled compared to the wonders of the world.
The immersed valley is a vista of life and prosperity.

I was there, I found the deepest of thoughts,
Encompassing the nakedness of my existence,
While the shrubs swayed back and forth as the wind gently swept the fields.

Verdant hillsides roamed end to end.
As the cattle are grazed.
It was there I found my inner-self.

Langdu, a place that I call home.
A SELECTION OF THE WILD FLOWERS BLOSSOMING IN SHANGRI-LA

by Valerie Ma
Summer 2012

ALL: Alpine flora diversity.
Eliza Adams came to CERS in April 2012, during her GAP year before commencing her studies at Princeton University.

Annie Cook came to CERS in April 2012, during her GAP year before commencing her studies at Yale University.

Shirley Dai is from mainland China and is 18 years old. She is starting her studies at Barnard College in New York City this fall. Shirley has been studying Chinese traditional dance, flamenco, modern, and classical dance for the past 14 years. “I really love dancing,” she writes. “The forty day internship at CERS is just amazing. …. I not only learned much more about Tibetan and Lisu dance, but gradually understood that dance can be another great media for people to learn more about the minority groups’ culture and traditions.”

Jason Kan is 17 years old. He is from Hong Kong and currently attends the Lawrenceville School in New Jersey as a senior. “My CERS experience presented me the chance to witness at first hand all the major issues that plague our society today: …. It’s one thing to see these issues through the lens of the media, but to see it unfold in front of your own eyes makes everything so much more real and tangible. At that moment, whether its the sight of an abandoned instrument, a block of ice falling off the glacier or an utterly destitute house, I no longer want to just be a bystander and allow the problem to sweep by. …. CERS has truly made me aware of the world that exists beyond the narrow box that I live in, and I am truly thankful for this awakening.”

Ingrid Ma, age 17, is from Hong Kong and studying at The Taft School. “I love music and play both the piano and clarinet.” Ingrid came to CERS for a second year to learn more about the musical culture in the area. She was a CERS intern for two weeks in the summer of 2011 and for one month in the summer of 2012.
Top: A selection of the 2012 CERS interns and staff.
Bottom: Hungry interns at CERS Zhongdian Center.

Curtis Wong is a Junior at Hong Kong International School who will be graduating in 2014. He enjoys the humanities, especially those subjects concerning politics and society. In his free time he likes to volunteer in the local Hong Kong community, read, play basketball, and hang out with friends. He spent 20 days with CERS in the summer of 2012. His experience has led to the strengthening of his appreciation and admiration of nature, as well as bringing up questions about the balance between nature and man.

Isaac Yung is 17 years old and of American/British citizenship. He is attending South Island School in Hong Kong. Isaac writes “Zhongdian was an awakening for me, it made me realize the essence of rural China… the opportunity to visit mystical Shangri-La and to learn about Tibetan culture, was a gratifying experience. This eye-opening journey spanned only two short weeks. The natural surroundings made me feel inner-peace and introduced me to the splendors of China. Zhongdian is the place to be!”.

Ivan Yung is 17 years old and of American/British citizenship. He is attending South Island School in Hong Kong. Ivan loves to play sports. His CERS experience and special moments included camping and working on the wild life exhibition project.

Lawrenceville, a prestigious prep school near Princeton New Jersey, sent a group of students and teachers to explore with CERS this summer. This article is by the head teacher, Michael Hanewald about their experience. They followed their own course of study, enhanced by our field experts and guest lecturers, while utilising CERS sites and back end resources.

Yung Yau College (YYC) is the only local Hong Kong secondary school with a super computer and animation lab. A group of students and teachers come to CERS every summer. Following their experience they create a short animation based on their experience. The animation is a ‘gift’ to CERS and premiered at the CERS Annual Dinner. Previous animations can be seen on the CERS website.

Valerie Ma, our youngest intern of 2012 at 13 year old, is studying at the Hong Kong International School. She likes subjects that require the use of the left side of the brain. She enjoyed the yak cheese from the CERS Langdu Cheese Factory site, and started a new CERS intern tradition of a small ‘raft race’ down the nearby stream.

Elizabeth Mamo, age 21, is a recent graduate of George Washington University, USA. An International Affairs major with a passion for the outdoors, Liz is also interested in international education and cultural exchange. She was a CERS summer intern for two months in 2012, assisting with all aspects of the summer education program.

Fiona Qi is 19 years old and studies at the Institute for Tourism Studies, Macau. A Heritage Management major who loves travelling to remote places she worked as a CERS intern on the Lisu Village Culture Conservation Project for four weeks in the summer of 2012.
INTERNS IN THE FIELD

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

CURRENT PATRONS

Hong Kong
- Gigi Ma Arnoux
- Dr Joseph Chan
- Kevin Chau
- James Chen
- William E. Connor
- William Fung
- Victor Hsu
- Hans Michael Jebsen
- Anish Lalvani
- Christabel & Ricky Lau
- Afonso Ma
- Albert Ma

Overseas
- Patrick Ma
- David Mong
- Daniel Ng
- Dr William So
- James & Mary Tien
- Maria & Giovanni Tomaselli
- Betty Tsui
- Patrick Wang
- Gilbert & Queenie Wong
- Dora Wu
- Sonny Yau
- Wellington & Virginia Yee
- Billy Yung

- Derrick Quok
- Oliver Silsby
- Chote Sophonpanich

Corporate
- City Developments Limited
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- Eu Yan Sang Int’l Ltd
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The mission of the China Exploration and Research Society is to enrich the understanding of our cultural and natural heritage.

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