A NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ACKNOWLEDGE CERS’ FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
President’s Message

Education, ever since the founding of CERS over 25 years ago, has always been one of our main mission focuses. We try to educate the world at large with our own projects, be they through documentary films, publications or lectures, on the importance of our natural and cultural heritage. We have also for over a decade allowed students to join us in the field for vital hands-on experience.

This is particularly so with our younger generation. Long ago, I have come to the realization that “Content” is not king, “context” is. By context, I mean the interpretation of content. It is by interpretation that we add value, and personalize all, or selective, contents that are available to us.

CERS attempts to be a leader to be an interpreter of content, relevant to our work. I pride ourselves that in the area of our expertise, we are relatively successful. It is precisely such “context” that we hope to bring forth to students who interned with us.

I have always encouraged, at times pushed, our interns to interpret what they see or learn. I even go as far as prompting them to go ahead even with their own biases. My simple guideline for them is get “personal”. The world is getting too generic and homogeneous. As a trained journalist, I always say a good journalist covers all viewpoints and offers a chance for public scrutiny and interpretation. But the best journalist almost always takes a side, and promotes it. It is more usually done through writing of columns.

For this year, we have many students, high school or college, who are sharing their experience through the pages of this Issue of our newsletter. We are proud to bring to our friends and supporters this Special Issue, edited by two of our “repeating” student alumni after their second summer with us, Jason Kan and Curtis Wong.

Wong How Man
Hong Kong
October 2013

Editors Note (Jason Kan and Curtis Wong):

Having now been fortunate enough to be part of two CERS summer trips, we truly understand what a positive influence CERS is for all its participants. No matter if it’s two weeks, a month or beyond, any time spent with CERS is time spent immersed in a foreign world of vibrant culture and pristine nature. Coupled with other participants and members of the society that are also curious, compassionate and humble, a CERS trip is not only an enjoyable one, but also one that helps so many individuals to re-evaluate their life priorities, outlooks and beliefs for the better. As such, it has been nothing but an honor for us to be part of these interns’ reflective process, and we hope that you too can catch a glimpse of how impactful CERS is.

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We all laughed in a chorus as How Man told his less-than-appropriate joke about shopping in America. Capitalism gives us so many choices, and yet so few choices. How many different kinds of toothpaste can there be? How many different flavors of cereal can we choose from? Modern marketing indicates that we prefer more choices, because with so much variety we will inevitably buy more. But is more really better? My Myanmar experience told me otherwise.

Myanmar, a country for several decades secluded from the rapid industrialization and modernization of surrounding South East Asian nations. Until a few years ago, in reforms that shocked the world, Myanmar opened up its doors and began to modernize. In just a few short years the country has experienced rapid change, notably in the political and economic realms.
The common people have gained access to not only the outside world but also the early benefits of modern economics. The introduction of objects like mobile phones, supermarkets, diesel engines; examples of how modernity has finally put its mark on Myanmar. In terms of the political landscape, the president of the nation has been pushing for more reforms, and presidential elections are slated to happen in 2015.

This means Myanmar’s pristine natural environments are bound to come under danger. I saw garbage being tossed onto riverbanks, diesel engines coughing up polluting fumes, and many instances of logging. Capitalism has become the newest influence besides the government; although providing many new sources of living for the Myanmar people, it only approves of a few ways to do things. As a developing country, this includes selling its resources or utilizing its cheap labor to manufacture for other countries. If development is not handled properly, Myanmar could become a smaller version of China, with pollution being a searing problem for the nation, as well as difficulty transitioning from manufacturing to more professional, specialized industries.

But I am not so pessimistic here in Myanmar than I was in China. Myanmar has a lot of examples to prevent the same mistakes happening, and the people are different. They have a kind, optimistic outlook on life. Despite the many hardships that they have had to face in the past decades, they believe in change for the better. People smile and treat others with care and attention. Perhaps it is their strong belief in Buddhism that fosters such benevolence in the people; or perhaps it is something that originates from within the Myanmar blood. Every morning at the markets, we would come across all sorts of merchandise, pedestrians and street vendors. Inevitably they would stop and stare, whether it was at our foreign clothing, the cameras that we carried, and our very different countenance compared to a Myanmar person. We would create small commotions, and yet no one would ever complain, or shoo us away, or glare at us. If we had been in a city standing around a store blocking its entrance, we would be met with much more negative reactions. Such is the beauty of Myanmar. It has been carefully preserved in a capsule of time, and it remains pure for the time being. Capitalism hasn’t eroded the hearts and minds of the Myanmar people. I hope it never will.

Myanmar has shown me that there is hope regardless of how dire the situation may be, and although we all frequently make mistakes, it is only normal. Humans are complicated and irrational; short-term gains frequently mask any intentions to evaluate long-term affects of an action. This is what happened in China, and is or has happened in many other developing nations. Myanmar can become the first of a kind, a nation that has progressed to modernity and managed to preserve its culture, its nature, and the different elements that make Myanmar so different and appealing to us foreigners. For many the unique appeal of Myanmar is the temples and its very different culture; for myself it is the people and the breathtaking landscape. Hopefully both these
things never disappear, even as modernity has begun to imprint itself onto the newly reformed Myanmar nation.

No one can tell what is ahead for Myanmar, but change is the only certainty for the times ahead. If Myanmar follows a generic path of development, then its culture and environment will be damaged if not sacrificed. If development is done deliberately and with care, its identity may just come out intact. If true, capitalism will have for the first time given a nation the power to truly choose, and not an illusion of freedom of choice.
When asked about how I spent the past two weeks in Myanmar, my mind starts spinning and I end up mumbling a long, incoherent sentence that somehow manages to mention all of the following words: bats, pagodas, boats, elephants, birds, markets, and temples. The experience is too exotic and eclectic for me to appropriately explain with a single comprehensive sentence. Moreover, words never seem to adequately describe the events; much of the beauty of the story is lost when it is told rather than experienced directly. For instance, I can explain to my mother how we caught our second bat after we had given up and were taking down the nets. I can describe to her the size of the bat, how fluffy its back was, and that it was flying with a newborn baby; I can even show her a picture of the baby bat. Nonetheless, my mother is unfortunately only able to appreciate the event on a very shallow level and she will most likely forget about the story in a few days. On the contrary, I don’t think I will ever forget this example of maternal care, how the baby bat, with its eyes closed, held on to its mother so tightly, completely clueless about its surroundings. This goes for the rest of the trip; I was so fortunate to be able to witness so many new things first-hand, and they all left such a permanent impression on me.

Among my many experiences in Myanmar, I particularly enjoyed being so close to wildlife. Many times during the trip, I found myself mesmerized by the beauty of nature; the rest of the world seemed to drown out around me as my attention was fully captivated by the thousands of bats covering the sky as they flew together to feed on the extraordinarily large butterfly hovering gracefully above us, completely oblivious to the six pairs of eyes following its every flutter with amazement. Having grown up in a city since I was young, such close interactions with nature have been either very limited or simply unavailable for most of my life. The most important lesson I learned from my interactions with wildlife in Myanmar was to keep an open mind about nature. Before the trip, I had a rather fixed idea in my head about what animals such as bats, butterflies, dragonflies, elephants, and spiders all looked like; each animal had to be a certain size and look a certain way. Evidently, my ignorance had led me to generalize and simplify these beautifully complex animals. It did not take long to figure out how mistaken I was. I was fascinated to observe with my own eyes the uniquely shaped spider we saw during our hike and the multi-colored grasshopper we encountered at the monastery – simply put, they shattered my original assumptions. Such interactions allowed me to develop an open-minded attitude towards the previously unimaginable. Realizing that I was wrong triggered my curiosity; I have since wanted to learn more about the different shapes and forms of these seemingly mundane organisms.

This curiosity is perhaps my biggest takeaway from the Myanmar trip; CERS has reawakened the spirit of exploring within me that had been in hibernation since my childhood. As
I grew up, I was always expected to do things with a definite goal; ability to focus on that goal was a virtue while digression was frowned upon. Furthermore, practicality was always the first priority. On the Myanmar trip, however, I learned to keep an open mind that allowed me to embrace all the spontaneous excitement and unexpected wonder the land had to offer. Our days weren’t merely about going up the river as fast as possible and I truly appreciated stopping at semi-random villages along the Irrawaddy River simply for the sake of experiencing and exploring. Often times, we didn’t know what we were looking for when we stopped at these villages, but we always managed to learn something new by the time we returned to our boat. My 10-day adventure in Myanmar mirrored our stops at these river villages; I left home not quite sure what I was looking for, but I had learned so much when I returned.
MYANMAR REFLECTION
by Jason Kan

Imagine an isolated African village, with its wooden huts and straw roofs, morphed with a cowboy town from out West, with its tin roofs and shutters all along the walls. Then you proceed to replace all the dirt roads with murky canals, the rickety wheelbarrows with narrow and long paddle boats, and elevate every building up 8 feet on wooden stilts, you will get what in my mind is an accurate depiction of a town on the Inle Lake.

It is partly because of this strange spectacle that Inle Lake was my favorite place on this Myanmar trip. Paddling our way from the post office to the elementary school and later right through a floating farm... it sure wasn’t anything ordinary.

Yet my love for this place stretched much deeper than just for its exterior beauty and charm, because it was only here at Inle Lake that truly reflected a sense of “Myanmar” to me.

Speaking as somebody who has been fortunate enough to travel throughout much of Asia, many places in Myanmar didn’t seem so unique. They were special, beautiful, but not unique. For example, while traveling up the Irrawaddy River, with its crowded waterways and golden pagodas shimmering all along the shoreline, I was easily convinced that I was in rural Thailand. Or when we visited a temple at Mingun, the Buddha and its surroundings an absolute immaculate white, I had no problem believing that I was in rural China. It was even more so at Bagan, where a sea of red temples made me second-guess myself that I was in fact in Angkor Wat. Some people may point out that this variety of culture is the unique symbol of Myanmar that I was looking for. But I wasn’t satisfied. I needed one single object or scene to capture the uniqueness of the country, like the Statue of Liberty does for...
MAIN: Bamboo huts on Inle Lake.
the US, or a favela for Brazil. It could be anything and I finally found it at the Inle Lake.

We visited several shops surrounding Inle Lake, all of which were operating with the same methods and techniques as the generations before them had. The blacksmith shop was still only capable of producing six to seven knives a day, a lady at the lotus weaving shop still used a knife to collect every thread of the 3-4 acres of lotus needed to make a single robe, and the ship building workshop still painted every inch of lacquer on by hand. To come in everyday and repeat through the same set of motions over and over again truly epitomized the concept of tradition and contentment of a simple life. Yet at the same time I noticed change. The blacksmith shop had recently begun importing other bronze products to sell at their shop, the Lotus weaving shop had just begun to branch off as a retailer of Chinese made flip-flops, and the boat making workshop had set up its own little stand selling the same small wooden crafts found at every tourist attraction we visited.

It is this sort of scene that seemed to symbolize Myanmar. Just as the country begins to open up to the greater world, it too begins to wake up from its slumber of simplicity. And even after so many generations have so seamlessly passed on its sets of unique traditions and habits onto the next, it seems irresistible, upon the slightest glimpse of wealth, to abandon everything in the wild pursuit. This transition from isolated tradition to international tourist hotspot, perfectly captured at these various shops, gave me the genuine taste of Myanmar that I had been searching for. Better yet, whereas a pristine beach or a breathtaking skyline is available in many places, to see a country progressing in front of your eyes is not. A spectacle like this is one of the few things that is dictated not by wealth but by time, and the opportunity to slip into father time’s small window to see this has been nothing short of a blessing.
Coming straight from a busy and hectic lifestyle at university with only 3 days for finding clothes and food before heading off for a month and half in Yunnan; to say I was just a little tired is an understatement.

I was to make a short documentary film about a subject on CERS in China and its work with the Yung Yau College. The students were to make a short film about their travels and a topic for an animation film. I was inspired by these students as I had been told that they came from a remote part of Hong Kong. I was extremely impressed with how smart and intuitive these students were. They had won up to 27 international animation awards. When we met they were nothing but a bunch of six young students waiting to learn more and achieve more. By their side always is a talented and caring teacher who took on this animation project. He spent a year going to classes and learnt how to use computer program so as to teach these students more.

After following the boys around, interviewing them and seeing the bees (their topic) for myself I was able to see how their work got on and how a story line evolved to become an internationally recognizable work. It was fascinating to see their brains spiral off in different directions depending on what discussions they had the nights before about bees, honey and disappearing culture. At the Lisu site we were able to see the bees and got a first-hand look of the traditional way in which beekeepers collect honey. Honey was kept in trees or kept in manmade tree huts which bees flew in and out of.

The staff also wanted me to have fun during my journey. I was able to see some amazing sites around Yunnan. There is a part of Yunnan which made me feel that the beauty was of a different magnitude. Although I had felt and experienced religion in China and around Asia; there was something different about the way I felt when being in Yunnan.

There was a massive sense of tourism in Shangri-la and see the nature, the people, the costumes and the traditional daily religious aspects of their life, it fascinated me. Having come from a very busy schedule back home, I was able to have a relaxing and somewhat religious experience. Buddhism was never shoved in our faces; I always felt that if we looked for it in people or within their houses, we could easily see or feel it. The people that worked with CERS were also always willing to answer questions and talk about their life which was a pleasant surprise. There was also a part of Yunnan that just made you feel so captivated.

I was also able to talk to some of the most fascinating people I have met in recent years. They were from different walks of life and with different skills. One thing that really impressed me was their resourcefulness against obstacles and stayed passionate about what they wanted to do. As passion is an important part of my course and my life, it is what drives me to do what I want.

If there is one thing I will take home from this trip; it is about willing to take a chance. I also learned the importance of nature and culture that is much needed in China and the world, especially during a hi-tech age surrounding us. It is often the simplest things in life like that will allow you to enjoy yourself. But you have to be open to new experiences.

MY CERS REFLECTIONS
by Melissa Murray
This whole trip to Yunnan was an awesome experience as we travelled to various places. We had plenty of activities, which were unique, and mind blowing. I thoroughly believe that all my friends, whom I have met through this internship, have experienced something different in their life, like I did. Even though I can talk a lot about the internship, I would like to share a bit of my thoughts on the bee collecting and honey making by specific tribes in Gehuaqing village.

Gehuaqing is a nice and warm place filled with kind and caring villagers, a village famous for its Shangri-la Honey. It was an hour car ride from Lisu village to Gehuaqing. It wasn’t an easy journey, as we faced many ups and downs through our traveling, but the beauty of nature made the hour pass by easily. The majestic mountains and the streams that flow from it were a visual treat for the eyes. In those mesmerizing views, we didn’t realize that we had reached the village until our Land Rovers stopped near a stream. Then we proceeded to pass thorough a wooden bridge and had a short walk towards the wooden hut, which had been leased out by CERS. It was a two story wooden hut, which had plenty of room for all of us. Those huts were traditional Lisu houses and special because they had been dismantled first then reassembled in the village to preserve the traditional houses and culture of Lisu people. The feeling was amazing, and one would not want to leave this place if one had stayed there once and got to enjoy the nature.

We just stayed in the huts and played till the sun had set and ate dinner together. We didn’t do much on that day except strengthen our bond with each other. The sky was so bright from the moon and the twinkling stars, which I had rarely seen in Hong Kong. I took this opportunity to enjoy the deep blue night sky for a little longer before we all entered deep slumber in our nice cushy beds till a new day had arrived.

My eagerness to visit the honey farm made me get up early. I was so excited to see the farm and see the honeycombs. My fellow interns were more excited to see the bees
than tasting the honey. Yet some were scared of the bees and their venomous stings.

Xiao Feng, who works for CERS and also belongs to Gehuaqing village, led the way to the honey farm, which was owned by his family. It was a twenty to thirty minute walk from the place where we stayed to the farm. A small trail that was running along a river that led us to the mountain. The path was filled with pig’s dung, which dispersed a pungent smell along the trail. It only took the first ten minutes until the exotic scenery and the sound of the water in the river conquered my mind, I guess it did the same for my friends too. Since my mind was totally occupied by the nature, I did not realize an old man of about fifty to sixty years old had joined us on the trail and walking with Xiao Feng. I wondered who that might be.

The trail ended with a highland, where a wooden hut was propped up neatly. Just beside that there are some wooden logs placed in regular distances. We knew what exactly it was since we saw the pictures of them in the presentation given by CERS team. These were the logs used to trap bees so that they could produce honeycomb inside the log. Right before we went to explore them, Xiao Feng called us all down to the stream and introduced that old man as her father. He gave us all a warm smile and started moving towards a big tree right behind him, a few meters away. The tree was humongous and extremely tall. On the trunk, a small piece of wood was inserted and we could see some bees circling around the log. I realized that they had called us down to watch Xiao Feng’s father collect the natural honey from the honeycombs inside the tree trunk.

He leaned a ladder like a tree trunk against the tree that had the honeycombs and started climbing. He proceeded to remove the wood, then inserted and started blowing smoke from his smoking pipe. I realized he was using the smoke to doze the bees so that he could collect honey without stings from the bees. It was amazing to see him collecting the honey without even a sting from the bees. I wondered whether the bees didn’t sting him or he had got used the bee stings. In the end he just removed the honeycombs with a knife and kept the honeycomb in a small silver pot. He then generously gave us the honeycomb to taste the honey, which was bliss for me, to have the chance to try natural honey after a long time.

After tasting the honey, we then moved towards the highlands again. He showed us the logs that trapped the bees inside for honey harvesting and opened one for us to see. He then scraped some honeycomb and made us try it too, before he closed the log again. He was overjoyed to share the honey with us. It showed me how innocent and generous these people in the villages were, who expect nothing from us, and yet are willing to share things they consider valuable with us. They were indeed loving and caring.

On the day we had to leave Gehuaqing, we all went to Xiao Feng’s house and bought the natural honey as a souvenir from this awesome place. I it is a good way to support them by buying some honey, which gives them the incentive to keep holding onto their culture and tradition. We all left with a hope that they would continue doing what they were doing, and never give up on their culture and tradition.
這次旅程對我們來說有獨特的意義，一來是新鮮感，二來是得來的珍貴回憶。旅程前的心情特別的緊張，因為實在有太多不確定的事情和未知的冒險，我們懷著忐忑不安的心情住進了營舍。陌生的環境，陌生的室友，卻異常的親切。同住營舍的村民都很友善，總是笑著向我們問好。同房的室友相處起來更沒有芥蒂。

當地的村民都很好客，會對住進去的人十分友善。他們會照顧我們一些有高山反應的同學們。在異地生病或是感到不舒服，是很憂慮的一件事，可是村民們都看慣了，知道怎麼處理，主動向我們提出幫助，一步一步的克服高山反應。

來到香格里拉，我們看到了在香港看不見的人和事，經歷了對我們來說堪稱「最艱苦」的行山旅程。同行的老師跟村民總會伸出援手，在危險的時候經常拉我們一把。我們真的十分感謝他們。還有，因著這次報告，我們有機會與當地人民作訪問及聊天。在跟他們聊天時，我們感受了他們的熱情跟接受訪問的喜悅。

雲南，一個看似十分遙遠的地方，我們卻有機會待在雲南十一天。在雲南瀰漫著的是清澈新鮮的空氣，生活著的是純樸的村民。這些在抵達之前已經想像過了，可是真正感受到之後卻十分的震撼。我們去了納帕海附近踏單車，那裡有一片一望無際的遼闊草原，比起孕育人類的大自然，我們人類顯得特別的渺小。看著有活力的大自然，看著在草原上的牛群，心生一種難以言喻的感覺。他們擁有一種靈性，他們的身心放任在大自然裡，他們是自由的。相比起生活在大城市裡的我們，他們擁有跟我們不一樣的眼神。我們亦去了看金絲猴和蜜蜂，這些都是我們在香港很少機會或不能看到的，所以這些體驗特別令我們感受深刻。這優哉遊哉的環境與香港的繁華都市截然不同，令人能夠把平日的煩惱拋諸腦後，體驗到悠閒生活的美好。

這次旅程接觸到雲南少數民族的文化，令我們大開眼界。看著藏族獨有的唐卡，每一筆每一劃，都能看出

這

次旅程對我們來說有獨特的意義，一

來是新鮮感，二來是得來的珍貴回

憶。旅程前的心情特別的緊張，因為

實在有太多不確定的事情和未知的冒

險，我們懷著忐忑不安的心情住進了營舍。陌生的環

境，陌生的室友，卻異常的親切。同住營舍的村民都

很友善，總是笑著向我們問好。同房的室友相處起來

更沒有芥蒂。

當地的村民都很好客，會對住進去的人十分友善。他

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看慣了，知道怎麼處理，主動向我們提出幫助，一步

一步的克服高山反應。

來到香格里拉，我們看到了在香港看不見的人和事，

經歷了對我們來說堪稱「最艱苦」的行山旅程。同行

的老師跟村民總會伸出援手，在危險的時候經常拉我

們一把。我們真的十分感謝他們。還有，因著這次報

告，我們有機會與當地人民作訪問及聊天。在跟他們

聊天時，我們感受了他們的熱情跟接受訪問的喜悅。

雲南，一個看似十分遙遠的地方，我們卻有機會待在
雲南十一天。在雲南瀰漫著的是清澈新鮮的空氣，生
活著的是純樸的村民。這些在抵達之前已經想像過了，
可是真正感受到之後卻十分的震撼。我們去了納

帕海附近踏單車，那裡有一片一望無際的遼闊草原，
比起孕育人類的大自然，我們人類顯得特別的渺小。

看著有活力的大自然，看著在草原上的牛群，心生一
種難以言喻的感覺。他們擁有一種靈性，他們的身心
放任在大自然裡，他們是自由的。相比起生活在大城
市裡的我們，他們擁有跟我們不一樣的眼神。我們亦
去了看金絲猴和蜜蜂，這些都是我們在香港很少機會
或不能看到的，所以這些體驗特別令我們感受深刻。
這優哉遊哉的環境與香港的繁華都市截然不同，令人
能夠把平日的煩惱拋諸腦後，體驗到悠閒生活的美
好。

這次旅程接觸到雲南少數民族的文化，令我們大開眼
界。看著藏族獨有的唐卡，每一筆每一劃，都能看出
繪著的心思跟努力。要完成一幅宏美的唐卡，需要很多細節的配合。就如我們做事一樣，注意好細節，才能一點一點築起一件工作，才能幹得意大事。另外，他們用的顏料是純天然的，繪出的畫不易褪色，可以保存很久。天然的物料，村民用料的智慧，還有熟練的繪畫技術，都深深的震撼了我們。

另外，我們非常高興能在這裡認識了很多新朋友，就是 Nadia，Sara，Melissa，Valerie。他們都很友善，跟他們一起渡過的十一天真的很愉快，亦讓他們有機會與外國人一起交流，並訓練了自己的英語溝通能力，實在獲益良多。

最後，我們想感謝CERS的工作人員，特別是每一位司機，他們每次都載我們去不同的地方參觀，實在是勞苦功高。另外，感謝為我們做飯的每一位，他們每天都為我們做了很多菜，而且更在我們生病時特別為我們做了稀飯，然後端上來給我們吃，真的很感謝他們無微不至的照顧。此外，也感謝卓瑪為我們安排了很多活動和講座，使我們的旅程變得充實。最後，十分感謝Dr. Paul和Dr. Bill，還有其他為我們講課的老師，在這幾天教導了我們很多不同方面的知識，使我們獲益不少。

這次的旅程是一個很好的經歷，讓我們脫離了學校的固有框架，重新認識自己，就像上了寶貴的一課。十一天旅程的結束，並不代表一切的結束。天下無不散之筵席，短暫的分離是為了以後的再會。我們帶走的不只是手信、相片，而是一班朋友的祝福。因為他們，我們有了新的體驗，有了新的感受、新的心境。
在這次雲南香格里拉的旅程中，我們一行十一人連同三位老師爬上海拔超過3500米的高山，走過崎嶇不平的山路，越過水流湍急的河流，當中所見所聞實在一生難忘，叫人依依不捨。

這次聯同中國探險學會一同在不同的地方探索，最主要的目的是要觀察蜜蜂的生態環境，並於校園製作一套動畫關於蜜蜂消失對人類的影響，藉此提醒世人保護蜜蜂。其實，當我們第一次聽到要與蜜蜂來個近距離接觸時，所有人都叫苦連天，平常我們見到蜜蜂掉頭便跑，現在卻要主動尋找起牠們，對我們不可不說是艱巨的任務呢！記得我們走了近四十五分鐘的路程後，出現在我們眼前的是一片樹木成蔭的森林，綠意盎然，隔着數棵樹木上便掛着一個個由眾多正六邊形組成的蜂巢，旁邊亦有五、六個「小屋子」，聽養蜂人說這些都是他們為蜜蜂搭建的「蜂箱」，我們懷著戰戰兢兢的心情觀察、記錄下蜜蜂的外表及一舉一動，作日後製作動畫的參考。我們更加觀察了養蜂人爬上樹採集蜂蜜的過程，看着他們冒着被蜜蜂攻擊的風險，幾經辛苦爬上參天大樹上採蜜，就算受傷亦沒有絲毫怨言，這令我們明白到很得的東西，也許別人要很辛苦才能製造，這更讓我們體會到「粒粒皆辛苦」的意思。

此程另一個令我們永生難忘的行程便非觀察金絲猴莫属了，金絲猴是國家一級保護動物，平常人基本上一生也沒有機會能看到，這次有幸能一睹牠們的風采實在使我們驚喜萬分，但接踵而來一個多小時蜿蜒的路程卻使我們失去了原本的熱情。當我們快要放棄的時候，眼前層巒疊翠的山上突然出現了數隻活潑可愛的猴子，正是我們攀山涉水尋找的東西—金絲猴。我們立刻恢復精神，拿出望遠鏡、相機、攝錄機等，把握每一分一秒。「一分耕耘，一分收穫」，不走過讓人腰酸腿痛凹凸不平的山路，又如何能看到瀕臨絕種的動物呢？

」「讀萬卷書，不如行萬里路」，這句話的意思並不是勸人荒廢學業，旅遊確實能學到很多課堂上不能得到的知識。正如這次旅程，我們親自搭建帳篷，從中學習如何在野外的生存技巧及獨立性，並增進了同學之間的友誼，也更了解彼此。

此外，雲南雖然沒有香港發展得那麼完善、沒有香港那麼整潔、更沒有香港那麼舒服，但那裡的人民卻真正能與大自然和諧共存，靠山吃山，靠水吃水，過著自給自足的生活，不會過份破壞環境。反觀香港，為了發展竟不斷破壞大自然，忽略了大自然的重要。

十一位學生在十一日的旅程中，得到的不只是增廣見聞而已，更重要的是從中學到的道理，這些東西或許我們在課堂上已經學過，但不經過親身體驗是不會真正明白的，這些才是這次旅程中最重要、最寶貴的東西。
十一天的香格里拉高海拔探險之旅，轉眼間便結束了！過程中需要有很堅定的意志才能完結這探險！感謝在我呼吸困難及頭痛欲際時背我上樓梯的林同學！感謝在我上山體力不支時推我幾把的陳老師！感謝與我一起與蟲同眠的尖子學妹Carol Wong！感謝偉大探險家How Man的教導！感謝Tsering Drolma及CERS給我們全程辛勞的照顧！更要感謝在我出現高山反應時照料我、帶我走下濕滑且陡峭的山路，及眼尖地拔走我腳上吸血蟲的周老虎！還要感謝帶領我們欣賞自然環境的Dr. Paul and Dr. Bill！嘉許11位同學們的守望相助！這次經歷顯然辛苦，但師生都獲益良多，感受深刻！

MISS LAU
謝謝！
As a self-proclaimed ‘city-slicker’, the prospect of spending the remainder of my summer holiday in the corners of rural China seemed daunting. Severed from the daily comforts that I was accustomed to, I fully expected bouts of homesickness and the challenges that would come with extracting myself from a sophisticated, urban city. Yet, while my experience with the China Exploration and Research Society was dotted with perpetual complaints, stumbling through what seemed to be a combination of both Yak excretion and mud and the endless bugs that would find their way through the crevices of our temporary abode, I found myself immersed in a culture incredibly rich and unique.

Born and raised in the metropolitan city of Hong Kong, the clearly defined culture of Yunnan that I witnessed fascinated me greatly. In contrast, Hong Kong’s culture isn’t so clearly defined. The lines where one culture begins and another ends blur together. Hong Kong boasts a large and varied expatriate community and while Hong Kong certainly has its own share of cultural quirks, Hong Kong’s true culture often becomes shrouded amidst layers of various other cultures. The clarity of Yunnan’s culture is perhaps what appealed to me the greatest. Amongst a vastly modernizing world, the traditions and ways of the people remain steadfast. The culture of Yunnan remains stubborn to change.

The people themselves perhaps best epitomize this unyielding sense of tradition. When listening in interviews conducted by fellow interns, I discovered that their tradition remains deeply rooted within their lives. Amidst the moments where I awkwardly fiddled with camera settings while simultaneously snapping portraits, I discovered that the locals remain ignorant, if not stubborn, to the modernization that has consumed China. All have no wishes to join the masses in the quickly modernizing cities of China.
While some locals wish only for their lifestyles to remain constant, others have expressed their wishes for higher education. Despite such wishes, the people of Yunnan continue to dance through the night with seemingly choreographed dances, collect honey in the traditional way, tend to their beloved livestock, and celebrate holidays like they would have in the past.

When I shift back through my memories to think of a specific incident or individual that embodied such customs and traditions, I think back to Xiao Drolma. Xiao Drolma is a member of the China Exploration and Research Society community. Perched upon her head is a traditional Tibetan head wrap used to shield her face from the sun. Upon her face seems to be a permanent smile plastered to her face. Xiao Drolma’s job is very much behind the scenes. However, that is not to say that it is not crucial to our experience as interns. Xiao Drolma spends much of her day cleaning and cooking with little respite. As interns, we were blessed with the opportunity to visit her Tibetan style house.

From the outside, her home is carved from a wood that closely resembles the soft brown of honey, embellished with vibrant colors. As I stepped into her abode, I found myself admiring the details that seemed to drape every surface. Ornate hand carvings adorned every crevice of the interior, each excruciatingly detailed. While Xiao Drolma’s house contained many necessities of every modern home, there were also hints of traditional ways of living. Her house featured a traditional kitchen, large pots that were at once used to collect water and a room used for worship, all of which signify the customs of the people in Yunnan.

The traditions of Yunnan were something that I was eager to capture. Yet, as an average writer and a below average artist, photography is the only medium that captures the awe-inspiring sights that the world offers. Photography for me is an intensely personal passion. At times, it is the only way I can express myself when words fail. That one moment that I wish to share with others but cannot express is the moment I choose to release the shutter. That is why I chose to capture the culture of Yunnan in pictures. A piece of advice that Wong How Man expressed to me was that “If something touches your heart, it is likely to touch the hearts of others.” The culture of Yunnan left its imprint, in a way that I cannot share in words, but only in pictures.

Through my photos, I hope to convey not only the unique traits of Yunnan’s culture but to also show others what I witnessed. I hope to communicate how I interpreted what I saw and perhaps replicate the emotions that coursed through my body in others. The photo can be as simple as child clutching his mother or as ornate as a young woman wearing her traditional clothing. No matter the subject, I wish for viewers to understand the story behind the photograph.

While I have reiterated this over and over within this short passage, I feel there is no way to articulate how distinctive and beautiful the culture of Yunnan truly is. Although surely it is has evolved over the years, the foundation of Yunnan’s culture remains intact. The preservation of the customs of those in Yunnan best reflects the China Exploration and Research Society’s mission: To protect and maintain the cultures and the environment of rural China. Our world is quickly becoming a society that emphasizes the need for innovation and the constant desire for updates. It is a community that clamors and craves for the new. Yet, in the heart of rural China, I found that sometimes the things that take your breath away have been there all along.
Spending 18 days in remote China may not seem like the crème de la crème for an average traveller, but as someone who is always ready to rough it up, I have come to love and admire the unique way of life I found there. Being in this almost backwards world made me ponder how different my lifestyle is to those who live in the villages of Yunnan province, disconnected from the rest of the world. Although I constantly complained about the bugs that congregated around the lights in the traditional Lisu houses and was in perpetual shock about the animal feces that lined the dirt roads, this is the typical way of life for these villagers. I may be used to skyscrapers and airplanes that dot the starless nights, but most villagers don’t think of my city life as the “normal life.”

The differences between my half American – half Asian culture and the traditional Chinese cultures of Yunnan became clearer and more fascinating to me throughout my stay. I decided to look into this further, asking three locals about their daily lives and then comparing them to mine. I spoke to Xiao Drolma, a Tibetan of Gong Bin village who works as a cook and cleaner for CERS, Xiao Feng, who also assists CERS and comes from a Lisu minority family in Ge Hua Qing village, and Drolma, another Tibetan who runs her own yak cheese factory in Langdu village. Some conclusions I drew were expected, yet others were absolutely mind-blowing.

One thing I already had some idea about was the differences in the way we all make a living and the responsibilities we have. Xiao Feng’s family farms, keeps bees and harvests mushrooms. They also do all their cleaning and cooking. When they needed to move into a new house, they took three years to build it themselves, gathering wood from the surrounding mountains. In contrast, my dad has his own investment business and works from home, and we have a helper who does all the household work. When we moved to New York a year ago, we hired someone to make sure our apartment was in a ready-to-move-in state when we arrived. The cause of these differences is partly due to our locations and lifestyles, but I now realize that the main root is the different level of education we have which results from whether or not...
we were able to go to school.

Going to school is basic part of my life, as is eating, sleeping and breathing. In New York, an education is the foundation for everything else and is crucial to survival. Xiao Drolma never had an education because her dad passed away when she was little. As a result, she now feels that it would be easier to get around provincial cities if she were fluent in Mandarin and able to recognize reliable brands and good quality items. Although she has a stable and happy life, she regrets not having gone to school. After hearing this, it was hard for me to understand her point of view. Since the jobs in her and the surrounding villages are mostly manual labor based, I didn’t think that the lifestyle of these villagers required them to have an education at all. It surprised me to hear how essential education was for Xiao Drolma, especially since I was once so convinced it wasn’t as crucial for her as it is for me.

By talking with Drolma about family celebrations and holidays, I realized how consumerism plays such a big role in my life but hardly any in theirs. With each holiday in my life come more things: Christmas supplies presents, Chinese New Year brings money, and birthdays give me more presents. It has become a habit, a tradition of ours, to always look for more and more. Holidays are not so much a time to celebrate, as they are a chance to receive. Celebrations in China have less to do with materialistic things. Drolma told me that during Chinese New Year in her village, families sing and dance and gather together to play games. I knew that presents weren’t necessarily a tradition but I now see even more clearly that my world has become so greedy that we forget the essence of holidays.

Perhaps the most surprising conclusion I drew from this trip pertained to something I never thought about before. I was so obsessed with comparing our daily lives that I forgot to think about my happiness and the happiness of the locals. I discovered that, for Xiao Drolma, Xiao Feng and Drolma, the prospect of living in a big urban city, just like the one I live in now, has never appealed to them. I realized that living a simple life could make someone happier than living in a world where there is always more to want. Driving around Yunnan province, passing locals on the road and sharing the serenity of life in this beautiful corner of the earth, I understood that although our lives are very different, we are all happy. You could be in Manhattan, amidst the skyscrapers and airplanes, or in Yunnan, where bugs congregate around lights and feces line the roads, but in the end it doesn’t matter. Even though our cultures are totally different, it all comes down to happiness, and in the lives of Xiao Feng, Drolma, Xiao Drolma and my family, happiness exists.
I knew exactly what to expect. At least, I thought I did. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t mean this in an arrogant manner at all, but rather because I’ve heard so much about the CERS excursions and the wonders they came across on their explorations. My dad started working with CERS quite a few years ago so he’d go on one or two excursions with them every year. And, every time he came back he had a bundle of new stories to tell me over dinner. The point I’m making here is that because my Dad has been so involved with CERS, he’s told me enough about his experiences for me to form my own general idea of what goes on. I’ve heard about Myanmar, Hainan, Tibet, and the trips around China. He’s told me about the yak cheese, as well as the Tibetan mastiff project (back when it was still going on). However, he didn’t talk about his experiences to teach me about yak cheese, or mastiffs, or how different plants are adapted to its environment. He sat me down for several hours at a time to teach me how to think. At this point, you may be asking why this is so significant, and how this is different to just reading the CERS articles. It’s different because hearing these stories from the perspective of someone who had actually been there, as opposed to reading and learning about it, gave me such a rich feeling of being ‘close’ to the projects themselves. Therefore, I felt like I knew exactly what to expect from the 18-day summer internship.

As a result, I didn’t feel like I could learn anything. Don’t get me wrong—I was still overwhelmingly intrigued and excited for this trip, because I wanted to experience all my Dad’s stories—the yaks, the Tibetan Mastiffs, the cheese, for myself. I also wanted to go on the kind of trip where nobody cared about what you looked like, where excreting (and sometimes egesting) in nature was a norm, and where you were always moving, always exploring. And this trip fulfilled all of the above. The number of times we encountered horrible bathroom experiences was countless. The longest we ever stayed in a place was 4 days in Langdu, and even then we were rarely settled, as we went camping up in Wudi Lake and visited the Yak Farm about an hour’s drive away from the Langdu site. We always kept moving, exploring, and for us – learning. Of course, you can’t embrace the
pros of nature without the cons, so with the beauty came bugs. With the rawness of nature came the absence of electricity (at times). With the Chinese culture came spicy food (even though it wasn’t a big deal, I always felt bad to return it). Even then, pretty much everything from this trip was amazing. I loved this trip when I was on it, and I still love this trip after it. We did so much in so little time, that even now, in retrospect, I’m still overwhelmed by the intensity and value of the experiences I gained from the trip.

Truth be told, this has been a surprisingly difficult article to write. The 18 days that we were there were truthfully mind-blowing. Enlightening. Exciting. Valuable, so much so that I’m having difficulty summarizing the trip in a simple sentence, because it was just so much more than what I expected it to be. If you’re reading this article now and haven’t been on something like this, take my word for it when I say that it’s worth it. I’ve learned so much, and have met so many amazing people. There’s such diversity in the people who make up the CERS crew, and you will never be bored. Thank you to everyone who participated in helping out us interns this summer, it’s because of you that we had such a great time. Lastly, thank you How Man, for giving me the opportunity to experience something like this. I am truly grateful, because not only did you give me one of the most memorable experiences of my lifetime, you introduced me to a new way of tackling problems when they surface.
A
midst the mountains, where the clouds and earth collide, the trials and tribulations of city life – latest clothes, high paying job, traffic jams... etc. - really seem trivial. When you stand amongst the villagers who find joy in the simplest of pleasures; the petty problems that arise from a consumerist attitude that most city-kid have adopted look wasteful and insignificant. And when these villagers lament not being able to achieve a higher education and yet still achieve so much with what little they have, you look back on your life and reflect on your achievements with the vast resources that have always been so easily available. The CERS experience really put my life into perspective in that it opened my eyes to another side of the world that previously was only glossed over through television and environmental campaigns. It showed me that money is not a pre-requisite to happiness nor is it really an aid. The sceneries, cultures, people and experience were all ‘free’ in the sense that no amount of money could have provided them all for me in Singapore. The CERS experience also helped me appreciate nature more by slowing down sometimes to enjoy the scenery rather that to only focus on the end-goal. And I think most importantly it reminded me that there is more to life than the flashy clubs, big houses and the playboy lifestyle that the media so often enjoys highlighting in society nowadays.

In a nutshell this experience has reminded me to never take things for granted. It was amazing after a mere 1 night spent camping out how great it was to see a toilet; or after a bath in the river how quick I was to remember the pleasures to getting pumped hot water. So often we take our pre-conceived ‘simplicities’ in life for granted. By which I refer to electricity, running water… even a cushioned couch! Even the ability to ‘go out for dinner’, or buy a new jacket despite our old one not actually having any defects. We assume that such things in life are a given. We create our own sense of reality and live in this ‘social bubble’ which, for some people, could really do with giving it a good pop. And that’s what the CERS trip was really good for.

Where else in the world would I have been able to eat 2 types of lichen (one of which was apparently not suitable for human consumption). To meet people that only require the simplest of pleasures to make them smile. The experience was not just a reminder to never take things
This came into my head at the end of the trip as I looked at the rushing river outside my room in Lang Du. And I felt it rather appropriate given How Man’s stepping stones to fame:

“Life starts as a trickle, a humble stream coming forth from the Earth, and every experience that you encounter is a stream feeding into you. If you add on enough, without ever losing sight of your end goal, you’ll eventually become a great river, being able to take on even greater experiences. And when you finally reach that end goal, not only will you be great, and have affected the lives of many people, they will also want to find where you have come from. Your source.”
I n my opinion, one of the best things about my internship with CERS in Zhongdian was the long car rides. Yes, even though after a few hours your bottom feels like those sewing cushions with twenty needles stuck into it, I couldn’t help but marvel at the amazing scenery that I was seeing again. On the road to the Langdu Yak Cheese Site, we drove through one of the highest passes in Yunnan. It’s all quite beautiful until one passes by a murky “lake” filled with gunk from the nearby mining sites. It was a mixture of pastel greens and blues, and resembled a piece of modern art. That was one of those times that I realized the winds of modernization had blown from the East and changed the environment, people, and culture of the Wild West of China.

Mining has become an integral part of Tibet’s economy in the past few years. It was actually surprising that the mountain roads weren’t filled with the red mining trucks when we were driving to Langdu. According to an article on China Daily, (“Mining to become key to Tibet’s economy; Du Juan in Tibet”) many Tibetans are now able to earn enough money to have the ability to buy cars within a year or two from working mining jobs. ‘‘At the beginning, many people were against the mining projects in Jiama, believing exploring the mines was not respectful to the spirits,’ he said. ‘The situation has changed now. Most graduates of universities in Lhasa want to work at the mine, considering it to be a good job.’’ Mining sites are popping up everywhere in the Tibetan area.

Although they are beneficial to Tibet’s economy and creates jobs, it is taking its toll on the environment.

A few days after we’d arrived in Zhongdian, we left for the CERS Lisu site. The Lisu people were once hunters, using crossbows and their skills to hunt for food. Unfortunately, there isn’t need for that anymore in these days, when you can buy the food pretty much everywhere. In order to preserve this unique tradition, Wong How Man started the crossbow festival. Modernization always affects culture, but it can be preserved if done correctly.

In fact, modernization hasn’t only influenced the Wild West of China. It has also influenced the Northern parts of China as well. One day after dinner, everyone gathered in the lecture area to watch “Swan Song of the Last Reindeer Herder”, a short movie produced by CERS. In the cold and considerably remote areas of Heilongjiang, Mariasol is the last reindeer herder of the Ewenki people. When other reindeer herders may have around 100 reindeer, Mariasol has over 400. Her son and daughter have gone off to work in more urban areas, but Mariasol has a different
kind of job, that nowhere else in China, or the world, exists. Modernization in China has caused the decline of such traditions and cultures, but CERS has dutifully recorded it through writing, photography and the film *Swan Song of the Last Reindeer Herder*.

Will there ever be a day that these cultures, lifestyles and traditions will be totally eradicated by modern fashion, capitalism, and concern only for the future, instead of preserving precious components of the past? Perhaps. But what CERS does and what we all need to realize is that we have to all stop for a second. Realize that with 55 minority groups in China, how many of these traditions, lifestyles and cultures will be gone? But perhaps they may survive and exist in different forms, such as pictures, videos and articles. Most importantly, all of us will remember what made the Wild West of China unique.
This summer's CERS (China Exploration and Research Society) internship in Shangri la was a breathtaking and phenomenal experience. I was one of the youngest interns at 13, which was beneficial because I could learn a lot from my older fellow interns as well as my instructors.

For my independent project I chose Langdu Wildlife and “The natural habitat of the Snow Leopards in the region” as my main focus of the project. My aim was to assist Dr. Paul Buzzard’s research on Snow Leopards and their whereabouts, so CERS may have opportunities in the future to catch sight of a Snow Leopard or two.

As part of his research, Dr. Buzzard sets camera traps throughout the Langdu Mountain Range in hopes of sighting Snow Leopards or evidence of their existence. However, up till now, no one besides Wu Jin a local Langdu Villager has sighted them.

I interviewed 3 villagers and herdsmen from the Langdu Village, hoping I could get some answers to my questions in determining the location of the natural habitat of Snow Leopard, as well as some exciting and helpful stories.
All of the villagers have wildlife in the areas that they live in. All of the villages have had Blue Sheep as one of their main species of wildlife. Less frequently sighted species of wildlife were bears, monkeys, and wolves. The locals all owned farmland and livestock that were frequently preyed upon by the local predatory wildlife, as were the Blue Sheep, mostly by wolves. “A few days ago a herder living above me, higher up in the mountains had his horse attacked by a wolf.” says Wu Jin.

The local villagers deal with these situations in a typical manner. They take out their guns and shoot the attacking wildlife or they make noises to scare them away. You can never catch or kill the attackers because they are very fast and come at night, or when you least expect it. The Langdu villagers have all seen these natural predators and have all experienced an attack at one time or another. In the past, there was more wildlife. But now with the increase of hunting, the predator population is decreasing which means there are more Blue Sheep and ultimately a larger source of food for the Snow Leopard population.

According to Sun Yong Rong, a 54 year old Langdu Village Yak Herder. “The wildlife come out all year round because they need food to survive.” But another opinion was expressed by Wu Jin, 38 year old Yak Herder and Milker; “They only come in the summer because in the winter it’s too cold to be out so they hibernate.”

In my opinion, there are more attacks in the summer, but there are still attacks in winter. Wu Jin, Sun Yong Rong, and Gig Me all have heard stories about Snow Leopards. But, it is only Wu Jin who has seen one. Wu Jin has mentioned that Blue Sheep are the main wildlife in his part of the Langdu village in the high mountains, which indicates that there might be Snow Leopards in the area, as Blue Sheep are the Snow Leopard’s preferred food source.

In conclusion, I hope that my assistance and observations while working with my fellow interns and Dr. Buzzard are useful in establishing the existence of the Snow Leopard.
Standing on the bridge over the natural stream at the yak cheese site, I stared at the stars and whispered the song. It was a rare bit of clear sky in the seemingly ceaseless string of rainy days on the trip. Coming from Beijing, where the heavy smog usually masks the sky, I was so moved by having the chance to meet the universe. Though I’ve been familiar with the stars and planets for a long time, every time I observe them, I still feel like it’s my first time, awed by the scene and unwilling to leave. It seems like the stars have the gravitational pull to keep my eyes on them. Time stops and peace settles in my mind when I look up at the night. Under the night sky, I feel like I have found my niche.

It’s my curiosity that keeps me interested in the stars. Though I already know some secrets about stars, I still stare at them with so much emotion, thinking about all the scientific wonders of the universe. The night sky is like a book that can never be finished, as there is always more to learn about the universe.

As How Man said, “The spirit of an explorer is to have the curiosity of a child.” At CERS, I met a group of people who have perpetual inquiries towards nature and culture. Their curiosity is stronger and broader than my fondness of stars. This summer brought together a group of awesome people, and I learned more about them and their wonders.

How Man, the founder of CERS, is a true curious explorer. Despite many exploration feats such as the discovery of the true source of Yangtze River, he also focused on culture conservation. At the Lisu site, How Man was attracted by the traditional hunting tool, the crossbow, and turned the obscure
and rapidly dying heritage into an annual festival. Our CERS team, along with all the nearby villagers, celebrated the festival by competing in crossbow archery. At the festival, local people sat under the tree; the village chief sharpened the arrows on the side; the head of the nature reserve kept order. The whole celebration was harmonious and lively. The crossbow festival was created out of How Man’s curiosity for cultural heritage and it turned out to be a great success in both exploration and conservation. Lisu people now have an occasion to enjoy and pay respect to their cultural heritage.

Dr. Bill and Dr. Paul are two biologists who hold a fascination towards nature. At the Snub-nosed monkey observation and other nature walks, the forest and mountain paths were slippery and rocky, but it did not bother them at all. Though surrounded by seemingly similar trees and grasses, Bill and Paul still could find their individual specialties. They often stopped, pointing at a flower, grass, or a fungus, staring at a bee on it or the shape of it, then came to us explaining how special it was. Looking into their eyes, I found the childlike excitement, just like as if a child had spotted a newfound insect in his backyard. Through all this, I also saw their great respect and awe towards nature. Besides the daytime activities, Dr. Bill and Dr. Paul also held several after-dinner lectures about their research on wildlife. All of their accomplishments made me reflect on the strong motivation they have, so strong that they can stay away from home for such a long time and still maintain the same passion they have for their careers as when they started. When everybody was busy writing articles under a bright Venus at the Sacred Mountain site, Dr. Bill sat at my side, completely devoted to his research. I personally think the driving force is the continuous and gradually deepening curiosity to nature, though I never asked.

On this session, we had a new friend, Dr. Mukesh, coming from Nepal. He is a zoologist and has been to China several times. Dr. Mukesh is a funny person: he placed pink flowers on his head at Wudi lake, he posed with a “shy” gesture in a group picture, and he also played with kids at the Sacred Mountain. But most impressive of all to me was his sharp eyes. On the hour-long car ride from site to site, I sat with Dr. Mukesh in one Land Rover. Whether the road was bumpy or smooth, he could focus on the plants and scenery from the beginning to the end and kept taking pictures of the plants he found interesting. The long drive induced me to sleep, but to Dr. Mukesh it was exploration. He recognized the small local Chinese flower from the window of our car and caught a big white rat no one else saw on our way up to the glacier. We could often find Dr. Mukesh walking on the mountain road in the morning, holding his camera, looking for treasures. He never felt bored of it and smiled like a child when he was satisfied with his findings. He had continuous wonders of nature that could be rarely found in modern society.

In a book written by a former intern at CERS, I read the interesting question: what is the difference between adventure and exploration? An adventure is purely breaking the physical limits of a man. However, an exploration is the process of discovering the unknown world by answering the wonders in a mind. I suppose, as How Man said, the key point is to be as curious as a child.

Life is a journey, and the 18-day CERS trip was like a short version of it. To enjoy and feel the scenery along the way is the essence of it. Sometimes I get so busy with schoolwork that I forget life isn’t all about chasing goals. This CERS trip turned me back into a child with continuous wonders, who is not only obsessed with the night sky, but more importantly, curious to explore the greater world around her.
Have you ever noticed the difference between a tamed pony and a wild pony? My project will explain my experience. A comparison on a tamed pony in Hong Kong named Maggie and a wild pony in Langdu named Magic. Maggie lives in a riding stable and is ridden almost every day by trained riders. Magic lives in Langdu at high altitude with the freedom to roam with other free roaming yaks, mules, cows and horses.

Maggie is a mare piebald and is quite big in size compared to other ponies. She is quite a lazy dressage pony but an enthusiastic jumper. The movements “buck” and “rear” do not exist in her vocabulary, in other words she is a well-trained, tamed and sweet pony. She has a stiff bend but a good stretch in her trot. Her canter is smooth yet heavy but also very even in her stride. When following other ponies or horses her attitude towards paces and movements are very positive.

Magic is a gelding and a crossbreed. Magic is quite a small pony. He is quite wild and therefore is not capable of being ridden. From lunging I saw he has excellent dressage movements. If he were to be moved to a stable and be tamed and trained he would be an amazing dressage pony since he has a lot of potential. Magic is quite wild and uses bucks and rears not only to protect himself but also randomly when he walks and trots. Patting or stroking him is very rare because he bites. Although he has a stiff bend he has a smooth, light and even strided canter, and with both the left and the right rein he has no troubles with getting the right lead leg. His trot is mostly at an even pace and he extends his leg as needed.

Maggie and Magic have both got their similarities and differences. The main difference between them is that Maggie is tamed and Magic isn’t. This makes a huge difference in their lifestyle and their behavior. As I described, Magic is very protective of himself; on the other hand Maggie enjoys human company. Another difference is how Maggie is a skilled jumper and Magic is a natural dressage pony. The main similarities are their identical stiff bends and their smooth and even-strided canter. Other than those similarities they are two very different ponies.

Through this experience I have learnt a lot but the one thing that opened my eyes the most was no matter where in the world, pony or horse, mare or gelding, young or old and tamed or wild they have all got elegance and grace. If I had the ability to combine Maggie’s personality and her amazing jumping abilities and Magic’s dressage skills and his flawless mane that would make the world’s most perfect pony.
As we approached Mandalay, the new four-lane highway that had been featured in BBC press releases appeared, like a scar on the green and brown landscape. It looked anachronistic, a bastion of modern convenience carved into the landscape with little regard for what stood in its path. Aquamarine tributaries converged with the silty brown and sprawling Irrawaddy River. Making our final descent into Mandalay, I mentally reviewed what I’d packed in preparation for this trip: mosquito net...check. Sleeping bag liner...check. Twenty-four granola bars...check.

Two ancient busses pulled up to the plane to meet us and we piled on and headed towards immigration. Rather than a patriotic display or photographs showcasing what the country had to offer, we were greeted with a huge sign that read “Import of Illegal Drugs is Punishable by Death.” This proclamation did little to quell my fears about travelling to Myanmar. Baggage in hand, we passed through sliding doors into the arrivals hall where we were greeted by Chaw Su and shortly after, Wong How Man and the rest of the group arrived. We ambled out to the bus and within seconds were dripping with sweat. Driving North from the airport was completely surreal. I gazed out at a sprawling landscape, dotted with trees that offered an oasis of shade amidst the scrub brush. Blues, greens and browns were the dominant colors, which made the sun blazing off the golden spires of stupas seem even more iridescent. About 25 minutes into the drive, Wong How Man pulled out...
his iPad and announced “this is not the way to the boat! Why are we going this way??” By now the air conditioning was in full gear and I was enjoying counting the cows that were more common on the road than cars (a ratio of about 50:1). Having just spent two weeks in Bangkok, it was dreamlike to drive on perfectly paved and marked roads without seeing another vehicle. Turning off the main road, we found ourselves on a one-lane trail with steep drop offs on either side. Moments later, we had arrived.

Disembarking from the bus we were swarmed with local children selling hats and fans in front of the gleaming 100’ long HM Explorer, complete with curtained cabins and a full crew. Walking the plank, we were handed fresh, ice-cold juice and wrapped in a blanket of cool air. There’s air conditioning?? I couldn’t believe it! Sipping watermelon juice on the deck, snacking on pork jerky and tomato Pringles, I laughed at my previous thoughts of reviewing what I had packed in preparation for this trip.

I saw one of the scientists reading a book with a newspaper book cover. “Just like when we covered our textbooks for school,” I said. He looked up and peeled back the newspaper cover; it was a biography of Aung San Sui Kyi and a reminder that we were in a country where political conversations can land you in hot water.

The engines roared to life and we started our journey up river as children waved from the banks. Their skinny, brown bodies sparkled in the setting sun. Women bathed and did laundry while we rather rudely snapped pictures of the exotic scene. We passed floating rafts made of timber with the occasional solar panel which served as an apt example of how Myanmar is a country with a rich history, grappling with how to move itself into the 21st century. Cows ambled around houses on stilts with thatched roofs and just as the sun slipped behind a hillside, we pulled up to a muddy bank to stop for the night. Dinner was served at 7:30 and Wong How Man proposed a toast and emphasized his personal motto, “If you’re going to do something, do it with style.” For him style meant being served a three-course meal, sipping white wine from chilled glasses and eating off fine china set on a linen tablecloth. Finishing the sorbet and tea we headed upstairs to look at the stars. Nature quickly reminded us where we were as we choked our way through a cloud of insects to the deck. “Turn off the lights!” someone cried. Once the lights were off and the bugs dissipated, I stared into the Milky Way and saw my first shooting star. My wish for good weather and new experiences was granted tenfold over the course of our time on the Irrawaddy, an overnight bus ride, at Inle Lake and a day in Yangon.

I am looking forward to sharing the lessons I’ve learned about the culture and history of Myanmar, as well as the struggles of the Myanmar people with my students. A special thank you to the generosity of Judith Corrente for the travel grant that she provided me to make this dream trip a reality.
INTERNSHIPS

Jamie Au, from Hong Kong, is 17 years old. She is currently a senior at Hong Kong International School. “Photography for me is an intensely personal passion. At times, it is the only way I can express myself when words fail. That one moment that I wish to share with others but cannot express is the moment I choose to release the shutter.” During her 18-day internship with CERS she always had her camera handy to capture the culture of minorities at CERS project sites. One of her favorite advice she got from Wong How Man on photography was “If something touches your heart, it is likely to touch the hearts of others.”

Audrey Chan is 15 years old and is currently a 10th grader in Columbia Grammar and Preparatory School. She was born in Hong Kong, grew up in Singapore and Lives in Manhattan. Her major interests are music and acting. During her 18 days with CERS she really enjoyed the cultural immersions at different CERS sites. “During my trip this summer with CERS, the highlight was staying at the three different sites and being able to connect with the local community. I thought that circle dancing in Ge Hua Qing was a special experience.”

Karthis Durasamy is 23 years old and is currently a sophomore at the University of Hong Kong. He is double majoring in biological sciences and biochemistry. He aspires to become a microbiologist in the future. Originally from India, he is very interested in different cultures. “Through the CERS trips I had amazing times experiencing new and different cultures and traditions.” He was especially interested in the architecture of different cultures.

Jonathan Eng, age 19, is from Singapore. He just finished his senior year at the Leys and is currently waiting to join the army as required for every Singaporean boy after 18. He wishes to study economics in college. He has a strong passion for learning and doing new things and that is what highlights his experience with CERS. “The (CERS) trip was a combination of the great views, friendly people that I got to meet during the trip and the ability to just relax in nature. The unique experience that was provided which I don’t think I may ever forget to notice. My experience with CERS helped me open my eyes up to issues of environmental and cultural preservation that I hadn’t been very aware of before.”

Leonie Lee, age 19, is currently attending Warwick University in the UK and she is majoring in biochemistry. As a hobby she loves taking pictures. During her 18 days stay with CERS she was especially interested in different food and recorded all variety of food with her camera.

Valerie Ma is 14 years old and is currently a student at Deerfield Academy, freshman Class of 2017. She has very strong interest in science, but she loves history and culture as well. "My highlight of CERS experience is getting to look at things at a different perspective, since it is my second year as an intern. But also, my other highlight is scraping the cheese mold off of the cheese racks at Langdu with Melissa and Tsiring Drolma."

Nadia Mastroyiannis, of German and Greek origin, grew up in Hong Kong. At age 14, she is one of the youngest interns of CERS this year. She has a strong passion for horse riding and handles horses like an expert. During her 18 days with CERS she could not move her feet whenever she saw a horse. She spent a lot of time trying to train the “wild” pony at the Yak Cheese Factory.

Sara Tomaselli, age 13, is another youngest intern of CERS this summer. She grew up in Hong Kong, but has recently relocated to the US. She is currently an 8th grader at the William Allen Middle School in New Jersey. She has very strong interests in digital photography and filmmaking, and takes high school preparatory classes on these subjects. During her 36 days internship with CERS she was especially inspired by Dr. Paul’s research on wildlife. For her individual interest she interviewed local people about how they deal with wildlife’s threat to domestic animals. She was especially interested in learning about Snow Leopard.

Curtis Wong, age 17, is a senior at Hong Kong International School. He is a returnee to CERS education program. He spent 20 days at CERS Yunnan sites in the summer of 2013 and 10 days with the education trip in Myanmar this summer. His interests include history, politics and business. In his leisure time he loves to do volunteering and service work. When asked about his experience with CERS this summer, he said it was as eye opening as last summer and added “Myanmar is a country that is beginning modernization and seeing how pristinest is it makes you yearn for the place to stay the same way forever.”

Tina Zhao, age 18, is from Beijing and is currently a senior at the Experimental High School Affiliated to Beijing Normal University. Because of her family influence she has a strong passion for medicine. During the 18 days with CERS she was truly into learning how different cultures understand and treat sicknesses. “CERS trip gave us enough space for our interests, giving me the chance to interview local people on traditional Lisu and Tibetan medicine, which sparked my interest in cultural anthropology. It also provided lots of opportunities to explore--for me, the most memorable exploration was observing the vast night sky on a roof with great people aside.”

Lawrenceville, a prestigious prep school near Princeton New Jersey, sent two faculty members to explore with CERS in Myanmar this summer. Both teachers are truly passionate about biology and teach biology at Lawrenceville. Jim spent his whole life studying bats and is a true expert. This article is by the other teacher, Ilana Saxe, about her experience.

Yung Yau College (YYC) is the only Hong Kong secondary school with a super computer and animation lab. A group of students and teachers come to CERS every summer. Exploring 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 animation can be seen on the CERS website. This year’s YYC group included 5 female students, 6 male students and 3 teachers. Like usual the boys pursued their interest in animation. Girls had their first adventure into the nature and really enjoyed learning about local cultures. Among the three teachers, Owen Sir is an expert on animation and has been leading YYC student groups to win various animation prizes.
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