A NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ACKNOWLEDGE CERS’ FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

CHINA EXPLORERS
CHINA EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY

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Yung Yau students on pilgrimage.
Interns at Lisu Crossbow Festival.
Introductory Message

It is an honour and privilege to be asked to write the Introductory Message for this newsletter, our Education/Internship Special Issue collection of essays, photos and artwork by CERS 2015 summer interns. This year found CERS hosting students at a diverse collection of our favorite sites and settings – at the restored 1939 house in the historic village of Shek O on Hong Kong Island, at our Tibetan-style CERS Research Center in Gyaltang, now renamed Shangri-La, three interns also joined us in Myanmar for an expedition up the Ayeyarwaddy River aboard the Society’s research vessel, the HM Explorer, and for a stay at our traditional Inthar style Bamboo House in Myanmar, perched on stilts above the wetlands of Inle Lake. We also visited the Lisu Cultural Village at Xiangguqing where we had a chance to see the rare Pied Snub-nosed Monkeys at the Baima Snow Mountain Nature Reserve and participated at the Lisu Crossbow Festival, and the mastiff kennels and meditation retreat at Guji, with its spectacular view of Mount Kawakarpo. And we added a new venue this year with our first trip to Yubeng at the base of the Sacred Mount, following the pilgrims’ trail.

Despite braving steep climbs, bitter cold showers, biting bugs, elephant flies, and constant schedule changes, the interns never complained. In fact, we had mostly very auspicious weather; despite the drought and torrential rains elsewhere in the region. The rain and floods subsided on the Ayeyarwaddy upon our arrival, Shangri-La stayed cool and pleasant, and holy Kawakarpo and his court even peaked out from the clouds to say goodbye to us on our way back from the pilgrimage at Yubeng. Our interns must have brought us some extraordinarily good karma for our trips.

They also brought us their open-hearted curiosity and infectious enthusiasm. We hope in return we have passed on some new perspectives and some lasting memories. Every year the summer program gives the CERS team and our interns a chance to learn, to recharge and to make new friends. For some, it is also a chance to meet and catch up with many old friends, since over years, several of our interns have become repeat offenders, just like full-fledged members of the CERS team. All of them, veterans and first-timers, deserve the right to wear the badge “CERS Explorer.” They earned it!
I’m Back Again?
by Audrey Chan

I am a chocolate soufflé for all types of biting bugs. The fact that I make a delicious meal for the mosquitos and black flies of Yunnan province, however, has not stopped me from coming back as a CERS summer intern for three years in a row. People often ask me why I return annually and why I enjoy it here, but I can never give them a satisfying response. I generally reply with, “I don’t know” or “because it’s fun!” This year I finally decided to think through and understand my feelings in order to honestly answer these questions for myself.

The life I live at home in Manhattan and the “China Explorer” life I live here are polar opposites. Back home, I like to have everything solidified in a plan.
If I do not have a day’s plan or if plans change I become anxious, overwhelmed with the discomfort of not knowing what to expect. Perhaps being a member of the CERS team transforms my mindset for the time each summer that I am here. My “China Explorer” side overpowers my city-girl side, as I live a life that is full of flexibility and freedom. I realize that I also enjoy the freedoms of not having a rigid plan. Unexpected changes and obstacles we interns encounter during our expeditions always excite me. Whether it is imaginatively figuring out how to get past a wire fence or spontaneously deciding to take an unplanned route and maneuver our way through a sacred cave, I am constantly exploring. I never feel paranoid or overwhelmed when plans suddenly change. Instead, I embrace this flexibility as a sense of freedom I cannot find anywhere else.

Being disconnected from my home community is another type of freedom I can only find here. Each time I come, I purposefully distance myself from social media that I often obsess over at home. It is possible to live without scrolling through the latest fashion trends and celebrity gossip that constantly bombard and distract me. I am able to look inwards and indulge in the beautiful surroundings of Yunnan. My mind is free to wander into deeper and more substantial thoughts.

Despite this being my third summer here, I never cease to discover something different. I always learn something more – I was able to stand closer to the Golden Snub-Nosed Monkeys, and I also participated in a pilgrimage hike alongside Tibetan monks and nuns. I realized how special these experiences are because they defy my peers’ expectations of how China is. Many of my peers know China as a booming nation with rapidly developing metropolises, but they do not understand the intricacies of its many ethnic minority groups or the vastness of its remote hinterland. I feel extremely fortunate to have this insider’s knowledge and the opportunities to discover the lesser known nooks and crannies of China that are completely foreign to those close to me.

How Man told me that there were two main components that fueled his interest in becoming an explorer in China. One was being Chinese. Growing up in Hong Kong among the 97% Chinese population, How Man did not feel out of place, but he always had a desire to discover more about his heritage and culture. College in Wisconsin was a big change and became the basis of the second component. Being one of only a handful of Chinese students, How Man came to understand what it was like to be a minority within his community. He realized that exploring minority cultures in China was a path that satisfied both his two points of interest.

I had a similar realization three years ago when I moved to Manhattan from Singapore. Chinese culture was widely understood among my community in Singapore and I was one of many Chinese. In my high school in Manhattan, however, I am one of only a few Chinese and perhaps the only one with a firm grasp of Chinese culture. Once I moved away from Chinese culture and became a minority within my new community, as How Man did, my urge to explore China and learn more about the intricacies of my cultural roots increased exponentially.

After spending a few nights at Xiangguqing Village this year, I learned that I also have values similar to those held by the Lisu people. Although their lifestyle is becoming increasingly Tibetan and modernized, the Lisu actively maintain their traditions, all the while keeping up with the development around them. I drew a comparison to myself here, noticing that while my own life has become dramatically more American, I take more pride in sharing my Chinese heritage with my friends and preserving my family’s own Chinese traditions.

Ever since I realized how precious this CERS experience has been to me, I have had a desire and calling to come back to explore and witness China’s development, but also to embark on a journey inwards. I also feel a personal commitment to see how the villagers and children I remember from the previous years are growing. I have established a connection with this region – the lifestyle, the people, and the spirit of exploration – that I do not have anywhere else. This connection will continue to inspire my belief that it is important to pursue whatever has the most meaning to me. I only realized I had an interest in discovering the inner corners of China and its minority cultures once I became a minority myself, but this interest has become an integral part of how I define myself.
I want to believe that I have a pretty balanced life: I like both the arts and sciences, I do my laundry every week, I try not to binge eat an entire family-size bag of chips in one sitting, et cetera.

However, I allowed the pressure of junior year to catch on. Cups of coffee started piling up. I was immersed in academics to the extent that I had nightmares about my grades and standardized test scores, cried everyday for two weeks and forgot how to perform ordinary actions such as opening doors. I thought that by giving up sports, television and social interaction, I could free up time to work. But I only fried my brain.

Before exams, my art teacher took our class outside for a walk. As we sat down on the grass, my teacher told us, “I want you all to sit here and not to think about anything; just feel the sun on your face and listen to the cars driving by. In this day and age, we have an infinite ‘to-do’ list. We’re so focused on doing things and moving forwards that we forget to notice our surroundings. So I want you all to take this opportunity to just stop and be aware. As artists, it is important not to think about perfecting details piece by piece but to attack the entire page at once and to look at the big picture.”

This pause was a wake up call. I hoped that my internship with CERS in Myanmar would help me explore my own balance by observing a different and unfamiliar culture in order to understand my place.

Once in Myanmar, longyis, the traditional skirt style cloth for both men and women, were the first oddity that caught my eye. After learning about the different ethnicities and cultures within Myanmar’s national
borders, I wanted to understand how unique longyi patterns and styles reflected the individuality of their respective ethnic groups and how their role in this society had changed over time. On our way downriver back to Mandalay on the HM Explorer, we stopped by a weaving village named Than Paint Tane. With the help of Su Hlaing Myint, the CERS Burmese field biologist, I interviewed Hewe Hewe, a Burmese weaver woman, and Myat No Thu, a girl apprentice. I asked Hewe Hewe what longyi style was most popular. I was surprised to discover that, while classic checkers has remained the most popular men’s style since the past, the most popular women’s style is a mix of Kachin and Chin patterns. Longyi patterns were once used to define and identify one’s ethnicity, but modern inhabitants of Myanmar mix and match patterns to their liking. Hewe Hewe also mentioned that a designer decides how to complement the patterns. On the one hand, “pure” traditional patterns are fading. On the other hand, people are starting to break the limitations and structures of their given identities and to assert their independent aesthetic opinions.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Two-year-old girl rows with her mother past the local primary school on our tour of the floating gardens at Mine Thauk In.
Fifteen-year-old weaver apprentice spins thread for U Gyan brand longyis. Craftsman uses his only foot to paint intricate designs on a box at In Dain morning market.
Blind woman finding balance at the Shein Ma Ka morning market.
Hewe Hewe’s apprentice, fifteen-year old Myat No Thu, is not attending high school; instead, she is learning how to spin thread and weave, because weaving is a lifelong profession. Before visiting the village, I was worried that the tradition of wearing longyis was in danger; we saw many stores advertising shorts and several miniskirts on mannequins in cities and larger towns. However, knowing that youth like Myat No Thu are still learning traditional techniques and that the majority value handmade longyis over machine made ones, I see that longyis are a well-maintained feature of Myanmar’s culture.

I wish I had asked Myat No Thu why she chose to weave at such a young age, especially because that decision would affect the rest of her life. Did she make that choice independently or was she forced to conform to a family trade? Education has always been important in my culture, but was this the same case in hers? How do we balance modernization and tradition?

At Inle Lake, we interns had the opportunity to interview the past and current students at the Inthar Heritage House Vocational Training Center (IHHVTC). I was extremely confused when many students, who were around my age, said that they either were still in university or did not finish university. Afterwards, I learnt that most students had studied or were still studying at a Distance University. Because high school in Myanmar ends at tenth grade, university students are very young. In addition, their matriculation exam scores solely determine their major; students with the highest scores must study medicine while students with the lowest scores must study at a Distance University, which is mainly taught online or through regular mail. Because this teaching method is relatively undeveloped, many students find it inconvenient. At the IHHVTC, students learn hospitality skills that have real applications to Myanmar’s booming hotel market.

Distance University education is not so effective. Even if a student manages to score high on the matriculation exam, he or she does not get to choose his or her field of study. Chaw Su, the conservation supervisor at the IHH Burmese Cat Café, told me that she studied chemistry in university but could not apply her studies in real life. After considering Myat No Thu and the IHHVTC students’ chosen professions together, I realized that economic stability (which does not seem to correlate with higher education) is their first priority. By understanding their imbalances, I began to understand some of my own.

The words of Yin Myo Su impacted me the most. Better known as Misuu, she is both the founder of Inthar Heritage House and the manager of Inle Princess Resort. Although the interview turned into more of a life story, she spoke wisely. She told us what her grandmother once said; “Don’t hate or love anything to extremes, or else life will teach you to moderate.” I had been obsessed with academics, and my physical and mental health consequently deteriorated. Misuu said, “Money enables you to stay independent, passion allows you to be happy, and community surrounds you with people whom you love. When you achieve this harmony, you have a win-win-win situation!” This past year, I have often pushed away people in my community to focus on school. However, I realized that art helps me stop and notice the larger scheme of things and keeps my in check. In a way, I am grateful that I have already found visual art as my balance, even though I still have a long way to go.

Misuu also mentioned that good and bad are not black and white; lines do not work that way. Like the situation with Schrödinger’s cat, in which the act of observation forces something to be in one state or another, we tend to categorize and enforce rigid definitions. There is no discrete way to define myself or define my balance, much like how the people of Myanmar are not just simply Burmese or Shan or Chin.

We cannot truly define borders, whether they be religion or physical appearance. Even though we cannot forget our heritage, we create our identities and make choices that affect people beyond our communities. Personally, I wrote and drew on my map of Myanmar to keep my roots strong during my internship. Everyone has their own unique, healthy way to grow as a human being.
Breaking news: heavy rainfall causes flooding in Myanmar; the governor of California declares a state of emergency due to drought; according to WHO, “[b]y 2025, half the world’s population will be living in water-stressed areas.”

Water is like a double-edged sword – too much of it can destroy but without it, life would not go on. Unlike energy sources, there is no alternative for water. The demand for this basic resource for survival is increasing with population growth, and many experts believe that in the future, wars will be fought over freshwater sources. For some, water is their life, as I have seen in the past two weeks in Myanmar.

The Irrawaddy is both the lifeline and destroyer of Myanmar. Not only do natural disasters devastate villages and towns along the Irrawaddy, it could also be the birthplace of tense hydro politics, because the source of the Irrawaddy is in the Tibetan Plateau of China. Moreover, Chinese companies have started building dams, which displaces locals from their homes, and started mining projects, which can contaminate the river if the metal toxins released are not taken care of properly. The effects of a contaminated water supply are multiplicative. Fish can accumulate large amounts of mercury and arsenic that can hinder the immune system of the Irrawaddy dolphins that eat them. Humans also fish from the river, as well as doing other daily errands such as bathing and washing. We took a sample of water from the Irrawaddy to test for present metals, and discovered that the sample had levels of lead, copper, iron, and cadmium higher than the national standards for drinking water.
The hydro politics of the rivers in Myanmar are not just transnational affairs, but domestic ones as well. Some of the aforementioned dams are in insurgent ethnic minority territory, so while the military government stands to earn a lot of money from these dams, the local people will be displaced by the flood zones and bear the brunt of development. According to an infographic-report by Burma Rivers Network, the Kayan people were forced to move due to Myanmar’s first dam, the Chinese-funded Paunglaung Dam. They lost their traditional homes that represent their peoples’ history. These traditions are tied to the water in Myanmar, and although we may not see the complete disappearance of these water sources, it is important to note that the function water serves can change greatly.

The Burmese are not just physically bound to water; the Irrawaddy River, for example, represents a traditional culture. There is a trifecta relationship between fish, Irrawaddy dolphins, and humans. They are quite interdependent, but can also be mutualistic. Some of the fishermen from Myit Kam Gyi, also dubbed “the dolphin village,” fish with the dolphins cooperatively. They knock on their boats using carved wooden sticks, and call, “bruu bruu”, for the dolphins, who in turn track and gather a school of fish. The dolphins signal the fishermen by revealing a part of their tailfin. When the fishermen are ready, they cast their nets over the school of fish. A study showed that the number of fish caught when this mutualistic fishing happens is more than a regular fishing excursion. Not only does this benefit the fishermen, the dolphins also get their share from the fish that escape the net.

However, the dolphins are subject to many threats. Electrofishing is the most direct threat, because when fishermen electrocute areas of water to stun the fish to make fishing easier and to catch larger amounts, they can accidentally electrocute dolphins as well. Deforestation leads to the degradation of water quality because of the heavy rainfalls that washes debris from exposed earth into the water, making the environment quite dangerous for the dolphins to live in. Noise pollution from boats and construction projects interferes with cetaceans like whales and dolphins who use sound to communicate, navigate, and feed. Construction of dams for hydropower and irrigation can also block fish migration and change the seasonality of the river flow, which can have some terrible effects on the ecology for the dolphins.

Some of the defining characteristics of Inle Lake are its water “roads,” floating gardens, and houses on stilts, all of which are examples of human adaptations to water. The only way to travel in between houses is either by the rare wooden bridges or long wooden boats, nowadays powered by a small motor. Villagers take pondweed from the middle of the lake to fertilize their floating gardens, that float up and down according to the water level. When passing by houses, we could see children swimming on their “front porch” while the mothers bathed, a sight rarely seen in other places.

Almost everything in Myanmar relies heavily on water, whether for food, transportation, or culture. Without water, many would have to find other sources of food and go into other industries. Although Myanmar is not classified as water scarce, the importance of water in Burmese society highlights the action that must be taken now in the rest of the world in order to secure earth’s finite resources for the future. However, securing these resources also means transnational negotiation and diplomacy, especially when many of the major rivers in Asia originate in the Tibetan Plateau of China.

Water may not seem like the most important issue to focus on today, but the efforts we can make now in securing water sources, keeping them uncontaminated, and preserving the traditional culture that ties directly with water can only benefit future generations.
The tuk-tuk rolls to a stop right outside a dentist’s office in the small town of Katha. Two red Chinese banners hang above the door – although there isn’t really a door. Along the dirt road stands an open office, with a maroon patient chair and almost-homemade dentistry tools attached to the wall. This setup only takes up one-third of the room, though. The rest contains shelves of Burmese books and magazines for sale, as well as a small sitting area. The multilingual shop sign confirms that a Chinese family owns this establishment. The grandmother of the household is Li Cuifang, a sprightly woman in her 80’s. I have come back, after our short meeting the day before, to ask her more about her life in Myanmar.

In the midst of the Second World War, Li, along with her family, escaped from her birthplace of Yunnan to Burma due to the circumstances of the war. They arrived in the town of Bhamo, just 65 kilometers from the Yunnan border. Li and her siblings grew up in Burma, so they speak both Burmese and Chinese. Later on, a family member married into the town of Katha. Li had six children – three sons and three daughters, whose graduation and marriage pictures adorn a ceiling ledge inside the shop, and her eldest son is the dentist of the shop. I asked her whether or not she liked it in Myanmar, and she said that she likes it, but doesn’t like it here. Perhaps living in Myanmar for over 60 years has become a necessity, and there isn’t much of a reason to move. Interestingly enough, when I asked about the changes in Myanmar, Li said she didn’t think that much has really changed.
Something had prompted me to return to the dentist shop and, after listening to Li’s story; I think it was because there seemed to be such a difference in lifestyle, perception, and aspirations between the younger and older generations of Myanmar. For me, even the name of the country itself represents two frames of reference: of history and of development and the future. Although the name “Myanmar” did concurrently exist with “Burma” (Myanmar became the government recognized name in 1989), I think of the traditions and history, as in the British Burma, when the name “Burma” is used. Alternatively, I think of development and an opening country when the name “Myanmar” is used. Li felt that there hadn’t been any huge changes in Myanmar, maybe because her generation is not actively perpetuating the changes. In my mind, her generation represents Burma.

When we were travelling up the Irrawaddy River, we stopped by a household that made bamboo rafts for a living. Htey Htey, Tinwin, and Ayekhaing, the women of the household, are middle aged and one generation younger than Li. They make about 1,000 US dollars per raft, made every three months, but still have some debt on their shoulders. We asked them, if they had enough money, what would they do with it, and they said they would do everything. However, when asked about what they would do if they weren’t bamboo raft makers, they hesitated, as if they had never thought about the possibility of doing something else. Bamboo rafts were their life, and they knew it would be extremely hard to break out of that box they were put in, because reality is what governs their lives.

After spending nine days on the HM Explorer, we moved on to Inle Lake, home of the Burmese Cat Café and the Inthar Heritage House Vocational Training Center. We interviewed several groups of students at the IHHVTC who were mostly between the ages of 18 and 21. When we asked what they really wanted to be in their future, they said fashion designer, singer, dancer, and entrepreneur, just to name a few, even though they were all studying at a hospitality school. On paper, these students are set to work in the hotel and service industry, but some of them have bigger dreams and aspirations than merely folding towels and sheets every day. This was a contrast to our interview with the women at the bamboo raft household.

Unfortunately, the reality is some people are born into certain circumstances that are not advantageous to what they want to do, but with the developing and opening of Myanmar, there seems to be more of a hopeful chance. At the same time, members of our generation, and maybe even the one before us, are the ones perpetuating development. The need to stay connected online, to have cell phones, is the Myanmar to the Burma. The increasing number of shopping centers, the telephone wires crossing the lush hills, and the Despicable Me minions on a plethora of products may be a complete contrast to the image of Burma, but development is inevitable in the newly globalized world, and that may be the future image of Myanmar. The course of Myanmar’s development, however, I think will follow its Southeastern Asia counterparts, like Thailand. Myanmar is flexible and malleable – it can be made to fit certain boxes and go certain directions by its own government, other countries, the Burmese population and the foreigners. When walking through the Bangkok airport, Natasha, a fellow intern, mentioned something that I agree with: Myanmar in the future will be like Thailand.

Life is different between grandparents and grandchildren outside of Myanmar, and I can already tell life is certainly very different, and going to remain different, for the generations in Myanmar. Although there is a discrepancy between the lives of each generation, it doesn’t negate the fact that there is a certain spirit that everyone shares here. Whether that’s the spirit of curiosity, preservation, pride, or friendliness, it’s a fact that Myanmar and Burma both refer to the same country. Even though there is development, history still exists as the yang to that yin. More importantly, the Burmese people are the ones who define their country.

On the last full day at Inle Lake, we visited the temple with the ‘five Buddha lumps.’ People have put so much gold leaf on the original five Buddha mini-statues that they now look like five differently shaped lumps. It’s the same as the process of Burma transitioning to Myanmar: the core is there – the lumps are still Buddhas, but so much has been added and modified that what you see on the outside is obviously not a Buddha.

I think that the friendliness and welcoming nature of the Burmese is quite unique in the busy, chaotic society that we live in. I hope that that will at least remain the core in the changing environment of Myanmar. I also believe the relationships that I formed with the people of Myanmar are what makes my perception of this country memorable. That is the reason why I returned.
MY FIRST GLIMPSE THROUGH ANTHROPOLOGICAL LENS

by Astor Wong
Everybody comes for a different reason, as reflected from the diversity of the crew – biologist, anthropologist, journalist, caving specialist, photographer... My time with CERS this summer in Yunnan was an eye opening experience.

I joined the expedition to gain firsthand experience of conducting anthropological fieldwork. I wanted to see what it was like to interact with local people, practice participant observation, and experience other cultures.

I found the experience of participating in the annual Lisu Crossbow Festival particularly memorable. I was surprised that warm smiles and the friendly ‘ni hao’ didn’t work. The villagers eyed me with skepticism and proceeded to ignore me. They then turned towards each other and chatted away in their local dialect. I was greatly distressed by my lack of progress, and couldn’t help but wonder how Professor Yu conversed with local people with such ease. I felt so awkward and embarrassed. Maybe the act of conversation in such a setting is a skill that I will acquire after some experience.

Nonetheless, I was not ready to give in yet, quite the contrary, I became more determined than ever to converse with the locals to understand the Lisu culture from a more authentic and local perspective. I began by helping out. I distributed some lollipops and drinks to spectators during the first part of the festival. I realized that this might be my prime opportunity to approach the locals because people tend to be less guarded when presented with gifts.

I also realized that playing with children was also a good way to gain trust with their parents. I befriended a five-year-old kid called Fujianhua, and soon after, I was chatting with his relatives. I learned that Jianhua was the grandson of the ‘bee man’ we...
met the day before. I chatted about other Lisu customs, like the Lisu dance during the New Year and, of course, the importance of the crossbow in Lisu culture. I asked them whether they enjoyed the crossbow festival. A man proudly identified himself with the tradition; “This is ours!” Although my small talk didn’t yield anything particularly substantial I was taking baby steps as a young anthropologist. I felt so apprehensive and nervous about these conversations at first and overcoming these fears was extremely empowering for me.

I found the pilgrimage hike to Yubeng to be one of the most fulfilling parts of the trip. The night before, however, I could barely sleep. I was neither an athlete nor a Buddhist follower, I did not know what to expect upon embarking on the sacred pilgrimage.

My fears were crushed when we started to hike. I managed to be one of the leading hikers. I am not sporty, and I convinced myself that I actualized the sacred power of the mountain. I imagined that I felt nature’s mysterious energy flow into and throughout my body. These supernatural forces helped me find my balance and pace. Call this a placebo effect, but through this experience I felt synchronized and I sympathized with the locals because I knew that this sacred mountain meant even more to them as pilgrims.

This was another opportunity for me to practice participant observation. This experience was even more casual since I didn’t formally interview people – it was more like short snippets of conversation with other pilgrims during the hike. The hike was also physically demanding, I could barely catch my breath, let alone conduct interviews.

The highlight of the hike was experiencing rebirth, or passing through the Bar Do – metaphorically, and somehow, physically as well. The Bar Do refers to the dangerous intermediate state between death and rebirth, along with the purification of sins through the process. We climbed into, and through a narrow cave during the hike. I learned that the narrow cave and process of squeezing through it represented a mother going through labor at childbirth. As we managed to squeeze ourselves out of the cave, we were cleansed and reborn. During this hike, I also felt that I understood more of the nuances in the relationship between man and nature. One must go through the physical obstacles of going through rocky terrain to appreciate the beauty of the landscape. This dialectic relationship between process and product implies a collaboration between mankind and the environment. The pilgrimage is also a reminder of how insignificant human beings are when compared to the greatness of nature.

‘Ethnocentricity’ was the first concept introduced to me at school as an anthropology student – it denotes that people impose their own cultural values and expectations on other cultures. I realized that forgoing ethnocentricity and achieving cultural relativity is easier said than done. I tried my best to put these ideas in practice by experiencing native people’s culture from the local angle. This experience with CERS was a memorable opportunity for me to put this theoretical concept into practice and to strive to comprehend minority cultures in Yunnan.
Travelling through Yunnan, the signs of change were noticeable. The landscapes were all undergoing some kind of alteration. The environmental, cultural and even spiritual landscapes that lay before us all had changes etched across them. Attempting to ascertain whether or not these changes were good or bad proved to be surprisingly difficult as each landscape and each change was unique; each presented successes, failures, progress and future challenges. Thankfully, the car rides were long, providing the much-needed time to try to grapple with these developments and their impacts.

The village lying below CERS’s Zhongdian center was visibly changing. With construction sites dotting the landscape and ever-larger Tibetan style houses slowly emerging, one couldn’t help but think of the implications of this kind of growth. Not only had the physical landscape of Gongbin Village changed, but the social and cultural landscapes had also been altered. A sense of competition was palpable, and confirmed by Xiao Drolma, a CERS staff member whose house we visited. When neighbors saw larger and more intricate houses springing up around them, they too were prompted to undertake their own renovations or new construction in a quest to outdo their peers. Huge sums of money and time were invested in these projects of pride, perpetuating the cycle of competition. It was amazing to see that, despite the sense of rivalry, the villagers of Gongbin stayed true to their cultural roots. The ostentation of these new houses was clearly Tibetan; though windows were bigger and houses taller, the structures themselves maintained a sense of authenticity - the decorative elements and intricate carvings in the cholma [a Tibetan altar place] were clear signs of traditional craftsmanship being preserved. However, the fact that it was the rivalry and competition that kept these elements of culture alive posed an interesting question: Does the meaning or reason behind these intricate and traditional designs get lost? And is that therefore a decay of culture or simply a transformation that can be labeled neither good nor bad?

Driving along the Yangtze valley, the environmental changes were obvious. The effects of clear cutting were evident, yet there was a faint sense of hope for recovery presented across the landscape. Though logging was extremely damaging to the region, the logging ban and tree-replanting subsidy programs introduced by the government in 1998 had encouraged positive changes; a naturally driven change towards restoration of the landscape. Yet, with evidence that illegal logging activity continued in spite of governmental effort, there was a pointed lack of change when it comes to the actions and attitudes of those carrying these activities out. Thus the classic issue persists; the tension between change (particularly mandated change) vs. individual willingness to actually do so.

Nonetheless as the Lisu Cultural Village site demonstrated, this did not have to be the case. Here, cultural and environmental landscapes had played off each other and co-evolved. The cultural landscape had adjusted to prevent negative environmental changes. With the establishment of the Baima Nature Reserve, traditional activities of the Lisu minority, particularly hunting, were threatened, giving rise to the question of whether or not culture can or should be sacrificed for the sake of the
environment. Yet, with the creation of the annual Lisu Crossbow Festival and the active participation of Lisu people (for instance as forest rangers) in the Baima Nature Reserve, the changes in culture and environmental landscapes had achieved a sense of harmony within that locale.

Changes that had proved to be rather difficult to consider in any sort of positive light were the ones taking place along the Mekong valley. With numerous hydro projects, the landscape was being altered in a way which seemed to have little foresight or concern for those living downriver. While these projects aimed to provide electricity to large cities, those who had borne the costs of these modifications received little to no benefit. Thus it must be realized that the radius of change was larger than the region that is undergoing alteration. Plans or decisions for change are generally not local; they were not confined by any sort of visible or tangible boundary.

Sacred sites, such as the sacred Mountain Kawakarpo were interesting to consider when it comes to change. The mountain itself should have been resistant to change, unaltered by human activity; as a sacred site, human interference and activity were forbidden past a certain point. Yet even so, Kawakarpo and the Meilixueshan range were not immune. Global challenges such as climate change had led to issues such as retreating glaciers in the Meilixueshan mountain range, even as social and cultural changes became apparent. Yubeng Village, at the foot of Kawakarpo and a popular rest stop on the pilgrimage around the sacred mountain, was visibly geared towards tourism. While it had brought benefits to the villagers in terms of their livelihood, something for which they should not be faulted, the number of tourists (and the students, interns and staff of this CERS trip could be included in this category) was surprising.

Is the pilgrimage being commercialized? Does this mean it is being degraded? Is there an overall loss of spirituality and sacredness to the physical landscape? These are questions that are difficult to answer, yet should be considered.

Change is inevitable and complex. A given geographical region will always be undergoing some sort of transformation, affected by both internal and external factors. It is however usually difficult to say whether a landscape is changing for the better or worse. Given that we wield the power to direct change, we need to be conscious of all that is involved, every facet of the landscape we are altering. Foresight is crucial to involve and consider those who will be affected as an effort to ensure that change is for the better. Yes, we may alter landscapes, but our goal should always be to steer clear of degrading them.
楊文瑜

由6月28日至7月10日為期13天的雲南香格里拉考察活動已圓滿結束。我帶著一行中的6名中學學生參加由中國探險學會舉辦的考察活動，這13天令我們有很大的感觸。

還記得我和一名學生剛到達香格里拉時已經有少許高山反應，還低燒了兩天。幸好得到學校的工作人員悉心照料下，我們慢慢適應高原環境。在此，我十分感謝工作人員對我們的照顧。

這十三天的考察活動分為幾個重點部分，例如在白馬雪山保護區觀看國家一級保護動物滇金絲猴，參與傈僳族的弩弓節，上山採蜂蜜，觀看茨中教堂，前往梅里雪山轉神山轉神瀑等體驗藏族文化……衆多精彩的活動實在難一一盡數。這一路走來，不同的考察地點，也使不同的挑戰，特別是前往雨崩村的三天。每天學生平均要爬六小時的山路，在高海拔地區爬山實屬不易，長時間爬山更具挑戰性。這正是訓練學生意志力的好機會。更因為有這些難關，到山頂所見的風景更顯得與眾不同，更令我們難以忘懷。這一系列的活動，我和學生也獲益匪淺。

學會為我們安排的行程深具意義。學生除了要身體力行地參與活動外，每晚學會邀請不同專業的教授就不同議題為學生作深入的講座，觀看紀錄片等。務求在活動之前對項目有基本了解，學生對不同活動議題才有更深刻的反思。作為他們的老師，我很高興可以看到他們對香格里拉的生態環境、少數民族的文化有深刻了解。每晚和他們進行討論時，大家也有不同的發現與體會。在旅程的後期，當他們發現問題，他們會自行尋找答案，再用英語與教授及其他國際學生交流，這種自學精神是難能可貴，望學生日後能繼續發揮此精神。

最後，十分感激翁先生多年來資助本校師生，讓我們有機會參與是次的考察活動。同時，希望更多師生能獲得如此寶貴的機會，獲益良多。

劉政亨

首先，我要感謝學校給與我這一次機會，到香格里拉參加長達13日的旅程。加上中國探險學會的完善發展，使學生可以到各地文化以及知識都為我預備，使我這一個旅程能夠安全愉快。

在旅程之中，各地景色都非常引人入勝。金沙江的震撼，白馬雪山公園保護區的熱鬧生態，雨崩神瀑的神秘，各式各樣的風景彷彿在我眼前，景點風景使我眼花撩亂。當中使我最深刻的，就是雨崩神瀑的旅程。我由雨崩村出發到神瀑需要走七公里的路，沿途攀山涉水，加上海拔三千多米之上空氣稀薄。即使我平時有做運動的習慣，這段旅程對我也是個大挑戰。一開始走過一道
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Observing Snub-nosed monkey at close quarter. Male dominant Snub-nosed Monkey.
Presentation at CERS Zhongdian Center.
Citing unforgettable experience.

橋—寒冰地獄橋：橋設於激流的正上方，當在橋上往下望，兇猛的流水如萬馬奔騰，無窮壓迫感迎面而來使人不禁後退並且忌諱三分。然後經過重重的原始森林，四面八方傳出千奇百怪的鳥鳴聲，音色有高有低，有長有短，彷彿置身於巨型音樂廳，享受着美妙的鳥兒交響樂。隨着音樂，時間都過得特別快，眨眼間就到了神瀑。當你高頭仰望，你就會深深體會到自己的渺小。看不到頂的瀑布令我想起學過的一首詩，飛流直下三千尺，疑是銀河落九天。流水猶如星星般墜下，當你走近神瀑，就能體驗沐浴於星河的快手，這種快感令人一生難忘。

這一次旅程不但能夠欣賞壯麗的大自然，更令我認識了當地藏族文化，雨崩村濃厚的宗教氛圍以及教徒對宗教的熱衷，都使我大開眼界。不論在自然生態、宗教文化或是風俗特色等各方面這個旅程都讓我獲益良多。不得不提當然是能夠認識一班親切的新朋友，希望下年能再次參加，學懂更多，見識更多。

王子恩

七月的香格里拉和同時期的香港相比已是冬季。六點半，我們一行人從雨崩村出發，徒步走向出發點。清晨的白氣已迫不及待地從口中冒出，行人因為時間太早，只是一路的零零丁丁。此時，山間的鳥叫聲和風聲既顯得格外明顯，望著遠處日照金山的美景，一切似乎都是一種享受。

走著來時的路，看著周圍熟悉的彩旗，好像在回顧自己的曾經。

過去的10天裡，我們有幸在學校的贊助下，參加了CERS舉行的雲南香格里拉交流活動。上山上了國家一級保護動物——金絲猴，尋找了逐漸消失的野生動物，參觀擁有獨特魅力的僑僑族文化，並參加了僑僑族一年一度的彌弓節。最後還走了幾十公里的山路抵達雨崩村，登頂神瀑。上述的一切活動對於不愛做運動的我來說，無疑是一個巨大的挑戰。在高海拔的地區爬上高山，每一步，每一呼吸都似是煎熬，再加上山路崎嶇，擔心摔倒受傷的心理壓力更是讓我難以喘息。但看著前方隊伍的漸行漸遠，我也只能咬緊牙關，繼續堅持下去。即使步伐緩慢，根本跟不上隊伍的速度。但前面的夥伴總會回頭給予我鼓勵，或是向我伸出援手，拉我一把，那時心裡一暖，好似吸進一大瓶新鮮氧氣，一下子恢復了活力，繼續前行。

在努力之下，終於到達目的地，我們也總能學到平日難以學到的課外知識。例如在這次由一位台灣人類學教授的講座中所說的「體...
LEFT: Yung Yau students and teacher at 4292 meter high pass to Khawakarpo.

RIGHT: Students resting on pilgrimage to Yubeng sacred waterfall.

梁衡芳

通過這次旅程，發現自己學會了很多東西，也成長了不少。像一開始的心態只是把旅程當作放鬆和玩樂的地方，其實猛然發現這是第一次增長知識和磨練突破自己的機會。

一開始，我們參觀金絲猴和蜜蜂的時候，路途十分艱難和漫長，我幾乎想半途而廢。對那未知去雨崩的路滿懷恐懼。可是沒有人放棄，我也一步一步地到達了目的地。那一刻山頂的風景和金絲猴的樣子真是很奇特……彷彿那一刻的感覺像是我心裡一個抹不去的印記一樣。通過這個對金絲猴和蜜蜂的觀察和體驗，我還明白到：「我們人類應該保護和珍惜我們的環境，這樣生物才不會消逝，得以一代一代保留下來。」

中間還有傈僳族人的端午節的體驗，真的很神奇，能讓族人的文化得以傳承。這個節日讓全村人民聚集在一起，比賽、唱歌、跳舞……每一個人都臉上的笑容都讓我感到十分欣慰。是呀，有誰不想讓自己民族驕傲的文

當中難忘的還是去雨崩的旅程，只能用「艱辛」和「美妙」兩個詞表達。12公里上坡和5公里下坡對我這種平時幾乎不運動的人來說簡直是煎熬和折磨。每走一步都有放棄的念頭。可是我的朋友和老師都會鼓勵著我：「別放棄，快到了，快到了！」，不單單是他們，就連沿途陌生的人們也向我們祝福著鼓勵著：「扎西德勒」！就這樣，在痛苦中感動的心態下一步一步向上，我成功渡過了這段旅程。望過了這沿途美麗絕頂的風景，山山水水，都像是一幅綺麗的畫卷般動人。

前十天的經歷如走馬燈一般，在我腦海裡迅速閃過，不知不覺，我已經登上了山頂一一亞口。四周的彩旗迎風飄舞著，似乎是在讚賞我的堅持，令我不禁會心一笑。回看身後的漫漫長路，這五公里多的路途就好像過去的十天，雖然一路都充滿了艱辛痛苦，但我們都總能堅持住，熬下來，最後對自己的努力付以鼓勵的微笑。

放眼前路，回望身後，這一段看似無窮無盡的山路，就好似我們的

八月十日，我們結束了在香格里拉的十三日旅程。滿懷著十三日的

為收穫」一樣，我們親自來到戶外，親身體驗到了真正的自然，在這天然的教室中學習傈僳族的文

驗，收穫」一樣，我們親自來到戶外，親身體驗到了真正的自然，在這天然的教室中學習傈僳族的文化，或是觀察金絲猴的日常活動，我們能夠去到知識被挖掘出來的地方去學習，學到的文化一定是更地道的。看到的金絲猴一定是更真實的，最終所能收穫到的必定是更完整的知識！
真的很喜欢这次旅程，带给我数之不盡的感想。让我学会应该珍惜自己现有的生活。因为在那里，他们十分贫穷，交通又不方便，生活环境十分简陋……一切一切的，的确我们现在的生活实在太幸福了！感谢这次旅程，我相信在我人生中是不會磨灭的經驗。

梁嘉雯
在這個旅行当中，我學識了很多，學會了坚持到底。因為我們差不多每天都在爬山，無論去看金絲猴，看老伯如何採蜜，去雨崩村看雪山，看神瀑，我們都是在爬幾公里的山。我不是一個爬山愛好者，雖然我是一個田徑運動員，但是我只是在訓練的時候跑一兩百米，六十米等等。我可說我是一個短跑選手，並不擅長長跑，所以在爬山的時候我常走一下，就喘息一下。有時候我會想放棄因為我覺得很辛苦很難受。當走得累的時候我會埋怨為甚麼我要在這裏受苦。但是我的隊友常常在這個時候跟我說：差不多快要到啦，堅持一下加油，你一定能做的。當我走到山頂看到神瀑的時候我十分開心。因為我終於做到了，我當時百感交集說不出話來。爬山也是一個令我印象十分深刻，因為每當我想起這次旅行我必定会想起爬山，而且是差在多每天都在爬山。

我的隊友虽然平時大吵大闹，但是他們總是需要的時候跟我打氣，讓我有力量繼續走下去，走的時候常常會遇到當地的人，他們會跟我們說扎西得勒，意思是祝福你，和你打氣，這種事情在香港是不見得見的。因為在香港每個人都在低著頭用電子產品，和朋友傳短信，聽音樂，玩遊戲等等，很少會有人主動和你打招呼，更不用說是祝福你。我覺得當地人很熱情，令我覺得很溫暖，很感動。

還有，我認識到傈僳族的傳統文化。我們去了白長雪山國家公園保護區居住，參觀了當地的博物館認識當地人以前是用弩弓去打獵，也知道他們以前的房屋是用木頭來建成，房屋的高度很矮小，我常常跟隊友一起接著笨頭。他們說房屋的高度矮小可以防止妖魔鬼怪進去他們的屋子裏，可以保障他們的健康。但是有保護區的責任他們不可以再去打獵，只能去市場去買肉類食物，而房屋也因為空間不足而改造成漢屋，就是兩個風格的房屋。不但空間大而房
楊子輝
在本年的七月的上旬，我參加了由中國探險學會所舉辦的雲南十二天的探險旅程。這十二天對不同人來說可能有長有短，但對我來說這是甚有意義，並是我重要的一個轉捩點。

首先，我很榮幸可以參加這次活動，因為這次活動令我大開眼界，亦都可以嘗試到很多在香港不能做的事。例如可以親眼看到採摘蜂蜜的过程，還可即場嘗試新鮮的蜂蜜。另外，我還觀看了中國受保護動物金絲猴，並且透過觀察從中了解他們的生長特性。還有，我參加了弩弓節，在這個節日中，我第一次嘗試很刺激的弩弓，這是一個很難得的經驗。我也跟當地村民談天，了解他們的文化。例如，有一個村民教我如何製作弩弓。

其次，最令我感受深刻的是到雨崩村。去雨崩村或神瀑的路程中，所有人都要像一個大家庭，每個人經過的人都會說一些鼓勵的話。所有人都有相同的目標，並一起朝着同一個目標，讓過程增添趣味。途中我深深感受到別人對宗教的堅持和熱誠。

另外，香港現在的青少年很多時間也在使用電子產品，根本沒有時間去接觸大自然和朋友相處。在旅途中，因為不會一定有wifi，所以多了更多時間去接觸新朋友，和親近大自然。

最後，謝謝中國探險學會的所有人士和在旅程的所有朋友，因為你們令我旅程增添不少色彩。

蔡澤裕
今年暑假，我很榮幸獲邀參加由中國探險學會舉辦的中國雲南省香格里拉考察體驗及交流活動，整個考察活動長達十三天，過程中我獲得了許多寶貴的經驗和豐富的知識，大大的擴展了我的視野。

在這個旅程中，我們去到白馬雪山公園保護區內了解十分稀有的滇金絲猴的生活現況，參加了少數民族傈僳族的特殊節日弩弓節，到訪了被稱為太子十三峰之一的雨崩村，是次活動讓我對雲南香格里拉當地的風俗習慣有了更深的了解。

在這個旅程中，讓我印象最深刻的是當我正在雪山轉山時，突然聽見了一陣響聲，回頭一看，竟然是一架飛馳的摩托車，它呼嘯而過，留下一地黑煙，這場景令我感到十分震驚，原來發展旅遊業已經為本來封閉的小村莊帶來了十分巨大的改變。而這個改變令我感到很驚訝，同時也使我意識到了旅遊業發展也可能會對當地的生態環境造成嚴重的破壞。

經過這一次的旅程後，我明白到了旅遊業的發展是一個大的趨勢，但旅遊業發展的同時也因為生態環境的保護形成平衡，否則會對當地的生態環境造成嚴重的破壞。最後，我要感謝我的學校，給了我一個如此寶貴的機會，讓我獲益匪淺。我也要感謝中國探險學會舉辦了這個有意義的活動和在旅途中的幫助。我還要感謝我的導師－楊老師在旅途中的照顧。謝謝你們，使我能一路平安。
Walking across a small bridge, crossing a mud puddle, and passing a mule camp, my teammates and I started heading into the deep woods. There were fewer people here, and the slope got significantly steeper. The vegetation was also so dense that I was barely able to see the sky. After walking through the density for almost an hour, I saw a beautiful array of colorful prayer flags hanging on trees. I could smell the scent of burning incense sticks wafting in my direction. I had seen prayer flags before, but I was confused about why there were prayer flags here – this was no vantage point, temple, pagoda or shrine.

I continued to follow the colorful prayer flags with my teammates. As we were walking, we continued following the colors, but we soon headed off the main trail. At the end of the muddy path, I was barely able to see a structure. Arriving at the front door of the temple, there was a giant rock with many white small scarf-like strips hanging on it and the footprint made by one of the first Dalai-lamas. Looking to the left side of the temple, I was able to clearly see our other teammates as small dots hiking up the main trail, and sacred Kawagarbo Mountain behind. The national park started as a dense and green forest, but as I looked further up, there was less and less vegetation and I was able to see the glaciers on the very top of the mountain.

While we were looking at the beautiful scenery, a monk greeted us. Before telling us anything about the temple, he mentioned about a Buddhist cave right above the temple, and told us to try going through it.

I was wrong to assume that this place was just any old, generic cave in the mountains. It turned out that the width of the cave got narrower and narrower. At the very end of the cave, I was able to see a wooden ladder leading up to another part of the cave. When I climbed up the ladder I was shocked to see what appeared to be a hole that was probably barely the size of a dog’s door. With no hesitation, I dived headfirst into the entrance of the cave. Crawling through the first few steps of the cave didn’t seem hard, but as I proceeded towards the middle of the path, the gap came to a bend with a small mud puddle on the bottom. At that moment I knew that if I stopped where I was, I would completely block up my teammates behind, so I bent over the top of the cave and wiggled through the mud puddle.
After I crawled through the cave, the same monk that greeted us pulled me out. When we all finally got out of the cave, the monk told us that the cave was a test to see if we were good people. He mentioned that only people with few sins could pass through the tunnel, and those with sins would not be able to pass through. After hearing from the monk, I was relieved - that moment I not only knew that I was able to go through an almost impossible cave, but also qualified as a good person. Additionally I felt very lucky because I knew that the Buddhist cave would soon be affected by the nearby tourist development, and I was grateful to experience it before this gem of a place would become a tourist attraction.

Although this was a very short moment in time, it is one that significantly changed my perception and expectations of Tibetan Buddhist religious traditions. It was also a most valuable time of self-reflection and cleansing. This experience brought about a precious moment of clarity.
As a group we also took a pilgrimage to the town of Yubeng so we could see Meili Snow Mountain (Kawagebo) and the sacred waterfall. Tibetan culture forbids climbing up the Meili Snow Mountain. This is because Tibetans believe that climbing the mountain would create an imbalance between the internal and external world, which would result in misfortune to all communities living near the mountain. The internal world is where humans and animals live, while the external world is the sky where the deities live. The sacred waterfall is believed to wash away your sins if you wet yourself with its water. In addition, the water is believed to cure any sickness or disease.

The CERS expedition to cultural Tibet taught me so many things that I will cherish for my life. It was an amazing experience and trip that I will never forget. During the CERS trip in cultural Tibet, I experienced different traditions and cultures that I otherwise never would have known existed. Besides learning about the rich and vast culture, our group also acquired knowledge on the nature and wildlife in the areas we were exploring. It was so diverse, due to huge environmental gradients.

What I found intriguing was how varied nature and wildlife were in cultural Tibet. While reading Ralph Litzinger’s paper on Kawegabo Mountain, I was enlightened by its informative contents regarding Tibet’s nature. Within Tibet there are four different environments; subtropical, temperate, boreal and artic-alpine, and finally permanent snow found in the mountains. All the different environmental gradients have produced 10,000 different plant species, and 500 different bird species. Rare snub-nosed monkeys can also be found in parts of cultural Tibet’s environment.

The area that we had explored had many captivating cultural and traditional facets. For three nights, we stayed in a Lisu village and participated in the annual crossbow festival. The Lisu people used to use crossbows to hunt animals, but since the ban on hunting in the area, the practice of using and making crossbows had dwindled. CERS was able to create an annual crossbow festival, thereby reviving the tradition of making and practicing how to use crossbows. This allowed the preservation and sustainability of a cultural practice.

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The CERS expedition to cultural Tibet taught me so many things that I will cherish for my life. It was an amazing experience and trip that I will never forget.
I have always wondered how it feels to be a celebrity, the subject of millions of paparazzi photos and the center of attention at any place and time. Now I know. My time on the red carpet, however, occurred where I least expected it: the villages along the banks of the Irrawaddy River in Myanmar.

Isolation - When I think of life in Myanmar, this is the first word that comes to mind. Perhaps my vague idea of the country and its history led me to believe that most of its people live a life generations behind our metropolitan city lives. In 1962, military leader Ne Win gained control of Myanmar overnight. Under “The Burmese way to Socialism,” Ne Win and his military government held the country under tight reins, strictly censoring speech and the press, restricting and controlling education, foreign businesses and tourism, and severely punishing political dissidents. I assumed I would meet people who had limited knowledge of the world beyond their homes. I imagined I would visit villages that were rural and backwards.

Throughout our trip up and downstream, I did see much of the isolation I had imagined. Unexpectedly, however, I discovered that isolation isn’t the only component to life here.

Modernization. Globalization - The 2012 reforms and opening up of Myanmar brought these two developments. Sanctions, most notably by the United States, were lifted, and the country began to welcome foreign businesses and tourists. As a result, the country has seen a surge in economic growth and development. However, the pace of modernization is uneven, and many areas remain insulated from the advances of the modern world.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Villagers at Tawyaqi monastery taking photos of us.
Students heading to school as boatman takes photo with mobile phone.
More paparazzi at Male village.
allowing international trade to increase; foreign companies came to compete with local ones; exports of rice, oil, peanuts and fish climbed back up. This opening up is also responsible for the surprisingly widespread use of phones I saw. In turn, the locals’ recent obsession with their phones accounts for my celebrity status here.

On the second day of our trip we visited Tawyagi Monastery. It happened to be a day of celebration, as the students at the monastery were completing their second to last day of exams. We walked up to a group of small children and handed out dolphin-themed candy packets. I heard shuffling noises from above and when I looked up I saw that, one by one, monks above us were poking their bald heads out of the windows, trying to catch a glimpse of us. Soon after, we were beckoned by a group of women who, using polite nods and hand gestures, positioned us in front of the monastery’s stupa and asked us to smile for their phone cameras.

I was an even bigger celebrity the two times we stopped by Male village further upstream, the first time to buy longyis and the second to search for our runaway cat, Minga. Curious children cautiously began making their way over to us as soon as our feet touched the beach. With each step further into the village, we gained more followers, more fans, more stares. The children grew excited; this was their rare chance to see foreigners. Surprisingly, the paparazzi’s cameras did not appear until it was time for us to leave. Maybe the villagers realized, as we walked down the main road, that this might be their last chance in a long while to see foreigners, for suddenly everyone had their phone out and was desperately snapping photos of us. Some stood discreetly by the side of the road but tapped their phones furiously for the few seconds I was in view. Others were brave enough to follow close behind, holding their phones just inches away from my face, trying to capture the details of my strange sunburn and the beads of sweat. I could even hear the sounds of their phone cameras clicking away. As I walked among the swarms of children, waving and giving them hi-fives, I wondered how many photos each person had taken and where those images were going to go.

Even the HM Explorer, secluded on the river and out of the reach of civilization, had paparazzi. Kyaw Moe Naing, 18, one of the servers onboard, occasionally snuck his phone out to snap photos of us as we talked and worked. He told me he had had his phone for four years even though it was expensive for him to buy. Despite his solar-powered village having limited cellular service and no internet access, he still uses his phone on the boat in his free time, mostly for Facebook and to take photos. I never expected any of the staff to have phones, and while the photo taking took a while to get used to, it was nice that we were all able to use our phones at the end of the trip to “friend” each other on Facebook.

My first few days in Myanmar raised questions in my mind that I continuously pondered as we floated along.

Is phone usage out of sync with the rest of the villagers’ lives? Most villages have no running water, stable source of electricity or paved roads, and people even bathe and wash their clothes in the river. Yet most villagers, including schoolchildren, own and are actively using phones. I would think that the locals would choose to improve their basic living conditions before getting cellular service and phones. To me, their lives are a strange combination of the past and present.

Are we intruding and disturbing the locals’ lives by taking their attention away from their original purpose? I felt that our roles were reversed. Instead of us marveling at their culture and capturing photos of their homes and lives, they were marveling at us and capturing our every move as well. This observation left me with pangs of guilt: Maybe it would be best if we were not there.

Now that I have had a few days to reflect on my experiences, I have a clearer understanding of Myanmar’s current situation. My feelings about it, on the other hand, are still a jumbled mess. I am happy that development is bringing modernization and globalization that help the country thrive and progress. I do not, however, like how change is happening so fast. Before I came I thought I would get the chance to completely detach myself from the connected world. But even in these remote places, I feel as though the digital era is taking over at too rapid a pace.

As for my guilty feelings, I have come to realize that coming here not only gives me the chance to see different cultures, but it gives locals a chance to see something different as well. Most locals don’t have the opportunities we have to travel, so us being here is a learning experience for them too. I just wish we could be less noticeable and distracting so our own experiences would be most authentic and we could be as unobtrusive as possible.

I guess I can safely say that being a celebrity is much more thought provoking and much less glamorous than I had always thought.
CTRL-S
by Stephanie Cheung
A group of nuns saw me sitting alone on a rock; they stopped in their tracks, smiling at me, and started speaking in Tibetan. We were hiking the pilgrimage route to see the sacred waterfall of Yubeng. I found the hike particularly challenging and I trailed behind my companions throughout the journey - before I knew it, I was walking alone. When I sat down on the rock, I was frankly feeling unnecessarily sorry for myself - I had a pulsing migraine, cramps all over, and a couple of bird dumps on my clothes made me very annoyed. The nuns realized that I didn’t understand Tibetan and one gestured her head towards the waterfall while another stretched out her hand. I took her hand and we all walked towards the sacred falls. After ten minutes or so they started to chant and prostrate themselves on the path. I took another route.

Later that day, a monk picked up my lens cap which had rolled down the valley. He told me to be very careful. An hour later, a stranger stopped by, seeing me framing the landscape with my camera and gave me a lecture on proper camera care in high altitudes - he even handed me a plastic bag to protect my camera. The day ended with a spontaneous meeting with other college-age students from Guangzhou, Kunming, Chengdu and Lhasa. We had beers and butter tea together. Later, I went back to the hostel for dinner to reunite with the CERS group.

It was a surreal day - one of those rare times that was a real, personal epiphany. It was one of those days that feels like such a blessing, and I don’t want to forget it.
As How Man and Xavier left the 1939 house, How Man looked at me, “Remember to turn off the lights and the air conditioning; the remotes are over here; just shut the door firmly behind you when you leave.” I nodded and turned back to my computer model of Shek O. I needed a few more photos of the surroundings and decided to quickly head up to the rooftop. Grabbing nothing but my camera, I headed straight for the stairs. I opened the door latch, propped the door open, and proceeded to frame my picture. Pressing the shutter down, I reviewed the overexposed image - a gust of wind slammed the door shut. I pulled at the steel door, desperately trying to find a latch, a doorknob – anything, to open the metal barrier. To my horror and disbelief, the steel door was firmly locked shut. I frantically yanked at the doors to the aviation exhibit room, and How Man’s roof top studio, but both were firmly locked. As if to hammer the last nail to the coffin, thunder and lightning struck. It started raining cats and dogs – while I was stranded on How Man’s balcony.
At first, I was amused and in stunned disbelief. How could something like this happen, especially in a place like Hong Kong? Especially to someone like me? I found it deeply ironic considering the fact that I was stranded on the rooftop of a base of a world-renowned exploration organization, concurrently, the house of someone known as the modern Chinese, Marco Polo. There I was, Stephanie Cheung, a humble intern and architecture student. Worse still, I had no phone, that techno’ extension of the twenty-first century human being, and no access to one. Now I realised what being technologically challenged means on a totally different and painful level! I also had no wallet, not that a monetary solution was my potential savior. At that very moment, I was only dressed in a white tank top, jean shorts, keen waterproof sandals, and holding an entry level DSLR with a wide angle lens. I had never been nor had I ever imagined being in a situation like this. My only piece of technology was rendered utterly useless, and it soon dawned on me that I had to rely on my wits to save my skin. I was in a very awkward situation and felt like the proverbial fool in a cliché cartoon.

I yelled for help, using every possible and indeed, on reflection, some impossible combinations of Chinese and English. I was desperate to garner all the attention I could. I heard the sounds of men whistling and the sound of Mah Jong chips knocking against each other from a distance. It was frustrating and surreal. I continued yelling for an hour. There was no one in sight, no one was responding to my calls, no one was coming for me. My feverish mind began frantically formulating plans, and to my relief, something came up: someone would hear my calls, and I would yell instructions to them to call members of the team. Yet this was like all overly dramatic and hastily conceived plans - they never work in practice!

I started scrambling around, thinking that, as in the movies, a spare key would be hidden somewhere. My situation would become a quest of discovery with the symbolic resonances beloved by post - modernist explicators of life and everything else. However, I was very wrong - there was no such thing in the real world, or the symbolic one! I eventually noticed a metal grate, the type placed in front of gutter drainage openings. I saw that it was made of thin, flexible metal and I bent its corner to create a makeshift lock pick. I slid it into the keyhole and tried picking the lock - exposure theory in action - I had no success.

At this moment, the most extreme idea brewing in the depths of my head began to surface. I could climb down the side of the building. Almost immediately, a voice, very paranoid, begged me to think twice. No! Stephanie no! Don’t be stupid, you could die...What if you seriously injure yourself? But, my ultimate objective was to capture the attention from the villagers to help me call someone, and I realized that staying so high up, people probably couldn’t hear me. It seemed that the most ridiculous solution was possibly my sole solution.

I climbed over the fence of the roof top bar and stepped onto the neighbor’s roof top. I then inched towards the edge of the roof and took the narrow stairway down to a window ledge. From the window ledge I wiggled the pipes, as if this was an accurate way of testing the strength of the attachment point. Like a child sliding down a playground pole, I hugged the sewage pipe and slid down. By repeating these steps I eventually reached the roof ledge of the neighbor’s house. Finally, I was only two stories above ground.

“Wah! What are you doing?” - A voice rang from the street level. Juanita, a Filipino helper, and my long-awaited savior, spotted me on the balcony. I laughed in relief, and explained my situation. “Stay there!” She yelled. I asked her to contact the people who lived in the house that I was now clinging onto. I wanted to be let inside so that I could return to the ground. “Ma’am nobody lives there!” My hopes faltered, crumbled to dust and were swept away by the stormy winds. Yet not all was lost - out of nowhere, she brought out a ladder. It was nowhere near me, but nonetheless I proceeded to carefully grab and step on a few more window ledges and pipe attachments, gripping them for dear life before reaching the ladder and climbing to the ground.

I was proud of myself for solving the problem, but the situation still feels surreal to me till this day. On a personal level, I realize that this was my first time being forced to completely rely on my own in terms of decision making.

Perhaps all experiences are linked and engaged after all, rather than isolated and exposed. My assignment to study the architecture of Shek O this summer now includes first-hand experiences of physically navigating through the rooftops of village houses. I studied a book on Hong Kong’s illegal roof top slums. The roof top constructions of Shek O were far from that, since most are illegal, temporary structures for the hedonistic purposes of entertaining guests and enjoying the marvelous sea view. However, this dangerous and illegitimate means of slipping atop and through structures is still a way of life for many in Hong Kong. These ways of navigating are the only ways of moving in out of their homes quietly and unnoticed.

I am grateful that I was able to remain reasonably calm and clear-headed. I am also so grateful to Juanita for providing the ladder and that I am safe and unscathed. This was no CERS expedition to the remote parts of Asia, but it was an internal adventure which captured the spirit of exploration. Never be afraid to dare; take a chance! All life is chance, and the person who wants to go furthest must be willing to both do and dare.
Shek O Village was established long before the rule of British colonial government in Hong Kong!’ said Ying-Jie, who could not have been prouder.

History, to me, is no more than mere ‘facts’ documented and interpreted by those who are in power, usually government officials and historians. It is only through the word of mouth of locals – the traditional tales, the legends, the local slang – that history itself transcends from cold and detached factual statements to vivid and lively representations of past culture and customs.

Tracing back the history of Shek O, the influence of foreign authority had long been prominent ever since the British government’s takeover of Hong Kong island; the 23 ‘Tai Ban’ houses still standing today at the coastal front of Shek O seemed to be an everlasting reminder of the esteemed Western power that once dominated the community. Co-inhabiance was a complex issue, even to the welcoming Shek O Village, that was oddly composed of a variety of ‘surnames’, since compromises had to be made to accommodate the well-off foreigners. Lands were ceded from original occupants for the construction of a golf club and the ‘Tai Ban’ houses. In exchange, to compensate for the loss of their lands for dwelling and farming, locals were relocated and offered job opportunities serving foreign club members. As the seniors recollected, the outlanders and natives lived peacefully together in Shek O, with the minimal interactions nothing more than employer-employee relationships. The chemistry between the two distinct cultural groups was not unveiled until stories of daily life, with a hint of cultural differences, were told.

To my surprise, without intention to delve into the topic of colonial interaction, Qing-jie’s story about the ‘Da Jiao Festival’ incidentally shed light upon the subtle relationship between the local inhabitants and the newcomers. Once in every decade, the ‘Da Jiao Festival’ is a momentous celebrative event for many villages in Hong Kong, not limited to Shek O. During the course of the festival, fasting is expected from locals who pray for blessings via refraining from meat. Unaware of the cultural taboo on meat,
an attendant of one of the foreign families stopped by the crowd as he returned from shopping for groceries, curiously observing the festival. To the villagers’ dismay, the careless attendant accidentally knocked over his basket of groceries and revealed the raw meat that he earlier had bought. Such offensive and disgraceful behavior aroused the outrage of the crowd, which then chased off the ignorant servant. Instances such as these were not sporadic, noted Ying-jie, who immediately came up with another similar story about a woman who also worked for the Western families of the village. At the request of her foreign master, she cooked meat during the ‘Da Jiao Festival’ as dinner for them, violating the taboo. The grandmother that stayed in the house while the servant prepared the meal, despite not being the one who infringed on the traditional rules, suffered from a sore throat after inhaling the smoke of the cooked meat. Villagers believed the symptom of sore throat indicated punishment for disobeying the words of the deities, and urged the grandmother to ‘jieyuan’ – to admit and offset the misdeed done.

Tales being circulated for generations and generations can hardly be verified; some may even consider such legends involving the supernatural power of gods as unenlightened superstitions. Nonetheless, do these tales need to be authenticated at all? After all, the word of mouth of local villagers revealed how they unconsciously feel about the newcomers and how they perceived the relationship between the two different communities. Superficially, the ‘public script’ told by the seniors of Shek O had given us an impression that the two co-existed peacefully back then; but it is only through the folk tales that the intricate dynamics between foreign and Hong Kong culture can be unconsciously revealed.

Another crucial page of Hong Kong history was the period of Japanese occupation, also known as ‘three years and eight months’ in colloquial language. Being born in such a blessed era as this, without direct first-hand experience of warfare, the traumatic memory of Japanese tyranny was to me distant history. Implementation of curfew and extradition, rationing of rice and water, and atrocities of mass murder and rape were once facts that I had learnt from history books about the Japanese totalitarian regime. Yet through the interviews, with the victims telling me their own tragic and fearful past poignantly, I myself somehow was able to feel and connect to the history. Once again, the past of the villagers being told became something more in the broader picture of history.

Brian Lau was born in 1943, in the midst of the Japanese military occupation. He was too young then to be a witness of the Japanese’ despotic rule, nonetheless, his family member’s retrospection of past misery had made him hold a grudge towards Japanese even today. ‘Life was so hard back then,’ Lau recalled as he frowned. ‘My mother tried to collect firewood from the backyard and sell it for money. However, firewood logging was prohibited by Japanese. The soldiers caught my mother and put her in Stanley prison.’ Limited supplies of food and water led to great hardship in livelihood, especially when Lau’s mother was imprisoned. His 12-year-old sister carried the burden of looking after him. ‘Many villagers starved to death during the occupation. To survive, my sister even walked a long way and went down to the sea in search of food for the two of us.’ Fortunately, Lau’s uncle, who worked as a chef at the Japanese army base, put in a few nice words about his sister, and Lau’s mother was released. But the nightmare did not end with the mother’s remittance. The extent of Japanese soldiers raping local women was devastating; young women all ran and hid in the barren hills for escape. I was even told that due to the catastrophic events, one of the young ladies had no choice but to give birth in a cave. In memorial of this legendary birth, the girl baby was then named ever after ‘Cave.’

Through these episodes of memory, the blood and tears shed by innocent people during warfare, for the first time for me, felt ‘real.’ The pictures became so vivid in my mind as I listened to their agonizing and unsettling stories. Hence, what should always be remembered is that, while we are reading or researching past histories, we should keep in mind that the death statistics are not mere ‘numbers’. Every life that was sacrificed meant a lot more than being included in a number in some history books. Every particular person that died in war had a complete back story and a family that awaited his/her victorious return.

▲
The effect of Japanese rule was extensive. Not only did it cast shadows on the minds of people who had lived in fear for three years and eight months, but it also scarred their physical dimension. Poor hygiene resulting from the inhumane administration, and the limited medical facilities on top of that, led to soaring child mortality. In those dark times, settlers in Shek O simply carried dead children in bushel baskets with a mattock, and buried the corpse in the woodlands near the mountains. As told by Ying-Jie, ‘The 14th child of “Chang Sheng’s” family had severe asthma back then. Her mother thought that the child was beyond hope and put her in the basket in sorrow. My mother stopped her and asked her to wait for a few days, despite that the chances were slim. In the end, the child survived and is still very healthy now!’ On account of the prevalent custom of child burial in those days, a local slang, was invented; ‘fun-ki-kun’ is a curse on others to die, as it means ‘sleep in a basket with a mattock’.

From story to story, we may observe how the Japanese occupation ravaged the lives of Hong Kong people in those three years; what was left were permanent scars in people’s memory. ‘Forgive but not forget’, Brian Lau wittily concluded. As time elapses, after generations and generations, people may be able to put down their hatred; but those horrific days would always occupy a place in their mind, and in history.

During my work in Shek O, I have realized the charm of stories being told. In academic study of history, people are always told to be objective, to be an observant and unbiased witness of passing time. These folk stories told by locals, on the other hand, are subjective, unproven tellings, with emotions and individual opinions. Some serious academics deem the later to be unworthy of researching, for they deviate from scientific objectivity. Notwithstanding, history is written by the influential powers in society, for whom the lenses adopted to observe or describe the community differ from those of the people in the community. Therefore, both history and tales should be interwoven together to present a complete and meaningful whole of past events.
Audrey Chan is 17 years old and currently a senior at Columbia Grammar and Preparatory School. She was born in Hong Kong, but has lived in Singapore and currently lives in Manhattan. She enjoys music and design as well as outdoor activities. This is her fourth trip with CERS, but each time she experiences something new. “Traveling to Myanmar with CERS this year was a wonderful experience. I had the opportunity to reflect and think about what I saw, as everything was new to me. I’m also glad I didn’t get seasick or devoured by leeches!”

Natasha Cheung is 17 years old and is currently a 12th grader at The Taft School in Watertown, Connecticut. She was born in Sydney and grew up in Hong Kong. Her major interests are fine arts, writing and actively exploring the world around her. Among many other life lessons, CERS has taught her to cherish even the smallest details in life and appreciate relationships with everyone around her, even if they don’t speak the same language. “Looking at the large number of clocks hung up in Myanmar’s monasteries, I have been reminded of how subjective time is - what we do with our time and how we perceive time is entirely up to us. Nine days passed by slowly on the HM Explorer, proving that time doesn’t have to fly by when we’re having fun.”

Stephanie Cheung is a second year architecture student at Cornell University. She is the youngest editor in history to be chosen for the esteemed Cornell Journal of Architecture. Additionally, she is the head media mogul for the award winning student run publication – Association. She is a self-proclaimed architectural urbanist, and enjoys photographing and writing about urban policies and buildings. In her spare time, she enjoys walking around cities and woodworking. Working with the CERS team has greatly expanded her appreciation for the complexities and nuances of heritage preservation. This is her first summer with CERS and she is extremely grateful for the opportunity to see vernacular Tibetan architecture and learning from a talented team.

Brandon Leibman is 16 years old and was born in the Bahamas and grew up in Dubai. He currently studies at Lawrenceville school in New Jersey and is the President of Dickinson House. He is a 3 season athlete – American football, wrestling and lacrosse - sings in the school choir, and plays the tenor sax. Although of Asian background and learning Mandarin at school, the CERS trip to cultural Tibet taught him the importance of preserving and sustaining traditional practices.

Ryan Ma is 16 years old and studies at the Taft school. He enjoys keeping rare exotic fish species and fishing, and runs an online fish group called Exotic Cichlid. He also has a passion for conserving endangered fish species. This is his second time with CERS and he had a completely new experience. “I was able to get a completely different perspective of China. Hiking and going through the Buddhist cave was an eye-opening experience.”

Valerie Ma is 16 years old and is an 11th grader at Deerfield Academy. She was born and raised in Hong Kong but also enjoys the quiet life in Western Massachusetts. She likes almost all subjects (except physics), as well as international issues and Bob’s Burgers (the TV show). Her time in Myanmar this past summer has influenced her to think about the bonds that people form: “In our busy lives, we sometimes don’t truly cherish the people around us. I miss Myanmar not only because of the beautiful scenery and captivating culture, but the people that I met, whether that was on the HM Explorer or in Katha.”

Emily Sun was born and raised in Hong Kong. She is a sophomore at Middlebury College, Vermont where she intends to major in Geography and continue her studies in Chinese language. This was Emily’s first summer with CERS, traveling with the organization to Yunnan and working on a map of new hiking trails in the Ailoshan mountain range. She hopes to continue contributing to CERS in the future.

Astor Wong, a 21 years old Hong Kong girl, is currently studying anthropology and archaeology at Durham University in the UK. She is intrigued by the intricate interactions in human society, thus her initial decision of studying psychology in CUHK. Later, however, she realized that her true passion lies in anthropology and is now devoted to natural conservation and culture preservation. The summer program of CERS offered a platform for her to engage in anthropological observation of local Tibetans and to get a taste of their culture. “I have always been thrilled to understand other people’s culture, hence I’m very grateful that this trip to Yunnan gave me an opportunity to practice what I have learnt in university. Such down to earth experience has enlightened me a lot.”

Yung Yau College (YYC) has been partnered with CERS since 2010. It is the only Hong Kong secondary school with a super computer and animation lab. A group of students and teachers comes to CERS every summer. Following their experience they create a short animation. The animation is a ‘gift’ to CERS and is premiered at the CERS Annual Dinner or other major CERS public activities. Previous animations can be seen on the CERS website. This year a group of six students, with their Mandarin teacher, joined CERS in Yunnan for two weeks.
Interns in the field

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Zhongtai lecturing to students.
Interns painting Tropic of Cancer.
Astor and Emily at Crossbow Festival.
Excursion on Irrawaddy.
Students trailed by locals.
Stop and go.
Visit to dentist’s clinic.
Students above Yangtze bend.

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