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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Cool children of Palawan.
Drolma & HKUGAC students standing in front of the Songzanlin Monastery.
The Duke-Stanford student athletes cooking at CERS Zhongdian Center.
YYC & CERS gang at Alishan Taiwan.
Introductory Message

As the news of millions of people displaced by climate disasters and political upheaval fills my news feeds, I find myself wondering how many of the children surviving these disasters will be stunted or emotionally scarred for life. How many of them might have had the capability of starting a world-changing business, or becoming a globally renowned economist, poet, or novelist? It strikes me, too, that there is another disaster closer to home. While not as dramatic, and much slower to unfold, it affects far more children. It is the disaster of broken educational systems that systematically drain the curiosity and courage out of so many students and lead them to accept choices that snatch from them the chance of ever achieving what they might have been capable of. While we at CERS may feel all but powerless to change the decisions of world leaders on carbon emissions, or to stem the tide of refugees fleeing violent conflicts, perhaps we can change the trajectory of a few lives by introducing students to experiences and opportunities that they would not have otherwise had.

Here we offer a complete collection of writing by the students and interns of the CERS 2017 Summer Education Program. They present us with an astonishing variety of approaches to looking at a diversity of topics, covering much of the broad scope of CERS’s work in exploration, conservation, and education. While some of the articles are the product of classic desk-top (and lap-top) research, many of the most interesting articles are based on personal experiences or first-hand interviews with local people. Some students directly and infectiously describe their joy in outside-the-classroom experiences that they have never had before, or even imagined before. Others struggle with some of the great questions that face us all today: How should our children be taught? How can we reach across the differences that divide us into tribe, race, and nation? What does it mean for a country or a region to be “developed?” What is the goal of cultural conservation?

CERS and its community of supporters can be proud that we gave these summer students and interns a platform, and perhaps a nudge, to experience and experiment in ways that they might never have otherwise.

Please read and enjoy.

William V. Bleisch, Ph. D.
Research/Program Director, CERS
23 October, 2017

With respect to the entire contents of this newsletter, including its photographs:
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Upon first sight, I did not think much of the six young men who came with their caravan of 18 horses to our campsite on the afternoon of July 27th. In my mind, these strangers from a village a couple hours away were merely here to help lead our 10-person CERS team on a shortened circumambulation around Ge Nyen Sacred Mountain (格聂神山). Little did I expect their company to be the highlight of the trip. After spending four days and three nights with them, far removed from civilization, cell service or internet connection, I came to respect, trust and regard them as my dear friends.

Two of the six, 23-year-old Dengzhu (登珠), and his 16-year-old brother Dorje (多杰), left a particularly strong impact on me on day two of our journey, during the hike to Xiang Ba Lang Cuo Alpine Lake (香巴浪錯湖). We had spent the morning on horseback, crossing streams and making our way up the valley. My horse, Sera, was a great companion. At a grassy marshland we enjoyed a lunch of gan liang (干粮)—dried goods including granola bars, crackers, and a round flatbread with yak cheese the herders offered us. Full and reenergized, we set off for the rocky mountain in front of us, aiming to reach the lake at the top.

Around a third of the way up, the rocks got bigger and the incline steeper. My determination to keep the fast pace I had started at the bottom of the mountain was proving to be more challenging with each step. Dengzhu caught up...
with me, smiling and extending his hand to help me out. At first I did not want to hold his hand; I wanted to be brave and independent, conquering the steep climb on my own. But Dengzhu persisted, offering his support every time we started upwards again after catching our breath in the thinning air.

As we continued climbing, I felt that Dengzhu was not only holding my hand to help me out. Maybe he enjoyed walking together. With this in mind, I began to appreciate and enjoy his company. Instead of trying to maneuver my way up independently, I gratefully took his support and followed his lead. Out of breath and unable to say much, holding hands was the way we began building our friendship.

The view at the top was magnificent. At 4468m above sea level, this mountain and lake is held sacred by local Tibetans as it belongs to the female deity Miyolangsangma. As I watched Dengzhu kneel and prostrate three times in front of the lake, I too could feel sacredness surrounding me. A glacier supplies the clear, blue water of the lake, so still and pristine it looks picturesque. Bright orange and purple flowers adorn its right bank, amongst piles of carved Mani stones and prayer flags left behind by earlier pilgrims. At the other end of the lake, the clean water feeds into a stream, splashing and dancing around the rocks as it makes its way down. Standing here, I felt nature’s overwhelming grandeur and power.

Done paying his respects, Dengzhu jumped up, asking me if I wanted to walk with him clockwise around the lake. At first I was hesitant. I did not want to cross the mouth of the lake and risk getting my socks wet; I only had one pair of socks and nights here were chilly. But I also knew that I would regret not taking up the challenge. Unwilling to be “chicken,” I took Dengzhu’s hand once more and proceeded forward. I crossed without any problems, jumping from one slippery point to another. Relief! It all looked flat and easy from here onwards.

My eyes had never deceived me more. We soon encountered a steep sandy bank. As soon as I took a step, my foot began sliding down, headed for the cold, blue water. My legs were almost in full split. I’m going to fall in, I thought with certainty. But Dengzhu came to my rescue, grabbing my hand tight and stepping down below me so I could lean on him. With a few more steps, we made it across the sandy bank. Relief!

Then came more rocks. These rocks were bigger than the ones we had encountered on our way up. I was not sure there was a way over and around them, but I knew that there was no turning back.

Adrenaline and excitement quickly overcame my nerves. Often I had to use all fours to hoist myself up and over the wobbly rocks; other times I’d step on the tip of a rock thinking it was stable enough to place my foot, only to see it dislodge from the pile and roll down the bank. Instinctually, I’d squeeze Dengzhu’s hand tighter each time, and he’d respond by holding my hand more firmly as well. Sweating profusely in my three layers of pants and tops, all I could manage to say to him was, “I’m okay” and, “Thank you.” He responded with a smile.

Dengzhu never let go of my hand. Even during the final stretch, a flat, grassy field, our fingers remained interlaced. I did not want to let go, either.

If Dengzhu had not insisted on holding my hand, I would not have made it up the mountain and around the lake. He had led me to safety twice without fail. I no longer cared that I did not do it all on my own. It was more meaningful that I shared the moment with him, creating a special bond and memory.

I went down the mountain with Dorje. He, too, took hold of my hand from the start and sprinted forward. Whereas Dengzhu followed my slow pace and cautious steps,
Dorje was more daring, urging me to keep his pace as he jumped from rock to rock, even piggybacking me off a few large ones. As we descended, Dorje told me we were taking the quickest way down. We ended up in the middle of the forest, forging our way through thorny bushes and knee-high grass.

Dorje was more talkative than Dengzhu. He asked me what “cheers” meant. At first, I thought he was saying “cheese,” but after bumping his fists together in demonstration, I realized he meant “cheers.” He also asked me how to say “no” and “go,” eventually creating the half English-half Chinese phrase “senlin no go,” admitting that the quickest way down may not have been the best idea after all. We discussed our families. I learned that he is the youngest of four brothers, one of which is studying to become a monk. He also told me that he cannot have long hair like Dengzhu because it is forbidden in his school. He is currently studying in Litang, the county capital, and wants to teach Tibetan there when he is older.

We stopped briefly to catch our breath in a patch where the trees did not obstruct our view of the sky. Dorje asked me if I knew which direction we were headed. Being directionally challenged, I laughed and told him I never know which direction I’m facing. He told me to look up to the sky and draw 十, the Chinese character for the number 10. From there, he taught me how to use the cross-like character to figure out the four directions. As soon as I nodded my head, finally beginning to understand our location, he tugged my hand and pulled me back into the bush.

A little bit later we heard shouts from the group behind us, telling us to slow down so they could find us. While we waited, Dorje pointed to the bracelet I was wearing on my left arm, asking me what it was. I told him it was a bracelet my friend gave to me a long time ago. I’ve worn it for years and rarely take it off, but in that moment I asked him, “ni yao ma?” (do you want it?), and proceeded to loosen the string off my wrist. At first he refused my offer, but upon my insistence he accepted my gift and asked me to help him tighten the knot on his wrist. He then took his necklace and gave it to me. I also refused at first, but after he said it was only fair we exchanged gifts, I put it around my neck. This necklace is a token of our friendship and reminds me of that moment now that we are apart. Without waiting for the others, Dorje grabbed my hand once again and we proceeded to run down the rest of the way.

My first impression of Dengzhu and Dorje had been completely wrong. In three hours the two had gone from being acquaintances to being my friends. If I had not trusted them to guide me up and down the mountain and around the lake, I would have missed the opportunity to connect with them. Through holding hands, we closed the gap between our vastly different lives and instead enjoyed each other’s company in the nature that surrounded us. Never would I have thought such a simple act could build such deep friendships.

Although I came expecting that the pilgrimage would be the focus of the trip, the relationships I built with these brothers ended up being more significant than the journey itself. I still think back to that afternoon every day. I still wear Dorje’s necklace. Those three hours, two people, and one place have impacted me more than I ever could have imagined. And it was all because we were hand in hand.
They are taking you to Palawan this time?! Lucky you, Hsiang Hsiang, you definitely gonna’ enjoy the seafood there… and remember to bring your swimming suit with you, a lot of chance for diving!” said Dephane, my aunt. I did not understand what she was actually referring to at that time, but I guessed that it meant this would be an interesting start to my internship with CERS, and I was going to have a very different and unforgettable summer.

I think I can say that I have had quite a lot of experience in traveling compared to many people my age, but although I am used to long trips to get to a place, I do not enjoy them. Thinking that we would spend the whole day just to get to the Palawan site made me a little bit sick.

Our plane was scheduled to take off at 13:45, but the trip started when we left the CERS “1939” Exhibit House in Shek’O around 08:45. Coincidentally, How Man read my mind and raised the topic; “It might seem really long to you, taking the whole day to reach one place, but it seems normal to me and I am chill with this.” Therefore I changed my mindset and started to think that getting to Palawan was just part of the ‘expedition,’ and I should just relax. After taking two plane trips, two car trips and one short trip on a rubber boat, we finally arrived at the CERS Palawan Education and Research Centre, and then we enjoyed our first seafood meal.

Timberlands or Havaianas? I brought my Timberland boots with
me for this internship, thinking they would be the best option, since they are good for walking through both rough areas and wet places. Thus the first morning in Palawan, I wore my Timberland shoes along with long black trousers to prevent suntan and deter mosquitos. I felt so prepared for my first day of exploring the area. Despite the many people questioning my choices before getting onto the boat, I was really confident with my outfit. But the moment I saw that the bridge between the land and the boat was submerged in water, my brain started calculating, for 41 milliseconds, the probability of destroying my shoes. I stuck with them, however, until I heard Xavier shouting at me; “Change to flip-flop!!” After that, my Timberlands were retired for my whole time in Palawan. Well… that was the first and probably one of the most valuable and practical lessons-learnt during the trip!

One important task of the trip was to explore the possibility of developing another tourist cave in this area in order to help raise local peoples’ incomes. With the CERS caving team, I not only saw how cave exploring is done, but I also got to learn from five great teachers who taught me a lot about caves. In addition to exploring a new cave, we also went to the ‘Hundred Cave’ which was studied with help from CERS in 2016 and has since become a new tourism spot in Palawan.

Visiting ‘Hundred Cave’ was an extraordinary experience for me. Although it has now been developed into a tourism site, the local people used all natural and local resources, such as bamboo and fishing lines to build the balustrade to the cave. There is also a restricted “do not touch” zone inside the cave. As a result, the cave still remains in its primitive state. While we were inside the cave, I felt like we were still exploring, rather than just ‘visiting’. In addition, the way up to the cave was not easy to maneuver and required significant effort. The challenge of getting there was icing on the cake and made it feel even more like an expedition.

After the caving tour, I helped Professor Song interview Tess Yatco, the guide for ‘Hundred Cave.’ She told us that she used to work as an extra to create atmosphere in the movies in Manila. Now as the head of this site, she only earns 1000 peso per month. This is something I cannot imagine at all, but Tess told us she really enjoys what she is doing now. I could see the passion and ambition in her eyes, and I realized that for her it is not about the money, but her dream for developing the cave. Hundred Cave is like her second baby. She has dedicated herself to this and is willing to pay whatever price to make it the next underground attraction.
This also applies to everyone in that village. They work really hard for this cave venture, and I can see that a bright future for Hundred Cave is coming soon.

The cave trip and the interview with Tess had a big impact on me. I saw how great was not only the simple work they have done, but also their desire for learning and their dedication. I also hope to have Tess’s courage and spirit in the future myself, for my own dream.

I have been on a speedboat, a yacht and a cruise ship before, but this was my first time, and probably my last, time taking a fishing boat. For a few days before, I had been examining the HM Explorer II across the river and wondering how the boat could possibly fit almost 20 people on board. More concerning to me, however, was my fear of getting seasick, and of the tons of other challenges with living on board the boat for 3 days.

Due to the drowsy side effect of the sea-sickness medicine I took, the first day onboard was a bit fuzzy to me. We anchored in the middle of the sea for the night and I fell asleep around 19:00, which usually only happens when I get jet lag. At 05:30 the next morning, awakened by the loud noise of the boat’s engine and the unbearable smell of its exhaust, I decided to move myself to the top deck

While we were on the way to our next destination, Johnson Island, I tried to experience what it is like being a local fisherman here. Instead of a fisherman (漁民), I always refer to myself as a stupid-man (愚民), because the mandarin pronunciation of these two words is the same. I looked at the scenery around me, listened to my favorite song and started to think about what this internship meant to me. That was the moment when I started to realize the things this opportunity had brought me. I cannot explain the feeling well using words, perhaps because I am an engineer instead of a writer. I guess it is that the internship that has let me live a life completely different from my own.

In CERS I have had the chance to truly experience local life. I have learned from the team how to approach and understand local peoples’ needs in order to reach the optimum level of collaboration and helping. I also learned from the local people that a simple life can sometime be even happier and more colorful than anything else.

Not Yet

“Do you feel these two weeks are longer than you expected?” How Man asked me.

“Strangely, yes!” I said. Indeed, I would not have said it out loud if he had not asked me, because I thought people only feel that time goes by slower when they are not enjoying the moment. But I did enjoy my time in Palawan, and I have experienced a totally different life there. Every day was completely different; I could not foresee nor expect what was going to happen (except for the crazy amounts of seafood we ate everyday). Sometimes I would just chill out at the site and do my own work; sometimes we needed to wake up at 02:00 in the morning to leave for another place; and sometimes, just as Xavier had said, I just enjoyed the moment, but always prepared for an unexpected event.

Did I see a lot during our diving trip in El Nido? No, unfortunately it was not the right season to see much sea life... I guess I should express it this way: I haven’t seen the sea turtles or dolphins, nor had enough time to enjoy the beach at Johnson Island and El Nido ... YET!

So... Palawan, see you again soon!
我們是3D電腦動畫學會的代表學生，本次我們有機會前往阿里山，多得黃效文先生給予我們機會，令我們體會到許多新事物，一生難忘，真的感謝您給予我們機會。

在這8天的旅程中，雖然每天都要攀山涉水，十分辛苦，但是對我們來說這是一個難得的經驗，因為我們在香港上課時，多數是在課室內聆聽老師的教學，很少接觸大自然。在山上沒有Wi-Fi，這的確令我們感到十分不習慣，雖然如此，這反而能夠拉近我和大自然之間的距離，是一個寶貴的學習機會。

本次活動主要是讓我們體會當地的原住民 — 鄒族的文化和歷史，全靠安大哥還有畢博士與我們一同學習，我們才可以學習到許多生物知識，當中更體會了許多辛苦而又有趣的活動，讓我擴闊見聞。就好像是在山上露營的那天，沿途我們要攀山涉水，幾經辛苦才能到達目的地，到達目的地後我們要利用竹子去製作餐具、建立避雨亭以及盛水，每樣事情都是要憑自己去打造的，可說是得來不易，期間安大哥告訴了我們有關鄒族打獵的事情，鄒族人對野生動物存有敬畏，每次狩獵時都會為動物祈禱，也不會隨便獵殺動物，進行賣買，只會自給自足，而且需要建造房屋時也不會隨便砍伐樹木，反而會利用生長速度快的竹子去建設，每一件事都會為大自然著想，這就是鄒族人的可敬之處，令我們不禁反思現代人只顧自身利益而不去考慮周邊人的感受。

此外，我們亦在旅程中學會了鄒族人保護自然環境的觀念，他們不會隨意地破壞環境，例如當昆蟲在他們的家中時，他們不會隨意地殺死牠們，只會用一些方法去驅趕牠們，並不學影響到大自然的生態和食物鏈，這是我們最欣賞他們的地方，因為身份是城市人的我們，看見昆蟲入侵我們的家中，我們的第一個想法就是滅滅他。

TOP TO BOTTOM:
YYC students learning from Amo.
Cleaning with mountain stream water.
台灣阿里山 – 感想

學生: 霍嘉榮、陳信一、曾偉超、錢錦達

聽到鄒族人安大哥的講解，令我們明白到動物的生命同樣需要被尊重，我們不應以玩樂的心態殺害動物。又了解到大自然與人類的關係，假如我們不斷破壞大自然，最終我們亦會受害。同時我們亦應該保護不同地方的種族，否則很多少數民族都會因全球化而消失，令世界的文化變得單一。
我們是順德聯誼總會翁祐中學的學生，也是3D電腦動畫學會的會員。首先，要向黃效文先生說一聲謝謝，感謝黃先生帶領我們去台灣阿里山進行考察。

作為活在擁有發達科技的城市的學生，我們實在沒法想像要在無電的情況下安然無恙地度過八天，這次旅程對我們的適應力是一大考驗，沒有高床軟枕，沒有無線上網對在旅程第一天的我有如噩夢。所有日常起居也要自己一手包辦，第四，五天的露營我們更要以地為床，以天為被，要自己動手製作餐具，我們把一開始的埋怨慢慢變成動力，讓自己學會野外的生活技能。這些經驗都是一般城市人沒法學會。

每晚在我們準備入睡時我總會回想起在香港生活時的點點滴滴，令我們更加珍惜自己的家。在原始的環境下反而令忙碌的都市人靜下來，反思一下自己的生活態度並作出改善，世界上還有很多人依然在貧窮線中掙扎，我們不應埋怨自己現時的境況，反而要活在當下珍惜生活中的每一分每一秒，但亦要保持自己的上進心，不斷提升自己的境界。

在考察之前，我們不知道甚麼是鄒族，也不知道台灣有接近20個少數民族這麼多。因為日本和中華民國的統治，令這些少數民族的文化漸漸消失，幸好鄒族的安大哥，想令鄒族的文化保留下去，他根據長輩的說話和有關的書籍重新將面臨失傳的傳統鄒族屋子建立出來。使年輕的鄒族人不只是在照片中才看得到，而是活生生在他們眼前呈現出來，從而知道自己的長輩以往的居住環境。

鄒族的人對我們非常熱情，使我們很快能投入之後的行程。安大哥認為鄒族文化中最重要的元素是文字和語言，在文字和語言中會包含了很多意義，如在鄒族的語言中的「鄒」的發音，是指人，所以鄒族是人族的意思。

請允許我們再一次對您表示衷心的感謝！因為您的帶領和協助使我們有一次這麼深刻難忘的經歷，您一路上對我們的關懷和幫助，使我感到十分窩心。謝謝您！
Throughout history, the person holding the position of Dalai Lama has been a controversial and influential spiritual leader for both the Tibetan and often the Chinese people as well. The position was originally established as part of the Yellow Hat or Gelug order during the Ming Dynasty in 1578 in order to stand as a symbol of unification for the Tibetan people. However, the power of the Dalai Lama and his teachings have now spread beyond the Tibetan borders to influence the lives and Buddhist practices of people in Tibet, China, and beyond.

The tale of origin of the Dalai Lama is embedded in a rich history of Tibetan Buddhism. The Yellow Hat order is the most recent school of thought in Tibetan Buddhism and was founded by Je Tsongkhapa, “the man from Onion Valley”, a well known teacher born into a nomadic family in 1357. Je Tsongkhapa was an avid admirer of the Kadam School which was well known for their Dharma practice, the realization of Buddha’s teachings in day to day life, as well as for their Mahayana focus on universal compassion as the basis for spiritual direction. He combined the major essences of the Kadam School with several other strains of Buddhist doctrine to form the Gelug order. In his later years, Tsongkhapa remained a part of the Sakya School. However, upon his death his disciples compiled his teachings and doctrine into a collection of eighteen volumes which stood as a basis for the Gelug order. As a result, the Kadam School ceased to be recognized as an independent order at the end of the 16th century and the Yellow Hat Order became the predominant representation of Buddhism in Tibet.

Tsongkhapa had many prominent followers but a key role was played by a particular pupil, Gendun Drupa. Drupa is said to have been Tsongkhapa’s own nephew and achieved a tremendous amount of status as the abbot of the monastery established by Tsongkhapa. Because of this and Drupa’s status as a scholar and holy man, he was posthumously declared the first Dalai Lama. Legend states that Palden Lhamo, the female guardian spirit of sacred Lake Lhamo La-tso in Lhasa, told Gendun in visions that she would protect the lineage and reincarnations of the Dalai Lama, even though the role had not yet been established. Ever since the solidification of the line of Dalai Lamas, monks have sought the sacred lake and meditated there in order to receive insight into where the next Dalai Lama will be reborn.

After Gendun Drupa’s death in 1474, a young Tibetan boy by the name of Gendun Gyatso was recognized as his rebirth. It is said that as soon as he was able to speak, Gyatso gave his name as Pema Dorje, the birth name of Gendun Drupa. Legend also has it that he told his parents that his father was Lobsang Drakpa, the ordination name of Tsongkhapa, and that he wished to live in the Tashilhunpo monastery in order to be with his monks. There are different accounts of whether he was officially recognized as the reincarnation of Gendun Drupa at four or at eight years old, however he was eventually proven to be the rebirth of Drupa and received his ordination as a monk at the age of eleven. He traveled extensively throughout his life in order to extend the influence of the Gelug school and died peacefully while meditating at sixty seven years old in 1542.

The 3rd reincarnation of Gendun Drupa, Sonam Gyatso, was the first to be given the official title “Dalai Lama”. He received this name from Mongolian ruler Altan Khan. Many stories surround how the title came to be.
bestowed upon the leader of the Gelug order, but it is said that Altan Khan wished to be recognized as the reincarnation of Kublai Khan. In order to achieve this, he solicited the help of Sonam Gyatso, who obliged and announced him Kublai Khan’s rebirth. In return, Altan Khan proclaimed Sonam Gyatso “Dalaiin Khan”, later changed to combine the Mongolian word for “great” (dalai) with the Tibetan word for master or teacher (lama). Thus the name Dalai Lama was born and retrospectively bestowed on Sonam Gyatso’s two predecessors, Gendun Drupa and Gendun Gyatso, as the first and second in the line of Dalai Lamas.

Altan Khan and Sonam Gyatso later cooperated to propagate the practice of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia. Altan Khan contributed by building Thegchen Chonkhor, the first Buddhist temple in Mongolia. This early friendship between Sonam Gyatso and Altan Khan sowed the seeds for later Mongolian rulers to establish the line of Dalai Lamas as rulers of Tibet. In 1603, Altan Khan’s great grandson, Yonten Gyatso, was selected as the fourth Dalai Lama and the bond between Mongolia and Tibet was further solidified.

The Tibetan people have always considered the Dalai Lama as a manifestation of Chenrezig, the embodiment of compassion. It was not until the fifth Dalai Lama, however, that their line was made the spiritual and political leader of Tibet. Lobsang Gyatso, the fifth Dalai Lama, continued in the tradition of the third and fourth Dalai Lamas and formed an alliance with the Mongol leader, Gushi Khan. With the support from this Mongolian ruler, Lobsang Gyatso was named the ruler of the Tibetan people. It was under the leadership of “The Great Fifth” that the seat of power in Lhasa for the Dalai Lama was established. All subsequent Dalai Lamas were born into the role of political and spiritual leadership for the Tibetan people.

The Dalai Lamas continued to stand as symbol of leadership for the Tibetan people until the 1950’s when relations between China and Tibet became violent. The People’s Republic of China and the Tibetan government collided in the Battle of Chamdo in November of 1950. It was during this upheaval that the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was fully enthroned. The Tibetan people were defeated in the battle and, in 1951, Tibetan representatives signed the Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, which integrated Tibet fully into the People’s Republic of China.

It is no secret that there has been friction between the Chinese government and the Tibetan people, who continue to struggle for the preservation of their culture. As political and social changes continue to take place on the continent, there is now an unfolding threat to the continuation of the religious heritage represented by the institution of the Dalai Lama.

There is more than a language within a country. A dialect is the variety of a language that is used by a certain group of people in a particular location. The Tibetan region of China has many dialects, but the main three are Amdo, Kham, and U-Tsang.

In Yunnan for the most part everyone speaks a version of Mandarin Chinese, which is called Putonghua. This is what they are taught in school and in other social settings. However, when Tibetans are among other Tibetan speakers, they speak a completely different language, which is the dialect for that small area.

The three dialects that are popular in the Tibetan region all have their own meanings. The first dialect is the Amdo dialect. The word Amdo refers to “the edge”. The region that speaks this dialect ranges between Mount Dorag and the snow covered Mount Anyemagen, which is considered the edge of Tibet. Dzongri and Khayo are two regions whose inhabitants speak the Amdo dialect the most. People that live within the Amdo region call themselves the “Amdowa”. This dialect is one of the most important of the known dialects within the Tibetan culture because it is spoken in many Tibetan autonomous prefectures and countries. This region is known for their animals; their herds of yaks and sheeps, but most importantly their horses. The Amdo region is also famous as the birthplace of the “second
Buddha,” Tsongkapa. However, perhaps the Amdo region’s greatest importance is that this region is multi-cultural and has rich ethnic Tibetan culture.

The second dialect within the Tibetan area is the U-Tsang dialect. Just like the rest of the dialects of Tibetan, U-Tsang also has a meaning. The “U” in U-Tsang means “the center” which, in Tibetan regions, often refers to the area of the valley of the Lhasa River. The “Tsang” in U-Tsang means “river” in Tibetan and refers to the extensive area that ranges west to north of Shigaste. The U-Tsang dialect is found in these two areas. The people who live in the U area of the U-Tsang region call themselves “Upa,” while the people who live in the Tsang region refer to themselves as the “Tsangpa”. Although the dialect is split into two regions the people who speak this language travel all over the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. The area that surrounds the U-Tsang area comprises the northern and southern areas of Mount Gangdis and Mount Nyanchen Thangl Ba. These areas have brought many new features to the world, especially their Tibetan culture. Because of the full rainfall and resources here, there was always lots of grain to support people living in these areas. The first king in Tibetan history, King Nyatri Tsenpo, was from this area. The first palace, Yumbulagang, was located here as well, and this area also saw the creation of the very first Monastery, which is known as the Samye Monastery. As you can see the U-Tsang region has had many of the “firsts” within Tibetan culture, which makes this region very important within the culture.

The third well-known dialect of Tibetan is the Kham dialect. People who speak Kham dialect are also referred to as the Khampa. The “Kham” in Khampa also refers to “the edge” and the Ba refers to “the people”. Kham is the language most commonly used between the two regions of Amdo and U-Tsang. For many generations, the people of the Kham Region have lived in various areas, but yet they still have always kept their dialect. There is an old Tibetan expression that the best people come from the Khampa region, however the laws should come from the U-Tsang region, and the animals, specifically horses, should come from the Amdo region. The songs and dances within the Khampa region are considered to be more elegant, stylish, soul hearted, and vigorous than any other region within the Tibetan areas. Between singing and dancing, dancing is the more popular throughout the culture because of the power and beauty the dance entails. Because this culture is one of the more beautiful cultures there is a festival that is held every year that is known as the Khampa Art Festival. This festival rotates between sites each year so that people within and even outside of the region have the opportunity to experience the beauty that the culture has to offer.

The Khampa are also known for their clothes because they are so elegant and remarkable. Aprons, vests, gowns, robes, and long sleeve shirts are the article of clothing that are included. Their clothing, in both genders, are very colorful because of the rich adornments and patterns that vary throughout the garments from head to toe. The patterns usually consist of coral, agate, gold, silver and turquoise. The women of the Khampa culture usually wear a head garment that is luxurious, while the men wear a fairly large, but loose garment. The Khampa region is very large, but it is possible to recognize if people are from the Khampa region by their clothes, however, you would not able to recognize where exactly they are from within the region.

All three dialect regions have many great features, and these are just a few. However, even though they all may seem very different because of their unique cultures within their regions, they all are connected through their common knowledge of Tibetan culture. It is important to focus on the many variations in an area when traveling, because the diversity is one of the things that makes the region so special.
The busier Americans become the less time they allocate towards making or eating food, suggesting that it is not an important part to the culture. Much of the food in the United States is very good, especially from my hometown, Chicago. Most, if not all food in the US, however, is taken from another culture. However, food is an important part of my life. Because my mother is Japanese and my father is part Italian, I grew up eating authentic meals from those countries, which has inspired me to try new foods from different cultures. Therefore, when coming to Shangri-la, I was very excited to learn about and try the food.

Tibetan and Chinese foods are unique, original, and unlike anything I have ever eaten. When eating food from a new culture it often reminds me of something I have eaten before; however, I did not have this experience when eating my first couple of meals in Shangri-la. There were certain dishes that reminded me of Japanese food, but most of them had a unique, rich flavor that is specific to the region.

Tibetans in Shangri-la mainly eat Chinese food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; however, there are also some traditional foods that are eaten daily. Yak butter tea and yogurt are among the most popular foods and are made from the milk of yak raised on local farms. Most farmers make these foods at their farms without outside materials. The most authentic Tibetan food is tsampa, ground poached barley, which is eaten by mixing the tsampa with yak butter tea. Yogurt is another traditional dish which is made from yak milk and a bacterial culture. These foods are eaten throughout the day as snacks and are offered to guests.

Unlike in the U.S. where people buy their food at grocery stores, most Tibetans buy their food at wet markets, which are comparable to farmers markets in the U.S. where all the food is fresh and is sold by private vendors. None of the food is refrigerated or frozen and it contains no preservatives; therefore, it is not kept for long periods of time. The vegetables are not as healthy because they may contain very harmful pesticides and cannot be eaten raw. People can buy more organic food from local farm, but it tends to be significantly more expensive.

Compared to the U.S., all the meat in Shangri-la has more flavor. Furthermore, more parts of the animal are eaten, such as duck neck and chicken feet. Most meat begins its journey when wet meat vendors buy livestock from industrial livestock farms outside of the area or from local farmers. Vendors then slaughter the meat and sell it fresh that day because they do not refrigerate it or use preservatives. Local farmers also sell meat directly to people, but this meat tends to be significantly more expensive because it is raised free-range. Farmers prefer not to slaughter the meat before selling it due to the Buddhist belief that all sentient life contains equal value. Pork from the local black pigs is among the more popular types of meat that are sold from local farms. As opposed to white pig pork sold at wet markets, black pig pork has significantly more flavor.

In Shangri-la, most Tibetan dishes include large amounts of garlic, ginger, and spicy peppers. These are mainly used for flavoring; however, they pose health benefits as well. When sick, Tibetan’s will sometimes grill pieces of garlic and eat them because they believe that garlic kills bacteria in the stomach. However, monks in Tibetan monasteries will not cook with garlic because it is not considered appropriate as part of a monk’s diet in Buddhism. Ginger prepared in different ways is also eaten when sick, because it helps clean the digestive system. During much of the year Tibet is unbelievably cold, and one of the methods of staying warm is eating hot peppers. Peppers can be pickled, dried, or raw and are cooked in a stir fry, served in a dipping sauce or even eaten whole. The spiciest pepper is xiaomi la, and is usually served pickled or chopped up in a dipping sauce.

Meals and eating etiquette in Tibet differ vastly from those in the U.S. Typically, family meals in the U.S. consist of a main course with a few sides. In Tibet meals consist of various dishes of equal size along with rice and soup which is all served at the same time. The amount of dishes other than the rice and soup depends on the amount of people eating. For example, there will usually be the same amount of dishes as people eating plus about one more dish. During the meal the dishes are put in the middle of the table and are eaten buffet style.
This is a traditional Chinese way of serving and eating food; and, most Tibetans eat in this fashion today. However, nomadic Tibetans eat mainly traditional Tibetan meals, because they do not have access to a large variety of food. Nomadic Tibetans have a very simple diet composed mainly of yak products and barley. They produce all the yak products they eat, including yogurt, yak butter tea, and yak milk. They also slaughter yaks and sheep for meat, but they prefer not to eat smaller animals such as chickens because they do not get as much meat for killing a life. Their most sought after meat is mutton. They prefer to slaughter their meat during autumn and not spring, because the animals are stronger and contain better meat after the summer. In order to preserve their meat during the winter they dig holes in the ground, put the meat in it, and cover it with yak dung, after which the meat freezes. The meat and yak products that are not eaten are sold or bartered to farmers in exchange for barley; with the barley they are able to make tsampa.

There are two kinds of people in the world; those who live to eat, and those who eat to live. Food traditions in different countries and regions tends to be an indicator of how rich a culture is. In my opinion, the United States does not have many cultural traditions, and the people living there do not appreciate food as much as in other cultures. Many Americans eat to live. In Tibet there are rich cultural traditions that have been going on for centuries, and the people spend a significant amount of their time around food and eating. Tibetans live to eat.

Recently Tibetan culture has been fading, as the younger generations are becoming influenced by Chinese and western civilization. Will the food customs fade as a result of modernization?

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**Something to Celebrate**

By Kat Anderson

Stanford University

In 2003, Wong How Man, the founder of the China Exploration and Research Society, travelled the rural areas of the Yunnan province on the Tibetan Plateau with the hopes of getting up close and personal with the incredible Yunnan Snub-Nosed Monkey. In addition to finding this fascinating primate, How Man and his team also stumbled upon the Lisu people, one of the 55 minority groups in China. The Lisu are considered “forest people.” Throughout history, their lives have centered on hunting. However, due to legal restrictions, hunting was quickly dying out. This left How Man and his team with a difficult question: How do you preserve a culture that revolves around hunting while also protecting the animals and enforcing laws? One idea was to start an annual Crossbow Festival.

In this festival, the Lisu people gather together with non-poison arrows and handcrafted crossbows, many wearing traditional clothing. The celebration includes crossbow competitions, singing, and dancing in an effort to keep the Lisu rituals and practices alive. Although it took a few years, the festival now has many teams entering, with participants taking very seriously the handicraft of making crossbows, comparing them, and competing with them. If this trend continues, the Crossbow Festival will play a central role in preserving this part of the Lisu hunting culture.

The challenging conflict of holding on to a beautiful culture while also allowing a community to modernize and adapt to the changing world is not uncommon. As globalization rapidly increases, languages, tools, clothing and other traditional items that are no longer practical are in danger of becoming erased completely. While not a perfect solution, celebrations and holidays can serve as a method to retain the rich culture and traditions of various groups. They not only teach younger generations about history, but also allow all participants to feel great pride in their heritage.

Celebrations demonstrate a lot about various human groups, including their beliefs and values. Take Zhongdian, a community on the Tibetan Plateau in rural China in the same province as the Lisu people. Rich with history and traditions, the people of Zhongdian hold many celebrations that each serves a different purpose within the community.

Some of these celebrations exist solely for the purpose of having fun and taking pride in heritage, such as the annual Horse Race Festival. As legends have it, this festival dates back to 770 B.C. when the Jiangtang people established the Jiantang Kingdom. On the 5th of May every year, the Jiangtang soldiers would gather together and practice their horsemanship. Although the kingdom was later invaded by the Tang Dynasty and
later became a part of Tibet, this practice was adopted into Tibetan culture and continued for centuries. Held on the 5th day of the 5th lunar month, today at the Shangri-La Horse Racing Festival you will see riders showing off their horsemanship and performing incredible tricks on their horses as well as many other sporting activities such as Yak racing, wrestling, and tug of war. In addition to these activities, groups wearing traditional clothing will perform dances and songs passed down from generation to generation, allowing the rich arts of Tibetan culture to stay alive. The Horse Racing Festival is a wonderful time for people from all over Yunnan to gather and take pride in their heritage.

Others festivals are a demonstration of faith and beliefs.

One such holiday celebrated on the Tibetan Plateau is the Butter Lantern Festival. This occasion, held on the 15th day of the first lunar month as a conclusion to the New Year festivities, is among the most important holidays celebrated for the Gelug, or Yellow Hat, Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Started in 1409 by Tsongkapa, the Butter Lantern Festival is a welcoming of the Future Buddha. Monks and artisans spend months preparing intricate and colorful figures out of Yak butter. It is tedious work and the sculptors must work in a cold environment and continuously dip their fingers in icy water to prevent the butter figures from melting, causing many monks to fall ill. On the day of the Festival, the sculptures will be displayed on stands ranging anywhere from three feet to three stories tall. After making the pilgrimage to the monastery over the course of the day, participants will sing, pray, and watch as the butter figures are illuminated in a spectacular display.

Probably the most common forms of celebration are a combination of both fun as well as religious beliefs. Losar is one example of this. In Tibetan, “Lo” means year and “sar” means new; Losar is the traditional New Year’s Festival. This occasion, a favorite among local children, can last anywhere from three to fifteen days. Tibetan Buddhists will present goat heads, barley shoots, and other auspicious offerings at a shrine to bring forth good harvest in the coming year. Firecrackers will be set off. Monks dressed as various terrifying deities will perform dances designed to educate and to ward off evil. Prayers will be said and pilgrimages made in hopes to reduce suffering for all beings. Along with these religious acts, many fun activities commence as well. Family and friends gather, drinking barley wine and feasting on favorite dishes.

The younger generations are not always willing to fully accept the rituals and customs passed down to them. Traditional Tibetan weddings are among these. Throughout Tibetan history, families have arranged marriages for their children. In some cases a man may have some say in who he would like to marry, but women are left with no power of choice in the matter. It is the families who work out the marriage agreements. The woman is often taken away from her family and her village to live with the groom’s family. The actually wedding, when the bride’s family rides to the groom’s family’s house with the bride, is a beautiful celebration and integral piece of Tibetan tradition, but it seems as if this practice is dying out. While unfortunate, sometimes celebrations no longer have value in a changing culture and must be adapted or eliminated for the younger generations.

While these are just a few brief examples of some of the many local celebrations, they illustrate the beliefs and values of the people of Zhongdian as well as demonstrate some of the various functions celebrations may hold.

Not only are holidays, celebrations, and festivals a cultural conservation technique, but they are also something that is shared by every human group around the world. Anthropologists and historians have yet to find a society, old or new, that does not have any festivals or celebratory gatherings. It might even be accurate to say that celebration and the creation of holidays is an integral part of human nature. Finding something that is shared by every group around the world is truly something to celebrate.
The Tibetan Mastiff has been a world wide staple of Tibetan culture that has recently spread through the western world and the Americas. During my first trip to China, specifically to the northwest corner of Yunnan Province in Shangri-la County, I had my first close up encounter with a traditional Tibetan Mastiff. I was on a volunteer trip through my University to work with local children on environmental sustainability, English skills, and sports, working with the China Exploration and Research Society or CERS. CERS’s founder Wong How Man created a purebred mastiff kennel in Deqen County in China, to preserve the declining gene pool that had been threatened by crossbreeding with other dogs. The program was recently halted after breeding mastiffs became a lucrative national craze, and a last remaining mastiff was re-located to the CERS Zhongdian Center in Shangri-La. This 10-year-old male mastiff wears the traditional black coat with brown marking under its neck and above his eyes.

Talking with staff and locals about the Tibetan mastiff, the importance of the breed to Tibetan nomadic and local culture really started to materialize for me. After looking through the library at the CERS Center, I found several books on the Tibetan mastiff and their importance to the Tibetan plateau.

The Tibetan mastiff breed is thought to be 5,000 years old, first originating from the eastern Himalayan mountains of Bhutan, Sikkim, and Tibet. One source described the Tibetan mastiff as the “Adam” of many of the large dog breeds, such as the Great Pyrenees, Burmese Mountain Dog, Rottweiler, and Saint Bernard. The oldest reports of the Tibetan mastiff go back as far as 1100 B.C.E. Tibetan mastiffs were described by both Greek and Roman historians as hunting dogs, and some were so furious they were put in Gladiator rings as fighters. The first pictures of Tibetan mastiffs were found in artifacts in Assyria and Babylonia around 700 B.C.E. While tutoring Alexander the Great, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, documented his encounter with the “Great Dog of India” as the dogs were being brought back to Greece. These are believed to have been the Tibetan mastiff. He described the dog as a superior hunter that could even take out a full grown lion. There was a famous story told during those times of a great hunt for a large lion with four Dogs of India. Once the dogs got a hold of their targeted lion they would not unclench their jaws even when the hunter pulled at them to the point where their limbs were being ripped off.

Their furiousness, loyalty, and size were reasons why they were also associated with some of the largest and most powerful nations such as the Persian Empire in the 6th century B.C.E., the Han Dynasty in 142 B.C.E., as well as with conquerors such as Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan. The famous Italian explorer Marco Polo heard of dogs from Tibet that were being sent by rulers to China. These large dogs, that were the size of a donkey and could kill a lion, were called “Liu Ngao” in China. Marco Polo had to see such an animal himself, and he not only found these dogs but started to study them around 1307. He described the Tibetan dogs, “…as strong, powerful, noble dogs, which are valuable servants on catching and hunting the musk-deer.” He also confirmed the stories he heard, describing the Tibetan mastiffs as being “tall as a donkey with a voice as powerful as that of a lion.”

HMs with one of the original Tibetan Mastiffs, Chili, from the CERS kennel (CERS/HM).
Hardinge, sent “Siring,” a Tibetan Mastiff, to Queen Victoria. The breed didn’t take hold in the kingdom due to their health, ferocity, and the hardship endured during the trip from the Himalayas to the British Isle. The United States received two Tibetan Mastiffs from Nepal in 1958, as a gift to President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Despite its name, the Tibetan Mastiff is not actually a true mastiff. The English, at the time it was introduced, called every new big dog breed mastiffs. They are more a mountain dog and are considered to be in the “Large Molossus Type” dog breed group along with the Saint Bernard. Historians have recorded Tibetan mastiffs weighing well over 215lbs, but now males are more commonly found weighing around 100-160 lbs. (75-120 for females). Tibetan Mastiffs usually live a relatively healthy 10 to 15 years. This breed matures late in their age, compared to other breeds, with males and females maturing around 3 to 5 years after birth. Their birthing season normally sits around December/January.

Tibetan Mastiffs have a distinct body type and color that has helped historians identify them in ancient text and stories. They have a well-portioned body with a large head with ears set high in a V shape. Their bushy tail sits high and hangs over the dog’s back. They are known to commonly have double dewclaws on their hind legs and a 5th toe may even be found on their forelegs at times. The coat of the Tibetan Mastiff has a soft, wooly undercoat that can have the texture of anything from silky to coarse. This coat can handle some of the harshest of weathers. Most common Tibetan Mastiff coat colors are black with rust brown markings, and the marking may also be yellowish to dark mahogany, solid red, red with dark saddle, solid black-brown and brown/tan. White can also appear on the chest or toes. Tibetans believe when a mastiff has markings over their eye it is good luck because it gives the mastiff an extra pair of eyes to guard with.

Pure bred Tibetan mastiffs can be seen wearing a red yak hair collar called the kekhor. This collar is a sign of the dog’s status. It also makes the dog look larger while adding extra neck protection from snow leopards and wolves who will try to bite at the neck in the event of an attack. The red dye also allows their owners and other travelers to identify them at farther distances.

There are two true types of Tibetan Mastiffs surrounding the Himalayans: the “Do-Khyi” and “Tsang-Khyi”. The Do-Khyi live in villages or travel with their nomadic caretakers. Their main purpose is to guard the flock of sheep and yak from predators. The Tsang-Khyi is considered to be larger in nature than the Do-Khyi and were often given to lamasesries to serve as protectors for the Tibetan Buddhist monks and lamas. For centuries, the Tibetan mastiff’s natural instinct was to deter unwanted guest that threatened homes and livestock. Their bark is warm and loud like that of a lion’s roar, making even the biggest of predators think twice before coming near.

Historians and people today all agree that the Tibetan Mastiff shows great strength, courage, independence, and loyalty. But Tibetan Mastiffs can be very stubborn. When training, they quickly ignore physical or forced punishment and are best taught with consistency and persistence given in a gentle and loving manner. That being said they are still extremely good-natured, intelligent, curious, and bold.

The Tibetan Mastiff is growing in popularity around the world and you can see why from all their great history and their impressive physical characteristics. In 2011, a Tibetan Mastiff in northern China was sold for 10 million Yuan and became the most expensive dog ever sold. Unfortunately, their numbers are no longer high in their homelands surrounding the Himalayans, despite the high prices. In the early 1900s, a large portion of the Tibetan Mastiffs first came from Bhutan, but now numbers have fallen. They are needed again to scare off Snow leopards, which are now illegal to kill. CERS plans again to save a cultural icon by sending young Tibetan mastiffs back to Bhutan, in hopes that their numbers will grow and they will once again become the protectors of the Himalayas.
DISTINCTIVE SPECIES OF THE TIBETAN PLATEAU: THE BLACK-NECKED CRANE

By Kaitlyn McCarthy
Duke University

Biodiversity is something that has always interested me, and the plentiful number of plants and animals unique to the Tibetan Plateau has continued to amaze me throughout my time at the CERS Zhongdian Center. In addition, I personally believe that the extinction of any species is a loss of a tiny part of the world’s rich history. As such, it is important to try and protect endangered species all over the globe. My passion for biodiversity and conservation was what led me to learn more about the incredible species called the Black-necked Crane.

Cranes may be the oldest birds to have lived on Earth; crane fossils have been discovered, dating back over 60 million years ago. The Black-necked Crane (Grus nigricollis), however, was first described for science only in 1876 from birds collected at Qinghai Lake, China. This much later than the descriptions of other crane species because it is one of the rarest of its family and is the world’s only alpine crane species; Black-necked Crane is the only crane species that spends its entire life on the high Tibetan Plateau.

To my mind, the Black-necked Crane is absolutely beautiful. The males and females are colored similarly: their bodies are mostly white, heads and neck are black after maturation, and lores and crowns are red. Young Black-necked Cranes tend to have lighter necks, with a color more closely resembling a whitish-grey. Interestingly, the tail of the Black-necked Crane is what distinguishes it from the common crane; the Black-necked Crane has a black tail, while the Common Crane has a grey tail. The Black-necked Crane has an average wingspan of 7.8 feet, making its flight graceful and powerful. Despite its relatively large wingspan, the Black-necked Crane only weighs about 12 pounds - optimal for flight.

The Black-necked Crane is considered to be a forager. Its diet primarily consists of tubers of sedges, plant roots, earthworms, small insects, and frogs. They also eat snails, shrimp, and small fish. Another food source for the Black-necked Crane is digging up potatoes, carrots, and turnips. The farm crops that they sometimes eat have caused a problem for their species.

As mentioned, the Black-necked Crane is the only crane species that spends its entire life on the high plateau. Thus, it absolutely cannot be raised in hot climates. Black-necked Cranes will set up their nests primarily in wetlands, but they can also inhabit fields. It is a migratory bird, meaning that it moves from living in one location during the summer to another during the winter to optimize its living conditions. During the warm months, the Black-necked Crane seeks out a home at higher altitudes, ranging from 3,000 to 4,000 meters above sea level. During this part of the year, the bird finds a cold, dry climate, with long days and intense sunshine. This is also the time that the birds breed, which is why this location is referred to as the breeding grounds. The breeding grounds stretch across the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, northern Sichuan, and southern Gansu. During the cold months, Black-necked Cranes migrate south to places slightly closer to sea level – 2,200 to 3,500 meters up. There, the climate is more temperate than that of the breeding grounds. The Black-necked Crane’s most common wintering grounds are the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, southern Tibet Autonomous Region, and in the Kingdom of Bhutan.

The Black-necked Crane is celebrated all over the world and its symbolic meaning helps to give it merit and protection. The crane represents some of the finest qualities a man in Chinese culture can possess: longevity, loyalty, prosperity, stable relationships, and wisdom. The lifespan of the crane is fabled to be one thousand years, which is why the crane is thought of as a symbol of longevity. Additionally, it is said to be a symbol of loyalty and stable relationships because, typically, a crane will mate with only one other crane for its entire life. Furthermore, the Black-necked Crane is said to be a supernatural spirit, symbolizing good luck and happiness. In some cultures, the crane is also a representation of cleanliness and purity, because it flies in the sky above the dusty world. In Bhutan, there is an entire festival devoted to the celebration of this amazing bird. The Indian states of Jammu and Kashmir consider it to be their state bird.
The crane is the most favored bird symbol in Chinese art, used to depict longevity and immortality. However, when paired with other symbols in art, its meaning will sometimes change slightly. For example, when shown with a lotus, it represents purity; when paired with peony flowers, it signifies prosperity.

Myths and legends surrounding the crane also contribute to the species’ rich cultural connection and history. One of the most common Chinese myths is that the wings of a crane will transport people up to heaven. In addition, the crane will carry people to higher levels of spiritual enlightenment. Even dreaming about a crane is a good omen – it indicates immortality and longevity.

The current Black-necked Crane population is somewhere between 8,800 and 11,000 birds. This may seem like a large population for a rare bird; nevertheless, it is currently classified as a globally Vulnerable species, having battled back from near-extinction during the 1980s. The close brush with extinction occurred during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution when farmers drained wetlands – the primary habitat for Black-necked Cranes – to obtain more arable land for farming and grazing. The regrowth of the population has been steady since the 1990s when China put more legal emphasis on protection of endangered wildlife.

Despite the success with the recovery of the Black-necked Crane population, a few major threats remain. First, some traditional medical practitioners believe that cranes have special healing powers and so they use them for their medicinal purposes. For example, the cranes are believed to be able to find bone-healing stones if a person were to break one of their eggs. However, in order to get the stone, a person would have to mess with the crane’s nest, which is extremely harmful. In addition to medical practices, Black-necked Cranes are also hunted – both accidentally and purposefully. For example, when Black-necked Cranes are caught feeding on farmers’ crops, some farmers may shoot them. Reclamation and cultivation of wetlands for farmland and pasture areas is the biggest threat to the Black-necked Crane population.

As verified by the resurgence of the Black-necked Crane population, conservation strategies that have been implemented in China since the 1990s have been successful. Buddhist beliefs, which stress peace and discourage slaughter of other sentient beings, have contributed to the survival of the Black-necked Cranes. Legal measures have also been taken, creating protected sites and nature reserves since the 1990s. According to Chinese law, anyone convicted of killing a Black-necked Crane will be imprisoned. Even some less traditional strategies have been found to work, too. For example, one group told local villagers that killing Black-necked Cranes would bring bad luck to their families. The importance placed on the well-being of their families made this a strong incentive for villagers to observe the conservation laws.

As we look towards the future of the Black-necked Crane, preventative measures need to be carefully considered to help maintain a stable population of the species. A good first step has been taken with the implementation of educational programs in areas where Black-necked Cranes were formerly not recognized as endangered or where conservation laws were simply ignored. The conservation of all cranes is important because of the many representations within Tibetan and Chinese culture and their rich history in the area. The threat of endangerment of a species is something that needs to be taken seriously because, once a species is extinct, it is lost forever – to be remembered only through art, legends, myths, and oral histories. Thus, the conservation of the Black-necked Crane is also helping to save a part of this world’s unique and rich history.
As a foreigner coming from the United States to China, I noticed multiple differences between the teaching styles in China and the U.S. Since I am interested in education reform, I felt lucky to have the opportunity to observe first-hand how education is structured in a new part of the world. My introduction and experience to education in China was brief, but I was still able to gather enough information from the directors of the ACE in China program, online papers, and by teaching English to the kids at the China Exploration and Research Society (CERS) center. This article briefly analyzes what I learned about the Chinese and American education systems, with a focus on school structure, standardized testing, and teaching methods.

With around 260 million students, 15 million teachers, and 514 thousand schools, China maintains the largest education system in the world. The education system is state-run and has minimal involvement from the private sector; it is run by the Ministry of Education, a government institution in charge of creating educational policies for reform, allocating the budget, coordinating all educational departments, and laying out the curriculum. The system can be split into three different administrative divisions: provincial, county, and township. Counties have the primary responsibility for education, managing and delivering primary and secondary education. The provincial-level division has maximum level classification and is in charge of higher education. The central government directly administers provincial-level divisions. The Ministry of Education mandates nine-year compulsory education, consisting of six years of primary education starting at age six or seven, and three years of junior secondary school from ages twelve to fifteen. Chinese students from all of the different provinces are given the exact same textbooks, with an incentive to learn prompted by the Gaokao, the college entrance exam that ultimately determines what level of education the students will have. Once the students have finished their nine years of compulsory education, they can take this government-administered test to see if and which senior secondary school they will go to. The senior secondary schools can be split up into general senior secondary schools, and secondary vocational schools. The Gaokao will assign the students to their various senior secondary schools.

Gaokao, which literally translates as “high test,” is China’s college entrance exam. At the end of their last year of junior secondary school, every Chinese student can take this government administered test to determine what path they will take. After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1978, more value was placed on a strong education, and the central government instituted the nine-year compulsory education policy in 1985. These nine years are all funded by the government, but higher education is not. Thus, students have to compete for scholarships based on their grades in school and their Gaokao score—which is why this test is given so much emphasis. The Gaokao is nine hours long and is taken over a span of two days. It covers math, English, Chinese Literature, and science, followed by an essay. Chinese schools teach their students the fundamentals of these subjects. Their final year of school is primarily committed to preparing for this exam. The students go through an extremely stressful time due to the weight and difficulty of the exam.

Unlike the Chinese education system, the United States system is primarily based on state and local responsibility. While there is a federal role in education, headed by the Department of Education, much of the authority lies in public and private organizations at a smaller scale. The Department of Education was created in order to collect information on schools and teaching methods that would help create effective school systems and provide an equal opportunity for all students. But, the actual curriculum and budget allocation are regulated by state governments. The United States does have some forms
of compulsory education that are determined by the state and the child’s circumstance. The different levels of education are elementary, middle, and high school, often followed by some form of higher education. The early-aged education can be completed via private, public, charter, and home schools. Much like the way China has the Gaokao to determine senior secondary education, the United States often utilizes standardized test scores to assist with college admissions decisions.

While standardized tests like the SAT5 and ACT are given a great deal of emphasis in the United States, they are not as important as the Gaokao is in China. Unlike the Gaokao, these tests are administered via private institutions like the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and College Board. The SAT and ACT are split into general sections like math, reading, writing, and science, and an optional essay. Colleges and universities often utilize the students’ scores on either one of these exams to determine admissions. However, many other factors are involved as well. The students’ GPAs, extracurricular activities, and backgrounds also all contribute to the decisions. Thus, while students do feel a large amount of stress because of these tests, not as much weight is put on the students to do well, because it is not the only thing that matters. Students generally take these tests their junior year or at the beginning of their senior year of high school. By then, they should have learned all of the material that will be on the exams.

One of the first things I noticed while teaching kids in China was how they immediately repeated the words and phrases I said. For instance, when I counted to ten, they quickly echoed. However, when I asked, “How are you?” rather than replying with, “I am good,” as we had previously taught them, they would say, “How are you?” It took a little longer to create conversations and get them to understand what was going on. One way we helped them figure out the meaning behind the greetings was to have a demonstration and get them to physically act out what they were saying.6 This method worked, even though they got rowdier.

The concept of moving around and having a more “creative” way of learning is very familiar in the United States. American students are taught to think critically and are often educated via more inventive means.7 In China, students are typically taught through rote memorization. The education is very uniform, with all students learning from the same textbooks, and leaves little room for creative teaching. Overall, there are positives and negatives to both education systems.

Since China’s central government funds the nine-year compulsory education and all students receive the same textbooks, education throughout the country is relatively equal. While the wealthier individuals can afford outside tutors and classes, in general, the students in the different provinces are given an adequate education. Considering the immense population, this is an incredibly efficient way of providing an education to children. However, because there is so much emphasis on the Gaokao and school grades, the students are constantly under incredible amounts of stress. Also, since the system is run by a central government institution, the students are not given a very specialized or flexible education. On the other hand, one favorable aspect of the American education system, is that the curriculum is relatively regionalized. For example, I grew up in the state of Nevada, which has a desert landscape.8 In elementary school, I got to learn a lot about the hot, dry climate, cacti, desert tortoises, and the local Native American tribes by going out and seeing them first hand. Not only did I get to learn more about my hometown, but I was also able to do so via creative means that kept me interested and wanting to learn more. However, the American education system has its flaws. Because it is coordinated by the state and local governments, there is a lot of inequality, due to each area’s different socioeconomic status.

Ultimately, I believe that each country’s education system has been doing an adequate job considering the population. We can learn from each other however, and I think we can take what we learn about each system and use that knowledge to reinvent an improved education system that is both adequate and equal throughout the country.
TIBETAN MEDICINE: BELIEF IN THE MIND & BODY

By Shannon Richardson
CERS Zhongdian Center

We were in the CERS museum in the Zhongdian Center when Dr. Bill shared a story with us: while visiting a local Tibetan friend, he was invited to witness a ritual for his friend’s sick sister. Although my interest in Tibetan medicine was sparked that day during Dr. Bill’s story, my passion for healthcare had already burned for many years.

My academic pursuits lie at the intersection of psychology and physiology where I itch to impact the world through medicine. For example, I seek to understand how patient-physician relationships and other psycho-social forces influence people’s mindsets and subsequently their physiological responses. Thus, while exploring Tibetan medicine at CERS, I chose to focus on Tibetan belief-based medicine, such as rituals and the theories behind their practices. I began to appreciate Tibetan medicine through my research because of its emphasis on the entire person – mind and body. I believe western doctors could learn from components of Tibetan medicine that maximize the healing potential of the human body by harnessing psychological factors of health. But first, I’ll lay out what I have learned through my research at CERS regarding Tibetan medicine.

Now, back to where these thoughts were born; Dr. Bill’s story. Once when visiting a friend at his house, Dr. Bill saw a yellow-hat sect priest praying. Two assistants and various male relatives had also gathered. After they all ate lunch together, the ritual began in earnest. As the priest repeatedly banged on a drum and chanted, the men used weapons, including fireworks, a fake gun and a real sword, to scare the demons in the house. A leather bag full of beans and wood chips was dragged from room to room throughout the house. It was then emptied out into a metal bin, and the priest examined the wood chips and took out any that stood up among the beans. The beans and remaining chips were then placed back in the leather bag, and the process repeated. Scare the demons, empty the bag, find the right wood chips, and repeat - this sequence continued until the very last demon was caught. After receiving a brief explanation, Dr. Bill understood the ritual to be a method intended to cure his friend’s sister.

An account similar to Dr. Bill’s was documented in Joseph F. Rock’s article in the November, 1924 National Geographic Magazine. Rock detailed a ritual of the Nashi people, an aboriginal tribe located in the Yunnan province. The Dzu Dü ceremony consisted of banging drums, dancing with swords, building a bonfire, and sacrificing a chicken. All of the ritual’s components were intended to cast away a devil believed to be causing a sick man’s ulcerated tooth. Rock reported the man’s mouth to be better when he woke the next morning.

The rituals that Dr. Bill and Joseph Rock witnessed both aimed to destroy demons that were believed to be causing illnesses. Two key differences between the rituals, however, were that Dr. Bill witnessed a ritual that was (1) performed by a yellow hat sect Buddhist priest and (2) did not involve a live sacrifice, as the Nashi’s did. Traditionally, Bon people would sacrifice animals and even humans for healing rituals. However, with the rise of Buddhism in Tibet, sacrifices contradicted their religious beliefs, so the practice evolved to become symbolic, in the form of gdorma. Zan par, the molds used to create special kinds of gdorma, are wooden rods with images of animals, humans or deities carved into them. The gdorma are made from colored dough pressed into these carvings, and are the metaphoric equivalent of Bon sacrifices.

Another practice that developed after Buddhism reached Tibet is traveling to a lama for a divination. The lama would ascertain the most appropriate mode of treatment for the patient, which could be either a ritual, an herbal medication, a dietary or lifestyle change, or surgery. I will not go into details regarding the various treatment options, but rather, I
will explain some roots of Tibetan beliefs and some theories behind their medical approaches.

Tibetan doctors rely heavily on pulse and urine samples to make diagnoses of imbalances of the three nyes pa or diagnosis categories: rLung (air), mKrhis-pa (fire), and Badkhan (water/earth). Air or wind, which represents the respiratory system, blood circulation, sensory organs, and movements, is embodied in the rLung. The mKrhis-pa or fire accounts for one’s digestions, bile, and heat energy absorbed from food. Lastly, the Badkan or water/earth refers to phlegm and room temperature bodily fluids or solids. The key to Tibetan medicine is keeping each nyes pai functioning smoothly. “It is necessary to maintain the balance of three elements so as to keep normal functions of human body” (Luo et al., 2015, p.451). When someone becomes sick, Tibetans believe it is caused by an imbalance in one of the nyes pa due to one of the three poisons of samsaric existence: desire, hatred, and delusion. With their emphasis on harmony among the three nyes pa, doctors don’t just treat the bodily-region causing discomfort; doctors treat an entire bodily-system.

Before being able to make these diagnoses, doctors will study in a university or monastery. Literally translated as “lineage of teaching”, the Tantras comprise the textual basis of their education. The Four Medical Tantras are the Root Tantra, the Explanatory Tantra, the Oral Instruction Tantra, and the Final Tantra. Each Tantra plays a specific role in teaching: the Root Tantra serves as an introduction to medicine, the Explanatory Tantra provides basic scientific information, like anatomy and physiology, the Oral Instruction Tantra teaches specific diseases in eight different categories, and the Final Tantra focuses on practical applications and clinical approaches.

My takeaway from this research connects with studies on how one’s mindset can influence one’s health.

Recently, Ali Crum in her Mind & Body lab at Stanford has been researching how people’s perceptions shape their reality. People’s beliefs are so powerful that, in fact, if they believe they will get better by taking a pill, they will, even if it actually contains no drug – the so-called placebo effect. Even when treated with real medicine, the psychological and social forces behind the placebo effect will still be in play, and may be as strong or stronger than the actual drug effect. Up until now, there hasn’t been much research on how to maximize the benefits of placebos by influencing the psychological and social forces that can contribute to such effects. Studies have revealed...
The Placebo Effect.

phenomena like (1) an increase in mortality rates of people who believed stress to be detrimental to their health, (2) a reported reduction in pain by patients informed clearly that they were administered post-operative pain medications, and (3) longer lives among participants who believed they were more physically active than the average person, even if they were not really more active.

These robust findings indicate how powerful the human mind can be in the body’s physiological response to treatment and in shaping health outcomes, but there has been little cross-cultural research on the belief-based influencers of health. However, I feel that Tibetan medicine adds a unique component to treatment, whereby patients wholeheartedly believe in their doctors and treatment plans, and doctors’ methods aim to heal a whole system rather than a part. This approach could have positive psychological benefits for the ill and subsequently, maximize the psycho-social forces that contribute to health. Further research should be conducted to determine whether or not the cultural variation in a person’s medical beliefs in fact shapes their mindsets to benefit their health.

Through my research at CERS, I began to realize that western medical practices, in its tendency to focus solely on regions of discomfort, has room to evolve to better harness psychological factors of health. One route of improving such contributions to health could be through cross-cultural research and understanding the benefits of belief-heavy cultures such as Tibetan.

References

On a whim last quarter, I took a class called Introduction to World Architecture. As an intended Mathematical and Computational Science major, I am not usually inclined to take that kind of class, but I decided to go for it because it sounded interesting. Although I enjoyed the class and the variety of buildings included in the course, I was disappointed in the lack of diversity in the architecture. The discussions we had about Western architecture were fascinating, but we did not spend as much time discussing non-Western architecture as I would have hoped. Seeing the architecture of the local Shangri-la region firsthand only confirmed my suspicion that there was a large portion of non-Western architecture that my class did not cover.

Tibetan architecture is fascinating to study because architects in this region have to be resourceful when it comes to finding building materials and figuring out how to stay warm. This resourcefulness results in a great variety of building styles from region to region. The architecture of this large region of cultural influence is very diverse. Therefore, I think it is best to talk about the architecture in terms of common themes and ideas as opposed to specific elements.

Tibetan architecture is unique in that much of it is based on functionality. The climate of Tibet can be cold and harsh, so the functionality of the building in terms of rigidity and warmth maintenance take first priority. Tibetan architecture is best described as “geomorphic”, architecture that varies depending on its surroundings. These factors can include the local landscape, climate, and materials that are available for construction. For instance, the most common tree that is used for building in the Shangri-la region is the Yunnan spruce, because it is light but sturdy. However, this type of tree is not available everywhere, and often other types of timber have to be used. These include fir, hemlock, oil pine, feather pine, birch, maple, and mountain poplar. In places where no timber is easily accessible, other materials such as stone and mortar, mud mortar, and sun-dried bricks are used. In much of Western architecture, the materials used to create the building mattered so much that they would be shipped from hundreds of miles away, to the point of being impractical.

Another key aspect of Tibetan architecture is sturdiness. In a landscape that undergoes frequent natural disasters, like earthquakes and landslides, having a strong building foundation is key. There is often a reliance on vertical columns to support the buildings. In some specific places, such as the assembly halls...
of monasteries, these columns are placed with careful attention paid to the distance between the columns. The walls start relatively thick and get slimmer as they go up, which adds to the sturdiness of the building.

Because of the harsh climate of Tibet, the production and preservation of heat is an essential aspect of the architecture. Although buildings are traditionally white, some buildings are painted red because the color red absorbs heat in the winter and reflects it in the summer. Some buildings are made of stone, because stone collects heat during the day and keeps it in at night. Most houses are two stories, and in some homes, the first floor is relegated to the livestock and the second floor to the family. This is useful in cold areas because heat rises, so the body heat of the livestock keeps the family above warm. Windows are often narrow in order to only let in the sun’s rays when the sun is low in the sky. This occurs during the morning and evening of the summer and at most hours of the winter, but the design prevents the hot rays from the afternoon summer sun from penetrating the building. Since many families cannot afford glass for the windows of their homes, they cover the windows with white cloth to let in light but prevent heat from escaping.

Tibetan architecture is unique in that it independently came up with many architectural structures that either currently exist or have existed in other parts of the world. For instance, many roofs on Tibetan buildings are flat in regions that don’t get much snow. Flat roofs are handy because they can be used to store things like firewood and fodder. Additionally, the roofs are a good place for relaxing, sunbathing, and even for romance. This is similar to the civilization of Çatalhüyök in modern-day Turkey, where people used to spend a lot of time hanging out on the roofs.

Another similarity exists in the skeleton of the buildings themselves. Tibetan architecture makes use of the traditional post and lintel set up. This means that two posts are put up vertically and another beam (the lintel) is fastened on them horizontally. This set up can be seen all over Western architecture, from Stonehenge to the Eastern Facade of the Louvre. Columns also play a big role in Tibetan architecture. They are used to hold up the building, but also to divide large spaces into different living areas or rooms. Particularly in the assembly halls of monasteries, columns are much more than just structures for support. The timber pillars are placed 230-300 centimeters apart (depending on the building) and often have shelf-like capitals. This type of specific column placement and decoration of capitals can be seen in many European buildings, starting as early as Ancient Greece and persisting through the Renaissance and Baroque periods. These columns, particularly in Ancient Greece, had special proportions that were standardized and widely used. Later, they focused more on the distances between the columns and how their placement affected the viewer’s perception of the building.

I have spoken a lot about the functionality of Tibetan architecture, but that is not to say that is not as beautiful or detail-oriented as other architecture. Tibetan buildings are some of the most ornate buildings I have ever seen in terms of woodwork and colorful paintings. But for me, the most beautiful thing about Tibetan architecture is the way in which it seems connected to nature, almost as if it is a natural part of the landscape. Many of the buildings that I saw in my architecture class either attempted to mimic the landscape that they were in or physically point towards its features. For instance, the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae points in the direction of a sacred mountain, attempting to direct the viewer’s eye to it. At Machu Picchu, there are small mountain-shaped stones that both resemble the surrounding mountains and point to them. Now consider the Potala in Lhasa; this magnificent building appears to be formed out of the mountain, as if it were just an extension of the mountain top. This is particularly noticeable during the winter, when the white building is surrounded by other snowy mountain tops.

The Potala was the only image of a building by another architect that Frank Lloyd Wright had in his office, and it would not be surprising if he took inspiration from it. Just like the Potala, many of Frank Lloyd Wright’s buildings appear to be a part of the landscape in which they reside, particularly the home Falling Water. This leads to more organic-looking buildings, as opposed to buildings that look like they were manufactured elsewhere and plopped down into an environment.

Tibetan architecture has a lot to teach us about adapting to our environment and working in unison with it.

References
While on my trip to Yunnan, my ACE peers and I had several opportunities to learn about Chinese and Tibetan culture. I became interested in funeral customs when we watched a film about CERS work on the mysterious hanging coffins of western China. I then decided to do my research article on Tibetan burial methods and funeral customs. I found information about Tibetan funeral customs by interviewing Tibetan members of the community in Gongbin Village where I stayed for three weeks. I greatly appreciated the interviewees’ honesty and openness in sharing these unique and fascinating traditions and customs.

To truly understand Tibetan funeral customs, it is necessary to examine Tibetan Buddhist beliefs surrounding death and transmigration of the soul. Firstly, it is a Tibetan Buddhist belief that there are six realms of life: Hells, Hungry Ghosts, Animals, Assura/Antigods, Heaven/Gods, and Humans. The Hells realm is characterized by anger, violence, and revenge, the Hungry Ghosts realm by greed, gluttony, and insatiable desire, the Animal realm by limited capacity and ignorance, the Antigods realm by jealousy and competitiveness, the Gods realm by bliss and peace, and the Human realm is a mix of all other realms. Each human will be reborn into a different realm depending on their karma, the results of their actions and motivations during their human life.

It is also said that one’s soul will wander in a state of transmigration for forty-nine days after one’s death. After a family member dies, it is the custom for Tibetan Buddhist families to keep the body in the house for about seven days while the conscious soul is still wandering. The body is usually covered in white, and some families will buy nice, new clothes. Buddhist monks will chant and perform rituals every seven days during the transmigration of the soul, chanting in an attempt to help and guide the wandering soul into its next life. Tibetan Buddhists see death more as a new phase of a larger life, rather than an ending to life, due to their belief in reincarnation.

In addition to engaging in rituals and calling for the guidance of monks, it is customary for the family members to behave in certain ways for the forty-nine days of the transmigration of the spirit, such as:

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
broken up with mallets to be mixed with tsampa, which is carried up to the heavens, the bones are collected and the individual. After the vultures feed and the flesh is in such a manner and will accumulate a lot of merit for sometimes monks, are of a very high rank and are well according to the interviewee, these professionals, who are reactions towards their job must be cheerful and willing. Adhere to the belief that controlling negative behaviors and laying it out for the vultures to feed on. In order to route to the next life, the professionals’ attitudes and such as crying and sulking avoids harming the souls after the cremation, the ashes are often put into a small clay pot, which remains at the family’s house or is brought to a sacred site. An interviewee described how, in this particular region, some prefer fire burial over water burial, as the process of cutting the body into pieces and disposing of it into a river is crude and cruel for the family members of the deceased to imagine. However, water burials are more common than sky burials where ever vultures are absent and it is economically impossible for families to pay for the process of the sky burial.

In an earth burial, the body is put underground to decompose in the dirt. It is often performed on Tibetans who have been assimilated into Chinese Han culture, or are of low social or economic status, or suffer from infectious diseases. Tibetans often view earth burial as the lowest, least honorable form of burial. Some believe that an Earth burial puts the body into hell.

In some regions, tree burials occur after the death of a child. The body is placed in the fetal position into a wooden coffin and hung on a tree in a remote forest to avoid being seen by living children. An interviewee described the effect that a child’s death has on a parents and that in Tibetan culture, parents pray to die first before their children.

The stupa burial is the noblest method of burial for Tibetans and is reserved for living Buddhas or Lamas of high status and ranking. The body is embalmed and wrapped with medicinal herbs, flakes of gold, and saffron and is placed in a stupa (a sacred religious monument). The corpse is then worshipped at the stupa.

Funeral customs and burial methods are just one of the many incredibly interesting and spiritual aspects of Tibetan culture. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to learn firsthand information about the culture and feel insatiably curious to learn even more.
knowing I was going to visit China Exploration & Research Society (CERS) in June, my proctor Valerie Ma spent one of the last night’s of study hall before school’s end sharing stories about her time as an intern there the past few summers. She pulled up pictures and described a summer spent on a boat in Myanmar with a community of enthusiastic explorers, spotting snub-nosed monkeys for the first time on Baima Snow Mountain in Yunnan Province, and lazier, enjoyable days spent with other interns playing cards in between diving into research articles for her culminating research report on opium. As a global studies educator and curious traveler, I had so many questions: “How were you inspired to research opium? What are some of your most powerful experiences you’ve had in the internship? Tell me more about the places you visit.” Valerie’s eyes would light up as she described her engagement with people, place, and community across China and the value of CERS, led by charismatic explorer How Man. While I had an impression of my future visit, I remained curious and excited as I anticipated my arrival.

About a month later, I was at the Zhongdian Center of CERS with four other Deerfield Academy faculty members: Michael Cary, Emma Coffin, Cindy Feng, and Will Speer. A professional development experience, our travels had already taken us to Beijing and Lhasa to deepen our understanding of China’s rich histories, cultures, and landscapes. With our visit to CERS, we aimed to better understand their important work, learn more about rural China, and imagine what it would be like to bring a group of Deerfield students, there.

During our stay, we visited two CERS sites: the Zhongdian Center in Shangri-La and the Lisu Hill Tribe Site at the base of the Baima Snow Mountain Nature Reserve. At the Zhongdian Center, we learned more about the history of CERS, explored the old town of Shangri-La, and experienced a slower-paced agrarian environment quite different from the bustle of Lhasa and Beijing. At the Lisu Site, we stayed in traditional Lisu houses, disassembled and reassembled at the site over the years by CERS from the homes of local families who were looking to do away with these structures and rebuild using modern architecture. As we immersed ourselves in this mountain community, we were able to participate in the annual crossbow festival, where members of the community gathered together for a day of cultural pride and competition using their traditional hunting tool. We also hiked into the Reserve, observing the Yunnan Snub-Nosed Monkeys, and heard stories of tracking, research, advocacy, and tourism around this particular species. In between these two important places, we drove through areas of China to which a typical traveler would otherwise likely not be exposed. As our caravan weaved along the Yangtze River, CERS Science Director Bill Bleisch peppered us with natural science and historical knowledge of the lush valley.

We were incredibly impressed throughout our stay; How Man’s stories of life as an explorer set the stage for valuable conservation work of places and cultures in a rapidly changing world. Through expeditions such as tracking river sources, to going door-to-door to collect cultural items that would otherwise be thrown away, to partnering with local communities on projects that balance tradition with changing tides, CERS investigates and supports the important connections between people and place. They partner with others to better understand environments, artifacts, and stories that may otherwise be lost, missed, or taken for granted. Conserving, CERS captures knowledge and experience, while leaving more to be researched, cataloged, and explored, as they complete projects in various locations, maintain partnerships, and inspire others to also make an impact.

As I reflect on our stay, long drives, and the connections made, I value my exposure to other people and places that define and make up China. We visited parts of the country that can’t be viewed or experienced from an on-and-off-the-bus experience, because they rest on the important connections CERS has made with others through years of exploration and work. Our gracious hosts: How Man, Bill Bleisch, Tsering Drolma, my proctor Valerie, and the rest of the CERS staff welcomed us with warmth, knowledge, and a willingness to allow us to better understand what life is like living, learning, and working in this community that is able to explore together. We left inspired, having had powerful experiences engaging with natural science, culture, and community in China, and for that, we are incredibly grateful to CERS welcoming us during our stay.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
CERS Lisu exhibit.
The Deerfield group.
Snub-nosed Monkey.
Crossbow Festival.
LEARNING TRIP TO CERS SITE IN ZHONGDIAN YUNNAN

By Jason, Isabel, Charlotte, Gordon, Jess, Rina, Joyce, Wilson, Bryan - HKUGAC

Jason Bootwala
This photo depicts far more than what is seen. Unseen from this photo is Gordon squatting underneath, steadying his shoulders to hold up my weight, trembling with every move. Elements of teamwork and bonding can be seen from every activity, be it our group projects, wildlife observations, not to mention late night sessions, the 9 individuals with their unique and varying fortes have come together as a team with formidable talents, just as how we were able to erect the prayer flags atop this tree, capping off a nice work of cooperation.

This excursion to Shangri-La was also a spiritual journey of self-discovery. This photo brings back the flapping sounds of the flags. Walking along the trickling stream and through the gaping valleys, the calming tranquility of nature let philosophical thoughts of our inner-self run wild, the holy pilgrimages healing our bodies spiritually. Tangible activities as pictured ranging from data analysis, cave-climbing allowed me to learn more about myself, my strengths as well as limits. As I returned to Hong Kong, I felt as a more mature person in control of my mind and body.

It also shows the explorer-stature that we have maintained throughout. We didn’t go there to see the sights, but to go beyond the facades of the natural beauty and delve deep into local life and learn about the culture. Numerous hands-on experience including competing among locals in the crossbow festival, or visiting Buddhist temples and imitating their ways of accumulating merit, paired with fruitful lectures, we approached the project in different dimensions, and got in return a most genuine and natural first-hand experience. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Albeit our disbelief in Buddhism, here we attempted to give our blessings through these prayer flags.

As I took the flags to the top, I carried on my back more than just prayers, but also our spirit of teamwork, that of as explorers.

Isabel Lau
I used to dream about escaping my ordinary life, not until the CERS trip reshaped the concept- our lives are never ordinary. This photo was taken during our pilgrimage around the Damo Buddhist cave. Serpentine across the lushly wooded landscape decorated with arrays of prayer flags, with chants engraved on every piece of clothing had shown the sincerity and compassion of the prayers. It was hard to explain our emotions embedded in us simply by words. We had followed the path taken by many followers of Tibetan Buddhism. Explore the vast, spectacular scenery, our footprints were left in this magnificent utopia we called Shangri-La.

I had simply failed to notice how little tiny things could be extraordinary as it was. Mr. Wong How Man, the creator of CERS has once told us, “Children are always the best explorer. Their curiosity makes them the best learner, better than adults for sure.” I had been waiting for opportunities and ignoring small details that were in fact resting beside me. CERS has taught me the difference between planning and action, saying ‘goodbye’ to ivory tower which we has stayed for 17 years was the first step of our journey. Get our backpacks, get lost, and just do it!

Charlotte Lau
Throughout the trip, we learnt so much about Buddhism,
as well as many other religions. Yet, what we learnt is just the tip of an iceberg. I still remember watching the short documentary on Pilgrimage on Mount Kailash and a French Priest. They showed me one common thing about religions: Determination. And that, is one of the things that impacted me the most. People who do Pilgrimage on Mount Kailash need to surmount high altitude illness and other physical difficulties, where the French Priest was very determined to preach the Catholic beliefs. Although he was unfortunately killed in the middle of the journey to Tibet, his beliefs and determination was acknowledged by the citizens. Tibetan Catholic believers are very grateful for his unconditional sacrifice. And the aim for determination in both religions is simple: for happiness and peace of all people.

We saw a lot of prayer flags throughout the trip. They are flags used to promote peace, compassion, strength, and wisdom. Instead of sending the prayers to the gods, the prayers are blown by the wind and spread to all pervading space. The flags remind me of the importance of cultural conservation. Culture conservation is not only concerning the materialistic level of one culture, but also the spiritual level of it. Yet, this cannot be taught through books or words, it must be experienced and acquired by oneself. I am not a Buddhist myself, but I definitely admire the mind and core values of the religion. Seeing those flags fluttering in the air, I could see our prayers spreading through the wind. I could also see the determination of Buddhists, who were willing to spread their prayers and conserve the religion unconditionally.

Gordon Chiu
This picture can basically sum up the highlights of the trip. For me, interviewing a senior hunter, Lao Yu, in Lisu was the most memorable. I have never been so close to someone who were the most popular hunter in a minority group. There’s also a very unique point of view raised by Yu that he actually wants to be a ranger as he’ll have more money to enjoy better life. However, the one who lives in city always thinks people like Yu would like to keep their culture and then forcing them to preserve their ‘own culture’. After this interview I understand that people should not always think about themselves and being selfish but also put themselves in other’s shoe.

Jess Lee
This jar of honey was a gift from the Fung Family.

It was yet another rainy day. We set foot on the muddy trail and followed a beekeeper, Mr. Fung, to seek for natural honey. In the last few mornings, we spread the golden sweetness across the Lisu homemade bread to fill our stomachs.

We eat honey all the time but we have never observed how this essence was harvested from the beehives. Unlike what we see on the television, the bees live in hollow wooden logs instead of boxes. The beekeeper popped open one of the numerous logs and smoked the bees out of it. He cut up the fresh honeycomb and honey just drizzle down like a waterfall.

What truly impressed me was the Lisu people’s awareness of not exhausting the resources. They will not over-harvest the honey, just enough for their own use and for limited. Moreover, even we were just guests, they were friendly enough to give us a whole jar of honey. All the people I met, all the conversations we had were the things that I treasure the most.

Rina Cheung
This ten-day experience was surreal and I could not ask for more. I am especially grateful to be able to have a deeper understanding towards Tibetan Buddhism. Before going on this trip, I know completely nothing about Buddhism. Anything related to it seemed unfamiliar and distant. Thanks to such wonderful opportunity I was lucky enough to
have received, I had a chance to take a closer look at this religion. I was impressed by how sincere people pray in temples, walking miles uphill to show their genuine respect to the Gods they believe in. You can see from the picture there is a monk carefully writing on a white cloth. What is actually happening is that he was writing down people’s name to send them blessings and fortune. There was not only one cloth but tens and hundreds of them. But he kept writing without any complaints. Such spiritual power moved me. I was amazed by how strong and determined people can become when they devote all their time into a religion. It really is a beautiful scene to be remembered.

Joyce Chow
Looking back at this photo, I can imagine myself carefully going one step at a time again on this slippery road as seen in the picture. Prayer flags that hanged on the trees crisscrossed along the road, bringing colours to the woods. We were doing a pilgrimage to one of the holy mountains of Buddhism at the time, learning how religions affect local people’s life and their culture. With the guidance of our education advisors, Drolma and Dr. Bill, we’ve gained so much knowledge and experience that can never be encountered in Hong Kong. I am so grateful that I got such precious chance traveling to Shangri-la and step beyond my comfort zone. Throughout the journey, I’ve truly understood the beauty of nature and it is inevitable that this piece of memory is irreplaceable.

Wilson Hui
Whenever I look at this picture, I can recall all the memories in the CERS trip. This picture was taken at one of the site near Damo Buddhist Cave, where we learnt about culture and religion in that region by pilgrimage around the sacred mountain there. Noticing the low hanging clouds, is an evidence for me stepping foot at over 3000 m above sea level, and that also leads to the stunning view of JinSha river flowing below our feet, unlike Hong Kong, there was no pollutant, or smog blocking the scenery. The JinSha river sparks up the experiences in the trip when the driver is explaining and describing the river on the way to sites. We are all amazed by the comprehensive knowledge of the driver, and later on found that he is a project manager of CERS! The JinSha river let me think of the hunter that I interviewed in the Lisu cultural village, as his family was fishing in the river for a living back then. The hunter there never hunts the golden monkeys (Yunnan snub-nosed monkey) as they believe the monkey is their ancestors. Last but not least, although not mentioned in the picture directly, I can never forget our educational coordinator, Drolma, and Dr. Bill, biologist, who both guided us throughout the trip.

Bryan Lo
When I asked Mr. How Man how big is the CERS campsite, he answered, ”To be honest basically the whole Shangri-La is a part of CERS.” In this journey, we visited the Zhongdian Centre and get settled there for a few nights. Being adolescents raised in Hong Kong, we could not really be able to adapt to their environment. There may be some part of the trip that are not really pleasant, but now it is just a piece of memory that is precious and unique to us.

Looking at this photo reminds me how special and unforgettable the journey is. To others, it may just be a static picture with astounding scenery; but to us, it is a trigger to a series of memory, bringing us back to the trip and recall every detail. The laughter, the tears, and even the moments where our group getting scolded by Drolma for not using the right technique to complete our group project. The most important of all, it recalls how much we had learnt from this trip. Not only the knowledge about the local people, but also knowledge that cannot be taught at school, how to be an explorer.
Welcome to the CERS center!” Drolma and few of her colleagues, as well as the bark of the fierce dogs which were luckily tied to the ground, greeted us warmly. We couldn’t take our eyes off the special 3-storey wooden building. As our pristine shoes step foot on the natural wooden floor, we found ourselves surrounded by framed photos of gorgeous nature, wild animals and expressive portraits taken by How Man. The dining hall was simple yet felt like home. I couldn’t believe we have finally arrived the famous Shangri-la.

Before the departure of the highly-anticipated 10-days trip, I expect to be overwhelmed by waves of energy-demanding activities. Waking up at 7 am every morning and not able to tuck into our beds until 11 pm. 10 exhausting, fruitful, packed days.

To my disappointment, the first two days were occupied by flights and road trips. Our adventure finally debuted as we arrive Xiangguqing. Early in the morning, we set foot into the forest along a damp and slippery trail. After half an hour of exposure to the showery rain, the Yunan Snub-nosed Monkeys were finally within sight. To be exact, the monkey’s high-pitched shrills caught our attention long before their funny face: button-sized eyes, Voldemort’s nose and a pair of sausage lips. We were all excited, trying to find the best spot to have

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a better look on the monkeys that have once faced extinction with our binoculars. Those mischievous shuttled in the woods without a second being still, making our scan sampling and vocal sampling on them more difficult. However with the guidance of Dr. Bill, tracking the disobedient monkeys was not an impossible mission. The monkeys flew across the luxuriant woods. Each jump seems to be a leap of faith, they lengthen their long arms and grasp the branches on the other end.

It was just mesmerizing to observe these mischievous monkeys as they all seem to have human-like emotions. Mothers were grooming their children with care, juveniles were fooling around and chasing each other, males will feel jealous and fight if their wives get close to other males. Their behaviors were as complex as human and have certain purposes. To study them all would be just as hard as sending human to Mars.

At first, it was just us there, quiet, focused. However, as it got late, tourists started to join us. Suddenly, the screech and squeak were covered by loud conversations; the fresh air was contaminated by nauseating cigarette fumes; the mysterious atmosphere was destroyed by the tourists. Instead of blaming them for their foolishness, education is way more important. People shouldn’t expect monkeys in cages and need to understand the monkey’s hardship due to human destructions and interference. Enlightenment is always the key to slay ignorance, to improve all life on Earth. Nevertheless, we still enjoyed the expedition to the monkey land.

Very soon huge pieces of honeycomb that were beautifully crafted by the bees were collected. We have been served honey as part of our breakfasts where we would have it with bread. I once thought the honey served was already at its finest. As cliché as it may sound, there is certainly nothing comparable to freshly collected honey. Drolma used a metal knife to cut open the soft and sophisticated honeycomb gently then asked us to have a taste of wild bee honey. I did not bother to use a fork. I held the carefully constructed honeycomb in my hand, with glittery honey dripping down my finger. Syrupy and rich flavor of honey was no doubt very addicting. None of us had less than three pieces of honeycomb. Despite having bee flying near us back and forth, it was still a unique experience.

Time is like an arrow, especially when you are having a great time. It was then time for us to leave as beekeepers warned us that the bees were going to become conscious again in short. Seemed that the effectiveness of the smoke was limited by time. It was when we knew that we had to farewell with the tasty honey.
Precious time has soundlessly drifted away as we found ourselves gazing across the lushly wooded landscapes of pine trees in the Damo Buddhist cave site. The drizzly path serpentine through an array of colorful prayer flags as we began our pilgrimage. Standing at an altitude of 3200m, the peculiar view of thick mist and deep valleys have left us all in awe. A faint breeze brushed gently across our trembling knees if only the magnificent scenery made us hard to believe that we were actually living in the reality.

We have always thought that Buddhism was a familiar term. It has always stricken me with terms, “vegetarian”, “monks”, “Buddha”... Not until the CERS exploration has completely reshaped all of these concepts. Distant prayers “Om Mani Padme Hum” echoed solemnly through the holy mountain. Recalling the film we had watched about the Mount Kailash the night beforehand, followers have to struggle through grand obstacles by finishing a course of pilgrimages with their body length, not to mention walking more than 50 kilometers per day for an entire month. The sea of prayer flags was seen strangling on the trees. Closely chained together by long polystyrene strings, they fluttered gracefully in the midair. Such beauty took our breath away. It was such a special moment for us, submerging into the surroundings and losing ourselves in the formidable of Mother Nature.

We dropped by a prayer site for a small break. Prayer stones with Tibetan chant were piled systematically into exotic pyramid which scattered around the site. A mixture of pine leaves and Tsampa were reduced into ashes. We closed our eyes, as the fragrant smell rush into our lungs, feeling utterly overwhelmed by the mightiness of nature. Birds sang peacefully above, all our troubles had vanished along with the smoke into the clouded sky.

“Life is a cycle, just like the pine trees, just like the pilgrimage.” A philosophic statement. The start and the end are two sides of a coin. It made us reflect on ourselves. We are still constantly mumbling through in the cycle of exploration. It will always be a never-ending journey.

This was definitely one of our most memorable trips. Not only because we got to understand each of our teammates more, but also because of how it changed our views on modernization. Modernization may bring a lot of benefits, including convenience, rapid economic development and technological development, but it also leads to cultural degradation.

Our research topic was about the gourmet culture of Lisu. There were two reasons for us to choose the topic. First, we wanted to be pioneers and be the first to dig deep into that. Second, who is not fond of food? All the recipes and food culture could be searched on the internet, yet we chose to conduct an interview with the village head. All of us were nervous and unclear about what to do at first. We were afraid that we would not understand the unfamiliar accent. Fortunately, Drolma helped us out and cleared up our concepts through the interview. In this research, we learned to truly distinguish between first-hand and second-hand data. Not only by the source, but to add on, there is one element that second-hand data does not provide—feelings. When we interviewed the village head, he expressed how much he misses the traditional Lisu food, such as the bitter buckwheat bread and the homemade alcoholic beverage.

This was when we understood the importance of cultural conservation. We put ourselves into their shoes and thought about what it would be if the renowned Hong Kong dishes — such as shumai, fish ball and egg waffle— fade into history. We believe that no one would like his or her once precious memory to be undermined in history. This is why cultural conservation is so important. This is also the moment when we realize cultural conservation is our responsibility.

We step foot onto the natural wooden floor of the CERS center once again. However, our shoes have now been overwhelmed by mud and dirt. We leave our footprints just like any other who have come to explore, learn and discover. Yet, we have only touched the tip of an iceberg. Every one of us was yearning for more, hoping to grasp just tiny bit of precious memory from the fading time.
WALKING AMONG THE LISU

By Bryan Lo, Wilson Lai, Jason Bootwala, Gordon Chiu - HKUGAC

During ten very educational days of exploring and learning, several activities were dedicated to delving deep into the cultures and traditions of the Lisu tribe.

To preserve the hunting culture of the Lisu people, CERS has been holding a crossbow festival every year, where Lisu people gather and participate. Without the contest, it is unlikely that the descendents of the Lisu people would remember the days past when their ancestors held a wooden crossbow and aimed it at their prey. The contest is more than just winning prizes and competing for honor. It gathers the tribe and acts as a medium to socialize and meet. It unites the tribe once again and reminds them of past times when they hunted together, ate together, and celebrated together.

This year’s festival was rainy, so it was a great surprise that around 80 Lisu people came to celebrate, including both men and women. The bad weather didn’t ruin the atmosphere. In fact, they all enjoyed their participation and surely had a lot of fun, and so did we.

Aiming with a crossbow is indeed a unique experience. Unlike aiming with a bow or a rifle, you have to raise the crossbow to your eye level to ensure an accurate shot. Holding the crossbow just like a rifle won’t do you any good, as the sight is not aligned with the arrow head. In the end, it will fly either above or below the bull’s eye. Without experience, it is certain that you will not be able to use the crossbow properly.

Although the crossbow culture can be preserved among the Lisu people through this festival, the hunting culture unfortunately will not be. The crossbow is important to the Lisu people, as their ancestors are said to have created this weapon, which then went viral in western societies. However, the method of preserving nature by the Lisu people is even more worthy of note, as it sustains the harmony between hunters and the environment, which can be hardly achieved by other hunting tribes.

CERS has done a great job in preserving the culture of the Lisu people, but it is up to the local people to determine whether or not the spirit of hunting can be kept in the future. On the second day of our visit, we followed CERS to a mountain that was full of a precious species – the Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkey. The Lisu believe that the Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkeys (Rhinopithecus bieti) were their ancestors, and so did hunt them. However, Lisu also relied on logging for their living. The forests were also the habitat for the monkeys, so to protect the monkeys, logging had to be stopped. As a result, the income of the Lisu could not be sustained. This was a problem that puzzled CERS and its partners; the trade-off between maintaining the Lisu people and their culture, or the habitat of the endangered monkeys. After years of negotiations, the Lisu decided not to log illegally. The loss in income was covered by the growth of tourism. Lao Yu, for example, used to be an expert hunter, but now is a forest guard taking care of a group of monkeys and arranging for visits by tourists. He stated that life for both himself and the monkeys is much better now in comparison to the past.

The food fed to the monkeys by Lao Yu is Song Luo, a kind of lichen that grows at a high altitude, which the villagers go up the mountain to pick. It is one of the main food sources for the Snub-nosed Monkeys, who will also pick tree buds to eat in summer. After their meal, they will groom each other’s fur, cleaning out bugs and other particles, and also as a way for enhancing social bonding. From the trip and the explanation from Dr. Bill, we all understand a lot more about this mysterious monkey living high up in the mountains.

Looking at the monkeys, it is more than a biology topic, it is about learning how to judge between different values, like whether the culture of the Lisu is more important, or the life of the monkeys, or the wilderness, habitats, and all sort of things. There is no perfect solution; it just depends on how you weigh each point of view, or if you consider this or that stakeholder. The trip to the monkeys was surprisingly inspirational. If anyone is willing to put time into a topic, knowledge is always there for us to learn.

We all filed into the van and drove to Gehuaqing Village to kick off the third day of our Lisu experience - to see the bee farms of the Lisu people. We got off at a small village and Dr. Bill immediately chipped; “Smells like a farm.” Indeed. We followed a local beekeeper to a trail behind the village, swamped with mud from the rain. We left behind the mud bricks and walls of the urban encroachment, and wandered deep into the thriving forest in the heart of the mountains.

Our trail converged with a creek that took a big bend. It ran along the bank and through the tall trees, cascading upon the tiny rocks, painting the perfect picture of nature. We hiked along the stream for a while before we stopped on a small hill, faced with a cabin (for the beekeeper) alongside what looked like numerous wooden barrels made from hollow logs, which were for the bees to nest in. The beekeeper stepped out of his gloomy cabin wielding a funny looking tin canister with a fire lit underneath. We all took a step back and held our breaths as we saw the master get to work. He knelt beside one of the logs, peeled open the wooden hatch a bit, stuck the spout of the canister into the crack and started puffing smoke from it into the log. This is said to help “sedate” the bees, preventing them from going on a stinging spree. He repeated the cycle until the hatch was fully opened. It revealed the dripping honey from the honeycombs, gleaming under the sunlight. A few bees flew in circles but appeared to be rather harmless. The fumes must’ve done their work.

A chunk of the honeycomb was sliced off, and Drolma divided it up into pieces for us to try. I took one between my two fingers, the warm honey oozing onto my skin, and...
popped it in my mouth before it got sticky. The sweetness of the goo resonated through my body. The whole directness and the purity of the product, extracted straight from the hives without artificial processing, added to the fulfilling taste of the honey. I stood there on the hill, overlooking the gentle stream flowing through the colourful rocks, the natural honey oozing down my throat, as I took it all in, the beauty of nature, the simplicity, yet tastefulness of it.

Dr. Bill’s lecture on bees was the highlight of the evening, as he talked about the science behind beekeeping. It turns out that beekeeping was very common among the Lisu people in Weixi, and that 16 families here have the surname Feng (蜂), which means bee in Chinese, in order to show their appreciation for the bees for being their main source of food and income. Bees are critical to human life, not just for honey, but also for their ecosystem services. They pollinate plants used for food and medicine, and also maintain diversity of flowers and plants. In modern beekeeping however, efficiency is the first priority; modern beekeepers would even feed them sucrose for production purposes, and sometimes bring in other bees, making local bees compete for nectar. Traditionally, however, the methods had a more gentle impact on the environment. The wooden log hives, in particular, are designed to allow the bees to come freely and construct their hives themselves, without too much human intervention. The beekeepers treat the bees with respect and receive the product, honey, in return. Sadly, nowadays, when most trust to more pragmatic and scientific approaches, perhaps such beautiful and important conservationist or environmental values will be lost along the way.

Interviewing locals is always the best way to get to know more about their culture. I was glad that CERS provided me such a precious opportunity to find out more about the Lisu people by interviewing the senior hunter, Lao Yu who now is a forest guard.

Yu is already a 70-year-old man now, but he started hunting when he was still a young child. Back then, he used to live next to the Jinsha River, the upper stretches of the Yangtze. He moved to Xiangguqing when he was 18 and has lived there until now. He was a famous hunter with numerous hunting skills and methods before the government banned hunting and turned this place into a national park.

The interview was memorable as I have never been so close to a foreign culture, especially such a minority group. Yu shared his hunting experiences and memories with me. They were all unique and cannot be searched online or found in books. Hunting is an essential tradition for the Lisu, and banning it will definitely result in the fall of the culture. Therefore I thought it might not be a good thing for Yu to abandon hunting and become a forest guard. However, what I got from Yu was beyond my expectation.

“My life quality has improved after being a ranger.” said Yu. His answer was not what I would have thought. He explained that being a ranger allows him to have more income and enjoy a better material life. Unlike in the past, he can live in a larger house with a less dangerous and tiring career now.

The interview was a great lesson for me as I had been thinking about how the Lisu can keep their culture and how we can help them. In fact, Yu’s answer reminded me that my thoughts are only applicable for people from developed areas. Only they will try to keep and preserve a culture, but never think of the people who may suffer from it. As a person living in Hong Kong, a developed city, I could not think of any reasons to oppose preserving a culture before the trip, but now I question it. Should we only fulfill our wants while sacrificing those of others? Yu is the litigant on this issue and he should be the one to choose his destiny, not me, and not anyone besides the villagers. The controversy on whether to preserve a culture or not may be endless, but it must have a balance of the interests of both sides. There may not be a way to solve such problems now, but I do hope one day we can find solutions which lead to a win-win situation.
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. 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 animation films can be seen on the CERS website. This year a group of 10 students, with their teacher, joined CERS in Alishan, Taiwan for two weeks.

The Duke-Stanford Student-Athletes Civic Engagement Program (the Duke-Stanford Group), is a group of 10 student athletes. This is the second summer that CERS hosted this particular group and they stayed at the Zhongdian Center for three weeks, teaching local children English and sports. The Duke-Stanford Student-Athletes Civic Engagement Program is a pioneering jolt program between the two universities to send athletes in various sports to developing countries to broaden their experience in practicing their sports as well as to provide health and environment related service to local communities. They all play different sports ranging from basketball to fencing. The students truly embraced the opportunity of working out a few hours every day at a high altitude of 3300 meters and interacting with the local Tibetan children on a daily basis.

Deerfield

A group of five teachers joined CERS in Zhongdian in late June for an excursion trip, including Heather Wakeman who is Global Studies, Sustainability & Service Fellow of the Center for Service and Global Citizenship at Deerfield Academy. She led a professional development trip with 3 other Deerfield faculty members: Michael Cary, Emma Coffin, Cindy Feng and Will Speer. A seasoned traveller, Heather brought along her global perspective and cheerful curiosity to enliven the experience for everyone. Valerie Ma, a Deerfield graduate and serial intern with CERS, acted as liaison and enthusiastic tour guide. The trip also gave the Deerfield teachers an introduction to our CERS Zhongdian Center and project sites so that they could recruit participants for next year’s regular summer session.

HKUGAC aims to provide a holistic education in a predominantly English environment in which students can discover the joy of learning through hard work, perseverance and creativity. By offering 9 students the opportunity to participate in CERS Trip in Yunnan since last summer the College helps students develop the capacity for empathy and become responsible, compassionate, inquiring, and globally minded people who contribute to the society. Next year, more students will be exploring in other research sites of CERS in summer and winter times.

Audrey Chan is 19 years old and currently a sophomore at Harvard University studying Anthropology and East Asian Studies. 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. As a fifth-year intern, she joined the CERS team on a mini expedition to Ge Nyen sacred mountain, as well as the cities and outskirts Lithang and Batang county towns. She particularly enjoyed interacting with local villagers and nomad families, for the relationships she built with them inspired her interest in ethnography which she looks to further explore in school.

Hsiang Hsiang Liu is 23 years old and currently a master’s student studying in Imperial College, London. She was born in Hong Kong, but has lived in Singapore and Taiwan and had education until 10th grade then moved to Germany to complete her high school education. Then she continued to university in United Kingdom. “This is my first experience with CERS and it was extraordinary. We went from deep down below the sea to high above 4,000m in a month, and there were so many opportunities of working out a few hours every day at a high altitude of 3300 meters and interacting with the local Tibetan children on a daily basis.

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The mission of the China Exploration and Research Society is to enrich the understanding of our cultural and natural heritage.