3 Hangzhou, Forty Years Ago and Now
8 Occupational Hazards of Being An Anthropologist
12 Journey to a Magic Place: Palawan
18 Exploring Upper Reaches of the Chindwin River
23 Into the Naga Hills
28 Where Nature Reigns
33 Tibetan Meditation-Medicinal Incense
35 News / CERS in the Media and Lectures
36 Thank You / Current Patrons

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Naga lady upper Myanmar
CERS team to Maoyon river source Palawan.
Underwater paradise, Palawan.
President’s Message

“What’s next?” That’s what today’s younger generation are focused on. The internet age has propelled the world towards a fast-track life and lifestyle, which is what the new generation wants to hear about and flock to. Even the business culture and goals today are geared toward fast return rather than long-term investment, instant gratification in one forum or another.

To ask the question “What was?” or “How back then?” seems passé, old-fashioned, and only for those of the last generation, those of my age and older. But when “disruptive innovation” becomes a generic term and a cliché for “the next big thing,” then “sustainable interest” in our cultures, traditions and heritage may have a renaissance.

CERS has a stable of old time supporters who care about the past. Not surprisingly, this A-list includes some very successful individuals in the business world. Almost all of them are well-read and knowledgeable beyond just having business-savvy.

Our supporters are a very special group not because of net worth or for being successful in business, but as people with dual-interests; caring for our culture and our environment. They care about our common past, as well as about our future destiny, committed to educating future generations. For that reason, many of these supporters even trust their children with us as interns. Writing a check may be easy for them, writing one attached with their kids is a strong vote of trust on top of commitment.

Idealism is becoming archaic? Not yet. Some of our former interns are now at the forefront of business participation themselves, even coming back as supporters of CERS. Certainly, investing in our next generation is good for the long-term.

Wong How Man
Founder/President CERS
Growing up, I disdained reading stories with sad or tragic endings. So, I formed the habit of reading the last chapter of a book first. If a happy ending was not assured, I would not commit my time to reading the front part, thus saving myself time, emotion, and a few tears.

But today, I cry even reading a comic. Every book I read is like a sad story, bringing tears to my eyes. With any reading that extends beyond twenty minutes or so, my eyes automatically start watering, an annoying byproduct of ageing, at least in my case.

So, it is with such strained eyes that I review photographs I took in 1977 in Hangzhou, now stored as low-resolution images in my computer. But this time, tears came to my eyes both from age, as well from my sweet and beautiful memories being abruptly taken away.

I have taken over a quarter million photographs in China since first visiting the country in 1974. The only time I would recall those nostalgic images would be when I revisited a place and wanted to compare the then and the now. So here I am, from a budding explorer to a seasoned one, revisiting Hangzhou after forty years of absence.

As the Chinese saying goes, “Above there is heaven, below there are Suzhou and Hangzhou,” a parody about the beauty and serenity of the two cities of coastal China. So, it is quite appropriate that, from the northern capital of Beijing, Qianlong, the most powerful and literarily sophisticated...
emperor of the Qing Dynasty, made six tours south of the Yangtze, each time stopping off at Hangzhou for extended stay.

Thanks to the courtesy of a dear friend Betsy of New York, who was celebrating her 75th birthday with relatives and close friends, I stayed at the posh Amanfayun Resort, directly adjacent to the most famous Ling Yin monastery in the suburbs of Hangzhou. We were treated to banquets with special performances. I felt particularly honored that all her guests had been friends of hers for decades, whereas I was a relatively new friend, yet also included in her very select guest list. Kevin Rudd, former prime minister of Australia, gave a lively address, and I was also given the opportunity to share my experiences in China.

As guests of this expensive resort, charging the likes of Rmb7,000 per one night stay, we have the small privilege of visiting the neighboring monastery anytime without entry fee. Otherwise, any visitor, pilgrim or tourist, would have to purchase a ticket for Rmb75 (USD12) to enter. Such an admission fee has become commonplace in China as the country has gone fully commercial. Even monks are becoming mercenaries.

“Ling Yin” literally means “spiritual and hidden”. Today, the monastery is hardly hidden, and certainly has compromised its spirituality by charging a fee to the large flow of supplicants who would otherwise be glad to make substantial financial offerings anyway. Busloads upon busloads of people arrive throughout the day.

It is only 7am in the morning, and I venture to make a quick circuit walk around the periphery before exiting,
as busloads of visitors are already arriving. But before the exit, there are several shops decked out with Buddhist memorabilia and mementos for visitors. While most are tourist trinkets, some items, especially cut glass or carved statues, command exorbitant prices. I suspect that such shops are commissioned to outside venders bent on cashing in on the goodwill of the pilgrims.

While tourists flood every famous site around Old Town, the West Lake, and religious or historical locations, our group is entertained to a most selective, choreographed visit, no doubt the best of what Hangzhou has to offer today. Despite the large number of cruise boats, large and small, on the West Lake, our pavilion of a boat allows us to sail around the lake in a leisurely manner with tea and other niceties served on board, prepared by the Four Seasons Hotel.

But the view, with all the car and foot traffic along the bank, is a far cry from that of 1977, a time barely at the end of the Cultural Revolution. Then there were few cars, none private, and only a few public buses, but lots of bicycles. I remember seeing young men with push carts around town, and propaganda murals and posters depicting Hua Guofeng, the successor of Chairman Mao, as well as the downfall of Chiang Qing, disgraced wife of Chairman Mao.

Today private cars, including all of the best-known brands, are choking up traffic. For the common folks there is a joke that normal people all use BMW - Bus, Metro and Walk. It takes us over an hour on a tourist bus to get from the West Lake to a specialty restaurant for lunch, as traffic comes to a stall during the weekends. Parked outside the restaurant is a full-gold Lamborghini. Some guard cones are set to protect it in case other cars might inadvertently scathe it.

I remember a joke, possibly a real event, that I read some time ago. A Saudi prince was sent to college. He wrote

▶
to his father, “Dear Dad, Berlin is wonderful, people are nice and I really like it here. But Dad, I am a bit ashamed to arrive at my own college with my pure-gold Ferrari 599GTB, when all my teachers and fellow students travel by train.” The father wrote back, “My dear loving son, 20 million USD has just been transferred to your account. Please stop embarrassing us. Go and get yourself a train too.”

Alibaba, one of the highest valued companies in the world, has its home in Hangzhou. Its new-gained wealth must provide the Gennie in answer to the wishes of many of China’s nouveau riche class.

I have a most educational visit to Hu Qingyutang, an old Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) store founded in 1874. The architecture is exquisite, with carved motifs throughout the large premises. The German apprentice who introduces the concepts of Chinese medicine to us has been studying here for eight years. His systematic explanation provides the most basic, yet comprehensive, understanding for us.

Despite our group being mostly westerners, they learn to appreciate the long tradition of Chinese medicinal knowledge, including how it complements modern western medicine. There was museum display of the history of TCM as well as rooms with specimens of rare animals traditionally used in Chinese medicine, though these species are now endangered and no longer available in the open market. Visiting the dispensary and observing the pharmacists in action is perhaps the highlight of our visit. Hung above is a framed photograph of Xi Jinping visiting. It seems to ensure the correct dosage and portion
During a sumptuous dinner banquet, we are entertained to a performance of the Sichuan face-changing act. The solo actor performs a rendition to the awe and applause of the audience, as his smooth and precise movements change the mask on his face within milliseconds, with a swing of his sleeves or a subtle turn of his body.

In today’s world, it seems such a skill could be very useful in a figurative sense. Though for me, I ponder in my mind whether symbolically Hangzhou can be given such a facelift to the days in the 1970s, when serenity reined and people were simple yet contented.

My friend Betsy Cohen from New York chose faraway Hangzhou for her 75th birthday celebration for a very obvious reason - her respect and affinity for Chinese culture, certainly not the city’s modern glamour. Her son Daniel who organized the event is Chairman of a New York bank that Betsy founded some years ago. Besides being an executive of the first order, his PhD is in Medieval Chinese Linguistics.

Historically, Hangzhou has been home to some of China’s literary greats, the likes of Su Dongpo and Yufei who wrote some of the most memorable classic poems and prose of all time. Today’s Hangzhou has gone through a major transformation. With prosperity, it seems that things are marching forward for the better. But perhaps it is also time to pause and think about returning Hangzhou to an epoch of the city’s literary past. A renaissance in the 21st Century would be very timely.
OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS OF BEING AN ANTHROPOLOGIST

(that we were not told in college)

By Astor Wong
Palawan, Philippines

It feels like I have been around for much longer, but in fact this trip to Palawan was indeed my third time on a CERS expedition. I was never the athlete type; I have trouble walking on concrete without tripping over my own feet. CERS’s explorations, as far I was told, would not be trekking-oriented. Yet somehow someone frail and physically inept like me wound up on three expeditions that involved hardcore hiking. And the five-day expedition to the source of Maoyon River was by far the most strenuous one I have ever participated in.

Allow me to briefly outline my outlook on anthropology as a discipline, so as to explain my role and expectations for this fieldtrip. The beauty of anthropology is the ‘bottom-up’ approach that we adopt in academic research. Unlike other social sciences that are more preoccupied with grand narratives and theories, anthropologists celebrate cultural diversities, appreciate deviations from ‘norms’, and reflect upon and challenge “the ordinary” embraced by mainstream society. In short, anthropology strives ‘to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange’. As a serious academic discipline of course anthropology also has its own elaborate theories and diverse schools of thought. Yet, what makes us different is the way we arrive at and apply those theories. Anthropology centers upon fieldwork, our research data mainly come from participant observation, interviews and ethnographies; we emphasize gaining personal experience and insights from local people through prolonged interaction, so that mutual trust and deep meaningful relationships can be formed. Instead of imposing overarching theories on the subjects we intend to study, in anthropology, we try our best to blend in and let stories unfold from the inside.

As an anthropologist, my major assignment for this expedition was to interview the indigenous Batak people, a tribe with less than 300 individuals. Minimal research on the tribe has been done previously by anthropologists, thus the conservation and documentation of their culture are becoming imperative, especially as their customs are decaying day by day with the intrusion of market economy. –My first encounter with the Batak dated back to the CERS Palawan expedition last March. For my second visit I was hoping to achieve a more in-depth understanding and a chance to build ties with the people by staying at their village for a longer time. My expectation, however, was constrained by the duration of the expedition – a mere five days. Worse still, I was told the day before the start of the expedition, that, due to logistical arrangements, I had to follow the rest of the team treading to the source of the Maoyon River, instead of staying at the Batak Kayasan Village for interviews. I had been with CERS long enough to learn
to adapt to spontaneity and to improvise. Little did I know that I was completely forgetting my wobbly and clumsy body.

I used to think of hiking as a sport of perseverance – I thought that even for someone for whom the athletic gene seems to be absent, it would be possible to complete any hike with enough endurance. But we were, quite literally, ‘cutting’ across the forest, as the Batak slashed a way through the bushes and vines with their machetes. There was no road or path of any sort to start with. Finding ourselves walking at the very brink on the mountainside, one could tumble down the valley with any slight inadvertence. But the ultimate challenge was definitely the countless river crossings. We needed to stride through the slippery riverbed, which required first-class balance skills. I couldn’t help but consider myself a huge burden to the team, as I could hardly manage to cross the stream without the help of at least two Batak. At first, I insisted on changing into my slippers every time I cut across water, as my trekking shoes got extremely soggy and heavy once soaked in water. However, into the third day of the expedition, I gave up and decided to walk in slippers in order to save time and effort. After all, the Batak, who helped us to carry all our supplies and baggage throughout the expedition, were wearing flip-flops all along – some of them even trekked bare foot. Of course it did not end well; they were much more competent than I was at trekking – it’s in their veins through years and years of practice foraging in the mountains. As for me, I struggled all the way in my slippers, hopping over boulder after boulder, striding across raging streams with my worn out, sore body.

This was undoubtedly one of the toughest journeys in my life. In university, we were told to expect to stay at remote locations with poor hygiene standards and without modern technology, but what I went through in this expedition was way beyond my worst apprehensions. One of the major setbacks of such a physically demanding expedition was that I was completely burnt out by the trekking itself; focusing all my energy in merely surviving. So I was not in my best shape when I conducted interviews and carried out participant observation, and at any rate there was not much time for carrying out research.

Despite all the hardship and limitations, I do regard this expedition as extremely fruitful. On a personal level, the sense of achievement upon conclusion of the expedition was truly immense, as I had managed to conquer, not nature, but the weakening inside of me. As for the research, roaming in the land of Batak enabled me to interact with the more secluded tribal people that would have been out of reach if I had stayed only
at Kayasan Village. Kayasan can be considered as the frontier for the Batak people, the gateway for them to connect with the outside world. For that reason, most of the Batak that resided at Kayasan were more integrated into ‘modern’ society. In fact, some of the Batak, like Annalisa’s father, who is an indigenous healer, retreated to the mountains renouncing adaptation to ‘modern’ livelihoods. During the five day expedition, we witnessed Batak practicing spear-fishing and assembling bamboo rafts; we were told about local myths by Batak elders, and passed through lands of enigmatic taboos. I also had my palm read by our local guide Solio, who is said to have spiritual powers.

We could also see that the practice of shamanism and belief in animism are surprisingly alive, undeterred by conversion to Christianity. In one instance, Annalisa asked for a piece of ginger to protect her child from evil spirits that might attack on their way home in the dark. We were also told not to touch or even question about seven peculiar trees in the woods, most probably related to some kind of local taboo. Still, one could ignore the signs of modernization. Even deep in the forest, Batak were wearing modern clothing and smoking cigarettes bought from the city. The changes of traditional customs and beliefs in the midst of fast-paced modern development deserve further examination, and there is much work to be done.
Anthropology can be strictly academic and still profoundly meaningful. Anthropologists put their hearts and souls into documenting and analyzing culture in hopes of contributing to a deeper understanding of humanity, not just in pure academic terms, but also in a broader ethical sense – to increase compassion of humankind through understanding and appreciating differences. As the renowned anthropologist Ruth Benedict once said, ‘the purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences’. Scattered around the world in the most cloistered territories, living with otherwise inaccessible tribal groups, attentively observing and tirelessly documenting, taking a piecemeal approach to slowly progress towards grand ideals. While the moral obligation will require generations and generations of dedication and commitment, anthropology can also be more practical, with more measurable and concrete results. Applying anthropology to development management enables us to devise more culturally sensitive and community-based developmental plans, which can not only help indigenous people to improve their quality of life, but also contribute to conservation of cultural and natural heritage.

The Batak are facing a dilemma that is faced by many other indigenous tribes all over the globe – the struggle in the modern capitalism-driven world. One disastrous impact is that the need for money cannot be eradicated once created. They now ‘need’ to consume coffee and smoke cigarettes and they ‘need’ to wear modern clothes, and for them to fulfill such needs, they need money. It is no use looking back to when they could still sustain themselves solely from forest resources, agriculture and bartering; there are now needs that cannot be satisfied by nature anymore. How can they survive better in the market economy? The commercial foraging that the Batak are engaging in nowadays, including almaciga and honey collection, are not reliable sources of income: the government has banned almaciga collection in certain seasons and the market for honey is quite irregular and unstable.

Fortunately, from this expedition we saw vast opportunity for the Batak; from ethnic and eco-tourism to traditional craftsmanship. Although the expedition could not be considered formal anthropological fieldwork, it enabled me to make a preliminary assessment of their current way of living. I think there are quite a few ways that CERS might contribute to helping the Batak to improve their own livelihoods through long term projects.
The bright trunks of the dipterocarps rise up from the dark understory, straight, white and clean of branches or scars. Their double-winged nuts lie scattered everywhere on the ground. One of the guides picks up one of the large nuts and tosses it up high in the air. It twirls and spirals down like a child’s whirligig flying saucer toy. Soon, we are all tossing the seeds up and watching them spin as they come down.

We have reached this remote and magical spot on a trek into the wild in search of the source of the Maoyon River, the longest river in Palawan, which cuts west to east nearly across the entire centre of the sausage-shaped island. We started our hike on the 21st of April from the CERS base travelling by van to the end of the roads, already far upstream. Our CERS team includes Howman, filmmaker Xavier, anthropologist Astor, and enthusiastic intern Charlie Brown on his gap year before college. The key person on whom we will all rely for the next week is Joceline Condesa, who alternatively and sometimes simultaneously serves as project manager, liaison, translator, and head cook. We are met by a team with three two-wheeled carts that will be pulled by carabao, the dwarf swamp buffalo that are grazing peacefully nearby. Paulino, our new Batak staff, is joined by a grey-haired Batak elder who is also a shaman. They will be our guides. Several young Batak men and women from nearby villages join us as porters to carry the heavy tents and supplies after Bayatao Village, beyond which the carabao carts cannot go. We hike to old Kayasan Village, where we spend the night in the old village community centre, an open air pavilion set on the edge of the
jungle. There is heavy rain in the afternoon, but it clears by night, which is lucky, because I am trying out a new light-weight hammock and tarp, tied between two trees on the jungle’s edge.

The next day we continue up river, crossing the river from the right bank to the left, then soon crossing back again, hiking through old swidden fields near the river. At another river crossing, there is a young Almaciga tree Agathis philippinensis on the bank, its odd foliage obvious among the more conventional trees. Agathis is an ancient genus of broad-leaved conifers, and most of its members are known only from Australia or as ancient fossils. It is the sole source of the valuable almaciga resin upon which the Batak depend for much of their income. We hike up and over a steep ridge, then descend to the river again where we stop for lunch. Heavy rain begins, and we nestle beneath a tarp while the porters build themselves a lean-to shelter of bamboo roofed with banana leaves. The rain lets up and a pair of young men passes us on the river, pushing and pulling twin bamboo rafts upriver. They will use the rafts to float heavy bags of almaciga resin downstream.

We move from the river up the bank to a newly burned swidden field with two grass huts. An old woman and a young mother with three children are resting in the village when we arrive. While Charlie passes out children’s books to the kids, Astor and Joceline interview the old woman. Although she does not know her age, she remembers the “Civil War” when the Japanese were here, so she must be more than 80 years old. She tells us that she knows the medicinal plants in the forest and goes out to look for...
them whenever she is sick.

We also learn from her and the shaman that the rock cliffs and mountain above us to the northwest are sacred, including an imposing bare pillar of rock that is called Marepennis. Formerly cannibalism was carried out up there, as an offering to malevolent mountain spirits. The old woman still makes offerings to the mountain spirits – but just bananas, chickens, and so on. No one can hunt or clear fields or live up there because of the spirits. It is also inside the Underground River Protected Area.

Charlie and the others see a single monkey leap the gap between distant trees on the other side of the Maoyon River from our camp, but I am too late to the spot. The old woman had told us that the villagers hunt Wild Boar and monkeys, which the old woman agrees are delicious. According to the old shaman, in the past the Batak had to make an offering before hunting, but this is not done anymore.

Later I ask the shaman if it would be a good thing if we could bring tourists here to visit the Batak. He says it would be good if they could earn a little extra money from guiding and portage fees. I silently wonder if community-based ecotourism could bring some income to the local people, as it has in Luang Namtha Laos, and if it could help protect the wildlife.

On the morning of the 23rd, we push on early in the cool clear weather, heading for the First Confluence that I can see on my satellite map. We follow the stream almost all the way, passing up opportunities to shorten the hike by
climbing up and over the steep ridges that separate different sections of the river as it snakes in 360 degree bends. The weather gets hot after our morning meal, with sunshine bearing down. Some of our team are having difficulty crossing the rivers over the slippery, rounded stones and boulders. I remember the advice that I was given years ago when I first learned to do this in Guizhou, where our base camp below Fanjing Mountain could only be reached after 9 treacherous river crossings. Mozhe shitou guo he. “Feeling the stones, cross the river.”

We stop at a large cluster of huts where Charlie and the others order wild forest honey. This is honey collected from the hives of Giant Honey Bees Apis communis, which build their waxy comb nests out in the open on the undersides of tree branches. It is dangerous work to climb up to take these hives, defended by hundreds or thousands of aggressive, stinging worker bees. In one of the huts, a young monkey is tied to a post by a halter around its waist. It is a Palawan macaque, a subspecies of the long-tailed Crab-eating Macaque that is ubiquitous across much of southeast Asia. The poor thing is terrified, and grimaces and jaw smacks in fear whenever anyone approaches. On a hunch, I try grooming its fur, parting the soft hairs as if to look for lice or ticks. I don’t find any, but the trick works and the little animal immediately calms down and presents a shoulder to be groomed, then its head and back. I feel sorry for it when I have to leave. Later I watch one of the local girls doing the same kind of grooming on the head one of the Batak women on our team. The girl finds an abundance of black arthropods, which she crushes one by one on a special wooden blade made for grooming. The woman then shampoos her abundant wavy hair, washing in the river.

After the almaciga staging area, the trail is less obvious and often just involves hopping from boulder to boulder beside the river. It is slow, stressful and tiring work. By 3:30 we arrive at the first confluence, where two large streams come together to form the Babuyon River. After setting up my tarp in the forest nearby, I go out to sit between the two rivers and listen to their roaring. Perhaps the left fork has more volume, but the right fork looks steep and wild and interesting.

We have dinner beside the river. Along the way, we had spotted a large eel that had just been caught and killed by a local Batak, and we bought it for our dinner. Barbecued over the fire, the flesh is white and tough, but delicious. I learn later that this was a migratory Anguilla eel, which means that it began its life thousands of miles away in the middle of the Pacific ocean.

After dark, numerous small frogs come out to sit calling on boulders, where they are easy to catch with a flashlight. Freshwater prawns quickly gather around titbits of meat thrown in the water. It has finally become routine to climb in and out of my hammock, and I sleep soundly.
is well until I leave the hammock in the night to answer nature’s call. As soon as my feet touch the ground, they are swarmed by tiny biting ants.

The next morning, we continue on along the river to a temporary settlement where two or three Batak families are drying almaciga resin in a camp of thatched huts on stilts. The huts are overtopped by tall rainforest trees, and the camp is invisible on satellite images, hidden by the shading tree canopy above.

With Charlie, Joceline and four Batak guides, I continue on to Confluence 2, which is only a half hour away. Here, the river changes its name again where three streams converge, from left to right, the Tarabanan, Langgugan and Karuray, with the right most one apparently the largest. Our guides tell us that the next confluence, the ‘gateway’ to the four potential sources, is several days away, and it would require ropes to reach it, crossing over the infamous “Bye-bye” Cliff, where a misstep could lead to your last farewell.

The forest is old and dense here. An oddly branching Pandanas palm with prop roots stands erect beside the trail, seemingly out of place here far from any swamp or rock outcrop. We get a glimpse of a very large woodpecker with black back and red crest, a White-bellied Woodpecker, as it flies out from a tree on the river bank. It is here that we see the amazing huge dipterocarp trees and play with their...
whirligig seeds. Usually, these valuable trees are the first to go, cut for their valuable timber, which is known in the trade as Philippine mahogany, although it is not related.

We return to join the others still waiting at the hidden camp and soon we all start the hike back. We cross over a high pass, which considerably shortens the trip back, and descend down to the ‘Honey Village’ we passed through on Day 2, picking up the dozen or so large containers of honey already prepared. We quickly continue along the river heading downstream to a spot where three bamboo rafts made of freshly cut bamboo poles tied with strips of bamboo are already waiting for us. We are soon relaxing on the rafts as the Batak porters turn into expert boatmen.

Our trip ended far short of the goal that I had hoped for, but still the trail was well worth the effort. Among other marvels, I had never seen so many tall dipterocarps in one place, and all dropping their whirligig seeds. While not a journey into wilderness, it was nonetheless a taste of the wild and unique forests of Palawan and the Batak people who know them best.
For the last two weeks, my team and I have been exploring the upper reaches of the Chindwin River, a major tributary of the Irrawaddy. The area is home to the Naga people, former headhunters inhabiting the border of Myanmar and India.

We met our exploration boat HM Explorer docked at Khamti on the middle Chindwin River, waiting for me and my team to fly in from Mandalay. Just slightly over three months ago, I reached the source of the Irrawaddy River in southeastern Tibet, and now we are on one of the most important tributaries of the same river. I have always wanted to explore the Chindwin and its upper reaches. So far, it has brought me to Khamti four times, each time making an effort to go a little further and find out more upriver.

Now we are sailing upstream rather than upriver, as the Chindwin becomes only navigable to small boats. We abandoned the comfort of our boat with seven cabins, electricity and a well-stocked bar, and moved on to tiny sampan-like wooden boats with long-tail motors. Each of these boats can barely fit three persons, with the waterline a few inches below us. In case the boat tips over, we all have our life vests on. However, should the boat flip, these life vests may not be adequate to save us, as many water snakes are seen in this section of the river, swimming with their heads showing above the water.
About an hour into a narrow gorge, perhaps some fifty meters wide, we reach a whitewater rapid. This was the end of our exploration three years ago. This time, I am determined to continue and advance further. We change into a yet smaller boat, each taking two passengers, and challenge the fast running drop of the river to reach some protruding rocks adjacent to the rapids. We disembark onto a narrow wooden plank to get our feet on the rock. Helpers carried our bags, including tents and sleeping bags. Drinking water, snacks such as power bars and cookies, and even beer, are important amenities for such excursions. The last item is particularly important for boosting our energy.

A quick hike up past a convenience store in a shed and then we descended some boulders. Three larger cargo boats were moored along the side. We boarded one, about ten meters in length, and the big diesel engine roared upstream with the eight of us. Fifteen minutes later, another rapid appeared in front. We again dismounted from the cargo boat and hiked some more, this time above and around a small mound of rocks, and descended to take yet another boat that was smaller, but nonetheless could fit us all.

Within a matter of two hours, we had switched boats in relay four times before reaching Taikti Village. Along the way, the many big and small gold mining operations along the river were both alarming and disheartening, especially for a naturalist like Dr. Bleisch, our Science Director in the team.
We are now at the border of Sagaing Division and Kachin State. A small army camp guards the beach where the boat dropped us off. A soldier with a semi-automatic rifle paced the riverbank to keep an eye over traffic passing, or trespassing. The Kachin Independence Army (KIA), an insurgent group that has existed in upper Myanmar for decades, are said to roam nearby. The group controls much of the hill country within Kachin State, from the Indian border all the way across to the Chinese side in Yunnan. The Myanmar government may have a tenuous hold on transportation and communication routes only.

Sandra, our young and capable Myanmar Country Manager, went ahead to negotiate with the Army for us to continue the river journey. She came back disappointed, as a special permit must be issued at Khamti. I reckon this will be the farthest north on the Chindwin we will reach, for now.

We are here during winter’s low water season, but from markings on the riverbank trees, I can surmise that, during high water rainy season, the Chindwin will overflow the banks, and the entire beach will disappear. We proceed up the hill as the village is within a fifteen-minute walk from where we land.

We visit the village with one main street, stopping by two Naga bamboo houses. I see a motorcycle coming by carrying a camouflage-clothed militia man with machine guns on his back. The place seems always on the alert and militarized, even for some civilians. After an hour or so of roaming the village, we begin our journey back.
By now in the afternoon, river traffic has virtually stopped up and down river. We manage to hire a boat, but the owner is only willing to go part of the way. We stop for the night to camp out along one of the many sand banks. The bonfire made from some gathered drift wood keeps the winter evening warm and cheerful.

Using the same fire, Zaw Phyoe Aung, our boat chef, and Wai Phyoe Thant, our boat captain, help warm up the pre-cooked food we brought along. In such a location and situation, simple fried rice tastes better than a full meal of multiple dishes on our boat. Even the junk food I brought along is junky no more.

The following morning, like every morning since we arrived in Myanmar, was very foggy and visibility was only ten meters or so. The sky usually would not clear up for a couple of hours after sunrise. Bill Bleisch, again like every morning, would roam the nearby forest to seek out birds from their songs. And here we were lucky to see a few Pied Hornbills gliding high above us, crossing the Chindwin River.

At many locations where we spent the night, Bill would set up camera traps and went to bed with the hope of retrieving photo images of some nocturnal animals in the forest the following morning. Though mostly disappointed, naturalists today must learn to live on hope, given the state of our modern world. Our young intern, Charlie, joining us during his gap year, provided some additional hope for the future.
Xavier documented as much as possible on film. Not only points of interest, but the record of our own activities may become important archival data someday, perhaps decades from now. Looking back at our earlier footage taken during expeditions some thirty years ago reveals much of value that is both historic and no longer exists, or even nostalgic.

At mid-morning, we hike to a nearby gold mine camp and negotiated a boat to continue our journey back downstream to our base boat, again going through the relay of four different types of boats, but in reverse order. Unlike some explorers today who are fixated on reaching a destination in one go, I have always been prepared to turn back when the situation prohibits further advances. Nonetheless I don’t simply take “No” as an answer, and would instead push for a conditional “Yes”. It seems to work time and again, though at times I would have to return after a long hiatus to secure a “Yes” to further my exploration.

So far, the uppermost Chindwin continues to evade my full exploration. For now, I have to satisfy myself by moving my fingers upstream on my iPad satellite image of the river, enlarging a whole region where jungle and river merges, with occasional plains where the river has left immense footprints of dozens, even scores of ox-bow lakes. Those look like perfect resting and wintering grounds for migrating birds from the Tibetan plateau to the north beyond the eastern Himalayas.

I know some day, hopefully soon, I will set my feet upon that beautiful landscape.
On January 19 we set off from the HM Explorer berthed on the Chindwin River just below Khamti town. We switch from the comfortable boat to two modified pick-up trucks for the road ahead into the north and west. While intern Charlie Brown, film-maker Xavier Li and Myanmar Coordinator Daw Sandra sit in the “air seats” bolted to the cargo bay of the truck, enjoying the dusty view, I opt for the more confined but less dusty cab, riding shotgun with the young Naga driver. The driver and I make small talk on the way in broken English and Burmese. His father is a soldier stationed near the town, and we stop briefly to meet him. The son is obviously proud of his new job as a driver, and he calls out the names of the towns as we travel through them. At Lahe town, 1,005 m above sea level, it is already 13:40 and I am hungry. Howman knows this town well, since it was the scene of the annual Naga Festival last year when he attended. This year the festival is in a more remote location, and we have decided to follow another route instead of attending the somewhat staged assembling of the tribes.

We stop to have a quick lunch and register with the police, then get back in our positions in the pickup trucks and continue on, passing some nice patches of forest, but there is progressively less forest as we continue on travelling west. Instead, we pass very large swidden clearings, where the trees and brush have recently been cut and are now drying before burning. The brush will be burned to release its nutrients, and then a mix of crops will be planted in the ashes – hill rice, beans, Job’s tears, pumpkins and gourds. ❯
A Black Eagle soars low near a hilltop, the first I have ever seen. We descend steeply to a river, then ascend along the river to Makyan village, arriving at 18:30 as dusk descends. Here, the houses are large with thick elaborate thatched roofs like over-turned boats. Nearly everything here seems to be constructed from bamboo or palm; the walls, the fences, the churches and the schools. Even the children’s jumping ropes are made of bamboo.

We eat and sleep in the morung house, which is the traditional men’s club of a Naga village. It also has sweeping thatch eaves and crossed bamboo ornaments with tassels above the entrance. To the right of the entrance is a totem pole and inside is huge drum made from a single enormous tree trunk. Heavy, double-sided, wooden beaters sit on top of the drum. The morung would have traditionally housed all of the young men of the village, who would be constantly ready to respond to any alarm of an attack or an interloper looking for victims. The defences were essential, as the Naga were traditionally raiders and head hunters. The last reported case of head hunting was in the 1990s on the Indian side of the border, but village feuds have continued right up to the present day.

The next morning, we have barely packed up the breakfast things when it is time to set off off again to another village, Tsawlaw near the Indian border. There we stop so Howman and Sandra can purchase more artefacts for the CERS collection.
In Tsawlaw, there is also a large morung communal house, with a huge community drum labelled 2008 and again carved from a single trunk of about 1.5 meters diameter and 12 meters long. I sit in the clan house and imagine. In old accounts, it is said that raiders would return with the heads of their enemies and hang them inside the drum, after which the men of the community together would beat out a victory song on the wood. As the heads bounced up and down in resonance with the drum beats, the men would call out jeers and mock them. Afterwards, however, the heads would be carefully cleaned and the skulls given a place of honour on a frame, there to bless the village and share their spiritual power.

We continue on stopping briefly in several villages along our way. Howman’s strategy has been to go out as far as allowed, then stop at different villages along the way back. At each village, if time allows, I peak under the eaves of the roofs to see if there are skulls on display. Many houses have skulls of water buffalo or mithun cattle hanging on their front walls, reminders of past feasts hosted for the village by the household. The mithun are semi-domesticated forest cattle unique to this part of the world. Inside or outside the houses, there are also often racks of other smaller skulls; wildlife killed on the hunt. I recognize many Wild Boar and Muntjac skulls, and there are also rarer skulls – the Chinese Serow, a dark-haired goat-antelope that can scale cliffs, and carnivores that may be civets or badgers. And there are primate skulls. Many have the prominent snouts, deep brows and raised sagittal crests of macaque monkeys, but some have enlarged crania and flat faces, making me guess that they may be from gibbons. The Western Hoolock Gibbon has been reported from this region, and local people tell us that, living in the forests, there is a black “monkey” with no tail that sings in the morning, which is a perfect description of the gibbon. The skulls look so human that it is easy to imagine the fathers of these Naga hunters taking human heads instead of gibbon heads.

On January 20, we stop in Makyan Village for the night, and are invited to sleep in the school house, which has been vacated by the teachers. Makyan is a large village with a good school, a church, a Buddhist stupa and a newly built morung with totem pole, all perched on a hilltop above the village houses. The morung is a large open structure, but the construction, with posts and beams of wood and split bamboo for walls, is not that different from the regular houses. After dusk, we see that several large bonfires have been started in the village below. Charlie and I descend to have a look, and we are immediately invited to sit in the circle of men and boys around one of the fires. Soon, I am also given a bamboo thermos full of warm, sour rice wine. It has a bamboo straw that is fitted on the opposite end with an ingenious woven strainer made of bamboo to keep the unhusked rice.
out of the stream of liquid. The wine has been prepared by the women of the village, and many of them are now inside the house preparing pork meat. Charlie and I leave to return for dinner with our colleagues just as the food is being distributed. One of the men rushes after us and gives each of us a hot piece of roasted fat-back. It is chewy, greasy and delicious.

That night, the others sleep inside the village school, among the desks and chairs, but I decide to try out the new CERS down sleeping bags, setting up my bed outside in the pavilion above the village. The bonfire party in the village below continues late into the night. I can hear the men chatting, and one man continually sings a droning chant, which is not unpleasant to my ear. There are also occasional choruses of yips and yells, which remind me of the Hollywood versions of Native American war cries from the old cowboy and Indian films that I watched when I was a kid in the US. I drift off to sleep finally, but at some point, very late in the dark night, a resounding chorus is issued, seemingly from all the men at once. After that, some men disperse, others stay on even later, talking and singing.
tickelli is missing. It is remarkable that five species of these fascinating birds occur in this region, but for how much longer? How long can these slow breeding birds hold on, with so little forest left and so many hunters, who are now hunting not only for their own use, but also to provide curios for sale to ignorant tourists.

Back on the HM Explorer and heading down the Chindwin River, I can’t help thinking about our Naga experience. Listening to the news, I can see a direct connection between the Naga men’s evening drinking parties and the tailgate parties that are planned for next week’s Super Bowl in the US. How typical was the Naga pattern of inter-village rivalry, raiding and warfare during the long pre-history of human evolution? Perhaps in the distant past, any human group whose members did not fight together, defending their village and raiding those of rivals, would not have thrived or survived. Comradery, loyalty to tribe, reverence for heroes, hatred of other groups - how many human traits are wrapped up in ancient necessities like that? Are there still lessons to be learned from the Naga?

What is the cause for this drunken celebration? I imagine that in the past it might have been the culmination of a successful head-hunting raid, or perhaps a male bonding ritual held in preparation for village warfare. Men’s gatherings like this might have been a necessity to ensure that the men fought bravely for their community.

In the morning we learn that the celebration was in fact for the completion of communal construction of a new house, which stands out from its neighbours by the colour of its roof thatch, still fresh and green. After breakfast, Sandra and Howman go on a collecting spree, and Charlie catches the fever as well. Prize purchases include hand woven blankets with traditional patterns, a bamboo drinking thermos complete with strainer straw, a pair of spears and a shield made of buffalo hide. I scold Howman and Sandra for purchasing more hornbill heads. Four species of Hornbills are now represented in Howman’s collection of heads: Oriental Pied Hornbill Anthracoceros albirostris, Great Hornbill, Buceros bicornis, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Aceros nipalensis, and Wreathed Hornbill, Rhyticeros undulates. Only Tickell’s Brown Hornbill Anorrhinus
The boy Jogelyn, barely a teenager, climbed up the side of the riverbank. With a sweep of the machete, he chopped down two blades of banana leaf and carried them over to the raft. Paulino pointed first to our bags tied to a tripod made from tree branches, then at my head. I got the cue and proceeded to cover our gear with one long leaf, and draped the other over my head.

Jogelyn returned the machete, and Paulino returned it to its wooden sheath slung to the left side of his hip. Our only mode of communication was by way of hand gestures, the simplest ones. But it seemed totally adequate in a place where life is simple and time is slow.

Momentarily rain started dropping, quickly picking up to become a downpour. The rainy season has started. Obviously the two members of the Batak people with me must have smelled it coming, and took the precaution just in time for me, and my gear. I tore off part of the long leaf in front of my face, so as to see Paulino and what’s in front. He was not missing a beat in poling the bamboo raft down the river.

The water is still low, as the dry season has just come to an end. Even going downriver, poling is crucial to attain a bit of speed. But speed here, even with human power acceleration, is still calm and slow. The only sounds were those of birds, crickets and cicadas, and...
of course the wind or breeze against the trees. There are dozens of small rapids. Some we cruised through with ease, a few required maneuverings around small rocks. Still others required Paulino and the Jogelyn to hop off the raft and guide it through. No sweat is expended at such locations as the water is quite cooling.

After a while, the rain was pouring so hard that it hit me from the side. At this point, the banana leaf, at least the one over my head, was just symbolic. I could have thrown it aside. But symbol is very important to hill tribes like the Batak, barely 300 individuals remaining. Suffice to note that a book based on a study done between 1966 and 1981 by James Eder, an American anthropologist, is titled “On the Road to Tribal Extinction.”

I must keep the leaf over my head, as a symbol of respect toward their care and the courtesy accorded me. Metaphorically, I am one among 1.3 billion Chinese, cared for by 2 of the only 300 Bataks. How minuscule am I when compared to such a special pedigree. This is when small numbers trump big data, I reminded myself, priceless as opposed to priced. How pitiful it is that our world, the larger world, has been turned on its head based on big data and large numbers. I feel fully honored, right here among nature and the Batak.

Earlier, right before parting ways with the rest of my team to go on my solo exploration, I jokingly suggested to Astor, our staff anthropologist, that she should start a Friends of the Batak Foundation. Now I have my doubts. Are we worthy companions of becoming their friends? Friends of people living so close to nature.

My decision to leave the main expedition was made in order not
to hinder the rest of the team. The Batak, perhaps four of them, quickly cut down 18 pieces of long bamboo off the side of our breakfast break area, tied them together with strips of bamboo to fashion a flimsy-looking, yet sturdy-in-function, raft for my escapade.

My mind drifted back to the raft I’m now on, with the bamboo floating two to three inches under water, thus the same for my feet and shoes. The thunder seemed to come from behind us, chasing us to “hurry” down the river. I could see dark clouds obliterating the mountains, like a giant screen to the right of me. With huge caves and pinnacles, these karst monoliths are where the rest of my team currently are heading, the foothill of the perpendicular cliffs that seal the western seacoast and beaches from the rest of the long island of Palawan. They are on the way to track down the source, or one of four main tributaries, of the Maoyon River.

My expedition has been reduced to three persons, myself and the two Batak helpers. But “my” real expedition has not abated or evaporated. It has simply split into two. On the first day out, I rode a two-wheeled carabao cart with another one hauling our supplies trailing behind. Path became trail, and trail became niche line, until the buffalo could go no further. I moved on with my legs. On the second day of the hike, I decided I had become a liability than an asset. We have carried with us only five days of supply, water and food, on this march. I was told in no uncertain terms that at the rate I was going, it would take at least seven days for the return trip.

Furthermore, my legs seem not to lift high enough to clear many of the branches and debris on the ground and I tripped many times, though not tripping over. The understory of the forest is filled with deadwood, stumps, roots, and tendrils. This trek through the jungle is a far cry from hiking on the Tibetan plateau where there is hardly any overgrowth higher than your ankle. Let alone that I usually ride horses on such expeditions. In order not to starve our fellow members for the last two days, I bowed out, not bailed out, and decided on taking a “cruise” downriver. Not a bad alternative for someone my age, ex-explorer yet to be.

Suddenly, Paulino’s knife, or machete, is out of the sheath again. He passed it to Jogelyn with just one word. Jogelyn jumped off and was chasing something in the shallow water. For a moment I thought it must be a water snake, as such reptiles frequent these waters. I have seen many during two occasions when I rafted down the Maoyon over the last two years. Paulino pointed to the right, then to the left. Apparently, whatever it was must be taking evasive action trying to escape.

Then Jogelyn grabbed the moment and the knife went down once, just once, right near the bank with heavy overgrowth above head in this jungle stretch. When he next put the knife into the water, he raised it with a
large lizard, perhaps a Palawan Monitor Lizard, hanging over the knife. He dropped the animal and proceeded to get back on the raft. The Palawan Hornbill’s cried suddenly above head on some tall trees rising to the sky. It may just be a funeral requiem song to the law of the jungle.

The night before, our entire team of eight and as many Batak people were gathered at the “town hall” of Kayasan village. We set up three tents and two hammocks for the night. Dr. Bill, as always, preferred to be at a distance and hung his hammock with mosquito netting under two trees. I set up mine against two poles of the villagers’ meeting kiosk with corrugated roof. Three tents were also set up under the same roof. Jocelyn and Mary chose to sleep on the floor, covered by two mosquito nets. The Bataks sat around the fireplace and retired to their respective homes or shelters later in the night.

Analiza, holding a months-old baby with another toddler tugging along at her leg, brought over a heavy jar of wild bee honey. She had been at our service on two rafting trips before and knows we like the stuff. At today’s commodity prices, 700 peso a kilo is a steal for such natural honey of the highest grade. As we went deeper into the jungle, the same kilo would feel heavier, yet the price would go down from 700 to 500 and at the remotest depth, perhaps only 400 or less per kilo. Such is the trail of commodities as it goes from source to market.

The almaciga resin, also called Manila Copal, follows the same pattern from where the Batak tap these rare trees, to becoming furniture varnish in Europe, or incense addictive for new-age meditation/yoga addicts, or exclusive coating for top violins. The prices adjust according to distance traveled, and hands changed.

Analiza revealed to us that, on last March’s difficult hike to a high mountain cave, she was actually already pregnant with this new baby, yet did not want to tell us. With the declining numbers of the Batak, a new baby should be most welcome, the more the merrier.

I woke up at around 2:30 in the middle of the night as nature called. But here at Kayasan, nature really called. Our “townhall” kiosk had been transformed into Carnegie Hall, with surround-sound music of the night. The crickets and katydids chirping and beetles or other insects whirring formed a chorus throughout the jungle around us. Now and then I saw a flickering light, larger than usual, of a firefly passing our open kiosk. They too, must be among the audience in the theater.

There was even a Koel, the long-tailed bird common to much of Asia, somewhere on a tree, making its dual-note calls. I counted each time it called for eighteen times before taking a break, rising in pitch and octave like a soprano to a crescendo before tapering off. Bill would tell me in the morning that it is a tenor, not soprano, as the Koel is likely a male, making his mating calls to attract a female.

I fell back to sleep when the trombones came into play, as a few of our team members joined in this chorus of the jungle. I was later told that my snoring created the most resounding baritone for the symphony of the night.

My “cruise” on a half-submerged bamboo raft was about to come to an end. But before reaching a dirt road where an SUV would be waiting, I went through some little-known patches. Little-known, that is, to us outsiders. The Batak knew these recesses like the backs of their hands. In between I ran into groups of one or a pair of Batak people, either building a raft or...
on the way to a hunting/collecting trip. The almaciga grows only deeper in the forest and those Batak on such collecting expeditions would disappear from home for a month at a time.

As we rounded another corner in the river, I saw a young woman with a child, perhaps twenty and two respectively, squatting on a bar of river stones and washing herself. She was pouring water over her shampooed hair with the baby lingering around. Completely naked from the waist up, she rubbed down the contours of her body and continued with her routine without as much as a glance at us. At that moment, I knew they are among true nature, and belong as one of its kindred souls.

Perhaps for just a short moment, I felt I had also been baptized by the water of the Maoyon River. With the law of the jungle, that bible of the Batak people that they abide to, I felt a sudden relief. I have not abandoned my expedition after all. I have only diverted myself to explore and seek for something even deeper than the source of this river.

For the majority of us who are baptized instead by the internet age, I hope we would only slow down, stop, and think for a moment longer. We too may just be able to listen to the call of the forest, as well as to the tweets of the last remaining Batak people. Yes, here their numbers are small, yet far more intimate. Let the supercomputers and the wonks at Cambridge Analytica deal with those big numbers. They are totally meaningless, frivolous and irrelevant as far as the jungle of Palawan is concerned.
There are three main types of Tibetan incense. The simplest is for time keeping, usually burning slowly due to the thinner air and lower oxygen on the high plateau, yet perfect as a time keeper since early days. Thus the term, “a stick of incense in time” as a basic unit of calculation. Senior monks may use such incense to mark the time for prayers, or in timing sections when teaching young monks to chant.

Another kind of incense, usually with stronger fragrance, is for environmental purification and cleansing. Among aristocrats and the wealthy with ceremonial costumes, it is normal practice to loan or exchange clothes to maintain diversity. As embroidered clothes cannot be washed, fragrant incense is used to smoke them after use, as a way of cleansing and sterilization.

The most complicated and valuable incense is used for meditation and has medicinal quality, concocted with special Tibetan herbs and medicinal plants. The Tibetan term for such incense is “Sum Bu”, “Sum” meaning “sleep well” and “Bu” signifying a long pillar.

Those made in famous monasteries, like the Mindroling monastery in central Tibet, produce a special aroma and have been circulated among Tibetans for centuries. Traditional incense made to these exacting formulas is extremely hard to find and now has become rare and very expensive. It is said to have special qualities for overcoming sleeplessness and insomnia. High monks use such incense also for meditation, and they are of special value as offerings.

Today, due to the huge numbers of Buddhists who patronize Tibetan Buddhism, many brands of Tibetan incense are flooding the market. Some are delivered in very elaborate packaging and sold to the high-end market or to wealthy supplicants. One particular incense lists its ingredients as including powder from musk deer scent pods and pangolin scales; both are products of endangered wildlife that should be under protection. ➤
The CERS collection of Tibetan incense comes from many regions of the plateau. The most unique is that specially prepared by the Luoga Rinpoche, a Living Buddha born in Lijiang in 1964. He was identified at three years old as the 17th reincarnation of the Luoga at Kangguo monastery, his head monastery in Qinghai’s Nangchen County. Luoga Rinpoche began his medical study at the age of 14 under the tutelage of a great Tibetan medical master. In 2006 he became the honorary director of the Chinese International Medical Institute.

CERS has visited the root monastery of Luoga Rinpoche in northwestern Yunnan at the base of the meditation cave of Damozushi, the first Indian sage, or First Master, who brought Buddhism to China. This is where his now famous Tibetan incense is carefully crafted, using an ancient formulation of Tibetan plateau herbs. The most important base is the roots of high altitude juniper, ground into powder. To this are added at least four other scented woods; eaglewood, sandalwood, clove and frankincense.

The packaging is beautifully done in a bark container, with each case holding 108 pieces of select incense, synonymous with 108 volumes of the Kanyur, the most important Tibetan Buddhist sutra, mirrored also in the 108 beads in a Tibetan prayer rosary. Such incense is often called “Wo Xiang”, meaning “sleeping incense”, as they can be burnt by placing the stick lying down sideways. Special incense boxes, some cast in metal, others constructed of hard wood beautifully painted over, are made for such purpose, to place the incense sideways. It just so happens that the incense is also good for sleeping disorders. It can of course also be burnt upright, and a small ornamental plate is included in the package for this purpose.

This blessed product is in great demand and usually does not reach the market, as almost everything produced is pre-assigned to Buddhist worshippers and monks from Taiwan.
CERS inducted three new Directors. We welcome Janice Wang, Afonso Ma and Derrick Pang in joining the CERS board.

Mr John Strickland, retired Chairman of HSBC, joins CERS as our Advisor. John was formerly a Board Director of CERS.

CERS caving team, together with a professional team from Bulgaria, explored and mapped the newly discovered Wuyan Cave at Lu Xi County of Yunnan, and presented results to the local government with proposal for the cave’s protection and development.

Mr John Strickland, retired Chairman of HSBC, joins CERS as our Advisor. John was formerly a Board Director of CERS.

CERS caving team, together with a professional team from Bulgaria, explored and mapped the newly discovered Wuyan Cave at Lu Xi County of Yunnan, and presented results to the local government with proposal for the cave’s protection and development.

HM paid a visit to the Honorable Monk Hsing Yun at Fo Guan Shan in Kao Hsiung Taiwan. The monk, now 90 years of age and have following worldwide with over 300 temples, rarely receive visitors while recovering from a stroke and subsequent surgery two years ago.

Makoto Ando and Koji, professional photographer and environmental guide from Hokkaido Japan were guests of CERS in Myanmar, sailing on HM Explorer and visiting our site at Inle Lake.

The CERS library, consisting of an exclusive and focused collection of books on China’s minority nationalities, border region and adjacent countries, has been moved from our Tai Tam base to new premises in Shek O, making it more accessible to staff and scholars.

Astor Wong joined CERS as our Staff Anthropologist.

A small piece of land in Mandalay has been acquired with a planned building as base for the CERS boat HM Explorer. This would become the home of our boat crew and staff.

Ten students joined CERS annual program with Duke and Stanford University as summer interns and stayed at our Zhongdian Center for three weeks.

Ten HUKGAC students and two teachers joined CERS as summer interns between June and July at our Zhongdian Center and nearby project sites.

Saskia Siłewicz, a gap year intern from Cheltenham Ladies College in the UK, joins CERS for one year beginning September this year.

Oral history on film has been made of Felix Smith in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Captain Smith who turns 100 in 2018 has flown military mission in five wars in Asia, from WWII to China’s Civil War, then the Korean War, the French Indo China War and later the Vietnam War.

Dr Li Xueyou, together with Dr William Bleisch and Dr Jiang Xuelong, has just published their joint paper in the European Journal of Wildlife Research on “Wildlife on Rani Sacred Mountain”, a site above Benzilan and below the CERS Tibetan nunnery project site. Blue Sheep and Chinese Goral are surprisingly abundant there. This is their third co-authored paper for this year. CERS supported Dr Li, a scholar of Yi nationality, in his research for his PhD.

HM was keynote speaker for Julius Baer during their function in Hong Kong, and in Singapore.

Tibet Geographic Journal published a lengthy article on CERS and HM long years of exploration and conservation work in China.

Rhythm Magazine published an article by HM on his years of exploration and conservation work to commemorate the magazine’s 20th anniversary. (pix) scanned.

HM also gave a lecture at the Eslite bookstore in Taipei on “Exploration of the Yangtze River Source” to mark the same anniversary celebration of Rhythm Magazine. It was followed by a half-hour interview at the Dai Ai TV Station.

Several aviation museums in the US has selected the CERS film, “Three Centenarian Pilots” as their standard archival film for showing. They are the EAA Museum in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, the National Air Force Museum in Ohio, and the WWII Museum in New Orleans.

Ada Ho published a new book with several chapters describing her experience with CERS and our staff. HM penned the Foreword.

HM speaking for Julius Baer. Da Ai TV interview in Taiwan.

CERS in the media and lectures

TOP TO BOTTOM:
HM speaking for Julius Baer. Da Ai TV interview in Taiwan.
Betsy and Edward Cohen extended their major funding to CERS for our work on exploration, conservation and documentary film making.

The Moritz Foundation continues their major funding to CERS for 2018, an ongoing support that lasted over a decade.

The Tony & Shelly Malkin Foundation joins CERS in support of an upcoming project in Ladakh India in restoration the Banday House in Leh Old Town, home of a Ladakhi explorer from the 19th to 20th Century.

We thank Laurence Brahm in hosting our CERS expedition team during our stay in Lhasa at his Shambhala Hotel.

We thank Marie-Therese Heid from Switzerland for regularly assisting us in searching for old and important archival material and books on early exploration in Asia.

Katia Buffetrille, ethnologist and Tibetologist from the Sorbonne Paris joined CERS as instructor to our summer interns from Duke and Stanford.

CURRENT PATRONS

HONG KONG / OVERSEAS

- Gigi Ma Arnoux
- Charles Brown
- Dr Joseph Chan
- Ingrid Ehrenberg & Joe Chan
- Eric Chen
- James Chen
- Choy So Yuk
- Betsy Cohen
- William E. Connor
- Judith Ann Corrente
- Ester Goelkel
- William Fung
- Victor Hsu
- Hans Michael Jebsen
- Barry Lam
- Rick Kroos
- Christabel & Ricky Lau
- Vic Lee
- Afonso Ma
- Albert Ma
- Martin Ma
- Patrick Ma
- David Mong
- Pung Family
- Thomas Pritzker
- Serge Pun
- Oliver Silsby
- Chote Sophonpanich
- Dr William So
- James & Mary Tien
- Betty Tsui
- Patrick Wang
- Conrad Wong
- Gilbert Wong
- Dora Wu
- Sonny Yau
- Wellington & Virginia Yee
- Jack Yeung
- Billy Yung

A subscription to this newsletter is US$100 for three issues. All proceeds support CERS projects. Please contact us directly if you are interested in signing up. See the bottom of page two for contact details.

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