A NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ACKNOWLEDGE CERS' FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

CHINA EXPLORERS

CHINA EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOLUME 26 NO. 3 AUTUMN ISSUE 2024

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Edward Stanford's map of China, circa. 1908.

A Mo'o and the animal bone shelves.

HM during Ryuku dive.

Interior of Takmachik Chenrezik Temple.

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President's Message

HM & Alyosha

Marking fifty years of exploration since I graduated from university in 1973, and just shot of forty years of founding of CERS, the world has become more polarized as well as politicized. Many people are becoming less tolerant of diverse views and beliefs. It is at such juncture that I feel more convinced we must present our multi-cultural approach to meet our mission, in exploration, research, conservation and education.

We can go comfortably high and low, left and right, within a broad swath of social spectrum in a kaleidoscopic world that we operate. Last year, I have the grace of celebrating my birthday inside a palace in Bhutan hosted by Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother, and this year just as joyously I was cheered along by two colorful street performers in the night market of Chiangmai in Thailand. Such diversity epitomizes what CERS stands for and I pride myself in being able to explore not only the edges of our physical world, but also that of our social strata.

This issue of the newsletter has contributions from many of our senior as well as younger generation. Pim Pim collaborated with CERS for years in architecture conservation from faraway Ladakh in the Indian Himalayas. Our new colleague Miriam who is a young explorer in her own rights wrote two pieces. Natalie our young but capable filmmaker reported on her visit to Alishan of Taiwan, and our youngest colleague Yida who has joined CERS a year ago after taking her Masters at HKU presented her reflections.

I hope my own contribution would in time become a punctuation for many of those who have marched along with me, or come after me, as their work would fill pages of our future newsletters in fulfilling the mission of this organization.

Wong How Man
Founder/President CERS

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RYUKYU ISLANDS

Some provocative thinking on names

By Wong How Man

Ryukyu

HM with Nemo.

Call it Ryukyu, Okinawa, or Yaeyama, if you like. However geographic name lasts longer than politically motivated names. Nearby to the Ryukyu is another example, Formosa, Taiwan, or the Republic of China. People choose what they prefer, sometimes according to current needs and reasons. When Chiang Kai-shek, a friend of America and a Christian, ruled over China, his Republic of China claimed Tibet was not an issue for others. But for the People's Republic of China? No way, that's another matter. It is a friend or foe issue, a principle related to the system of government, plus all the other rhetorics in-between. Claim also Mongolia if you will, which the map of China in Taiwan tends to do up till recently.

Exhibit A. Recently CERS acquired a 1908 atlas of China prepared by renowned British cartographer Edward Stanford whose eponymous maps store is still at Covent Garden of London. This atlas of China was compiled by Stanford for the UK-based China Inland Mission, a Christian missionary organization, during a time when the Qing Dynasty was about to collapse. Its map of China included, as expected, all of Tibet, even Outer Mongolia. Despite Taiwan was under Japanese occupation as a colony since 1895, Stanford obviously did not approve, and contained it inside the map page of Fukien (Fujian) Province.

Universal suffrage or democratic process as we call it in whatever high-sounding name, it is unlikely that Hawaii joining the USA as the 50th State in 1959, or Sikkim becoming part of India in 1975, can be reversed with a future round of the same procedure when sentiments and conditions should change. Unifying is considered a happy event, and the reverse of fortune to be divided will be labelled separatism. Likewise, marriage or divorce can be another analogy.

Let's go back to names. Few people realize IBM represents International Business Machine, and 3M stands for Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing, let alone HSBC relates to Hong Kong and Shanghai. Where CERS (China Exploration & Research Society) has a major Center in the Tibetan area of Yunnan, within the last couple of centuries, the name has changed from Gyalthang to Zhongdian and now called Shangri-la, cashing in on James Hilton's book Lost Horizon.

Likewise, what contemporary maps all called the South China Sea suddenly for some and in part became the West Philippines Sea. But then the Philippines was a colony of Spain, then of the USA, up until 1946, when it was "granted" independence. The sale of Alaska was yet another case in point, a misfortune for Russia, and fortuitous for the US. ▶

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Stanford's Map of China.
Stanford Chinese Empire Atlas.
Fukien & Taiwan Map.
Map of Spratly & Palawan.
Southern islands of Ryukyu Group.
Map of Aleutian Islands.

Political sensitivity seems more acute these days when nationalism can become kingmaker, as well as diversifying of trouble at home, rallying for support that otherwise does not exist. The tensing up of the Spratly seems one such case.

All the above rantings are just food for thought, be they convincing or not. But with such historical interpretations and a few questions in mind, I took a flight from Tokyo to Naha, then with a connecting flight to Ishigaki, hoping to visit the southernmost islands of the Ryukyu group of archipelagos. It seems interesting for a geographer to look at several of these long strings, at times overarching, of archipelagos in Asia. From the north there is the Aleutian, here the Ryukyu, and further south the Paracel and Spratly group. They are all of present-day contention in one way or another, potential Hot Spots for a Cold War or a Hot War in the making, especially when bystanders may fan the fire.

I was told that it was farmers from Taiwan who were the intrepid pioneers and cultivators of the land in the larger islands in the south. So besides other interests in the geography of these islands, I wanted to talk to some original farmers from Taiwan.

Taking a circuit drive around the island, once out of the city center and along the coast is Tojinbaka, an archaeological site and now mausoleum dedicated to the Chinese. A sign in Chinese named it "Tomb of Tang", which was in reference to Chinese, a general term dating back to China's Dynasty Tang epoch era. The site was going through a major upgrade with new pavilions added. While the architectural style was quite common of that of southern China, the symbolic significance was not simple, representing the very early settlement of the Chinese community on the island.

In more contemporary times however, it was meant to remember an incident of Chinese laborer uprising, after a shipwreck with over 400 workers being stranded near here in 1852. These workers were on their way being shipped from coastal China to California, as part of the coolie trade. The rebellion was instigated by the slave-like condition these workers had to undergo, sold as laborers to America.

This incident happened at a time when Japan did not even claim these southern islands. Another old map CERS acquired, published in 1880

during the Meji period gave the evidence. It covered coastal China, the lower part of Japan, and all of the Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan. On this map, Japan is colored in pink, and the Ryukyu only has its upper section in pink, whereas the lower half, including Taiwan, is in white, as with coastal China. Before that time, Ryukyu was a kingdom, paying tribute annually to the Imperial Court of China.

Maps and history apart, I went on to look for the Taiwan connection as I traveled along the coast of Ishigaki. Passing an area with a wondrous waterfall, I arrived at the Sabichi Cave, a privately owned cave along the way to the northernmost tip of Ishigaki. It is a limestone tunnel leading to a beautiful part of the sea where the tidal wave hit a coast of karst. Many tourists make a stop here and pay for entry through the cave. Tsugumi Hirae lives here and manages the cave. Seventy years of age, she is a second-generation settler from Taiwan. She also operates a gift shop at the entrance to the Cave.

"My father came here from Taiwan 70 to 80 years ago when he was 32 years of age. He soon got married to my mother who was from here, and my grandmother was from Kabira. My father worked as a dentist. He passed away young at age 50 when I was only 11 years old. Without a license, he had to secretly conduct his dental practice behind our house. He also rode his motorcycle to various places to provide treatment, as well as traveled to remote islands to offer his service. He acquired his skills in Taiwan and brought along his dental tools here," Hirae was quite willing to tell us her family story as she continued.

"My family is mentioned in the book Taiwan in Yaeyama" by Yoshihiro Matsuda, a writer for the Yaeyama Daily Newspaper who is very interested in the Taiwanese settlers. He even went to Taiwan to collect research material. When the Taiwanese settled in Yaeyama, they experienced many hardships. As a child, my home was located midway between Nagura and the city center, an area frequently visited by Taiwanese. Therefore, I often hear Taiwanese being spoken and can understand it, though I am unable to speak it. Taiwanese people visited us often, even daily. At that time, the people from Taiwan were often bullied by the Japanese, so my mother told me to keep my Taiwanese heritage a secret," Hirae felt comfortable to reveal to us some of her inner feelings. ▶

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Beach of Ishigaki.
Mausoleum temple.
Japan's 1880 China coastal map.
Ryukyu group island as half in red.

"It was us Taiwanese who brought the first pineapple plant to the island, and now it is known throughout Japan. The female members followed and came to help as farm workers," said Hirae. "At the time of my mother's generation, there was a ship in the southwestern islands connecting to Taiwan. My cousin is in Taiwan, but now no ships are going there. If I were to go, I would have to travel to Naha first and then fly to Taiwan. I really hope that they would re-establish a route for ships going to Taiwan," Hirae added her aspiring wishes as she thanked us for taking an interest in her.

With Hirae's information about pineapple, we went on to visit a pineapple farm, run by Dong Changdai, a 68-year-old lady of Taiwanese descent who has settled in Ishigaki for forty years. Her husband, though also of Taiwanese descent, was born in Japan and thus only speaks Japanese and Fukienese, but not Mandarin. As we arrived, Dong was packing her small van to get ready to go to market, delivering her farm vegetables, and above all some ripe pineapples from her farm. Dong is fluent in Mandarin Chinese, having grown up in Taipei. She apologized that she had to rush to market, nonetheless hurried to peel us a few small pineapples of her picking, apparently very proud of her product. They are most tasteful and sweet, being fresh from the field around us.

In fact, pineapples from the Ryukyus, in particular Ishigaki, are so famous that even its juice commands exorbitant prices. Online, a bottle of 500ml pure juice costs HK$148 or US$20. Another brand carried by HKTVmall of 900ml is on sale from HK$450 at a bargain of less than half price, yet still at HK$205. The juice, however, is as toxic to your wallet as to your palate, boasting that "each bottle uses three ripe pineapple juices, with a harmonious resonance of pineapple acid and sweetness in Ishigaki Island is memorable", perhaps even intoxicating if left alone to ferment.

We swung by to the northern tip of the island where a lighthouse marked Ishigaki's northernmost extremity. I always have an affinity for lighthouses wherever I go along the coast, as they are always situated at the most precipitous and strategic locations. This lighthouse on Ishigaki is no exception with a stone tablet depicting its position.

Our next stop is Miyako, one of the three bigger islands at the southernmost tip of the Ryukyu group. It is called by Taiwanese as Ba Chong Shan (eight layers of mountains). With its pristine white sand and turquoise-colored water around much of the island, it is a paradise for diving and snorkeling within Japan. I did not miss the chance to stop by one of the hot spots and took a break in snorkeling, looking at some of the near-coast coral and colorful fish.

At Miyakojima fishing port, we interviewed a local fisherman. Kuniyoshi is 70 years of age. All fish caught at sea here are auctioned off at Gyoren but it is not open to the public. The high-priced fish, such as Sujiara and Shirohamahaze are not sold to fishmongers, but only to luxury hotels. All fish caught here are consumed locally and not shipped to the mainland of Japan.

The most common fish sold at auction are the Onaga (Longtooth Grouper), Kannagi (Giant Grouper), tuna, Ise Ebi (Japanese Lobster), Nishikiebi (Ornate Shrimp) and Goshiki Ebi (Five-colored Shrimp). All these marine catches at Miyakjima are relatively inexpensive, at 3000 yens at most, compared to those in the Main Island of Japan. The catch is not very productive during the summer, though currently during our visit it is tuna season. Fishermen here use live bait, and with it has caught large fish sizing up to 13 kg. However, the Aochibiki (Bluefin Trevally) which used to be quite abundant has become more difficult to catch in recent years, perhaps due to over-catching.

We were hoping to buy some fresh catch for dinner. However, at the time of our visit, the boats were out at sea and wouldn't return until between 4 to 6pm. So we parted ways and drove around the island to visit another lighthouse, at the easternmost tip of Miyako. Here as I looked down at the pristine water during low tide, I could see a very large school of turquoise-colored fish. They looked like some giant grouper, floating in and out as the tide gushed in and out of the shore. It was a wondrous site as I left this point, being the last stop of my sojourn here in the southernmost part of Japan.

As I finished my short but interesting visit to the Ryukyu Islands, some earlier thoughts came into mind again, regarding the names used, both Ryukyu and Okinawa that I have seen in signages or shop names around the islands, at times right next to each other. So as name changes go in China: Canton has become Guangzhou, Peking is now Beijing, and Tibet is gradually spelled as Xi Zang. I would not be surprised that in time China may also become Zhong Guo. Such I cannot predict to come, though we have seen within my generation that Great Britain has kissed off its Greatness, and is now officially and popularly known as the United Kingdom. How long it will remain united is yet to be seen, let alone there are other countries with the prefix "United" as well. Provocative as it may sound, it may or may not become a reality in generations ahead. As an optimist, let's hope again for unity of all, rather than separation.

And as far as the people go, the Taiwanese settlers here in the Ryukus are fast being assimilated into the majority ▶

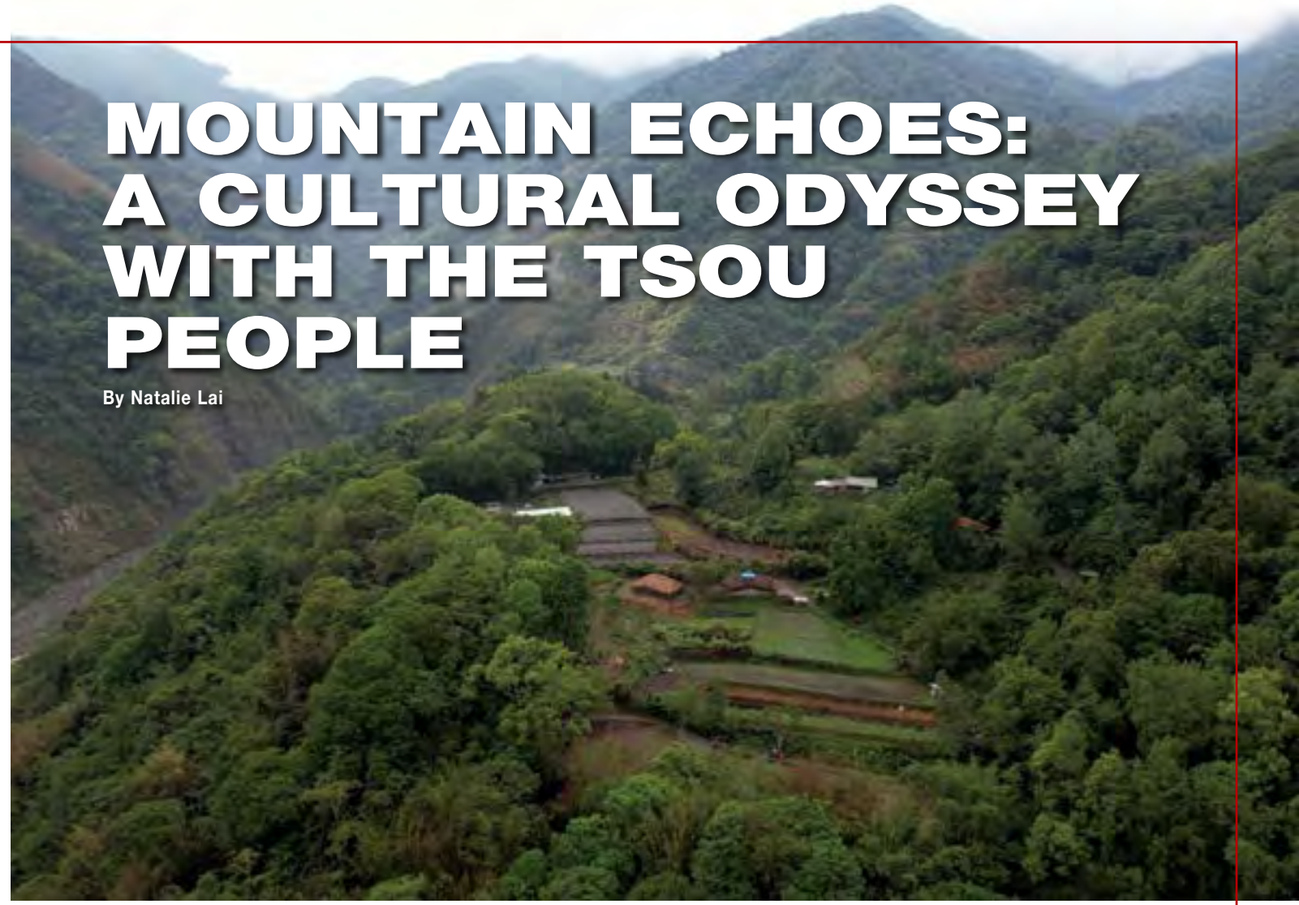
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Sabichi Cave.
Sea coast beyond cave.
More coral fish.
School of coral fish.
Lighthouse with tablet.
Ishigaki pineapple juice.
Ishigaki pineapple harvest.
Tsugumi Hirae.

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Blue groupa at coast.
Seacoast wave.
Japanese flag sunset.

Japanese race. It gives me thoughts regarding the indigenous Ainu people living in Hokkaido to the north of Japan, one of its members I met just earlier this year. The century-long assimilation policy in Japan left such people with little dignity and identity, until only five years ago in 2019 when the Ainu were legally considered indigenous to Japan's northern region. Be it as it may, I would like to think that perhaps the Japanese have been for centuries being reverse assimilated by the Ainu, through
their most popular and favorite diet choice of sashimi. After all, the Ainu are the original hunter fishermen of Japan, eating raw meat and fish before the dawn of fire is the most logical outcome, which the Japanese ultimately borrowed and adopted.

Unlike others who may come to the Ryukyu, or Okinawa, for its pristine ocean, fine seafood, or seaside hotels and resorts, it offers for me a chance to reflect on other matters beyond a few beautiful islands. As I look out over the horizon from the coast of Miyako on our last day in the Ryukyu Islands, the setting sun turns burning red over a graying sky. Suddenly I felt as if I was looking at the national flag of Japan. I hope in my mind that this is not a bad omen, as I know the sun will rise again tomorrow morning, for another brighter day ahead of us all. But let us not try to stop others in rising, even if they may surpass you someday!



MOUNTAIN ECHOES: A CULTURAL ODYSSEY WITH THE TSOU PEOPLE

By Natalie Lai

"From here, I will guide the driver, as there will be no road on the car GPS," said Sharon, our Alishan project coordinator (CERS site designer). Our team of seven had arrived at Tapangu village in Alishan Mountain Township, Taiwan, and drove onto an unassuming trail that led us further into the mountains. Like many CERS projects, our cultural conservation site for the Tsou people (鄒族) was hidden deep in the mountains, where we planned to stay for two nights and visit "The Man from the Mountains."

An Xiao-ming, whom we call by his nickname A Mo'o, is a member of the Tsou indigenous group of Taiwan. Except for his years of education and military service, he has spent almost his entire life in the mountains. When the government planned to build a Tsou cultural center and consulted the Tsou community, young A Mo'o, passionate about his cultural identity, exclaimed, "Let's build it as the house of the Tsou people!" Nevertheless, he had no idea what a "Tsou people's house" meant at that time.

During the Japanese occupation from 1895 to 1945, followed by half a century under the Nationalist government, the indigenous culture of the Tsou people was highly suppressed and had largely vanished when it came to A Mo'o's generation. Determined to take responsibility for his words, A Mo'o, almost single-handedly, began collecting stories from Tsou elders, tracing the life of the early Tsou people. However, it wasn't until about 10 years ago, with support from CERS, that his dream ▶

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Alishan project site.
A Mo'o building traditional Tsou dwelling (Archive 2012).

TOP TO BOTTOM:
A Mo'o and the animal bone shelves.
Interior of the dwelling.
Amo with guests.

finally began to take shape. A Mo'o built a traditional Tsou dwelling, providing a physical platform for the younger generation to learn about their cultural heritage.

The traditional Tsou dwelling (Emoo) was a hut with a thatched roof. In the center of the house was an A-frame structure that served as supporting beams and a shelf, with a fireplace underneath to hang and dry crops for storage. Around the central structure, there were a storehouse, a stem bed, animal bone shelves, weapons, and tools for farming, hunting, and cooking. As A Mo'o showed me around and explained each area, I was amazed by the life hacks and customs of the early Tsou people, and admired the dedication A Mo'o put into the house.

"When Tsou people talked about culture, there were only fragments of old memories left for reminiscence…But now, with the house, the concept becomes concrete and multifaceted," A Mo'o said.

It was getting chilly in the valley. The rain, which had been falling all day, suddenly turned into a downpour. A few of us gathered at the guesthouse next to the dwelling, also built with traditional Tsou architectural elements but well-equipped for student experiential learning trips. A Mo'o set up a fireplace in the living room to keep us warm, illuminating a wall of historical photo displays behind him. "When did the history of the Tsou begin?" I wondered. "It is hard to trace. However, for the Tsou people, our origination often comes from myths that lead to ancient times when Hamo the God blew seeds to restore the barren lands among the Tsou area." said A Mo'o, "The Tsou language doesn't have a written form. Before our living patterns were shattered, histories and myths were passed down orally."

A traditional Tsou community had a rigorous social and family structure. I could imagine how, with such close family kinship, the younger generation followed their senior members in fishing and hunting, learning all the necessary knowledge about nature from a young age. As a hunter, A Mo'o's knowledge ranged from wildlife to environmental protection. "If you mess up any single component, you can't catch anything," said A Mo'o, "Modern education's emphasis on academic results has downplayed learning in a natural environment. Textbook knowledge can actually link to indigenous lived experiences, which I aspire to promote to the students."

The rain finally stopped. I walked out of the guesthouse and took in the vista of the valley. Beams of sunlight peeked through the foggy mountain forest, where the indigenous Tsou people have interacted with nature for thousands of years.

Being labelled as former "head hunters" is just an outsider's attempt toward exoticism. Unlike modern scientific approaches, indigenous traditions of the Tsou people are indeed a treasure trove of knowledge, reflecting the accumulation of organic learning experiences through generations. Recognizing that humans are an inseparable part of Mother Nature, which should be respected and revered, has shaped the ethos of the Tsou people to be grateful and humble. Perhaps this could prompt us to reevaluate our perspective in today's modern society.

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Traditional dwelling (left) and Guesthouse (right).
Guesthouse.
Traditional dwelling.

SURVEYING ENDANGERED BUILDINGS IN LADAKH

By Pimpim de Azevedo

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Dragar temple is built on a granite hill, it is difficult to imagine how the masons have build the walls in the rock. On the right, colored red is the Gongkhang the protector room dedicate to local deity Jamtsen. View of the two temples, the one in the right is built with traditional materials, which now dedicated to the local deitiey and the most recent one in the left in concrete, which is the prayer hall. We can see the valley of Dragar, Sakti and the Stok mountain range behind.

Until recently, Ladakh was isolated from the world due to high passes, difficult access, and a harsh climate. However, this did not prevent people from settling in the region or using it as a crossroads for trade among neighboring areas. It also served as a starting point for expeditions by notable explorers such as the Portuguese Jesuits in the 17th century on their way to Tibet, as well as William Moorcroft and Alexander Csoma Körösi, who created the first Tibetan-English dictionary..

The first roads connecting Ladakh with other parts of Indian territory were built in the 1960s. Prior to this, undertaking a journey required walking and using pack animals. Until recently, many villages and settlements lacked access to roads and electricity, which slowed changes in these areas. However, in the past decade, settlements and villages have undergone drastic changes, and traditional architecture has suffered significant losses as a result of road construction. The replacement of traditional architecture has affected not only vernacular buildings but also religious structures and monuments.

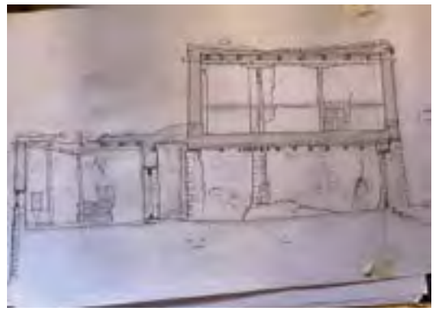
With the support of CERS, we are undertaking a project to survey historic structures at risk. The initial surveys focus on two temples: the Drakar Temple in the Sakti Valley (central Ladakh) and the Chenrezik Temple in Takmachik (lower Ladakh).

The Drakar Temple is located in the Sakti Valley, in a branch valley leading to Pangong Lake in Nubra, and was historically one of the routes to Changthang and Tibet. The Drakar (cliff/rock palace/fort) is a protector's temple, perched on a granite hill below the ruins of an extensive fort. Little is known about the history of the temple or whether it existed during the time the fort was inhabited. A few decades ago, a new temple was built nearby, and the contents of the old temple were moved there. More recently, a concrete temple was constructed beside the old one.

Since the original temple was dedicated to the protector (gonkhang), it is painted red every year and prayer flags are hung on the mountain god shrine (lha to). Despite this, people continue to damage the paintings with graffiti. The fate of the old Drakar Temple mirrors that of many temples and shrines across Ladakh. Not only are religious structures being abandoned and left to decay, but other important historic buildings are also suffering the same fate. Without regular maintenance, buildings are left to decay, erode and collapse.
The Chenrezik Lhakhang in Takmachik, lower Ladakh, is an old shrine room that survived the reconstruction of the temple by the community. Located beside a new concrete temple, it is still used by villagers and monks. However, its future is uncertain as it may eventually be replaced by concrete.

Together with CERS, we hope that documenting and surveying these sites will help preserve the architecture that would otherwise perish in silence. These historic buildings, constructed by artisans using basic tools and scarce materials, particularly wood, provide valuable insights into the lifestyle, architecture, and history of Ladakh.

Survey team: Pimpim de Azevedo, Yutaka Hirako, Nidhi Divecha and Richard Dollamore, 2024



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
View of the interior of Takmachik Chenrezik temple, here prayers and offerings are made by the villagers. The community still uses the shrine what extendes the life of the temple.
Detail of the lantern of Chenrezik temple in Takmachik.
Yutaka making sketch to be used for measurements in Dragar temple.
Sketch prepared by Yutaka to mark the measurements of Dragar temple.

DIGGING GOLD IN THE HIMALAYAS:

A Glimpse into the Life of Caterpillar Fungus Harvesters

By Miriam LEE

TOP TO BOTTOM:
An army of harvesters of caterpillar fungus setting off to the highland meadows early in the morning.
Treacherous drive in the gorge.
Idyllic village of Manang.

"The harvesters are going to come back from the mountain between 5pm to 6pm. You can go up the *Kharka* (yak pasture) to meet them," said the owner of the mountain cabin. We were having our heads down in bowls of hot garlic soup, allegedly good for alleviating the discomfort of high altitude sickness. Early in the morning, the seven of us hiked up from the village of Tanki next to the mountain town of Manang, where How Man decided to stay behind to finish his book. How Man had befriended the Nepali owner of the Yeti Guesthouse in Manang, who gleefully shared his years living in Hong Kong with the fun guru.

Journey to the Kharka

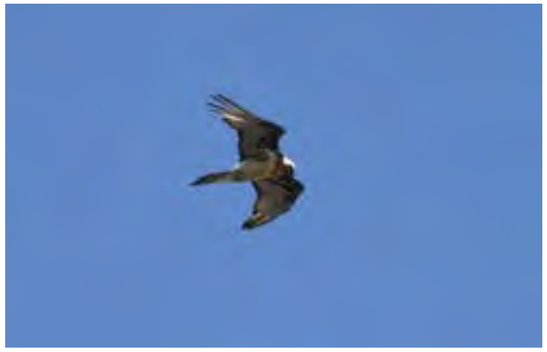
Fast backwards to a few weeks ago in mid-May, the CERS team embarked on a journey from Shangri-la to Nepal, traversing through the Tibetan Plateau with two off-road Defenders, a Land Rover Discovery and a camper van, and reaching Kathmandu via the Rasuwagadhi-Kerung Pass. Much of the roving on the Chinese side was on pristine coal tar or asphalt roads, offering a smooth and scenic ride to soothe the gruelling trek through the remote semi-desert on the altitude. The notoriously rugged highways in Nepal would put these sturdy vehicles to the test, and reluctantly the camper van was left at Gyirong Valley, home of the little-known Daman people, for the team to pick up upon their return.

Upon arriving in Kathmandu, the team met with Miriam, who was on her first day with CERS, and Narayan, a long-term local partner with CERS in Nepal. Narayan is Associate Professor and Head of Department of Natural Resources Management at the Center for Postgraduate Studies, Nepal Engineering College of Pokhara University. He has been conducting wildlife surveys and research on climate change in the Himalayas for nearly two decades. We planned to explore the mountain areas near Manang and Mustang, in the Himalayas north of the Annapurna mountain range. Together with Thorong La Pass (5416m), Chulu East Peak (6584m), and Muktinah (3762m), they form the world-famous trekking route circumscribing Annapurna. Our goal was to visit the areas where the yak herders roam, observe the local conditions, and survey the wildlife in its natural habitat —snow leopard, blue sheep, musk deer, pika, lammergeier and more.

Before heading towards Manang, we made a detour to the lowland — Kumroj Community Forest and Baghmara Community Forest in Chitwan National Park. Sandwiched between the south of the outer foothills of the Himalayas and north of the Indo-Gangetic Plain, the Terai is a vast paradise for local "big five" — elephant, one-horned rhinoceros, the endangered Bengal tiger, the critically endangered gharial crocodile, and leopard alongside with animals such as spotted deer, sambar deer, peacock, ibis and others on the luxury of a jeep safari and the back of an elephant. It also gave an experience of the geographical and climatic contrast in the small land-lock country of Nepal on how, within a day's drive, one can traverse from the tropical lowland to vistas of rugged, snow-capped peaks.

The scorching heat of Chitwan proved unbearable for the team, especially for those acclimated to the cooler Tibetan heights. We hence hurriedly ascended to Manang through Besishahar, the town, before reaching the Annapurna Conservation Area registration office to escape the oppressive temperatures. Views of the roaring river in the gorge, terraced fields, and waterfalls compensated for our weariness navigating the treacherous hillsides along the pitted and broken roads. The idyllic village of Manang seemed more attractive under the precipitous crests and glaciers, apparently so for How Man as he decided to stay behind for a couple more days to write, complemented by morning walks among old village houses, white stupas and a dainty monastery.

We started hiking from the neighbouring village of Tanki, a miniature of Manang with only a handful of households remaining. Trekking to *Kharka* above 4500m was relatively easy for those accustomed to the Tibetan ▶



TOP TO BOTTOM:
Lammergeier.
Blue sheep.
Himalayan monal.
Pika.

TOP TO BOTTOM:

Collectors of caterpillars having their cash ready.
Harvesters selling their finds to the collectors.
Cleaning a caterpillar fungus.

Plateau's altitude, but challenging for others from the sea level. With each moving according to his or her own pace, and spotting some wildlife and interesting highland plants along the way, we arrived at a mountain cabin just a few hundred metres away from the *Kharka* in the late afternoon. *Kharka*, in Nepalese, means yak pasture. This yak pasture is only a few hour's hike away from the famous Thorong La Pass. As the sun began to set on the lap of Khatung Kang, we put down our soup bowls and headed to the *Kharka*.

Meeting the Harvesters

Caterpillar fungus, known for its high international market value and medicinal properties, plays a crucial role in the local economy, aiding poverty alleviation and job creation. At a bench next to a village hut, a few men in down jackets were flashing fistfuls of Nepalese rupee notes, shouting "*Bulung, bulung*"! They were collectors of caterpillar fungus, one of the legs that constitute the transnational trade of this legendary fungal fruiting bodies. *Bulung* is a nickname used specifically in the Manang region for caterpillar fungus. Small groups of men and women in comparably ragged clothing stopped and chatted. Some groped their pockets and pulled out brown, match-like stems that they had painstakingly harvested from the high meadows in exchange for a few worthy notes. A sizeable one in good condition could sold as much as 2000 rupees (around HK$120 or US$15). On a lucky day, a harvester may get 5-8 pieces of *bulung* — a handsome income given that the average weekly salary in Nepal is around HK$1000.

Most of the harvesters here could hardly make this money at other times of the year. For some this "worm rush" was their only substantial income. This is the exact reason that they come from different places in Nepal to capitalise on the window of five weeks from mid-May to mid-June to forage these prized fungus at an altitude of 4000-5000m. Yarchagumba, meaning "half insect half plant" in Nepali, shares a similar meaning with *dongcongxiacao* (冬蟲夏草) in Chinese as "winter insect summer plant" which aptly describes its entomopathogenic nature. The fungus Ophiocordyceps sinensis parasitises the larvae of ghost moths from where the fungus germinates. Infected caterpillars lift their heads upward from earth tunnels toward the surface. Fungal stromae grow from the mouth of the caterpillars and extend above ground to disperse ascospores when they die. In regions where caterpillar fungus is harvested and traded, they are famed for a variety of medicinal and tonic properties — anti-cancer, anti-tumour, anti-viral, cholesterol-reducing, immuno-modulating, anti-oxidant, enhancing stamina, and aphrodisiac, just to name a few.

There were hundreds of harvesters returning to their camps in the *Kharka*. Some could afford bunk beds in the cabins around the village; others pitched their shabby tents with the yak herders. We negotiated our way through the hundreds of yaks which were also making their way down the meadow in the sunset. At the end of the *Kharka* we stumbled upon the tent of two sisters, Lakshmi and Maya, who had travelled from Gorkha to come here on a 3-day bus ride, hauling food, clothing, utensils and a tent to collect caterpillar fungus. It was the fifteenth day for them in Manang, but luck had not been with them. Lakshmi shared that she had spent 16,000 rupees on getting here, including transportation and license for collection, but had yet managed to recoup their investment. Today they were only able to find one piece of fungus. The night began to fall and the chill seeped in. The sisters burnt firewood and cooked a frugal meal of roasted corn, dhido (typical Nepali dish from mountain tribes), and sautéed Stinging Nettle Leaf. Despite their hardships, the sisters remained determined, betting on better luck on the next day to make ends meet.

In the wee hours of the next morning, we followed the footsteps of the harvesters to the highland pasture of Patan. The air was filled with a palpable sense of urgency as the harvesters hurriedly prepared for the arduous day ahead. They hastily swallowed a handful of flour, and packed fried corn and soybeans into their *Patuki* (traditional cloth bag; usually 10-12 feet long, worn around the waist to support the back and also to stuff snacks, phones and other small items). Laughter and playful banter echoed in the crisp morning air as friends and compeers climbed uphill. The blue sky shimmered against the silhouette of the long queue they formed on the ridge. For a moment we sat in silence and watched them moving like a bustling colony of ants on the lap of the snowy mountains. The determination and energy of the harvesters were inspiring. Without immense concentration, acute eyesight, and sheer optimism, who would roam the exposed mountainside for 12 hours straight to look for that tiny stem of fungal stromae camouflaged in the soil and dry grass? It was no different from finding needles in haystacks. The strenuous trek and ambition of a bonny collection embodied their dreams, sustenance, bills to pay, education for their children, and medicine for their ageing parents. Their exhausted bodies and tired eyes carry the heavy burden of the present in their quest for a better tomorrow and keep climbing for plenteous finds.

Within the harsh realities of poverty and the biting cold, the jingling of yak bells and birdsongs of the mountains seemed almost surreal. The Himalayas are seen as a land where gold grows. Despite this, the joy of life continues in their persistent search for an elusive insect with fungus that holds the promise of a brighter future. We waved goodbye to them with a bittersweet smile of admiration and empathy, and a deeper appreciation for the complex interplay between tradition, economy, and ecology in the Himalayan region of Nepal.

Digging Gold & Its Impacts

The collection of caterpillar fungus significantly impacts the local economy of Manang and surrounding districts. Its high market value has earned it the moniker "precious as gold". From remote highland meadows of the Himalayas, market demand for caterpillar fungus creates a trade network across mountains and national boundaries. Most of the collectors of caterpillar fungus in Manang would sell their season's harvest in Kathmandu, sought by traders predominantly from China, who then brought them to more affluent cities such as Hong Kong and Shanghai. ▶

TOP TO BOTTOM:

Fresh caterpillar fungus.
Caterpillar fungus is treasured like gold.
Harvesters returning to Kharka at sunset.

TOP TO BOTTOM:

Much of the grazing grounds of the yaks overlap with that of where caterpillar fungus grows.
Male harvesters drinking at a local bar.
Lakshmi and Maya cooking dinner outside their shabby tent after a not-so-lucky day.

However, the environmental consequences of over-collection are concerning. Issues like anthropogenic pollution, biodiversity loss, and ecological imbalances have prompted local authorities to implement policies for sustainable collection and conservation. Locals and scientists alike offer the one-two punch of over-harvesting and climate change as a means of explanation. With hundreds of distinct sets of regulations governing their harvest, there remains no cohesive system, or incentives, to ensure a sustainable harvest. At the same time, new sprouts require a specific range of altitude, temperature, humidity, and snow cover. Those variables are no longer so predictable, and the fungus today cannot be found at the lower elevations where they were once plentiful.

Degradable and non-degradable waste produced by collectors in the Himalayas has also degraded the environment, leading to calls for balancing economic gains with environmental protection. Ensuring the sustainable collection of caterpillar fungus is crucial for preserving the delicate Himalayan ecosystem while supporting the local economy.

This excursion to Manang provided a rare and intimate glimpse into the lives of caterpillar fungus harvesters. Their journey, fraught with challenges and driven by hope, reflects the broader story of resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity. The experience also highlighted the need for sustainable practices to protect both the livelihood of the harvesters' livelihood and the environment they depend on.

WONG HOW MAN CENTRE FOR EXPLORATION
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

Chair Explorer's Message

Exploration is about filling gaps of knowledge, be they physical or mental ones. CERS has been fulfilling that for four decades. Now that aspiration is extended into education as well. It has been one year since founding of the HKU Wong How Man Centre for Exploration. I am pleased to see that many faculty and students have interacted with this new Centre, be it through visit to the many CERS field sites, or participated in events we held in Hong Kong or at the University of Hong Kong.

I continue to believe that this new partnership would ultimately inspire students and scholars to create new knowledge, besides being taught through established knowledge. That is the essence of exploration, making new and first-hand discoveries. I have confidence that my own 50 years career in exploration can become a stimulus for others to follow, and even be exceeded, especially among our younger generation with vitality.

In time, such activities in exploration, ignited by curiosity that we all have as a child, would embellish each and everyone of their identity, integrity, and pride. Let us share in the following pages, some of our Centre's recent activities and results.

Exploration Programme

Summer Expedition — Shangri-la & Beyond

Yunnan, Tibet and Sichuan | July-August 2024
Miriam Lee, Executive Director, CERS
Dr Hayson Liu, Deputy Director, WHMCE

CERS crew and experts with HKU student group at CERS Zhongdian Centre.

The vast Tibetan region is geographically, ecologically and culturally diverse, covering the provinces of Tibet, Yunnan and Sichuan of China. CERS has been working in this region for almost four decades, steering many ground-breaking exploration and research programmes, as well as a plethora of conservation projects towards unique and iconic natural and cultural entities such as the elusive Snub-nosed monkeys, Tibetan mastiffs, black-necked crane, Tibetan nunnery and clinics, and yak cheese making. CERS Zhongdian Centre, scaling a compact college campus, provides first-rate boarding amenities to researchers and students, and houses an unrivalled collection of artefacts pertinent to CERS's accomplished exploration and documentation of ethnic minority groups. This is a propitious starting point for HKU students and faculty members to understand the magnificent landscape, survey of wildlife, heritage conservation, community preservation and more.

This summer CERS Zhongdian Centre hosted HKU eight students, and organised overland excursions to a number of CERS research and conservation projects in this extensive region ranging from architectural restoration, cultural preservation, revival of traditions and nature conservation.

Apart from glimpsing a family of snub-nosed monkeys in the nature reserve, the group was fortunate enough to come across the 10th anniversary of the Crossbow Festival of the Lisu people, a community-based gala started by CERS in a bid to preserve the hunting practices of these formerly forest hunters. Students tried shooting with this traditional weapon made by Lisu villagers and aiming targets on the bullseye instead of prey. They were accommodated at the cluster of 20-some characteristic wooden cabins preserved by CERS as the last remaining architectural heritage of the Lisu people.

HKU student team participated in the Crossbow Festival.

From the subtropical forest in Yunnan, the group roved 600 kilometres away to the high altitudes of 4000m above sea level at Litang near the Garze Tibetan area in northwestern Sichuan. There was a palpable sense of sacredness as the HKU team met Tashi Rinpoche (扎西活佛) while he led us to visit the Renkang Ancient House (仁康古屋), the birthplace of the 7th Dalai Lama also restored by CERS, and engaged in a conversation with him. The group as well arrived in time for the spectacular annual Tibetan Horse Racing Festival, where hundreds of colourful tents were pitched on the expansive grassland that elaborately decorated horses paraded and raced in a variety of games for days. While in Litang, they also visited a yak cheese factory, a cultural entrepreneur project supported by CERS. Drolma and her son Losang warmly welcomed the group and explained their work on finding the best yak milk and improving facilities for manufacturing this prized delicacy.

The hike to Genie Sacred Mountain (格聶神山) was definitely a highlight of the trip, with lots of wildlife photography and birdwatching opportunities. On the mountain the students visited the historical Gulang Monastery, as well as the meditation cabin of Tashi Rinpoche's family beside the monastery, also restored by CERS. As the group let nature be their teacher, they found a pile of yak bones and spent a couple of hours assembling the skeleton. It was a challenging activity even with guidance from the local Tibetans. It was both fun and enjoyable for the team.

During the trip students were encouraged to be curious and observant, and talk to people from all walks of life. They made comparisons and reflections on these new and stimulating experiences, pondering intellectual and personal perspectives on different environments, cultures, lifestyles and even among their own peers. It was a truly inspiring journey for all.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

HKU students at the Horse Racing Festival with local Tibetan kids in Litang. H Students climbing the Genie Sacred Mountain (格聶神山). Students visiting the yak cheese factory. Assembling yak skeleton with the help of local Tibetans. Visit at Renkang Ancient House.

CULTURAL EXPLORATION DAY

Hungry Ghost Festival – Fusion of Religions & Traditions

HKU & Shau Kei Wan | August 2024
Dr Hayson Liu, Deputy Director, WHMCE
Lam Yu Hoi, Year 4, Faculty of Arts, HKU

It is not just about ghosts, but a fusion of different religions and beliefs. The very same festival has different names — "Zhongyuan Festival" (中元節) in Taoism (道教), "Yu Lan/ Ullambana Festival" (盂蘭節) in Buddhism (佛教) and "Filial Piety Festival" (孝子節) in Confucianism (儒), and "Ghost Festival" in Chinese folk religion. The primary goal of the festival is to bring the hungry ghosts out of suffering by offering food (施食), but through the years it has integrated with the traditional value of filial piety (孝), which participants accumulating merits to prevent their ancestors from being reborn as hungry ghosts.

WHMCE started the event with a lecture for students with a brief overview of the Hungry Ghost Festival, including its origins, rituals, and underlying beliefs. This was followed by a field trip to Shau Kei Wan, where students first visited the only Zhang Fei Temple (張飛廟) in Hong Kong and learned about this historical figure from the Three Kingdoms period.

Subsequently, students participated in the Hungry Ghost Festival in Shau Kei Wan. Ms. Mandy Cheng, the festival organizer, introduced the difference between the mainstream Chiuchow-styled Hungry Ghost Festival (潮人盂蘭勝會) and the Canton-styled Hungry Ghost Festival (廣府盂蘭勝會) they hosted. Students had the opportunity to witness and engage in the rituals and experience how they were practised.

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Lecture at HKU before the visit.
Visit at Zhang Fei Temple.
Students and friends at the Hungry Ghost Festival.

EVENTS & NEWS

CERS Exhibit House

Shek O | July-October 2024

CERS and WHMCF hosted several groups of HKU students at the Exhibit House at Shek O this summer. These local and international young scholars got to know the work and philosophy of CERS, and how expeditions, research and conservation projects are organised and established in the peripheries of China.

OTHER NEWS

Fountainside Chat

— From Rocks to Rockets: The evolution of space-borne remote sensing in defining Asia's most important river sources

HKU | September 2024

Martin Ruzek, a former scientist at NASA Jet Propulsion Lab (JPL) and retired Director of Program Development, Universities Space Research Association, gave a presentation on the evolution of space-borne remote sensing, applying it on several CERS expeditions in defining Asia's most important river sources including the Yangtze, Mekong and Yellow. The talk was well-attended by HKU faculty members, friends of CERS, HKU students and other interested members of the public.

Fine Art Asia 2024

— From South to North (天南地北)

HKCEC | October 2024

Curated by CERS and WHMCE, this exhibition at the 5-day art fair presented a cultural journey that transcends diverse regions. Visitors at our booth were able to explore two distinct and unique cultures, from the snowy forests of the Ewenki people in northeastern China to the mudflats of Lau Fau Shan in Hong Kong that feature oyster farming of the Pearl River estuary.

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Martin speaks at HKU.
Martin & HM.
Mud scooter exhibit.
Reindeer herder Ewenki Yakut tribe artifacts.

FAITH DEFINES EXISTENCE(PART I)

Ripples from the Bagmati: A Traveler's Reflection

By Lyu Yida

Nepal

I'm sitting in a Discovery 4 on the way to Chitwan National Park, feeling dizzy and weak. It's our first stop after leaving Kathmandu. Over the next few days, we'll be jolting along Nepal's "thrilling" dirt roads, with chances to see the endless Himalayas. Yet, I'm too tired to do anything, feeling frustrated and wondering why I fell ill at such a crucial time.

The illness came out of the blue. Just days earlier, we were buzzing with excitement about catching Buddha's birthday in Kathmandu. I rolled down the car window wanting to snap a picture of Kathmandu's traffic, which was even more tangled than my life plans. That's when we passed the Bagmati River, looking all battered and bruised.

The Bagmati River winds through Nepal and India, eventually merging with the sacred Ganges. For Hindus, this river holds deep spiritual significance, serving as the site for sky, at times called celestial, burial. In Kathmandu, after a person passes away, their body is brought to the Pashupatinath Mandir, which is also called Cremation Temple. After three hours of burning, the ashes are then scattered into the river, a ritual believed to liberate the soul and guide it toward eternal peace. ▶

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Crowds circumambulating the stupa at night on Buddha's Birthday.
Body being cremated, Pashupatinath Mandir, Kathmandu.

It suddenly struck me—maybe I'm feeling so terrible because I visited the Pashupatinath Mandir last night! In Chinese culture, death is a huge taboo. Growing up, my family never allowed me to attend funerals, and even as an adult, I was left out of the annual tomb-sweeping ceremonies. So, I've always had this deep curiosity about the various ways people deal with death, like the mysterious rituals of sky burials.

When we arrived at the Pashupatinath Mandir that night, we stumbled upon a family who had just lost their elderly grandfather. They wrapped his body in dry straw and carried him to a pyre. The family gathered around, performing a series of prayers, circling his body several times before dousing it with alcohol and setting it ablaze. I couldn't help but inch closer, fascinated, as I had never seen a dead body before, let alone one engulfed in flames.

Beside the roaring flames, the Bagmati River flowed silently. The river already murky and polluted, appeared pitch black in the night, as if it could swallow anything in its depths. The temple was filled with people, and the old man's body was just one among several being cremated. Apart from a few loud mourning cries from the old man's son, the crowd remained calm, with another family softly singing as they prepared for a sky burial. On the other side of the narrow river, a young couple even whispered sweet nothings to each other.

In that moment, I truly grasped the different perspectives on death. For some, it is a painful ordeal to be avoided; for others, it is a release to be celebrated.

But how can a soul be cleansed in a sacred river choked with human refuse and garbage? It reminded me of the crisis in the Ganges, Nepal's neighboring river in India. British colonial deforestation led to soil erosion, and modern industrialization has exacerbated pollution. Religious rituals, with millions of devotees bathing and offering sacrifices, further strain the river's water quality. In Varanasi, over 30,000 bodies are cremated annually, while others decompose naturally, contributing to contamination. Today, China's water quality standard for rivers sets a limit of 40,000 faecal coliform bacteria per liter, but the Ganges in Varanasi has a staggering 100 million, South Asia's largest river is rapidly approaching the limits of what its environment can bear.

Thinking of this, I could almost smell the stench of the Bagmati River myself, and quickly rolled up the car window.

Once we drove out of the city, the car ride felt like being on a classic amusement park ride, the "Disco Rotor." My mind wandered uncontrollably towards superstitions, like how my mom always refused to let me join in tomb-sweeping, saying I might "disturb" something and get bad feedback.

The thought of this frightens me a bit. I regret that I should have properly worshipped various deities during the past few days in Kathmandu, the city of gods. I should have said "no offence intended" to the gods before going to watch the cremations.

On Nepal's bumpy roads, I shared my worries and reflections about our time in Kathmandu.

To be honest, it wasn't until I wandered the labyrinthine streets of Kathmandu that I truly grasped the phrase "a temple at every turn, a shrine on every corner." The city is a tapestry of faith, woven with over 2,700 temples and stupas. These sacred spaces house a staggering 33 million Hindu deities - a number that outstrips Nepal's entire population by 3 million supernatural souls.

I remember when I walked into a street temple, the locals enthusiastically described their many gods, each overseeing a different aspect of life. Overwhelmed by the complexity, I

just have one simple thought: Here, there are truly as many gods as there are people.

On Buddha's birthday, at the entrance of the Monkey Temple, a crowd knelt in reverence before Venkateshwara's footprint, who is the god of hills and destroyer of sins. They scattered rice grains and cash over the impression as if this could somehow ease the guilt of being born to be a human. But just as a woman offered 100 NPR, a gaunt vagrant with hunger in his eyes, swiftly snatched away the money meant for the divine.

At the Boudhanath Stupa, also on Buddha's birthday, it was really a sea of humanity. To say it was shoulder-to-shoulder would be an understatement. From the rooftop of a four-story restaurant near the stupa, the swarming crowd below resembled a colony of ants. The entire plaza was shrouded in the smoke of burning Tibetan incense, veiling the Wisdom Eyes in a misty haze. It made the gaze upon the masses below seem even more distant and enigmatic.

For the next few days, due to Nepal's bumpy mountain roads and my physical discomfort, I remained in a daze. When my mind finally cleared, time had become a jumble. As I fumbled for my camera, hoping to piece together a timeline, we passed by one of the snow-capped peaks of the Annapurna range.

That is when I realized that the beauty of a landscape depends so much on one's state of mind. In the two weeks before, we'd travelled from Yunnan to Tibet and then ▶

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

New Defender wading through water on a narrow road.
Unparalleled road in Nepal's mountainous region.
Pilgrims on Buddha's Birthday.
Venkateshwara's footprint, Monkey Temple, Kathmandu.
Panoramic view of Kathmandu from the Monkey Temple.

Boudhanath Stupa at night.

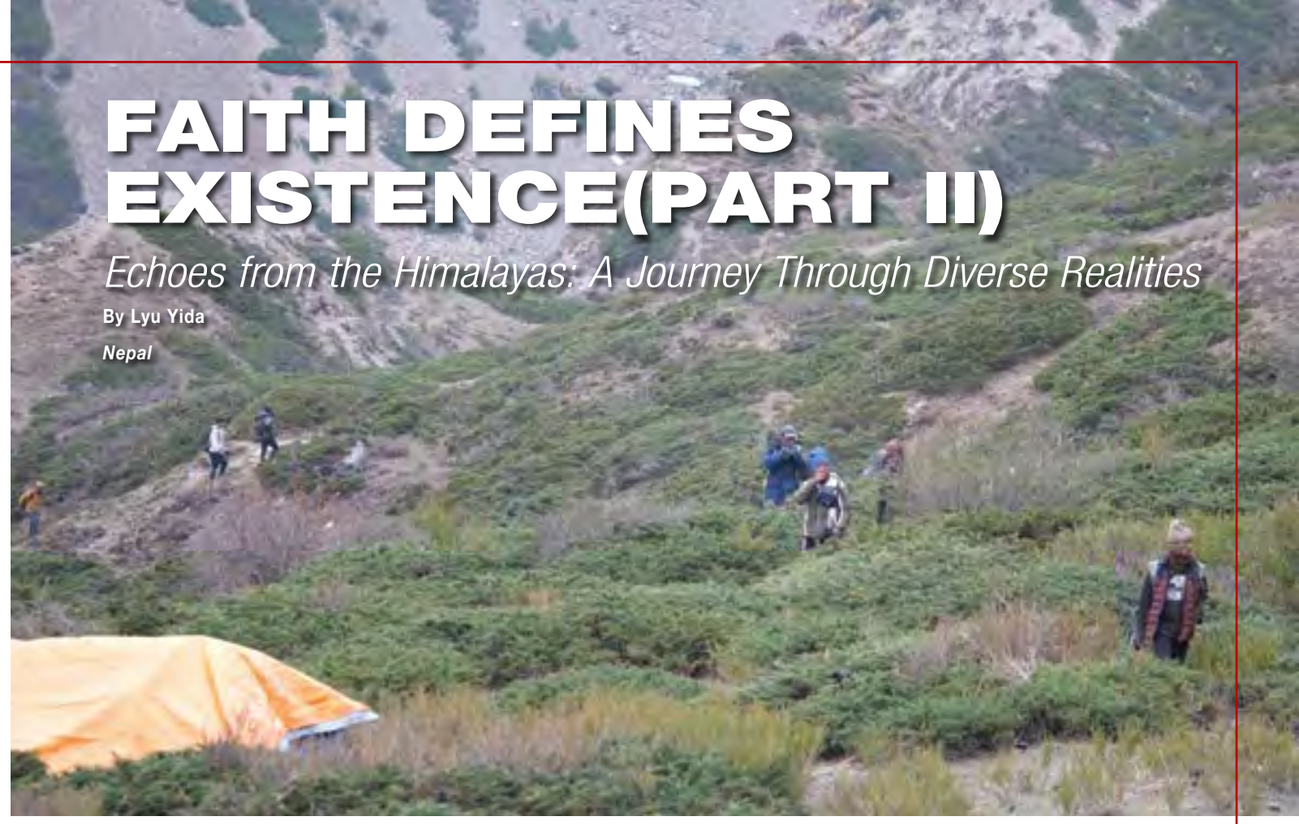
crossed into Nepal, seeing many stunning snow-capped mountains along the way. But what stands out most is exactly that day I began to feel better. On a rare stretch of paved road in Nepal's mountains, the soft light behind the snowy peaks seemed more warm and dreamlike than ever before. At that moment, I felt my heart leap with a joy I hadn't experienced in a long time.

Then I bounced back like a rubber ball. Teacher Tai chuckled, "See? I told you to stop letting your imagination run wild. The moment you put a leash on those thoughts, you perked right up!"

I was about to gently object, saying my discomfort wasn't due to overthinking. I think I'd fallen into an anthropological trap, overlooking the clash between logical and primitive thinking. When I encountered the sky burial—a "folk tradition" I had never seen before—I mistakenly believed I was in a research area where modern civilization studies primitive culture, leading me to misjudge the dangers ahead, In other words, I'd overestimated my mental fortitude, unaware that I wasn't as prepared as I'd thought for such experiences.

On second thought, What teacher Tai said is actually right. Life offers no rehearsals; each day unfolds live. To embrace experiences, there is no preparation time. Past events hinge on one's perspective. Many challenges, including illness, yield to willpower. Just as our mindset colors the landscape, it influences our life's journey.
At times, cease pondering, and issues dissipate.

So, I just grinned back, "You're right! I think I just inhaled too much bone ashes at the cremation grounds!"



FAITH DEFINES EXISTENCE(PART II)

Echoes from the Himalayas: A Journey Through Diverse Realities

By Lyu Yida

Nepal

Before entering Nepal through Gyirong Port, we drove from Kunming, stopping for a few days in Lhasa. There, at the entrance of the Langzixia Prison, my thoughts were a jumbled mess. During my brief time learning about Tibetan Buddhism, I had no idea about the heavy history behind the term "Lamaism," which has since fallen out of use. The prison, now turned into a museum, has its walls lined with old photographs. It's a bit ironic to see these images of simple, honest Tibetan faces from 70 years ago displayed alongside ritual items made from human leg bones and skulls.

Stepping out of Langzixia and into Barkhor Street, the sunlight was blinding. Pilgrims prostrating themselves on the road were everywhere. The era when a person could be bought, sold, or killed at will under the iron fist of communism is long gone. Even the Dalai Lama's reincarnation now requires official documentation sent to Beijing. Yet, in this place, faith seems like something that will never be shaken.

This reminds me of our experience between Mustang and Pokhara, where we stumbled upon a hidden Tibetan village called Tserok camp. The original settlers were part of the wave of Tibetans who fled with the Dalai Lama in the late 1950s. Without official status, they are essentially refugees. The village boasts a school built by the Tibetans themselves, but it can only accommodate three grades. Children over the age of nine must find ways to attend school in Pokhara. They cannot own houses, have no land, lack identification documents, and their work is not considered legal. By many standards, they live a marginalized life, devoid of modern freedoms. Compared to the similarly situated Gyirong Daman people of Tibet, who have had a better life after 2002, it's hard to imagine these villagers saying, "Tomorrow will be better." ▶

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Cordyceps gatherers descending from the mountains.
School of Tibetan village, Mustang, Nepal.
Lama in the prayer hall, Tibetan village, Mustang.

Chatting with 38-year-old Tsering Wangchu in the village, I posed a question that now seems too naive: “If you could, would you and your family return to Tibet?” His eyes locked with mine, his voice steady and resolute: “No. Our Dalai Lama is here.”

Near Mustang County in Nepal stands the ancient Vishnu temple of Muktinath. It is said that this sacred site is both the abode of Vishnu and Avalokiteshvara, making it holy ground for both Hindus and Buddhists. A young local strongly recommend me to a side chapel housing the eternal flame. Barefoot on icy floor, I joined the queue, mirroring the faithful, palms pressed, head bowed, offerings extended. Yet where I expected divine fire, I found only the whisper of cold ash.

Before the main hall of Muktinath Temple, stretched a large pool. Indian families, having journeyed by bus across borders, road-weary but spirits high, arrived in waves. Ritual bathing was required before entering, so the waters of purification knew no distinction - men, women, elders, and giggling children all waded in together. Their joyous cacophony rose like steam, I think it is a harmonious blend of faith’s celebration and the simple pleasure of cool water on sun-warmed skin.

One of my most vivid memories is of the day when we completed a grueling six-hour climb in the Annapurna region, finally reaching a place called Yak Kharka. This remote outpost served as a base for cordyceps hunters.

As dusk fell, men huddled in the homestay lodge, their laughter and clinking glasses a sharp contrast to the scene outside. There, two sisters hunched over a flickering fire, their flimsy tent barely visible in the gathering gloom. Their meal is just a handful of foraged herbs because they were saving every rupee for their husbands and children back home.

After our adventure in Nepal, we pitched camp near DireVillage in Ngamring County, Shigatse. At 4,800 meters up, the air was so thin that, the lack of oxygen felt like scrubbing a toilet, and I even hallucinated seeing a yak using an oxygen mask.

For two days, I played sidekick to Sister Li Na, treasure-hunting for local handicrafts. Every home we visited was like a presidential art gallery - Mao and Xi’s portraits were the must-have wall decoration with no exceptions.

Leaving one house, our pockets heavier with sheep-ear charms, I spotted something that deserve a double-take. There, on a trailer, was Che Guevara’s face, looking as out of place as a surfer in the Sahara.

This wasn’t a one-off. I’d seen Che’s mug plastered on vehicles all over Lhasa too. Why the image of this warrior, who traveled 20,000 miles across the Americas and ultimately encountered communism, keeps appearing in Tibet is something I still can’t figure out, but find it intriguing.

Despite the sketchy network in the high altitudes, news about the Israel-Palestine conflict still trickled through. Israel’s bombing of Rafah worsened Gaza’s crisis, while in the US, anti-Semitism accusations seemed to become a tool for ideological control.

As a non-religious Chinese, I struggled to grasp the persistence of Western religious conflicts. Learning about monotheism, I realized some Jews just treat their doctrines like an ironclad rulebook and the Bible like a constitution. They see themselves as the only chosen ones, using media control to turn past suffering into privilege.

Perhaps, it is this very belief that led some Jews to persecute Christians centuries ago, and now to disregard others and engage in extreme actions.

Our final stop was Yanjing, home to Tibet’s only Catholic church. Before entering the church, I wondered if Tibetan robes and Jesus were an odd mix, like last time I felt awkward seeing Asian Lawyers in Hong Kong’s High Court wearing those ridiculous powdered wigs. But once inside, it felt as natural as yak butter in tea. The congregation was mostly elderly people, all tranquil and devout.

It reminded me of interviewing Zoroastrians in Hong Kong during grad school. When we first met, from their appearance to their attire, I genuinely couldn’t distinguish them from Central Asian Muslims. However, they didn’t follow the Quran at all, but rather the Avesta.

Reflecting on this, I can’t help but marvel at how each encounter with a different faith deepens my sense of the spiritual chasms that exist between us humans.

“Spiritual chasms” might sound a touch dramatic or vague. Perhaps it’s more accurate to say that as I’ve matured, especially during this year of rapid growth with CERS, I’ve become increasingly aware of how opposing viewpoints permeate every aspect of life. I’ve come to realize that “truth” and concepts of “right and wrong” aren’t objective realities, but rather subjective constructs.

Upon our return from Tibet, the Paris Olympics were on the horizon and a controversy in women’s boxing emerged. Two athletes with XY chromosomes were allowed to compete as women due to their DSD (Disorder of sex development) condition and passport gender, based on International Olympic Committee rules. This decision sparked debates about fairness in women’s sports.

Initially, I opposed their participation. But I reconsidered and debated to myself: What about DSD individuals’ human rights? If we ▶

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Two sisters cooking in front of their humble tent.
Simple dinner of two sisters.
Camping at 4,800 meters altitude.
Children in DireVillage.

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Slogan wishing for world peace in Kathmandu Bodhnath Square.
Worshippers praying in church.
Words on a Kathmandu wall.

disqualify athletes for hormonal advantages, how do we justify other natural physical advantages in sports, like longer limbs in swimming? Can we define absolute fairness based solely on physical attributes in competitive sports?

At that moment, I realized that, just like with religious beliefs, any issue in life can be viewed from different perspectives, leading to completely different thoughts.

These ruminations remained private, as I chose not to voice my opinions online. After all, meaningful exchange and discussion can only flourish in an environment of rationality.

This journey of almost two months was a spiritual and mental enlightenment for me. I saw how people from different religions and regions live in entirely different spiritual worlds. They were remarkably content and steadfast in their belief of the world as they perceived it.

I remember during my undergraduate studies in mainland China, we had a mandatory course on Marxist materialist philosophy. One idea in the textbook left a deep impression on me: the opposition between matter and consciousness is only absolute within very limited bounds. My understanding is that while we ostensibly inhabit a shared material realm, our personal views make the world appear completely different to each of us.

For instance, economists might believe their reports and data can shape the world, but anthropologists argue that what truly influences the world is how people value capital. The world's complexity and fascination lie in this subjectivity, and this applies to both people and religions within it. In a sense, the world becomes what you perceive it to be.

However, given my poor performance in this course, I'm not certain if my interpretation strays too far from the mainstream.

On the day I turned 24, I stumbled upon an online forum where peers exchanged snapshots of their lives. The most popular thread posed a question that struck a chord: In this bewildering modern world, when will we, the disoriented youth, finally uncover that elusive, ultimate answer to happiness?
My mind drifted to the experiences of the past two months. I saw pilgrims inching their way along Route 318 to Lhasa, prostrating with each step. I recalled the monkey temple, where mysterious footprints lay outlined in a blanket of rice grains. I remembered a secluded Tibetan prayer hall, nestled in a remote corner of Nepal. And then, unbidden, came thoughts of Israel, forging its path, destination unknown.

If people can have such unshakeable faith in their own creations, isn't the answer, perhaps, simply ourselves?

So, after a long silence, I pressed enter, sending my response into the vast digital ocean.

NEPALI STRANDED IN TIBET

At long last citizens of China

By Wong How Man

Gyirong, Tibet

Some two hundred years ago, a Nepali cavalry was dispatched to fight in Tibet during the Qing Dynasty. It was a time when Nepal as a Himalayan kingdom was at its zenith of power, led by a king who wanted to expand its influence into neighboring Tibet. The Tibetans lost the battle and requested the Qing court to intervene, sending in its reinforcement army. Ultimately the Nepali was defeated and retreated to south of the Himalayas. However, some of its army since then had been stranded in pockets of the border region inside Tibet. These are now known as the Daman people (meaning calvary), living much like refugees for over two hundred years. Over twenty years were these descendant Nepalis given Chinese citizenship, and thus finally can get around like a normal person. Before, they did not have any status, no identity cards, no schooling for My team and I were on our way to explore northern Nepal, traveling from southern Tibet into the country, or former kingdom before its last king was abolished in 2008. I decided to pay a visit to the Daman people, few as they are now remaining in China. A recent survey put them at less than 300 individuals, 47 families in all, residing in one village the government has built for them. ▶

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Abyss to heaven.
Daman woman & child.

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Daman militia.
Daman boy.
Daman new villas.
Basong in front of new home.

Basong, 41 years of age, has been the village chief for many years, recently being elected again as head. His father was also village chief before him, but was killed while trying to arbitrate between four of the villagers during a drunken brawl turned into a fighting bout. Basong was barely seven years old at the time. He is a bit shy and very humble, though obviously proud of being accepted as a member of the Communist Party. In fact, I found all Daman people I ran into quite modest and humble, due perhaps to their long generations of being stateless and looked down upon. But their lot is looking much brighter in the near future, as the government is caring more and more about minority nationalities' welfare and each of their unique identity. Many of the young men among the Daman are now being recruited into the local militia as border guards, at a pay of Rmb 300 per day.

After over two hundred years of being separated from their motherland of Nepal, today none of these Nepali Daman people speak Nepali and Chinese and Tibetan has become their native tongue. For Basong's parents' and grandparents' generations before the founding of the PRC in 1949, the borderline was not very well defined and its control were not very strict. Thus they could cross the border, staying on the Nepal side in winter for warmer climates, and on Tibet's side during the summer. However, neither side would consider them its citizens, and thus stateless. Basong's wife is 45 years of age. Together they have two sons, one going to junior high, the other in primary at county town Gyirong. As for Basong, he has joined government study tour and visited Beijing, Hangzhou and Changsha.

In an ethnographic study by Chinese scholars ten years ago, it surveyed a total of 51 Daman families, with each household head listed. Unsurprisingly, all of them have Tibetan names, not one carries Nepali name. Today there are 47 Daman households in total. Now with full status to travel, some have moved to Lhasa or other provinces. Those remaining will soon be moving into a new and posh community that is built by the government for them, free of charge.

We went to have a look at these new houses and were amazed at how modern they are, each with a spacious living room, kitchen with facilities installed, and two or three bedrooms with modern bathrooms. Furthermore, there are six duplex villas with floor-to-ceiling windows, open kitchen, bathtub outfacing, built to serve as their communal boutique hotel. A large dining area in a separate building serving also as a restaurant is included to help the Daman maintain a comprehensive coop business. The effort by the government to design a sustainable living model seems quite obvious.

In the past, the Daman people, without status and much skill, could only perform the most lowly and unwanted jobs in the area. Basong started doing odd jobs at the age of nine, like digging for potatoes and frying barley or other labor-intensive work. At that time the daily pay was RMB2 a day. Now life has improved beyond his imagination. Their work pay now is for men RMB220 and for women RMB210 per day, in rotation soon to begin with operating the new premises of tourist villas given to their community. In the past, as landless people, they are not allowed to collect cordyceps, or caterpillar fungus. Today, between May 20 to July 20, they can also go search for these high-value fungus in the mountains.

In the past, most Daman men engaged themselves in iron-smithing work. The locals called the Daman men as "Da Tie Jiang" which is considered a lowly job and somewhat a derogative term. We managed to locate two Daman artisans who are still maintaining their traditional occupation of iron-smithing. The main craftsman is Tashi Dengju, now 53 years of age. He started working in this profession at age 18. An elderly man sat and continued turning a hand-fan to blow air into the hearth of coal. When the piece of iron inside the burning coal is red hot, Tashi would take the axe-like metal out with a pair of plyers and hit the edge a dozen or so times, before putting the axe back to repeat the same process over again and again. Harnessing such metal into an axe would require a long time, but the finished piece can be sold for over RMB1000, not a small sum in this remote area, though ten years ago such axe commands only a quarter the price. Inflation has hit even remotest corners of China I assume.

Not far from the Daman new village and closer to the border with Nepal is a small temple on a hillock. The spartan temple Jipugurupu is where local Tibetans believe Guru Rinpoche, the highest monk of the Nyingma Sect of Tibetan Buddhism, has spent time meditating. The hike there takes about half an hour from the Tibetan Jipu Village situated next to a very deep gorge. The village is a clean community where the government has built and assigned houses to each household with many shops catering to local Tibetans coming here daily as pilgrims.

The main temple, though quite small, has an altar. There it has three seated statues. In the middle is Songtsen Gampo, the most revered Tibetan King of the 7th century. He famously had two wives, one a princess from China and the other a princess from Nepal, both sitting on his two sides in this shrine. In an adjacent smaller shrine also has two statues. Here only a statue of the King and his consort the Nepalese Princess are in it, without the Chinese Princess Wen Cheng. The fate of the Daman people seems to resonate that union in this temple and shrine, between China and Nepal, through a matchmaker in Tibet.

Much has been written about Princess Wen Cheng of China, and many shrines built. Even elaborate television series has been made. But little has been documented about the Nepalese Princess married to the Tibetan King before Princess Wen Cheng arrived in Lhasa. A booklet given to me by Her Majesty Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, the Royal Grandmother of Bhutan, recorded the Nepali King's final instructions to his daughter, Princess Bhrikuti Devi, ▶

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Iron smithing.
Making an axe.
Jipu Tibetan village.
Tibetan home.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
King with Nepali Princess.
The King of Nepal's Final Instructions To His Daughter Bhrikuti Devi.
XXXX.
Guru Rinpoche sacred site.

before her departure to Lhasa. It may be of interest and for the record to quote below in whole:

O! Daughter, dear as my very eyes listen! In the extraordinary land called Tibet, with high mountains, pristine lands, and formidable snowy peaks, cool and cold, this palace of the gods. Whence four rivers fall and four seas are fair, where the five grains grow and various gems are found, where one finds ever so many joys and contentment and grain is eaten red. The subjects are not [ordinary]; their Lord King is a god. Not just the fourfold retinue, they're of the bodhisattva race. They lack the holy Dharma, yet the King's commands are Dharmic. They lack supreme Sangha friends, yet their true friend is the Nirmāṇakāya king. To such a land, my child you must go.

This [statue of]; the Śākya Sage, object of my devotions, commissioned by Indra, Lord of Gods, and of precious jewels made by Viśvakarman, bears Buddha's blessings. Consecrated by the Buddha himself, who said, "There is no difference between devotions to this holy object or to my physical remains." The Buddha's qualities are countless and limitless, and this image of the Victor, with qualities so limitless. Daughter of my heart, make it the object of your devotions. This Maitreya turning the Dharama wheel, sprung of itself up from the Victor's blessings, worship it and you will be born at Maitreya's feet and similar

King Songtsen Gampo with his two consorts, Princess Wenchang and Bhrikuti Devi.

qualities without measure will arise. This Self-Arisen Sandalwood Tārā worship her and you are saved from eight fears and will awaken in your next life. Similar qualities without measure will arise. So, daughter of my heart, make it the support of your devotions.

Ah! Child from who I cannot bear even a moment's separation, in the Tibetan land, where the language and race are different, make your comportment and disposition like this: Make your view loftier than the high sky, your behavior broader than the heavens; Make your dignity heavier than Meru, king of mountains, your smile more beautiful than a lotus; Make your dress tighter than knotted silk, your mind more obedient than white silk; Make your temperament softer than Chinese silk, keep [your belongings] better than a medicine pouch, in saving, be wiser than a honeybee. With the affection as of close kin, treat [others] like a sister. Be profoundly accommodating like the ocean depths. Make your shoulders broad as the earth. Move your hands swift as lightning in the heavens. Make your hands clean as a lotus. Be kind to the wicked as to your own children. Respect the good as you do your masters. Love each sentient being as your mother. Strive in virtue like it is your occupation. Abandon sin like poison. Have great faith in the holy Dharma. Mind your tongue like a dead man's corpse. Keep moderation in food as in medicine. Work others' benefit like medicinal extracts. Be sure to be clear as the sun. If you do, benefit will come to Tibet, and you will awaken in your next life.

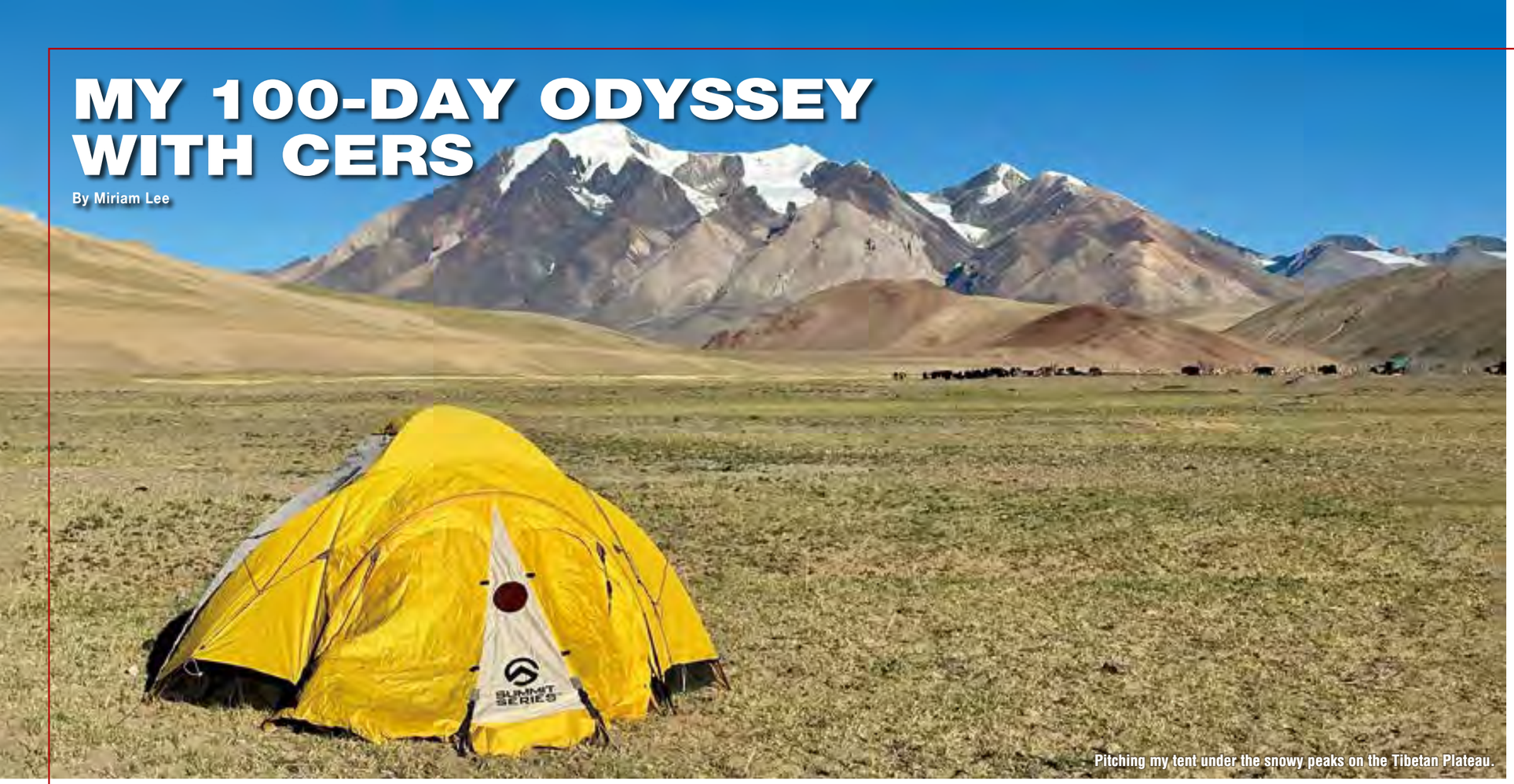
Ah, Cherished daughter, Thritsün, to you I grant a treasury of jewels-seven elephant loads. These implements of inexhaustible enjoyment I send, child, to carry you across the pass of poverty: artisans skilled with many tools and servants. I send, child, to accomplish your work, and this large group of servant girls. I send, child to attend and wait on you, the goods of marketplace and customs house, and all sundry delights wished for in Tibet. I send, beloved daughter, whatever you want. Of old, daughters have not ruled their fatherlands. Therefore, daughter, go to the center of Tibet, comfort the emanation-king and serve him. Propagate the good religion decreed [by the king]. Make the lord's palace secure. Erect holy images of the Three Jewels in Dharmic fashion. Build great monastic temples and statues. Make the Buddhadharma grow and offer to the Sangha. Delight the Tibetan king and ministers.

The happy ending of the Daman people is yet another positive, yet hidden, story for me who am optimistic and have spent half a century exploring China. It may only be a tiny story among the currently popular worldwide negative reporting of China from a media bent on discrediting the huge accomplishment of a rising China, be it because of paranoia or for whatever reason. Selective reporting, even fact-based, is not balanced reporting. I would not worry about declaring my own biases and prejudices, despite being Chinese and having seen China close up for fifty years. Claiming neutrality in this day and age in a highly politicized world is only for the naïve readers.

As reporting on China goes, the like of those I admired from an earlier generation, Theodore White for Time Magazine, Owen Lattimore for Pacific Affairs, and John Service for the Foreign Service, are all names of the past. All of them who wrote what they saw in real about China were sidelined, censored and ostracized. Today the internet in the hands of anyone has long blurred the line between fact and fiction. Long ago, the Chinese Yin and Yang circle with a curvy middle line is perhaps a good analogy, except that today even that line is becoming blurred as well. Dao can no longer explain our highly political and polarized world.

MY 100-DAY ODYSSEY WITH CERS

By Miriam Lee



Pitching my tent under the snowy peaks on the Tibetan Plateau.

My first encounter with How Man and CERS was almost 20 years ago in the summer holiday. Needing something to fill up the void after sitting for the excruciating A-Level exams, I found myself assisting the editorial work for the now ceased Hong Kong Discovery magazine, where I had the joy of delving into the travels and expeditions of the authors. Among them were a few manuscripts from How Man, detailing his encounters with the Tibetan antelopes, black-necked cranes and monasteries in the mountains. I was truly intrigued and fascinated by the stories, and imagined one day I might be able to visit and contribute to these natural and cultural wonders of the world.

With this little dream, miraculously I stumbled upon such an opportunity when I graduated from university. I got to work with the legendary Dr Rebecca Lee, founder of the Polar Museum Foundation and a good friend of How Man, on organising multiple expeditions to the polar regions. The gruelling experiences in the biting battering weather and weeks of solitude gave me a taste of the roughness in exploration, but under controlled risks, as all activities in the last remaining unspoiled environments of the world are strictly regulated. I was also riveted by the many compact and isolated settlements in these winter-lands, and how they negotiate the traditional way of life and modernisation. For instance, how the young generation juggles hunting seals and arctic foxes, and a packed school schedule.

Born in a sea-wise family, sailing in the Arctic and Antarctic oceans was something not only fulfilling a childhood dream but also a tribute to my ancestral roots. Being at the ends of the world compels me to know where I am from. As a Tanka, I have always felt that the history and lives of these boat-dwelling people are not being properly recognised. Centuries of marginalisation, and urbanisation of coastal areas in recent decades have forced most of the Tankas from being the outcast into oblivion. Wary of the older folks' fading memories, I started to document their individual stories and research the history and social issues pertinent to these floating communities. Some of these stories eventually got published online and in some major printed media.

Then came this moment of serendipity. A friend told me that a "very respectable explorer" was interested in my articles. One day, out of the blue, I received the following WhatsApp messages from How Man:

"Can you take me around CWB typhoon shelter? I grew up near Tai Hang."

"In return, I invite you to our Shek O Exhibit."

At that time I was quite swamped with work and study at the university. I very much wished to give this celebrated figure a tour around the real bay area of Causeway Bay but never got the time to. He kept exchanged texting thereafter me with more WhatsApp messages of photos of sunrise in Cape D'Aguilar, fishes caught in Tai Tam and CERS's state-of-the-art fleet of off-road vehicles and boats. Soon the messages sounded more imperative.

"I am leaving for Siberia recce expedition soon. You introduce me to CWB shelter please when I come back."

With a dash of mischief, I wanted to show the hero that I had done my part before him, and threw him a photo of me as the discoverer of a coral fossil at the bank of Lena River — the first find ever of the kind. That must have impressed him more than being a native of Causeway Bay, as he instantly texted:

"Now you are more relevant. How rare someone in Hong Kong should know Yakutia and Lena River."

"Send me your CV."

How Man indeed asked me to meet later, not in Causeway Bay, but at Shek O Exhibit House or Club Lusitano, whichever I preferred. Afterwards, he introduced me to William while running through CERS projects on Lantau. The rest is history.

Perhaps it was with this exploratory and carefree spirit that it seemed fitting for me to report for duty on my first day with CERS in the Himalayas rather than at the office in a high-rise in Hong Kong, and start right away with a five-week overland trek. The mileage cumulated in the first three months with CERS was phenomenal, from the Tibetan Plateau at 5000m above sea level to Hainan tribal settlements by the sea, tranquil mudflats and coves in cosmopolitan Hong Kong to displaced migrant communities in the border area between Thailand and Myanmar. And the journey goes on. Although How Man often says that the expeditions today are not as tough as they used to be, pitching tents beside glacial lakes, shutting myself off in the sleeping bag from the howling of wolves and barking of Tibetan mastiffs, editing notes on my laptop at the threshold of a remote Tibetan monastery are still quite something. Having been in expedition logistics and management of research projects at the university, I understand perfectly the manpower and meticulous organisation required behind all these operations. It takes much more than an adventurous spirit let alone personal charisma, but teamwork, studious research, and entrepreneurship. On this sultry and sunny Sunday on 1 September 2024 which marks my 100th day with CERS, my greatest realisation is that it takes a village to succeed and persevere. The superb staff team, dedicated field researchers, field assistants, drivers, local partners and the wonderful support of directors and friends are the most precious assets of CERS. There are certainly more hundred days to come, more challenges, and more fruitful returns.

CERS/HKU BOOTH AT FINE ART ASIA 2024

This is the third year we participated in the FAA exhibition at the Hong Kong Convention Centre. The first year, we presented artists from Myanmar and Bhutan, and was featured by the South China Morning Post. Last year, we took up two booths and presented ethnic diversity projects CERS is involved in within China and Southeast Asia, with a second booth featuring How Man's "Days at the National Geographic".

This year, we presented an exhibit with the title, "Sky in the South & Earth to the North". It features CERS early project with the Ewenki nomadic hunter/reindeer herding Yakut tribe with less than 200 individuals remaining along China's northern border. To the south, we present CERS current project in partnership with the University of Hong Kong in documenting and reviving the use of the mud scooter, a historic tool used along China's coast for oyster farming and tidal flat marine product gathering.

Many distinguished guests visited our booth during the five-day event.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Carrie Lam with CERS work group.
William Fung & a visitor.
Nancy Lee at exhibit.
Prof. Lydia Cheng & Belinda Hung.
CERS Team at FAA.
Rosa Pun & Yida.
Derek Collins, Keneth Ng, Christabel Lee + HM.
David Mong & HM.
Carrie Lam with HM.

NEWS NEWS NEWS

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

HMRGM & Ashi Tashi.
CERS team at Kathmandu.
Sampan in Tai O.
Student intro of Bangkok church.
Map of Li village.

■ Her Majesty The Royal Grandmother of Bhutan met How Man with her sister Ashi Tashi at the latter's home early September two days after Ashi Tashi turned 101 years of age.

■ A CERS team of seven visited Chiangmai in Thailand in August to learn about refugees turned entrepreneurs in order to establish a future site for education purposes.

■ CERS is in discussion with the Changjiang county government in Hainan Province regarding their initiative of turning our project site where we have preserved twenty traditional Li nationality adobe houses into a UNESCO heritage site.

■ With support starting with the last remaining wooden sampan CERS secured and donated to the Tai O Cultural Society, a fourth replica is now produced and launched, and used for education purposes. The China National Day evening saw four samples being used for this purpose.

■ Students from three high schools in Bangkok met with How Man and led him through an area of cultural and religious diversity where Christians lived peacefully among Buddhists for a century.

CERS IN THE MEDIA AND LECTURES

● HM joined some 300 students of the University of Hong Kong for their High Table Dinner at Chi Sun College and delivered a talk on his own upbringing in Hong Kong

● Martin Ruzek, a retired scientist with NASA, presented a lecture at the HKU Wong How Man Centre for Exploration on the subject of space-borne remote sensing and how the technology assisted HM to define several river sources of Asia where Martin was a key member of the expedition.

● Enlightened Sojourn, a series of How Man's books published in Taiwan just released its 6th and 7th books with Foreword written by George Yeo, former Foreign Minister of Singapore.

● A new film is finished regarding How Man's 50 years of exploration, citing many of his friends who have marched through stages of his life and career.

● The Hainan government released in their official media recognizing the work of CERS in preserving a group of thatched houses of the indigenous Li nationality.

● CERS hosted several groups of local and international students to our Shek O 1939 Exhibit House as part of our regular engagement with the University of Hong Kong.

● Miriam Lee, CERS Executive Director, joined Polar explorer Dr Rebecca Lee for a presentation re their polar experiences at the HK Space Museum. For RTHK Radio, Miriam recounted her experience in exploring and conserving rural architecture and landscape in HK and the Asia Pacific region. At the HKU Main Library, she joined faculty of architecture Prof. David Lung and Secretary of Environment Wong Kam Sing in addressing HK's sustainability and conservation practices.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Chi Sun College lecture/dinner. Martin HKU lecture. Miriam with Dr Rebecca Lee (left) and Mr Gabriel Lee (centre), Vice Chairman of Polar Museum Foundation. HKU students in Shek O. Hainan Government media. HM book series.

THANK YOU THANK YOU

■ We thank George Yeo, former Foreign Minister of Singapore in writing the Foreword of How Man's latest two books.

■ Alice Woo supported CERS in building our new Northeast China Pavilion at our Zhongdian Center in Yunnan to house our fine collection of ethnographic artifacts.

■ We thank Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother for her many gifts to members of the CERS board.

■ The Shun Hing Education & Charity Fund made another major three-year pledge of donation to CERS.

■ Ester Golkel and her family continue with their annual major donation to CERS, which has lasted almost twenty years.

■ Adrian Fu, long-time supporter and friend of CERS made a donation in support of CERS work in Hainan coastal project and the Lisu Crossbow Festival in Yunnan.

■ Kenneth Ng, son of the late CERS long-time Chairman Daniel Ng, donated Daniel's Breitling Aviation Emergency Watch for our Aviation Museum.

■ CERS friend Don Chow made a donation to CERS.

■ Harvey Young, a friend from the US made a donation to CERS.

■ We thank our new patron Jacequeline Zhang as well as long-time patrons Chote Sophonpanich, Betty Tsui, Serge Pun and Han Michael Jebsen for their support.

■ Alex Yan and his company Wing King Tong supported again in printing of the CERS 2025 desk calendar.

■ The Jebsen Company continue their support of wine and beverage for CERS functions and at our facilities in Hong Kong.

LEFT TO RIGHT:
George Yeo in Hong Kong. Northeast China Pavilion. CERS 2025 desk calendar.

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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.