A NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ACKNOWLEDGE CERS' FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

# CHINA EXPLORERS

since 1986

CHINA EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOLUME 27 NO. 2 SUMMER ISSUE 2025

3 HIMALAYAN EARTHQUAKE MENACE - Myanmar not alone
4 Stronger or More Doubted - We Face Them All Together
6 Resilience in the Face of Disaster
8 Tradition Meets Transformation - The Resilience of Miko's Fishing Community
14 AROUND JAPAN IN A CAMPER VAN (Part 1)
19 AROUND JAPAN IN A CAMPER VAN (Part 1)
24 Palawan Beckons Again - No Smooth Sailing
28 Leica at 100 - My German camera odyssey
34 CERS In the Field (Palawan, Japan, Shangrila, HK)
35 News/ Media/ Lecture/ Editor's Notes
36 Thank you / Current Patrons


**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:**

*Where Oshin mother lived.*

*Chiang & Soong at chess.*

*Foundation crack after earthquake.*

*Bosshard & Leica with Mao.*

**Founder / President**
WONG HOW MAN

**Directors:**
DR WILLIAM FUNG, CERS Chairman
Chairman of Li & Fung Group
CHENG KAI MING
Professor at the University of Hong Kong
HANS MICHAEL JEBSEN
Chairman of Jebsen & Co. Ltd.
CHRISTABEL LEE
Managing Director, Toppan Nexus Limited
VIC LI, Co-founder, Tencent
AFONSO MA
MARTIN MA
DERRICK PANG
CEO of Chun Wo Group
JOYCE SONG
Engineer, banker & art historian
ELIOTT SUEN
JANICE WANG
CEO of Alvanon
GILBERT WONG
Founder Chairman of Bull Capital
BILLY YUNG
Group Chairman, Shell Electric Holdings Ltd.

**Advisory Council:**
ERIC S. CHEN
Vice Chairman, SAMPO Corporation
JUDITH-ANN CORRENTE
Philanthropist, President of Met Opera
DANCHEN
Former Vice-Party Secretary of Tibet
Vice-President, China Writer's Federation
BARRY LAM
Chairman, Quanta Computer, Taiwan
DAVID MONG
Chairman, Shun Hing Education and Charity Fund
DR MICHAEL J. MOSER
International Attorney
TUDENG NIMA
Tibetan Scholar
JOHN E. STRICKLAND
Retired Chairman, HSBC
K.L. TAM
Map Expert

**CERS Field Staff:**
TSERING DROLMA, Education Officer
LI NA, Kunming Admin. Officer/Project Manager
LIU HONG, Speleologist
ZHANG FAN, China Director
ZHOU ZHEN, Logistics Support
EI THANTAR MYINT @ Sandra,
Country Manager, Myanmar
SU HLAING MYINT, CERS Field Biologist
Program Coordinator/Logistic Support

**Headquarters Staff:**
BRENDA KAN, Office Manager
NATALIE LAI, Filmmaker/Archivist
MIRIAM LEE, Executive Director
YIDA LYU, Filmmaker/RA
TRACY MAN, Financial Controller
BERRY SIN, Logistics Director

**Editor:**
MIRIAM LEE

**Design and Printer:**
TOPPAN NEXUS LIMITED
(852) 2973 8600

**HOW TO REACH CERS:**
Unit 7& 8, 27/F, Tower B, SouthMark,
11 Yip Hing Street, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong
phone (852) 2555 7776 fax (852) 2555 2661
e-mail: cers@cers.org.hk
Website: www.cers.org.hk

A NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ACKNOWLEDGE CERS' FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

# CHINA EXPLORERS

CHINA EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOLUME 27 NO.2 SUMMER ISSUE 2025

## President's Message

HM in a Soviet era submarine

There are seismic changes in the world today, both literally and figuratively. The Myanmar 7.8 earthquake with epiccenter around Mandalay hit the country in a devastating way, on top of ethnic strife and political upheaval during the last few years. CERS has two centers in Myanmar — one in Mandalay and the other at Inle Lake, not too far from each other. Our dedicated colleagues in Myanmar report on the damages incurred in the following pages.

Palawan in the Philippines has been one of CERS focus of research and conservation for the last decade. The geopolitical situation in the South China Sea has made the operation of projects in the region more volatile. Recently, we have invited a team of multi-national research professors from the University of Hong Kong to visit the area and propose future research plans. Their initial reconnaissance of the area was reported in our last newsletter.

However, to make such programs workable and smooth, we need to find local operational partners within the country as hosts, to alleviate obstacles. CERS is accustomed to being low-key in our work, but such practice may well be interpreted as being secretive. The world is going paranoid, real or imagined. Having a local partner would make our work more transparent, ensuring future collaboration success. Several of our old friends in Manila, all respectable individuals, would become trustees of a new foundation being set up in the Philippines. They would be more engaging in providing advice to CERS as we move forward through turbulent seas, which I hope will subside and become calmer in time.

Like geological tectonic plates of our physical world, after small and big tremors, they would gradually quiet down and rest in peace. I hope the same will be true in our geopolitical world. Of course, one consolation is that CERS has for a long time set ourselves up to be a non-political organization, finessing our way forward, for example, in both Mainland China and Taiwan. This issue has a feature of one such project, where we have planted a seed some ten years ago in a remote hill tribe region of Taiwan, now seeing fruition in being noticed even in Europe. These days, we explore Siberia and the edges of Japan as well as many frontier regions of Southeast Asia.

Indeed, exploration is a curiosity and knowledge-driven endeavor that has gone through millennia in human history. CERS is proud to carry that spirit forward.

*Wong How Man*
*Founder/President CERS,*
*Chair Explorer, HKU WHM Centre for Exploration*

*Disclaimer: Opinions offered by authors of this newsletter do not represent that of CERS, be they on religious, political or there socio-economic issues.*

*With respect to the entire contents of this newsletter, including its photographs. All Rights Reserved. Copyright 2025. @ China Exploration and Research Society. Please contact CERS for reprint permission.*

# HIMALAYAN EARTHQUAKE MENACE

## *Myanmar not alone*

**By Wong How Man**

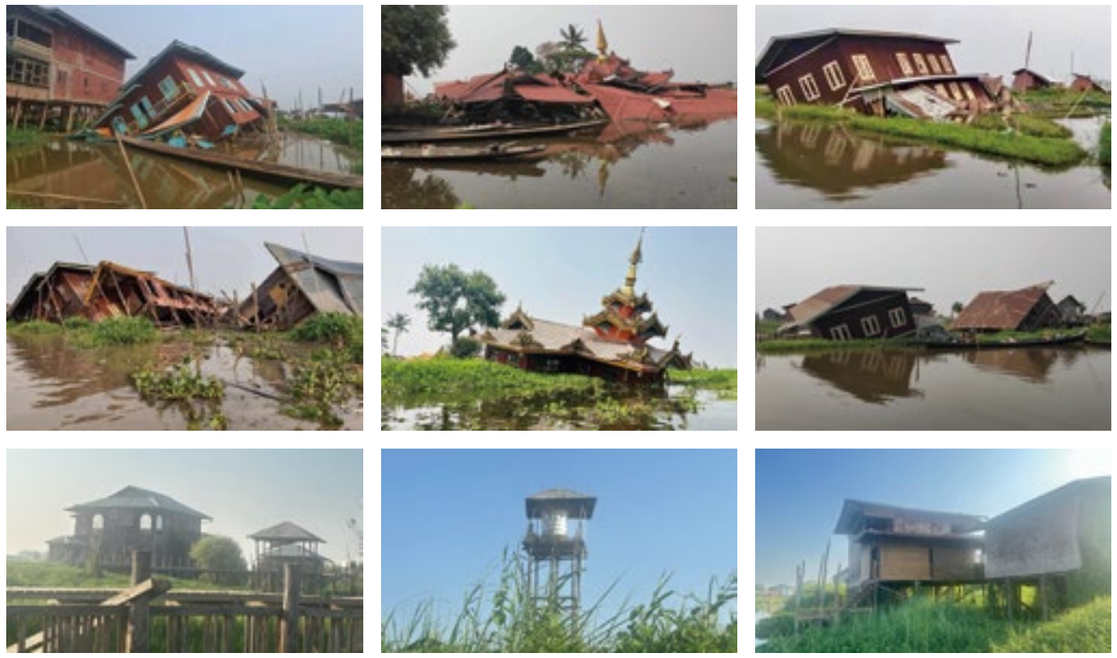
The Richter scale 7.8 quake in Myanmar on March 28 this year may seem surprising for people living near its epicenter in Mandalay as the region is not rife with such earth-shaking tremors within recent memories. But history has taught us that earthquakes of such magnitude do repeat themselves within decades, or every few hundred years, or millennia.

Some thirty kilometers north of Mandalay along the Irrawaddy River is the town of Mingun. An earthquake in 1838 left many cracks on the huge pagoda that never got finished, and one of the two gigantic lions guarding the premises also collapsed.

The tectonic plates between the Indian continent crashing into the Asian continent happened some 30 million years ago, creating the uplift which is today's Himalayan range. That activity has yet to end, thus creating occasional tremors, large and small, with fault lines adjusting to coexist and gradually settling down in temporary peace. The world record 8.6 quake on August 15, 1950, devastated much of southeastern Tibet, upper Myanmar (then known as Burma) and Assam of India. A full article in the National Geographic described this colossal earthquake. The 2015 Kathmandu 7.8 quake, which caught me at the airport, is yet another recent display of the Himalayan plates in action.

While the internet and news media reported much on the destruction around the recent Mandalay quake, little is known about the damage done at Inle Lake of the Shan State some 200 kilometers to the east. CERS maintains several premises on the lake. The pictures above depict the devastation around the lake, with many old stilt houses and even temples totally collapsed. We have been fortunate as our buildings stood their ground, perhaps due to being built more recently and with stronger wood. Even our three-story-high water tower seems to be intact and upright. But for the rest of the community, they are not as fortunate and await assistance from within and outside of the country.

While our Inle Lake premises may be spared from destruction, our two houses in Mandalay are not as fortunate and sustained major damage, with one house having to be totally dismantled for future rebuilding.



Inle Lake destruction among CERS premises miraculous survival.

# STRONGER or MORE DOUBTED

## *We Face Them All Together*

**By Su Hlaing Myint**

**TOP TO BOTTOM:**
**The river view of Mandalay House among damage.**
**The west view of collapsed Inwa Bridge.**

On March 28, 2025, my mom, sister, and I set off for Mandalay in the morning, following our familiar route along the stunning Sagaing Mountain and the winding Ayeyarwaddy (Irrawaddy) River. This road always filled me with a blend of freshness and memories that brought comfort each time. I wanted to enjoy the journey, but everything changed when we arrived at the clinic.

I was inside when my mom joined me, and we settled on the floor of the first floor. Suddenly, the ground shook violently—the first earthquake struck. My sister quickly ran to us, clutching important documents and belongings. We barely had time to process it when a second earthquake hit, making us fear for our lives. Clinic staff rushed in, urging us to leave the building and guiding us to safety away from the towering structures.

Finding a completely safe place felt impossible. We stood together with a diverse group of people, united by fear yet bound by our shared humanity. For almost two hours, we waited on a hot road filled with electronic equipment. In that moment of chaos, we turned to our faith, praying for strength and peace. I later learned those earthquakes measured 7.7 and 6.7 in magnitude, marking a day we would never forget.

**LEFT TO RIGHT:**
**The East of Mandalay House. The talking two ladies near a fissure.**

Once my medical treatment finished, our focus shifted to returning home to Sagaing, but we were met with devastating sights — buildings reduced to rubble, some fully collapsed, while others leaned precariously. About halfway to Sagaing, we found enormous cracks in the road. It was heart-wrenching; some cars had fallen into landslides, and the air was thick with desperation.

Our original route was blocked, so we turned back in search of another way. Along the way, we encountered other Sagaing residents whose faces mirrored our worry. The cracks had widened; the Inwa Bridge had suffered severe damage. Communication was challenging as the internet failed and phone service crumbled. Finally, we decided to head toward the Yadanabon Bridge, the last connection between Mandalay and Sagaing. Moving slowly through debris, we reached the bridge, only to find it closed due to structural failures.

Staying in the village felt like the safest option. I couldn't shake the feeling that Mandalay might never fully recover. As we made our way toward the CERS Mandalay House, we saw destruction on both sides of the road. Buildings were either fallen or barely standing. The steps leading to HM Boat were ruined, and the retaining wall had crumbled into the river. Thankfully, the staff secured HM Boat from drifting away, but it wasn't safe to stay in Mandalay House, the Explorer Noodle Café, or HM Boat.

We had no choice but to seek temporary shelter. Monasteries and community halls became our refuge. As we slept on the ground with only sheets, the cries of children and the frightened whispers of adults were haunting reminders of the tragedy. Nights felt endless; tremors and the quiet shifting of our community lingered in the air. Using local transportation, the Mini Oway, seemed the best choice amidst the chaos. The temporary jetty was packed with worried faces. Boat operators discreetly charged half price to those desperate to get home. Soldiers at the jetty asked everyone how much they had paid for their local boat.

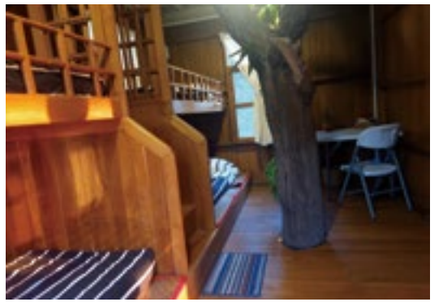
The broken old bridge had become a symbol of heartache in Sagaing Township. The fissures and flattened buildings stood as lasting reminders of our struggle. Each fissure, at least eight feet deep and six inches wide, reflected the magnitude of our loss. Yet, despite this, I wanted to remember the lessons we were learning from this disaster. Our community's resilience filled me with hope, and I knew we could rebuild.

Mandalay House has been central to our projects for the past seven years, supporting educational initiatives and cultural heritage programs. Though our future felt uncertain, hope lingered, reminding us that we could rise again.

As we sought to collect materials for rebuilding, we understood that our losses were not the end. Even if physical structures lay in ruins, our commitment to nurturing education and cultural heritage would endure. We would heal together, determined to emerge stronger from these depths. The four virtues of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity could guide us, helping us face the challenges ahead. Ultimately, I truly believe that the Sagaing earthquake brought us closer together, igniting a fire within us to endure and thrive.

# RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF DISASTER

By Sandra Ei Thantar Myint



**TOP TO BOTTOM:**

**CERS House 8 before quake.**
**Living quarters.**
**Deck of Noodles Shop.**

It was just an ordinary day for the CERS Myanmar Operations Team and many others across the country — until the severe earthquake struck. In Yangon, I had just stepped out of a four-storey office building after attending to HM Explorer boat matters. As I tried to call a taxi, I noticed a nearby car swaying unnaturally. At first, I thought I was feeling dizzy. Then, people around me shouted, "It's an earthquake — come stand here!"

When things finally settled, I attempted to call Su, who lives in Sagaing, along with team members from the Mandalay Project Site. But phone service was down for nearly an hour, and data connectivity was lost for several hours. Being offline and outside, I had no idea how serious the situation was in Sagaing, Mandalay, and Inle until I reconnected with our teams. The extent of the damage was shocking, adding on to the many after shocks.

One of our most cherished initiatives, Mandalay House 8, served not only as our project centre but also as my second home since 2018. I spent most of my days there — working, living, and building something meaningful alongside our dedicated team members: Su, Ko Thaung, Shwe Bo, and Ko Su Shin. Every corner of the house held memories: riverside workspace, bird-watching balcony, communal bunk room, and sunset classroom. Everything was chosen and crafted with love and purpose.

Mandalay House 8 had become a hub of learning and empowerment. We organised summer English four-skill courses for young learners in the village, as well as English grammar and general knowledge sessions. Even during COVID-19 lockdowns, we continued to engage youth through online Zoom sessions. We also launched housekeeping and hospitality training to empower our internship students from the village, art workshops to support the traditional pottery industry, and sustainability initiatives under the "Clean Up Our Campus" project. These efforts took root and began to thrive in the community.

Despite the challenges, we also launched here a Community-Based Social Enterprise — the Explorer Noodle Café. We introduced the Healthy Budget Vegetarian Noodle to encourage reduced plastic use and healthier, eco-conscious habits. Not only did the noodles become popular, but our Explorer Tea also emerged as a bestseller. This tea, prepared with ingredients from Shan State, followed traditional methods rooted in literature rather than market trends. Beyond profits, we sought to uplift the region, preserve culture, and foster unity, each cup symbolising shared effort and meaningful connection.

Before the earthquake, our CERS Myanmar team was making steady progress. The café helped cover utility costs and intern salaries. Visitors from nearby areas came to enjoy Explorer Tea and special Shan noodles while taking in the scenic Dokhtawaddy River. Traditional boat rides revived income opportunities for local boatmen and encouraged preservation of the historic Innwa boats and paddling methods. Village tours offered therapeutic hands-on experiences — hand-weaving, pottery-making, painting, and shopping for handmade souvenirs — bringing relief and inspiration to people used to the pressures of urban life. All of this flourished despite ongoing political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020.

The earthquake's sudden arrival halted this momentum, damaging homes, schools, and sacred sites. For many, it was a traumatic reminder of life's fragility. In response, our team showed extraordinary unity and courage. Within hours, local members were checking on the project site, relocating essential items, and assisting others in need. Despite these hardships, they extended care and compassion to their neighbours, embodying the true spirit of CERS. Our House 8 however, structurally damaged, would need be totally dismantled, and rebuilt later on after the ground becomes settled. As we continue to address immediate needs, we also look to the future. To rebuild and sustain our work.

Despite the hardships, this is also a time of renewed purpose. With encouragement from our global CERS family, we know we are not alone. We've established temporary shelters, distributed essential supplies, and remained present in our communities—not just physically, but emotionally. One message has guided us through it all: "The most important thing is to do what we can with what we have — efficiently, effectively, and to live life day by day."

These words remind us that strength isn't only about resources; it's about the choices we make each day, driven by hope, heart, and the power of community. In just three weeks after the earthquake, we even managed to reopen a temporary tea shop on the CERS Garage land, using the limited resources we had.

No matter how difficult the conditions may be, I believe that we can rebuild and create even better projects with my team in Myanmar. Fuelled by passion and the unwavering spirit of exploration, and with support from our global CERS family, we will carry on.

**TOP TO BOTTOM:**

**Hand prints by child.**
**Broken house foundation after quake.**
**Collapsed river bank.**

# TRADITION MEETS TRANSFORMATION

*The Resilience of Miko's Fishing Community*

**By Miriam Lee**

We pulled our camper van up the ramp in front of an unpretentious, 70-year-old traditional Japanese house characterised by wooden frames, paper screen doors, and dark grey roof tiles, reminiscent of the rustic scenes in the 1980s hit TV drama series Oshin. Takegoshi-san, in his rubber boots, greeted us with a warm smile. "You are very lucky," he remarked, his eyes glimmering with joy. "The sun is only coming out today after three consecutive days of snowstorms." The serene fishing village was enveloped in an unusual early spring landscape, with over one meter of snow piled high alongside the road, an unexpected sight that belied the imminent change of season. This lingering winter has prompted local fishermen to push back their plans for resuming fishing in the sea, extending their hiatus as they await the thaw that would bring back the bounties of the ocean.

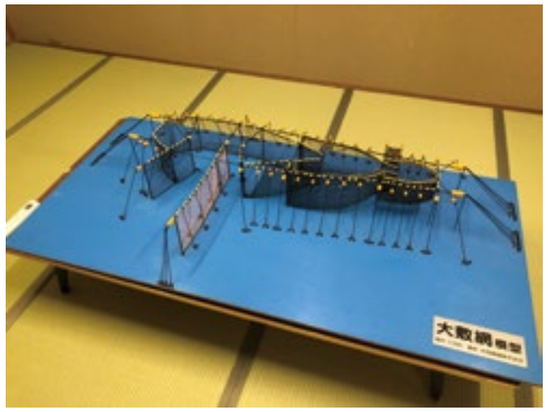
In the tranquil fishing village of Miko, nestled in the heart of Wakasa Bay, Takegoshi-san and his family stand as custodians of an ancient fishing practice that has thrived for nearly a millennium since the Heian period. Wakasa is one of the largest bays on the Japan Sea, featuring expansive seaweed beds dominated by the species Sargassum fulvellum, sprawling across approximately 2,000 hectares, creating a vital habitat for an array of marine life, including sea urchins, abalone, and turban shells, while nurturing the northern limit of the natural habitat for arame sea oak. Its sandy sea floors and rich mud areas form crucial spawning grounds for numerous fish species, including Japanese pufferfish, willowy flounder, red seabream, and bastard halibut, making it a highly productive area for local fisheries.

For over nine hundred years, the villagers have employed a meticulously designed fixed net system, a unique and time-honoured fishing technique that showcases their profound knowledge of the marine environment. Placed at the optimal orientation to adapt to the shifting currents and seasonal migrations of fish and squid, these nets are not merely tools; they embody the accumulated wisdom of generations of fishermen who have observed and learnt from the sea. The structure of the nets is both intricate and robust, engineered to withstand not only the relentless currents but also the tempests that can unexpectedly sweep through Wakasa Bay. This remarkable craftsmanship reflects an intimate understanding of local marine ecology, as fishermen expertly predict the movements of species within the rich tapestry of underwater life.

As the seasons change, so too does the availability of fish; early spring brings the much-anticipated firefly squid, or hotaru-ika, whose delicate appearance marks the start of a new fishing cycle. This is followed by the summer chub mackerel, or saba, which can yield staggering catches of up to 10,000 in a single haul, demonstrating the efficiency of their methods. The fixed net system is a testament to ▶

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**

**Takegoshi-san and his fellow fisherfolk set out their boats at daybreak. Communal fishing in Miko of Wakasa Bay.**



**TOP TO BOTTOM:**
**Sorting fish .**
**Model of fixed net system.**
**Takegoshi-san showing us around the fishing port.**

the villagers' strategic thinking and adaptability, requiring them to not only engage with the physical demands of the sea but also to understand its rhythms and patterns. Each deployment of the nets is a calculated endeavour, grounded in a deep reverence for the marine environment and an unwavering commitment to truly sustainable fishing practices that have sustained their community for centuries. Each morning, regardless of the season's grip — save for the harshest winter days — the fishermen set out on their boats to the fixed nets in the middle of the bay with unwavering commitment. With practised precision, they manoeuvre the boats around the fish that have found their way to the net, coaxing them to the surface and scooping them in specially designed minnow nets into ice-filled holds to keep them fresh.

Upon their return, the day's labour transforms into an art form at the village's sorting table. Here, every fish is handled with the utmost care, meticulously sorted into various containers packed with ice. The catch is rapidly dispatched to the bustling seafood markets of Obama and Tsuruga, or carried to the kitchens of Kyoto's most exquisite restaurants. Among the treasures of the bay, some fish, like the revered Japanese pufferfish, are carefully maintained alive, a testament to the community's respect for quality and freshness.

This meticulous orchestration from sea to table has defined the tradition of supplying food to Japan's imperial court known as Miketsukuni, encompassing the three regions recognised for their rich and abundant offerings: Awaji, Shima and Wakasa. Among them, Wakasa Bay has long been celebrated for its exceptional marine products, so much so that Kyoto bestowed upon them the designation Wakasa-mon, meaning "things from Wakasa." For centuries, these culinary treasures were transported to the ancient capital along the Saba-kaido, or "Mackerel Road," an intricate network of trails that wound over hills from the coastline of Wakasa Bay to Kyoto. On middle-way, Kumagawajuku functioned as a vital rest stop for porters, who, laden with over 30 kilograms of freshly caught fish, journeyed overnight to ensure that the nobles received seafood of the finest quality. This rich history emphasises not only Wakasa's culinary heritage but also its enduring connection to Japan's imperial legacy.

But what distinguishes the fishing prowess of this community is their egalitarian system, where income generated from their efforts is shared among all households

that contributed, after deducting communal expenses for essential business needs such as mending nets, fuel, and other necessary amenities. This approach to resource sharing not only fosters a strong sense of community but also exemplifies a rare and profound practice that is often absent in other parts of the world. Fishermen of Wakasa Bay take great pride in their work and maintain a well-structured social organisation that fosters a harmonious community spirit, where sharing and collaboration are the norm. As men and women come together to fix nets and harvest kelp, the atmosphere is filled with laughter and camaraderie; I was handed a crunchy baton of freshly harvested kelp, a testament to their abundant work. Yet, this idyllic existence is not without its risks and disadvantages. While the labour demands teamwork, it is the men who venture out on fishing boats, leaving households without sons — unless they adopt — facing the prospect of gradually fading from the community. In recent decades, a concerning trend has emerged as young people increasingly shy away from continuing the familial traditions of fishing, drawn instead to the allure of more exciting lifestyles in the city. This shift raises pressing questions about the sustainability of their centuries-old practices: will the rich heritage of the fishing villages of Wakasa and its unique fishing community endure, or will it, too, succumb to the forces of modernity and change?

Compounding the challenges faced by Miko's fishing community is the undeniable impact of climate change, which, while not significantly altering the total catch ▶

**TOP TO BOTTOM:**
**Villagers harvesting kelp.**
**I was given a kelp stalk as a snack.**

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**
**Sashimi platter prepared by Mrs Takegoshi**
**Snow in late spring in Wakasa Bay.**
**At Takegoshi's homestay.**
**Impromptu participation in a local celebration.**
**Grey heron enjoying a meal of leftover small fish from fishermen.**

volumes over the years, has led to notable shifts in the species that populate Wakasa Bay. In recent seasons, fishermen have observed a gradual but alarming transition, gaining fish typically found in warmer waters while losing those from the cold currents that have long sustained their livelihoods. This change poses a substantial threat to the traditional fishing practices that rely on seasonal patterns and the delicate balance of marine ecosystems. As fishermen navigate these evolving dynamics, the once-predictable rhythms of their catch have become increasingly erratic, raising concerns about the future viability of their methods and the sustainability of a way of life that has endured for generations. The intersection of global warming and the heritage fishing techniques of Miko underscores a poignant reality: adapting to a changing sea may become the defining challenge for this resilient community in the years to come.

Yet, amidst these challenges, the community of Miko is brimming with hope and resilience. Embracing change with open hearts, local fishermen have seized opportunities presented by government initiatives aimed at diversifying their income. Programmes to establish inviting home-stays during the long winter months, when the sea rests, have ignited a sense of entrepreneurship within the community. Though it may be daunting for those who have dedicated their lives to the ocean to embrace new skills,

the fishermen's willingness to learn is nothing short of inspiring. They have diligently complied with guesthouse regulations, attaining certifications in preparing the notoriously poisonous puffer fish, along with the intricacies of meal preparation, kitchen management, guesthouse safety, and hospitality.

As they welcome occasional winter visitors into their homes, they not only preserve their cherished traditions but also weave a richer cultural tapestry that invites others to experience the warmth of their community. The infusion of modern technology has further lightened the burdens of their labour, making the art of fishing more accessible and appealing to a younger generation. With newfound enthusiasm, some young people are choosing to stay, bridging the timeless connection between tradition and innovation. Ultimately, the message emerging from Miko is one of vibrant optimism: the community stands united in its commitment to not only preserve its age-old fishing practices but also to celebrate the rich culture and pride that accompanies the sharing of their extraordinary seafood with the world. In this harmonious blend of heritage and progress, the spirit of Miko shines brightly, illuminating a hopeful path forward for generations to come.

# AROUND JAPAN IN A CAMPER VAN (PART 1)

By Wong How Man

*Honshu, Japan*

My first camper van, a 1962 VW I purchased in 1973 during my last year in college was only US$150. It was all rusty and served as my vehicle to and from work, at a burger restaurant/ bar joint along the St Croix River dividing Wisconsin and Minnesota. My real camper van experience however started fifty years ago in 1975 and lasted for over half a year into 1976, living like a nomad and gypsy. That journey is yet my longest expedition to date. With my friend Edward, a mechanical engineer who understands basic automobile maintenance and repair before electronics dictated much of the car's functions, we took to the road from Canada in a brand new VW camper and drove all the way to Panama. As the Pan American "Highway" gave way to the jungle in what is known as the Darien Gap, we left the van behind and flew to South America with a backpack. After a tour in South America, until funds ran low, we went back to Central America and drove the van back to California.

Since then, I have been addicted to camper van life. Living in the US for much of the next two decades, I bought yet another VW camper van. Touring the coast, the mountains and the prairie of North America, through sunshine, rain or snow, I led a camper life, not just recreational, until I moved back to Hong Kong in 1994. Such a lifestyle allowed me to bring along many of the books I wanted to read, and write at leisure, in the company of wilderness and nature. Home was, fortuitously, also among nature, in a log cabin inside the Angeles National Forest above Pasadena in California.

Camp life became routine for five decades of my life in exploration, yet the comfort of a camper van stuck in my memory, and started crawling back gradually from my heart. As I move into my seventh decade, the septuagenarian word which I disdain and defy in activities, I found the opportunity to again move back into a camper van. I continue to explore China, where today much of the roads are paved, rendering the use of four-wheel-drive largely irrelevant.

So, since the pandemic, I added a camper van to our fleet in China and began traveling in style, a blessing to my

body, as well as to my bladder, given that it comes with a shower and toilet. Such luxury seems appropriate for a senior explorer on expedition.

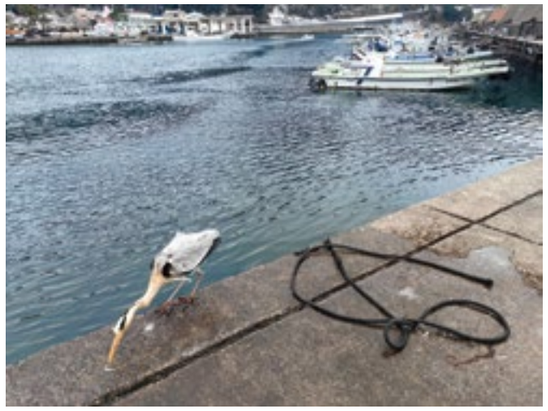
I began exploring northern Japan some fifteen years ago, almost yearly to eastern Hokkaido, observing and studying wildlife in the winter. Last year, I expanded our work to cover also the southern fringes of the Ryukyu Islands in Japan. Yet I have only gotten to know the main island of Japan through my early work covering gardens and traditional houses around Kyoto and Tokyo. So on this recent trip, I decided to use a camper van and make a circuit trip from Tokyo to the west coast, then the middle section of Honshu. Between homestay, traditional ryokan inn or inside the camper, surprises beheld me, in remote fishing villages, as well as in snowbound mountain enclaves, where tradition as well as craftsmanship of old remain largely intact. A few highlights below speak well of a worthy ten-day trip with a camper van.

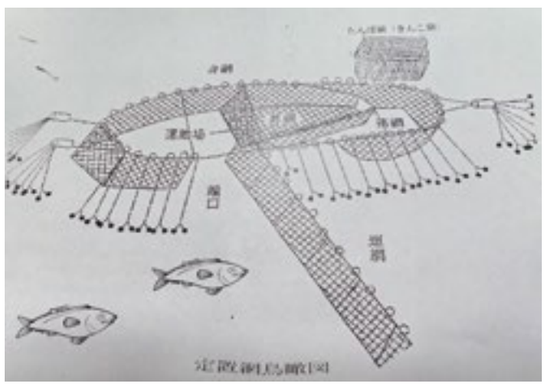
Satoshi Takegoshi is president-elect of the fishing community of Wakasa along the mid-central west coast of Japan. He is also a registered chef in the finest Japanese tradition of raw fish cuisine. We have chosen his home to stay for two nights when we visited Wakasa. Whenever he offers a big smile, his gold tooth is a distinct emblem of a rural common folk of the countryside, though in this case that of a fisherman.

Miko is one of several small sleepy fishing villages along a stretch jutting out into the Sea of Japan within Wakasa Bay. A small harbor shelters a dozen or so fishing boats from the rougher sea beyond the breakwater causeway. Early one morning at 6:30, we were at the harbor to see the return of a fishing boat, a father and son team. Toshio Shigeta is the most successful and renowned fisherman among villagers, and his son Koki is learning fast though only a teenager. His wife Naomi is on shore with a small pick-up truck, collecting the fresh catch, squid, fish, et al, for delivery to a nearby market. A gray heron ▶

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**

**Foot spa with view. HM w/1962 camper. 1975 To Latin America. HM w/new camper. Satoshi home stay. Satoshi seafood dinner.**






stands nearby to greet the return of the boat, within two meters away, pecking at tiny minnows left on the ground. The local fisherman called it “Sagi”, meaning “thief”, a scavenger that it is. Returning from the cold frozen air at sea, both father and son in bright yellow overall were puffing at their electronic cigarette to warm themselves.

Traditional fishing however, which has been practiced for almost a thousand years, is not based on single-family units. Huge fixed nets, an intricate system that evolved and improved over centuries, are a community-based method. Many families would engage in it together, using a much larger boat with a crane to wheel in the closed net, set at sea for a longer period. Each harvest may involve thousands of pounds of catch, then divided equally among the families. It seems to me that primitive socialism, at times margin on communism, is based on need, rather than ideology. Much less a struggle between the proletarian and the capitalist.

In the afternoon, we saw a few families, mainly women but also a few men, working along the waterfront as smaller boats brought in harvested seaweed and kelp, as well as some wild sea grapes, washing and cleaning them ready for the market.

For two nights I slept in the camper van among the snow while the rest of our team took up three rooms at Satoshi’s house. Each evening, we were feasted with an exquisite dinner served in twelve to fifteen small and colorful side dishes and condiments. I pity his wife who would have to clean so many plates and tiny dishes afterwards. The cuisine was usually sashimi made from the fresh catch of the day, nicely set onto a wooden boat modelled as if returning from sea with the fish on display head-high.

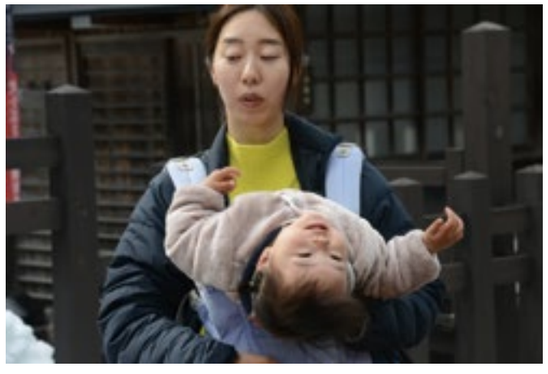
During the day, we took a chairlift up a nearby peak that offers a panoramic view of five lakes at the foothill into the distant coastline. Late winter snow made the scenery even more tranquil as I sat on a bench with my boots

off, soaking my feet in the hot spa while taking in the breathtaking view below. There was a small shrine with a fierce-looking deity, putting a spell on stacks of small clay dishes next to it. Visitors can pay a token price, use a pen to mark names or illness or whatever is bedeviling them, and throw it like a frisbee into the air, dropping off into the forest below. This act is supposed to cast off negative elements. I have felt blessed all my life and could not think of anything that needed casting off except some of the overweight fat around my belly.

Down the mountain and not far is the Uriwari water spring, boasted to be the second best mineral water within Japan, harnessing many awards. A short hike through a green forest took us close to the springhead, allowing us to drink from the live stream coming down the mountain. Miriam, our team member, has been in the area before with her friend Asaka who led us around, carrying her two-year-old boy in her baby-carrier. Less than a century ago, women would be carrying two barrels of fish weighing up to 30 kilos and walked all the way from the coast here in Wakasa Bay to Kyoto through the ancient Sabakaido, or “Mackerel Highway” route, an 18 ri or 72 kilometer ordeal, within a single day and night. ▶

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**

**Toshio family team.**
**Kelp harvest & cleaning.**
**Mineral water spring head.**
**30kg mackerel coast to Kyoto.**
**Drawing of fixed net.**
**Satoshi explaining fishing.**
**Thief heron.**



**TOP TO BOTTOM:**
**XXXX.**
**Deity with clay frisbee.**
**Asaka carrying child.**

It was the first day in March and the cruise boat on the lake resumed on this day for the first time after a few months of hiatus during the winter. Five of us became the first and only passenger on its first run of the year. As the boat hugged the lakefront, it stirred up sleeping ducks that took to flight in a flutter, after months of having the entire lake to themselves with no disturbance. In months ahead, this boat would ride the lake multiple times each day, offering little reprieve for the colony of aquatic birds.

We stayed for two nights at the posh lakefront Hotel Suigekka with only thirty rooms. All hotel guests, except us, seem to be local, and generally older. While Japanese are most polite and well-dressed, the dining room was an exception where you would see men and ladies coming to dinner with their nightgowns on. They were either just out of the hotel hot spring spa, or intending to go there right after dinner.

Our next stop along the coast would be the Noto Peninsula before turning inland to visit other hidden hamlets, and heading back to Tokyo.



# AROUND JAPAN IN A CAMPER VAN (PART 2)

By Wong How Man

*Noto Peninsula, Japan*

January 1, that of a New Year should be a happy day. But January 1 2024 for one country is not for celebration, but as a memorial to a badly timed disaster. A devastating 7.5 earthquake hit Noto Peninsular on Japan's west coast. Thousands of buildings and homes collapsed, covering Ishikawa prefecture as well as nearby areas. Almost 600 people died with thousands injured.

I have developed some cursory interests in earthquakes ever since I met world-renowned seismologist Clarence Allen at Caltech in the late 1970s. He was the first scientist introducing me to look at early satellite images, including pointing out fault lines of earth as seen from space. Subsequently, I was caught in the earthquake in Guatamala in 1976, in Los Angeles in 1994, the Taipei one in 1999, and the Kathmandu one in 2015. I even took up reading of historic quakes, including the 8.5 TREMOR in southeast Tibet in 1950. So accident-prone is only a footnote for an explorer who is earthquake-prone.

Many of us in the rest of the world may not remember the earthquake in a faraway land. But disaster often hit not once, but twice, like the atomic bomb that hit Japan in WWII. On January 2, when all of Japan was racing to provide damage control and relief to the earthquake-stricken area, an airplane of the Japan Coast Guard was taxiing for take-off at Haneda Airport in Tokyo heading to Noto Peninsula to deliver relief supplies. For unknown reasons, it entered the runway without ▶

**TOP TO BOTTOM:**
**Shirabu Onsen. JAL crash to ash. Caved in middle.**

permission and collided with a Japan Airlines Airbus on the runway which had just arrived from Hokkaido and was given permission to land. Five passengers died on the Coast Guard plane with the pilot being the only survivor. Whereas for the commercial plane, all 367 passengers and 12 crew members successfully evacuated and miraculously survived the crash before the airplane was burned to ashes on the ground. This sad incident provided a corollary as an aftermath of the immense earthquake.

As we were traveling along Japan's west coast, we decided to take a closer look at Noto Peninsula, and what had remained after the earthquake. We chose to visit and stay on Noto Island, connected by a long bridge to the peninsula. As we approached that last coastline of the island, we saw some old buildings, mainly traditional homes collapsed and yet to be cleared off the ground despite a year had passed. Usually, these houses have their heavily tiled roof caving in right in the middle, apparently the weak point of such structures. At a largely deserted harbor with few fishing boats left, we slept in a two-storied homestay house in the very quiet and desolated Bagaura Village. The northeastern tip of the island was where a lonely lighthouse stood, some two hundred meters on a dirt path uphill above another tiny dead-end village. In the village, not one person can be seen, the only life were three cats sitting outside a house curling themselves against the freezing wind.

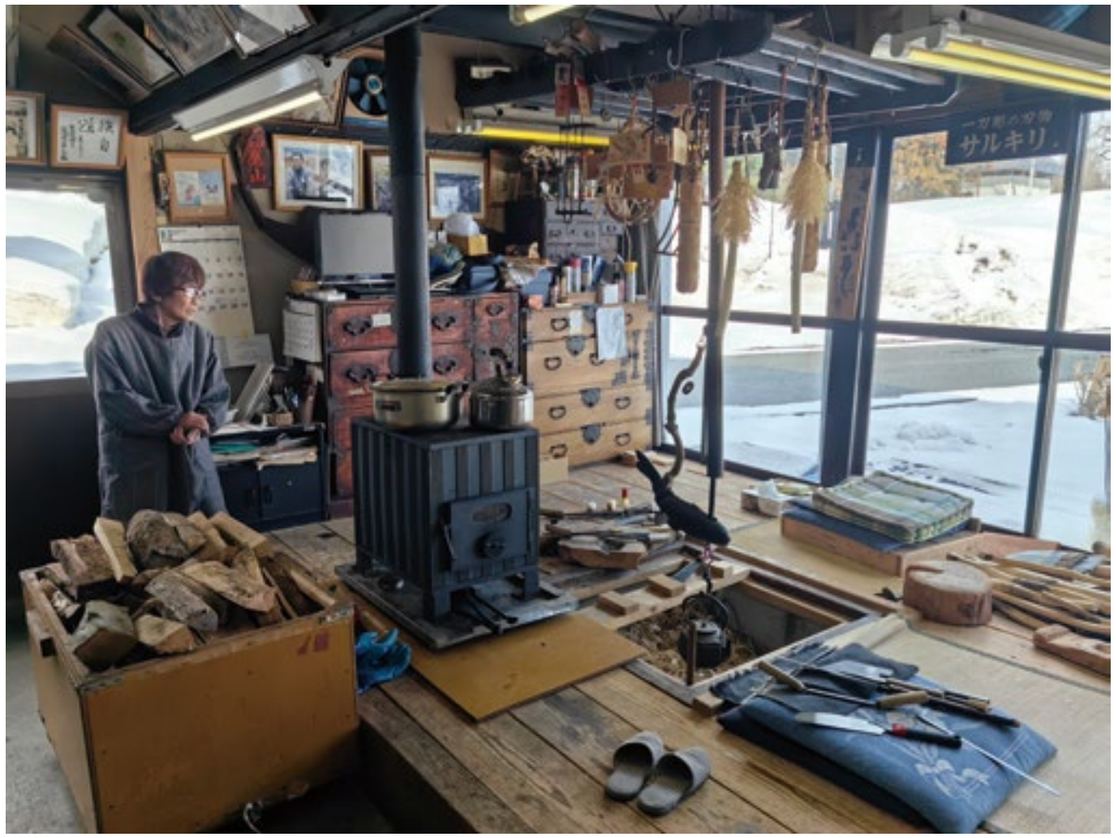
We stopped by a larger harbor where a year after the quake, bulldozers and earthmovers were still around, gradually repairing the damaged ground. The harbor breakwater here was said to have been relocated by the tremor, at times uplifted by several meters while the coastline at one point has moved out for almost two hundred meters. All usual activities, fishery and restaurants, have yet to return to normal, with the coastal town all quiet like a ghost town.

Sad as everything may look, perhaps the one and only exception was the Ojima Glass workshop on the island. Masahiro Kikuchi is a master glass artisan who has won many awards. He inherited a house from his aunt a few years ago in this far-off island, and decided to move his studio here permanently. From a simple home, it had now grown to become a two-storied studio and shop opposite a glass museum across the street. We stopped by for a look while a few young artisans were at work inside the studio, blowing or tempering freshly made glassware. At the shop, I chose to purchase a sake flask with blue and white stripes, with four lovely matching glasses.

With the sake container and cups on hand, I must now find the sake wine to fill it as we turned our travels inland. But first, we hugged the coast at Oyashirazu–Koshirazu, literally translated as "not knowing parents, not knowing sons". The place was thus named because of its isolation and dangerous ground such that people would be so apprehensive as to have forgotten their own parents and children. Only one market was open and we were lucky to buy freshly cooked king crab, and hastily fashioned a surprise crab-meat birthday cake for Miriam, one of our team members.

Once inland, we were among the snowbound towns and villages of Japan in the winter. In the mountains was one famous hot spot, not because of its steaming hot spring and spa. It was the shooting location of the highest viewership rating television series - Oshin, a long series run in Japan and throughout Asia in the mid-1980s. It is about the very rough beginning life of a young Japanese woman by name of Oshin who ultimately became an iconic business (Yaohan Department Store) tycoon, a true story turned drama on air. Busload of tourist showed up to make snapshots and selfies of where Oshin found her way here to meet with her mother. While I do not watch TV and know little of the story, it seems Oshin has a following far and wide, as I could hear multiple languages being ▶

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**
**Lighthouse of Noto Peninsula.**
**Earthquake sea coast shift.**
**Snow clearing.**
**Where Oshin mother lived.**
**Village under snow.**
**Sake distillery.**
**Miriam's birthday crab cake.**
**Glassware shop.**
**Glass blower.**



**TOP TO BOTTOM:**

**Keiko with Kanpu's work tools.**
**Kanpu at work.**
**Eagles facing each other.**

spoken among these visitors. Everyone else on team, Berry, Randy, Miriam and Sato are all familiar with the story. The huge precipitation resulted in a large amount of snow, obliterating the village houses as workers with safety ropes tried to clear thick snow piled up above the road to avoid it coming down as avalanche.

Further inland I found an ancient sake distillery to complement the new flask I bought a day ago. Toko is not just any famous sake to quench my quest. It was founded in 1597 with over 400 years of history, now inherited by the same family up till now for 23 generations. Even during the Edo period when rice was a very much valued staple, whenever there was famine, sake making was prohibited, but Toko is one of few distilleries in the country being allowed to continue to brew their famous sake. The ancient distillery had many wooden barrels and equipment on display for visitors, before ending at a shop where we bought some of its finest sake. I also tried the special sake-flavored ice-cream.

It seems handing down of business and crafts from generation to generation are common practice throughout Japan. At the snow-covered onsen lodge, a traditional Japanese ryokan we stayed inside the mountain with its famous hot spring spa, the Shirabu Onsen at Nishiya has been handed down by the same family for over 700 years since its founding in the Muromachi period. As for the current 19th generation, it is run by its female boss Hisako Endo, and her husband Endou who helped us register, handled our bags, assigned our rooms,

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**

**Women basket weavers. Grapevine weave. Team in front if Onsen lodge. Finished grapevine baskets.**

even took photos for our team as we left the snow-bound historic abode after a night of warm stay.

At the bottom of the mountain, we made our last stop, not least a shopping stop, at yet another generational but young craft shop. Young in that the gentleman was only into the sixth generation in running this shop, and his adult son Kentaro, the seventh is just learning to take over the business. At the Yozan (Eagle Hill) workshop, the owner Kanpu Toda and his wife Keiko are both my age, born in 1949 and now approaching 76. Kanpu is famous for his one-knife carving, meaning using just the same knife, not multiple different-sized knives, in the carving of his wooden sculptures.

With his one single knife, he demonstrated the carving of a standing eagle spreading its wings and standing on a pole. Within just a short fifteen minutes, it was complete. Most impressive was with a few delicate yet firm slide of his hand, the wings came into shape as if ready for flight. Next with a tiny piece of scrap wood on the ground, he trimmed it into a twig and fashioned a tiny eagle barely a fraction of a centimeter long.

While Kanpu was sitting in the front of the workshop, in an aft chamber were half a dozen older ladies sitting quietly weaving baskets from grapevine fiber. I paid a pittance for the two wooden eagles while purchasing a rather pricey hand-woven basket. The eagle costed me a meager 2000 yen (US$15), whereas the basket was fifty times that at 120,000 yen (US$800). Such an exceptional workshop demonstrated both low and high end pricing to fit shoppers with any budget. I wish other famous branded shops in the world will take heed.

This cheapest and most expensive purchase I have made since a very long time would close my sojourn around Japan as we drove our camper van back to Tokyo. Now I must think of who is deserving to receive this impulse buying basket. As for the big and tiny eagles, it is more personal despite much less costly. I would keep them to remind me of the skill and craftsmanship of someone my age.

# PALAWAN BECKONS AGAIN

## *No Smooth Sailing*

**By Miriam Lee**

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**

**Adjusting the ropes on the waves.**
**Fishing scaffolds withstanding the swells.**
**Fishing boats seeking refuge in the mangroves.**

Palawan beckons once more as I embark on my third trip in six months, a testament to the location's magnetic allure, the robustness of ongoing projects at the Centre, and the untapped potential for future development. The shimmering turquoise waters and gentle tropical breezes offer a welcome respite from our hectic work with the CERS headquarters office. Each visit to this paradise reinvigorates my commitment to the rich cultural and ecological tapestry that Palawan embodies.

Preparation for this journey demanded meticulous logistics as we loaded our vessel with ten days' worth of food, water, diesel and more. However, navigating the bureaucratic maze proved to be as challenging as the journey itself. Just as we were poised to set sail, red tape surfaced, requiring extra licenses from multiple offices and prompting last-minute calls that threatened to delay our departure.

Sailing in a vessel remodelled after a local fishing boat comes with its own set of limitations. While we took pride in our seaworthiness, the comforts we typically take for granted on land were sorely missed. Our generator could only provide power for two hours a day — a daunting prospect when everyone scrambled to charge devices essential for work and communication. This made me reflect on my ancestors, perhaps not so different from the Tanka people of Hong Kong, who thrived on boats

without such conveniences. They, too, sourced supplies from various locations on Hong Kong Island, diligently gathering fresh produce from the wet market by the then Bowrington Canal, getting fuel from North Point, and buying freshwater coupons from the Marine Department office in Shu Kei Wan. Here in Palawan, local crews displayed similar resourcefulness, gathering an assortment of essentials from neighbouring towns. The abundance of fresh fish practically at "one's door" mirrored our history — just throw a line and reel in a seabream, seabass, or even a slipper lobster to supplement the dinner table.

Our sailing plan was ambitious: depart from the mouth of Maoyon and navigate towards the archipelagos of Cagayancillo in the Sulu Sea, then north to Cuyo and El Niño — a miniature triangle within the world renowned Coral Triangle. Although many of these islands have emerged as "hidden gems" for diving enthusiasts worldwide, the fisheries and social heritage of islanders remain largely unexplored and under-documented. This expedition seeks to shine a light on those cultures and ecosystems worth preserving and understanding during our sailing.

Cagayancillo holds a special place in our hearts, being the hometown of Joceline, our country manager at the Palawan Centre. After a prolonged absence due to the pandemic, she is eager to reconnect with her roots. Accompanying us is her uncle, a vibrant member of our boat crew who has resettled in the fishing village close to the Centre and looks forward to revisiting his childhood home.

Just moments after leaving the calm estuarine waters off Maoyon, we were met with the formidable force of the monsoon. Waves crashed against the bow, propelling us up and down relentlessly while cascades of spray drenched our deck. Despite our attempts to shield the front deck, every wave seemed to conspire against us, and our belongings were quickly relocated to the kitchen at the rear of the boat, seeking refuge from the deluge.

How Man and I took to the upper deck, hoping to enjoy the spectacle of the sea, but soon found that even there, the thrill encompassed not just beauty but a surge of adrenaline and constant splashes as we faced the relentless waves. Ultimately, the captain deemed it too dangerous to proceed and sought shelter at a nearby island, where we anchored for the night, the dim moonlight providing a serene backdrop as dinner was prepared.

As dawn broke the following day, we continued our quest northward, waiting for the right moment to transition into the open sea. But stronger winds and waves thwarted our efforts, battering the boat from all sides. Taking my place on the upper deck, I felt as though I were riding a perpetual amusement ride, the thrill mingled with ▶

**TOP TO BOTTOM:**
**A local fisherman.**
**Facing the storm.**

trepidation. Around noon, the captain made the difficult decision to retreat further into the narrow strait between Purok Mandaragat and the twin sand islands of North and South Verde Islands.

Despite the mounting adversity, Joceline's adventurous spirit shone through. She approached a local fisherman making his way ashore, asking if he could guide us for a closer look at the village. With some reluctance, we boarded his smaller craft, weaving through choppy waters into a small fishing community nestled behind shimmering mangroves. The village, comprising about thirty households, echoed with the rhythmic sounds of nets being packed and sun-dried fish being collected. Disappointingly, by the time we arrived, most of the choicest seafood had already been sold to the nearby resort, leaving us empty-handed on our return.

Thus began our four-day impasse, stranded in this relatively calm stretch of water yet surrounded by tumultuous weather. Ever hopeful, we consulted weather forecasts while thunderstorm icons continued to flash ominously on our phone screens. The persistent rain poured over the lush mountains, and alerts of heavy rainfall and potential flooding felt like a reminder of nature's unforgiving might. News filtered through of a tourist boat capsizing near Tay-Tay, the stark realities of maritime exploration illuminating our venture.

Inside our confined floating quarters, we faced the challenge of limited electricity and internet, relying on the camaraderie of our crew for entertainment. A fisherman shared eight medium-sized crabs he had caught, and the alleged sighting of a dugong sparked brief moments of excitement. Adaptability became our mainstay: the table served dual purposes for meals and work, our sleeping arrangements were improvised on the dining bench, and we shared limited bathroom space. Amidst the chaos, a spirit of unity blossomed as we learned to navigate the challenges that cooperation had to offer.

Exploration is, by nature, unpredictable. Our plans had shifted, time stretched, and patience was tested; yet within these trials lay opportunities for connection and resilience. For, in moments like these, the true heart of exploration emerges — not just in the allure of discovering new islands, but in the bonds forged in the face of adversity. As we await the winds to soothe our journey, I hold onto the belief that every setback will yield a richer understanding of the maritime legacies that shape not only our path but the very communities we aim to discover and serve.

As we reflect on our experiences, it becomes evident that exploring and researching in this region is fraught with challenges, particularly stemming from the geopolitical complexities that can complicate our efforts. The very commitment to empower local communities and preserve their cultural heritage can be undermined in a hostile environment where stability is elusive. Instability lingers, threatening the projects we cherish and the partnerships we strive to build. Yet, amidst these uncertainties, hope remains a resilient thread woven into the fabric of our mission. It fuels our determination to find ways to navigate the intricate web of local dynamics and ensure that our initiatives can flourish, transforming obstacles into opportunities for lasting engagement and positive change. As we continue our journey, we hold steadfast to the belief that collaboration and understanding can pave the path forward, illuminating the way for a brighter future in Palawan.

**TOP TO BOTTOM:**
**Screen capture of weather forecast.**
**Moonless stormy sky.**

# LEICA AT 100

## *My German camera odyssey*

**By Wong How Man**

***Hong Kong***

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**

**Leica factory.**
**HM's Leica M4, 5 & 6.**
**HM's D'LUX series.**
**Ella Maillart in China with Leica.**
**Maillart's Leica (front).**
**Intimate photos of Chiang.**

At the end of dinner, Andreas Kaufmann, owner of Leica, took off a tiny red pin on his jacket and gave it to me. He further invited me to visit Wetzlar Germany, where Leica's new headquarters would open soon in May 2014, being moved back to the original site where the iconic camera and optics have been manufactured since 1925. Manufacture is probably an understatement, more accurately, "engineered" or "crafted". Two CERS chairmen were at the dinner, our former chairman Barry Lam and current chair William Fung. Barry is an avid collector of Leica and deeply appreciates their technology. William on the other hand is interested in the brand with its long-revered "made-in-Germany" label. A few months later, I did visit the very modern and posh Leica new headquarters in Wetzlar, a day before its grand opening to avoid all the VIP guests.

This year marks the 100th year of the founding of Leica, the world-renowned camera that captured not only some of the best pictures of the 20th Century, but also the mind and imagination of those who aspire to record fine pictures resembling those appearing in leading journals of the world, like in the pages of the National Geographic where I have worked under their auspices for a number of

years. I have yearned to have my own Leica since 1974 on my first major trip to China, seeing an older friend using a Leica IIIg with a retractable lens. Instead I was using a Nikon FTN, a workhorse for reporters during that time. But many of the field scientists and explorers that I admire from a generation before me used only Leica.

Soon after, around the mid-1970s, I picked up my first Leica, a second-hand M3, and later a M4 while living in the U.S. That became some kind of a spell, I began collecting M3s that are more affordable. By the 1980s when I was working with the National Geographic, despite using Nikon's in the field, the Leica, between my small collection from M3 to M6, became my recreational camera of choice, especially when I want to go retro or artsy with Black & White photography.

With both the M4 and M6, I fitted the 35mm as my standard. I can hide it nicely inside my jacket until I swing it out quickly for any impromptu and momentous quick shot as I walk down the street or inside a marketplace. This was during a time when people were more camera shy, before the dawn of mobile phones and selfies. I must say however that I have seen many aspiring photographers wearing a Leica, rather than using it. A wide-angle requires little focusing, with fully adequate depth-of-field for instant and spontaneous operation. During days of using film, a veteran photographer would know all the specs and differentials in his camera like the back of his hand. Looking at the weather and time of day, the choice of speed and f-stop is almost automatic, a no-brainer for any seasoned photographer. I know of no other camera but the Leica that feels so light, yet so sturdy as if it is an extension of your hand.

A generation before my arriving in China, several Western journalists and explorers were already roaming remote ▶

China with their Leicas. My favorites whom I read most about are Ella Maillart and Walter Bosshard, both Swiss, and German aviator Graf zu Castell. They recorded in photographs an age in the 1920s and 1930s when such images are rare and extremely valuable. Maillart recorded in photos Manchuria and the Silk Road while on expedition through some of the most isolated areas, whereas Bosshard covered China including Tibet and the Taklamakan during the German Central Asia Expedition between 1927-28, and later the Gobi in Mongolia and some of the rare images of the Communists holed up in the hills of northwest China as well as Chiang Kai-shek and his wife Soong Mei-ling in their home.

Both Maillart and Bosshard are Swiss, thus neutral in being accepted by both sides of the hostility between Japan and China at the time. Such position allowed Bosshard to cover the conflict happening in China between the Japanese and the Nationalist on both sides of the battle front. In 1936, one of Bosshard major competitors is American photojournalist Robert Capa, also a Leica user. Both tried to get their reporting into pages of leading pictorial journals like Life Magazine. Bosshard has obvious advantage in gaining assess to leaders within China.

One of Bosshard series of war-time photo was of a Nationalist soldier in front of the camera in full uniform, including camouflaged as if in the battle front. It ended with a posed picture of this soldier holding a rifle and being shot and falling backwards. A similar photo by Capa became his most famous image, depicting a soldier shot and falling backwards during the Spanish Civil War. The image even became cover of a book about Robert Capa. Both images by Bosshard and Capa were taken in 1936. It is difficult not to compare and contest the coincidence of these two photographs by two rivals.

Castell was a pilot and made large amounts of photographs from the air in the 1930s flying for Eurasian Aviation

**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**
**Bosshard & Leica with Mao. Bosshard with Leica's. Bosshard with Leica.Bosshard's falling soldier. Capa's falling soldier. Graf zu Castell in flight gear. Shanghai bund. Beijing Forbidden City. Zhou Enlai by Capa. Chiang Kai-shek by Robert Capa. Walter Bosshard. Chiang & Soong at chess. Intimate photos of Chiang. Chiang Kai-shek & Soong with Sven Hedin.**

Corporation, a joint venture between the Nationalist government and Lufthansa. Using a small Leica camera, he explained how his Leica slit shutter screen curtain direction of motion was from right to left, thus perfect and corresponded with his flying on the left side captain seat of a Junker airplane while shooting out the window. During low level flights a shutter speed of 1/200 second was sufficient despite the high speed of the aircraft at 200km per hour, since the shutter runs against the direction of the landscape moving below.

The subsequent photos he took throughout China from the air in 1934 became a much-valued book, covering southern China, the coastal towns and cities, geographic features, to inland Sichuan, the Gobi and far-off Xinjiang, the earliest record of China from the air during that era. Over a decade ago, I was fortunate to have met his daughter in Munich who helped us procure 100 high-resolution digitized photos from a museum where she donated all negatives as a repository of her father's legacy.

Barry Lam, CERS former Chairman, has one of the finest collection of Leica cameras. It included some mint condition specimens as well as very-used ones by iconic photographers like Alfred Eisenstaedt. Eisenstaedt took the Life Magazine cover photo of a Navy sailor kissing a nurse at Times Square upon news of the end of WWII. Though I am not a full-time or professional photographer by training or by trade, he graciously included my rather beat-up and first M4 I purchased pre-owned into his collection. Beyond that, Barry also collected very coveted prints taken by Leica, like an entire set of photographs taken during the shooting of the 1953 film Roman Holiday, starring Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck. Much of his collection, Leica's or photographs, are rather private. My modest contribution to Barry's huge collection, besides a M4, is an original copy of the Life Magazine that came out a week later after the picture was taken on August 14, 1945. ▶

While old or rare photographs are hard to come by, they can be reprinted as long as the negatives are still in good condition. Some prints are made into posters and reproduced countless times, one of the most popular and reproduced images is that of romantic revolutionary Che Guevara taken from a Leica by Alberto Korda in Cuba. My one search however, also of some little-known Leica images yet to be fulfilled, are those taken by Che Guevara himself when he twice visited China. From film documentaries and photos, I can see that Guevara had his Leica over his neck and was seen using it. I contacted his son Camilo who is also a professional photographer, but failed to meet him when I was last in Havana when he was having an exhibition in Italy. My search will however continue despite Camilo's passing away in 2022. Che Guevara is known to be an avid photographer, using several brands of cameras including a Leica 2 series.

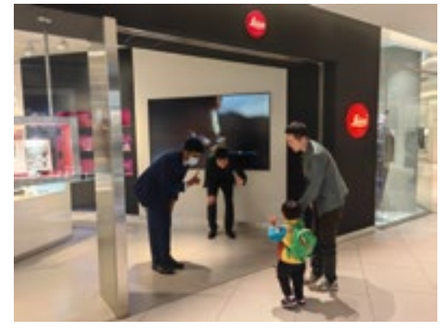
Speaking of the reproduction of photos taken by Leica, that's nothing compared to knock-offs of the entire camera. Within my own collection, I have one "Leica" made by the former Soviet Union, and another one made in China, both are almost like exact replicas, detailing to the most minute functions. These are copies of the early III series Leica. The Shanghai-made 1950s copy of the IIIb has a very limited edition of only 1198 pieces, and sold at the time for only Rmb80, almost twice the amount of a university graduate's monthly salary. In the 1960s, China even made a M3 copy, with very limited edition of supposedly 100 pieces, with three matching lenses.

One other matter stood out regarding the history of Leica that I must mention here. Though Ernst Leitz, owner of Leica from the 1930s to the 50s is German, he and his daughter Elsie successfully saved many Jews during WWII. As a very humanitarian family, Dr Leitz hired many Jews in his factory to produce the much-needed optics for Germany's war efforts. He gradually sent these workers and their families, totaling hundreds, overseas to set up offices in New York, London, Paris, Shanghai and even Hong Kong, thus away from the

persecuting hands of the Nazis. The book Freedom Train recounted such admirable history of the Leica legacy, telling a very little-known personal soft story beyond the more well-known hardware instrument.

To bring a hundred-year Leica story current, while in Japan I went to the famous Big Camera store in Ginza of Tokyo. While the high-end Leica's are beyond my budget and failing eyesight to be relevant, the newly released Leica D'LUX 8 small camera was within my reach, at around USD1800. Despite having a huge selection of cameras in stock, this new model was out of stock at Big Camera. I turned to the Leica flagship shop at the posh Ginza Six Mall. Outside the window glass is embossed with the number 100 to celebrate Leica's 100th year. Only a display model was on hand but not for sale.

Finally, a friend in Hong Kong managed to get me one, a parallel imported one, and put it in my hands within a couple of days. True to form, it was engraved in the back, "Leica Camera Wetzlar Germany". I turned to the bottom and read the serial number, 5933277. Further down below in tiny small print it said, "Made in China", Amen!



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**
**Che as taken by Korda. Che in China.**
**Ginza Six flagship shop. Toward next 100 years.**
**Soviet copy with manga. Close-up Chinese copy.**
**HM's Leica IIIb. Camilo Guevara with Leica.**

# CERS IN THE FIELD
## (PALAWAN, JAPAN, SHANGRILA, HK)

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:**

**CERS in Shirabu, Japan.**
**CERS/HKU Professors in Palawan.**
**HM with cuttle fish.**
**Birthday boy, Vincent & guests at Tacheng.**
**Judith Corrente with HM at CERS temple site in Tai O.**
**Field work on Palawan Explorer boat.**



## NEWS NEWS NEWS

■ HKU professors and researchers visited Palawan, they are David Baker, Jonathan Cybulski, Cheuk Yan Lee, Shelby McIlroy, Ryan McKenzie, Juha Merilae and Mihai Tarce.

■ CERS acquired a rare 1945 US Air Force Willys Jeep to complement our huge archive of records and artifacts on WWII

■ Hainan Changjiang county government organized a ceremony to receive from CERS 1500 early images of Hainan taken during HM's 1984 National Geographic Expedition

■ CERS launched the Junior Research Assistant Program with students from Chinese University and Heep Yunn high school to conduct archival documentation at the 1939 Exhibition House in Shek O

■ CERS guests visited CERS at our Zhongdian Center and nearby sites. They are Lydia Cheng, Belinda Hung, Stanley Wong, Vincent Jim, Vasilli Gorokhov and Zhao Rui

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:**

**HKU professors on Palawan Explorer boat.**
**Hainan Changiang Governor & HM at ceremony.**
**Students working in 1939.**

# CERS IN THE MEDIA AND LECTURES

● Amo, a member of the indigenous Tsou tribe of Ali Shan, and partner to CERS preservation of Tsou architecture, is invited to Prague to present his project.

● Zhang Fan, CERS China Director, made a presentation at the Yunnan Tengchong Scientists Forum

● Miriam Lee, CERS Executive Director, presented a paper on Coastal Environment and Historical Urbanism at the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments (IASTE) held at the Bibliotheca Slexandrina, Egypt.

● Several Hainan media, including newspaper, television channel and internet news, covered CERS donation of cultural assets and archival material to the government.

**LEFT TO RIGHT:**

**Amo at Prague exhibition. Miriam in Egypt. Hainan media coverage.**

# THANK YOU THANK YOU

■ Adrian Fu donated a Landcruiser Prado for CERS expedition use

■ Billy Yung, CERS vice-Chairman, donated a 12-passenger HiAce van for CERS use in Palawan of the Philippines

■ Fredrik Atting joins as new CERS patron

■ Dr Lydia Cheng joins as new CERS patron

■ Lowell & Phyllis Chang join CERS as patron

■ Linda Wang, a long-time friend of CERS became CERS patron

■ Many patrons renewed the support for 2025, Dr Joseph Chan, Jeannie Chou, Philip Chu, Andy Hei, Wendy Kwok, Christabel Lee, King Pang & Magdalen Yum, Anna Yeung

■ Eric Chen, former CERS director from Taiwan, directed his annual support to CERS to our project with the indigenous Tsou people of Ali Shan in Taiwan.

■ Mei Kwong donated much of her family's art and furniture to CERS. These included many rare lacquer and silver ware from her family's distinguished heritage during their days in Myanmar (Burma).

■ Michael Yong Haron makes a donation to CERS to mark his company new collaboration with CERS.

**LEFT TO RIGHT:**
**Adrian Fu's Landcruiser. HiAce in Palawan. Chang & Fu families at CERS 1939 House. Mei Kwong with HM.**

# CURRENT PATRONS

## HONG KONG / OVERSEAS

- Fredrik Atting
- Dr Joseph Chan
- Eric Chen
- Lowell and Phyllis Chang
- Lydia Cheng
- Terence Chu
- Vivien Chou
- Ester Goelkel
- William Fung
- Adrian Fu
- Andy Hei and Susanna Lo
- V.K. Hsu And Sons Foundation Limited
- Hans Michael Jebsen
- Wendy Kwok
- Barry Lam
- Christabel & Ricky Lau
- Vic Lee
- Afonso Ma
- Martin Ma
- David Mong
- Pang Family
- King Pang & Magdalen Yum
- Thomas Pritzker
- Chote Sophonpanich
- Serge Pun
- Stephen Suen
- Betty Tsui
- Linda Wang
- Gilbert Wong
- Dora Wu
- Anna & Eric Yeung
- Francis & Rose Yuen
- Billy Yung
- Jacqueline Zhang

**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.*