A NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ACKNOWLEDGE CERS' FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

CHINA EXPLORERS

CHINA EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOLUME 11 NO. 2 SUMMER 2009

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Scientists Liu Qiang and Wang Kai with captured crane for satellite tracking
Bale of tea at Tibetan market
Dr Susie Rijnhart in Tibetan dress
Fr Yao Fei offering communion

Directors:

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PAUL BUZZARD, PhD, Field Biologist
CAO ZHONGYU, Logistics Support
LIU HONG, Speleologist
QIJU QILIN, Tibetan Expert
MARTIN RUZEK, Earth System Scientist
ZHANG FAN, Kunming Conservation Center Director
YAO XUE MEI, Education Officer

CERS Office Staff:

BERRY SIN, Logistics Director
TRACY MAN, Accountant

Editorial Consultant:

CATHY HILBORN FENG

Design and Printer:

SNP VITE 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

CERS TAI TAM RESEARCH CENTER
(852) 2809 4181

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President's Message

The current economic crisis is unprecedented within memories of our generation. It incurred a crippling effect on the business community all over the world. Investment portfolios of individuals and institutions are taking a substantial loss, with return on investment going through a big dive in 2008 and well into 2009.

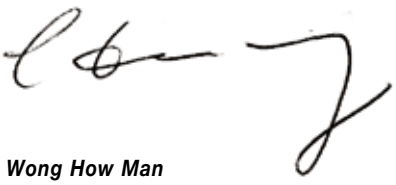
But for those who have also been investing their money into worthy causes, their return may not look that bleak. To the contrary, such investments may be the only consoling factor to their hearts during this difficult economic time.

I do not own a single share in any stock in the market. My shares have all been invested into CERS, with results which we would continue to bring you through the pages of this expanded newsletter, now with 36 pages. Our return on investment? It may be difficult to quantify, but no less real. Two friends who have been supporting us for years recently pledged larger commitments to CERS. I can only presume that they found our returns on investment worthy of their expanded support.

For our friends and supporters, I owe a very big thank you. Almost everyone so far has stayed with us through this financially difficult time. You are certainly one of those who find it gratifying to invest in something with deeper intrinsic value that is important to our future generations.

The range of projects CERS covers is extremely diverse. Given the small staff size, and budget of our organization, I sometimes wonder if it is magical. But let's not flatter ourselves, there is much still to be accomplished ahead of us, and we need all of you along to make it happen.

A recent *Newsweek* article showed a picture of a Land Rover with someone on top in safari outfit. It reads, "Half the fun of going out into the bush is dressing the part". As CERS has field work in our blood, not just in our clothes, and from this issue on, we will devote one page of pictures, sometimes exotic but never dramatized, called "CERS IN THE FIELD". Enjoy it, even if you are in an armchair.



Wong How Man
Founder/President, CERS

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WATER SPLASHING FOR NEW YEAR 1371

Nearly two months ago, I spent New Year at Jinghong in southern Yunnan. Here I am again, spending New Year at the same place. Two New Years in slightly over two months, one based on the Chinese lunar calendar and the other the Dai minority calendar at this southern border of China. The atmosphere between the two celebrations is drastically different.

Nearby is the mighty Mekong River, which connects the same culture, fate and destiny of people from several neighboring countries. In fact, people of Thailand, northern Laos as well as the Shan State of Myanmar also celebrate their New Year today. It is commonly known as the Water Splashing Day, to usher in the New Year.

My team and I were here to explore caves of the region, but decided to take the day off to join in the celebration. Early in the morning, I was collected by my good friend Tenzin, Vice-Party Secretary of Yunnan Province, to view the official opening of the ceremony together. The road to the main square was totally jammed. ▶

Wong How Man
Jinghong, Xishuangbanna
April 15, 2009

UPPER: Splashing water to usher in the New Year
BOTTOM: Monks offer prayers before the festival begins

Trucks of all sizes were loaded with water, hurrying in the same direction. In many pick-up trucks, people would put a huge plastic sheet in the flatbed to create a temporary pool of water. Riders would stand inside the pool and splash people in the streets, or each other when two such trucks should cross paths. This was the first year that water trucks and fire engines had been banned from the scene. Previously these machines would have a superior firing power, or more accurately watering power, over all else.

People from all walks of life walked in groups headed for the same destination. Some wore matching T-shirts as a team uniform. Others donned colorful festive costumes. Some women wore sarong-like long skirts. Children were having their greatest field day, everyone toting a colorful gigantic water rifle, sometimes half their own size. The tiny handgun-type water gun I was familiar with was nowhere to be seen.

Everywhere we looked, men and women were carrying variations of water rifles, some which had up to five shooting sprays. The designs have multiple compartments to hold as much water as possible. I saw a few "splashers" carrying the traditional insect spraying machine on their backs, with the tank apparently filled with water. Even a specially designed watervest, like a photographer's vest, was making the rounds. It comes with a shooting nozzle like a fire-thrower. The most conservative participants, like some of us, held plastic wash basins, which meant we frantically looked for refills each time we emptied them.

People were pouring water over, or shooting water at, each other, or at every person with whom they crossed paths. Strangers would become immediate friends – or possibly enemies – depending on how one interprets being doused with water. Some would intentionally dump excessive water over beautiful young girls who were making their way towards the main square. Drenched, they could only giggle and try to hide. But there was no escaping the torrential splashing.

At the official ceremony, the ritual was more civilized. Accompanied by ethnic dance and music to the rhythm of the traditional Dai Elephant Drum, a band of monks in saffron robes marched onto the stage. Buddhist mantras were recited over the loudspeakers as the head monk took some sacred water and poured it symbolically over some of the officials on stage.

Once the official announcement was made that Water Splashing for the Year 1371 was beginning, all hell broke loose in the square.

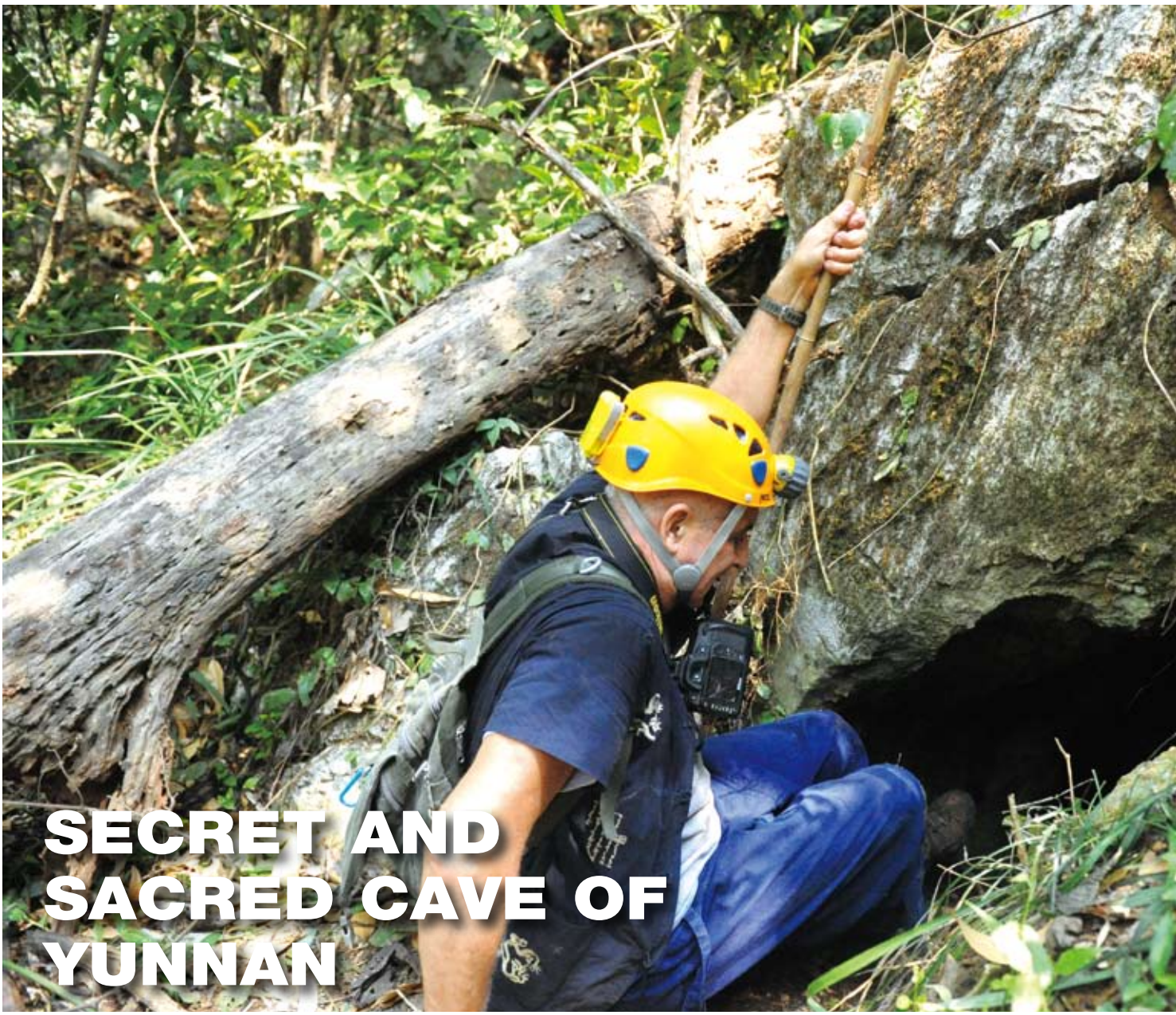
It was like seeing water fountains spring up from all directions as the amassed crowd went hysterical dousing each other. There were a few fountains in the square and people jumped in with their buckets or wash basins and splash liked mad. The group of high officials I was with retreated through the back of the stage. Nonetheless we got drenched as the water spared no one. Some standers-by obviously took discriminate aim from behind the crowd, and made their revenge on government officials, spraying us with water "bullets".

One guest of our team, French-Italian Patrick, must have provoked an assault by bringing with him a tiny umbrella to try to shield himself from the onslaught. Within a short time he was encircled by a gang targeting their water at him. At first, he stood high with

his umbrella like a statue for a target. But before long, he was brought to his knees, bracing his face and body under his tiny umbrella. It was one of the most hilarious sights of the day. Then we retired to our hotel villa to dry ourselves.

Patrick, totally amazed by the event, was further dazed to find that his "waterproof" backpack was soaked with water. In it were his camera, mobile phone, Blackberry, notebook and other knickknacks. Late afternoon, I walked by his villa to make sure he was still alright after the near-drowning experience. He had paid a price for participating in the "fun". I felt sympathy for him as I gaped at the line-up of electronic equipment drying under the hot sun of this tropical corner of China. We had just ushered in the Year 1371.

LEFT: The town square is flooded with well wishers
TOP TO BOTTOM: Colorful water guns on parade; Patrick under fire-or, water; Patrick brought to his knees



SECRET AND SACRED CAVE OF YUNNAN

Wong How Man
Meng Yuan, Xishuangbanna
April 17, 2009

Bo Langwen is a 65-year-old Dai man. His best friends Bo Langjin and Bo Langsha are also 65. The trio, like triplets, lives in Chengzi Village right at the border of a nature reserve where CERS has been exploring historical caves since last year. Zhang Fan, our China Director and leader of the CERS Caving Team, has become a habitual visitor and trusted friend of the Bos. As we chatted, the elders began letting us in on one of the most guarded secrets of the Dai villagers – about a cave few people knew about.

"The cave is called Bimi (secret) Cave and is a well-kept secret among the Dai elders," said Bo Langwen. "Even women and young people do not know the whereabouts of this cave. I was only told of the location of it when I turned 55, 10 years ago when my father-in-law finally felt that I could be trusted." He must have been faithful to his wife to have been deemed worthy of knowing the family secret.

Nearby, perhaps 400 meters away, is another cave famous to all. Bao Niu Jiao Cave (Precious Bull Horn Cave) is traditionally visited by Dai, one of China's minority nationalities, from around the region. Even those from across the national border in Laos or Myanmar come here to worship.

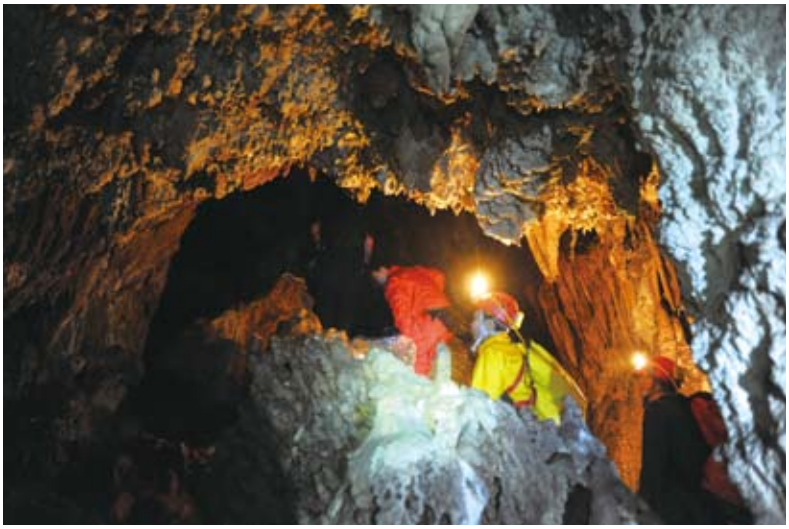
LEFT: Entrance to secret cave
TOP: Stalactites drip from the cave's ceiling
BOTTOM: Stalagmites rise from the cave's floor

It is considered a sacred Buddhist cave where pilgrims come and recently opened as a tourist cave. But Bimi Cave is considered both sacred and secret.

The cave was so well hidden that a year or so ago when the three elders tried to relocate it, they at first failed to find it under the thick bushes among this tropical rainforest of southern Yunnan near the border of Laos. But today we are in luck. With the sharp sheave of a Dai knife, they led the way and cut through the thick undergrowth of the forest, opening a foot path up the hill from the village, above and beyond a Buddhist temple.

Why have they kept this cave a secret? In case of wars or calamities, the village elders could bring their families there to hide in safety. If all the villagers, especially younger ones, should know about it, the secret might not be so well kept. But decades of peace ▶

within China may have rendered such a hiding place irrelevant, thus the three Bos were willing to reveal it location.



We entered through a small crevice between two hidden rocks and descended several meters below ground. The formations inside this karst cave are still very active, with stalactites and stalagmites growing all over. A few bats stirred and fluttered into flight. The three elder men used simple flint sticks barely a few inches long to light their way. When one flint stick burned to the end, another was lit as they moved forward. Our team, in full caving outfits and headlamps, followed closely behind.

At one point, a simple sleeping mat was placed under a receding indent. Bo Langwen said it was for the cave guardian to sleep. For three months every two years, a local senior monk comes to meditate and pray to the Cave God. During that time, meals are brought to him twice a day. Bo said that it would take over a day to finish exploring the cave to its end. At one point, the crack was so small that we had to get on our knees, bend our bodies sideways with our arms folded and stretched forward to squeeze into another chamber that led to another labyrinth of channeled paths.

Measurements were taken to draw up an accurate and three-dimensional cave map. We collected some insect specimens. Two teams of filmmakers, including one from CCTV Channel One, documented our entry into the cave. It is not unique, though. There are probably countless hidden caves throughout the karst region of southern China. Our knowledge and discovery of China's underground treasure is only just beginning.

The township we are in is called Meng Yuan, phonetically similar to either "dream faraway" or "dream fulfilled". With our visit to this secret and sacred cave in the border area of China, I feel the second interpretation is more appropriate: My dream has been fulfilled.

TOP: Howman squeezes through a narrow section of the cave
BOTTOM: CERS team penetrates new depths
RIGHT: Annie Taylor with her escorts

WOMEN EXPLORERS TO CHINA (1880-1930)

Katie Farrell
February 4, 2009

(Apart from personal reflections of the author, the following includes excerpts from a CERS permanent exhibit at our theme museum in Old Town Shangri-la featuring the history of exploration in China. A room there is devoted to women explorers; here, we spotlight three such distinguished individuals.)

The air was quiet and cold, but pregnant with a deep, layered history. It a was late November afternoon and the sun hung low and grey over the great Ta'er Monastery (Kum Bum). A few tourists could be seen huddled in small groups around the great square. The deep well of history at Ta'er Monastery had been colored by my recent assignment from How Man Wong to delve into the history of Western women explorers in to western China, including Tibet and Xinjiang.

Now, here I was, the very place where English missionary Annie Taylor distributed text cards introducing Christianity in 1887; Canadian Dr. Susie Carson Rijnhart treated wounded monks during the Hui (Mohammedan, Muslim) uprising in 1895; and where from 1917 to 1920 French Tibetologist Alexandra David-Neel spent two and a half years translating Buddhist texts from Tibetan to French. David-Neel described the monastery as: "paradise…Recessed in the hollow of a valley…with beautiful decorated roofs furnished with ornaments and flying banners, it is a feast for the eye".

I could not help but feel I was cheating. I cannot even say I followed in their footsteps, but touching down in a few places gave me a greater depth of understanding of their accomplishments. The trip from Ta'er Monastery to Qinghai Lake (Koko Nor) that Alexandra David-Neel, the Rijnharts, and many others made in a journey of over 10 days, I covered in just three hours by car. David-Neel spent four months on foot to Lhasa, facing not only obstacles of extreme weather, but of bandits and wolves. I simply boarded a train in Xining to arrive 25 hours later in the "forbidden city".

The year 2008 brought several interesting inflection points to the world, including the Beijing Olympics, the first significant bid for the US presidency by a woman, and renewed debate surrounding Tibet's relationship to China. These events made it especially interesting to look back 100 years to previous intersections of similar moments – namely the dialogue between Tibet and China, the western world's focus on central Asia, and the evolution of women's rights in the US and Europe.

At the turn of the 19th century, Western women lived within strict confines of society. They were considered second-class citizens – unable to vote, own property, or sign a contract. They lived in the shadow of their husbands and their lives were relegated to the home and children. It was considered improper for a woman to travel alone, wear trousers, or pursue higher education. It was during this time, from approximately 1880-1935, that the explorers Annie Taylor, Dr. Susie Carson Rijnhart, and Alexandra David-Neel traversed the world's highest peaks and entered some of the most closed areas of western China.

Retrospectively, the immediate question asked, particularly of women explorers, was, "Why would they venture into the unknown and why would they dare challenge social conventions?" This was a question never asked of their male counterparts.

TOP LEFT AND MIDDLE: Chortens at Taer Monastery in early days and today
UPPER AND LOWER: Alexandra David-Neel as pilgrim and at home in Paris in her senior years

Annie Taylor (b. 1855, d. after 1908) was a missionary and a pioneer. In almost all cases of Western exploration, Christian missionaries arrived first. China was no exception. Annie Taylor's reason was likewise because of religion. Annie sailed from England on September 24, 1884, and arrived in Shanghai eight weeks later. She spent eight years in western China and India before making her dash to Lhasa, even visiting Ta'er Si, being one of the first Europeans to do so. It was here that Taylor's passion to reach Tibet was stoked: "If no one else is found to go among them, I must," she wrote to her director of the China Inland Mission of the great need for missions in Tibet.

Annie spent a year in Gansu Province, on the border of Tibet, waiting for the right moment to begin her journey to Lhasa. At dawn on September 22, 1892, Taylor snuck through the city gates to meet her Chinese guide. Annie's caravan consisted of only a few horses and five other people. Shortly after crossing the border into Tibet the group was attacked by robbers, who took almost all of their possessions. She was the first Western woman to enter Tibet proper. ▶

After four months of traveling at extreme elevations and temperatures, Annie Taylor was arrested on January 3, 1893, only three days from Lhasa. Annie was escorted a days' ride to the chief by 30 soldiers: "I felt truly proud of my country when it kept so many to keep one woman from running away." The chief intended to send Annie back to China, to which she announced "[You] may carry my corpse, but [you will] not take me back against my will." The chief provided her with blankets, food, horses and an escort of 10 soldiers. Her return trip took a total of three months. Taylor arrived in Kangding, Sichuan on April 13, 1893, after traveling over 2,100 kilometers (1,300 miles). As Annie Taylor looked back on her life, she observed, "I see that I have seldom undertaken what everybody else was doing. I have always preferred to strike out a new road and when it was made tolerably smooth, I have left if for others to travel. In this sense I may consider myself a pioneer."

Susie Rijnhart (1868-1908) graduated from Trinity University (Canada) at the age of 20, with the enviable distinction of being the first lady in Canada to obtain first-class honors in medicine. Susie later married Petrus Rijnhart, after which they decided to open a mission in China, independently of larger organizations like the China Inland Mission. Dr. Rijnhart was heroic not only for medical and missionary achievements, but also for her ability to survive after a series of tragic events that left her alone, without supplies, months away from the Tibet-China border.

The Rijnharts left the US in 1894, their destination the town bordering Ta'er Si, where they were immediately folded into the life of the city. The Rijnharts' plans to start a small clinic in their home quickly evolved to treating both injured monks from Ta'er Si and their opponents during the Hui Uprising (1895-6).

After a medical trip to Qinghai lake, the Rijnharts were inspired to attempt a journey to Lhasa to further their missionary goals. Susie's "Why?" centered on Christianity: "Let it be clearly understood that the purpose of our journey was purely missionary; it was not a mere adventure or expedition prompted by curiosity or desire for discovery, but a desire to approach our fellow man with the uplifting message of truth."

The Rijnharts set out for Lhasa on May 20, 1898. Shortly into the trip, the Rijnhart's son, Charlie, only a year old, fell asleep one morning and did not wake up. Charlie's death dealt a calamitous blow to the group. Continuing toward Lhasa, bandits soon attacked their small caravan stealing all but one horse, all of their supplies, and food. The next morning two of their guides went to look for help, but never returned. Petrus attempted to reach a

LEFT: Dr Susie Rijnhart in Tibetan costume
RIGHT: Alexandra David-Neel (centre) seated in middle in front of Potala Palace

group of nomads just around a bend in the river, but blocked from view by a sharp jetty of rocks, never returned.

After waiting two days the thought crossed her mind: "Why! I can never get away from here safely…I will never be able to get out of the country, I am so far from the border; I might as well be killed first as last," but Susie continued on rather than relinquish her fate to starvation Through sheer will Rijnhart was able to remain alive. Left with nothing, she traded what little she had for guides and food. As a woman traveling alone, at camps she was never allowed to sleep in a tent, and was often left to sleep on the snow outside. As she departed Tibet, there were many moments where she narrowly escaped with her life. Two months after Petrus' disappearance, Susie reached a mission in Kangding (Dardo), Sichuan, and in her first words in English declared: "I am Dr. Rijnhart" (Rijnhart, *With Tibetans in Tent and Temple*, p888).

Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969) is perhaps the most well known female explorer to cross Tibet's peaks. When she departed Paris in 1911 for India for an intended one-year trip, she would not return for 14 years, and only after she reached Lhasa. Alexandra had aspirations to become one the world's preeminent 'orientalists,' as they were known at the time. Alexandra's "Why?" was inspired by religion, not by Christianity, but through her deep emersion in Buddhism.

David-Neel constantly pushed the boundaries – whenever an authority or society told her she could not do something she immediately pursued that thing until it was accomplished: "I had endeavored to reach the Tibetan capital rather because I had been challenged than out of any real desire to visit it."

During her time in India and China, David-Neel became an expert and experienced practitioner in Tibetan Buddhism. She not only reported accounts of Tantric Buddhism – but spent 22 months living in a cave in alternating times of extreme solitude and conversations with a famed gomchen (hermit) lama delving into the psychic and mystic elements of the religion – and as mentioned above spent two and half years at Ta'er Si.

David-Neel disguised herself as a beggar and pilgrim by darkening her skin and using a Yak hair braid to substitute for her own. She set out on foot from Yunnan Province, accompanied only by her adopted son Yongden. There were many times when Alexandra's disguise was nearly revealed, moments when she and Yongden nearly starved or froze to death, but after four months Alexandra David-Neel became the first Western woman to reach Lhasa in 1924. "All sights, all things which are Lhasa's own beauty and peculiarity, would have to be seen by the lone woman explorer who had the nerve to come to them from afar, the first of her sex." In regard to Lhasa, Alexandra boldly stated: "I wanted to show the world what a woman could do."

Twenty-five hours after departing Xining, I arrived in Lhasa on a train that traverses the highest tracks in the world. Tibet is still wrapped in a shroud of mystery both from within and from an outside perspective. Time in Lhasa simultaneously pauses and rushes by: A great current can be felt flowing beneath one's feet, while a faster, superficial, modern river of cars and buses whizzes by above.

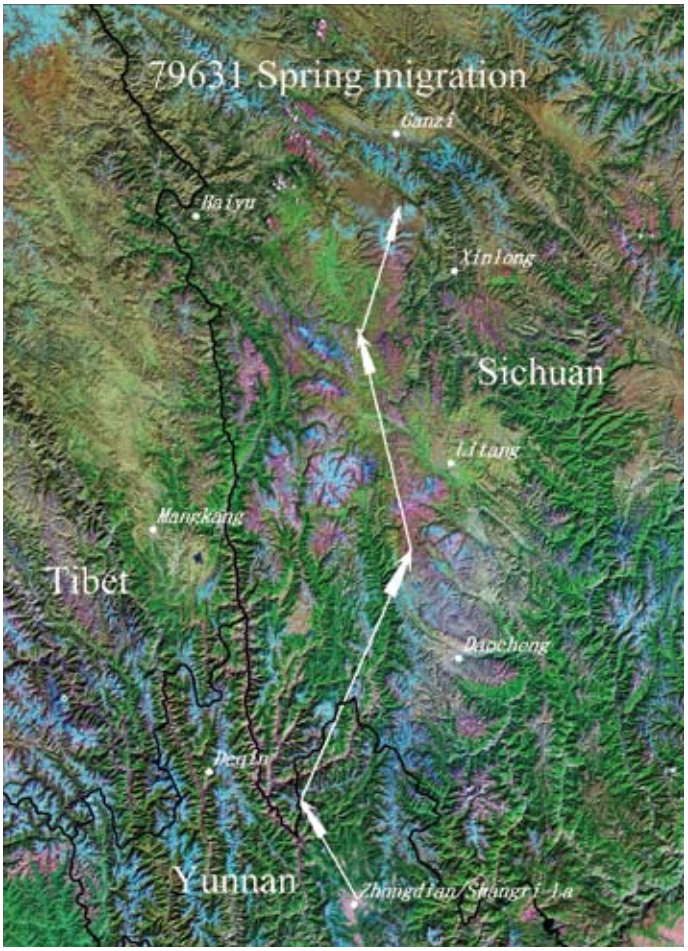
The question of "why?" must be asked of any explorer, but it was Alexandra David-Neel who answered with simplicity and strength: "Adventure is my only reason for living."

CAPTURING CRANES AT NAPAHAI

Liu Qiang
translated by Wong How Man
April 27, 2009

Migrating birds arrive in the autumn and leave in spring. Where do they come from? Where are they heading to? Would they be coming again next year? Throughout time, this has been a riddle for people with an interest in science or just the romance of nature. Legend has it that 2,000 years ago, a palace consort in the kingdom of Wu tied a red string onto the leg of the swallow to find out whether the same bird would return the following year to its nest above her window.

Napahai is a wetland paradise in Shangri-la of southwest China, bordering the Tibetan plateau. The pristine state of this ecosystem provides an ideal wintering home for the Black-necked Cranes. Every year as weather on the high plateau turns bitterly cold, over 300 Black-necked Cranes migrate from the north to here. As the breeze of spring kisses the new greening grass, farmers begin tilling the soil and sowing barley seeds. These spiritual birds of the plateau, as if hearing a calling from the north, begin their mass migration. Seeing the silhouette of them flying further and further away, we cannot help but ask where they are heading.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Scientists Liu Qiang and Huang Kai with captured crane; migration route of crane out of Napahai; Bar-headed Goose captured by mistake; a stray dog caught in our trap

Modern science and technology satisfied our quest for knowledge, even fulfilling our dreams. The latest developments in satellite-tracking techniques enable us to follow the birds' migration. To understand the Black-necked Crane's migration, a four-way partnership was organized, with the China Exploration & Research Society, Academia Sinica's Kunming Institute of Zoology, the International Crane Foundation, and China's National Bird Banding Center. In January 2009, after acquiring permission from the National Forestry Bureau to capture the cranes, the project was formally launched.

Freezing blizzards torched the landscape of Napahai during this coldest month of January. Even the thick-skinned furry yaks preferred to stay indoors in their barn. Our crane-capturing team left the CERS Center and was on its way at the first glimpse of dawn as the Land Rover bumped along the dirt road. Our approach scared into flight flocks of roosting ducks along the edge of the wetlands. But our team members were all excited and energetic, with eyesight trained on a group of Black-necked Cranes in front of us. Today, we must have a great field day, everyone thought. ▶

Once we arrived at the site, CERS staff Ah So took on the forward charge, using an axe to crack the ice to make a safe path of approach. The rest of us followed with all the traps and various paraphernalia necessary to get the job done. The most important part of capturing the crane was to set the traps at a location they are likely to walk past. All efforts can be wasted if the traps are set at the wrong place. So planning by experts who know well the activity pattern of the cranes is crucial. The rest of the team would then place the traps according to plan. After four hours of strenuous labor in freezing cold and mud, the first batch of traps was successfully set. What remained was a protracted waiting game.

At the outset, we had mentally prepared ourselves for this difficult task. But it turned out the difficulties far surpassed our wildest imagination. In all, over a two-month period, we set more than 3,000 traps – but our capture record was dismal. There were over 40,000 other wintering birds at Napahai, a huge number compared to the 300 or so cranes which were our target. These migrating birds as well as other domestic animals created unexpected obstacles.

Unintentionally, we captured many ducks, Bar-headed Geese and Black Storks. Even pigs and a dog were caught in our traps. Despite being upset that these preys had messed up our traps, we had to quickly release them as we saw them looking at us with eyes of fright, begging for mercy. To ensure trapped cranes would not be injured, we had to check our traps twice a day, both in the morning and evening. Every time, we went out with high expectations, and each time, returned feeling disappointed and defeated. Morale and spirit gradually dissipated as we failed time after time in our effort to catch our first crane.

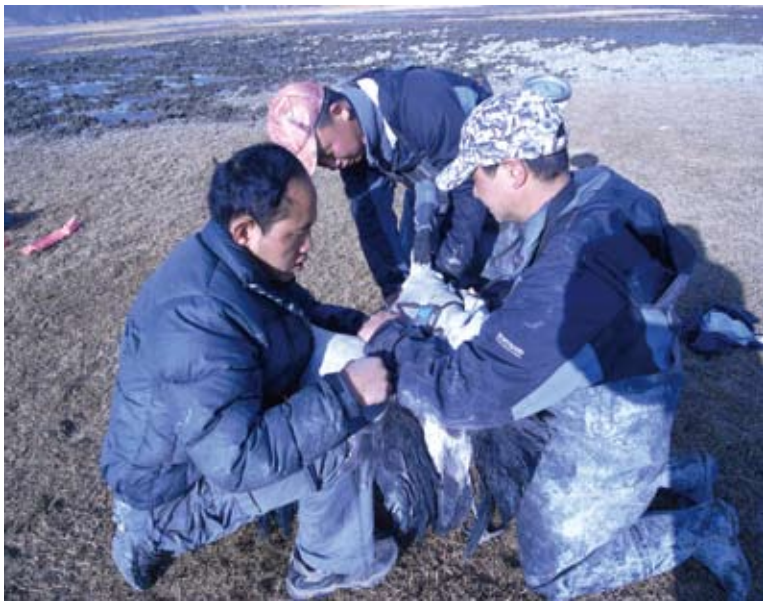
I was the person in charge of and responsible for this capturing and satellite tracking effort. That our efforts might fail weighed heavily on my mind. Failing to capture the cranes would mean aborting our project, our hard work wasted. I began to loose sleep and lost my appetite for food. Within a few weeks, what was weighing heavy in my mind translated into lightness in my body as I lost three kilogrammes.

There is an old saying in Chinese, “Three stupid leathersmiths can be smarter than one Ju Geliang” (Ju is considered one of the wisest among ancient Chinese scholars/military strategists). It means good team work can conquer the worst adversities. Thus I called a group meeting and tried to devise a new plan of action. We decided to change tactics by using a different type of trap and relocating them from the cranes’ feeding ground to the cranes’ roosting ground at night. Once this plan was agreed, everyone set to work and relocated all our new traps.

TOP FROM LEFT: Trial set-up at CERS Center; setting traps inside wetland; modifying new traps
BOTTOM LEFT: Satellite devices to attach on cranes
BOTTOM RIGHT: Affixing equipment on captured crane

After over a month of trial and failures, on February 12, we finally caught our first adult crane. When I saw the captured crane in my spotting scope, tears came to my eyes. Everyone was so excited, it was beyond words. We rushed to the scene and rescued the crane from our trap. We quickly took all types of measurements of its physiology as well as other vital data. Then we carefully attached satellite tracking device Number 79631 onto the crane's back.

The device is a tiny plastic box measuring barely 6.4 cm x 3.4 x 2.8 cm and weighing 88.7 grams, placing no restrictions on the bird's normal flying or on-the-ground activities. There is a short antenna sticking up from the device as a transmitter to space-borne satellites orbiting high above. It is supposed to provide up to two years' operation, allowing the bird's daily location to be transmitted through satellite to ground stations and finally to our computer. Tracking data flows in continuously at six-hour intervals. Every night such data would be passed to me at 11 pm through email for analysis. When the device's battery fails in about two year's time, it will disengage itself and fall off the bird.



Once we switched on the device and released the crane, our computer would from now on track the bird's whereabouts, allowing us to understand its daily activities. We watched this very fine adult crane walk off slightly unsteadily, before flying off into the distance. All of us could finally breathe an air of relief once it was out of sight. In our hearts, we prayed that it would continue to live happily and join the migration to a distant land for breeding.

Now our focus is no longer on catching cranes, but following the bird's daily routine through satellite tracking. Where is it today at this specific time? Is it still healthy and unaffected by the frightful ordeal of being captured and handled? Has it left Napahai? Would it arrive safely at its migration destination for breeding? All these and other questions continued to nag us. Every night at 11 pm, I sat in front of my computer and waited anxiously for the new data to come in. Then the next morning, I would reveal the new location to our team.

On April 7 at around noon, Crane 79631 finally took flight and departed Napahai. On the third day after its departure, it arrived at a small alpine lake and wetland between Xinlong and Baiyu counties of western Sichuan. In all, it has flown over 400 kilometers spanning its wintering and summering grounds. Since arriving at this site, it has stayed put with a short range of daily activities. Black-necked Crane my friend, let us hope that we will meet again this coming winter at Napahai.

(A second crane was caught on March 14, a sub-adult which stayed at Napahai wintering site until late May. By chance or karma, the first crane stopped at its breeding site within a short distance of Tumu Monastery in northwestern Sichuan. This is where for many years CERS has been conducting landslide control in order to protect an important monastery.)

TWO TAOIST MOUNTAINS, THIRTY YEARS APART

Wong How Man
Yunfeng Mountain, Yunnan
January 14, 2009

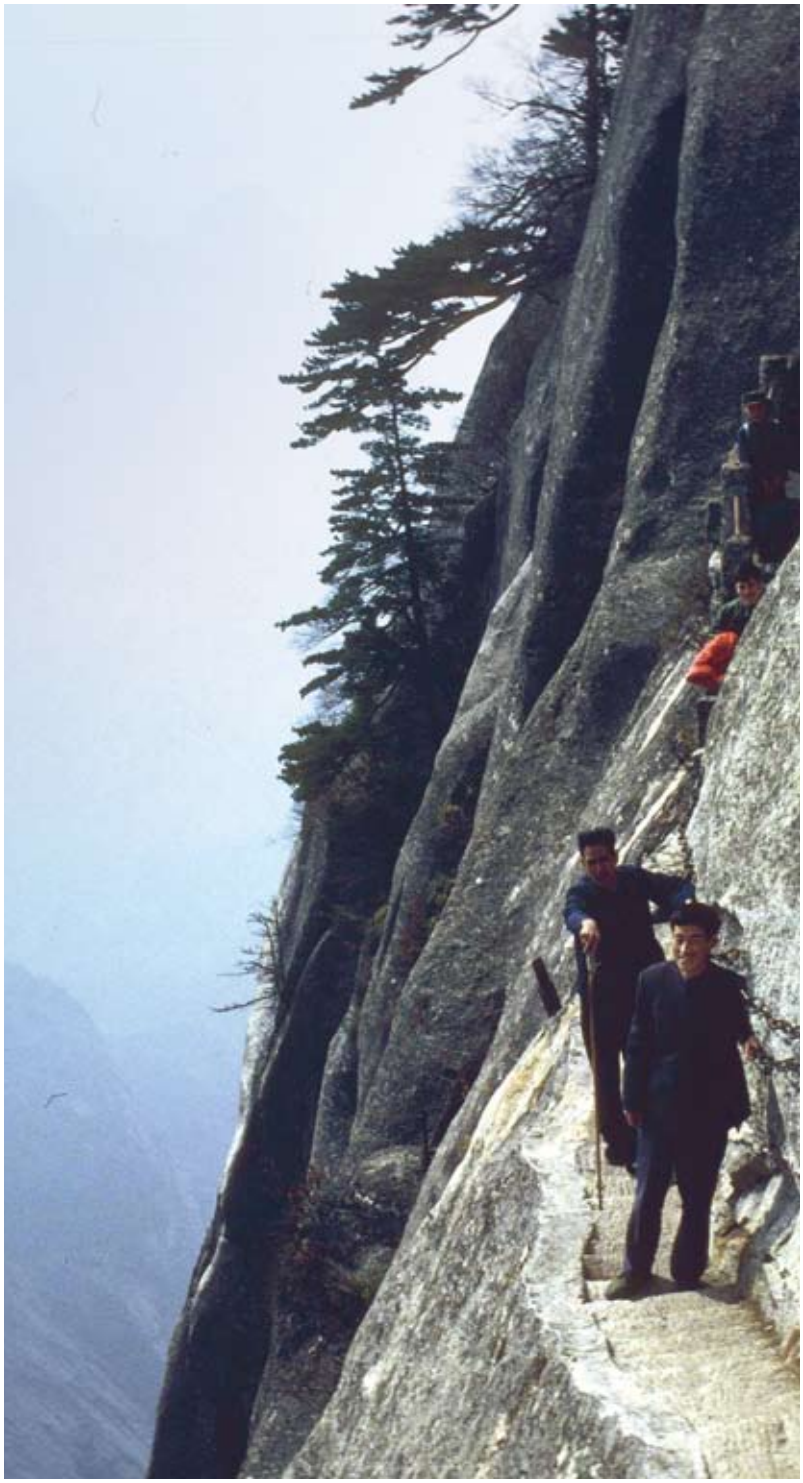
Looking down from Yunfeng Mountain on surrounding area

"Since days of old, Hua Shan has only one road of approach,
My climb has expended but for two days though.
At 'Rock of Return' I stop to think thrice with hesitation,
In front of 'Palm Cliff' my four limbs shake with trepidation."

Wong How Man, 1979 at Hua Shan

"华山自古路一条，我今攀登费两朝.
回心石旁三思后，仙掌崖前四肢摇."

黄致文，1979 华山



It was 1979 when I was in Beijing to attend a state dinner celebrating the 30th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. Afterwards, I traveled westward and visited my first major Taoist mountain, Hua Shan in Shaanxi Province. It ranks as the most dangerous and precipitous among the famous Five Sacred Mountains of China, taking its position as the Mountain of the West. My visit was at a time shortly after the Cultural Revolution, before tourism became a household term.

I had five local officials as my escort as we made our slow climb up the mountain. Many steps were carved into the rock side barely large enough to place one's feet. Maintenance was almost non-existent given the limited resources at the time. Any misstep would have sent a visitor tumbling downward 1,000 meters, or in Taoist terms, 'heavenward'. At many of the most hazardous areas, rusted iron chains provided marginal safety as we eked our way upward.

On my first night, we slept inside a natural cave, sharing it with two elder Taoist monks. Accommodations were scarce, except for the few temples which provided simple abodes in their ante chambers. I was greatly impressed by my guardian escorts who took exceptional care for my safe passage through the mountain. As I passed each site of extreme danger, one of them would always stand on the outside to give me a hand, guarding me against slipping.

The lofty goal of Taoists to attain spiritualism with their ultimate journey to heaven is best translated here as, every step takes you higher – less anchored to the ground. Even the toilet was suspended in mid-air inside a makeshift shed, with one's excrement

disappearing far below. The Yellow River below makes a gigantic loop like a huge brushstroke meandering on China's landscape. In its path, it leaves the forested green valleys of the Qin Ling Mountains to its south and heads north into the dry deserts of Inner Mongolia, a demarcation of two contrasting ecological zones like the Ying and Yang symbol of Taoism.

The monks lived among the elements and led a simple and basic life. I went away thinking highly of the Taoist tradition, particularly in awe of their devotees' utmost attempt to live with nature, among its most breathtaking grandiose at Hua Shan. Historically, Taoist monks from Hua Shan were said to practice their spirituality with the sword as a tool. Such an exercise routine established its fame as a form of Chinese martial art since ancient times. The extreme terrain of the mountain is ideal for perfecting one's swiftness and light-footedness, and certainly courage as well. Laozi, the founder of Taoism, is said to have headed for heaven at a senior age, riding on the back of a crane. Hua Shan seems the perfect place to embark on such a journey.

Today I loathe returning to Hua Shan as the newly built cable car and tens of thousands of yearly visitors would likely erase my very special memories of the sacred mountain. ▶

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Negotiating the narrow path eked into Hua Shan; footpath up Hua Shan in the 1970s; scared pool of water near the top; How Man with escorts on Hua Shan; hidden retreat of Taoist monks

Thirty years transpired and here I am visiting another Taoist mountain enclave in the southwest corner of China, barely 20 kilometers from the border of Burma (Myanmar) in Yunnan. Because of its remoteness, Yun Feng Mountain is less visited by tourists and is still a special place for pilgrims, especially for the Dai minority of China and Shan people of Burma.Unlike Hua Shan which is famous throughout the land, Yun Feng is known only to people within its immediate vicinity of southwestern China – unless you are very inquisitive.

Inquisitive indeed was the Chinese scholar Xu Xiake. Xu is revered as China's leading geographer and travel writer since the late Ming Dynasty, 400 years ago. In 1639, Xu visited Yun Feng Mountain, stayed for two nights, and purportedly wrote two poems which are now lost to history. However, his account of Yun Feng Mountain in his diary survived and provided us with a vivid description of the mountain and its temples during those days. It is amazingly similar to what one finds on a visit toYun Feng Mountain today.

Yun Feng, meaning Cloud Peak, is a perfect synonym for its location. On most mornings, clouds are hanging below its rising peak which is in the shape of a pinnacle. In fact, it was Xu Xiake who first compared Yun Feng Mountain to Hua Shan, noting that the final approach by carved-out steps to the temple on the peak of a precipice much resembles the 'dragon's spine' of Hua Shan. He also described the chamber he stayed in as being suspended in mid-air. These must be the same chambers next to the worship halls which housed us today, though some foundation stones had been filled in below us to make the structure less dangerous.

Xu also described hundreds of gibbons singing in unison. Up until 300 years ago, monkeys and other primates were said to roam the mountain, often stopping at the temples to play and be fed. However in contemporary times, the temples had been deserted or burnt down in successive incidents, first during the Second World War when the Japanese raided the area, and later the Cultural Revolution which had a devastating impact throughout the country. The resident monks and nuns were driven away each time. Since then, no more monkeys hang around. ▶

Precarious "Dragon's Spine" to one of the summits of Hua Shan

TOP: The long steep stairs leading up to the summit temple of Yunfeng Mountain
BOTTOM LEFT: Taoist nun Tang Xinkuan at Yunfeng Mountain
BOTTOM RIGHT: Aging Taoist monk of Hua Shan in 1979

In stark contrast to Hua Shan, which had mainly monks and only a couple nuns during my visit, Yun Feng Mountain plays host to around 20 Taoist nuns and just two monks. I cannot help but think again of the Ying and Yang of Taoist cosmology when I compare the two mountains.

Tang Xinkuan is a nun who joined the temple 20 years ago. I asked her what brought her to Taoism and she said that she was drawn by a strong feeling and affinity towards it since she was a child. Her studies at the temple were mostly self-initiated without a teacher, and she had just begun studying the "Dao De Jing", a most important work of Laozi. I asked about her progress. "I am starting to feel something special," Tang answered.

There are three steep sections in the final approach towards the uppermost temples. Each involved climbing a series of steps cut out of the mountain side. Historically they are called the "Three Ladders to the Clouds". Even with the steps widened in recent years, these approaches still fill the visitor with a unique sense of apprehension. Iron chains had been installed as railings to afford pilgrims a feeling of safety.

Taoist masters were known to be great medical practitioners, fashioning special pills from herbs they gathered from some of the most difficult to reach mountains. Stories had it that such pills or potions, for external or internal ailments, may take years to incubate and could be life savers as well as longevity formulas. Taoism also teaches sexual techniques considered healthy for the body and mind. Other important forms of teachings include meditation, breathing exercises, and even dietary recipes.

In today's world, not only Chinese believe in Feng Shui or geomancy, something refined and perfected by Taoism. Using a specially inscribed compass, as invented by Chinese 2,000 years ago, a Feng Shui master can dictate the direction in which a house should be built, where any piece of furniture should be put, or even what direction one should face while sleeping. Even in death, a Taoist monk is often consulted, leading the way for the deceased to join his or her ancestors.

Today, as the sun rises every morning anywhere in the world, there are thousands upon thousands of early risers practicing the age-old exercise of Tai Chi – which has its origin in Taoism. Called Shadow Boxing in the West, even modern people from other parts of the world embrace this ancient form of body and mind exercise.

I rose before sunrise at Yun Feng Mountain. Below me the valley was sealed in a layer of clouds whereas the sky around me was crisp and clear. Standing against a railing waiting for the sun to rise above the distant hills of the Gaoligong Mountain Range, I could hear chanting accompanied by the rhythmic beating of a wooden instrument. No one was practicing Tai Chi, as no worldly person would climb this remote Taoist mountain in such ungodly hours.

In the two days that I was here, I had several satisfying vegetarian meals inside the main temple and slept in a small room overlooking the flying eaves of the building. This first of a series of temples was constructed to honor a Taoist sage, Lui Dongbin. Lui lived during the Tang Dynasty and was revered as one of the Eight Sages. He was known to roam the ancient capital of Chang An (today's Xian) and his followers knew him by his famous martial art routine, "Invisible Heavenly Sword".

As our world degenerates from trouble into turmoil and our environment degrades from bleak to brink, perhaps the next great Taoist guru will descend Yun Feng Mountain to help induct our worldly souls towards heaven. I can imagine in my mind that he is also a capable martial artist, traveling swiftly with his sword behind his back, ready to dispose of all evils throughout the land.

Tea for Tibet

Paddy Booz

CERS has provided a three-year grant for Paddy Booz to conduct travel and research, with the ultimate aim of a book manuscript.

One, the best tea from China,
Two, the pure 'dri [female yak] butter of Tibet,
Three, the white salt from the northern plains,
All three from different places,
All meeting in the copper pot.
Yet, how the tea is brewed
Is up to you, O tea maker.

Tibetans first encountered tea more than a thousand years ago and quickly took to the new beverage with great enthusiasm: It grew from a luxury to a necessity and became the indispensable drink of everyday life for reasons of hydration, nutrition, digestion, social interaction, hospitality and religious functions. Tibetans grew fully dependent upon tea during the Song dynasty (960-1279) when a vital tea-horse trade developed, which brought brick tea to Tibet in great volume. Yet, from the very start, this pillar of Tibetan life has been provided solely by China.

I began my research by looking into sources on how the people of the plateau understand and percieve tea. The earliest mention of tea in Tibetan writing comes from a 10th-century medical text found at Dunhuang in Gansu Province. The beverage was first seen as a medicine, further emphasized in a legend from the 15th-century *Chronicle of China and Tibet*. This quasi-historical account of the arrival of tea in Tibet holds many details that perhaps point to real events. The story involves a king who falls desperately ill. A magical bird brings a twig of tea, and the king recovers. He sends his people to search throughout Tibet to find the source of this plant, but only one minister succeeds by going to the borderlands of China. He brings back two loads on the back of a doe, and so begins the tale of tea and Tibetans; they claim the legend dates to the year 700.

Other Tibetan sources that mention tea include catalogues of trade items, tea-offerings in religious manuscripts, references to tea in the famous Gesar epic, and records from the Derge Printing House, which show salaries and bonuses for workers being paid in tea.

Most entertaining of all is the lively and witty *Dispute Between Tea and Beer (Ja chang lha-mo'i rtsod-gleng bstan-bcos)*, wherein the goddesses of tea and beer *(chang)* each vigorously defends and

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Tibetans buy tea bricks in the market; bales of tea stacked up in storage; packing tea bricks at Ya'an factory; porter loaded with tea bricks ready for the long journey

praises the benefit of her drink, while denouncing the other. The goddess of beer complains about tea, "a vagabond drink, that ill-omen which came from China... to that drink which caused full destruction was added salt, butter and other inappropriate foods." Then the goddess of tea has her turn: "... a tea-fairy appeared... a shining brown colour, clear and beautiful," who claimed:

"I am the root of life of all practitioners.
I am the hammer that destroys ignorance.
I am the dagger that cuts out laziness.
I am the finest of all teas."

This "finest of all teas" has almost always come from Sichuan Province, from the five counties of Ya'an, Mingshan, Qionglai, Tianquan and Yingjing. Although Yunnan Province played a small role, since the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) between 80 and 100 percent of all tea for Tibet has passed through the Sichuan border town of Kangding (Dartsendo), which acted as a transshipment centre. During this period of over 300 years, tea from China was transported on the backs of carriers *(beifu)*, who courageously carried up to 350-lb loads to cover the distance between the tea factories in Ya'an and the Tibetan border. I have interviewed eight of the surviving beifu, all of whom are very old; one man, Wang Huqi, was 98.

My research has attempted to show the symbiotic relationship between the Ya'an tea-growing and tea-producing areas and the Kangding Tibetan traders. The entire relationship can be viewed as a circle that enclosed the essential elements of the tea trade, all of which took place within a 200 km diameter. I have also shown that the term "tea-horse route" is a misnomer, and that only during the Song and Ming dynasties were horses a real part of the tea trade. After about 1670, commerce and transport should more accurately be called the "tea-medicine trade."

The phenomenon of brick tea and the organization and functioning of the tea factories has also been a focus of my research. In the heyday of the tea trade at the end of the Qing Dynasty, it is amazing how a handful of counties manage to produce and deliver 15 million pounds of tea to Tibet every year, under the most trying physical, geographical and political conditions.

Money and finance played their parts, too, and I have gone into the methods of taxation and all-important *yin piao* quota system that controlled both the production and delivery of tea. Also important was the role of monasteries, the monk-agents engaged in business and the participation of rich Khampa families in the tea trade.

Most important of all in the smooth running of the tea trade were the Guozhuang *(mgo drung)* trading houses. Once the tea carriers deposited their heavy loads after 20 days of walking, what happened to the tea? Here begins the little-known story of this Tibetan institution. Forty-eight of these historic houses functioned through the centuries as the point of contact and conduit of trade between Tibet and China. The "middlemen" comprised a unique group of women known as *Aja*, the most capable, wealthy and powerful people in Kangding. As heads of the Guozhuang, their linguistic ability and wily business skills assured their position and success.

My field research included travel to numerous sites in the Aba, Ganze and Diqing Tibetan prefectures, and also to Lhasa and destinations in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Most important, however, were the relationships I developed with scholars, carriers, tea enthusiasts, scientists and historians along the way, especially in Ya'an and Kangding – the two sites that have stood at the heart of the Tibet tea trade, even to this day.

EASTER IN TIBET

Wong How Man
Cizhong, Yunnan
April 12, 2009

Father Yao Fei sports a crew-cut and stands about five foot four inches. Despite his short stature, when dressed in a long white gown, he stands tall among his followers. Here in this mountain enclave, Fr Yao leads as well as serves his Tibetans devotees of Christ in a pristine valley along the Mekong River.

He has been here for just over a year, as shepherd to his flock in a village where 80% of the population is Christian, rather than Buddhist – a religion to which almost all Tibetans traditionally adhere. Yao's original home is Inner Mongolia but he was trained and later ordained as a priest in Beijing 18 years ago. He became a Catholic at the age of 20 and is now 45 years old.

TOP: Easter service at the Cizhong Church
RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM: Night service before Easter Sunday at the Cizhong Church; Candle vigil in the Church courtyard; Fr Yao Fei offering communion at Easter; old and new generations of Tibetan church-goers; trans-generationed Easter service in Tibet

Fr Yao was rushing around as I followed him outside the church courtyard. With a straw broom, he brushed aside pieces of trash left and right of the cobbled-stone approach to his parish. "I must hurry up as soon everyone would be arriving," he said without turning his head to look at me. With a wave of his hand, he asked me to pose questions at a more appropriate time, not when he was preparing for the high mass he was to preside over in less than an hour.

I obliged and settled back as a quiet observer as events unfolded during this Easter Day on the high plateau. The Cizhong (Tsechung) Church was started just over a hundred years ago, in 1905, by priests of the French Foreign Mission in Paris. The French priests introduced the first vineyard into Yunnan. Afterall, they needed wine to say Mass, and thus began a long tradition of winemaking in southwest China.

Over the years, many priests lost their lives to hostility and harassment by Tibetan Buddhists and monks, so their numbers dwindled. In 1931, the French decided to leave. The Pope called in priests from the Saint Bernard Mission of Switzerland who usually lived on the high pass of the Alps, made famous by their gigantic rescue dogs of the same name. These Swiss priests, though more familiar with the climatic extremes of the Tibetan plateau, continued to struggle against both natural and human hardship in preaching the Gospel. The last priest to be murdered was Father Tornay of the Swiss Mission, in 1949. The Vatican later canonized him as a Saint.

Such were the hazards of evangelizing pagans of the Tibetan race in the fringes of Tibet. The founding of the People's Republic in 1949 put an end to this work as all foreign priests were driven out of China. The last to leave was Fr Savioz, now 90 years old and retired at the Mission in Martigny of Switzerland. Running the Cizhong Church was left to a handful of young Chinese priests who had been trained and ordained by the French and Swiss priests.

Feng Jiguo is 81 years old and his Christian name is Francois. As a teen, Francois attended school to become a priest when the revolution led by the Communist reached Yunnan in 1949. He abandoned his priesthood study but remained a devout Christian throughout his life. Just as the service was to begin, we chatted in front of the church. In a crisp voice, Francois recited sections of prayers in Latin to impress me. He told me how excited and proud he felt when Fr Savioz sent him a letter by way of some visiting French tourists about a year ago.

My team and I were here to film the ending of a documentary about the early missionaries to Tibet. Just a year ago when I was visiting Fr Savioz at the Saint Bernard Mission, we found an old black and white film, 48 minutes long, of the priests entering Tibet between 1947 and 1948. As there was no narration, CERS sent our filmmaker Chris Dickinson and Tibetologist Katia Buffetrille to interview Fr Savioz about the film in which he was also featured as a young priest coming from Europe. Now, the film is in its final stage, and I wanted to see how the church – which was started over a century ago – is doing today, especially during Easter.

Last night I saw about 70 Tibetans attend a special candlelight service presided over by Fr Yao. Today, more than 300 people showed up in church, including old folks and at least a dozen or so babies. Obviously, Christianity is thriving in this remote corner of the Tibetan borderland. Before the Mass began, many women and a few men made their confession to Fr Yao. As the Mass came to an end, I rose to leave. Behind me, almost everyone was lining up in front of the altar to receive Holy Communion. If Fr Savioz were to see this, he would certainly smile. Likewise Saint Maurice (Fr Tornay) would smile down from heaven, as he knew his life was not sacrificed in vain, but as a martyr who successfully brought the Gospel to the Tibetan plateau.

Searching for Yaks Over Thin Ice

Paul Buzzard, PhD
CERS Field Biologist

COUNTER-CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A Wild Yak stands proudly; Wild Ass herd on a winter terrain; a lone wolf scouts his stalking ground; Wild Yak at attention over a ridge; Wild Yak readies to charge

"Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this sun of York." When Shakespeare wrote these opening lines he was referring to Richard III as the sun of York. For me, herds of wild yak in Arjin Shan Nature Reserve shined like the sun of Yak, and my recent winter expedition with reserve officials was a great success. Not only did we collect a lot of data on wild yak and other wildlife, but there was enough adversity that the data seemed well-earned. We spent two days at the onset repairing the four-wheel-drive and steering in one of our rented trucks and had to cut the surveys a week short because they could not be trusted. This may have been a blessing in disguise, however, since on the drive out we crossed frozen lakes that were not so frozen and had to outrun ice cracking behind our wheels.

With the trucks repaired, my hopes were high because on the way into the reserve we met its director Yang, who claimed to have seen about 1,000 wild yak by the station at Yishikipati. This was likely an overestimation, but we still saw around 200 at the station, another 500 or so yaks from Yishikipati to Karchuka, and another 1,000 or so around Kardun for a total of about 1,700 wild yak. We were thus able to confirm that the reserve's wild yak population is in good shape and globally important to conservation of the species. We also got a better understanding of yak ranging, with sub-populations that seem to centre around the above mentioned areas.

Threats to wild yak conservation remain, however. For example, while at a lunch with police officers in nearby Huatougou, Qinghai, wild yak meat was served on the table. I was told it was Chinese beef and tried it. For the record, it is very lean with a nice gamy taste which is reminiscent of American buffalo or bison. It is likely that limited hunting still occurs despite the yak's Class I protected status, but they are helped most by the reserve's remoteness. An expert's field guide to the birds of China said, "The great reserve of the Arjin Mountains has salt lakes and montane habitats and is about as remote as you can get in China."

In addition to wild yak, we saw a variety of other wildlife. Tibetan wild ass or kiang were the most commonly seen ungulate, and we saw at least 2,500. Often the kiang were in mixed groups with yak, reminiscent of zebra with wildebeest in Africa. We also saw at least 350 Tibetan antelope or chiru in herds that were primarily sexually segregated. Males had lost their vivid breeding coloration of black face/forelegs. No chiru were seen around Karquka where rutting groups were observed in December 2005. According to the reserve's Zhang Huibin, most chiru have already moved off the Kardun rutting grounds to the west. We saw less than 100 Tibetan gazelle and no goitered gazelle inside the reserve, but these small drably colored gazelles are easily missed on surveys. We also saw a herd of approximately 70 blue sheep – a mix of males, females and young – over the hill behind our campsite in Kardun. Hopefully future surveys can focus more attention on blue sheep and other alpine fauna.

We saw fewer carnivores than in previous winter surveys. We saw only two wolves feeding on a yak carcass, and two foxes. It was interesting to learn through interviews, that Asiatic wild dogs or dholes may be found in the reserve. Dholes are a more tropical species but after noticing dhole in the CERS playing cards of endangered Xinjiang wildlife, I asked Tuscon, a Yishikipati resident, about them. Tuscon distinguished between dholes, wolves, and red foxes in my field guide and claimed to have seen a pack of around 20 dholes. The badlands around Karchuka seem to be especially good habitat for such animals and there seems great potential for future research on them. They may have an important influence on chiru predator-prey dynamics.

Finally, in keeping with the CERS mission, we gathered information not only on biology but also on culture. Tuscon's wife found two pieces of Tibetan prayer stones at the hills behind Kardun camp site. Old cities along the Silk Road often contained Tibetan documents but finding Tibetan relics in the remote reserve of Xinjiang was still unexpected. Similar stones have been analyzed by Beijing scientists and they are thought to be several hundred years old. They will make a fine addition to the CERS museums.

HOT SPRING PILGRIMAGE IN TAIWAN

Wong How Man
Wulai, Taiwan
February 23, 2009

The crystal-like water was steaming just a little. It was so tempting, I could not resist its inviting sparkle. Mesmerized, I sat at the edge of this hot spring tub, slipped off my sandals and dipped both of my feet into the soothing water. The warmth penetrated deep into my heart, for this is not just any hot tub. The fact that it is not open to the public, and indeed not even used privately by the hotspring owner, provided that satisfaction akin to taking a bite of the forbidden fruit. All this happened quickly, perhaps too quickly, as the caretaker stood waiting just outside the door.

The tiny cubicle tiled bath can barely fit one person. I cannot help but wonder whether Prince Takamatsu, brother of the late Emperor of Japan, entered with his wife Kikuko or alone during their honeymoon here in 1930. He traveled to Taiwan and particularly here to Sichongsi to bathe in this famed hot spring. In fact, the premises were specially renovated in anticipation of his royal visit – one of love and romance.

Thereafter during the remaining years of Taiwan under Japanese rule, it was reserved for generals and high ranking officers of the Imperial Army as the choicest R&R location. The hot spring was first discovered and used by a hill tribe of the region in 1907 during the early years of Japanese occupation.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Historic hot spring in Taiwan; entrance to the royal tub; honeymoon sanctuary of a Japanese prince

The room has been closed to the public for a long time, preserved for posterity after the Prince's historic visit. Today, it remains an attraction as visitors flock here to try the hot spring within this Japanese-style Yamaguchi Hotel, now renamed Chingquan Hot Spring Hotel. Beyond the multi-pools in the backyard of the hotel where guests can dip and soak at ease, they can also take a peep through a locked glass door housing the original tub royals patronized almost 80 years ago.

With journalistic instinct and persuasiveness, I managed to convince the lady at the front desk to have the door opened so I could photograph the room. My excuse was that the chill morning air outside created condensation on the inside of the glass door which partitioned the room. I told her that I came to Taiwan on a hot-spring pilgrimage and would be writing about my experience. She bought my story and obliged, which led to my earlier rendezvous with history.

I am not a fan of hot springs. Those I have visited were in remote and faraway places of western China, including many in Tibet. I was usually in dire need of a bath during my lengthy expeditions and welcomed the warmth and cleanliness of such pristine surroundings. More often than not, I can enter these hot springs in nothing but my birthday suit as there are no spectators even if I had been an exhibitionist. But on this trip, I visited several hot springs around the island, hoping to have a better understanding of the culture which is more prevalent in Japan and Taiwan than in other places. My wishes were momentarily fulfilled, especially when I treated myself to the same tub used by one of Japan's noted royals.

Just two days before setting my feet in that most unusual tub, I sampled two other hot springs. One was at the Shinkong Farm in Hualien belonging to a close friend. While most natural hot springs surface at the earth's crust, some require sinking wells deep into the ground. The farm drilled a 900-meter deep hole before they reached the thermo strata and successfully pumped up the water. Despite this effort, the hot spring is like an oasis in an amusement park as families come for the main attraction of the farm and zoo animals, yet can enjoy the relaxation of the hot spring.

The following day, I stopped along the Jhihben Stream of Taitung County along the eastern coast. The boutique hotel I stayed at, with only 68 rooms, was established in 1965 and set in Japanese style. The pools with differing temperature to suit any personal choices were facing a lush forest of tropical overgrowth. Just as I was quietly enjoying a glass of wine under a misty sky sprinkled with a little drizzle, a rock band began their high decibel jamming in the next building – a high-rise hotel with over 600 rooms. The clash of culture between old and new was a bit overbearing and prompted my early retirement.

Just as I was about to finish my circuitous trip around the island, we made our last stop at the hill village of Wulai, barely 40 minutes from Taipei. Somewhat similar to the colonial hill stations of Southeast Asia where the British and French went for a cooling retreat from the tropical heat, here is where folks of Taipei try to escape from the city's summer heat. It may seem strange that they would leave behind the hot weather to enter a hot spring. But away from the buzzing life of a big city, a person can hide among green hills while soaking in his favorite hot spring cottage enclave.

It was late afternoon Sunday and the single-lane traffic curving around the foothill was slowing to a stop-and-go pace as everyone was heading home about the same time. Even though we were against the traffic, it took us a long while to negotiate the last three kilometers into the village town. Everywhere were hot spring hotels and even home-based bed & breakfast type hostels. We got to the top of a circular road around the mountain a short distance from the famed waterfall of Wulai, arriving at the Fu Lun Hot Spring Hotel.

Built along the hillside and hidden among cherry blossom, green maple and oak trees are several small buildings housing the hot spring baths. It is barely 5:30 in the morning and I am ready to take my last dip as a finale to my idyllic journey around the island. Later this morning, there would be meetings in Taipei and my busy schedule would soon obliterate the footprints of my hot spring trail. But perhaps in the future when I am exhausted from work, my mind can flash back to the quiet moment when I soaked in the warmth of Taiwan's hot springs, a different Shangri-la for the body and mind.

I must hurry just a little. Outside the balcony of my room, I can hear the water from the faucet filling up my tub set among the trees whereas a rooster is calling as if rushing me on. Though following a hot springs trail is not a routine undertaking for any intrepid explorer, for one who is 60 years of age, perhaps being side-tracked is acceptable.

** For reservations at the Chingquan Hot Spring, check www.since100hotspring.com.tw*

CERS IN THE FIELD

TOP CERS filmmaker Chris Dickinson inside the secret and sacred cave
MIDDLE: Cao Zhongyu filmming Black-necked Crane capture and satellite-tracking in the Napahai mud
BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT: Zhang Fan deep in thought at Yunfeng Taoist Mountain; How Man working at a Hainan site

NEWS NEWS NEWS NEWS NEWS

■ CERS conducted extensive caving activities during the first six months of 2009, including hosting a caving team from Slovenia.

■ Ranee May, Professor at the University of Wisconsin in River Falls, continued teaching yak-cheese production to Tibetans. This is Ranee's fourth visit to the site at Shangri-la.

■ In collaboration with the Kunming Institute of Zoology, an exhibit of insects, fish and birds will be created at Inle Lake of Myanmar. Tourists can soon visit both this exhibit and the Burmese Cat Café/ restaurant within sight of each other.

■ CERS continues its collaboration with Singapore's Nanyang Technological Uiversity Film School. Students and professors will use CERS projects to make broadcast quality films.

■ CERS patrons Audrey and Anthony Lo, and Chang Ching-ho visited our Hainan village conservation site at Hong Shui.

■ CERS patrons David Mong, Gigi Arnoux, Stephen and Anna Suen, Eva and Danny Patterson, Wendy and Sammy Lee visited CERS Shangri-la Center and nearby project sites.

■ Wong How Man recently delivered lectures to the Harvard Business School Alumni, the Hong Kong University Museum, the Royal Geographical Society and for the Omega Management Group, including President Stephen Urquhart.

TOP: Anthony and Audrey Lo, Eufung Hwang, Marie So, Chang Ching-ho, Xavier Lee, and Berry Sin at Hainan project site
BOTTOM: CERS guest David Mong (far right) and How Man (left) with four generations of a Tibetan family

CERS IN THE MEDIA

● *Oryx*, an important scientific journal of Cambridge University Press, published a paper in Volume 43 Issue 02 on results of survey at the Tibetan Antelope Calving ground of Xinjiang. Dr William Bleisch and Dr Paul Buzzard, both CERS scientists, were the lead authors.

● The same issue of *Oryx* published another paper on the Distribution and Conservation of the Sino-Mongolian Beaver in China. Lead author/scientist is Chu Hongjun. His research is supported by CERS.

● *Global View*, a leading business magazine in Taiwan published two articles by Wong How Man.

● *Apple Daily* published a report after visiting the Basel Watch Fair and announced the Limited Edition CERS Omega watch.

● CCTV Beijing broadcast a special on caving history in China with a feature on CERS caving activities.

● CCTV Channel One is making a feature film about CERS.

THANK YOU THANK YOU

■ Land Rover provided a new Discovery 3 for CERS' use in Hong Kong.

■ The Shun Hing Education and Charity Fund made another large donation to CERS for 2009 in support of our documentary filmmaking. They further support the Society with Panasonic brand equipment.

■ Sonny Yau joins as a new CERS patron. Sonny has supported CERS on other occasions and now is expanding his support.

■ We thank Patrons who recently renewed their support: Gigi Arnoux, James Chen, Joel Horowitz, Hans Michael Jebsen, Wendy and Sammy Lee, Audrey Lo, Daniel Ng, Eva and Danny Patterson, James & Mary Tien, Nissim Tse, Marjorie Yang, Virginia & Wellington Yee.

■ William E Connor continues his long years of support by making another substantial donation.

■ Judith Corrente continues her funding support of CERS.

■ Mainland Headwear is producing hats and caps for CERS.

■ Xavier Lee helped produce a second version of a CERS film on Hainan.

TOP: New Land Rover for CERS in Hong Kong
BOTTOM: Marie So, Yao Yuemei and Xavier Lee during interviews in a Li village in Hainan

CURRENT PATRONS

HONG KONG
- Gigi Arnoux
- Kevin Chau
- Ben Chang
- James Chen
- William E. Connor
- William Fung
- Hans Michael Jebsen
- Thomas & Linda Lau
- Christabel & Ricky Lau
- Sammy & Wendy Lee
- Audrey Lo
- Kevin Lo
- David Mong
- Daniel Ng
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- Michael Tien
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- Marjorie Yang
- Sonny Yau
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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 CERS is to EXPLORE remote regions of China, conduct multi-disciplinary RESEARCH, CONSERVE nature and culture, and EDUCATE through dissemination of results in popular channels.

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