

A NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ACKNOWLEDGE CERS' FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS



CHINA EXPLORERS

CHINA EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOLUME 14 NO. 3

AUTUMN 2012



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
*Monks and student monks at Baiya Monsatery.
Glass fish of Inle Lake.
Burmese cat moms.
Cranes of Hokkaido.*



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President's Message



In Buddhist tradition the lotus has a very special place. The Buddha is often featured in a pose presiding over a lotus. In Tibet the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" means Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus. I too, once offered the Dalai Lama a karta, or ceremonial silk scarf, made from lotus fiber.

The lotus is perhaps also a metaphor of wisdom in life, with its flower blossoming during the day and folds up during the night. As brightness descends it would open up, spreading its beauty and fragrance, whereas when darkness prevails it would retreat into its own self meditation. Wise people can learn from the lotus in times of adversity as well as in times of

abundance, setting sail to roam free or pull it in to rest. Perhaps such revelation can also apply to handling of political climate in many countries.

I often try to remind myself, when things are going right, to use both my mind and my heart, adding passion to intellect. Whereas when situation gets tough, I should only use my head to resolve it. Adding heart and passion in such cases would often mean hate, anger and other negative vices, making matters worse.

Such manifestation comes from experience, drawing on years of failure and defeat, rather than streak of success. A healthy dose of defeat can be a constant reminder of reality, as well as keeping one selectively humble and modest, when situation calls for it. Today's teaching tends to focus on leadership as the ultimate form of success, without teaching prudence of when to exercise leadership when called for, and when to be just a simple normal being. The lotus taught me otherwise.

CERS has turned 25 and there is much for me to contemplate if I should lead the organization into its next stage. China is a very different scene from when I first saw it in 1974, or when I founded CERS in 1986. Nonetheless, changes in China do not make us obsolete, though our operation method may alter with time. For example we now expand our work into neighboring countries, especially those that open up late and remain rather pristine a land for exploration and conservation into the future.

Having just Returned from the Olympics and watched many events, it offers me a perfect metaphor. Usain Bolt is an example for our work style, sprinting like 100M race, where the last 30 meters really counts, winning it with grace and style. On the other hand, the 4x100 relay is a good reference for succession, giving our next-in-line enough lead to bounce forward to win. Having financial stability and multiple sites as a platform for the next generation are synonymous to that. For the long term however, it should be like a marathon, sustaining into the future. Building an endowment in the long run would achieve that end.

But first, we must make sure what we have built is worthy of sustaining, and that would be a real test.

Wong How Man
Hong Kong
October 2012

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PRISON BREAK!

That was my first thought when I looked into the aquarium. Where there had been a dozen fish the night before, now there were only three. A drying fish corpse in the corner of the museum room was proof enough. His fellow inmates had apparently all made good their escape and plopped back into the lake from whence they came.

These amazing escape artists are Inle Snakeheads, a species of fish that are unique to Inle Lake in Myanmar.

Snakeheads of another colour have been in the news lately. No, I am not talking about the American congressional elections. Snakeheads are a genus of fish that includes several important food fish in Asia. They are in the news because Northern Snakeheads, probably from China, have escaped from aquariums in the USA, far from their native Asia. They were first discovered in Florida and their odyssey has already taken them as far as Maryland, New York City and British Columbia. Snakeheads, named for their wide mouths filled with needle-sharp teeth, are also known as the Frankenfish in the USA, perhaps because of their ability to travel overland for long distance out of water, “walking” using their highly versatile pectoral fins. They are new to American ecosystems, but are highly adaptable, and because they were introduced without their natural predators and diseases, their population could explode there. ►



by Dr William Bleisch
Inle Lake, Myanmar

TOP: Viewing aquarium at Inle Lake.
BOTTOM: Snakehead fish of the lake.

This in turn could become a huge problem for native species, which never evolved defenses to predation by these voracious nocturnal predators. The US Fish and Wildlife Department has mounted a take-no-prisoners campaign to eradicate the Northern Snakehead wherever they are found.

The snakeheads in Inle Lake, however, are exactly what we want to protect. They are an entirely different species from the Northern Snakehead, and they belong in Inle Lake. In fact, this species is unique to the lake. Here at Inle Lake, the tables are turned. The Inle Snakehead and other species that are endemic to the Lake (i.e., are found nowhere else) are threatened by dangerous invasive species. The invaders here are species like Common Carp and Mozambique Tilapia. Both of these fish have been nominated for the list of the World's 100 Worst Invaders. Introduced by the Fisheries Department in a well-meaning but misguided effort to improve the local fishing, these exotics may instead wipe out many of the native species upon which the fishery formerly depended. The Inle Carp and the Inle Herring Barbel (*Puntius compressiformis*) are just two of the many endemic species that have become extremely rare. Our partner and advisor, Mr. Tin Win of Hein Aquarium in Yangon, told us that the Herring Barbel was once so common that he did not even bother to take picture of this one fish. Now, it is the only Inle Lake fish that he does not have on his computer. It is nearly impossible to find and may already be extinct.



TOP LEFT: Fish ready to go into aquarium.
TOP RIGHT: Fish released into aquarium.
BOTTOM: Fish in tank.

As a last ditch effort to save the unique fish of Inle Lake, CERS and the Inle Princess Resort have teamed up with Mr. Tin Win and his son Ye Hein Htet of Hein Aquarium in Yangon. Tin Win was trained as a water chemist and worked for many years for the government, but retired early after he was asked and refused to doctor data on water quality measurements. Always passionate about Myanmar's freshwater fish, now he pursues his passion full time. Now, CERS and the Inle Princess Resort are working together with him and his son to create a fish-watchers paradise at Inle Lake.

On September 15, museum space was a hive of activity when the first fish arrived. The electricians were behind schedule and still had not installed the wiring and sockets for the all-important bubblers and filters needed to keep the fish alive. As the tanks were being cleaned filled with clear lake water, electricians were busy stripping wires and mounting circuit breakers. The lights finally came on just as the fish were ready to be released from the plastic bags used to carry them.

That first day, the team set up three aquaria displaying four species. The tiny Crimson Minnowlet (*Danio erythromicron*) quickly formed a school, as these little mini-fish darted about to keep up with their compatriots. The mixed tank of Golden Sprat Barbels (*Devario auropurpurea*) and Red-headed Minnowlets (*Microrasbora rubescens*) swirled with colours. In contrast, the eerie Inle Snakeheads skulked on the bottom, waiting for darkness when they are most active, their watchful eyes seeming to have more than the usual fishy consciousness.

In retrospect, I wonder if those Inle Snakeheads were already planning their prison break. Sometime that same night, all but three of them managed to jump up the aquarium walls and shimmy through the foam roof of the tank. Luckily, the Inle Snakehead is still common in the Lake, and in fact is one of the most common species in the fish markets. So the escapees can easily be replaced. This is a good lesson for us before we introduce the other 15 endemic species into our collection. Some of them may soon be irreplaceable. 🇲🇲



ABOVE: Upper Salween in Yunnan.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

by Wong How Man
Lhasa

Prerequisite of exploration spirit

Recently three interns joined CERS on their gap year before attending Yale, Princeton and U of Chicago. In all three reports after their experience with us, each wrote that they came into the program without knowing what they would get out of it, just having faith in the Society based on our track record they could find online. One of them Zoe Nalebuff heard my lecture at her high school at Choate and decided to jump in for a six-month stay. Their ultimate experience came to testify that our program is well worth their time. More and more interns are applying to join us based on such “blind” faith.

As Eliza Adams wrote, *...how curiosity alone, about the unknown cultures and regions of China – can to this day shape the course of your life....this flexibility allowed me to travel to China with merely no information regarding the future four weeks....I too have felt the need to reason how I spend my time. Inspired by CERS, I feel confident next time to proceed without and see what justifications come about down the road.*

Annie Cook wrote, *...boarded a plane to Hong Kong with no exact idea what we were going to be doing, or where we were going to be for the next month....able to assume the CERS go with the flow attitude that only made the experience even more unforgettable....in such a short period, I have learned more about myself as a person and a rising adult.* ►

Zoe Nulebuff wrote, *...even a month ago when I got off the plane in Diqing, I still didn't really know what I am getting myself into. Now I know why. Writing a job description would be impossible.*

That perhaps can provide us with some small consolation that CERS has come of age, 25 years since its founding. Like students applying to Ivy League schools, they have confidence in such long-established institutions to deliver a well-rounded or focused education and learning experience. All our lives, we invest our time or money into something in more calculated ways. Rarely are we willing to explore the unknown, which is the core value and mission of CERS as a cutting edge exploration organization.

Curiosity-driven learning and unexpected opportunities driven inquisitiveness, rather than fully structured learning with curriculum, is also what we advocate at CERS. As I often say, "show me a three year old and I show you an explorer." That saying rings true when I have the opportunity to unlock that wealth of original curiosity within our interns. Demonstrated by the many CERS projects as case studies, we also show interns how to grab the chance to make a difference, often with limited resources but unlimited innovation of ideas. Such entrepreneurial spirit is not much different from those pursuing a business agenda, though in our case not so much for personal gain.

While with CERS, many interns learn rather than being taught; the former being active, the latter passive. CERS' multitude of project examples is like setting up a buffet table. Each participant can pick and choose to some degree to their liking and appetite. Whatever the individual found passionate about, the learning process is usually enhanced and accelerated. Of course, we also have some of the best scholar/academic types within our organization to offer the balance of intentional, rather than intuitional, teaching.

Just as our interns Annie and Elizabeth are preparing to leave us, it is time to prepare for a new expedition. Our latest expedition is no exception to this rule of surprise. On trip with me as guests are some of the most calculated friends of mine in the business world. Our plan was to explore a new route into Tibet from Yunnan. Words abound that a final bridge has been completed, linking the upper Salween River in Yunnan to Zayu, a reclusive town in southern Tibet bordering India. We wanted to be one of the first to penetrate into this unknown region.

At Fugong and Gongshan counties, we were treated to hospitality, songs and dances of the Lisu and Nu minorities. A feast with local flavor left an indelible



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:
Lisu girl with handy video cam readying to cross Salween by cable bridge. Pilgrims at the Barkhor in Lhasa. CERS entourage guests at high pass in Tibet. Student interns, teachers and staff at Zhongdian Center.





impression to both our palate and our hands, as that replaced utensils like chopsticks and spoons. When we got closer toward the border with Tibet, hopes ran high, then dipped, as we saw cars crossing our path with plates from Tibet. These were vehicles trying to cross the pass in front that got turned back by heavy snow and rockslide. Days of rain we encountered in the valley manifested as snow at higher elevation.

Finally, at Bingzhongnuo, our hopes were dashed. We salvaged our loss by visiting a remote Christian church up the mountain in a Nu village. The aging lady caretaker of the church sang us a wonderful hymn in Nu dialect as her grandson translated for us. As we double-backed downriver, we observed a Lisu lady crossing the Salween by a cable bridge. Such bridges used to be abundant along the river but had since been replaced by suspension bridges.

Swinging from one bank of the river on the high side, the simple pulley on a steel cable took the person across the river by gravity. Near the other bank, the weight of the person sags the cable and it becomes necessary to pull oneself across the last stretch hand over hand until solid ground can be reached. Tying a prototype of an action camera on the lady's hat, we acquired some unmatched footage of the thrill and excitement of her crossing, as if taking us along on the run.

After making two worthy stops at Dali and Shaxi, a Tea-Horse Caravan station near Lijiang, we reached the CERS Zhongdian Center, pondering our next move. As several guests had never been to Lhasa and were hoping our planned route would end there, we decided to fly to this former citadel of the Dalai Lama, and abode of the Tibetan gods.

Our first day in Lhasa was spent in the most popular sites, lining up among thousands to enter the Potala Palace, visit to Sera Monastery to observe the mock debate in the afternoon, and going around the Jokhang Monastery at busy Barkol Street in the evening. For dinner, we had a small but special party for one of the members of our group. Zhou Chengjian celebrated his 47th birthday in the presence of Quzhong Rinpoche, a new friend introduced to us by Danchen, former Vice-Party Secretary of Tibet. ►



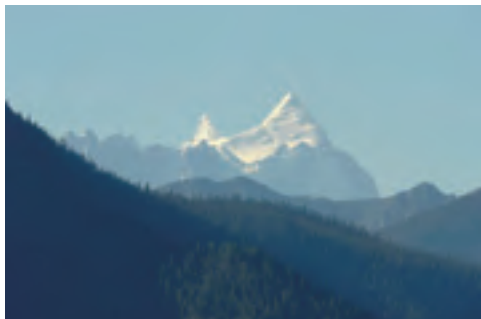
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Annie and Eliza as interns. Renee, William, Sylvia and Inja in Tibetan region with Catholic church in background. Snowing at monastery in Tibet. Tibetan catholic at home.

For the second day, 32-year-old Quzhong Rinpoche of the Taklung Kagyu (White) Sect of Buddhism took us to visit his monastery some three hours away from Lhasa beyond the Charla Pass at 4845 meters. While Lhasa was full of sunshine, the pass was veiled by clouds and it began snowing quite heavily. Even as we arrived at the monastery, the snow continued to fall. We were ushered into a reception room for a late lunch. As I ate our simple meal, water dripped on our heads and shoulders. Melting snow on the roof found its way through leak on the building to reach us. After lunch as we were given a guided visit of the main assembly hall, again I felt water hitting my head at different intervals. It was thus that we learned about the ill-maintained leaking roof of the monastery, rebuilt in the mid-1980s in haste as government policy became liberal, allowing the revival of the monasteries after the cultural revolution.

This sudden snow offered an opportunity for us to provide support in re-roofing the monastery. My friend William Fung was able to decide on the spot to use his funding to benefit the monastery. Had it not been for the heavy snow, and the right temperature that melted it upon hitting the building, we would not have known the problem the monastery was facing. The Rinpoche was too modest to ask some strangers for assistance. This chance visit provided opportunity to all. This very special monastery got some much needed support and our group obviously gained some merits. Even William the benefactor got a most wonderful picture, snow flakes framed by a door in the monastery. Perhaps that is also a door that opens up to auspiciousness for our entire team.

It's all about Karma as they say in Tibet. As with the new road through a backdoor from Yunnan into Tibet, I soon will make another attempt and expect as much surprises awaiting me and my team. 🇨🇳





EXPLORING THE BACK OF SACRED KHAWAKARPO

by Wong How Man
Petu, Tibet

Zhou Chengsu, nicknamed “Tiger”, and Zhao Kun are competitors. For a very long time, they are rivals in fishing, often belittling each other about the other’s skill, or lack of it. Last night they were again at it, as both casted their line by the Yu Qu River, a major tributary of the upper Salween River in Tibet. We were camping there en route to the little-known back side, or west side, of the Sacred Khawakarpo Mountain.

After ten minutes, Zhao brought in his first catch, a 25cm small scale fish common to the

plateau. This is his first trip to Tibet and his first catch on the plateau. Soon after, he pulled in another fish, with a gagging laugh that kept “Tiger” miffed for a long while. Finally “Tiger” gave a big laugh as he pulled in a larger fish at almost 40cm and weighing in at half a kilo. As night fell, we collected dried branches and firewood for a bonfire, hoping to grill our catch. At final count, Zhao netted six fish, “Tiger” seven and Wang Jian a pitiful single catch. Zhao protested and insisted that his six fish weighed more than the seven caught by “Tiger” and declared himself the winner.

I wanted to have the last laugh and reminded everyone that nearby were lots of rags on trees and the river banks, possibly a popular site for ►

TOP: Khawakarpo as seen from the north inside Tibet.
BOTTOM: Distant view of Khawakarpo.



water burial by local Tibetans whereby they cast dead bodies to let it float down the river. Perhaps that's why the fish are so abundant and fat in this vicinity. No one seemed entertained by my joke. But seeing that they salted the fish rather than cooking them fresh, my remark must have some impact on them.

I have wanted to explore this little-known corner of Tibet for decades. Ever since I first saw Khawakarpo in 1982 on the Yunnan side, I have always wondered what the back side of this most spectacular mountain may look like. For thirty years, I must have looked from the east side over a hundred times, including during the pilgrimage Year of the Sheep when CERS set up a clinic/teahouse at the foot of the mountain, but even more frequently after we set up our Mastiff Kennel facing the entire range.

"It takes me one day hiking to get from our village to Fushan on the Yunnan side where we get all our supplies and sell our wares" said 18-year-old Pema Jiangqen as a matter of fact. "But it took us three days of driving from Fushan to get here," I uttered. In such days of road travel, that indeed is quite unusual. "So what do you sell over there?" I asked. "Zong Cao and Xong Rong," came the answer. The Caterpillar Fungus and Matsutake Mushroom has become a mainstay for income on the plateau over the last two decades. The former grows at elevation of 4000 meters pasture and are harvested from May to June, whereas the latter are found among pine forest at slightly lower elevation between July and August. These two valued merchandises have provoked a stampede for Tibetans to race each other to the outdoor even before summer sets in.



Thirty years ago, a piece of this worm-like fungus cost 8 cents as my drivers bought them during my National Geographic expedition. Today, the same tiny piece can fetch Rmb50 or more. "So how much can you make on collecting such natural products?" I asked. Pema answered that each year a family can make around Rmb150,000 on a good harvest. That amount is a hefty sum for such remote region. Looking at the simple ways they live at this Modei Village at the end of this distant road, literally the end of the world, I often wondered what they do with that money. Another question baffling me is how little their material lifestyle has improved despite an obvious growth in monetary wealth. Perhaps that is the reason the monasteries and temples in Tibetan area are becoming more and more decorative and colorful as rich supplicants try to gain more spiritual merits.

Pilgrimage is another method of attaining merits in future life. So everyone here at Modei village would go on the Kora, or



circumambulation, of the Sacred Khawakarpo Mountain. Each circuit around the base of the mountain would require eight to twelve days of difficult hike, depending on one's physical condition. The more calculated ones would do it during the Year of the Sheep when each Kora would count as twelve during the auspicious year which matches the sacred mountain's zodiac. During this more special year, last in 2003, CERS established a clinic/teahouse to service the pilgrims at the starting point of the Kora by the bank of the Mekong River. Our team also managed to collect data, science and social science data, while interviewing pilgrims from all over the plateau. We are looking forward to the next pilgrim year in 2015.

On the day of our arrival, heavy cloud covered the peaks of Khawakarpo and we could only see the snowfield from the waist of the mountain upward. We were told most of the time the mountain is veiled by cloud or mist, hiding the majestic look from us commoners. Only the blessed and faithful ones would be afforded an audience in full view of the monarch. We turned our Land Rovers around to seek a place to set our camp for the night. ►



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Upper Salween inside Tibet. Village on Khawakarpo western foothill.
Setting camp in the field. Camping at roadside in Tibet.



TOP: Tibetan boy by the Salween.

BOTTOM: Cantiliver bridge over the Salween.

By a clear mountain stream, we pitched tents, right on the road, as we knew no other traffic would dare come this way in the dark, given this is a most precipitous “road” eked out of the mountain side, finished barely a year ago. Along the way, Himalayan Marmots gazed at

us from within two meters of our cars whereas the occasional yak would stampede away from us. Rocks and stones still tumbled down the side of the mountain as we timidly inched our way to get here. As I retired to my tent, stars began to show and I prayed for a clear sky in the morning.

My prayers must have been answered as I woke up to a total clear blue sky. Not a spot of clouds were seen as we quickly made breakfast and decamped. By 8am we gingerly retraced our tracks, hugging close to the mountain side as we drove toward Petu village some thirty kilometers away. As the cars were climbing and we rounded a corner, suddenly we saw the full view of Khawakapo behind us. Even its consort “Metsemo” was showing its peak from behind. The Five-Crown Mountain was diminished as a shadow well below the majestic and sacred peak. We stopped our progress and I heard numerous team members exhaled sighs of admiration.

Our goal was met. My goal was met. It has been at least two decades since I wanted to gain the back side of Khawarkapo for a peek. It is most gratifying and humbling experience that this wish is more than met, as the sacred Khawakapo generously unveiled its grandiose to my full view. 🇨🇳



RAINFOREST IDYL

by Dr William Bleisch
Phong Nha – Ke Bang



Fresh from spending Chinese New Year in the cold and snows of Manchuria, I decided to try the tropical heat of central Vietnam for a change. I answered an invitation to be part of a project in Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park, a huge protected area in the Truong Son Mountains of central Vietnam.

Because of its towering limestone mountains, river canyons, springs and caves, Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park has been recognized in as having outstanding universal value as a unique example of “the earth’s history, a record of life, landform processes and features” and became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Park managers have now decided to try for another trophy – recognition as a World Heritage Site for biodiversity as well. The World Heritage Committee has responded favourably, impressed with the number of rare and unique species found in the Park, but the Committee set three conditions for approval. The first: add an enormous extension to the area protected, giving it a solid connection with the two major protected areas over ►

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Entrance to an unexplored cave in the center of the National Park. Over thousands of years, a curtain has formed below a drip of mineral rich water from the ceiling of the cave. Exploring a wild section in of one Phong Nha - Ke Bang’s caves. A speleothem (cave formation) in the wild part of Paradise Cave records the complex geological history of the region.



the ridge to the west. The plans for this extension are now completed, awaiting only the signature of the Prime Minister. This will increase the area of the World Heritage Site to a whopping 1,273 square kilometers. The second condition is a review of enforcement and protection in the park. Perhaps the Committee's request is motivated by the obvious violations of wildlife protection law and common sense that are going on in park-side restaurants, where deer and wild boar are on the menu, and bear and pangolin are available for the right price.

UNESCO's final condition for the park is the reason that I have been invited for an extended visit: Working with a Vietnamese team, our task is to produce a comprehensive, five-year strategic management plan for the park and its 250 staff. Following a quick survey, we will need to work fast to hammer out an internationally acceptable plan for in just four months. Mission Impossible? Time will tell. In the meantime, I have a great opportunity to get to know this amazing Park.

The noise of the motorbike I am riding drowns out the sounds of the forest dawn. I am on the Ho Chi Minh Trail West Highway heading north through Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park. Both sides of the highway are lined with tall trees and abundant lianas, with occasional breaks in the canopy where tree ferns and wild bananas grow below the towering giants. I stop often and turn off the engine to listen to the dawn chorus of birds. At one stop

I think I hear, indistinctly at first, the high wailing of the first lone calls of a male gibbon. I pause again further on, and now the calls are clear. A female gibbon joins in and together the couple complete a full Great Call duet. The calls are higher and faster than the calls I remember from my field research on Chinese gibbons in Yunnan Province. These are the unmistakable calls of the Southern White-cheeked Gibbon, now recognized as a distinct species.

I stop again on a bridge spanning the river near the junction with Victorious Road 20. A dozen Van Kieu minority people climb up the long steep embankment onto the road. The women and girls wear the long striped sarongs characteristic of this minority, and each of the men and women carries a strong back basket woven of rattan. Unable to communicate verbally, we wave before they abruptly end their rest and turn off down the road, walking back into the forest.

Later, I have the chance to continue on Road 20 to a remote village near the border with Lao PDR. The Arem and Ma Coong ethnic groups live here in two villages in the core zone of the Park. They are among the smallest ethnic groups in Asia. Until 1962, they lived in the forest in caves or in simple houses made of bamboo and leaves, surviving on forest products and hunting. They used simple tools and their clothes were sometimes made from the bark of a toxic forest tree (*Antiaristoxicaria*) and forest vines. In 1992, the entire population of 475 Arem people was relocated from



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Tam Toa Cathedral built in the late 19th century but destroyed by American bombs in 1968. A Leafbird shows an interest in photography. Mourners make offerings to the war dead at the Eight Heroic Volunteers Cave in Phong Nha. Van Kieu people inside the National Park collect forest products to survive. They are one of the rarest ethnic groups in southeast Asia. A Pig-tailed macaque greets visitors to Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park, one of nine species of primates that live in the Park.

and Lao PDR. One of these monkeys, the Hatinh Langur, is only protected in the Park, while another, the Southern White-cheeked Gibbon, is a rare relative of the gibbons of Yunnan. Forty-six species of bats have been recorded in Phong Nha - Ke Bang. Since 2002, scientists have discovered an average of two species each year that are new to science, including one new bird, six new reptiles, one amphibian, twelve fish, two butterflies and one new plant species. The park supports other rare species that were recently discovered nearby, like the strange Saola or Vo Quang Ox, with no close living relatives, the Annamite Striped Rabbit, the Sooty Babbler, and the bizarre Bare-headed Bulbul. The Laotian Rock Rat was recently found in the Park. This rare animal is known as a 'Lazarus species,' the last of a lineage that was thought to have gone extinct long ago. Its nearest relatives are known from fossils at least 11 million years old.

their caves to two new settlements established specifically for them. Poverty and problems remain however. Once entirely dependent on the forest, they still harvest resources from the National Park, although this practice is now considered illegal. These forest people are quite familiar with the use of all the plants in the forest and they are also expert hunters. They have no interest in leaving the forest. One Vietnamese anthropologist summed it up; "You have moved them to new houses, but their hearts are still in the caves."

In addition to hunting for their own use, minority people are also supplying local restaurants and markets with illegally traded wildlife; deer, bear, pangolin and even gibbons. The forest people also know the location of the precious timber in the park, such as the ebony-like Go Mun (*Diospyros* spp.) and the rosewood Go Hue, (*Dalbergiatonkinensis*). These trees now command extraordinary prices because of the demand for exotic timber for traditional furniture. Recently, park rangers burned a stash of illegal timber found in the park's extension area. Local Vuc minority loggers, who live next to the park, then kidnapped three park guards. The stand-off ended badly for all.

Despite the logging and a brisk illegal trade in wildlife, the Park still boasts extraordinary biodiversity. It is home to nine primate species, including three that are only found in the Truong Son Range along the border of Vietnam

All of these species are only found in the Annamite Mountains, making Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park one of the most important protected areas in Southeast Asia. It is well worth protecting, and well worthy of being called World Heritage. It is a privilege and an honour to be able to support it in my own small way. 🇻🇳





THE LAST CORACLE

A last ditch effort in collecting

by Wong How Man
Baiya, Dege

It was 1991 on a survey to 18 monasteries of Kham, or eastern part of the Tibetan plateau, that I saw a single-yak-skin coracle for the first time. It was also going to be the last time I saw such a vehicle being used, to cross the mighty upper Yangtze River. At the time, our Belgian conservation architect Patrick Troch braved the fast-running torrent and crossed the Yangtze with a Tibetan mastering the wooden oar as the coracle went up and down and in circles across the river, an anxiety-filled moment for us spectators.

On numerous trips along this stretch of the upper Yangtze over the last two decades, I have never again seen the use of such coracle. Asking around produced the same answer - that such practice had long come to an end as bridges now span the river at different locations. As I mourned the passing of yet another traditional relic of our common culture, I ordered through a local monk the purchase of one such last remaining coracle for the CERS collection on yak products.

We were fortunate that a retired and disused one was located and bought for us. It had remained in the distant town of Dege for the last five years until now I make a special trip to pick up this last remnant of a coracle. Others may not realize the intrinsic value of such an object while pursuing other monetary or material assets. CERS is however bent on preserving cultural assets which will some day be recognized

as our common heritage and legacy. In time, such endeavor may prove to be the most equitable use of capital, rather than money being invested to produce numerical growth. Many of our friends must realize the importance of this work, thus generously supporting the activities of CERS for many years.


Frequently these efforts, both in time and money, that CERS spent in order to secure a disappearing artifact, a last story told by those in passing, or documentation in pictures or film of eclipsing heritage seem to be disproportionately huge in return for a tiny vestige of our past. But in retrospect, they are well worth our efforts. Today we have a repository and archive of many such disappeared relics of our past. It is also such work of preserving



or recording of our heritage that we try to use to inspire our younger generation in cultural values, not just popular values common to our modern and fast-track world. Most collectors take home their collection. Not so with CERS. Everything we collected as artifacts were kept in China.

Today, CERS is the proud owner of perhaps the last intact Coracle of Tibet. In Tibetan, such object is called “Guo Ji”. Yesterday when I asked a middle-aged Tibetan living along the Yangtze about this “Guo Ji” river vehicle, he called upon his teenage son to go look for it in his barn. For a long while the kid drew a blank, not knowing what the father was talking about. Finally the mother went inside the cow pan and brought forth a dried and folded piece of very old yak hide. At one time, this would have been the stretched skin, tied over a frame of poplar or willow branches to make a coracle. Today such item is lost in the memories of the old, and totally unknown to the young.

Made in three days, used for centuries, and lost within a decade. That is the story of the last coracle.

Postscript: Fortune befell us as we drove away from Baiya Monastery. Along the Yangtze in nearby Baiyu County, the Baiya Rinpoche has built a pedestrian suspension bridge in 2006, connecting Tibet to Sichuan. A family here used to operate a coracle ferry with a three-skin six-passenger coracle. It was retired six years ago since the bridge was completed. We managed to secure this second and larger coracle as a primary specimen for our collection. 5/12/12 

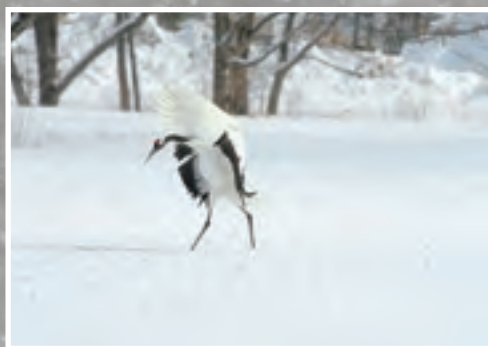
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Patrick Troch, conservation architect crossing Yangtze in a coracle circa 1991. Coracle by the Yangtze. Coracle of CERS collection. Loading coracle onto car. Monks and butler of Baiya. Monks and student monks at Baiya Monsatery.





JOY OF PHOTOGRAPHING CRANES AND EAGLES

by Wong How Man
Kushiro/Hokkaido, Japan





“A picture is worth a thousand words”. So consider this as a book length article of 12,078 words, with a dozen pictures taken over a two-day period while exposing myself to the bitter cold of eastern Hokkaido. I have just booked my next visit for February 2013, staying again in the farm house of Makoto Ando, right next to one of the most beautiful sites of the Japanese Cranes, or Red-Crowned Cranes as they are called in China. 🇨🇳



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:
Burmese Cat moms, caretaker Kin Kin, expert Veruska and vet Ki Ki Tin. Floating garden for the cats. Full litter of feline.



EXPERT CRITIQUE OF BURMESE CAT PROJECT

Vera is a cat expert with years of experience breeding champion Burmese cats in Australia.

by Vera Ludmila Taborsky
Sydney

I arrived in Yangon (once known as Rangoon) after a 10 hour flight from Sydney. This was the first time I travelled to South East Asia, so I was somewhat apprehensive. However, I was soon warmly welcomed by Misuu Borit, owner of Inle Princess Resort. At the Inle Princess, I was overwhelmed and delighted by the warmth and friendliness of the staff, and this warmth never wavered throughout my stay.

Next day I was taken by boat to the Cat Café at the Inthar Heritage House where about 40 females are housed. All of the cats were outgoing and extremely friendly indicating they had been well handled and lovingly cared for. This pleased me immensely.

First thing I noted was their diet of fish and rice. Contrary to common practice in Asia, this is not the correct food for cats and may lead to long-term health problems. It is now recognized that



all cats are direct descendants from the African desert cat *Felix silvestris lybica*, first tamed by the early Egyptians. The cat is one of the few remaining obligate carnivores, meaning they are wholly dependent upon fresh meat and bone for their long term health and survival.

Cats' teeth have been designed to rip through tough hide, fur and bone. In this way, the teeth are self-cleaning. The flesh of fish, on the other hand, is too soft to perform this function, leading to a build-up of plaque and subsequent tooth decay. Toxins from rotting teeth lead to gum disease and eventual damage and failure of other organs in the body.

The diet was soon changed and after several days all cats were happily munching on raw red meat, chicken legs and wings. The chef was relieved he no longer had to cook for forty cats!

The next thing we looked at was the cats' environment. While their environment was good, very airy and sunny, I wondered why the cats were kept enclosed at night. Cats are nocturnal creatures and like to move around when it is dark. Kin Kin, the Cat Manager, explained that they had been plagued by girl cats "escaping" during the midnight hours. Although the Heritage House is surrounded by water, the Burmese cats can swim, and girls were often striking out to meet their favourite boy. What females will do for a good male!

However, keeping a colony of 40 cats is a vastly different proposition from keeping two or three cats in a home environment. With such a large colony, it is vitally important from a health perspective that cats are kept in a fresh, breezy environment at all times. I indicated that the solution would be to build an enclosure that surrounded Heritage House from water level to tree top and a shade cloth roof to provide some shade and protection from the rain.

As a possible consequence of their previous environment, I noted several cats had a minor skin complaint. To fix this we bathed the cats in apple cider vinegar and placed all on a course of antibiotics I recommended, administered by the Inle veterinarian, Ki Ki Tin. ►



It is important to know that infections can spread very quickly through a large cat colony. If even one cat displays a bacterial infection, all cats in the colony must be treated for that condition. Failure to do so will result in many sick cats. If the condition is viral, the sick cat should immediately be isolated.

I now turned my attention to the stud cats. There were two of these, both quite good types. I was told that one of these, Son, was very ferocious and could not be handled. However, I recognized him immediately as one of my cats. Whether or not he remembered me, I do not know, but he was very soon in my arms kissing me, cuddling me and purring, much to the astonishment of all, who had never witnessed such behaviour.

One mistake here was that both studs were housed together. This is an absolute no-no. The only time the male cats meet in the wild is to fight over females or territory. Male cats do not socialise, they live apart, surrounded only by their own bevy

of females with whom they constantly mate. This is nature's way of keeping a control on pedigree. It is interesting to note that the Burmese stud is the most prolific of all breeds and is rarely, if ever, infertile.

If both boys had been left in a common environment, one or both would have eventually died through pernicious injury caused by fighting. The cats were separated and placed in separate buildings where each is totally unaware of the other cat's existence. Peace now reigns!

I suggested procuring a vasectomised boy for taking girls "off call" whenever a litter is not wanted. If the female's reproductive cycle brings her "on call" and she is not mated, she runs the very real risk of reproductive infections. A vasectomised boy can take a girl safely "off call" with no subsequent litter.

While most of the girls are desexed, four remain entire for breeding purposes. I recommended desexing two of these, to be replaced by more suitable girls in the future.

I also recommended the purchase of a particular computer program which will enable Kin Kin to accurately record the breeding program. It is important to know which stud is being mated to which girls and the resultant litter. This is useful for any number of reasons, including tracking genetic faults. In addition, if one knows which colour genes both the male and female possess it is possible to predict the colours of the kittens in any given litter.

I explained colour determination to Kin Kin. Of course, there are many other factors governing why one would want to undertake a particular mating, including line breeding for type, but this was far too complex to explain in a single session. It requires many years of experience and knowledge. Even after many years most breeders do not fully understand the intricacies of breeding. However, I am sure Kin Kin will eventually acquire this knowledge. 🇲🇲

BELOW: Veruska administering a cat bath.



INLE LAKE MONSOON REFLECTIONS

by Wong How Man
Inle Lake, Myanmar



ABOVE: Approach storm over Inle Lake.

Life has indeed changed, for the better and with more abundance, as can be observed even from a roll of toilet paper. For newcomers to the country of Myanmar, such little signs can be seen from the toilet paper holders on the wall. They no longer can fit today's full roll of paper. Just a couple years ago, such sundry items are rare, and they came in small sizes. Thus, the former toilet paper holders can only hold maybe half a roll in today's sizes.

And then the rain and water level, they too have changed, either too much or too little, at this once quiet enclave of Inle Lake in the northern Shan State of Myanmar. As I am writing, inside my friend Nang's café in the Lotus Silk Workshop/Factory, I am buffeted by rainstorm coming in all directions, left and right, front and back, with some drizzling onto my computer. That doesn't seem to bother me in the least, as I feel quite at home here, having visited a couple dozen times within the last ten years.

I love the monsoon, when the rain brings the summer temperature down, at times to a chill in the morning or evening. The water level is now up, and in a couple months even higher, to the edge of the wall of the first floor of these houses on stilts above the lake. That will be when I come back again in October to give a lecture, during the boat festival on the lake. Just six months ago in March, it was way low, and totally dried in some areas. Everyone here noticed things have gotten more drastic, either too much or too little. But as an explorer, I tend to appreciate extremes, making my senses more acute.

There is an old Chinese saying, "Things going extreme will turn to the other extreme." No doubt when a country was desolate and people desperate, revolution happened. We have seen history repeats itself. When the disparity between rich and poor, have and have-nots, move to the edge, we can expect the self-adjusting measure. At times, it manifests itself in violence and civil unrest. But that is the course of history, and that of mankind. We have seen that in China in the last century. Will it occur again this century? We shall see.

Yes, I am becoming a student of history. I brought along newspapers and magazines to catch up on the latest, in China and the world. I even brought a heavy volume of the China Journal 1927 edition with twelve issues bound as one, just to reminisce a time before my time, in articles and pictures. Recent papers and magazines described the uproar of the BoXilai and wife debacle, I wonder whether BoGu has now become a double-syllable last name, and why the Chinese press never called Madame Mao as MaoJiangqing? ►



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Monsoon down pour in the village. Glass Fish in a bottle. Glass Fish with sky as backdrop. How Man in the Jeep. Burmese Cat contemplating over window. Merging of storm and fine weather over the lake.

Then there is also the controversy about introduction of new text books into Hong Kong schools. Had the Gang of Four succeeded in masterminding the Communist Party, are we supposed to still love the party? I don't think so. Maybe reverting to my college days and self-studies on dialectics may help, or was it supposed to be "dialectic materialism" as communist ideologues would have it. George Orwell, who wrote his first novel *Burmese Days*, and later *Animal Farm* and *1984*, probably knew better. Some animal, like the Pig, is favored, and given the right to interpret the past and dictate the present, but certainly not the future!

Had Orwell seen this little fish we caught last night, he might have written about it too. In our bamboo trap came two tiny fish, with transparent body. We kept them in a small bottle as I lifted it up high to take a photograph. The blue sky and white clouds after the rain became a wonderful backdrop to the silhouette of the fish. The head and stomach are silver lined. We tried comparing and could not find it in the 15 species of endemic fish to the lake that a Yangon fish expert Tin Win had sent us in his email. So could it be yet another endemic and new species? An email exchange with Tin Win revealed that this is indeed a rather newly discovered fish, first seen and identified in 1998, now commonly known as the Glass Fish.

From the new CERS Exhibit/Rooming House, as I look to my right, I can see the Burmese Cat Café, inside the grand-looking Inthar Heritage House. This is where CERS has our Burmese Cat Reintroduction Project, now into its fourth year



and very successful. Many friends have stopped by, besides daily tourists who now have heard about this “pet” project. Slightly closer are two new buildings which will soon become our Fish Exhibit, with ten aquatic tanks being installed to display live endemic fish of Inle Lake. Can these Glass Fish take up a place of residence there? I certainly hope so.

Today I took a tiny boat out rowing, practicing to balance this slender piece of wood in wavy water as other noisy motorized boats pass me by. The more I sat and rowed, the more I wonder how the locals stand perfectly balanced and row with one foot wrapped around a long oar, a signatory icon of Inle Lake. More noisy motorboats roared by and my mind was split between balancing my boat and how to device a simple muffler to help reduce the engine noise of the boat motors. Not just for my peace of mind, but to aid the boat operators from putting up with such deafening daily routine.

The boat I used today is barely seven feet long. But thirty minutes away by plane is Mandalay.

There CERS is building our first Exploration Boat. It will be 100-foot long when completed. A new chapter of our exploration will commence once it is launched, as we go up and down the Irrawaddy River, and the Chindwin River skirting western Myanmar almost parallel to the Indian border along Assam and Nagaland.

I have often said, “I go to Myanmar and turn back my watch one and a half hour, but I turn back the years by 50”. Where there are roads here in Myanmar, we may be 50 years apart. Where there are no roads and can only be reached by boat, we are likely a hundred years in difference, just like George Orwell’s *Burmese Days*. And in this age of fast break-neck change, going back to a time when life is slow and people are simple is not only nostalgic, but remedial from the ills of our modern society. Myanmar gives me time to contemplate not only the what, where and how to live, but the why as well. So watch out CERS followers, we will soon embark on an expedition back in time, both an outward as well as an inward journey, and in a new boat!

Oh yes, and a corollary to the growing roll of toilet paper. When I took out my friend Ohn Maung’s 1949 vintage Jeep for a spin, I first thought the steering wheel must have also grown bigger. My body could barely fit between the wheel and the chair. As it turned out, it was my waist line, which had also gotten bigger, pushing itself against the steering wheel. Without realizing it, my explorer profile has become that of an executive profile. I too, like Myanmar, must be having it good with food in abundance! 🇲🇲



MORE MYANMAR REFLECTIONS

by Wong How Man

Inle Lake, Myanmar

My makeshift space, using two aluminum cases stacked up as my desk, has a most idyllic view, overlooking the lotus pond and rice fields below.

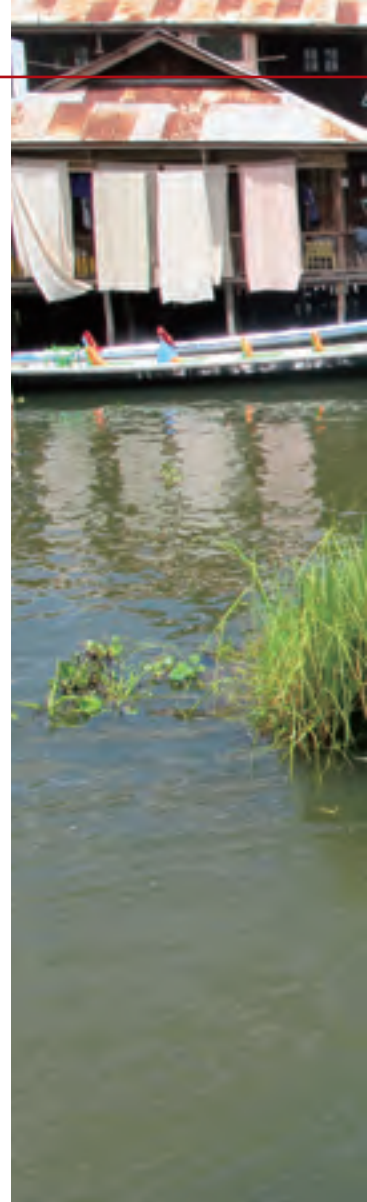
My hands are most busy, not on the keyboard of my computer, but scratching every inch of my arms, legs and body. Last night, it seems the mosquitoes have spared no surface exposed to the outside, and even part of the inside where my thin longyi offers little protection. And I am the one who usually boast that bugs don't like my taste. Now bumps are everywhere. Having brought no ointment against itching, I resorted to the age-old remedy of using my saliva. As the saying goes, *licking the wound*, which all animals tend to know as a natural cure.

But do animals also appreciate beautiful and pristine sceneries like we do? Cats obviously do, as they often sit upon windowsills and look out quietly. Pigs, I am not so sure. Mosquitoes? They are too busy satiating themselves with my sweet blood, and now must be hiding in some corner fast asleep.

The monsoon rain comes everyday, not falling but pouring. I love the sound as it beats down on the corrugated zinc roof, like rolling of drums. Watching it hit the water, or on the lotus leaf, is also a special treat to the eyes. The curtain of water comes down the eaves like a small waterfall. I enjoy coming to Myanmar during the rainy season when there are fewer tourists and the downpour cool the otherwise tropical air. And the rising water here at Inle Lake, giving reflections to everything around me, still or rippled made by passing boats. The mosquito bites soon become a passing irritant as the itch gradually goes away.

All day long, I watch a parade of hyacinth or patches of waterweed flows by our Exhibit/Rooming House. Some are like tiny floating gardens measuring a few square feet in area. Others are large as a small islands up to tens of square feet. I often wondered where these endless patches of "garden" are traveling to. More than once that I thought of climbing on one to join them on their journey. But good sense trumped innocent dreams and I lost my chance to go to that forever land. As a consolation, I pulled in one of these "gardens" and proclaimed it our own CERS island. Coming annual dinner, it may be on the block for auction.

I have been here for ten days. Resembling an island paradise, our new CERS Exhibit/Rooming House standing on stilts over water became our





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
An island floating pass a boat. Picturesque view from bathroom. CERS exhibition. CERS Exhibit/ Rooming House.



home. Like early missionary to such remote places to build churches and converting of their flock, today we are slightly better endowed with more conveniences and resources in building our several project houses within this community.

Gradually, one panel and one mosaic of photos at a time form our exhibit, depicting the many journeys I have taken throughout the country over the last decade. Soon, children from around this area can stop by our exhibit room and admire the diverse

beauty of their own country. Though I cannot boast of the same religious zeal of early missionaries, we somehow got our act together without making too many prayers.

I feel a bit apprehensive to add air-conditioners to our upstairs rooms. But having been here during the torching heat of a Myanmar summer, I opted for some civility than being puritan conservationist. And then my Ferrari of a boat, the inflatable Zodiac, raised some eyebrows sitting ►



next to our more sedate longboat of local style, nonetheless acted as our Flagship with the CERS logo at the bow.

Speaking of missionaries, I recall reading a conversation between a Kachin Chief and an Irish priest of the Columban mission, high up in the mountains near the border with China. Each year, the Chieftain and his council decide in January which piece of land should be cultivated that year. The shrubs, vines, and trees on it are cut and allowed to dry for several months in the sun before being set on fire. Lit by a man named Ma Tu and a woman Ma Htu, the two nats or spirits who first produced fire, came ashes that form the fertilizer for the new rice crop.

After harvest, that particular plot of ground lies idle for ten years. If anyone is tempted to interrupt with this cycle, the Chieftain said, “He needs only look across the border into China to see the dire results when land is pushed too hard.” There, under pressure of population growth, trees on the hills were uprooted and the land cultivated year after year, until crops grew lean and rain tore away the soil. “Now those hills are barren of crops and of people,” the Chieftain told the priest. This account, however, was from the year 1936. How it rings true even today.



ALL: Mosaic of produce and hands at five rotating markets of Inle Lake.

All of us, my team of seven, went to the nearest town Taungyi, a former hill station for the British, to shop. While some of us were picking flip flops, kitchen utensils or knickknacks, I bought two longyi's as that has become my daily outfit in Myanmar. In the heat of my joke about man should wear longyi and woman “shortyi”, I totally forgot

to pick up the merchandise after paying for them. Next time when I go to town, I would seek out this longyi shop across from the 7-Eleven, a little Burmese street café.

Larger stores in Taungyi are invariably own and run by Chinese, many have been in the country for generations. Xu Jinshan, operating a bathroom facility shop, was born in Myanmar but speak perfect Mandarin. Almost all ethnic



As sanction by some western countries on Myanmar is lifted, more and more restaurants, serving local dishes or western cuisine, started to open up around the lake. We began our restaurant circuit and aim to prepare our own star-studded Michelin list. While pizza at the Golden Kite is tasteful, it has yet to match home-made cheese that tops the pizza at the Inle Princess. If one should arrive at the resort during the summer months, after dinner you can appreciate fireflies dancing through the night under the canopy of the trees, even in the rain. Besides chirping crickets, the occasional tak-tak-tak calls of the gecko provide special ring to the ears.

Should one come in the winter which is high season for tourists, migrating birds abound. Egrets and Cormorants are always plentiful, whereas Kingfishers and Ibises are also welcoming sights. Without seasonal fluctuation are the five local markets near our Exhibit/Rooming House. Like clockwork, they rotate in a once-every-five day circuit, from one to the other, providing fresh produce for thousands of villagers along the south end of Inle Lake. Two panels of our exhibit is devoted to just this five markets, each with its own character.

With tourists stampeding to the Lake, land has become less expansive and prices considerably more expensive. Looking again to what happened to China over the last twenty years and we would have an inkling of what may become of Myanmar. With luck, they may be more careful in charting an equitable future between development and conservation. The Kyat currency is rising and money doesn't go as long a way as ten years ago. This is high time for us to invest into the future before prices rise even higher. With luck also, we may see several CERS projects completed, ahead of change and before a time when we can ill-afford the price. 🇲🇲



Chinese would attend Chinese schools run by Chinese associations of each town and city.

Along the hill on the edge of Taungyi town is Aythaya Vineyard owned by a German. Five years into operation, his wine can be found everywhere in Myanmar and sold also at nearby Heho Airport. A French rival Red Mountain is rising fast in the hills behind the Inle Princess Resort of Inle Lake to compete with the German.



TRASH TO TREASURE, *once again!*

by Wong How Man
Cape D'Aguilar, Hong Kong

Yes, there is some danger. But since birth, we face danger all the time, with injury (both physical and emotional) or death always looming in the dark at any unknown corner. The matter is how to mitigate or limit it, or whether you can afford the worst consequences. As a life-long explorer, I often teach my own kids and interns, “If you can afford the consequences, go ahead!”

So it is with such calculation that I embarked on setting up my private studio/gallery at a seemingly “precarious” location in the southeastern tip of Hong Kong island. If this had been a CERS investment or undertaking, I wouldn’t have felt so easy about it. After all, there are other liabilities involved, not least financial and legal implications.

First, let me describe the history and heritage of Cape D’Aguilar, better known in Chinese as Hok Tsui because the physical shape and features of this point at the eastern tip of the island resembles a crane’s beak. The village by the same name predates the British arrival to Hong Kong. We’ve been working on saving a species of crane in China for almost 25 years (since 1988), and our work may provide some karmic merits for me to take some risk here.

Whereas Cape D’Aguilar, its English name, was coined as early as when China ceded Hong Kong to the British after the Opium War. D’Aguilar was the first Lieutenant-Governor of the new colony and commander of the



Hok Tsui Village

British Troops in China. Coincidentally, his Excellency’s name is more familiar to expats and locals who frequent the pubs and bars of Lan Kwai Fang since D’Aguilar Street leads up to it from Central.

In 1875, the very first lighthouse of Hong Kong was constructed at Cape D’Aguilar, guiding maritime ships coming into Hong Kong harbor. Today the lighthouse still stands at the same location and is fully operational, though automated rather than serviced by lighthouse keepers of the old days.

A short distance away at Hok Tsui village stands the only watch-tower of Hong Kong Island. Called in Chinese a “*geng lou*”, it functioned as a defense structure that villagers could retreat into when the turbulent coast of centuries past was at times pestered by pirates and bandits. Built with large pieces of stones carved out of nearby boulders in the hills, there were tiny gun turrets high up in case the villagers needed to fire back at enemies. The word “*lou*” means tower and “*geng*” refers to a night-watch person who would hit a percussion instrument every hour on the hour to signal that all is well, thus allowing villagers to continue with their dreams.

Both the lighthouse and the watch-tower were classified by the Hong Kong government as historical monuments. Now here’s the trick. We collectively honor such architecture like the “*geng lou*” as something



worthy of preserving, giving it protected status, the village adjacent to this monument however is classified as a “squatters’ village” by the Lands Department of Hong Kong. How did that happen?

After the Opium War the British seized Hong Kong in 1841. They later acquired the New Territories in 1898 for a 99-years lease. That sets the stage for two different government policies in dealing with traditional village rights within Hong Kong. Those north of Boundary Street were recognized by the government, accepting the rights of abode and property rights of the indigenous villagers due to tradition. After all, the British could play generous given the understanding that one day that part of Hong Kong would return to China when the lease ran out. However, things look differently on Hong Kong island.

The remaining parts of Hong Kong were all considered Crown Land given to England in perpetuity. Thus all traditional rights of the villagers were considered at best temporary and at worst outright illegal. Allowing their continued existence was considered “tolerated”. Over the years, these were classified under “squatters” within the Lands or Housing Department ►

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

A satellite image of Cape D'Aguilar. Dilapidated shed before restoration. How Man's studio after rebuilding. First lighthouse of Hong Kong at Cape D'Aguilar/Hok Tsui.

of the government, regardless of how old such villages are or how long their inhabitants have been residing there. In early survey maps of the British, at least 22 such villages were accounted for within Hong Kong island, such as Aberdeen, Stanley, Tai Tam, Shek O, and not least Hok Tsui Village.

This duo-system of designating and managing old village and villagers of Hong Kong evolved to this day. Given the turnover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the system has never been challenged or reversed, either by downgrading the New Territories traditional rights (a hopeless scenario) or upgrading those in Hong Kong. As such, villagers of Hong Kong old villages are put in the same “squatter” category as those who immigrated to Hong Kong, legally or illegally, and set up real squatters’ villages among the

hills and outlying areas of the colony in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Needless to say, due to the lack of security and stability of staying in such villages, those who had the first opportunity would rather move into the city or take on offers by government to relocate to housing estates. Gradually many of these old villages also became abandoned or more or less vacant.

Because of having no land rights or deed, such marginal or gray area properties gradually changed hands with a much lower price tag than houses with full legal rights and deeds. Some bought it because that’s what they could afford. I took over such village houses because I treasure their heritage and pristine environment, knowing full well that my rights are minimal to nil.





CLOCKWISE FORM TOP:
Studio with viewing deck. Only fortress
guard house on Hong Kong island, a
historical monument today. Inside
studio with photograph display.

However I hold the hope that when push comes to shove, the village watch tower can become both a literal and figurative defense of our rights. What logic stands when a tower built by the villagers is recognized as part of history whereas the village itself cannot be accepted? Does it mean the government is more dangerous and ruthless than the bandits and pirates the villagers tried to deter? Would it take a Class Action to rectify this obsolete policy? It would be difficult to challenge existing laws. But when a law is not well conceived or outdated, there are mechanisms for reprieve as well as channels by which such laws can be changed.

At my age, I can afford to be a bit more philosophical. One of my relatives saw the dilapidated house, then a posh studio/gallery that I turned it into. She quipped, “How dangerous. The new flat I bought off Regent Street in London came with a 999-year deed.” “Deed indeed,” I replied. “If you ever have a divorce, make sure your lawyer secures for you the first five

hundred years and leave the rest to your husband,” I joked. She didn’t think that was funny.

Meanwhile I will enjoy this “squatter” house while I can. So could the government ever demolish such “squatters”? Yes, but then an unlikely earthquake were to hit Hong Kong it might do so just as well. In the mean time, I will create exhibits and share my photographs with those who care to drive a little to discover this hidden corner and history of Hong Kong.

As I also said to my kids and interns, “Others see opportunity and grab it. I create opportunity, take advantage of it while I can, and face the consequences later.” My Hok Tsui place is a perfect example. 🇭🇰



CERS IN THE FIELD



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
CERS team dining along the Salween. CERS Advisor William Fung and guests Sylvia, Youngju and Inja, Zhou Chengjian and Renee visiting Old Town Museum. Sylvia, William and Renee along cliff of the Salween. CERS team at Inle Lake. Field emergency treating infected foot of How Man. Guests at meal time in Yunnan.



■ Qiju Qilin, CERS Tibetan Director of our Zhongdian Center, is having his first solo exhibition of oil painting in Hong Kong opening Nov 9 at the Sin Sin Gallery. He is the first generation of Tibetan artist trained at the famed China Institute of Art in Hangzhou.

■ CERS is funding a new project in Gyantse Tibet in restoring a historical building which was used as a distillery by monks of the famous Kumbum, first built in 1427.

■ CERS co-sponsored the annual Lisu Crossbow Festival which the Society help founded a few years ago. We also entered several teams, including staff and interns in the competition. We also brought in as a corporate sponsor Coca-Cola China which provided gifts and prizes.

■ CERS hosted at our Tai Tam Center Consul General WaiLwinThan of Myanmar, Consul General Nguyen Thi Nha of Vietnam, and Vice-Consul General Phil Ingram of Australia.

■ Two new exhibits are now on display at CERS facilities at Inle Lake Myanmar, one on Endemic Fish with Aquarium and the other a Photo Exhibit of the huge diversity of the country.

■ HM presented lectures to students of Hong Kong University on "Exploration and Conservation in Remote China" and to Friends of the Chinese University Museum on "Islam and the Silk Road".



■ CERS hosted a Hong Kong University Museum group visiting three of our projects in Myanmar, The Burmese Cat Café at the Inthar Heritage House, the Endemic Fish Aquarium and our Photo Exhibit Center, all at Inle Lake of the Shan State.

■ Restoration of a Lisu courtyard house at Gehuaqing village inside the Baimaxueshan Nature Reserve is now complete and will be used for artifact exhibit and education.

■ CERS began making another film documenting the early flying career of CNAC pilots Moon Chin (99) and Peter Goutiere (98) during their visit to Shanghai from the US.

■ How Man visited 93-year-old Father Savioz at the Grand St Bernard Mission in Martigny Switzerland. FrSavioz was a pioneer missionary to Tibet before 1949.

■ Author Elizabeth Breil joined the CERS Writer Residency Program and stayed at our Zhongdian Center as she prepared her manuscript for a new book on Chinese Calligraphy/Painting Brushes.

■ A CERS team of three participated at a rock climbing competition hosted by Guizhou Climbing Club.

LEFT: Tibetan building in Gyantse to be restored.

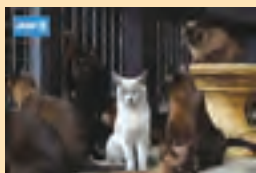
RIGHT: Qiju's oil painting of Tibetan houses.



TOP: Misuu interviewed on CCTV.

MIDDLE: Burmese cats featured on Agence France Presse.

BOTTOM: How Man's two new books.



CERS IN THE MEDIA

● How Man authored two new books "Nature as My Companion" and "Culture as My Friend", both bilingual books with photos to illustrate over twenty stories in each book.

● CCTV produced and aired on Channel 9 prime-time two 45-min documentaries on CERS projects around northern Myanmar.

● AFP (Agence France Presse) released a story on the CERS Burmese Cat, including a video on YouTube. It was syndicated and picked up by many newspapers, including the Bangkok Post.

● TVB Hong Kong broadcasted a feature focused on the CERS Yak Cheese project.

● Time-Out Magazine Hong Kong published a special interview with How Man.

● Virgin Australia inflight carried a special feature story on How Man as an explorer.

● Commonwealth of Taiwan new book featuring 30 years of their publication history includes a feature on almost a dozen books they have published authored by How Man.

THANK YOU THANK YOU



■ Coca-Cola supported the Lisu Crossbow Festival by providing gifts and prizes.

■ How Man would like to thank Stephen Urquhart, Omega President, for inviting him to the London Olympics.

■ Eric Chen, Ingrid Ehrenberg & Joe Chan, Ester Goelkel, Derrick Quek, Oliver Silsby and Chote Sophonpanich renewed as Overseas Patrons. William E. Connor, James & Mary Tien, Sammy Lee renewed as HK Patrons.



■ Dr William So established an internship scholarship for Roedean School UK.

■ Antonio Koo continues his yearly donation to CERS for 2012. Lewis and Lisa Chan also made their second year donation. Melanie Pong also made a generous donation.

LEFT: Coca-Cola supports Lisu Crossbow Festival.

RIGHT: How Man and senior medalists at the Omega Olympic Pavilion.

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

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