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The Power of Tibetan Women



Fig 1. A Tibetan woman walking with her livestock & kids

“Follow the dung, and you will find the right path.”

This sentence was from our first day of exploration after arriving in Litang. We initially planned to head west to see the sunset, but plans must constantly adapt to changing circumstances. Unfortunately, the mountains obstructed the sunset, prompting us to change our plan and prepare to hike up to get a full view of Litang. We had been searching for a way to reach higher ground, but luck wasn't on our side. When we finally found a potential way, fences blocked it. Despite feeling disappointed and frustrated, we didn't give up. We descended again, searching for another route to higher ground. That's when we noticed a trail of dung to the left of the road fork. We followed the trail and finally reached our destination.



Fig 2. The trial blocked by fences

Two nights before we left Zhongdian, we enjoyed a short film about yak cheese. The Wisconsin team collaborated with CERS to craft yak cheese using local tools and the prized ingredient of the Tibetan region, yak milk. Following their success in creating cheese samples, the team began instructing local women in yak cheese making. The local women displayed keen interest in developing this product and wore traditional Tibetan clothing to show their appreciation. One such woman, Deji Drolma(德吉卓瑪), firmly believes in the future success of yak cheese and has invested significant effort into its production. She remained receptive to learning from the Wisconsin team, particularly when faced with recurring challenges in cheese production. Through her diligence in enhancing industrial hygiene and preventing mold formation, she achieved notable improvements in the quality and quantity of the cheese. And she succeeded in making yak cheese up to standard. She started putting money into it and even took over a shop in the old town of Dokuzong to sell her yak cheese. When things were about to go right, fate played a big joke on her! Fire breaks out in the old town of Dokuzong in Shangri-La County. All these years of hard work and dedication have vanished in a flash. But even if she had nothing left, she still had her skills and the courage to start over. And now, her yak cheese is famous all over the world. It even won a prize in the World Championship Cheese Contest, named "貢姆".



(Left) Fig 3. The Yak cheese factory in Litang

(Right) Fig 4. We tried the yak cheese paired with Xinjiang grapes

As someone who grew up playing sports, I understand the meaning of "never give up" all too well. It's easy to say as a slogan but hard to live by. I started playing Taekwondo at 10, which is considered a late start for someone aspiring to excel in the sport. However, I persevered because I didn't want to be just an average kid like my classmates; I believed in my potential to be different. I set goals for myself, kept practicing, and continuously worked on improving. Whenever I felt confused, I wasn't afraid to ask for help. At 14, I seized an opportunity to be selected for the Hong Kong Junior Team. I felt ready to take that chance and gave it my best shot. The day with the team wasn't that good. It was the first time I realized that training alone wouldn't improve my skills without a strong background. The training was tiring, with limited rewards. Giving up isn't a wise choice; it affects you, your teammates, and coaches. Over the years, I continued to train and push myself, but I have yet to have the chance to compete. Although many people are involved in race selection, the team has limited spots, and I have yet to be able to join. One of the most challenging things I experienced was when my coach decided to move to another country during the COVID-19 pandemic. I was left without a place to train so I couldn't secure a spot in the top four for the 18-30 age group in the upcoming Hong Kong Poomsae Competition. Consequently, I was disqualified from participating in the HKG. This time, fate pushed me to give up HKG's journey. My journey with HKG has ended, but the journey of my Taekwondo life will not end.

I met a young Tibetan girl at the horse racing festival who was only ten years old but already had to help with household chores and care for her baby cousin. Unlike me, she is expected to do these tasks despite being the same age as me. Her hands, small yet covered in scars and calluses, tell the story of her hard work. On the other hand, at home, I am like a spoiled brat. While Tibetan women are strong and skilled at household tasks, they often have little say in their destiny. However, the younger generation is more empowered, as I learned from the girl's sister, who dreams of traveling the world. This new generation seems fearless in making decisions and wants to choose their paths. The traditional idea of becoming a nun is giving

way to new opportunities, primarily through education.



Fig 5. Pictures with Tibetan kids in Litang racecourse

"Follow the dung, and you will find the right path." If you fail, follow it, and it will lead you back home.

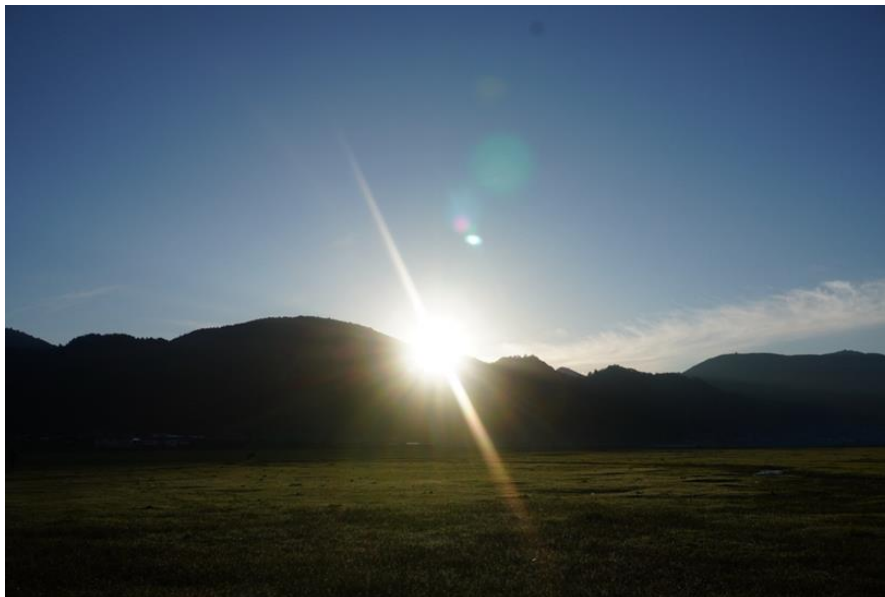


Fig 6. Sunrise in Litang