



Chair Explorer's Message

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

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

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



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

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

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



HKU student team participated in the Crossbow Festival.

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

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

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



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

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

CULTURAL EXPLORATION DAY

Hungry Ghost Festival – Fusion of Religions & Traditions

HKU & Shau Kei Wan | August 2024

Dr Hayson Liu, Deputy Director, WHMCE

Lam Yu Hoi, Year 4, Faculty of Arts, HKU

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

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

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

TOP TO BOTTOM:

Lecture at HKU before the visit.

Visit at Zhang Fei Temple.

Students and friends at the Hungry Ghost Festival.



EVENTS & NEWS

CERS Exhibit House

Shek O | July-October 2024

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

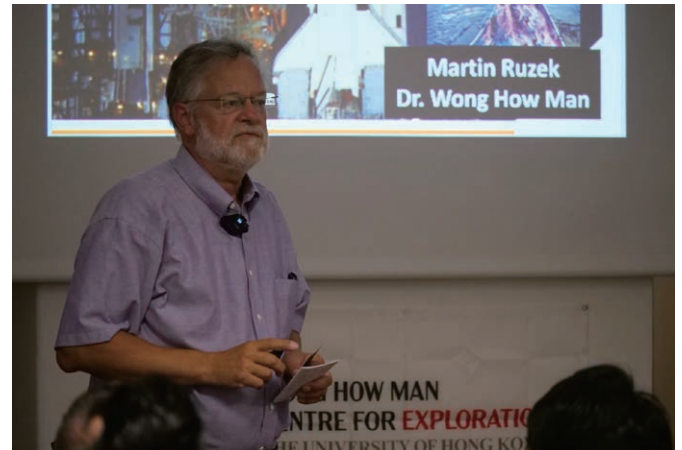
OTHER NEWS

Fountainside Chat

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

HKU | September 2024

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

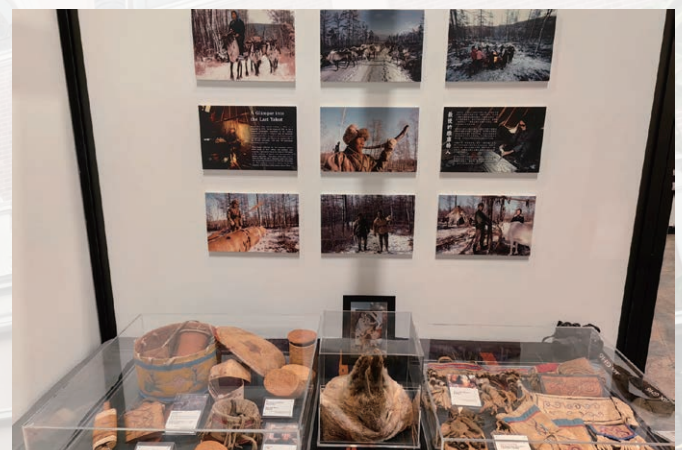


Fine Art Asia 2024

— **From South to North (天南地北)**

HKCEC | October 2024

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



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