

News Items from Department of Geography for *SOSC Faculty E-Newsletter* (submit in August 2014)

■ Geography Field Camp to Yunnan Province, China (19-28 May 2014)

Every year, the Geography Department organises a field camp for its second-year undergraduate students. This year, the field camp (organized by Dr. Claudio Delang, with the assistance of Prof. Tang Wing-Shing, Ms. Cheung Ka-Ling, and Mr. Liu Yi) took the students to Yunnan Province, China, from the 19th to the 28th of May 2014. A total of 65 students took part.

Yunnan is a province with incredible diversity, from both environmental and socio-economic points of view. During the field camp, students explored different issues related to resource management. Yunnan being one of the “poorest” and “most rural” provinces in China, with agriculture as the main economic activity outside the largest urban centres, the environmental problems are related to:

- 1) Deforestation to increase agricultural areas, and provide wood for various economic and livelihood activities;
- 2) Siltation in rivers and lakes, as a result of deforestation;
- 3) River and lake pollution, caused by pesticides and fertilizers used in agriculture

During the field camp, students explored different issues related to these environmental problems and the activities undertaken by the Chinese government to address them. The trip started in Kunming, where students visited the city and had a very informative lecture by Prof. Hu Jinming of the Asian International Rivers Center of Yunnan University. After Kunming, the group headed north, and visited the area around Dali and Lijiang, where the government is promoting tourism to draw people away from farming, and as a means to improve socio-economic conditions. The area benefits from two factors. First, the pleasant climate of the area during the summer, when in most areas in China people want to escape the summer heat. Second, the fact that the area is inhabited by a number of ethnic minorities, with a colorful history, and with well-preserved towns, which can be promoted as tourist attractions.



Lijiang



Cormoran fishing on Erhai lake

Dali is the former capital of the Bai Kingdom, and a well preserved city, with tourism being one of the main economic activities. Near Dali the group visited the town of Xizhou, a Bai minority village bordering the Erhai lake. The town is undergoing important changes. One of the traditional economic activities is fishing on the lake. However, this is now restricted because agricultural activities have increased the pollution in the lake, and overfishing has reduced the fish stock. For this reason, the government has been promoting tourism, and some

fishermen have become tourist operators, taking tourists on their small boats for a short fishing experience. The second important change in Xizhou village is related to farming. Although there is considerable land, and during the visit, at the end of the dry season, there was still sufficient water in the paddy fields to grow a second crop of rice, population pressures has created land scarcities. To address these problems, the local and provincial authorities, together with the local population, are attempting to transform the economy and reduce its dependence on the environment (both the lake and farmland), by promoting tourism in the village, to some extent attempting to duplicate the development of Dali. The visit of Dali and Xizhou were facilitated by Miss Du Lili and Dr. Zhu Ming of Tourism and Culture College of Yunnan University, who helped students interpret their observations.



Interview of farmers in Xizhou



Religious festival near Dali

After Dali the group reached Lijiang, where the group spent the next four days. Upon arrival students visited Lijiang Campus of Yunnan University, home of the Tourism and Culture College. On the campus, students had two interesting lectures on Lijiang's history and tourism development. The next day, the students visited the town with Yunnan University students and engaged in a small research, which they presented on the last day (and wrote up as the field camp assignment). During the presentation, the students received useful feedbacks from professors of the Tourism and Culture College of Yunnan University, which helped them better understand the conditions in Lijiang.

Near Lijiang, on the next day the group visited the Liming Danxia landscape. From the 1950s to the 1990 there was a great deal of logging on the mountain, and the neighbouring valleys, which resulted in their near-complete deforestation. Since 1998 the forest has been replanted, though with *Pinus Yunnanesis*, which makes the area very hot, and the climb more tiring. Students was briefed on the geomorphology of the area by Dr. Zhu Ming of the Tourism and Culture College of Yunnan University. The area is inhabited by Lisu minority, and Dr. Delang briefed the students on the reforestation programs of the Chinese government, and the economic and livelihood activities of the Lisu minorities, both in Yunnan and the neighbouring countries.



Visit of Yunnan University, Kunming



The Liming Dangxia landscape near Lijiang

Near Lijiang the group visited the Lashi lake, which like the Erhai lake (not far from Dali) is polluted because of the agricultural activities surrounding the lake. Tourism is now being promoted as an alternative economic activity to fishing. Miss Du, of the Tourism and Culture College, briefed the students on the social and ecological conditions of the lake, and the social lives of the members of the Naxi minorities that live around the lake.

The group also visited the ancient town of Shuhe, a town close to Lijiang, where tourism forms the bulk of the economic activities, and students was able to observe the differences between Lijiang and Shuhe. While tourism provides a good economic alternative to farming and fishing, it also carries environmental costs, as tourists need large amounts of water, which can no longer be used by farmers, generate large amounts of waste, and increase the prices of goods, making Lijiang an expensive city to live in. Thus, while tourism brings great economic opportunities to some people, not everybody is able to take advantage of these opportunities, so there are both winners and losers. Finally, students visited two of the geomorphologic marvels of the area, the Tiger Leaping Gorge, and the Dragon Snow Mountain.



At the top of the Dragon Snow Mountain, near Lijiang

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