

"Shangri-la—It is a dream, a mystery, and the moon and the sun in the mind of many Tibetans."  
- from a guidebook found in Zhongdian, recently renamed Shangri-la County



Hi!

In December, I went with the NGO to Diqing district, northwest Yunnan, bordering Xizang and Sichuan provinces. Along with a CBIK program assistant, an architect (there to give trainings for the traditional housing projects), and our Tibetan driver, Ding Zhu, I went to three separate Tibetan villages over a ten day period. Needless to say, it was amazing!

This is what I came to China for—the rural side—this way of life. While I contributed little to the group, I was assured that it was okay because I could go first with them to experience "the field," since I would be going back. While my heart is still with Shaxi Township, Jianchuan County, Dali Prefecture (a village of mainly the Bai minority), I am excited. I don't even think the full experience of my trip has even hit me yet!!



Sometimes I get tired of city life, everyone rushing around, no one seeming to give a damn about each other. It seems just much too rushed, especially in terms of traffic. It's understandable, in terms of increasing globalization, population, divisions between the rich and the poor, etc.

Yet every once in a while, I do encounter something that tells me that we are all still in this together, and people don't always just look out for themselves. For example, I was on the bus—which is now a rare occurrence due to my wonderful, cheap bike—and as more people piled on, I pulled my backpack in front of my chest.

I lazily balanced the bag on the back of the chair in front of me, and I must have shifted it too much, because a 60 year old woman sitting behind that chair suddenly insisted on putting my bag in her lap. I protested, but I knew it was no use because most Chinese women seem to have this incredible ability to get things their way. She also took my jacket, which was in my hands. Sometimes, I try to give back as well. It's worth it to see the smile on a person's face, to just get along with people.

I went on my second visit to Shaxi in January. I think I am beginning to realize why there is a lot more research on rural-to-urban migration from the urban standpoint, as opposed to the rural.



Rural life is extremely difficult. Yet there are many happy people in villages, some tight bonds, and most importantly, people know each other, and feel that they are “in it” together. Yet in the city, migrant workers are probably struggling a lot more, even if they make more money. They have to deal with being out working, probably by themselves unless they are in retail/restaurant or something similar, and even then they may not know their co-workers. Migrant workers deal with no insurance, long hours, bosses that are probably not looking out for their best interests,

having lower "status," perhaps having to communicate in something other than their native language— and the @#^%&\$#!!!! traffic. I get more emotional seeing a man riding a bike pulling a huge cart full of glass panes than I do seeing a row of women planting rice. Both are backbreaking jobs, but I think being in the city, away from your home, just makes it that much harder. Thus, if researchers were to follow this line of feeling, they would probably choose to look at it from that aspect.



Roughly translated, this is a picture of a "visitor-receiving platform," for praying. The first picture on page 1 shows Tibetan prayer flags with Snow Mountain in the background. The other pictures are of Tibetan farm land and a village.

—Julie  
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