

Being in China, I have gotten used to the changes that occur about once a day. I never fully know what's going on and what will happen in the future, which makes things a little difficult sometimes. It also means I have a lot of highs and a lot of lows. Early February was a high, only to have it interrupted for a month by being away from Yunnan. However, I am now back on the horse, back to being rather busy - and it's great! Of course, if it could come at a steady pace, that would be even more divine.

My last couple months in a nutshell—

In January, I tagged along with six Tibetans from a village in Deqin to Luquan (uplands of Yunnan) and Xishuanbanna (down south) for field visits so that they could see project sites. It was an amazing trip. This picture is of us in Burma, where we crossed the border for about ten minutes.



I'm pictured here with Tibetan ladies from Hongpo village (front row, on right). They had taken me to some hot springs nearby. It sounds like heaven, and it was: wonderful people, hot springs in the mountains (cheap, too!), singing and dancing all night long. Many of the women from that village go there once a year, before the New Year begins.

The visit to the Philippines (Boracay Beach) was amazing and I highly recommend it. I also had a Fulbright conference which was intense. I am currently connecting with many NGOs, including a

newly opened migrant center. Also, I'm still working on some slightly new projects in the same villages in which I've been based and I'm about to begin focusing on research involving village cooperatives.

Kunming's first migrant center opened in February. I'm going to become a pretty committed volunteer there. I went to the community in which the children live, and they're going to be starting an oral history project. Many of these kids hang out at the center after school and on weekends. My original proposed project was on rural-to-urban migration from the rural perspective, so I'd say that for me, finding this place was perfect, though it changes my research focus a lot.





We took the kids on a field trip to the Green Lake and then Yunnan University. These children are wonderful. The migration center is great, but it means I'll be away from the house for almost 12 hours many days.

China is scrambling for stability as its workers age. The proportion of people 60 and older is growing faster in China than in any other major country. The number of retirees will double between 2005 and 2015, when it is expected to reach 200 million. By mid-century, according to UN projections, roughly 430 million people—about a third of the population—will be retirees.

Lastly, I recently engaged in a Chinese birthday—my own! The tradition is for the birthday celebrant to treat all her/his free-loading friends :D...

...and **hip hop exists in Kunming!**

I would now like to mention an issue I had never given that much thought to—leprosy victims. In the 50s and 60s, the Chinese government created leprosy villages in order to isolate victims of this disease. In Yunnan there are over 100 such villages, at least one in each county. The villages were provided with some subsidies, but things are still hard today. For example, markets are far away, and many people refuse to sell to or buy from these victims. Even after being cured, sufferers cannot easily reunite with their families, due to a societal stigma. The families suffer—one man's son could not find a job, not even with the army, because of his father having leprosy. In the end, he couldn't find a wife, and had to marry far away to a woman with mental disabilities.

These stories were told to me tonight by a man working for a rehabilitation center. I asked him what someone outside of his organization could do, and he simply said, "Come with us." Though I am not so sure what you, my readers, can do yet, hopefully I will have more information in the future.

—Julie
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