

China Spring Scholar Project

I decided to apply for this program because it was an amazing opportunity to challenge myself. I've worked in research teams before where the majority of the team spoke a foreign language but China would be more challenging than anything I have had to tackle before. When I did research in Cuba I was limited by the language barrier but since Spanish and English both have Latin origins it was easy to get the gist of what was going on and the language was easy to pick up. Chinese however is entirely different. When I first started studying mandarin the first few classes were just about pronunciation. Unlike English and Spanish the melody of the word seemed to have great importance. One minor error in the way the word is pronounced or its tone could result in you saying something completely different. I found that out the hard way when I tried practicing with some foreign exchange students from China and they repeatedly burst out laughing. Apparently I had been saying something completely different to what I expected, even when I repeated words straight back to them they still didn't sound correct. The complexity of the language meant that even with some background in mandarin it was almost impossible to keep up with what was being said.

In order to keep up during the project I had to really test my communication skills. Reading facial expressions and gestures was crucial. At home I can usually recognize when someone is angry, sad or excited by the tone of their voice, but Chinese sounds so different we even struggled to read those cues. Because of these communication restrictions it was essential that we listened very carefully to everything Dr. Chen said to us. In order to get all the work done in good time we would have to work efficiently, and with Dr. Chen the only person able to translate there would be little opportunity to ask questions as she would have her own tasks to complete. We had to learn quickly and use our problem solving skills regularly if we were to be of any help to the team and not interfere with the accuracy or efficiency of the project.

Before we departed on our journey we were given an opportunity to train in film technique with Ari and Joseph. Joseph explained to us how the videos would be used to promote SDSU programs and as an academic resource. During our talk about the editing process he put a huge emphasis on storytelling. It's not enough to just go out and film clips of things that look interesting you have to be able to set the scene and show your audience how and why everything is connected. At this point in our preparation the only resource Michael and I had to prepare was the information we had got in the interview and the posts we had read on the golden monkey website. We knew a great deal of what the project was about but still had a limited knowledge of what exactly our role would be on the project. We knew we would be filming but not exactly what the setting would be or how limited our opportunities to film would be. When I've worked on film projects before we had always started with a test shoot where you go and scout the location then use that information to develop a storyboard that you can shoot from. However, with such limited knowledge of exactly where we would be going and what our daily schedule would consist of this was not an option. We would have to approach each day as a start of a story and make sure we got enough footage to set up each scenario that could unfold. This was a different way of working for me but was an excellent opportunity to use film in a new style. It

was important that we were always thinking about our film task in order to do this successfully and that meant treating the camera almost as an extension of my body, we could never leave without it. Unfortunately that also meant the tripod became an extension of Michael's body much to his irritation at times. After being hit in the head by it a few times whilst loading it into overhead lockers whilst traveling and being caught on numerous bushes while hiking to say the least he was more than relieved to be returning it to Dr. An at the end of 2 weeks.

Our journey began early in the morning. I had been so distracted by the number of last minute preparations i had to do and completing assignments ahead of time for classes I would miss that it had not occurred to me quite how soon I would be standing in China. It wasn't until I arrived at the airport with my duffel bag and backpack that it really dawned on me that my adventure was about to start. As we began our journey with a short flight to Los Angeles we were rewarded with a stunning aerial view of the California coastline. Usually planes travel too high for you to see the coast with that great of detail but the short flight time meant we stayed at an elevation that was perfect for admiring California's beautiful coast and my mind was soon wondering and imagining how different the environment would be when we arrived in Fanjingshan. We were not disappointed, the dusty browns and tired greens we see in California due to the intense sun and lack of water were a stark contrast to the lush greens that decorated the mountains in Fanjngshan.

By hour six of our fourteen hour flight to Shanghai we were exhausted. The cabin was dark and almost everyone on board had fallen asleep, that was until the Chinese family sitting in front of us decided it was the perfect time to get in screaming argument. Dazed, exhausted, confused, and still half asleep Michael and I had first row seats to what looked like could escalate into a fist fight. After what felt like over an hour shouting the fight that had expanded to include the family two rows in front finally ended. Unfortunately so did my ability to sleep, needless to say I was relieved when we finally landed in Shanghai and ready to pass out by the time we reached Changsha.

The following morning our journey to the nature reserve began. The city of Changsha was surrounded by a haze of fog and the skyline of skyscrapers was littered with construction cranes. The skyline seemed so dense with high risers it was impossible to see how more buildings could possibly fit. We asked Shuang if the fog was a regular occurrence and after a short conversation with our taxi driver we were informed that the fog was a result of the extensive building work taking place throughout the city. In keeping with the developing city the train station was also incredibly modern. The high speed train looked more like an aircraft than any train i had seen before. Its structure was so streamlined that it was not surprising it could reach speeds up to 300km/hr. But despite its incredible speed the train moved fluidly, if it wasn't for the scenery quickly passing the windows the passengers would have been unaware of how fast they were traveling.



After arriving in Changsha we met with one of the nature reserves directors and Rangers as well as Dr. Chen for dinner. It was our first experience of the local cuisine. During the interview I was warned that the food was incredibly spicy and oily. I stopped eating meat when I was 5 years old so am use to a vegetarian diet with the exception of fish so was nervous to see how the food would agree with me. I knew maintaining my diet whilst traveling could be difficult so I had prepared my stomach before the trip by drinking probiotic drinks daily and taking lots of vitamins to ensure I would be able to adjust my diet whilst away in a hope that my host would not have to accommodate my dietary needs. Despite my preparations I was still nervous since it was important that i was polite and as I did not want to offend our company. After a series of handshakes we sat down and were each served a small glass of green tea. When the food arrived I was relieved to see it was all served family style. Other than the bowl of rice i was handed i would be able to serve myself. Relief washed over me, this style of eating i knew would make it easier for me to handle my dietary restrictions without offending my host or leaving a half full bowl of food on the table. I've always found it fascinating how eating customs vary so greatly around the world. In many countries it is seen as offensive to leave food on your plate, in other countries it is offensive to eat your plate clean since it suggests your host did not give you enough and in America it is not uncommon to be served a double sized portion so you have enough to take home for 2nd meal! It turned out my nerves had been completely unnecessary, the food was delicious. The flavors were rich and we were amazed by how fresh everything tasted. The spice was different to the type of spice I was used to. It was fairly mild but still delivered a slight kick adding to the body of flavors. When the bowls of rice were passed around for second helpings i was more than happy to serve myself more. My favorite dish that night was an eggplant dish in a rich sauce.

Whilst eating the room was filled with laughter and relaxed chatter. The team were clearly well acquainted and enjoying each others company. The atmosphere around the table was setting the scene for an amazing trip. Although I could only understand a few of the words being thrown around the table I was thoroughly enjoying the company. Every 5 minutes of so glasses were raised in cheers adding to the lively fun ambience of the evening. I could instantly tell this was going to be an incredible few weeks.

The journey into the nature reserve was incredibly bumpy. The roads were full of potholes and the regular landslides meant many bridges we passed had collapsed. We stopped briefly at the entrance to the nature reserve whilst a member of our team ran out to get documents. The entrance consisted of a grand gate with amazing intricate patterns and writing. In peak holiday season more than 10,000 tourists a day enter the reserve. Today however the entrance was quite with only thirty or so tourists standing outside the gift shops or in line for tickets. Spring is still considered to be a part of the off season for tourists. Michael and I saw our brief stop as a perfect opportunity to get some footage of the entrance. This was the shot Joseph was talking about, setting the scene to tell a story. We pulled out the tripod set up the camera and began filming a pan shot of the entrance. By the time we were half way through the shot Dr. Chen was shouting at us to hurry and get back in the car. It had only been maybe 3 minutes. That was our first lesson in filming, we needed to be able to know when it would be more appropriate to just go hand

held. The image quality would undeniably be better with the tripod since it would be more stable but the time it took to set up the tripod we clearly couldn't always afford without delaying the team. As quickly as we could we packed up our gear and jumped back in the car.

Halfway through our journey we were required to get out of the car and climb over a mound of rocks. A recent landslide had left the road unusable, it was impossible for a car to get passed. When we asked Dr. Chen how long it would take to have the road cleared we were told it had already been like this for 6 months. The locals had learnt to work around the giant mound of rocks and had organized for a bus to meet us on the other side to continue the journey. It was surprising to see how a landslide of this size could be such a common obstacle in daily life.



When we arrived at Shiao Dong's house we were greeted warmly by our hosts and assigned rooms we could get settled in. After changing into our rain gear we met downstairs for breakfast before preparing for our first day on the field.

We hiked into the jungle following the river. The river ran fast with large amounts of water passing over large moss covered boulders. As we made our way to the first vegetation plot location we had to cross the river multiple times. Sometimes this was challenging since

the higher we hiked the more vertical the land became and we soon had to start grabbing branches in order to assist us on our ascent. The ground was a combination of clay, mud and slate like rock. When the slate piled up it created rockslides. We had to be especially careful of where we placed our feet since one wrong step could send a pile of rocks and dirt sliding down the mountain edge.

We stopped a few times along the way to drink water and were greeted with stunning views of steep mountains thick with green forests. These breaks were not long enough to set up the tripod but seemed to be just enough time to pull out the camera and get a few hand held shots of the scenery. We learnt to take the guides cigarettes as a cue for time. If they lit a cigarette we would have enough time to pull out the tripod and get a few shots but as soon as they start to put out their cigarettes that was the cue to dismantle the tripod and pack up. Using the cigarettes became a great tool throughout the trip since it allowed us to estimate how long we had to film without interfering with the progression of the hike.

The first vegetation plot was in dense forest. They tied a orange and pink ribbon around a tree and then our host, Shiao Dong, started running out in different directions with a tape measure. It was hard to fully understand what was happening since the vegetation was so dense and all instructions were being given in Chinese. During this plot it was important that Michael and I stayed still in order to prevent the rocks from sliding interfering with their sample. We set up the camera on the tripod and began to film what was happening but it was nowhere near as easy as

the practice filming we had done in the SDSU studios. The vegetation was so dense it was almost impossible to get a clear image of people working without being in the way and the terrain was so steep we had to hold onto branches in order not to go sliding down the mountain.

After the plot had been prepared with ribbon markers and the trap set we began hiking back down the river to our next plot. When deciding where to take vegetation measurements and set the camera it was important to take into consideration the presence of other cameras and the proximity to the road. In order to check this we used GPS. As we hiked in the direction we wanted the 2nd plot to be we found our first piece of evidence that monkeys were present in the area, a skeleton. The skeleton of a small monkey lay on the side of the path, the skull made it clear that the skeleton belonged to a primate. This monkey had clearly been dead for sometime since there was practically no flesh left on the bones, it was hard to tell if it was a golden monkey or another type of monkey found in the region.



The second vegetation plot varied drastically from the first. The terrain was almost flat in comparison and the trees were so sparse you could see every corner of the sample. With easier terrain and better visibility we were able to get a much better idea of how the vegetation plots were done. Dr. Chen explained to us how the markers signal the four corner of a square quadrat and how a central marker is used and then a tape measure is ran out North East, South East, South West, and North West in order to make the square, Samples with sparse vegetation such as this transect also have markers for North, East, South and West. Not far from the plot was access to the river and on the boulders were monkey facies showing we were in an area frequented by monkeys. Within the plot, measurements were taken for tree trunk width, average tree height, number of plant species and evidence for monkey presence. To measure canopy cover Dr. Chen used a fisheye lens camera and directed it vertically in order to get a photo of the cover at each of the marked points.

We arrived back at Shiao Dongs house at around 5:00pm. We ate dinner in the main room around a small table that looked as though it were wearing a skirt. Shiao Dongs's father sat beside me and indicated for me to put my legs under the blanket. I was surprised to find there was a heater inside the table to keep your legs and hands warm. After a long day of hiking the warm table was greatly appreciated. The temperature had significantly dropped with the sun making my damp clothes instantly freezing. After eating, a flow of local villagers passed through the house. Some came to eat, others just stopped by to drink or talk. I was amazed by how close the community seemed and how welcoming the family was. By early evening the long day and jet lag had gotten the best of me and I was ready to turn in.

The next day we travelled back into the field to set two more video traps and carry out two more vegetation samples. The majority of camera traps that have been set in the past few years have

been in the reserve but Dr. Chen was keen to set up more cameras in the experimental zone and in areas closer to villages and the road. A local agreed to give us a ride into a nearby village where we met another local who agreed to show us around. It was important that we worked with the locals during this part of the study since we were not within the nature reserve. Behind the villages we could see evidence of where the land had been terraced in the past but was slowly being replanted to become wild forestland again. We followed the river inland away from the village passing multiple plots that were associated with the payments for ecosystem services.



The plot Dr. Chen chose was just up from the river bank and had dense trees. When standing in the planted forest you could see there had been some planning in regards to where the trees were planted since some were organized in straight lines creating corridors. The ground on this plot was much flatter than the steep ground we worked on the day before and there were much fewer plant species, a monoculture had been planted. We asked the director of the nature reserve who was accompanying us if the trees here were the same trees they used to build houses, he replied yes but when they are much larger, the trees here he believed were only 10 or so years old. We were amazed that these 20-30ft trees could only be 10 years of age. We were told that they are brought in as saplings and planted but that this area was too dense and will need to be cleared since there was too much canopy cover.

Since the landscape was much more manageable today Michael and I each received an opportunity to assist in the data collection. Dr. Chen explained how they mark each tree with two ribbons because the moisture makes it likely one ribbon will be lost. At each point the GPS is recorded and the canopy is measured using a D700 SLR camera. The camera is set up with a fish eye lens so when pointed towards the canopy it will take 6 photos at different exposures. These photos are then overlaid with software in order to determine the % canopy cover. When taking photos it is important to take a photo of the identity card first and to make sure the camera is level and pointing north. We also assisted in using the rangefinder. The range finder is used to



determine the slope of the plot. One person stood at our lowest marker and a person of equal height stood at the highest marker the range finder was then used to calculate the slope between the two peoples eye levels. The rangefinder was also used to determine the average tree height. To do this a tree was selected that looked around average height and then the person collecting measurements stood 10 feet away and used the rangefinder to determine the angle to the bottom of the tree and the angle to the top of the tree. This data would then be put in excel to calculate the height.

After all the vegetation data had been collected we moved on to another area to set up the video trap camera. The cameras were attached to the base of the tree, this surprised me since the majority of photos i had seen of golden monkeys showed them swinging high in the trees. Dr. Chen explained this was true the monkeys do spend the majority of their time high in the trees but by fixing the cameras lower they can record more animal species and monkeys are only recorded in areas of high activity. The camera was labeled with a sharpie with the site number and the GPS location was recorded. The cameras were set up to take 3 photos and 15 seconds of



video for each movement detection, with intervals of 1 second between detections. As well as labeling the cameras with sharpie the SD cards inside were also labeled with the site number. Internally the camera is also set up to have a record of the GPS and correct time to allow us to know exactly where the video was recorded and at what time of day. In order to make sure the camera is set up correctly the trap is set off and then the memory card is removed and put inside a digital camera to check the footage, if it looks correct the SD card is then put back in the camera trap and left. Since the camera is set

off with any movement it is important to clear the area of any branches that could interfere with the camera to make sure the camera has a clear shot. Any movement of branches can set the camera off wasting memory space, so the more cleared the area is the better. After setting up the camera it flashes for 10 second before beginning to function, this gives the researchers just enough time to clear the area. The second vegetation plot was very similar to the first, it was not a long distance away from the road or river and was in close proximity to the village. This plot however was in the opposite direction from the village when compared to the first. At the second plot we repeated vegetation measurements and set another camera trap.

Between vegetation plots we were invited into our guides house for tea. The house seemed identical to Shiao Dong's from the layout to the exterior. I asked Dr. Chen if all the local houses follow the same format and i was informed that it was a traditional building style that is used by all the local residents. The only thing different about our guides house was the large pig barn attached to the side. The front garden was filled with vegetable patches making it clear that the majority of food was grown on site. i was impressed by the large variety of vegetables he had growing. Growing food yourself however is not uncommon in this region and it explained why the food we had tasted the night before tasted so fresh.



Beside my seat we noticed the longest pipe we had ever seen. Michael and i were shocked that they made pipes this long but apparently this was not common since the rest of our team fell about laughing when they saw it. The director even got up to hold it out and try to make sense of it. After speculations on how it is used were passed around the circle our guide returned also

laughing and explained that he made it long so he could rest it on his shoulder and reach the fire pit without getting up.

That evening as we were sitting around the table for dinner the living room became filled with a group of local elders. They were in deep discussion about something that was clearly a serious issue. Shiao Dong's father was taking lead and great discussions were being had about a piece of paper cover in Chinese lettering. Dr. Chen explained that Shiao Dong's father is the village leader and they are currently in the middle of trying to raise funds for a local temple. According to Dr. Chen they were almost halfway to having complete funding. Michael and I were so grateful for the family and village's amazing hospitality that we each offered to make a donation to assist in the local project. A \$20 donation did not seem to be a lot of money to us but they were very grateful for the money and Shiao Dong's father said he would have our names engraved into a stone on the temple as thanks. This led to a great debate of how exactly you write Michael Cassidy and Inka Cresswell in Chinese. After lots of giggling and scribbling on paper they had finally come up with something that resembled our names and as it was passed around the table and people attempted to pronounce our western sounding names everyone fell about in laughter.

The next day started differently, the morning was delayed by the breaking of ground on a local temple. At breakfast we went downstairs to find Shiao Dong's farm house filled with local people from the village. The men were attempting to catch a chicken, it took at least six men to capture the chicken that seemed to be repeatedly escaping their eager hands. The chicken had been captured as an offering for the gods. We travelled up to the temple site which was filled with men and some children. We were amazed to watch them pull the structure together with only manpower and no help from machinery. Like monkeys the men could quickly climb to the top of the structures where they would be passed more materials to continue the build. There was nothing to assist in their ascent and the structure was only being held together by a lot of careful balancing. Hanging on a peg against one of the wooden beams were large slabs of pork. They were also being used as an offering to the gods. The temple location was in dense trees on a hillside not far from Shiao Dong's house. We were told this site was chosen because it had good feng shui. After a series of fireworks were released we returned to the farm house to prepare for our field trip. Whilst we waited for our guide to be finished attending to the temple we played with the local children who had accompanied their parents down to the house. We played football, blindfolded tag and their version of rock paper scissors which involved a lot of slapping.

Dr. Chen decided she wanted to set a camera up closer to the road so we used motorbikes to travel into the Nature Reserve to a different location. The location chosen was about a 20 minute drive away. They chose a plot at the very bottom of the valley, this meant a very steep hike down the cliff side. The plot chosen was in very close proximity to a house and the land surrounding the house was full of grazing cows that let off alarming calls when they heard us approaching. For the most part the cows were very friendly but avoided us when they could. The plot had dense trees and the landscape was still slightly terraced. We collected more vegetation data and set up a camera that overlooked a ridge looking back towards our plot. The hike back up to the

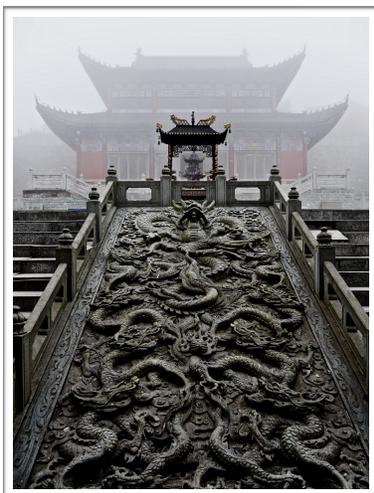
motorbikes was exhausting and we were constantly having to grab onto trees for support. After returning from the hike we took a bus back to the township where we would be staying for the next few days.

Dr. Chen needed a day to process data so Michael and I were able to explore the more touristy parts of the Nature Reserve. This included a hike to the highest peaks of the park. We took a cable car up to a platform and then followed a series of wooden steps. From the viewing platform we could see incredible mountains that almost looked as though they were floating due to the mist. The cable car had taken us above the cloud bank. At the very top of the highest peaks we could see buildings that looked like houses. We continued up the stairs until we reached a viewing platform that gave us amazing views of the landscape, it was full of tourists posing for photos.



After a few pictures we continued to climb up the stairs that led to the highest peak where we had seen the houses. As we climbed, the passageways became narrower and the stairs became steeper. We were constantly passing signs that warned of rock slides and a risk of lightning. The mist would drift in leaving us surrounded by white and then clear revealing a new landscape. At one point the stairs almost disappeared and were replaced with chains and rocks that could be used as footholds, at this point we had no choice but to use the chains to pull ourselves up. The rocks were also becoming wet from the mist making it harder to get a steady grip.

When we reached the top we were greeted with a view that can only be described as spectacular. The chains surrounding the cliff edge were decorated with love locks that reminded me of the love lock bridge in Paris. Most tourists did not climb to this height so other than a few people we were alone, even the reserve director who had accompanied us said he had never made it this high before. What we had thought were small houses turned out to be Buddhist temples that had intricate gold Buddha statues inside and incense burning in the wind outside.



After taking our photos and taking in the view we hiked back down to another platform where we had lunch before hiking to the top of another rock mountain. This climb was shorter than the first but much steeper, carved into the rocks we could see Chinese characters and at the very top there was another temple and a skybridge connecting where the rock had split. We were amazed at how they could build a bridge at this height. After descending from this rock we decided to make our way to the last viewing platform. This walk was much easier and in the summer we were told it would be filled with beautiful flowers

but currently there were only bare branches. Unfortunately when we reached the viewing platform at the end we were greeted with a view of just white. The mountains were completely engulfed in mist leaving us staring at a blank view. On the way back down to the cable car we passed many Buddha figures and people praying.

That afternoon we traveled back down the mountain to a local village. The village was filled with the traditional wooden style buildings. We were told that the building style varied greatly depending on what nationality of Chinese the people were and that this building style was only present where this nationality lived. Many other nationalities have more modern style buildings with more brick and glass when compared to these wooden designs.

The next morning we woke up to a sudden change of plans. Originally we were supposed to be spending the day on a 6 hour hike through the nature reserve setting 4 camera traps along the way but after being contacted by the local police we were told foreigners were not able to travel through this part of the park for safety reasons. In a last minute change of plans we traveled back to Shiao Dong's village to assist Shuang in his house surveys.

Shuang had left us earlier in the trip to recruit students from a local university to assist on the house surveys and was now joined by four new team members 2 biology majors and two urban planning majors. When we met him he was interviewing an elderly lady, it was hard to get a grasp on what she was being asked since all questions were in Chinese but from the paperwork being used it was clear to see that the survey was very in depth. After pointing out where her parcels were on a map Shuang and his team hiked to the parcel location and recorded the GPS. Calculations were then done to see how accurate she had been on the map. Shuang said the concept of the maps can be very difficult for the local people to understand due to their limited education. Most people in this village only attended school for maybe five years but this woman had had no formal education.



The next day we met with Mr. Shah and his brother also known as Mr. Shah. Mr. and Mr. Shah we were told are two of the most active volunteers when the researchers from San Diego State University are not present. They regularly go out to check on the cameras and look over footage. Checking the cameras can be difficult since if all the batteries are removed the camera may be reset. This is a very difficult task for the volunteers since all the programming is in English. For this reason Dr. Chen brought a battery checking device. After training Mr

and Mr Shah in how to use the device to check for battery charge Michael and I were able to document Mr Shah checking the cameras. We visited three plots during this hike. The terrain was more slippery than usual due to the thunderstorm that had taken place the night before leaving the terrain moist and damp. With the increase in humidity there was also a large increase in the number of insects.

The mountain where the plots were located were at least a 30 minute drive away from the village we were staying in. The road was narrow with constant twists and turns, potholes and boulders. There were several moments when i thought there was no way that this mini van could possibly make it up the mountain. However the tiny old mini van would have put most Jeep four wheel drives to shame. How it managed to make it up the mountain with its tiny wheels I will never fully understand.



The next two days were spent completing more house surveys, as usual the people were amazingly welcoming and patient as the students asked question after question. Watching the local people be so understanding and giving with their personal time made me embarrassed to think of my hometown. I remember completing surveys for my geography A levels and i would be lucky if just one out of ten people agreed to complete my five minute survey. But here these people were willing to sit down and offer three hours of their time, in exchange for their cooperation the students attempted to give the participants packs of cigarettes but most villagers even kicked up a fuss when it came to accepting this small gesture of thanks. I was truly overwhelmed by the kindness of these people.

During the house surveys we moved to another town that was surrounded by beautiful yellow fields of flowers. When Michael and I stepped outside to explore the local area we noticed we were being followed. A small mob of school children with camera phones had taken to following us everywhere. I imagine I got a taste of what it feels like to be a celebrity being followed by the paparazzi. When we turned around they would quickly hide their phones as though they had been caught but after we waved at them a few times they came over and we ended up taking multiple photos with them. In this area it was very rare that a foreigner passed through, they had only seen them on TV.

One of our local guides attended the local high school and one night after dinner he asked if we would be willing to go to the high school and meet some of the students. Happy to help Michael and I accompanied him to the boarding school which was home to 2000 students. As we entered the gates a crowd of children slowly formed around us each of them shouting 'Hello, nice to meet you!'. When we looked up there were even bigger crowds of students watching us from the balconies and after I waved they all quickly waved back excitedly. We met with the high schools English teacher and headmaster who asked if we would be willing to talk to some of their senior level students in their English class. When we entered the classroom i was shocked to see the

size of the stack of textbooks each student had on the desk. Shuang said those books were only for one class and were only homework assignments. It was 8pm, they were still in class, and their homework assignments created small mountains on their desks, I found myself wondering how they ever find time to sleep.

The English teacher explained to us that the students have been learning English for about 10 years but have never had the opportunity to speak with a native English speaker. I gave an introduction to the class explaining who we were and then Michael and I did a Question and answer with the students. Their enthusiasm was amazing and it was delightful to hear them talk about their hometown with such pride. After the visit a group of the girls asked me to take selfies with them and I left them my email address so they could write to me if they wish.

The thing that amazed me most about this trip was the people. The province is very poor economically but what they lack in money they make up for in community and kindness. The people we encountered during our trip were passionate and proud. There was never a moment where I felt unwelcome and according to Shuang there had not been a single act of theft in the past 10 years. We were incredibly privileged to have been allowed the opportunity to visit such a strong community.

Working on this project allowed me to develop my filming skills but more importantly it allowed me to build on my communication and teamwork skills. In the future I hope to go onto working on wildlife documentaries and this project gave me a unique experience to learn what it is like to work with a small team with limited resources. It also taught me more about interacting with people from different backgrounds, with different cultures and different traditions. These skills will be essential later in my career since I will often be put in positions where I need to work with local people whose customs are different from mine. Learning to understand and interact with communities is an important skill for conservation. I hope to work in marine environments in the future and a common problem is finding a balance between economics, tradition and conservation. Over harvesting has become an increasing problem in oceanic habitats but in order to address this problem you need to go to the root. Telling a community to stop fishing because there is an endangered species or you want to make a coastal marine reserve is not a solution. These kinds of actions could take away an entire village's livelihood or generations of tradition. In order to handle these situations in a successful way you need to be able to understand the local community and use problem solving skills to address all the problems associated with the changes. Although this project was about terrestrial conservation I believe I have gained essential skills that can be applied to handling marine conservation issues. Learning about how a community different from my own works and spending time with local people whose customs are very different to mine has allowed me to improve my social skills for being put in these foreign situations that could greatly benefit me later in my career.

