

Fall 2012

Manifestations of Tibetan Buddhism in Pudacuo National Park and its Effectiveness as an Environmental Education Tool

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MANIFESTATIONS OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM IN PUDACUO NATIONAL PARK AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION TOOL

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Fall 2012

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Abstract

Pudacuo National Park in Shangri-la, Yunnan is mainland China's first national park and comprehensive conservation and eco-tourism attempt. The Nature Conservancy worked with Yunnan provincial government to establish park guidelines and advocate for certain conservation measures. One of the important guidelines that The Nature Conservancy included was local cultural preservation. A primary goal of this experiment in US-modeled national parks is to ensure the longevity of traditional values and beliefs in the parkland area. Pudacuo National Park is not only attempting to conserve the local Tibetan Buddhist tradition but also is attempting to capitalize on the uniqueness of the experience by providing environmental education revolving around the belief system. This paper synthesizes Pudacuo National Park's use of Tibetan Buddhism to promote environmental education by looking at the inclusion of Tibetan Buddhism in all aspects of the Pudacuo visitor's typical experience. This paper will go on to show via an environmental education study that Pudacuo National Park's use of Tibetan Buddhism on signs is an effective way to educate visitors.

Acknowledgements

It is with genuine gratitude that I express thanks to everyone who went out of his or her way to assist with my Independent Study Project in Shangri-la, Yunnan. First, I would like to wholeheartedly thank our Program Director, Lu Yuan, who has been nothing but supportive to all of us throughout our entire semester. Additionally, on-site support in Shangri-la was provided by Dakpa Kelden who was invaluable in assisting me in securing a job within Pudacuo National Park. Mr. Kelden also enriched my experience in town by extended many offers include me in traditional Tibetan Shangri-la life.

An additional acknowledgement must be made to all of the bus drivers and tour guides on staff at Pudacuo National Park. The guides, drivers, and security guards were more than willing to address all of my questions and to explain abstract Tibetan Buddhist concepts to me. I am particularly grateful for one guide, Nolon, whose English and Mandarin language got excessive use during my visit and who made sure that I truly felt like a part of Pudacuo staff.

Technical Notes

The majority of the interviews cited in this paper were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Direct quotes from these interviews and subsequent translation into English will be denoted by the use of ‘ within a set of quotations. These interviews were usually informal conversations in which the interviewee knew that the information they provided would be cited in this paper. Handwritten notes were taken during all interviews and a dictionary or translator device was used to ensure the true meaning was understood. See Appendices for transcripts from most interviews conducted at Pudacuo National Park with park officials.

Additionally, several terms utilized in this paper are not translated from their original language and consequently are italicized to denote differentiation. These words are either pinyin (Mandarin Chinese) or are Tibetan words.

Finally, names have been changed for all those cited in this paper. Even though much of this information is not culturally or politically sensitive, due to the political tension that could be manifested in the area, the names have been changed to protect interviewees.

I. Introduction:

“The protection of biodiversity in a region..... should not only be about protecting one of the greatest sites of all the Tibetan and Chinese people, nor should the terms of protection only be stated in the scientific language of ecology. The protection of nature had to make way for the religious beliefs and practices of the Tibetan people...¹”

The inter-relatedness of Tibetan Buddhism and nature is an ancient concept that has historical roots on the Tibetan Plateau and, as Tibetan Buddhists dispersed, has since branched out to areas of China. Tibetan Buddhist religious traditions highlight nature and environmental integrity as crucial aspects of life itself.² “Precisely because things and events exist relatively and appear as having form, they are empty of independent existence,” His Holiness the Dali Lama explained.³ Nature and life are dependent entities and consequently have a deep connection that is revered by a practicing Tibetan Buddhist. This innate exchange between nature and the human spirit has been exemplifying the concept of environmental awareness and conservation for years; this is an emphasis that came significantly prior to other cultures realizing the importance of conservation measures. This trend of reverence and respect for the environment has carried through to the modern Tibetan Buddhist world, where environmental protection and conservation

¹ Litzinger, Ralph. "The Mobilization of "Nature": Perspectives from North-West Yunnan." *JSTOR*. The China Quarterly, June 2004. Web. 14 Nov. 2012.

² Gyatso, Tenzin. "A Tibetan Buddhist Perspective on Spirit in Nature." *Seeing God Everywhere: Essays on Nature and the Sacred*. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2003. 17-27. Print.

³Gyatso, Tenzin. "A Tibetan Buddhist Perspective on Spirit in Nature." *Seeing God Everywhere: Essays on Nature and the Sacred*. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2003. 17-27. Print. The belief by Tibetan Buddhists that Buddhists want to alleviate all suffering from sentient beings has a direct tie to environmental protection.

measures are now, more than ever, being incorporated as an important part of Tibetan Buddhist's connection with nature.⁴

This inter-relatedness and connection between humans and nature in the Tibetan Buddhist world sparked my initial interest into how Pudacuo National Park, a national park on the Tibetan Plateau, preserves and maintains a cultural focus on Tibetan Buddhism, or *zangzu fojiao*. The questions that I wanted answered by this study are the following: What was the reasoning behind making Tibetan Buddhism a focal point of the park? How is Tibetan Buddhism manifested in Pudacuo National Park? Finally, is Tibetan Buddhism an effective environmental education tool, and if so, how is the park creating a relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and environmentalism in the visitors' minds?

Pudacuo National Park is mainland China's first national park, located in Shangri-la County, Yunnan province, China. It was founded in 2006 at the behest and with the aid of The Nature Conservancy. By 2012, Pudacuo had over 220 employees and covered an area of over 2,000 square kilometers.⁵ Over 97% of the national park remained undeveloped; the only developed areas (300 square kilometers) were confined to a loop road-system that took visitors to three different stops.⁶ As the first national park in China, the concept of

⁴ Karmapa, Gyalwang. "Karmapa Addresses the Mind and Life Conference on Ecology, Ethics, and Interdependence" KHORYUG - Buddhists for Environmental Protection of the Himalayas." *KHORYUG Karmapa Addresses the Mind and Life Conference on Ecology Ethics and Interdependence Comments*. N.p., 30 Oct. 2011. Web. 04 Dec. 2012. In Tibet, the Gyalwang Karmapa, the Ogyen Trinley Dorje Lama, is currently heading a movement to preserve biodiversity through monastic means. The Ogyen Trinley Dorje Lama has had his speeches and addresses published in revered scientific journals, such as *Conservation Biology*.

⁵ MeiMei. Personal Interview. 12 Nov. 2012.

⁶ Grumbine, R. Edward, and D. Q. Zhou. "National Parks in China: Experiments with Protecting Nature and Human Livelihoods in Yunnan Province, Peoples' Republic of China (PRC)." *Biological Conservation* (2011): 1314-318. Web. 15 Nov. 2012. Pg 1317.

Pudacuo National Park is very different from other conservation and preservation strategies such as National Wetland Park, Forest Park, or Nature Reserve,⁷

Similar to the other three concepts, the national park is government-led but its focus is on teaching and educating the public as opposed to solely conserving land and conducting research, as are major focuses of the other nature designations.⁸ A national park is intended to have a high conservation value while also holding a high allure for tourists, both foreign and domestic. Eco-tourism goals of the national park plan are evident in the visitor facilities, and Pudacuo National Park set the standard for environmentally friendly, accessible visitor facilities. National park officials' goal of promoting responsible tourism was made evident by the eco-buses, green toilets, and solar power facilities.

I was fortunate enough to live and work as part of Pudacuo staff inside the park for two weeks conducting interviews, observing visitors, and listening to guided tours. By living inside the park and making friends with tour guides, I was truly able to get an insider's view of the park's functioning mechanism and develop an understanding of the use of Tibetan Buddhism inside of Pudacuo. By conducting interviews with employees of Pudacuo National Park, Tibetan Buddhist social scientists, and national park officials during the months of November and December 2012, I was able to come up with a clear picture of Buddhism in the park proper. Information garnered from interviews is coupled with on-site observations and published, peer-reviewed literature for further elucidation.

This paper will first outline Pudacuo's conception as mainland China's first national park and The Nature Conservancy's key role in this development. Then, the decision to

⁷ As of 2011, China has 1865 protected areas.

⁸ Pudacuo National Park Staff, comp. *Park Tour Guide Manuscript*. Shangri-la: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

incorporate Tibetan Buddhism into Pudacuo will be discussed followed by a description of the various ways Tibetan Buddhism, both organic and manufactured, is visible within the park. The guided tour was the main focus of study because over ninety nine percent of domestic tourists visit the park and only participate in the guided tour.⁹ Finally, an analysis of the park's use of Tibetan Buddhism as an effective environmental education tool will be synthesized and the conclusion explained. National park development can often be a controversial issue with many arguments for and against their development. All of the conclusions reached in this paper are reached independently of analysis of environmental impacts of Pudacuo National Park or national park development.

II. China's New Concept of a National Park

a. China's guidelines.

China was encouraged to base their model for Chinese national parks off of standards presented by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (hereafter IUCN) and based off of visits to United States' national parks. The driving forces that ultimately pushed Chinese officials to designate land as national parks were, first, the increased number of Chinese tourists who had leisure time and wanted to explore their own country and second, Chinese officials' acknowledgement of the need to conserve land which was rapidly being degraded for economic gain.¹⁰ The augmentation in the middle

⁹ Nolon. 12 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview. The guided tour is the only tour offered when purchasing tickets. Because most visitors come to Pudacuo as part of a large tour group (consisting of 20-30 tourists), the bus-tour is the standard form of visitation.

¹⁰ Wang, Guangyu, John L. Innes, Sara W. Wu, Judy Krzyzanowski, Yongyuan Yin, Shuanyou Dai, Xiaoping Zhang, and Sihui Liu. "National Park Development in China: Conservation or Commercialization?" *SpringerLink*. AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment, 27 Oct. 2011. Web. 17 Nov. 2012.

class in China appeared in the early 1990s and resulted in an increase in the amount of leisure time individuals had. This increased leisure time translated to a dramatic rise in the need for outdoor recreation for all of these new Chinese domestic tourists.¹¹ A response to these two changes in Chinese society was the proposition of eco-tourism and conservation in the form of national park units.

The focus of this report is the province of Yunnan, where these two impetuses were key in pushing the provincial government to designate land as national park land. Northern Yunnan is the most biodiverse region of China and is cited as being the “most biodiverse temperate region on earth,” containing 30 rare or endemic species and functioning as a corridor for over 400 wintering birds.¹² This habitat is also very fragile and susceptible to ecological disturbances. In response to the threat the increase in development across China posed, in 1998 non-governmental organizations, specifically The Nature Conservancy, began pushing and gaining support for a conservation measure to maintain biodiversity throughout Northern Yunnan.

An additional component of national parks’ guidelines in Yunnan included a focus on local economic development. At Pudacuo, focusing on local economic development includes giving locals priority hiring, permitting locals to continue grazing their animals within the park’s boundaries, and providing the locals a yearly stipend of 5,000 RMB per household. ¹³

¹¹Wang, Guangyu, John L. Innes, Sara W. Wu, Judy Krzyzanowski, Yongyuan Yin, Shuanyou Dai, Xiaoping Zhang, and Sihui Liu. "National Park Development in China: Conservation or Commercialization?" *SpringerLink*. AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment, 27 Oct. 2011. Web. 17 Nov. 2012.

¹² "Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas." *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, n.d. Web. 23 Nov. 2012.

¹³ MeiMei. 12 Nov. 2012. Personal interview.

b. The Nature Conservancy's involvement.

The Nature Conservancy played a key role in advocating for the establishment of a national park in Northern Yunnan. According to their website,

“The Conservancy supported the Chinese government's efforts to establish Pudacuo in June 2007 by introducing the concept of the national park system to officials and advising the government on how best to establish this kind of protected area.¹⁴”

In reality, The Nature Conservancy did more than just introduce the concept to provincial officials; The Nature Conservancy was a major impetus behind the establishment of the park. Their advocacy for the development of a national park in Shangri-la was proposed in tandem with The Great Rivers Project, where The Nature Conservancy worked with government officials and locals alike to protect land surrounding three of China's greatest rivers.¹⁵ The Nature Conservancy is lauded with helping to get the area encompassed by The Great Rivers Project to World Heritage site status.¹⁶ Pudacuo is a more recent development and one component under The Great Rivers Project.

The Nature Conservancy proposed the plan and model for a national park and ultimately played the strong advocate for the establishment of a national park in Shangri-la. However, the region that was to become Pudacuo National Park encompassing the Bitahai

¹⁴ "China: Pudacuo National Park." *The Nature Conservancy. Protecting Nature. Preserving Life.* N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Nov. 2012.

¹⁵ Zinda, John A. "Making National Parks in Yunnan: Shifts and Struggles within the Ecological State." Chapter in Yeh, Emily and Coggins, Christopher, eds. In press. *Mapping Shangrila: Nature, Personhood, and Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands.* Seattle: University of Washington Press. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

¹⁶ Zinda, John A. "Making National Parks in Yunnan: Shifts and Struggles within the Ecological State." Chapter in Yeh, Emily and Coggins, Christopher, eds. In press. *Mapping Shangrila: Nature, Personhood, and Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands.* Seattle: University of Washington Press. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

Nature Reserve was not the original area of concern for The Nature Conservancy.¹⁷ The Nature Conservancy was not focusing on the area around Bitahai because they were more concerned with gaining a net increase in the total amount of protected land. Because Bitahai, a protected area encompassing 26,869.2 hectares of land in Northern Yunnan, has been protected since 1981 by the Yunnan provincial government, The Nature Conservancy did not focus their attentions on this already protected land.¹⁸

One of The Nature Conservancy's primary goals in the Shangri-la area, in addition to protecting the biodiversity of the region, is to protect cultural integrity. The Nature Conservancy's core values are listed on their website, one of them being a "Commitment to People, Communities and Cultures." In holding true to this value, The Nature Conservancy brought together groups of scientists and carried out surveys of vegetation, geology, and cultural livelihoods in the area that would be affected were it to become Pudacuo National Park.¹⁹ What followed was a comprehensive report that served as the guideline for the establishment of a national park. The expectations for a national park laid out in this report were five-fold: A national park should be created that "protects the environment, conserves biodiversity, supports recreation that benefits the local economy, gives rural residents a role in decision-making bodies, and promotes scientific research and environmental

¹⁷ Zinda, John A. "Making National Parks in Yunnan: Shifts and Struggles within the Ecological State." Chapter in Yeh, Emily and Coggins, Christopher, eds. In press. *Mapping Shangrila: Nature, Personhood, and Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

¹⁸ Zhou, Wei, and Baokun Chen. "Biodiversity of Bitahai Nature Reserve in Yunnan Province, China." *Biodiversity and Conservation* 15.3 (2006): 839-53. *Springerlink*. Web. 14 Nov. 2012.

¹⁹ Zinda, John A. "Making National Parks in Yunnan: Shifts and Struggles within the Ecological State." Chapter in Yeh, Emily and Coggins, Christopher, eds. In press. *Mapping Shangrila: Nature, Personhood, and Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

education protection.²⁰ The report also included in-depth plans for a Shangri-la national park—elaborate plans that eventually were scaled down by the provincial government and entirely altered to become what is today Pudacuo National Park.

Pudacuo National Park, once created, was almost completely incongruous with the original plans for a national park proposed by The Nature Conservancy:

“Pudacuo National Park.... looks quite different from the hiking trails and back-country bed and breakfasts proposed by TNC and the Research Office, and it has not instituted the independent, unified oversight they endorsed. Instead of taking backpacking treks, visitors ride buses.²¹

Despite the disparity with their original plan, The Nature Conservancy continued to take an interest in Pudacuo. The officials involved with The Great Rivers Project at The Nature Conservancy decided that maintaining involvement in the Pudacuo project would allow for the best outcome, as they could offer conservational insight that might otherwise be overlooked in lieu of tourism and economic opportunities.²² The area itself represents a vast array of different ecological zones that are ecologically valuable and worth protecting; there are sub-alpine meadows, rare high-elevation wetlands, fir forests, old-growth forests,

²⁰ Zinda, John A. "Making National Parks in Yunnan: Shifts and Struggles within the Ecological State." Chapter in Yeh, Emily and Coggins, Christopher, eds. In press. *Mapping Shangrila: Nature, Personhood, and Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

²¹ Zinda, John A. "Making National Parks in Yunnan: Shifts and Struggles within the Ecological State." Chapter in Yeh, Emily and Coggins, Christopher, eds. In press. *Mapping Shangrila: Nature, Personhood, and Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

²² Zinda, John A. "Making National Parks in Yunnan: Shifts and Struggles within the Ecological State." Chapter in Yeh, Emily and Coggins, Christopher, eds. In press. *Mapping Shangrila: Nature, Personhood, and Sovereignty in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.

and alpine lakes all within the park's boundaries. Now, the park protects over four times the original land that was protected by Bitahai Nature Reserve.²³

In sticking true to one of their tenets, The Nature Conservancy has been key in pushing for and maintaining cultural and religious heritage within Pudacuo. The Nature Conservancy has a goal of working to include local knowledge and cultural traditions into their regional conservation efforts. When looking at Pudacuo National Park, the local tradition is very clearly a Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

II. China's decision to incorporate Buddhism into Pudacuo National Park

a. Relationship between biodiversity and sacred sites.

At sacred sites, of which Northern Yunnan has many, one of the reasons biodiversity has remained so high is because of the reticence of locals to farm or use what they consider to be holy land for anything other than its religious purpose.²⁴ Local customs often prevent harvesting in religious land and this type of indirect conservation has come to be known as "traditional stewardship."²⁵ In Tibetan influenced areas, a sacred site can be anything from a mountaintop to a holy lake, such as Bitahai.²⁶ Because of this natural relationship between religious traditions, biodiversity, and environmental protection, the logical step

²³ "China: Pudacuo National Park." *The Nature Conservancy. Protecting Nature. Preserving Life.* N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Nov. 2012.

²⁴ Anderson, Danica M., Jan Salick, Robert K. Moseley, and Ou Xiaokun. "Conserving the Sacred Medicine Mountains: A Vegetation Analysis of Tibetan Sacred Sites in Northwest Yunnan." *Biodiversity and Conservation* 14 (2005): n. pag. *Springerlink*. Web. 24 Nov. 2012.

²⁵ Anderson, Danica M., Jan Salick, Robert K. Moseley, and Ou Xiaokun. "Conserving the Sacred Medicine Mountains: A Vegetation Analysis of Tibetan Sacred Sites in Northwest Yunnan." *Biodiversity and Conservation* 14 (2005): n. pag. *Springerlink*. Web. 24 Nov. 2012.

²⁶ Anderson, Danica M., Jan Salick, Robert K. Moseley, and Ou Xiaokun. "Conserving the Sacred Medicine Mountains: A Vegetation Analysis of Tibetan Sacred Sites in Northwest Yunnan." *Biodiversity and Conservation* 14 (2005): n. pag. *Springerlink*. Web. 24 Nov. 2012.

for The Nature Conservancy and the Yunnan provincial government was to emphasize the importance of Tibetan Buddhism. Potentially, without Tibetan Buddhism's spread into Northern Yunnan, there might not have been an ecologically important area to protect and turn into a national park because it could have been degraded many years ago. Often the places with the most biodiversity are also those that are most economically underdeveloped. In recent years, with the push towards modernization and economic development, if areas high in biodiversity were not under protection, they may have been degraded for economic gain.

Sacred sites serve as a visible connection between human cultures and the environment. In fact, "in many regions of the world, sacred sites have been shown to have a major effect on conservation, ecology and environment due to the special precautions and restrictions associated with them."²⁷

b. Tibetan Buddhists native to Pudacuo Area

Tibetan Buddhism is aptly named in that the main country of origin is Tibet. However, as Tibetan Buddhism has spread and as those who were Tibetan Buddhist practitioners moved from central Tibet into the border regions, their religious traditions migrated with them. Pudacuo is located within a border region, often referred to as Eastern Tibet or Gyalthang. Currently, more Tibetans live outside of Tibet than in Tibet itself, and in Shangri-la, a little more than half of the population is Tibetan Buddhist.²⁸

²⁷ Anderson, Danica M., Jan Salick, Robert K. Moseley, and Ou Xiaokun. "Conserving the Sacred Medicine Mountains: A Vegetation Analysis of Tibetan Sacred Sites in Northwest Yunnan." *Biodiversity and Conservation* 14 (2005): n. pag. *Springerlink*. Web. 24 Nov. 2012.

²⁸ Mortensen, Eric. "Tibetan Buddhism in Shangri-la." Songzanlin Monastery Lecture. Yunnan, Shangri-la. 2 Nov. 2012. Lecture.

Tibetan Buddhism is very different from other forms of Buddhism in China or in the world. China has two other major forms of Buddhism, Pure Land and *Ch'an* (also known by its Japanese name *Zen*). There are some similar elements between all three prevalent forms of Buddhism but Tibetan Buddhism is unique from the others in that elements are heavily tantric oriented which influence both ritual and meditation.²⁹ Because the form of Tibetan Buddhism emphasized at Pudacuo is very different from other forms of Buddhism that the majority of visitors practice, visitors' experiences at Pudacuo are education-filled as they are encouraged to compare what they know about their own forms of Buddhism with the tantric Buddhism of Tibet.

III. Manifestation of Buddhism in Pudacuo National Park

a. The Buddhist origins of the park's name.

The name *Pudacuo* was chosen because of the Tibetan Buddhist influence in the designated national park area. The name *Pudacuo* as a whole means *Boat Lake* and was the original name of *BitaHai*. The Mandarin name *Pudacuo* is a derivation of the Tibetan name *BitaHai*, which also means *Boat Lake*. Prior to the establishment of the national park, the area was first and foremost an area containing a famed natural reserve. *BitaHai* Nature Reserve was, and continues to be, famous across the Tibetan Buddhist world because of its significance as a Tibetan Holy location.³⁰ After the park was established, park bureaucrats and officials took the name from the famous Tibetan Holy Lake and translated it into Mandarin.

²⁹ Dr. Kevin Vose, Professor of Tibetan Buddhism, the College of William and Mary. 27 Nov. 2012. Personal Correspondence.

³⁰ Nolon. 12 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

In Tibetan, “*cuo*” means “lake.” In Mandarin, “*Puda*” is the word for holy boat. The name Pudacuo takes its influences from both Mandarin and Tibetan languages and created a name that generally reflects the cooperation of Tibetan culture and Mandarin Chinese within the park itself.³¹

The word “*Puda*” is also the same base word as the base word in the name “Potala Palace” in Tibet and of “Putuo Mountain” in Zhejiang.³² Both of these sites are significant in Tibetan Buddhism as well.

Language	Word	Meaning
Mandarin	Puda	Boat
Tibetan	Pota/Bita	Boat ³³
Mandarin	Hai	Lake
Tibetan	Cuo	Lake

The first written records on Pudacuo come from the Tenth World Missionary Karma Lama Ga Ma Ba about 800 years ago.³⁴ In his writings, specifically found in a 159-page religious text called *Qu Ying Dorje*, he expounded on the beauty and holiness of the land that is present-day Pudacuo National Park.³⁵

b. Clockwise routes of the buses and the significance of road length.

When a visitor first boards onto an Eco-Bus at Pudacuo National Park, he or she is greeted by a park employee tour guide who begins the tour with the sentence,

³¹ Pudacuo National Park Staff, comp. *Park Tour Guide Manuscript*. Shangri-la: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

³² Nolon. 12 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

³³ “Sanskrit and Tamil Dictionary.” Def. 2. N.p., n.d. Web. 8 Dec. 2012

³⁴ Pudacuo National Park Tour Guide. “Pudacuo National Park Bus Tour.” Pudacuo National Park. Yunnan, China, Shangri-la. 05 Nov. 2012. Speech

³⁵ Nolon. 12 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

“Tibetan Buddhism turns in a clockwise direction to ward off the Lake Refuge God, so today we’re visiting the national park in the clockwise direction of the Tibetans.³⁶”

The Tibetan Buddhist tradition of turning in the clockwise direction originated from the desire to follow the sun’s daily path across the sky from East to West.³⁷ Legend says disasters and strife can be avoided if people walk around holy mountains or holy lakes in the clockwise direction, following what is known as the right path. Mani wheels are also spun clockwise so that passersby can read the imprints of the prayers in the same way that the sun moves. Finally, *Stupas* are also circumambulated in a clockwise manner.³⁸ According to legend, by walking in the clockwise direction, bad luck brought upon people by the Lake God will be avoided.³⁹ By incorporating this sentence regarding clockwise travel into the opening speech, the tour guide informs the visitor of the significance of Tibetan Buddhism at Pudacuo National Park. This is a theme that carries through the entire tour, as each stop’s focal point, in addition to the natural beauty, is the Tibetan Buddhist influence. For some visitors, hearing this sentence is their first indication that Pudacuo is related to Tibetan Buddhism. In fact, almost all of the visitors that first come to Pudacuo have no idea that this area is an important Buddhist location.⁴⁰ However, as one tour guide expressed, visitors are all eager to learn once they figure out the importance of the religion and its ties to the natural beauty of the land.

³⁶Pudacuo National Park Staff, comp. *Park Tour Guide Manuscript*. Shangri-la: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

³⁷The term “clockwise” is a transliteration from Sanskrit meaning “sunwise.”

³⁸Ladner, Lorne, and Zopa Thubten. *The Wheel of Great Compassion: The Practice of the Prayer Wheel in Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000. Print

³⁹Pudacuo National Park Tour Guide. “Pudacuo National Park Bus Tour.” Pudacuo National Park. Yunnan, China, Shangri-la. 05 Nov. 2012. Speech

⁴⁰Mei Mei. 16 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

The one paved road in the park that leads visitors to the three major stops is 6.9 kilometers in length. The numbers “6” and “9” in Tibetan culture are significant numbers because six and nine are both derivatives of the number three. In Tibetan Buddhist culture, three is important because three is representative of the Three Jewels: The Buddha, the Dharma, and the *Sangha*, or community. The Three Jewels are said to be rare and demonstrate perfect attributes, ultimately saving a person from the misery of life.⁴¹

Prior to recent renovations, the walking paths within Pudacuo were 3.3 kilometers and 3.6 kilometers in length at Shudu Lake and Bitahai, respectively, totaling 6.9 km. Again, the visitor sees the manifestation of holy numbers “6” and “9” at Pudacuo National Park. Formerly, the visitor was encouraged to walk both walkways to entirely be submerged in Tibetan Buddhist tradition and to bring them good luck. In recent years, however, Bitahai’s walkway has been lengthened to 4.5 kilometers and the significance of the numbers has been dropped from the tour guides’ speeches, as the walkways no longer total to 6.9 kilometers in length.⁴²

c. Shudu Lake stop.

The first stop on the tour is Shudu Lake. Shudu Lake, like the other two stops, is saturated with Tibetan Buddhist references, symbols, and meanings. First, the name “Shudu Lake” itself is derived from a Tibetan Buddhist legend and means Cheese as hard as Stone. “*Shudu*” is a transliteration from the Tibetan word “*Shuodu*.” According to the legend

⁴¹ Guenther, Herbert V. *Tibetan Buddhism without Mystification. The Buddhist Way from Original Tibetan Sources. [With Tibetan Texts in English Translation and in the Original.]* Pl. III. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966. *Google Scholar*. Web. 8 Dec. 2012. Additionally, the number nine in Chinese culture is believed to represent the whole of one’s self and is consequently one of the more important numbers.

⁴² Pudacuo National Park Staff, comp. *Park Tour Guide Manuscript*. Shangri-la: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

that the tour guides tell the visitors, many years ago a monk came to the grassland surrounding Shudu Lake. The farmers offered the monk cheese and this cheese was the richest, hardest, and best cheese the monk had ever eaten. This is how the lake came to be known as “Cheese as hard as stone.” The yaks grazing on Shudu Lake pastures are big and healthy and able to produce good cheese. The surrounding grassland of Shudu Lake is famed for its ability to produce such strong yaks.⁴³

There is another, non-Tibetan Buddhist legend that explains a legend about Shudu Lake. This legend describes a Queen in heaven who frequently comes down to earth to look into Shudu Lake and use it as a dressing mirror.

Two different guides explained that only the Tibetan Buddhist legend about Shudu Lake is told to visitors on the tour bus.

“Tibetans have very realistic legends,” Nolon explained. The other Chinese legend is too fantastic and doesn’t give any explanation for any realistic phenomenon.⁴⁴ Whereas the Tibetan legend explains how this area came to be famed as a rich pastureland and why farmers grazed their cattle on the lush grass. In fact, farmers living inside Pudacuo still bring their animals to graze on this legendary pasture.⁴⁵

Many farmers still reside within Pudacuo National Park and utilize the lush grassland around *Shudu*. There are approximately 500 farmers living in two central villages within the park. The ethnic minorities of these farmers are either Yi or Tibetan. The Tibetans are most commonly Tibetan Buddhists and consequently worship within the park or at neighboring monasteries. The *Baita* or *Stupa* mentioned that overlooks Shudu Lake is

⁴³ Nolon. 12 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview. All details regarding Shudu Lake legend.

⁴⁴ Nolon. 10 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

⁴⁵ Nolon. 12 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

frequented by local Tibetans within the park as a site of worship. Every 5 days during the month, locals climb up to the *Baita* on the mountaintop to burn wood and pray.⁴⁶

In addition to the Buddhist legend, the area around Shudu contains a *Baita* at the nearest mountaintop overlooking the lake. A *Baita*, or *Stupa* in Tibetan, is a Tibetan Buddhist structure of great importance, translated from Mandarin to English to mean White Tower. At the top of the mountain overlooking Shudu Lake, the *Baita* contains a Living Buddha's ashes. Local Tibetan Buddhists and visiting Tibetan Buddhists alike ascend the mountain and walk around this *Baita* three times, all the while praying.⁴⁷ This particular *Baita* is very old and was built before the national park's establishment in 2006. One guide cites the *Baita* as being ten years old.⁴⁸

d. Militang Stop.

The next stop on the guided tour is a ten-minute stop overlooking an elongated meadow where it is not uncommon to spot several hundred yaks, dzo, or horses. The name "*Militang*" is Tibetan in origin, with the meaning of "Buddha's Eye." In Tibetan Buddhism, Buddha's eyes represent omniscience and the "all-seeing" nature of Buddha.⁴⁹

According to the legend, this meadow perfectly resembles Buddha's eye in length and in shape. Militang meadow is 4.5 kilometers long from east to west and .5 kilometers wide from north to south.

⁴⁶ Mei Mei. 16 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

⁴⁷ Nolon. 10 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

⁴⁸ Nolon. 10 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

⁴⁹ Nolon. 10 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

e. Bitaihai Stop.

Bitaihai, or Bitai Lake, is considered one of the most holy lakes in Tibetan Buddhism and consequently is highlighted by most of the tour guides as the “most beautiful location in the park.⁵⁰” When the visitor steps off the bus at Bitaihai, he or she is immediately faced with a large park informational sign proclaiming the Tibetan Buddhist significance.

The accompanying legend about the lake that is not told to tourists is a legend about a war between Tibetan and Naxi people approximately 800 years ago. At Bitaihai 800 years ago, the lake was covered with a thick sheet of ice, and it is on top of that ice that Tibetan warriors and Naxi warriors had a huge battle. Many lives were lost, and the corpses of the dead remained on top of the ice. When the ice thinned and eventually thawed, the bodies drifted to the bottom of Bitaihai where they remain today.

“For this reason,” explained a seasoned tour guide, “we Tibetans think this lake is taboo.⁵¹”

The rich history of the lake and this taboo make Bitaihai an important religious lake to Tibetan Buddhists. As the visitor walks around the 4.5-kilometer walkway that borders the lake, they are greeted with eight different signs elaborating on the Eight Significant Treasures commonly found in Tibetan Buddhism. These Eight Treasures, or otherwise known as the Eight Symbols of Good Fortune or the Eight Auspicious Symbols are the precious parasol, the golden fishes, the vase of great treasure, the lotus flower, the clockwise spiraling white conch shell, the knot of eternity, the golden pennant, and the dharma-wheel. All of these symbols come associated with an intangible spiritual

⁵⁰ Pudacuo National Park Staff, comp. *Park Tour Guide Manuscript*. Shangri-la: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

⁵¹ Nolon. 17 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

significance.

Historically, these symbols date back to the Sanskrit or Pali texts of Indian Buddhism. Since the spread of Buddhism into China, these Eight Auspicious Symbols have come to strongly manifest themselves in Tibetan Buddhism.⁵² These symbols in traditional Tibetan Buddhism indicate good fortune and represent the offerings of Vedic gods to the Shakyamuni Buddha upon his attainment of enlightenment.⁵³

As the visitor walks around Bitahai, they walk along a boardwalk that periodically has educational signs explaining a specific element of Tibetan Buddhism. There are signs explaining natural phenomenon, such as rhododendrons, and there are signs elaborating the Eight Auspicious Symbols. These signs are all similar in function and layout, in that first the term or symbol is defined according to common Tibetan representation. Next, a summary of the accompanying legend is delineated. Finally, the Pudacuo National Park manifestation of the symbol is described. The function of these signs is to educate visitors about the Tibetan Buddhist legends and symbols and then to relate the symbols to nature.

* * * * *

1. First, the visitor comes to the Precious Parasol (*Wu Duo* in Tibetan) informational sign. The parasol in traditional Indian and Tibetan culture is a status symbol, as Sakyamuni is said to have received an ornate parasol from Brahman out of gratitude. In Tibetan Buddhism, carrying thirteen parasols was the sign of ultimate power and reserved only for the Buddha. Thirteen stacked parasols represent the shape of bases of the spires of Tibetan

⁵² Dargyab Rinpoche. "The Nine Best-Known Groups of Symbols in Tibetan Culture." In *Buddhist Symbols in Tibetan Culture*, pp. 15-83, Wisdom Publications, 1995.

⁵³ Beer, Robert. *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols*. Chicago: Serinda Publications, 2003. Print. Just like these symbols appear frequently in Indian Buddhism, they also appear in Chinese Buddhism and represent different organs of Buddha.

Buddhist *Stupas*, such as the one found at Shudu Lake, and symbolize important events in the Buddha's life.⁵⁴ In addition to being a status symbol, the intangible meaning of the parasol is spiritual power and protection.⁵⁵ At Pudacuo National Park, a natural form of the parasol can be seen at a site called the "Lover Trees." The sign reads:

"a couple of parasol like trees (*Quercus aquifolioides*) branches and leaves intertwined grow at the north side of Bita Lake, looking like a lover hand-in-hand. The Local People call them the Sister Tree or the Lover Tree. It is deemed to be the revelation of the Precious Parsol in Bita Lake."

Although the sign espouses the significance of these trees, they are not part of the regular tour in which the visitor participates. The visitors are not shuttled to see the Lover Trees as they are shuttled to other various locations within the park.

2. Next, the walkway leads to sign number two, proclaiming that the Dharma Wheel (*Chakra* in Tibetan) is also found at BitaHai. Historically, the wheel of Dharma is the wheel that Buddha set into motion emphasizing the inter-connectedness of all of life and the inevitability of spiritual change. "There is no beginning and no end, and it is at once in motion and at rest," writes Dagyab of the wheel.⁵⁶

At Pudacuo, the organic manifestation of the Dharma wheel is the round isle in the middle of BitaHai. This island is a "natural visualization" of the wheel and is a perfect replica of its shape.⁵⁷ On the island, a temple called the Hall of Manjushri was created to allow people to make offerings to Buddhist deities. However, this temple is not open to the

⁵⁴ Beer, Robert. *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols*. Chicago: Serinda Publications, 2003. Print.

⁵⁵ Dagyab Rinpoche. "The Nine Best-Known Groups of Symbols in Tibetan Culture." In *Buddhist Symbols in Tibetan Culture*, pp. 15-83, Wisdom Publications, 1995.

⁵⁶ Dagyab Rinpoche. "The Nine Best-Known Groups of Symbols in Tibetan Culture." In *Buddhist Symbols in Tibetan Culture*, pp. 15-83, Wisdom Publications, 1995.

⁵⁷ Pudacuo National Park Staff. *Natural Visualization of Eight Treasures in Tibetan Buddhism*. Shangri-La: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

general public. As it is located on an island and transport is an issue, only employees of the park are permitted to boat out to worship at this temple.⁵⁸

3. Next is the symbol of the Vase of Great Treasures (*Beng Ba* in Tibetan). In Tibetan Buddhist culture, the vase is filled with water or nectar, surrounded by trees. The water, or nectar, is a symbol for collecting karma, wisdom, and wealth.

At Pudacuo, the entire shape of Bitaihai as seen from an overlook is said to resemble the Vase of Great Treasure. The vase is typically a “far-bellied vessel with a short, slim neck,” which resembles the view of Bitaihai from the overlook point designated on the road.⁵⁹

4. The fourth sign that visitors come across on the walkway is the sign of the Golden Fishes. This symbol depicts two fish, bodies erect, facing one another, coming out of the water. The sign reads:

“*Suvarnamatsya* (the Golden Fishes) alias Double-Fishes, *gSer-nya* in Tibetan, is used to symbolize the Buddhist in the state of transcending the secular world and attaining extrication like the fishes in the water.”

The Golden Fishes symbolizes the freedom from suffering and the reaching of enlightenment and eternal life. The fish also represent fertility and plentitude because they reproduce very rapidly. At Pudacuo National Park, Bitaihai contains a type of schizothorax fish named *Ptychobarbus chungtienensis tsao*.⁶⁰ This fish originated during the quaternary

⁵⁸ Ling. 16 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

⁵⁹ Dargyab Rinpoche. “The Nine Best-Known Groups of Symbols in Tibetan Culture.” In *Buddhist Symbols in Tibetan Culture*, pp. 15-83, Wisdom Publications, 1995.

⁶⁰ Pudacuo National Park Staff. *Natural Visualization of Eight Treasures in Tibetan Buddhism*. Shangri-La: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

period about 2 million years ago and is said to be the fish in symbolized in Tibetan Buddhism of the Golden Fishes.

5. The fifth sign is the Right Turning White Conch Shell (*Shankha* in Sanskrit). The White Conch Shell is significant to Tibetan Buddhism as a traditional symbol of spreading Buddhism's doctrine due to the clockwise spiral of the shell. The shell represents a medium used to profess the dharma. At Pudacuo, the natural manifestation of the Conch Shell is found on the opposite shore of Bitahai, directly opposite from the sign's location. There is an outcropping of rock at the base of the mountain that is white and is similar in appearance to the White Conch Shell.

6. Sixth is the Lotus Flower (*Padma* in Sanskrit). At Pudacuo, the Lotus Flower sign is abreast of the west marsh, in which grasses and other plants are thriving. The Lotus Flower in Tibetan Buddhism represents the concept that beautiful things can grow out of sludge or mud without themselves being harmed. Ultimately, the lotus flower symbolizes enlightenment and purity.⁶¹ There is also a natural manifestation of the Lotus Flower at Bitahai in the form of a clean, cold spring that deposits into Bitahai.

According to park literature, local residents of Pudacuo worship the Lotus Flower and offer a sacrifice to the Lotus Flower every first and fifteenth day of every month of the lunar calendar.⁶²

7. Next, the Eternity Knot sign is displayed at Pudacuo. The Eternity Knot, or *Shrivatsa* in Sanskrit, is an ornament worn commonly around the waist to symbolize the interdependency of everything in life. The knot indicates unity and harmonious

⁶¹ Pudacuo National Park Staff. *Natural Visualization of Eight Treasures in Tibetan Buddhism*. Shangri-La: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

⁶² Pudacuo National Park Staff. *Natural Visualization of Eight Treasures in Tibetan Buddhism*. Shangri-La: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

relationships in the world as well as the endless nature of Buddha's knowledge. At Pudacuo the Eternity Knot is not a huge natural landmark or a legend, but rather it is an adornment that visitors can see in almost all of the architectural designs of the buildings around Bitahai.

The Eternity Knot is also seen in natural form, as various winding rivers or creeks dotting the landscape at Pudacuo. Such streams are organic reminders of one of the Eight Auspicious Symbols.

8. Finally, the eighth and last Auspicious Symbol that Bitahai dedicates a sign to is the Golden Pennant, or *Dhvaja* in Tibetan Sanskrit. The Golden Pennant is also known as the banner of victory. In Tibetan Buddhism, the Golden Pennant has become known as a symbol of dominance over evils or defilements.⁶³

An additional large sign is erected at Bitahai that also educates visitors about Tibetan Buddhism, although it is not directly related to the Eight Treasures of Tibetan Buddhism. This large sign explains the significance of prayer flags (*pataka* in Tibetan), Mani piles, and the six-word Lamaistic Mantra "*Om Mani Padme Hum.*" This sign is conveniently located in a place along the walkway where prayer flags and Mani piles are both visible.

Prayer flags function as an important symbol in prayer rites during Tibetan Buddhist prayer rituals. The prayer flags printed with the phrase "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" flutter in the wind blowing off of Bitahai and are said to send the prayers into the air. The function of the mantra "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" in Tibetan Buddhism is a Lamaistic phrase

⁶³ Beer, Robert. *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols*. Chicago: Serinda Publications, 2003. Print.

that is intended to banish illness, ensure longevity, and bring wealth to the chanter.⁶⁴ Similarly, the function of Mani piles to Tibetan Buddhism is also one of prayer rites. The Mani pile is also known as the One Hundred Thousand Stone Pile and is said to satisfy the wishes and desires of the person who prays and walks around the Mani pile in the clockwise direction thrice. Mani piles in Pudacuo represent the boundary between mountain and habitable area. Further up the mountain behind the Mani pile is known as “the door to the mountain.”⁶⁵

f. Local’s utilization of the park for Buddhist purposes.

Locals are defined as people that live within the borders of Pudacuo National Park. Locals are predominantly Tibetan Buddhist and have constructed *Baitas* and other symbols of Tibetan Buddhist significance. Within the park limits there stands various Buddhist shrines or Mani piles that testify to the Tibetan Buddhist nature of the locals.

Although locals within the park are overwhelmingly Tibetan Buddhist, they must leave the park’s boundaries to worship in a temple proper. When the farmers living within Pudacuo have free time and want to worship, or on any holiday, they go to Songzanling Monastery, located approximately 6 kilometers outside of Xianggilila town.⁶⁶ Only employees can access the one temple in the park, as previously elucidated.

Despite the lack of temples within the park, locals are permitted to construct *Stupas*, mountain shrines, or Mani piles in their villages to facilitate practicing their religion.

⁶⁴ Pudacuo National Park Staff. *Natural Visualization of Eight Treasures in Tibetan Buddhism*. Shangri-La: Pudacuo National Park, 2012. Print.

⁶⁵ Litzinger, Ralph. "The Mobilization of "Nature": Perspectives from North-West Yunnan." *JSTOR*. The China Quarterly, June 2004. Web. 14 Nov. 2012.

⁶⁶ Ling. 17 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

IV. Buddhism's effectiveness as an environmental education tool

Although it is clear when walking around the visitor center that most, if not all, of the people visiting Pudacuo National Park are not Tibetan Buddhists themselves, they do have some sort of interest in learning about the traditions and customs of Tibetan Buddhists. There are many resources available for the visitor from the moment they enter the door of the visitor center. There is a fully staffed informational and complains desk with employees ready to answer questions (although the most common question I heard was "where is the bathroom?"), a full brochure rack with Mandarin pamphlets detailing Pudacuo's plants, animals, and Tibetan Buddhist symbolism, as well as knowledgeable tour guides (*daoyou*) on every bus.

Once they leave the visitor center and the confines of the bus, however, the visitor is on his or her own to decide whether or not to continue his or her Tibetan Buddhism education. As previously mentioned, Pudacuo is filled with opportunities for individual, autonomous learning if visitors choose to read the signs.

As part of my comprehension of Tibetan Buddhism, one of my questions was whether or not people actually take their own initiative in self-education and read the signs. If so, are people more inclined to read the signs related to Tibetan Buddhism or nature? To answer these questions, I conducted a study. Over the span of four days, I visited four different sites with informational signs along Pudacuo's walkways; two sites were at Shudu Lake and dealt with nature and plants and the other two sites were along BitaHai and dealt with the Eight Auspicious Treasures of Tibetan Buddhism. Every day at each location I waited for three different groups of people to walk past the sign. If individuals stopped (defined as completely stopping movement of both feet. Passing

11/6/12	4:19pm	0/4	40+s		
11/8/12	2:10pm	0/5			
11/8/12	2:14pm	2/6th	m/f 20+s audibly having conversation		
11/8/12	2:16pm	7/21st	large tour group		
11/9/12	12:30pm	0/9			
11/9/12	12:41pm	0/6			
11/9/12	12:42pm	0/13			
11/9/12	1:10pm	0/5			
11/9/12	1:30pm	4/4th	all: 23s		
11/9/12	1:33pm	1/5th	m:10s		
11/9/12	1:35pm	0/7		tour group	

glances or reading while walking were not counted as “stopping.”) the length of their stop was timed and recorded. The following is the data collected at each of the four sites over the four days.

Education Survey:

Data:

Environmental Education Study: Location 1			
Shudu Lake Sign #1, beside parking lot			
Date	Time	Fraction Stopped	Time
11/6/12	12:48pm	1/16th	20 seconds
11/6/12	1:10pm	1/4th	20 seconds
11/6/12	n/a	no other bus arrived during designated one hour	
11/7/12	1:40pm	0/6	
11/7/12	1:45pm	0/10	
11/7/12	no other bus arrived during designated hour		
11/9/12	2:19pm	0/23	
11/9/12	2:30pm	3/13th	all: 10s
11/9/12	2:41pm	1/17th	m:24s

Location 2			
Shudu Lake Sign #2, half-way point			
Date	Time	Fraction Stopped	Time
11/6/12	1:55pm	0/2	n/a
11/6/12	2:05pm	0/2	n/a
11/6/12	2:10pm	1/23rd	3 seconds
11/7/12	1:49pm	0/2	
11/7/12	1:55pm	0/11	
11/7/12	2:00pm	0/3	foreigners
11/9/12	2:55pm	0/3	
11/9/12	3:01pm	0/1	
11/9/12	3:10pm	1/12th	f: 13s

Environmental Education Study: Location 3				
Bita Hai Lake Sign #1				
Date	Time	Fraction Stopped	Time	Notes:
11/6/12	3:40pm	1/3rd	15 seconds	only stopped to take photo
11/6/12	3:44pm	2/16th	m:10s / f:25+s	f stopped to take photo
11/8/12	1:05pm	1/17th	m: 30	
11/8/12	1:10pm	0/4		
11/8/12	1:16pm	0/5		
11/9/12	1:30pm	4/4th	all: 23s	
11/9/12	1:33pm	1/5th	m:10s	
11/9/12	1:35pm	0/7		tour group

Environmental Education Study: Location 4				
BitaHai Lake Sign #2: halfway point				
Date	Time	Fraction Stopped	Time	Notes:
11/6/12	4:15pm	1/2nd	m:15s	read sign to completion
11/6/12	4:19pm	0/4		
11/6/12	4:24pm	2/2nd	40+s	
11/8/12	2:10pm	0/5		
11/8/12	2:14pm	2/6th	m/f 20+s audibly having conversation	
11/8/12	2:16pm	7/21st	large tour group	
11/9/12	12:30pm	0/9		
11/9/12	12:41pm	0/6		
11/9/12	12:42pm	0/13		

Results: At Shudu Lake Sign #1, 6/89 people came to a stationary stop (6.74%). At Shudu Lake Sign #2, 2/59 individuals stopped (3.38%). At BitaHai Lake Sign #1, 9/61 visitors stopped (14.75%). Finally, at BitaHai Lake Sign #2, 12/68 people stopped (17.65%).

Conclusion: The conclusion that can be reached from this data is that, disregarding group dynamics, individuals were approximately 10% more likely to come to a complete stop in front of Tibetan Buddhism-related signs at BitaHai than they were to stop at environmental related signs at Shudu Lake.

While some people view Pudacuo National Park's tactic as one of commoditization of Tibetan Buddhism, it is working as an effective education tool. Those individuals that take the time to look at the educational signs walk away from the signs having learned something relating to the religious belief system. When asked what they garnered from their visit to Pudacuo, all of those visitors informally asked could identify this area as a Tibetan Buddhist area. However, as the data shows, the overwhelming majority of people did not take the time to stop and read the signs. This leads to the conclusion that most of the information learned by visitors is learned from the tour guides' speeches, which are almost compulsory as the visitor does not have the ability to go elsewhere when the tour guide is speaking on the bus.

While much pertinent information is given in the tour guides' talks regarding Tibetan Buddhism, suggestions for the park to enhance visitor education and awareness would be to rewrite the park tour guide speech to emphasize the Eight Auspicious Symbols prior to the busses' arrival at Bitahai. Because people are forced to be inside of the Eco-bus and a vast majority of them are listening to the tour guide, by introducing the Eight Auspicious Symbols before the visitor's arrival at Bitahai, the visitor's interest may be piqued and he or she may be more inclined to stop and follow up on what they already were introduced to inside the bus.

V. How Pudacuo Relates Buddhism and Environmental Goals

Incorporating Buddhism into environmental conservation measures is an effective way of explaining the importance of key organisms to an ecosystem. Pudacuo National Park functions as a corridor of travel for many species of birds that are endemic to Yunnan and

the Tibetan Plateau. According to Birdlife International, a worldwide bird conservation group, Bitahai and the surrounding land is a key ecoregion because,

“the key objectives of the Nature Reserve are to protect alpine and mid-alpine marshland, wetlands, lakes and the wild species having these areas as habitats. The protected targets are including rare alpine fish species, waterfowls spending the winter in the waters and their habitats, alpine coniferous forests and mammals living in these forests.⁶⁷”

One such species at Pudacuo National Park is the Black Necked Crane. During the in-bus speech, tour guides explain the importance of the Black Necked Crane to Tibetan Buddhism. The Black Necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*) is a bird that breeds on the Tibetan Plateau and winters at the marshland in Pudacuo National Park from approximately October until May.⁶⁸ Estimates place the population of the birds at 3,600 in China and during any given day in November up to 8 can be spotted at one time at the East end of Militang Meadow within Pudacuo National Park. ⁶⁹ The Black Necked Crane is listed by the IUCN as a vulnerable species because of the rapid loss of wetland habitat in its migration corridor. Consequently, the global population, in tandem with the population within China and Yunnan, is on the decline.⁷⁰ In 2003, 3,562 Black Necked Cranes were wintering in Yunnan and western Guizhou. In the past nine years, the population of these cranes has

⁶⁷ Zhou, Wei, and Baokun Chen. "Biodiversity of Bitahai Nature Reserve in Yunnan Province, China." *Biodiversity and Conservation* 15.3 (2006): 839-53. *Springerlink*. Web. 14 Nov. 2012.

⁶⁸ BirdLife International 2012. *Grus nigricollis*. In: IUCN 2012. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2012.2. <www.iucnredlist.org>. Downloaded on 21 November 2012. The Black Necked Crane is currently listed (updated in 2012) according to the IUCN classification as a vulnerable species, which is one step down from an endangered species. The IUCN justifies their classification: “This species is classified as Vulnerable because it has a single small population that is in decline owing to the loss and degradation of wetlands, and changing agricultural practices in both its breeding and wintering grounds. However, the population has apparently increased in recent years, and if these increases prove to be genuine and sustained then downlisting to a lower threat category may be appropriate.

⁶⁹ Nolon. 16 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

⁷⁰ BirdLife International 2012. *Grus nigricollis*. In: IUCN 2012. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2012.2. <www.iucnredlist.org>.

been decreasing as a result of the transformation of wetland into farmland and the overall loss of habitat.

In addition to being important as a rare, endemic species, it is an important religious bird for Tibetan Buddhists. The Black Neck Crane is said to bring good harvests and to protect the crops of locals, and consequently is highly revered.⁷¹

Next, the *pytchobarbus chungtieneasis chuntienensis* is an extremely endangered species of fish that, up until the point of the publication of this paper, is only found in Zhongdian, Yunnan province, China.⁷² Because of its very local distribution, this fish has received a Grade I national protection level. This fish is known to Chinese locals and visitors alike as the “Heavy Lipped Fish,” and has a significant meaning in the Tibetan Buddhist world. According to legend, this fish represents The Golden Fish in the Eight Auspicious Symbols of Tibetan Buddhism and can be exclusively found within Bitahai. The *pytchobarbus chungtieneasis chuntienensis*’ more ethereal meaning is that it is analogous to a Tibetan Buddhist who has reached enlightenment and detachment, the apogee of achievements in Buddhism.

Both of these organisms have educational signs devoted to them at Pudacuo National Park. These signs list the species’ importance both ecologically and religiously. It is the park’s hope that by tying these endangered and ecologically important organisms to Tibetan Buddhism, to which many visitors have an emotional connection, they will better be able to raise awareness about these critical organisms at Pudacuo. Religion and belief systems ultimately hold a strong emotional appeal to humans and the park is utilizing this

⁷¹ Nolon. 16 Nov. 2012. Personal Interview.

⁷² The Master Plan of Bitahai Nature Reserve, the Inventory, Planning and Design Institute of the State Forestry Administration, March 2003.

religion as a medium for environmental education, as people respond better and more strongly to those things that resonate strongly with them.

VI. CONCLUSION

Often when a rapid influx of tourists descends on an area, they do so at the detriment of local customs and traditional values. However, the newest brand of land conservation in China, the national park, works to smoothly incorporate tourists into a preserved area that is hailed for its value as a biodiverse, unique ecosystem. At Pudacuo National Park, Tibetan Buddhism is visible in almost every aspect of the park and its use as an education tool is very apparent throughout the visitor's entire experience in the park.

One of the primary goals of this experiment in US-modeled national parks is to ensure the longevity of traditional values and beliefs in the parkland area. Pudacuo National Park is not only attempting to conserve the Tibetan Buddhist tradition but also is attempting to capitalize on the uniqueness of the experience by providing education and souvenirs revolving around the belief system.⁷³ Tibetan Buddhism is a subject that holds great intrigue and mystery for non-practitioners and practitioners alike and Pudacuo National Park offers the perfect experience for the visitor to combine nature and religion, one of the main tenants of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Tibetan Plateau, birthplace of Tibetan Buddhism, is heating up faster than anywhere else in the world. Climate change is currently felt and will continue to be felt

⁷³ Whether or not the capitalization is ultimately for the benefit or detriment to the native Tibetan Buddhists is still a question for debate and was not analyzed in this paper. Different interviewees voiced different opinions on the matter, and because a conclusive result on general feelings can not be realistically made, the subject is left out of this final paper.

dramatically as ice caps melt, rivers run dry, and the Tibetan nomadic lifestyle ceases to exist. Often called the “Third Pole” because it houses the third most ice in the world after the Arctic and Antarctic, the Tibetan Plateau supplies water to over one billion people, including people living around Shangri-la.⁷⁴ A country filled with individuals who respect and revere nature will be hit the hardest in the face of climate change and will pay the most dramatic price for the indiscretion of the rest of the world.

While at Pudacuo National Park, a visitor may not entirely change their environmentally degrading tendencies. However, they will at least come away from the experience educated about the natural world that is so precious to human existence. Education about the natural world and preservation of it is the first, most important step in conservation of nature and a very core idea within Tibetan Buddhism.

“Compassion for the “other,” whether people, animal species, trees, or other plants, and for Earth itself, is the only thing that will ultimately save us human beings.⁷⁵”

⁷⁴ Ogyen Trinley Dorje, H.H. 1. G. K. (2011), Walking the Path of Environmental Buddhism through Compassion and Emptiness. *Conservation Biology*, 25: 1094–1097. doi: 10.1111/j.1523-1739.2011.01765.x

⁷⁵ Ogyen Trinley Dorje, H.H. 1. G. K. (2011), Walking the Path of Environmental Buddhism through Compassion and Emptiness. *Conservation Biology*, 25: 1094–1097. doi: 10.1111/j.1523-1739.2011.01765.x

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APPENDICES

Recommendations for Further Study

Pudacuo National Park is a comparatively new national park and consequently there is much research to be done on many different aspects of it. For my study, I chose merely one small aspect of the entire park unit. Further ideas and topics that can be studied are:

- 1) Is the capitalization of Buddhism in Pudacuo beneficial or detrimental to Tibetan Buddhism?
- 2) After visiting the park, what do people specifically learn from their experience?
- 3) Case studies of villages within National Parks and how they work with the park officials to maintain livelihoods.
- 4) Effectiveness of Buddhist Monasteries and Nunneries in environmental protection.

Itinerary:

Nov 5 – Nov 14: Employment/Residency at Pudacuo National Park.

Nov 16 – Nov 17: Benzilan for a Tibetan wedding. Monks present.

Nov 18 – Dec 3: Shangri-la. Contact with Tibetan Buddhist monks to garner a better understanding of the intricacies of the religion and its relevance to Pudacuo. Further contact with religious scholars for elucidation.

Dec 4 – Dec 7: In Kunming.

ISP Experience:

Going into the ISP period with a plan and completely changing not only my plan but my location created extra hurdles in completing this ISP. All of my preliminary research and contacts were made in Xishuangbanna regarding traditional agriculture and as a result, I had very little prior knowledge about the type of environmental issues that I would be studying in Zhongdian. However, once I got to Zhongdian and met members of the community and various NGO's I knew this was the place I wanted to work for the following month.

Initially in Zhongdian, I contacted various environmental non-governmental organizations in hopes of finding a volunteer position for the 30 days I was in town. However, I ran into numerous issues as director after director explained to me the challenges of employing a foreigner, even informally as a volunteer.

I would not have had the fantastic opportunities that I had in Zhongdian without the help of Lu Yuan's contacts in town, Dakpa Kelden. I was considered part of the Pudacuo staff because of a fortuitous connection made with the Park Director and the consequent meeting with him. Becoming a part of the staff was relatively easy compared to the bleak news that I had been receiving from every single NGO that I contacted telling me that getting a foreigner on staff or as a volunteer was virtually impossible, as the Chinese government had such strict regulations.

I realized after I chose my thesis the great challenge I would have interviewing people about Tibetan Buddhism because of my limited vocabulary relating to anything religious. Thankfully at Pudacuo there were very eager tour guides who wanted to practice their Mandarin and English almost as much as I wanted to learn about their traditions. It

was frustrating at times to try to communicate about abstract Buddhist ideas, but my vocabulary and patience concomitantly grew as a result of this experience.

Interview Transcripts:

- Interview with Nolon, bus tour guide

November 7, 2012

-the villages are not tourist destinations, the busses do not stop at the villages to let people off

-The national park encompasses three different attractions, Shudu Lake, Militang, and Bitahai. The Nature Reserve only encompasses one, Bitahai.

- Focus not so much on Buddhism like the script says to, but rather on the natural elements (ex: the spruce trees).

- Busses are considered Eco-Busses because they prevent visitors from driving into the park themselves and causing more pollution.

November 12, 2012

- Every other week the bus tour guides wear authentic Tibetan clothing. Even the few Naxi tour guides must wear the Tibetan apparel.

-Black Necked Cranes are holy birds to Tibetan Buddhists. They protect peoples' crops. Endangered birds and emphasized by park literature and signs.

November 13, 2012

- Tibetan monk wrote the Qu Ting Dorje. A famous religious book about Buddha.

- Ga Ma Ba is the author, was formerly a Living Buddha.

- Lived in Pudacuo's land many years ago.

- Baitas are Important Buddhist shrines. The one in Pudacuo is at Shudu Lake. People circumambulate Baitas three times while saying prayers.

November 14, 2012

- "People that come to Pudacuo do have an interest in Tibetan Buddhism. But it is too complicated to learn everything, maybe can learn just a little bit."

- Tibetan Buddhism is very different from Chinese Buddhism, two different kinds. Very very different.

- Interview with HuoGuo, leader of ticket selling at Pudacuo National Park.

November 12, 2012

-many if not all those that live inside Pudacuo are Buddhist

-there is a very important relationship between Buddhism and nature

- Interview with Yan Ling Pi, Head of Complaint Officers

November 12 -13, 2012

110yuan for ticket, 80yuan for bus fare

because our park is on their ethnic land, farmers living inside the park get money every year from us. More than 1000yuan. Because of this, all of the farmers love the national park.

Luorong village next year will build a hotel.

If farmers have free time they go to Songzanlin to worship. Only place inside park is on the island at Bitaihai. Only employees permitted to worship there.

Before visitors come to Pudacuo most do not know this is a Buddhist place

Scientists live in Kunming and come to Pudacuo rarely to do studies.

Can buy authentic Tibetan Buddhist goods in the gift shop at Pudacuo.