

**Persuasive Strategies of the Bai Ma (White Horse)
Snow Mountain University Green Camp Expedition
of 1996 in China***

D. Ray Heisey

Yu Zhen

Kent State University.

Peking University

Yan Jun

Editor, *Forestry News*, Beijing, China

Abstract

This article describes the persuasive strategies used by the University Green Camp Expedition that went to the Bai Ma Snow Mountain region of Yunnan Province in Southwest China in the summer of 1996. As the most influential and largest volunteer group in China, it made a significant impact on the Green Revolution in China. As a group of university students, the expedition chose the strategies of using people connected with different universities, selecting the Bai Ma Snow Mountain area as a symbol of conservation where the golden monkey and endangered forests are located, by deciding on the summer time, by taking well-established photographers along to record the needs of the area, and by planning a national exhibition of the photographic works at the conclusion. The paper examines the impact of the expedition in terms of changes made in Yunnan Province and the publicity given to the Green Revolution at large by this expedition.

Background of the Expedition – Its Origin

In December 1995 a large group of people, including students from many different universities, gathered at the Beijing Forestry University in Beijing and held a candlelight vigil to call attention to the plight of the golden monkey, which numbers only about 200, the only ones left of this species in the world, and the ancient forests in which they live in the southwest of China, in Yunnan Province.

The threat to the monkeys' existence came from plans by local government officials to permit local loggers "the right to clear-cut the monkey's primeval habitat" (*Newsweek International*, October 7, 1996). As a result of this meeting, and due also to the efforts of others on behalf of the forests and monkeys, students and other interested adults organized a group to make an expedition to the area in order to call attention to the potential damage that was to be done as well as the damage that had already been done by local people.

The goal of the expedition was to save the valuable trees that in certain areas were the home of the golden monkey, and at the same time provide alternative plans for the local people to have income. The motive of the local inhabitants was simply to improve their economic conditions, so in the felling of the trees and selling them, they were doing the only thing they knew to do and thus needed to be educated as to the results of their activities.

Though this was the goal of the expedition, one of the means for achieving this goal was to make a positive contribution to the local people by helping them come up with ideas and plans to provide alternative income, other than destroying the trees and wildlife. There were plenty of other natural resources in that part of Yunnan Province, but the local people did not know how to develop them and make a profit out of them. It was an all-volunteer group that prepared to make the expedition in the summer. Up until this time, it was the most influential and the largest volunteer group in size to be involved in this kind of activity. It caught the imagination of many university students who volunteered to join the group and who were thus able to provide an outlet for their growing idealism. Two years earlier, the Friends of Nature was founded in Beijing "as an organization devoted to revitalizing Taoist environmental consciousness" (*Newsweek International*, October 7, 1996, p. 14). In fact, a member of this organization, Mr. Tang Xiyang, was the sponsor and one of the leaders of the expedition, who provided his experience, his knowledge, and his maturity, so the Green Camp Expedition participants already had support for their goals and plans to help save the wilderness in Yunnan Province.

Leaders of the Expedition

In addition to Mr. Tang of the Friends of Nature, the leaders of the University Green Camp Expedition were young, energetic, and highly motivated persons who wanted to make things happen. The chair of the executive committee was Yan Jun, a recent graduate of the Beijing Forestry University. He was an editor of the *Forestry News* who was responsible for the newsletter, Green Weekend, which was published in Beijing. He also was a photographer whose skills would be put to good use on the expedition to photograph the needs of the local area as well as the activities of the expedition throughout their camping experience.

Another leader was Yu Zhen, a post-graduate student at Peking University in the School of International Studies. She was made communications director for the expedition and served on the executive committee to help plan and manage the affairs of the group. She had been a graduate of Jiangxi Normal University with a major in educational administration and a minor in Japanese. She was now majoring in cross-cultural communication in Peking University. She had served as a restaurant manager, an English teacher, and translator and journalist in the Beijing TV station. This background gave the group a well-qualified person to help organize the expedition, investigate the local culture, administer the news conference in Beijing and in Kunming, and to coordinate the international photo exhibit that came at the end.

Another leader, in that he provided considerable publicity, was Xi Zhinong. He had spent time photographing the golden monkey in the forests and then found out that loggers were going to be able to cut down their trees in the Yunnan area (*Newsweek International*, October 7, 1996, p. 13). He tried to convince local officials to stop their project but was unsuccessful and took his cause to Beijing which caused much attention to be given to the fate of the golden monkey.

Persuasive Strategies Employed by the Expedition

Use of University Students

The use of young people from the many universities in Beijing was one of the strategies used by the group that gave the movement an energy and a collection of skills that worked well for the expedition. Students would be able to go through a camping experience with ease and creativity. The expedition planned to climb mountains, visit villages, sit and talk and eat with the local people, and interact with them to determine the best way to meet their needs if the source of their income--the trees--was to be closed down. Students have ideas, they have energy, they have connections, and they have motivation--a suitable combination for an expedition group to put together. The "Green Clubs," as they are called, have emerged on the campuses of the Beijing universities and "have spread nationwide, offering students a limited outlet for their idealism," even though they are still not permitted to criticize the Three Gorges Dam project (*Newsweek International*, October 7, 1996, p. 14). The University Green Camp Expedition to Yunnan was so attractive to students, that many who wanted to go were not able to because of the limited space for only 20 in the group, together with several environmental protection experts, writers and journalists. It offered a learning experience, an opportunity to offer their assistance in a real-life project, and a chance to make a difference.

Bai Ma Snow Mountain as a Symbol of Conservation

The choice of Bai Ma (White Horse) Snow Mountain as a symbol of conservation was a logical one because of the many elements its area provided. The mountain is a very famous one and one of the most beautiful in the region. Many people are already familiar with it so that when the expedition announced it was going to Snow Mountain people knew where they would be going. The Snow Mountain area was the prime location for the home of the golden monkey which was now a threatened primate. The monkey is a very beautiful animal and with some spectacular photographs by Xi Zhinong, it became a symbol itself for the Green Camp Expedition.

The Snow Mountain area of course served as the region in which the endangered forests were found which provided the home for the golden monkey. When the Green Camp Expedition participants held up banners with LIVE AND LET LIVE and FORESTS FOR THE FUTURE, they made the trees of the region a living symbol also of their environmental movement.

Another reason for this region being a very good choice to go to was that it was the home of indigenous Tibetan people who were in great need of assistance. China prides itself in its being a home of many minority nationalities and the Tibetan people of Yunnan Province are one of those minorities. The expedition thus had a human dimension to its conservation efforts because the Tibetan people were inhabitants also in the region, along with the golden monkey and the ancient forests.

The Snow Mountain area was a strategic choice because it was the most recent area where local officials had just made a decision to allow the trees to be logged by the people and it had become an issue in the news. Even though this region was a long distance from Beijing where the Green Camp Expedition originated, it was a highly visible area for publicity purposes because of the golden monkey, the endangered forests, the Tibetan people, and the logging industry plans, all coming together in the beautiful Bai Ma Snow Mountain region. For a group of young university students to trek there and make an effort to make the mountain a rallying point for their cause was a calculated and strategic decision.

The Summer as a Time to Do Something Visible

The timing of the expedition was also strategic on the part of the university students. By going in the summer (they departed on July 25, 1996, and spent a whole month there), they avoided any conflict with university classes or their academic responsibilities. It served as a real-life laboratory for doing something positive for their country and for people who were in need of help which they could provide. During the late winter and spring months they had time to make their plans for the journey to be made in the summer and to decide exactly which places in the

Snow Mountain region they would visit. They also contacted the local officials to let them know ahead of time what their intentions were and how they hoped to help the local people. They planned to spend time with the Tibetan people and others whom they would be meeting and actually did so. They lived with the people, talked with them, learned of their problems and needs, ate with them, cooked for them, danced with them in the evening, and entered into their social living activities to establish friendship and harmony with them. In this way the university students from the north helped to authenticate their experience and their mission to the Yunnan area and the people who lived there and who would be affected by any decisions that were to be made.

The expedition, as the participants entered into the local lives of the people, provided the opportunity to speak directly with the local officials to encourage them to change their plans and not allow the logging to take place. They helped the officials to understand the importance of saving the forests and the monkeys and other plant and wildlife in the region. By establishing direct contact with leaders, the people, and other persons of importance to the region, the students were able to communicate and accomplish specific tasks for the region, not just engage in protest or criticism of what people were doing. They investigated the local culture to learn about the people and their customs and needs, and investigated their economy and resources. So the timing and the actualizing of the expedition for the local residents were important dimensions of the strategic plans.

Taking Along Well-Established Photographers

The decision to include reputable photographers, such as Xi Zhinong, and the group's own Yan Jun was likewise strategic. They took a complete photographic record of the beauty of the region, the damage to the forests by showing the stumps sticking up silently on the mountain sides, the grandeur of the ancient trees not yet destroyed, the beauty of the lovable golden monkeys and their families, the conditions of the indigenous people and the activities of the expedition when they joined in with the local people. The journalists photographed every stage of the expedition from the beginning to the end. It gave an opportunity for the group to hold a press conference at the beginning of their expedition because of the well-known photographer, Xi Zhinong, and others who were supporting the cause.

By photographing the journey that lasted for a month during July and August 1996, the expedition not only could publicize its own efforts and work, but it could feature the local people as participants in the dilemma facing the country in transition toward modernization. This Snow Mountain region was only one area where environmentalists were concerned, but it served to demonstrate the difficult questions confronting the country as the economic boom continues in China. The expedition's decision to photograph the journey was actually a positive thing for the

region because it enabled the students to demonstrate that changes were in the process of being made. They could show with documentation where the logging had been stopped as a result of the efforts made.

The photographic record also provided an excellent opportunity for the international news media to pick up on the superb and professional photography done on the expedition, thus making the mission visible not only nation-wide but world-wide, as it turned out.

The Expedition's National Exhibition

The decision to hold a national exhibition at the end of the summer next door to the National Library in the heart of the capital city, Beijing, was a very persuasive strategy, as well. The exhibition of the University Green Camp Expedition displayed the photographs of the journey and allowed people to see for themselves what the students had been through, what they had accomplished, what the conditions were that they had visited, and why it was so important for the saving of the animals and forests for the sake of the country. The exhibition, attended by many people in the month of September 1996, provided a national forum for the cause the students represented, not only as a work of art, as far as the photography was concerned, but as a part of a larger national social movement.

In this way, it gave an opportunity for the Green Movement in China to have a success in its own name. The exhibition of the photographs became a symbol and a message to China that young people as volunteers can accomplish very bold and courageous tasks for the common good of the country.

The Impact of the Expedition and Its Strategies

Changes in the Snow Mountain Area

The University Green Camp Expedition considered its efforts as a major success in bringing changes to the Bai Ma Snow Mountain area. The visibility provided by this active and creative group of university students and environmentalists who went to live for a month with the people and to help them in their dilemma was a major factor in the overall cause. In October 1996, just a couple months following the expedition, it was internationally reported that " Under mounting pressure, Yunnan officials stepped in to block the local logging scheme earlier this year, and now plan a wildlife refuge in its place" (*Newsweek International*, October 7, 1996, p. 13). The photographer Xi and Mr. Tang, the author of *A Green Tour* published in 1993, "linked the fate of the golden monkey's habitat to the larger threat of deforestation along the upper Yangtze.... The argument seemed to work, for Beijing quietly pressured provincial officials to kill the logging scheme" (*Newsweek International*, October 7, 1996, p. 15). The

publicity and the positive approach used by the expedition helped to save the golden monkeys and the forests in the region. Mr. Tang, who had traveled with his wife through seven countries in 1988-91 prior to writing his book, said, "My wife was suffering from cancer and so was the earth; she and I will face these two cancers with courage" (Yu Zhen, May 31, 1997).

In addition to the wildlife refuge planned for the area, other examples of positive assistance to the local people are the harvesting of a special kind of mushroom and helping the local government assist in managing this business for the people, the developing of other natural resources such as Chinese medicines and natural water, and the developing of the travel and exploration business for the area (Yu Zhen, March 2, 1997).

International News Coverage

As has been noted by the reader in the sources used in this article, the University Green Camp Expedition was reported as part of the featured story on China's Green Revolution in *Newsweek's* October 7, 1996, International Edition. In this six-page cover story, the Yunnan expedition by the Beijing students and others was highlighted on the first page and the last page, including a photo of the group on the first page, along with a full-page photo of the golden monkey by photographer Xi. *Newsweek* reported that "an emerging community of green activists embraced" the crusade to save the Yunnan forests and students in Beijing held rallies with banners "Save the Monkey" (p. 13).

In addition to the news coverage in *Newsweek*, there were at least 30 newspaper and TV programs broadcast that covered the expedition and the international exhibit that followed. Such publicity certainly assisted in providing "the mounting pressure" on government officials to make changes in Yunnan Province.

Support for the Larger Green Revolution

Not only were the needs of the local people met by the changes made, and the fate of the golden monkey and the forests averted, but support for the overall environmental movement from this one successful expedition was considerable. On the closing day of the international exhibit of the expedition's photographic works in Beijing, the authors were present to meet members of the expedition, as well as the public, and were interviewed by local television reporters. These reports were broadcast later in connection with programs on environmental issues. The golden monkey exhibition served as a highly visible symbol of the issues and gave supporting material to be used in education of school children and of the public at large. The *Newsweek* article used above closes its report with the following assessment, including a specific reference to the Yunnan expedition in the summer

of 1996: “Many Chinese environmentalists will remember the summer of '96 for their first string of successes--for the proliferation of green clubs, the chants of ‘Save the monkey,’ the battle to conserve the headwaters of the Yangtze and above all, the new green tilt in the Beijing party line. Today environmental activists have a brighter future than many embattled mill owners and loggers. That may not amount to a revolution, but it's a step toward a greener China” (*Newsweek International*, October 7, 1996, p. 17).

It may be of interest to note that a recent news report from western Sichuan Province indicated that the central government in Beijing has outlawed further logging in the area in order to help stop the widespread flooding resulting from the logging industry. Money was allocated for planting trees to replace the trees that had been cut down on the mountain sides. The severe flooding in this area was widely reported during the summer and fall of 1998 and this ending of the logging industry in the region was seen as a positive step in the environmental arena (CNN, 1998).

Lessons Learned

One of the results of the University Green Camp Expedition to Yunnan was the lessons that were learned about the group's goals and strategies that can be used by other volunteer groups in China as well as for other conservation groups in other parts of the world. When a successful effort in a developing country like China makes international news and has an impact on the Chinese government, not known for its willingness to bend to student pressure, people can take notice of the means they used and the practical and resourceful goals that they had established. There was much careful planning that went into the expedition, for the executive committee of the expedition met regularly from January to July 1996 to map out their goals and strategies to accomplish a successful enterprise. This was the first of its kind in China so the positive approach that was adopted to provide answers for the local people and not simply protest what they were doing proved to be a workable one. It provided an incentive and a model to follow for other volunteer groups in China and especially in the environmental area.

The extensive publicity given to the expedition was an important lesson to be learned from the experience. The leaders planned from the beginning to capitalize on the potential photo opportunities that the expedition would provide. It worked. The media coverage, the photo exhibit, the hard work of the expedition's participants paid off in the long run. Yan Jun, the chair of the executive committee of the expedition, as editor of the Green Weekend newsletter of *Forestry News*, gave much publicity to the efforts of the expedition. As a photographer himself, he took many photos of the trip and published them in the exhibit and in his newspaper. The emphasis on photos to bring people's attention to the cause and the people was

an effective one from the standpoint of persuading the public as well as government officials.

A Raised Consciousness Among University Students

The raising of students' consciousness about the environment was a final and important impact of the expedition to Yunnan Province to save the monkeys and the forests. As has been indicated, when the cause was first brought to the public's attention in Beijing in December of 1995, hundreds of university students responded and wanted to help. They were motivated to help the endangered species and to do something positive with their summer time. Being successful in this effort helped them to enlarge their vision to other causes related to preserving the environment. One student wrote of the effect it had on her life as a university student. Another responded in a job interview application that "a career path is like mountain climbing--when looking back, you always have a sense of fulfillment, while looking forward, you find what you have done is far from the top" (Yu Zhen, December 1, 1996).

Conclusion

The article has described the persuasive strategies used by an environmental group in China to save the endangered golden monkey and valuable forests which serve as the home of the monkey as well as other important animals. Considering that only an estimated 200 monkeys of this species exist in the world, it is crucial that a group of university students decided to take their summer in a camping expedition to the southwest of China in order to call attention to their cause. The expedition leaders strategically chose university students, the Bai Ma Snow Mountain area as the place to camp and live with the people, the summer time when students were available and it would be easier to travel, well-established photographers to record the journey and its activities, and the holding of a national exhibition of the expedition's photos to climax the effort.

The impact of these strategies was recorded as considerable. Changes were made in Yunnan Province to stop the loggers and help the people to use alternative resources for income. International news coverage was given to the expedition that linked it to the larger environmental issues in China that helped to sustain and move forward the green movement in that developing country. The expedition provided lessons for others to learn about their success and helped raise the consciousness of university students about environmental concerns.

How long-term these changes will prove to be remains to be seen. The issues of the environment are always complex and related to other social and governmental concerns. When such a group of university students mounts a strategic plan that makes a difference in a developing country needing all its natural

resources, it deserves notice not only among environmentalists but among communication scholars, as well. In rhetorical and social movements, momentum and success are important ingredients in carrying the message to larger audiences and to those people who are in a position of power to make decisions. The strategies employed by such movements and groups need to be examined and shared for a fuller understanding of these phenomena, especially when they occur in countries such as China, where the culture and the social order are quite different from that found in the West.

* Paper presented at the 6th International Conference on Cross-Cultural Communication: East and West, on the theme, "Intercultural Relations, Communication and Linguistic Perspectives" at Tempe Mission Palms Hotel, Tempe, Arizona, March 26-29, 1997, sponsored by the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies, of Trinity University and by Arizona State University.

References

- China Daily*, October 30, 1996.
 CNN, Earthmatters, October 10, 1998. Reported by Rebecca McKinnon. Author's notes from the broadcast.
Newsweek, International Edition, October 7, 1996, "Green Heat," 12- 17.
 Yan Jun. Personal Interview, November 6, 1996.
 Yu Zhen. Resume, October 30, 1996.
 Yu Zhen. My Statement, December 1, 1996.
 Yu Zhen. Personal Interview, November 6, 1996.
 Yu Zhen. Personal Letter, March 26, 1997.
 Yu Zhen. Personal Letter, May 31, 1997.

D. Ray Heisey is Professor and Director Emeritus, School of Communication Studies, Kent State University. Kent. OH. Yu Zhen is a post-graduate student in the School of International Studies, Peking University, Beijing, China and Yan Jun is Editor, *Forestry News*, Beijing. China. Professor Heisey served as a Visiting Professor in the School of International Studies, Peking University, during the Fall semester 1996 when material for this paper was collected.