

Since I completed my LIA project in my own country, I did not have an international experience. Instead, I had a deeply meaningful cultural exchange in the Tibetan region of Yushu, the heart of the Kham Tibetan area, where I spent two months working in conservation. While I had previously visited Tibetan areas as a tourist, this was the first time I lived there as a resident. This shift in perspective allowed me to experience the culture in a much deeper way.

Yushu is a place of breathtaking beauty—endless grasslands, snow-capped mountains, and landscapes that feel inseparable from spirituality. I was struck by how religion and environment are interwoven: prayer flags fluttered on every mountain pass, temples stood quietly in almost every valley, and Buddhism infused daily life in visible and subtle ways. The cultural richness was equally remarkable. Many people still wear traditional clothes on the streets; yak herding continues as a livelihood; and community festivals, such as horse races, bring people together in celebration.

One of my strongest impressions, however, was that Tibetan culture is not “remote” as stereotypes often suggest. I lived in a vibrant city where people gathered every evening in the main square to dance traditional circle dances around an electric “campfire.” The dances went on for hours, welcoming everyone—residents and newcomers alike—into circles of movement and music. This collective joy and hospitality left a deep impression on me.

I was also warmly welcomed into local life. A colleague invited me to a family gathering on the grasslands, where more than 40 relatives celebrated together under large tents, sharing homemade dumplings and other dishes. Later, the women dressed in traditional clothes and went to the mountain pass for photos, expressing pride in their heritage.

During my stay, Yushu also hosted football and basketball tournaments and its famous horse-racing festival. The enthusiasm of the crowd cheering for the Yushu football team was unforgettable. At the horse-racing festival, people paraded in traditional dress, singing and dancing, while thousands gathered in the square at night to enjoy spectacular performances.

What I learned most from this experience was the sense of unity, warmth, and inclusiveness that define this community. I was grateful not only to work and make friends there, but also to truly live as a participant rather than a passerby. Conversations with young locals were especially inspiring—they spoke passionately about improving livelihoods while protecting the environment, and about building new projects for their hometown. Their vision and determination made me reflect on my own role, and I hope to continue supporting and learning from such efforts in the future.