

HANDOUT 1: MAPPING KEKEXILI

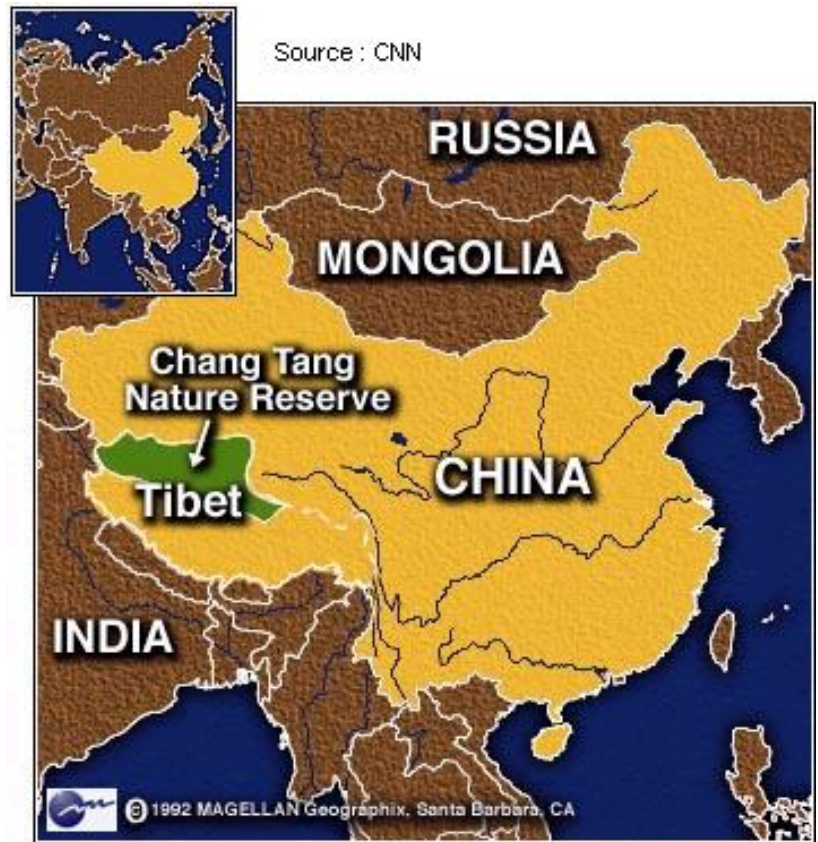
The Chang Tang, or Northern Plateau, is a vast and remote, high altitude grassland in northern Tibet. Kekexili is located within the Chang Tang region. The snow-capped mountains of Kekexili are the source of the Yangtze River. The river, the longest in Asia, flows eastward from Tibet through China.

Travelers to Kekexili have described the landscape as barren and harsh, primitive and pristine. Elevation is approximately 16,000 feet (5,000 meters) above sea level. Because oxygen is thinner at such a high altitude, breathing becomes more difficult. Simple exertions like climbing or running can trigger a shortness of breath. The region poses extreme survival challenges for those who attempt to trek across the sweeping plateau. Quicksand is one danger, especially during the summer months when snow melts and rain drains quickly through the sandstone. Because the area lacks natural resources for building fires or shelters, humans risk death from exposure due to gale-force winds and freezing temperatures (often well below zero degrees Fahrenheit).

Except for some nomadic Tibetan tribes, few humans live in Kekexili. Many species of wildlife, however, thrive in this isolated place. Specifically, Kekexili is home to Chiru, or Tibetan antelope, as well as wild yaks and donkeys, white lip deer and brown bear. The Himalayan marmot, a type of rodent, burrows in the red sandstone, creating havens for spiders and other insects. Fox and falcons also find sanctuary in Kekexili.

Did you know . . . ?

Kekexili is also known as *Hoh Xil*, which means “beautiful maiden” in the Mongolian language.



In 2006, the Chinese government announced that a team of geological experts had begun mapping this large uninhabited region of western China. The goal of the mapping project is to assist in scientific research, energy exploration (including a search for oil), and wildlife protection.

Screening Sheet A—Sky Burial

DVD reference: Chapters 1 – 4, *Mountain Patrol*

Part 1 – Pre-Screening Discussion

Directions: Before watching the opening scenes from *Mountain Patrol*, read each of the notes below. Be prepared to discuss each key point with the class.

Did you know that . . . ?

... a Tibetan Prayer Wheel is a hollow metal cylinder on a rod handle that contains a sacred text or prayer?

Tibetan Buddhists believe that spinning the hand-held wheels spreads spiritual blessings.



... a *stupa* is a Buddhist shrine?

Often a stupa is a cairn, or pile of stones, marking a grave. Each person who visits the gravesite leaves a single stone as a mark of respect. The structure in the left foreground of this photograph is a stupa.

... a sky burial is a traditional Tibetan burial ceremony?

The corpse is reverently placed on a mountainside at a location where vultures—sacred birds in Tibetan beliefs—gather. A religious leader dismembers the body for consumption by the vultures. Although the practice may seem gruesome to those who do not understand Buddhist beliefs, in Tibet the ceremony is sacred and solemn, a way of honoring both the individual by returning the body to nature and the birds of prey who gain sustenance.

Screening Sheet A—Sky Burial (continued)

Part 2 – Screening

Directions: After viewing the scenes, answer the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What is the first image shown in this film?
2. Why do you think the director started the movie with shots of poachers killing the antelope?
3. On the day Ga Yu arrives a funeral is taking place. What is the significance of this funeral? What does this scene suggest about Tibetan burial customs?
4. Why has Ga Yu come to the camp of the Kekexili Mountain Patrol? What does he want?
5. Who is Ri Tai, and what does he want?
6. In film as well as in literature, one way to reveal the character traits of an individual is through behavior. What does Ga Yu's behavior during the burial ceremony suggest about him?
7. Another way to reveal character traits in film is through the reactions or opinions of others. How do the children react to Ga Yu? How do they react when they hear Ri Tai's name? What do these reactions suggest about both men?
8. In these opening scenes, some of the men carry guns. What does this suggest?
9. As Ga Yu enters the courtyard of Ri Tai's home, what does he see?
10. Alone in his room, Ga Yu reviews some "documents." What are these documents and why might he have them?
11. Who is telling the story? How do you know?
12. "Tibetans always point knives at themselves," Ri Tai tells Ga Yu over dinner. Discuss this statement. What do you think it means? What does it tell you about Ga Yu?

HANDOUT 2: CHIRU!

Part 1: Captain Rawling's Sighting, 1903

Directions: The passage below is from *The Great Plateau*, written by Captain C. G. Rawling and published in London in 1905. Captain Rawling had gone on expedition to explore the Northern Plateau of Tibet at a time when the land was generally closed to foreigners. While on this expedition, he encountered herds of chiru, or Tibetan antelope. Read the passage and discuss with the class.

Having nothing particular to do, I climbed a small ridge to the north of the camp and came upon a truly marvelous sight.

Almost from my feet away to the north and east, as far as the eye could reach, were thousands upon thousands of doe antelope with their young. The mothers were mostly feeding, while the young ones were either lying down and resting, or being urged on by their mothers. All had their heads turned towards the west, and were travelling slowly in that direction, presumably in search of the fresh young grass springing up in the higher western tablelands.

Everyone in camp turned out to see this beautiful sight, and tried, with varying results, to estimate the number of animals in view. This was found very difficult however, more particularly as we could see in the extreme distance a continuous stream of fresh herds steadily approaching; there could not have been less than 15,000 or 20,000 visible at one time.

Part 2: Report from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2006

Directions: The passage below is excerpted from a much longer report prepared by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and published in the *Federal Register* (Vol. 71:60) on March 29, 2006. It is a declaration of the Tibetan chiru as an endangered species. Read this excerpt and be prepared to discuss it with the class.

We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, determine that the classification of the Tibetan antelope (*Pantholops hodgsonii*) as endangered throughout its range is warranted, pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973. . . The best available information indicates that the total population of Tibetan antelope has declined drastically over the past three decades such that it is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. . . .

If one assumes that the historical population of Tibetan antelope was 500,000 individuals (an apparently conservative estimate), then the most recent estimate of 70,000 represents a population decline of greater than 85 percent. . .

The principal cause of the Tibetan antelope population decline has been poaching on a massive scale for the species' fur (wool), known in trade as shahtoosh ("king of wool"), which is one of the finest animal fibers known. Shahtoosh is processed into high-fashion scarves and shawls in the Indian States of Jammu and Kashmir. These

items are greatly valued by certain people of wealth and fashion around the world. The international demand for Tibetan antelope fiber and shahtoosh products is the most serious threat to the continued existence of the Tibetan antelope. Although overall mortality rates are not known, mortality due to poaching was estimated to be as high as 20,000 individuals per year in China (State Forestry Administration of China, 1998). . . .

Although the shahtoosh trade has existed for centuries, killing of Tibetan antelope on a widespread, commercial basis probably began only in the 1970s or 1980s, resulting from an increase in international consumer demand and increased availability of vehicles on the Tibetan Plateau. [Researchers] noted that, with the increasing availability of vehicles beginning three decades ago, truck drivers, government officials, military personnel, and other outsiders had greater access to shoot wildlife. Most Tibetan antelope poaching takes place in the Arjin Shan, Chang Tang, and Kekexili Nature Reserves by a variety of people, including local herders, residents, military personnel, gold miners, truck drivers, and others (Schaller 1993; Schaller and Gu 1994). Organized, large-scale poaching rings have developed in some areas. Poachers always kill Tibetan antelope to collect their fiber. . . .

Tibetan antelope are also killed for their horns (used in traditional medicinal practices), hides, and meat, although these uses are secondary to the use of fiber.

Screening Sheet B—Shahtoosh

DVD reference: Chapters 5 – 8, *Mountain Patrol*

Directions: After viewing the scenes, answer the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Describe the scene in which the men depart the village for their patrol through the mountain range. What are the men and their families feeling and how does the filmmaker suggest this?
2. Why does the patrol set up a checkpoint on the road? What authority do they have over other travelers in the region?
3. Describe the behavior of the men as they arrive and camp for a time at the Budong Springs Conservation Station.
4. In this sequence of scenes, how does the filmmaker capture the vastness of the Kekexili landscape? Cite specific images.
5. The fishermen are not poachers. Why does the patrol fine them?
6. When the patrol comes across a field of hundreds of slaughtered antelope, they gather the carcasses and bury them. Why? What does this scene suggest about the relationship of the men to the animals, to nature?

HANDOUT 3: KEKEXILI DIARY

Directions: Read the passages below and be prepared to discuss them in class.

When Chinese journalist Teng Jingshu learned that director Lu Chuan was making a film about the endangered chiru of Tibet, he traveled to the mountains of Kekexili to join the film crew for a number of days. He recorded his observations in a diary, excerpts of which are printed on the National Geographic website (www.nationalgeographic.com/mountainpatrol/prod_diary.html). The passage below, dated October 4, relates to a scene in the film where the mountain patrol chases the poachers across a freezing river. Director Lu Chuan believed that he must shoot the scene on location in order to capture the real Kekexili. However, the freezing temperatures and strong winds made this a very dangerous film assignment.

Oct. 4. It was rolling time. In the scene, the guards spot the poachers and hunt them down. The shouting, the gunfire, the crossing of the river and the big chase—everything was perfect. It got dark during shooting, and the temperature dropped severely. It was not yet 5 p.m., but it was already -3 degrees Celsius [27 degrees Fahrenheit]. I put on every piece of clothing I could find, but it was still not enough. The actors had to wear nothing but their underwear, and cross the icy river with bare legs. It was so cold out there! Assistants would bring coats for the actors immediately after each shot, but the lips of the men had already turned blue. It is hard to imagine any creature that could survive this kind of coldness. When the shooting finally ended at 7 p.m., all the actors were on the verge of collapse. I touched their coats, which had already frozen like marble.

Oct. 5. The "crossing river" scene was still not completed. Usually the crew set off around 1 p.m., and started shooting at 3

p.m. However, the weather in Kekexili is unpredictable and can change from sunny to hail in mere minutes. It was especially cold that day. Clouds covered the sky and it was snowing. The river was colder than ever, but the actors still had to jump into it. By 7 p.m. some actors were too frozen to speak. Then shooting had to stop, and all the actors were sent to a local hospital emergency room. Lu Chuan was silent all the way back. I understood his dilemma at having to keep to the schedule but also having to take care of the actors. All of the seven actors who had gone into the river were now lying down one by one on hospital beds receiving infusions. They told the two assistant directors who visited them that night that waiting on the river bank between scenes was worse than rushing through the river. The wet body would go numb. They joked with one actor, Zhao Yisui, because he was literally frozen to tears. Zhao was a little bit embarrassed but argued that he could not help it. I had seen his face turned to livid purple with cold during shooting.

Screening Sheet C—Conflict on the Cumar River

DVD reference: Chapters 9 – 15, *Mountain Patrol*

Directions: After viewing the scenes, answer the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. The patrol finds an abandoned jeep. How do they know it belongs to the poachers?
2. Why does the patrol burn the jeep before moving on?
3. Why does the patrol remove their pants before crossing the river?
4. Ga Yu has no gun. This is not his fight. Why then does he, too, remove his pants and cross the river?
5. The wounded poacher dies. How does Ri Tai react and what does this tell you about Ri Tai?
6. Why do you think the director included this scene with the dying poacher? What might the director want us, the viewers, to know—or to feel?
7. Among the poachers is an old man, whose name is Ma Zhanlin. Do you recall seeing this old man earlier in the film? If so, in what scene?
8. The poachers have no guns and no pelts. Why does the patrol handcuff them?
9. What does this sequence of scenes reveal about Ma Zhanlin?
10. Ri Tai has captured the skimmers but not the gunmen. He also has one volunteer who is wounded. Why does he not turn back with his prisoners?
11. What does the scene where the truck is stuck in the ice reveal about Kekexili? About the patrol? About the poachers?
12. This sequence of scenes ends at camp at night with two patrol volunteers staring up at the sky. Describe the mood of this scene. What do you think the director wants you to notice or pay attention to and to feel?

HANDOUT 4: BACKSTORY AND BEYOND—RESEARCHING THE WILD YAK BRIGADE AND THE ENDANGERED CHIRU

Directions: This is a collaborative learning activity. You will work in a group of 3 or 4 students. Each person within the group will complete one of the research tasks listed below. As a group, decide who will take each task. Once you have completed your research, report your findings to the group.

Step One. Select one or more of the topics below and start your research. Be certain to cite sources specifically and completely.

The Wild Yak Brigade

Questions to consider:

- ☐ Who or what was the Wild Yak Brigade and why was this formed? When possible, provide specific details of names, dates, locations.
- ☐ What controversy surrounds the Wild Yak Brigade?
- ☐ Who was Dakpa Dorjee and how did he die? What relationship, if any, does he have to the character of Ri Tai in the film *Mountain Patrol*?

The Endangered Chiru

Questions to consider:

- ☐ What is the current population of the endangered Tibetan antelope in Kekexili?
- ☐ What other factors—besides the illegal shahtoosh trade—may have contributed to the decline in the chiru population in the 20th century?
- ☐ Who protects the chiru today in Tibet's Northern Plateau?

Websites to research: Your research need not be limited to these sites. You may also wish to incorporate newspaper articles as well as photos and other sources of information.

- Tibet Environmental Watch www.tew.org/index.html
- China.Org www.china.org.cn
- World Changing www.worldchanging.com
- Tesi Environmental Awareness Movement www.ecotibet.org

- Newspaper archives from the 1990s: *Los Angeles Times* www.latimes.com; *New York Times* www.nytimes.com
- National Geographic www.nationalgeographic.com

Step Two. Present your findings to your group. As a group, determine on how best to organize and present your material for posting on the information wall.