



Music and a Movie in the Mountainside

■ By Hou Jun Hong

In ancient times the Daliang Mountains had the reputation of being an important gateway to China's southwestern border, where travellers can drink in breath-taking sights such as Xichang Ancient City, Lake Lugu and Luoji Mountain. However, today the words Daliang Mountains evoke images of poverty stricken areas that will remain poor indefinitely, of communities where most children

rarely see the inside of a classroom. Not many people truly known the beauty of the place: the sky is of purest blue, and the sound of the Yi people's melodious local folk songs are almost intoxicating. CEIBS Alumnus Li Jianping (EMBA 1995) is one of the lucky few who have experienced this side of the Daliang Mountains. He first heard students from Daliang Mountains E Liping Central School singing Gu Mo A Zhi during a charity concert held by Cedar Highrise at Shanghai Concert Hall. He was captivated by the folk song's beauty, describing it as a heavenly tune. The words are simple, but they evoked strong emotions.

Light of hope

Li Jianping had long been a big fan of shooting videos, and it occurred to him to make a micro movie with Daliang Mountains as the theme, showcasing the folk music of the Yi people and the young singers.

He began working on the project in early 2016. After about four months of preparation, he had assembled a team of four CEIBS alumni: Lu Xiaohong (AMP 19) in the leading role of Mr Han, the teacher; Wang Feng (EMBA 1998) was responsible for production and shooting footage; Huang Sudong (EMBA 2003) was the producer; while Li Jianping took on the roles of director, screenwriter and post production.

By July the team was in Xichang City,

their first time ever in the Daliang Mountains. Their plan was to capture the Yi's authentic Torch Festival. But they arrived to find that the Festival is typically held in November, during the Yi New Year, and it was almost impossible to find a place to get video footage in summer. But their effort was not in vain. Through a CEIBS alumnus who was working with charity organisation Cedar Highrise they met A Ji, a local guide. He helped them get to an old village where locals kindly agreed to don their traditional costumes and perform the festival for Li and the team. This scene was later edited into the micro movie, adding an ethnic flavour.

Two months later, the team made its second trek to Daliang Mountains. This time, their destination was the E Liping Central School. It was located in Butuo, the poorest county in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, where Cedar Highrise has been doing charity work for many years. Getting to E Liping was not easy. They first took a flight from Shanghai to Chengdu and transited to Xichang, then they drove from Xichang City to Butuo County and finally to E Liping. Then it took them another 10 hours to drive across 200 kilometres of mountainous terrain and 35 kilometres of broken roads.

The hardships faced during the journey were almost unbearable. Rain made the mountain road vulnerable to landslides and there was the constant threat of the pothole-riddled road

being blocked by uprooted electricity poles. But the team pressed on, even when they had to get out of the car and push their way through. When they finally arrived safely at the Central School in E Liping, after a bumpy ride, everyone was still in high spirits. "We were there by choice; we were willing to bear the hardship," Li Jianping explains.

His remarks are typical of the CEIBS spirit.

Seeing the challenges the children had to overcome just to get to school – traveling four to six hours a day (roundtrip) over mostly hilly terrain – Li Jianping became even more determined to create the movie. He said: "I don't know what kind of help is best for them, but we hope our micro movie can make even a little difference. If people see the movie and get to known the beauty and music of the Daliang Mountains, and are then willing to help the people help themselves, we would be more than happy. We especially hope the children will have a chance to go beyond the mountains."

Several locals joined the small team, making a film crew of about eight. The process was rather difficult. Each day they had to make the four- to five-hour trip between Butuo County and E Liping. They eventually selected a few small actors from the choir, and a very clever girl named Ji Er was chosen as the lead. It is difficult for inexperienced children to recite

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lines, but Li Jianping wasn't bothered. “Those children are not afraid of appearing before the camera,” he told his crew. He allowed them to just be themselves, and the young actors and actresses were soon at home. The result was an authentic and very moving film.

Li Jianping used his experience in three-dimensional animation to design and create special effects. For example in one scene, a row of geese were flying when one of them fell, a beautifully shot and moving metaphor that echoes the movie's plot. Even the angle of the shots was designed to show respect for the people of the Daliang Mountains. As Li Jianping explained: “Helping the weak and giving to the needy may make some people feel they are somewhat of a saviour. I don't like that, what we are doing is putting ourselves on an equal level. We are looking for the beautiful things in Daliang Mountains, we are searching for the touching tunes in the folk songs of the Yi people.”

The making of the micro movie required Li Jianping's full attention and he spent most of 2016 focused on the project. There were more than 20 rounds of post-production. He listened to the suggestions of many professionals and friends, and

condensed the movie from 30 minutes to 18. In order to better use music to reflect the theme of love, he and Prof Emu Shama Muji Sama of the Xichang Conservatory of Music composed a song Mama on the Mountainside, to echo the folk song Gu Mo A Zhi. The CEIBS alumni chorus' rearrangement of Mama on the Mountainside took the championship at the second Combined Voice International Business School Chorus Invitational Tournament in November, 2017. Earlier that same year, on January 5, Gu Mo A Zhi also won third prize in the Shanghai Charity Micro Movie Festival. On the same day, the micro movie premiered at the Cedar Highrise Angel of Daliangshan charity event. It left many viewers in tears. Netizens also had high praise once the online version was released.

The dream lives on

A year later, Li Jianping heard from Hui Zhiming , who was doing charity work in Daliang Mountains, that Heihamulazuo – a little girl who had sung really well in the chorus – had been admitted to a junior high school in Jiangyou City, Sichuan Province. This was a significant step as it meant she was included in the national schooling plan for impoverished areas.

The news made Li Jianping remember a conversation he had had with Heihamulazuo when they were making the movie. He learned that her father had passed away and her mother was ill, so she was living with her grandmother. After fifth grade, she had to quit school because her family could not afford to send her to middle school. She had to go back to poverty-riddled mountain life. Touched, Li Jianping had shared her story in his WeChat Moments. Hearing that she was back in school, he was relieved that a problem that had obsessed him for so long was finally solved.

The micro movie Gu Mo A Zhi wouldn't have been possible without the generous help of many CEIBS alumni. They voluntarily participated in the movie and often spent their own money on the project. Huang Sudong and Li Jianping bore the pre-and post-production costs. The CEIBS alumni drama club, choir and many alumni members also provided a lot of support to Cedar Highrise when it was organising the Dalian Angel charity party. The event was funded by CEIBS Alumni Golf Club and alumnus Chen Yong. And more than 10 alumni organisations made generous donations, helping Cedar Highrise raise more than RMB700,000. As Li Jianping said, “CEIBS is a leading

business school in Asia in management education, and we must also be leaders in taking social responsibility."

The entire experience in the Daliang Mountains has touched so many lives. Sometimes it is hard to tell who got more out of the experience, the people of the poor mountainous region or those who went to help them. There is one memory that is particularly touching. It was Mid-Autumn Festival and the movie crew heard that many children had never tasted moon cakes. With Wang Feng spurring them on, they pooled their money and bought more than 1,300 mooncakes for teachers and students

at the school. That spontaneous act of kindness was not forgotten. When the movie wrapped up and the crew was about to leave, a shy boy approached Lu Xiaohong with two pens in his little hands. It was their way of saying thanks. And the friendship continued with the children sending letters to team members after they were back in Shanghai. "I think public welfare is more than just good behaviour; it is also an emotional experience. You get your reward the moment you do it," Li Jianping wrote on his way back from the trip. "The car is bumping up and down the mountain road, leaving behind a cloud of dust. I'm sitting in the car silently, and I can't take my

mind away from Daliang Mountains. I set out to make something that would touch others, but I am the first to be touched. When I came here, I brought along boxes that were full of clothing and food; I emptied them to find my heart full, filled with love and emotion."

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