**Paradise Found in Shangri-La**

Ariel Mieling

**1** I never thought I’d find myself in paradise — but then I never thought I would be displeased by it either. When I got off the bus in a little town in the isolated mountains of southwestern China, I discovered myself in what bills itself as the paradise of James Hilton’s 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*. In 2001 the town adopted the name that rings of mystery and enchantment, Shangri-La. In less than 24 hours, I was ready to leave.

**2** Although the town is in a remote valley, just as Hilton’s Shangri-La was, the author didn’t describe the stores of touristy knickknacks and the Western-style cafes I found.

**3** Nor was the nearby Gansu Monastery anything like the lamasery of the novel. Even though it is the largest Tibetan monastery outside Tibet, it lacked the religious vibrancy I had become fond of in other parts of Asia. The monks loitered around looking bored or irritated, and the buildings pulsed with tourists.

**4** Farther afield, I was unable to find the lake that, on the map, was as large as the town itself. Nonetheless, there was still a Lake Scenic Area where you could have your picture taken on a horse saddled in the Tibetan style.

**5** Disappointed by all this, I was still persuaded to go to the town’s weekly dance with my fiancé and a few others from our guesthouse. I prepared myself not to be impressed and gave little weight to our fellow guest’s description of the dance as “a local thing”.

**6** Arriving at the square, we found the event in full swing. People danced, spinning in multiple circles along the square’s edge. Everyone knew the steps to each song. Although I saw some obvious tourists in Gor-Tex jackets with new digital cameras around their necks, most of the crowd seemed to be local. Old men danced with gusto, embellishing moves they’d practiced for years. There were shop girls and teenagers and even the occasional toddler, following Mom with awkward steps.

**7** I searched for the source of the music and found a loudspeaker installed in one corner of the square. It seemed public and official enough to have been installed by the government. I wondered if the speaker was for the community’s enjoyment or to create another event to attract tourists. But with the music and the movement, I couldn’t remain cynical for long.

**8** I joined the circle and followed the steps of those around me — with varying degrees of success. I spun and spun until my body and the dance’s complexity urged me to stop. Panting, I decided that I needed to go take a nap. I was beginning to see the charm in this town and getting just a glimmer of why a person might never want to leave.

**9** When I woke up, leaving was still at the top of my agenda, but my fiancé and I still had hours before our bus departed. Squinting in the bright morning light, we surveyed the terrain surrounding the town and began walking through the winding streets toward the closest hill.

**10** Soon, we found ourselves following three old men and their cattle. They weren’t herding exactly; each man had only one or two cows. It was more like Shangri-La’s version of a group of friends taking their dogs for a morning walk. We followed them all the way into the hills until we spotted a peak we wanted to climb.

**11** We broke off, climbing upward as the men went along the valley floor. Pink and yellow flowers, red leaves, and gray puffballs lined our route up. While furtively catching my breath, I stopped every few feet to examine the unusual plants.

**12** Finally, the terrain flattened out, leaving us with a panoramic view of the town on one side and an endless array of hills on the other. I sat down beneath the prayer flags that marked the peak and bit into an apple bought early that morning. Fresh cold air hit my face and filled my lungs, and a feeling of contentment settled over me. Paradise had crept up on me, and I didn’t really want to leave, ever. Nonetheless, staying didn’t seem to be the right answer either.

**13** In *Lost Horizon*, Hilton’s main character, Hugh Conway, finds peace in Shangri-La and then leaves. After climbing down the hill and picking up my bags, I was about to do the same. As the bus weaved along the road out of town, I kept sight of a rainbow framed against a brewing storm. At each turn, I saw the rainbow in a new location, arching in a different direction. I began to understand how Conway and I could both choose to leave paradise. Paradise is not confined to a single place; it moves with us — like a rainbow. Paradise depends more on our perception than on the location itself.

**人间天堂香格里拉**

艾瑞尔·米灵

1 我压根儿没有想到自己会置身于天堂——然而，也更压根儿没有想到这天堂会让我如此扫兴。当我乘车到达这个位于中国西南偏远山区的小镇时，我发现自己不经意间来到了在詹姆斯·希尔顿1933年的小说《消逝的地平线》里被誉为人间天堂的地方。2001年这镇子还特意更名为香格里拉，直接沿用了书里那个神秘而又令人向往的名字。可我呢，待了不到24个小时就想离开了。

2 尽管小镇地处偏远的山谷，就像希尔顿笔下的香格里拉一样，但是书中可没提到我在这里看到的纪念品商店和西式咖啡馆。

3 此外，附近的甘肃寺院（译者注：此处应为松赞林寺）也和书中描述的那个喇嘛庙大不一样。尽管这是地处西藏之外最大的藏传佛教寺院，却一点也不像亚洲其他地区的寺庙，我所钟爱的宗教气韵这里简直无处可寻。喇嘛们四处闲逛，看上去要么百无聊赖，要么烦躁不安，整座庙宇里都是涌动的游客。

4 走了很远我也没能找到地图上标出的那个同小镇差不多大小的湖泊。不过倒是看到了一个所谓的“湖泊风景区”，在那儿有配着藏式马鞍的马供人骑着拍照。

5 尽管对这一切都感到失望，我还是被拖着同我的未婚夫以及旅馆里几个游客一道去参加镇上每周一次的舞会。同去的游客说，这种舞蹈“颇具当地特色”。但我根本不以为然，心里还觉得肯定会很没意思。

6 到达广场的时候正值舞会的高潮。人们翩翩起舞，绕着广场的四周一圈又一圈地跳着。所有人都熟悉每首曲子的舞步节奏。人群中有一些明显是游客，他们穿着戈尔特斯夹克，脖子上还挂着崭新的数码相机，但绝大多数还是本地人。那些上了年纪的人跳得非常投入，多年练习的舞步中还加入了他们自己的舞姿。一同起舞的还有女售货员和十几岁的少年，偶尔还能见到蹒跚学步的小家伙们笨拙地模仿着妈妈的舞步。

7 寻着乐曲声，我看到广场的一个角落里放了个高音喇叭，看起来应该是政府负责安装的公共设施吧。我在想，这些设备到底是用来丰富本地人的生活，还是用来吸引游客的呢？可是，伴随着音乐和舞蹈，这些愤世的念头也就渐渐抛诸脑后了。

8 我加入了跳舞的人群，跟着周围人群的节奏，也还过得去。我转啊转啊，最后终于感觉吃不消了，再也跟不上复杂的舞步。我气喘吁吁，觉得自己要停下来休息一下了。直到这时，我才渐渐感受到小镇的魅力，隐约开始明白为什么人们会不愿离开这里。

9 第二天早上醒来，我的第一个念头还是要走，不过距离发车，我和未婚夫还有好几个小时得打发。我们眯着眼睛在清晨灿烂的阳光下环视了一下四周，然后迈步在蜿蜒的小街上，走向最近的一座小山。

10 不知不觉间，我们跟在三个老汉赶着的牛群后走着。其实，他们也说不上是在放牛，因为每人只赶着一两头牛，活脱脱一个香格里拉版的三两好友早晨遛狗、散步的景象。我们跟着他们一路走进了山林，然后看见了个小山头，决定爬上去。

11 随后我们告别了放牛的老人们，他们沿着山谷继续前行，而我们则开始往山上爬。粉色和黄色的花朵、红色的树叶，还有灰色的马勃菌缀满了整条山路，每走一小段我都会停下来偷偷喘口气，趁机好好观赏那些不同寻常的植物。

12 地势终于平缓了下来。抬眼望去，一边是一览无余的小镇，另一边则是连绵不绝的山丘。我坐在山顶的经幡下，拿出早上买的苹果啃了起来。清新凉爽的空气扑面而来，直沁心脾，满足感油然而生。身处天堂的感觉就这么悄然而至，我再也不愿离去。可是，就这么一直待下去似乎也不是正确的选择。

13 《消失的地平线》一书中，男主人公休·科维在香格里拉获得了内心的平静，但最终他还是离开了。下山之后整理好行装的我也做出了同样的决定。汽车沿着蜿蜒的公路渐渐驶离小镇，坐在车上的我凝望着空中的彩虹，风雨将至。每一个转弯处，我都看到彩虹射向不同的方向。渐渐地，我开始明白为什么我和科维都决定离开这个人间天堂。要知道，天堂不会固守一隅，其实它就如同彩虹一样，会和我们一路同行。心安之处，即为天堂。