

Prelude of Shan Shui

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On a Sunday evening in March 2009, Weng Ling and I are once again talked ourselves into the mood of worrying about the future of human and nature, and the wildlife we both beloved. We were surprised by how much in common we share, between a scientist and an artist. This finding inspired the idea of an art show on nature, environment and human future, the topic that would be appreciated by not only artists and scientists, but also the people who could appreciate art or science. The show was later named “Shan Shui”, which is after “Shan Shui Conservation Center”, the NGO I founded, and also reflected the traditional Chinese concept on nature and art.

The year of 2009 was also a turning point for Shan Shui Conservation Center because we became one of a few independent Chinese NGOs whose mission is to conserve nature. The center, al team of twenty some people, has been active in vast western China with the dream of establishing an Eco-Equity, a balance between human and nature, tradition and modernization, bottom-up and top-down.

This dream originated in the middle of the nineteen-eighties, and China’s natural conservation movement has only just taken its first steps when I followed Professor Pan Wenshi of Peking University to Qinling Mountain in Shaanxi Province to conduct research on the Giant Panda. One day, I saw a pregnant tufted deer accidentally spring into a local village. Before my eyes, the villagers gleefully chased down the doe until she collapsed, froth spilling from her mouth to the ground. I was about to intervene, a villager turned to me and said with sincerity: “You’ve got some luck to have meat the moment you walk in!” That day’s events shook me to my core. The conservation movement cannot succeed without the support of local populations.

An answer is needed, not only to the question of “what should be done” but, more importantly, to that of “what could be done” in practice. With that purpose, I joined in international NGOs, where I searched for a way to reconcile conservation with local development. From launching the Sichuan Wanglang Nature Reserve eco-tourism program to encouraging the Baima Tibetan community to participate in conservation, and from hiking across the 4800m high Kokoxili to experiencing the Tibetan sacred mountains in Metdog, the nation’s only county without road access, I have seen that simple approaches to solving complicated environmental problems are bound to fail; at the same time, I have taken deep inspiration from traditional cultures while putting conservation principles based in

science into practice.

With the same aspiration, a team of young people together formed the Shan Shui. We pursue the way that conservation could gain support from the majority in the context of China's fast economy development. We discovered conservation initiatives deeply rooted in local and cultural ground while promoting better governance and scientific disciplines of our local partners. We introduced a Carbon Sequestration program and a Watershed Conservation Fund, drawing investment from the open market to conservation; and we worked together with the government to give more authority to village communities, making local populations an integral part of conservation efforts. The results of these efforts have allowed a real faith to take root: Eco-equity really is possible!

Shan Shui works among the giant panda and the snow leopard, and in the area with the headwater of three rivers on the Tibetan Plateau. Shan Shui's ambition is to inspire more people to care for and respect to nature. We believe that our experience in China may eventually contribute to the world for a more sustainable future. This is no easy task and the real change could only come from the heart of people and the commitment from the majority. This is exactly why the Shan Shui Art Show was initiated: using the art to mobilize people's affection toward nature and further taking actions in conservation.