



Director's statement

Gary Marcuse, Face to Face Media

This is the third in a series of films that Betsy Carson and I have produced about the origins of environmental movements in North America, Russia and now China. These programs (*Nuclear Dynamite*, *Arktika: the Russian Dream that Failed*, *Waking the Green Tiger*) have been produced in association with CBC's *The Nature of Things*.

These films are, each in their own way, celebrations of the rise of grass roots movements on three different continents over a period of fifty years. In North America the environmental movement grew out of a peace movement in the 1950s that was inspired, in part, by environmental concerns. Radioactive strontium from nuclear testing in Nevada and the South Pacific was detected in milk and in children's teeth and bones. This led to a greater understanding of food chains that allow the concentration of radiation as fallout landing in farm fields was consumed by cows and passed to children through their milk. In Russia the environmental movement was inspired by concerns about toxic Soviet era nuclear waste that was abandoned in the arctic as nuclear submarine bases were closed and the Russian economy collapsed. In China, as shown in *Waking the Green Tiger*, a movement crystallizes around a campaign to save a wild river in Yunnan province. What all these movements have in common is the passionate desire of ordinary people to protect the environment and their willingness to speak out and to assert their right to do so.

Together these programs trace a transformation in our understanding of the world we live in over the last 60 years. In the past the world seemed larger and more fragmented. Events half a world away had little impact. But gradually, with a better understanding of food chains and ecology it has become clear that we live in a fragile collection of interlocking ecosystems, and the biological systems and species that we destroy may never be seen again.

The step from environmental awareness to environmental action is difficult. Activism by its nature disturbs the status quo and triggers a response from vested interests. Without support from the public, the government, and the law, environmental activists are often exposed to pressure, repression or violence, as has happened in many countries. A movement is more than a spontaneous demonstration. It only emerges when the ground has been prepared for it. In our films we have tried to describe both the inciting events that triggered the movement and the broader social context that made a movement possible.

The existence of an environmental crisis in China is well known. For decades public policy was driven by the philosophy that nature must serve the people. During Chairman Mao's time the philosophy was more explicit: man must conquer nature. The consequences of this neglect are evident. China's outspoken vice-minister of the environment, Pan Yue, has in the past been very explicit about the extensive air and water pollution that affects up to half of the population. As one step toward addressing these issues, the news media, beginning in the 1990s, have published and broadcast hundreds of thousands of reports about air and water pollution and endangered wildlife. This helps to inform and animate the public. But until quite recently there was little evidence of anything like a grass roots movement that could make a difference. Many green groups were limited to more symbolic efforts like tree planting, litter collection, and nature walks.

But starting in 2004, as described in the documentary, something changed. Green activism evolved into a green movement when local villagers and activists joined forces to oppose a massive dam project on the Upper Yangtze river at Tiger Leaping Gorge. Ordinary people are also speaking out about the problems of pollution with a new sense of conviction. Every week there are hundreds of local demonstrations triggered by concerns about toxic waste. How this happened, and how this green movement supports the evolution of democracy in China is the subject of our film.