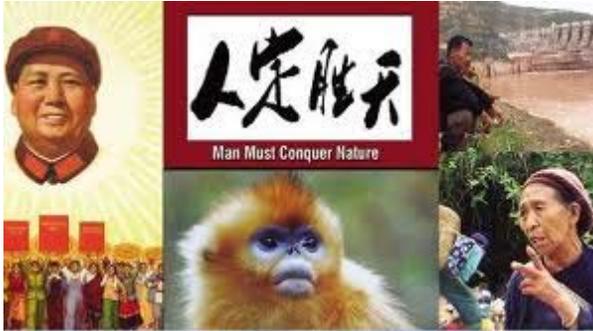


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Review: *Waking the Green Tiger* – PIF 2011



In *Waking the Green Tiger*, Gary Marcuse chronicles the recent rise of environmental activism in China. Some historical trends around this issue are explored, while the mission to prevent the construction of dams along the rivers in the Yunnan province makes the film's central narrative. This environmentalist campaign is portrayed in this film as an example of the type of public participation that has been impossible in China until very recently.

This film describes the government's and the public's slowly changing approach to the environment in China, and includes a great deal of historical information. Without some detailed background information, it

might have been difficult to realize the significance of the recent activism seen in the rest of the film. Following the Cultural Revolution, the ideology favoured by Mao Zedong was that of conquering nature in the name of industry and progress. Messing with the ecosystems has led to a variety of environmental fiascos – such as the killing of sparrows (seen as pests), which resulted in crop failure and massive amounts of death from famine. Since it was impossible to challenge government projects, they went on in a particularly dangerous trial-and-error fashion. Many disasters later, the government approved on an act that allows for feedback from the citizens in regards to projects that may affect their surroundings. The environmentalist Qu Geping, who appears in the film, was nearly the sole person to undertake the early efforts in reducing environmental damage. Now, other activists are able to make their voices heard, though taking action against a potentially detrimental development is not still neither easy nor entirely safe.

The campaign to halt the dam project in the Yunnan province is the film's main subject, with the historical information and archival footage surrounding the documentation of these efforts. If dams were to be built along the Upper Yangtze river, the resulting flooding of the nearby villages would displace many citizens. Several activists are profiled in this film as they strive to educate the villagers (who are often under the impression that they can trust government projects to be good for their wellbeing) about the effects that past dam-building projects have had on surrounding areas. The documentary filmmaker Shi Lihong, for example, has managed to create a channel of communication between various remote villages by sharing her film about an impoverished group of displaced farmers. Her audience would usually become irate on the subject of the dam-building once they became more informed about the project.

Waking the Green Tiger manages to be very informative by putting together the past and present to demonstrate the constraints of environmental activism. The mood of the film is cautiously optimistic, and it communicates the importance of focused effort when it comes to the struggle against environmental destruction.

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