

CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING WILDLIFE TOURISM IN CHINA



Photo: Johannes Bauer

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CHINESE VALUES: ANTHROPOCENTRIC v. ECO-CENTRIC

- * Wildlife tourism in China is based on centuries-old Chinese values and views about the natural environment and the role of humans interacting with nature.
- * Traditionally wildlife has been viewed as a resource to be exploited for human use and while classical literature and art eulogise many animals they are invariably anthropomorphised.
- * The Chinese value system juxtaposes the western paradigms of environmental conservation, wilderness and sustainability, upon which wildlife tourism is based, with essentially anthropocentric values.

CHINESE VALUES: ANTHROPOCENTRIC v. ECO-CENTRIC

- * Underlying difficulties in wildlife policy development is that there are no direct equivalents of key words in Chinese.

- * **nature – *da-ziran***
 - literally “everything coming into being”
 - expresses the totality of mountains, rivers, plants, animals, humans, all bound up in their five elements - fire, water, earth, wood and metals
 - ‘Man’ is based on earth, earth is based on heaven, heaven is based on the Way (*Tao*) and the Way is based on *Da-ziran* (nature): all modalities of being are organically connected.
 - an anthropocentric perspective in which ‘man’ lives and works in harmony with nature, where, because nature is imperfect, ‘man’ has a responsibility to improve on nature
 - It is thus distinct from a western perspective that separates nature and civilization (humans), which views nature ideally as free from artificiality and human intervention.

CHINESE VALUES: ANTHROPOCENTRIC v. ECO-CENTRIC

Underlying difficulties in wildlife policy development is that there are no direct equivalents of key words in Chinese.

* “Wilderness”:

- western ecotourism - pristine beauty, a place away from all evidence of human occupation and modification, a space for spiritual renewal, its intrinsic worth bound up in its ‘naturalness’.
- Chinese: no exact equivalent
- the closest - “*huang-ye*” - literally ‘uninhabited countryside’
- does not carry the same connotations of pristine, beautiful unsullied isolation.
- Rather its connotations are negative, in the sense that the land is ‘bad, or ‘poor’ or ‘not fertile’; it is not conducive to productive use by ‘man’.
- Perhaps the nearest English language equivalent would be the ‘badlands’ of the American frontier.
- Again, an anthropocentric perspective related to its material benefits for humans.

CHINESE VALUES: ANTHROPOCENTRIC v. ECO-CENTRIC

Underlying difficulties in wildlife policy development is that there are no direct equivalents of key words in Chinese.

* “Wildlife”

- Chinese: no equivalent
- the closest - ‘*ye-shang dong-wu*’ - literally ‘wild animals’
- By definition ‘*ye-shang dong-wu*’ are either ‘dangerous’ or -
- they are in competition with man for scarce resources and must be confronted.
- ***Ye-shang dong-wu***: elements of nature that are unpredictable, and out of man’s control
- Therefore to bring man and nature into harmony wildlife (animals) must be eliminated as a danger or a competitor
- In the process if wildlife can contribute to man’s livelihood through greater security or sustenance, then harmony has been achieved
- Its consumption or elimination is thus seen as a ‘good’, in stark contrast to western values based on maintaining biodiversity through conservation and protection.

CHINESE WILDLIFE TOURISM

- There is a long and venerated tradition in China of ‘going into the countryside’ in search of medicinal plants,
- but not of ‘going into the countryside’ to place fauna under a scientific microscope.
- China - poets and mandarins who extolled the beauty and virtues of nature, artists who painted its landscapes, explorers such as the famous geographer, Xu-Xake (15th century), but -
- few if any Darwins of zoology where furthering scientific understanding was sufficient objective in itself to justify scrutiny of the plant and animal worlds.
- While emperors amassed great collections of all sorts of things including animals and birds, butterflies and flowers (pleasure gardens, parks and hunting grounds) no encouragement/system for lesser mortals to do likewise
- to this day, China lacks the western concept of contemporary touristic activities of ‘birders’ and ‘birding’ and wildlife safaris: they have no counterpart in either ancient or modern China for domestic tourists.

CHINESE WILDLIFE TOURISM

- * Wildlife is an extant component of China's tourism activity today, but its manifestations tend to be rather different from the west.
 - Captive animals (zoos) not wildlife/wilderness tours dominate (slides of Yuquang Scenic Spot Zoo, Hubei Province)
 - Snake farms - select the appropriate live snake for soup, or wine or gall bladder, take it home in a wire cage (slides of Snake Farm, Guangdong)
 - National parks and nature reserves have zoos and aviaries attached (after all, one cannot see the animals in the wild because of the thick forests!) (slides of Shennongjia Nature Reserve animal cages)
 - Theme parks - nothing to do with animals - often have mini-zoos and circuses attached (slides Miniature Three Gorges Miniature Scenic Spots World Theme Park, Yichang animal show)
 - totally consistent with Chinese values that wild animals (*'ye-shang dong-wu'*) are dangerous and need to be eliminated or at least confined where they cannot cause harm.
 - Very popular - restaurants with menus of wild animals, many of which can be viewed live and personally selected for the eating.

POLICY & LEGISLATION

- * Policy and legislation differs markedly from popular ‘cultural’ values.
 - The Government has broad, ambitious legislation on nature reserves, biosphere reserves, wildlife management and conservation, which embraces western values of conservation unreservedly –
 - in stark contrast to the practices of management which continue for the most part to be culturally embedded in traditional values.
 - In 1980 China was one of the first signatories of the IUCN’s World Conservation Strategy (IUCN 1980).
 - In 1988 China promulgated the *Law for Protection of Wild Animals*, and subsequently formulated a series of related laws, regulations and administrative procedures such as *Regulations for the Management of the Forest and Wildlife Type Nature Reserves*, *List of Key Wild Animals under State Protection* and *List of Endangered Rare Plants under State Protection*

POLICY & LEGISLATION

- * Policy and legislation differs markedly from popular ‘cultural’ values.
 - The *Regulations of the Peoples Republic of China on Nature Reserves 1994* incorporates reserves with core areas based on biological values from which public entry is prohibited and all economic activity is to be excluded.
 - Article 26 states: “It is prohibited to carry out such activities as cutting trees, grazing, hunting, fishing, gathering medicinal herbs, reclaiming, burning, mining, stone quarrying and sand dredging, etc.”
 - Article 28 prohibits “tourism, production and trading activities” from the core areas (PRC 1994).

POLICY & LEGISLATION - The 'Implementation Gap'

- * However there is a large 'implementation gap' between the rhetoric and intention of the legislation and actual practice on the ground
 - while the ideology of strict protection for wild animals and nature reserves is incorporated in legislation, there exists no national policy on ecotourism for reserves and -
 - tourism in nature reserves is largely uncontrolled
 - A study of 83 reserves (54 of them Level A national nature reserves) in 1998 by Zhuge Ren (2000), revealed that 68 (82%) had at least one prohibited activity occurring inside their boundaries, 54 of them had 3 or 4 such activities, and 14 of them had 5 to 8 prohibited activities.
 - 40% of all reserves he surveyed had forms of tourism activity within their boundaries, including within their core areas.

POLICY & LEGISLATION - The 'Implementation Gap'

- * Zhang *et al* (2001) identified a similar implementation gap with reference to wildlife management.
 - Continuing lack of knowledge on the status and ecology of animal populations in China's biosphere reserves;
 - Very little if any resources invested on animal management;
 - No programs in place in any of the reserves to identify and survey wild animals;
 - A poor knowledge base of protected area managers in wildlife ecology and management; and
 - Continuing problems with wildlife poaching and collecting despite the establishment of reserves. (Zhang *et al*, 2000, p.2).

POLICY

Wildlife Conservation Programs

- * Notwithstanding the implementation gap, China has utilised its legislative foundations to embark on a number of wildlife conservation programs.
- * Included are the “**Seven Key Rescue Projects**”:
 - *The Giant Panda Conservation Project:*
 - *The Rescue Project for the Crested Ibis*
 - *The Conservation and Development Project for the Chinese Alligator*
 - *The Rescue Project for Eld's Deer*
 - *The Rescue Project for Wild Horses*
 - *The Rescue Project for Saiga*
 - *The Rescue Project for Pere David's Deer*

The Rescue Project for Pere David's Deer

- * Pere Davids's deer became extinct in the wild in China in the 17th century, and the last surviving captive animal died in the early 20th century.
- * However small captive populations survived outside China.
- * Three reserves have been established for the re-introduction to China of Pere David's deer since 1985 when the deer were first returned.
- * From just 22 animals in 1985, China's herds now number more than 800.
- * An examination of the dynamics of this conservation effort provides useful insights into value systems surrounding wildlife tourism in China. The Biosphere Wetlands reserve of Tin-ur-zhou in Hubei Province where the deer have been re-intorduced into their original habitat forms the focus of this study.



Pere David's Deer

(Elaphurus davidianus)

(Source of sketch:
Beck & Wemmer 1983,
frontispiece).

Chinese - *milu*

Commonly called
"*sibuxiang*"
("unlike any of the
four")

by Chinese people,
because of its
horse's head,
donkey's tail, ox
hooves and deer
antlers.

The Rescue Project for Pere David's Deer

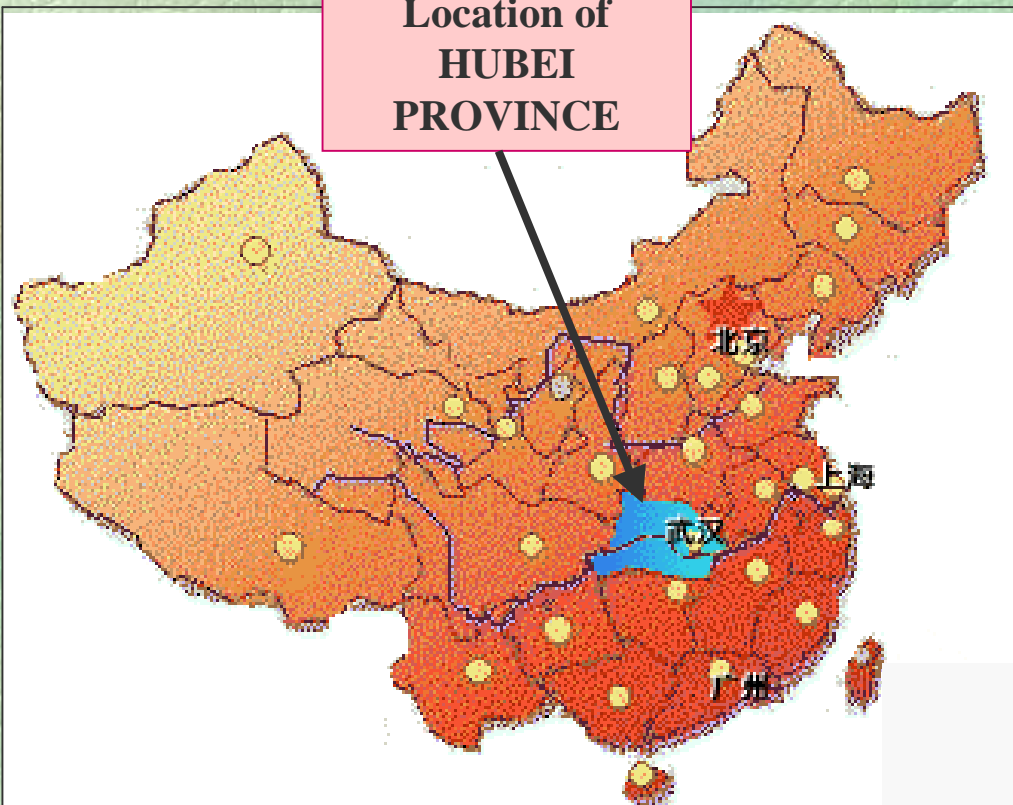
- * According to Guo & Pang (2000), Pere David's deer had long been the symbol of imperial power in China.
- * Stags' antlers burgeoned in spring and were shed in autumn, in line with nature's cycle, "but Chinese ancients interpreted this phenomenon as a sign from heaven, and regarded David's deer as an auspicious animal."
- * Contemporary belief held that imperial power was bestowed from Heaven (emperors were 'sons of heaven') and emperors "wanted their power to be passed on forever within their dynasty, in the same way as the antlers of the David's deer would continue to be discarded and replaced.
- * The emperors would therefore hold grand ceremonies outdoors every autumn, to observe the spectacle of David's deer shedding their horns" (Guo & Pang, 2000, p.1). For hundreds of years emperors kept herds of captive David's deer for both ritual and hunting purposes.
- * Maintaining Pere David's deer numbers in perpetuity may be seen as one of the earliest forms of wildlife conservation and sustainability
- * The last imperial herd occupied 320 square kms, with a solid stone/brick wall more than 72 kms long (*Nan-Hai-zi* Imperial Hunting Park, Beijing, 1900).

The Rescue Project for Pere David's Deer

- * In 1865 a French missionary in China, Pere David, an amateur naturalist, saw the *milu* in the Imperial Hunting Ground and obtained two hides, skulls and antlers which were sent to Paris for identification
- * They were identified as a new species - *Elaphurus davidianus* - and aroused great interest in Europe.
- * Pairs were sent by the Emperor to the Berlin, Paris and London zoos, where they increased to about 20.
- * The Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900 saw the destruction of the entire imperial herd of *milu* and -
- * When the European countries learnt of the extinction of the deer in China, they pooled all of their remaining animals (18) and sent them to the Duke of Bedford's deer park at Woburn Abbey.
- * There they bred successfully until by the 1980's there were more than 800 David's deer in more than 120 collections around the world.
- * In 1985, as a gift from Britain to China to mark the agreement to hand Hong Kong back to Chinese sovereignty, 22 deer were returned to China.
- * First re-established in the restored imperial hunting grounds (now a zoo) at Nan-Hai-zi, as numbers increased two wetlands reserves in the deer's original habitat on the banks of the Yangtze were established - Dafeng Reserve and Tin-ur-zhou Wetlands in Hubei.



**Location of
HUBEI
PROVINCE**





The Rescue Project for Pere David's Deer

- * **Tin-ur-zhou** is one of China's 16 designated wetlands of national importance.
 - Some 568 plant species and 156 bird species have been recorded there.
 - Tin-ur-zhou Wetlands have been placed under the control of the Department of Economic Development Administration rather than National Parks or even the Hubei Tourism Bureau.
 - The County needs to 'develop' the wetlands for revenue and E.D.A. opens the door to development funds, investment loans and a better tax regime than the other management options. The 'Guiding Principle' is 'constructive protection' - development which has a balance with conservation -
 - but this means that the driver for conservation is economic development.
 - Two revenue raising activities have thus been identified for David's deer: -
 - ecotourism
 - deer products
 - By 2001 more than 200 head of deer -
 - Aiming for a herd of 800 to allow sustainable annual culling for deer products -
 - and 2 million visitors per year within five years
 - The original 'ecotourism' development plan called for tourists to visit the processing abattoirs and exit through the deer products retail outlet.
 - Recommendations (by the authors of this paper) to revise these forms of tourism are under current consideration by the County authorities

Conclusions

- * The issue of wildlife tourism in China counter-poses western ethics and moral values about conservation with Chinese traditional values based on utilitarian consumption.
- * Tourism development inevitably means in Chinese terms the construction of something for economic gain, and -
- * the tenet of minimising human intervention/presence that underlies the western concept of wilderness wildlife tourism, is lacking.
- * Western environmental ethics make the value judgement that species ought to exist, and that humans therefore have a responsibility to ensure their survival for their intrinsic worth -
- * where-as the Chinese view is a pragmatic anthropocentric one which makes value judgements about whether a species ought to exist if it cannot provide a benefit to humans, or is dangerous to humans, or is in competition for scarce resources.
- * The Chinese concept of 'man improving on nature' is evident in many of the activities undertaken inside the boundaries of nature reserves, and -
- * the tension between western and oriental values about wildlife tourism and David's deer in Tin-ur-zhou is not confined to Hubei Province but present throughout reserves and national parks in all Provinces.
- * Over time it is anticipated that the environmental ethics and principles of conservation embodied in Chinese legislation, slowly taking root, will eventually be applied in the management of wildlife and reserves.