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"Approaches to Conserving Vulnerable Wildlife in China: Does the Colour of Cat Matter—if it Catches Mice?"

Harris, Richard B.

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China's environmental problems are well known, but recently its record in the area of wildlife conservation, particularly with regard to endangered species, has come under scrutiny. Environmental values colour how we in the West view both China's past experience with wildlife and what strategies it should adopt to foster better conservation. Chinese have long taken a utilitarian view of wildlife, valuing species primarily as resources for man's use and only secondarily for other reasons. However, China has not developed institutions capable of sustaining the desired use of wildlife in the face of ever-growing demands. I suggest that Western criticisms of Chinese utilitarian attitudes are inappropriate, ineffective, and possibly counter-productive: deep-seated cultural mores change slowly. Instead, Westerners concerned with the fate of China's wildlife should assist the development of systems that act to channel demand for wildlife's material benefits toward investment in conservation. Such systems will likely require devolution of considerable control to local levels, strengthening incentives to favour long- over short-term benefits, and—notwithstanding common Western attitudes—substantial consumptive use of wildlife.

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