

## **Society/China: Green Dragon film producer discusses China's green building movement**

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*As China gears up to host this year's Olympics and the international community tries to engage this developing nation to reduce emissions, steps are being taken by the national and local governments in China to create a more sustainable society. During today's OnPoint, Caroline Harrison, creative director and co-producer of The Green Dragon media project and film, discusses her experiences filming her new documentary that focuses on the sustainable design movement in China. She addresses public reaction to the movement and discusses the expert interviews she conducted while in China. She also talks about some of the major challenges facing the Chinese as they try to create a more sustainable environment.*

### **Transcript**

Monica Trauzzi: Welcome to OnPoint. I'm Monica Trauzzi. Joining me today is Caroline Harrison, creative director and co-producer of the Green Dragon Media Project and Film, which is being shown at Washington's Environmental Film Festival this week. Caroline, thanks for coming on the show.

Caroline Harrison: Thank you, Monica.

Monica Trauzzi: Caroline, the Green Dragon film focuses on the sustainable design movement in China. Talk a bit about how you came to this project and how the idea for this came about.

Caroline Harrison: Sure. Well, honestly, Monica, there's a very grass-roots story behind that. I went to the opening of a green cafe in Monterey, California, where I live, and there I was talking, I think over a plate of brie and a glass of wine, to a young man called Max Perelman, who was a graduate student at the Monterey Institute. And he started talking to me about China and he was off to China in three weeks to do what seemed to be an extraordinarily high-level research project into this subject. He was going to be talking to some of the leading developers in China, high-level government officials, etc., etc. he went on and I was fascinated. And his end product was going to be a written PDF that I didn't think many people were going to read. And so I said to him, as a filmmaker, you've got an extraordinary subject. Why not make a film? And so we decided, over that plate of brie and perhaps another glass of wine, that we would go ahead and we would put together proposals over the next three days. And we had enough money to go to China in I think it was three days.

Monica Trauzzi: Wow, so it happened really quickly.

Caroline Harrison: Very, very quickly and we were on a plane in three weeks.

Monica Trauzzi: Wow. And so why the title Green Dragon?

Caroline Harrison: Sure. The dragon, in China, is a symbol which really is in the mind of just about every citizen in China. It represents almost a dream. The dragon is a representation of who they are. It's

a state of identity. So, obviously, we went with the dragon as that symbol, and then the Green Dragon rather than the Red Dragon for instance. Is there a Green Dragon out there?

Monica Trauzzi: And I want to get into some of the nitty-gritty of your shooting and what exactly is shown in the piece. We've been hearing so much about the poor air quality in China and I want to hear about your experiences there in terms of breathing and pollution. What were your experiences while you were shooting?

Caroline Harrison: Sure, OK. There are some photographs on our Web site, I think of me hanging out of a car window with a mask over my face. I mean that says it all. It is like that. It is difficult to breathe, all the black gunk comes out your nose at the end of the day, etc. But I will say this, that China's environmental challenge, as I'm sure your viewers know, they hear a lot about, there's some really start issues over there. To throw a statistic out there, 400,000 people a year die of death related to air pollution and they spend 200 billion a year, 200 billion related to environmental damage. That's a lot of money, but when toxicity, if you like, gets into your water stream people end up very sick and it's difficult to clean up your water. They have that issue. When your air fills up with particles that people really shouldn't be breathing it can remain in the air, but when a big gust of wind comes along it will get blown away. Or when the rain comes along it will get rained down and then it's clean again. So it's a relatively quick fix problem, air quality. To say one more point, their main issue is that 80 percent of the air pollution in the urban areas comes from mobile sources and that means cars and trucks and all of that. That's their challenge. They can clean it up quickly, if they stop putting out there, but it's the car that's the problem. Everyone wants one.

Monica Trauzzi: And that's a problem worldwide too, as we both know. Experts in your documentary discuss this sort of paradigm shift that's happening in the national government there over the last couple of years relating to sort of green issues. Talk about that, what does that mean? What's happening there?

Caroline Harrison: Well, this came through as a theme again and again and again for many of the experts that we were talking to. The central government is well aware of many issues and many solutions and they have been for a long time. They're a very research heavy type of a government. They want to know the facts before they make the decision to move forward. You know, China is an enormous country. It's like an enormous ship and it takes a lot of momentum to slow that ship down and move it in a new direction and that's what they're doing right now. And I think that all of those years of research which have been taking place now come to a point where they know where they've got to steer their ship, but it's a big thing to move and they're just getting all of these new mandates and new laws into action and trying to filter that education down to the local government level.

Monica Trauzzi: And let's talk about that, because what is happening on the local level? What is the reaction from the people on the street, the general public, who have other issues to worry about besides building a green skyscraper? What is their reaction?

Caroline Harrison: Well, I've got two answers to that and the first is, with regards to the local government, what's happening at that level, and then what's happening at a general public level. And I think they're different. So, at a local government level first there's, you see, it's a difficult one to answer actually, because there's a mentality in a way about Chinese people that's very different to the way that we are. And I'm not an expert on it, but there's *guanxi* that has to be built, a sense of relationship. Particularly within local government level you really have to be answerable to the next person above

you, so risks aren't taken very easily at the local level. But with this whole paradigm shift that people are talking about the central government has to set out a few new mandates. So every five years they have the five-year plan for that five years and the local governments have to meet certain requirements and that's how they further their careers. So they're all desperately trying to work out how to do this and one of the mandates that's been laid down is the 50 percent, every new building in China has to use 50 percent less energy than was used for a comparable building in 1989. And I think they've only got 2 1/2 years left now until the end of this five-year plan, current five-year plan, to actually achieve that. So they're all desperately trying to work out how do we do it? But at one level it's that they're not that open to rapid change because everything has to be done in the way that it's done, but they've got quite a challenge on their hands right now. The second answer, with regards to the general public, well, this is, again, an interesting one because the Chinese people, their whole culture is rooted in a sense of what is cyclical. There was a wonderful interview we had with the guy who was saying have you seen the traffic in Beijing? We're like, yes, we've seen the traffic in Beijing. Have you seen how, even when the traffic light goes red, nobody stops, they just keep moving with the flow? That's a very Chinese way. You keep moving with the flow. There's a pattern of behavior that you follow. And, basically, the idea of green is very much a sort of solution-oriented way of thinking and the Chinese people understand that everything has to feed back into itself. There has to be a solution to a problem. They know there's problems. There's enough media out there about it and some people are suffering from it, so they know there's problems, so they're very solution oriented. And I think it's a very logical people. It's a very logical thing to go green on a mass scale. It's just a question of whether it pays enough. You know, whether it works out financially.

Monica Trauzzi: Right, and are there concerns because they've basically grown their GDP through their use of coal, are there concerns that by switching to something else, by stepping away from this coal-driven economy, that the GDP is going to drop and that they're not going to flourish as much economically?

Caroline Harrison: Honestly, I don't think there is a lot of fear. When you start breaking it down and you start asking a developer to spend 12 percent more on the green building, then there's fear because the way the policy has set up right now he's the one who's meeting that cost. It's not distributed across different parties. But when you look at the nation, no, I didn't pick up on there being a lot of fear. And we won't go into it too much, but they are coal based. That's where they get a lot of their energy right now. There's various new technologies that they're looking into seriously on a national level for sort of capping the gases that come outside, etc., that comes out of that process and regenerating energy through different technology using that. So, they can still be using a base of coal, but not be generating nearly as much.

Monica Trauzzi: You had one expert in the documentary who sort of gave this counterpoint and he's the chairman of a Chinese development company and what he said was very interesting. He said, "The life of the building can be hundreds of years, but the green products that are saving energy today will only last 30 to 40 years. Thirty years from now aren't the products we use today going to become a disaster for humanity? Today's solutions are only a transition for what's coming next." Do you think that message is being lost in China, in the U.S. where we're sort of being told that this is the solution, but maybe not for the long term? Maybe it's only going to be a solution for a few decades. Is that message lost in translation?

Caroline Harrison: I'm glad you picked up on that, that's good. For anybody who hasn't seen the film, that's the statement, if you like, that the film ends on.

Monica Trauzzi: Yeah.

Caroline Harrison: Yes, it is getting lost and it's funny because the stark reality of being in China is that they, by and large, run very, very low-impact lifestyles. And there's still a certain amount of traditional Chinese architecture around and it's all built completely low tech, low energy, and that's the sort of building that will last for hundreds and hundreds of years without any kind of technology needing to be replaced. Whereas, a lot of the mass market solution that is being offered and the green products that are being talked about, whether it's HVAC systems or solar technology, a lot of those technologies will need to be replaced within say 30 to 50 years. And, yes, it does potentially become trash. So he's got a very interesting point. And why I put it at the end of the film there was because there is something that struck me about the Chinese culture and their sort of kind of deeply entrenched philosophy that made me think, huh, these guys not only have a lot to teach the rest of the world, but they also have the opportunity to kind of leapfrog what everybody else is doing because they're building from scratch and they have so much more to build in the next 20 years. And if they get it together to do this sustainable development on a mass scale, I think it will look very different to what it might look like in this country for instance.

Monica Trauzzi: So, obviously the story doesn't end there because there are still many unknowns dealing with their sustainable design future. What's next for you and your production goals? Are you going to stick with this story and with this project? What's next?

Caroline Harrison: I'm glad you asked that too. Well, we have had an extraordinary opportunity that's come along and it's not set in stone yet, but there is an NGO in China, and there's very few NGOs in China, headed by an extraordinary Chinese woman called Jinji Iman. And they work closely with the central party school to generate material that teaches Chinese mayors and government officials about sustainable development. So it's mandatory, for instance, for every mayor in China, when he gets promoted, to actually attend the school. It's like a boot camp for various things, learning how to do their job and part of that is now, and it's only been recently added, the sustainability leg of that. So we've been asked to potentially produce films that will be incorporated into that course. So, that's going to be on an international level in China, but I hope that we are going to be able to deliver something there, but at the same time, use those filming trips and that information that we get because it's going to be a lot of very interesting information about all aspects of sustainability in China that will generate a series that will then get publicly broadcast over here.

Monica Trauzzi: Thank you for coming on. That was very informative. That was great.

Caroline Harrison: All right.

Monica Trauzzi: Thank you.

Caroline Harrison: Thank you, Monica.

Monica Trauzzi: This is OnPoint. I'm Monica Trauzzi. Thanks for watching.  
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