

University Sponsorship Programme 2005-06: Student's diary

**Project : Chinese White Dolphin–
Population Monitoring**

Date : 5 to 15 February 2006

Student: Vivian Lam



9th February, 2006 (Thursday)

Dear Diary,

Today was spent mostly on traveling, eating and talking to people. Traveled almost 5 hours, with 3 changes back to the headquarters at Chongzuo. This was because the weather changed abruptly and we would not be able to go out by boat for the next few days, therefore Qin lao shi thought it would be better for us to head back. This gave us a new insight on real life research, it is easily constrained by environmental factors. But I guess this is natural, since we are working on wild animals, and not captive ones. There's bound to be a lot of unpredictable situations. I think this is part of the "fun" though since working in this field is going to be a lot more challenging.

We were supposed to go pick up Xiao Long's teacher, but she was late. Met a graduate of PKU (Wang Wei Jia) at the bus station and Qin lao shi asked him to bring us to the headquarters first and we parted ways. We found out that Wang Wei Jia is working at a nearby village to help farmers but he studied electronics at university. A very nice guy who wants to dedicate his life to help poor villagers in the rural areas.

We were so happy and surprised to find a lot of people our age at the headquarters. A great thing about Prof. Pan is that he emphasizes on education a lot! He loves talking and teaching us about the things he's worked on or just sharing his everyday experiences. There's Tu Bun (Year 3 english major @ PKU), Zhang Bo Ju (Year 3 Ecotourism major @ PKU), Ku Gwa (Year 4 Economics @ PKU), Xiao Tang (Guangxi University), Wei Xiong (PKU), Zhang Qing (Medicine student @ PKU) and Gary (University of Illinois). They're all here to help the Professor with different things - some

are helping him on the translation, some are helping him with the white-headed langur research, some are helping him on the excavation, some do a bit of everything =)

While chatting with Shadow before sleeping, we came to the topic of losing passion for our field and what we do. We both thought that it would be quite easy to lose interest in terms of what we do in conservation, as most of the things done in research are quite repetitive and monotonous i.e. collecting data. In my opinion, if we have conservation aims like what Prof. Pan has for every single one of his project, then this aim can keep us motivated through the hard times, as we know that the data collected would be able to help save animals, would actually make a difference in the world. There's also a difference between the working styles of China and Hong Kong, we realized Prof. Pan researched a long time on each of the species he has chosen. It has been no less than 10 years for the Panda as well as the white-headed langur, however, in Hong Kong, most projects are completed in 2-3 years. Prof. Pan aims to learn everything about the animal and then setting up conservation measures to save that certain species. Also talked about getting more experiences on following professors on real-life research, wondered if there are any other sources of funding that could support us to see more and learn more, going to different projects. I think this has been a great experience so far, we needed this sort of experience to broaden our horizons. Not so much in scientific work, as we were there for only a short period of time and there are many different techniques used at different stages of the project. But in terms of observing how a scientific project takes place, not just the results but the whole processes, including the ups and downs. Much time is spent puzzling over the correct method, sometimes work is slow and you feel like you're going nowhere. There are also a lot of politics included. Also experiencing fulfillment when a long existing problem has been solved!

It felt good to be back at the headquarters and meeting Prof. Pan again. It makes a whole lot of difference to meet so many people from different parts of the world, yet having the same aims and goals as yourself. I think it really does give you a boost in your enthusiasm and passion towards conservation as you feel that you are not working alone in a sea of practical, money-orientated businessman.