

From Beijing Besieged by Waste to Plastic China: A Conversation with Artist Wang Jiuliang¹

Yang Jing¹

*Wang Jiuliang is a Chinese photographer and video artist based in Beijing. Since 2008, he has been focusing on the issue of waste. From 2008 to 2013 he investigated more than 460 landfills around Beijing and made a 76-minute documentary film, *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, which attracted extensive media attention in China and abroad. Wang Jiuliang won a Gold Award as Outstanding Artist of the Year at the 2009 Lianzhou International Photography Festival. Since 2014, Wang Jiuliang launched an investigation on imported plastic wastes in China. In November 2016, *Plastic China* was awarded the 2016 IDFA Special Jury Award for First Appearance. He is regarded not only as an artist, but also as a social and environmental activist.*

Yang Jing: We all see waste as one of the most severe environmental problems in our daily life and we usually avoid rubbish dumps. However, you took waste as the subject of your work. As far as I remember, in one interview with Phoenix TV, you mentioned that when you were working on a video project about the worship of Chinese traditional deities and ghosts in 2008 in your Shandong hometown, you couldn't even find a piece of clean land for your video shooting. Was that your first encounter with the waste issue?

Wang Jiuliang: Yes, although I was producing wastes every day, I had never regarded it as a big problem before then. However, in my hometown, a place carrying a special meaning for me, I was shocked by the scattered wastes everywhere. Such a painful feeling was like the feelings of a little boy who had kept his favourite toy and after many years he suddenly found it had already been destroyed. Anyway, the love for hometown is deep in my heart. When I was a child, what I liked most was to roll in the field in spring, bathing in the warm sunshine, having my bare feet touching the cool ploughed soil and smelling the fragrance of the soil; that was such a delicate and nice feeling. My feeling for my hometown first forced me to think about why and how the change has happened.

Looking through the composition of those wastes, I found that most of them came from fertilizer and pesticide package bags. My hometown was a high efficiency agricultural area in Shandong. The fertilizer and pesticide package bags I saw were not big packs. These products, such as foliar fertilizer, fruit protective agent and root-inducing substances were all in small packs for convenient use, reminding me of the instant noodle, sausage and instant coffee package. Quite like the fast-food culture in

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the consumption society, this fast-food culture in agriculture made a big amount of waste as well. I looked through the manufacturers of these products — BASF, Monsanto and DuPont. The products of these international chemical companies flooded into this rural area in China. Chinese farmers used the seeds, fertilizers and pesticides produced by these international companies, worked hard on Chinese soil, and then exported their products to Japan and South Korea. What did it mean? It means that these Chinese farmers were one component of modern capitalist machinery; they were workers of industrial agriculture. Behind the waste issue was the global capital flow. If I wanted to present my findings and ideas, and wastes would undoubtedly be a vehicle or a breakthrough point for me. This speaks my first encounter the issue of waste.

Maybe you have read from media reports that at the beginning my project was not *Beijing Besieged by Waste*. I first wanted to make a project titled *Supermarket* to have a critical reflection on our consumption society through the issue of waste. Later, to get some supplementary materials for *Supermarket*, I went to shoot rubbish dumps. When I was there, I was shocked! Before that, in my mind, rubbish only meant dirtiness and a bad smell; I never thought that the severity of this issue was totally beyond my imagination. It's to say, I first went to find the supplemental materials for my planned big and profound project; afterwards, I found the supplemental materials to be the most severe problem. Soon after that, I changed to this project. The *Supermarket*, as a video art project, was put aside.

Yang Jing: So, you had already started the *Supermarket* project, but your findings guided you to the waste issue, which gradually departed from your initial idea?

Wang Jiuliang: Exactly. I never mentioned this in media interviews, because I think they have no interest in this. But since you are doing research, I believe that it is necessary to map out the whole context.

Yang Jing: After *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, you started *Plastic China* project. I was interested in the shift of your concern. Saying *Beijing Besieged by Waste* was still a general revelation of waste issue, *Plastic China* was focused on one type of wastes — imported plastic wastes. It revealed how these plastic wastes came to China and what irreversible damage they brought to the workers in the industry, to their families and to the local environment. How did you shift your focus from a general concern of the waste issue to imported plastic wastes?

Wang Jiuliang: Since I started to explore this field, with the passage of time and the advance of my investigation, I found many answers as well as obtaining more confusions and questions. So long as I still had the desire for exploration, I needed to dig in deeply. My working experience was an endless process of finding answers followed by getting more new questions. When I finished the three years' work on *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, we already knew the scale of the waste issue, but how to

solve it? Actually, this question was in my mind from the very beginning. After a long period of investigation, this question made me worry a lot. Without deep understanding of this issue, we might be able to talk easily about how to solve the waste issue; however, with a deeper understanding of this problem, we became more cautious about giving the solution. The main waste disposal methods include landfill, incineration, composting and recycling. We saw the disadvantages of each solution; neither incineration nor landfill was harmless, and composting not so practical. It seemed sorting and recycling would be a better solution. At that moment, everybody was talking about sorting and recycling. Maybe the curiosity of an artist or being by nature an investigator soon led me to find the problems in waste recycling. The truth was not as nice as we thought.

In 2011, I went to Berkley, California for an exhibition. I had a deep interest in how wastes were processed in the USA; so with the assistance of an NGO, GAIA, I went to a large sorting and recycling plant in the Bay Area. I saw that after a fast sorting, the unrecyclable wastes directly went to landfill while the recyclable ones were divided into glass, plastic, metal and paper. The manager showed me around the plant and introduced me to the whole procedure and the advantages of sorting and recycling. According to his introduction, more than 80% waste was recycled and he was actually pretty proud of it. We had a pleasant talk. Then, before I was about to leave, pointing to the container trucks in the yard, he said to me: look, these are going to China! He immediately realized he had made an indiscreet remark and totally avoided this topic afterwards. After a quick sorting, all paper and plastic wastes were loaded in container trucks, transported to Auckland harbour and then shipped to China. These paper and plastic wastes from their municipal solid wastes were directly exported to China without even having been washed and disfigured. Afterwards, I got the 2011 data of the waste materials exportation from California to China; the plastic wastes alone came to more than 1 million tons. 72% was directly shipped to China and 28% via Hong Kong. I also found that from 2010 to 2015, that plastic wastes imported to China each year came to more than eight million tons. My heart was filled with an inexpressibly poignant feeling when I finally realized the severity and scale of this problem.

Yang Jing: More than eight million tons each year?

Wang Jiuliang: Exactly. One container is for 20 tons, so, eight million tons mean 400 000 containers. By the way, this figure was not accurate; the real figure was more than 10 million tons. Each year, California exported more than 1 million tons of plastic wastes to China. How about other states of the USA? How about other countries? After I returned to China, I immediately started my investigation. I was eager to know where these wastes were going. Searching and tracing online clues, I found that most plastic wastes went to Wen'an, a county in Hebei Province. Wen'an was the largest sorting and recycling centre for imported plastic wastes. Later, I had a deep investigation in Tianjin, Hebei, Jiangsu and Guangdong and found large-scale

processing sites of plastic wastes in these provinces. 9.6 million tons plastic wastes would mean 1 ton per square kilometre in China. Our land would be totally covered by these white pieces. What an awful image! The worst part of the story was those loading and processing sites. In one small town, I saw thousands of family firms processing plastic wastes, which had destructive impacts on local environment. The ground water was totally contaminated and became undrinkable in the coming decades. The fumes from waste incineration were poisonous and severely harmful to people's health. One day I went to Wen'an for an investigation, in one open rubbish dump, I saw so many colourful plastic pieces, but none of them made in China. Reading the letters and signs on these pieces, I figured out that they were from Germany, Spain, Japan, the USA and etc. In this place, you could find the plastic wastes from almost every developed country. This was the United Nations of wastes, a wasteland of the world. It was on China's territory. What a super-realistic and ridiculous scene!

Yang Jing: It is so ridiculous. We knew that the plastic waste pollution in China is severe, but we always thought that those wastes are made in China. I suppose that most people knew nothing about those imported plastic wastes.

Wang Jiuliang: Yes, the environmental problem caused by wastes in China is not only from China's own wastes; beyond the public view, China has been processing the wastes from the whole world. China is the largest importer of paper wastes, plastic wastes and electronic wastes. Immediately, I decided to do a project, a project about the "wasteland of the world, the recycling centre of the world".

Yang Jing: Was it the initial idea of *Plastic China*?

Wang Jiuliang: Right. First I wanted to have an investigation and tell people the facts about waste recycling. People didn't recognize the problem, and though many NGOs and media were merely talking about the benefits of recycling, instead of making an easy judgment, I wanted to make people to reach more comprehensive information. The more information they have, the more accurate an understanding they would have and a more accurate evaluation they could make. In fact, not only the Chinese were ignorant, but even most American people had no idea of where these plastic wastes were going. Afterwards, when I e-mailed my colleagues in Sweden, Denmark and Spain, they were very surprised as well. A Norwegian NGO was undertaking an investigation and they used my materials. They told me that in Norway, 99 % people didn't know about the truth of this issue. You know that the environmental protection has been always good in Scandinavian countries, people have environmental awareness, emphasizing sorting and recycling, and utilization of waste, but most people there didn't know that their waste went to China.

Yang Jing: So there were even plastic wastes from Norway?

Wang Jiuliang: Yes, from Norway, Denmark and Sweden. This finding made me feel bad. Until now, I haven't yet found plastic wastes from Finland, but I'm not so sure — maybe Finnish words are more difficult to identify. Of course, plastic wastes exportation from Scandinavian countries to China was certain companies' actions, nothing to do with their governments. Many Chinese companies and individuals, driven by greed for high profit, imported these wastes under the name of recyclable resources and processed them in those unqualified family firms, even though China has strict regulation on the importation of recyclable resources.



Stills from video "Plastic China", 2016, courtesy of the artist.

Yang Jing: This finding is so shocking.

Wang Jiuliang: It is the truth. This is our world. Look, this is Sweden, this is the USA and this is China. The world is so small. You might never imagine that a piece of rubbish from a family living in Brooklyn, New York would finally find its way into the hands of a Chinese country boy. The Chinese country boy and the kid of a middle-class Brooklyn family are connected together by waste. This was the most ridiculous point in my finding. I can tell you a story. I videoed a little boy who was hanging around rubbish dumps every day. One day, he found an unused SIM card and he asked his father to insert this card into mobile phone. Immediately a message in

Dutch appeared on the screen: welcome to China. This was pretty sarcastic. This SIM card is still kept in my home, it is a LEBARA card — it sounds like a Swedish company. There is another story. I saw a little boy wrapping a piece of waste newspaper around his body, fixed by waste tape, pretending to be Spiderman. I noticed that the news printed in this newspaper was the wedding ceremony of Princess Zara Phillips. The headline photo of the wedding ceremony was on the back of the little boy. Once I saw that, the exciting *Trumpet Voluntary for Wedding March* started to play in my brain, and in front of my eyes was the little boy running in rubbish hills. These messages mingled together in my head, the absurdity of the world is beyond our imagination.

Yang Jing: Yes, at this point, the world was integrated into a whole in such a super ridiculous way.

Wang Jiuliang: I hope this has answered your question about the shift from *Beijing Besieged by Waste* to *Plastic China*. The work process was rather long. Because when I shifted to the issue of plastic wastes, I recognized this as an almost independent topic. What is plastic? We know that it is a kind of macromolecular material. How many types of macromolecular materials are there and how about the nature of each type? The fume from waste incineration is poisonous, but why? What's the toxicity of the fume? We knew that it produces dioxin, what is the chemical formula of dioxin? What harms does it make to human health? I have to make myself familiar with all these things; otherwise I can't go on with this project. So, the way I worked was different from many other artists.

Yang Jing: I feel that your work was like a treasure digger, when you accidentally opened a side door in which you thought there wouldn't be anything special, you soon found that you entered an unexplored world.

Wang Jiuliang: Yes, it is like this. But what I found was not treasure, but rubbish, haha... there were more hiding questions. So, the conception of this project was not from my preference for the subject, nor was it well established from the beginning. It was developed during the process of investigation. It was impossible to complete this project in one month or one year. Instead, it took three or five years. And after five years had passed, I found the work was still not completed, there was still endless uncertainty waiting ahead. Since the beginning of *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, I have been working on the issue of waste for 8 years.

Yang Jing: When did you start *Beijing Besieged by Waste* and finally complete it?

Wang Jiuliang: It started in October, 2008; it was completed at the end of 2011. Since 2012, I started *Plastic China*. Before then, I had already done preliminary planning and preparation in 2011. Video shooting started in May, 2012. From then on, I have been working on *Plastic China*. Now, we are almost at the ending stage, but still

working on graphic design, colour correction and subtitling.

Yang Jing: I heard that you took 4000 to 5000 photos for *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, or even more than 10 000?

Wang Jiuliang: Actually, I took more than 10 000 digital photos and 5 000 photos of 120 films. I made more than 60 hours video clips. At that time, we had a tight money budget, so we used DV tapes sparingly. I investigated more than 500 rubbish dumps. My motor bicycle odometer reading shows that I rode 15 000 kilometres for this project.

Yang Jing: Did you receive support from other people?

Wang Jiuliang: Yes, many people helped my work on *Beijing Besieged by Waste*. In 2009, I won the Golden Award for Excellent Artist of the Year at Lianzhou International Photo Festival. In my acceptance speech, I told the audience that I was only an executor. This project was completed through the conscious cooperation of many enterprises, institutions and individuals. Those were not just polite words; they were from the bottom of my heart. Taking an example, when I started *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, I didn't have a good camera; Bao Kun let me use his Mamiya RB67 camera and lenses. In the early stage of my work, I didn't have enough money; Lao Li helped me. When Bao Kun and I went to visit Lao Li and told him this project, Lao Li said to me that this was a good project. Then he gave me 20 000 RMB, his own money, and encouraged me to go on with this project. He said that this work was also for him and those who were too old to do it. Later, I often received money from Bao Kun, mostly the service fee he earned from his work for seminars and his royalty fee. Another story, Ouyang Xingkai, a photographer in Beijing, lent me his Canon EDS MARK 2. Later, Bao Kun introduced me to Zhou Qiyue, an owner of a photographic equipment shop in Beijing. He kindly lent me a panoramic camera which cost than 200 000 RMB at that time. Later, Xiao Yanqun gave me a scanner. It was rather expensive, above 30 000 RMB. So, a lot of people provided me with money and equipments. We worked on this project together. It's also worth noting the help from Jin Yongquan, the director of the Photography Department of *China Youth Daily* at that time. He thought that I might encounter dangers and helped me to get a special press card, which, he thought, might protect me in case of threats to my life. In addition, I used to borrow money from my good friend, Yang Xueping, always paying back and borrowing again. Later, I got more support from different people. There were many stories behind them. My budget was so tight that when I went for investigation and video shooting, I always chose cheap hostels. There were many hardships on my journeys, but that was not my concern, I was focused on how to shoot good video work.

Yang Jing: About the presentation of *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, how many different ways and mediums did you choose?

Wang Jiuliang: *Beijing Besieged by Waste* was a comprehensive investigation project. I didn't consider it as a typical artwork. At the beginning, it was an art project, but afterwards, art became less important in our work. Art was a medium, a vehicle; our ultimate purpose was not to have this work exhibited at MOMA. I used video, an art medium, to better reveal this issue, to better make the information reach the audience. The presentation of the issue was the most significant factor. The ways of presentation were multiple. The first part was a big volume of textual materials, including my thoughts. The second part was a big amount of photos; they were not only art photos, but also documentaries. The third part was a lot of small video clips. The last one was a video documentary of 72 min, available on Youtube. These forms and mediums are juxtaposed together. If I am speaking about which were more important, maybe the photos and the video documentary were more important. But actually, all these forms and mediums were presenting the same issue.

Yang Jing: In an interview with Xu Gehui, Phoenix TV's anchor person, you said that before 2008 you had already started making a video project, but your early work was far from social issues. It sounds different from *Beijing Besieged by Waste* and *Plastic China*. Can you give an introduction to your early project?

Wang Jiuliang: That was about Chinese worship in gods and ghosts, something rather illusory. As a series, it had three parts. The first part, titled *Afterlives*, told the stories of ghosts. The second part, titled *Honouring Souls*, explored the ancient funeral objects. Funeral objects have a long history in China. The well-known terracotta soldiers were the largest scaled funeral objects. The stone statues lined along the Spiritual Way of the Thirteen Tombs of the Ming Dynasty were also funeral objects. Before the Han dynasty, funeral objects were made of stone or pottery. Later, funeral objects were more made of paper. This video was about the different paper-made funeral objects and their meanings. The third part, titled *Paradise*, was about modern funeral objects, for example those paper-made Mercedes-Benz and BMW limousines, credit cards and US dollars. This project of ghost worship still indirectly reflected the reality of the world. That was my first solo exhibition and it was held at the 798 Art Zone. There were also limited edition photos for sale and I sold out many prints. That was a typical contemporary video art project. But soon after that, I felt this project was too distant from society. In September, 2008, more deeply feeling this, I talked with Bao Kun and I couldn't help crying. I felt so depressed. I was already 30 years old; when facing such a fast-changing society, I entirely indulged myself in my own little world. Bao Kun approved of my idea; he thought that I should look at the social reality. Engaging or not engaging means two different values of art, which leads to different paths of art making. The 2008 summer was a dividing line. When I told him the problem of waste I saw in my Shandong hometown, our ideas about art with social responsibility fitted in easily. He suggested me to go on and reminded me of the severe problem of waste in Beijing. So, soon after that, I started my investigation.

Yang Jing: When you were working on *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, your economic situation was very hard. Then, when working on *Plastic China*, how did you manage to get funding?

Wang Jiuliang: I would rather like to talk about this because I want to share my experience with other artists, so it might be helpful for them. As I mentioned, at the beginning, my friends and teacher supported me, but it was not a sustainable way. After *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, I realized that working merely with passion was not possible; I tried to find opportunities of commercial cooperation and sponsorship. The man sitting next to me is my first sponsor, Yue Guanting; his company sponsored me with the initial outlay. We thought that we could complete the video shooting in 3 to 5 months; later, we found it was far more difficult. One year afterwards, we ran out of money but the project was not complete. We had to find other sponsorships. Believing that our project was meaningful, we soon found a chance to cooperate with ZDF and received a grant of 120 000 RMB. Later, we sent out plan to more institutions that fund documentaries, including two well-known institutions, the Sundance Institute in the USA and the IDFA (International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam) Fund. We obtained a small grant from Sundance. In 2013, we received a grant of about 130 000 RMB from IDFA. All these supported us to go on. Later, CNEX, a Chinese documentary film foundation, became the main producer of this project and resolved the issue of follow-up funding. By the end we had received sponsorship of more than 2 million RMB in total. For an independent documentary project, it was a considerable sum of money. Many documentary makers worry about money; from my point of view, the core issue is that their project must have something of relevance to other people. My story about the imported plastic wastes in China does concern different people, so it had a lot of resonance on many different levels both within China and outside the country.

Yang Jing: The core value of a project must be its ability to resonate on different levels. I read in a news report that some people called you an artist, but others thought you were an environmentalist. You defined yourself as a social activist. Do you think if it is possible to integrate the role of artist, environmentalist and social activist into one?

Wang Jiuliang: I don't want to categorize myself in one specific way. In the circle of environmental protection, people called me an environmentalist; in the circle of contemporary art, I was seen as an artist. In a broader media circle and society, people thought that I did something useful to society and regarded me as a social activist. It was more defined by others, not by me. So, what I was didn't matter. Anyway, I don't want to define me as a pure artist, I think social activist might suit me better in a broader meaning. I worked for the social good, I chose art as the vehicle, I took environmental protection as my path, and photography and video as the medium and tool. I think this was the internal logic.

Yang Jing: Yes, this also relates to the understanding of art. We often consider artists as aloof and solitary, separating themselves from the real society and making art in their studios. Their work is somehow distant from specific social problems. But, do you think many contemporary works point to social issues?

Wang Jiuliang: Some works have a direct connection, some an indirect connection, and others no connection. If we talk about art's level of engagement level with society, I think there are several levels and we can find representative artists of each level. Whether at home or abroad, the situation is like this.

Yang Jing: Internationally, which artists who are directly involved with social issues have been important influences?

Wang Jiuliang: I might know more about photographers and film artists. Internationally, there were many photographers who concentrated on social reality, such as Lewis Wickes Hine and William Eugene Smith. Many film artists also inspired me. I'm especially fond of some Korean films made at the beginning of this century, as the reflection of Korean Society, such as *Silenced*, *So-Won* and *The Attorney*. For example, the film *Silenced* played an active role in the passing of a law that protects children from sexual abuse. Among all mediums, photography and video art are the closest to social reality.

Yang Jing: Among contemporary artists who used art to engage with social issues, many are photographers and video artists. What do you think of this phenomenon?

Wang Jiuliang: Yes, it is based on the convenience of photography and video art. The medium has advantages. This was not at all coincidental. From the earliest time, photography was a mimic of the real world. It must be based on objective reality. It can't be a pure creation out of imagination. This was different from painting. Therefore, from the beginning, photography had this characteristic of reflecting the social reality; the later film was also like this. So, photography and video art have the closest connection to society and are most directly engaged with social issues.

Yang Jing: Many contemporary artists engaged in social work through their art. There are many socially engaged projects. For example, I investigated the artist Zhou Chunya's *Art for the Disabled Scheme* and I think there has some inherent aspects in common between your work and his project. Zhou Chunya is an artist, but his project went beyond an art work. According to your thinking, where is the border?

Wang Jiuliang: Yes, in this case, art is a vehicle for more content. When art enters real life, its ultimate goal is to bring certain change to society and people's lives instead of making an art piece. This is the basic difference between a social project and art as the artist's creation. I incline to the former work mode. For me, my ultimate

purpose is not the art work; artwork is only a triggering factor, triggering other things to happen. The ultimate goal, for me, is why I did this project. My goal was try to be a problem solver. To reveal this issue is the precondition to solve the problem. Revelation and solution are two parts of a whole. Whether as an artist or a peasant, I'm first a social person. When we see social injustice, how can we keep silent? If I don't keep silent, I must have my way to speak out and make change, no matter whether as an artist, a scientist, or a farmer. Everybody can do something in his own way. This explains why I set out to work on this — there is no need to overstate my personal role in this work.

Yang Jing: During the video shooting of *Beijing Besieged by Waste and Plastic China*, you encountered a lot of hardships and even dangers, because your investigation undermined certain people's vested interests. When artists engage with society, they take art work as a vehicle and wish to bring obvious and positive social change. What do you think are the prospects for this kind of work made in China?

Wang Jiuliang: This is a timely question. We can't cut our connection with society. There are certain conflicts and tension between my work and society. There is severe conflict in China today. Behind the waste issue was the contradiction between us and the chain of vested interest in vicious power. The struggle between us and the evil force was irreconcilable. The operation of this kind of project is becoming more difficult recently due to the control from the government. It does not matter if it is in an artistic way or other way, so long you want to engage in real social issues, you'll have to face more difficulties and ruthless suppression. Under this totalitarian system, many people even don't want to see or hear the truth. We have been focusing on social problems; so, we have naturally felt more pressure than other people. Certain things are beyond our imagination. For example, the ban of a Hong Kong movie *Ten Years* was followed by a boycott of this year's award ceremony of Hong Kong Film Awards. Another example was last year: because a Ukrainian film, *Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom* somehow related to Chinese political ideology, the broadcast of the Award Ceremony of the Oscars in 2015 was blocked in mainland China. This showed that the control of the media was already at a ridiculous level.

Yang Jing: I have one last question. Let's look forward to some positive changes. If you look back, what impact has your work had on the media, the public and the government and what noticeable change has it brought?

Wang Jiuliang: Until now, I only have done two projects. So, let's begin from *Beijing Besieged by Waste*. The feedback I received made me very happy. Due to our endeavour, more people have seen the facts and then, through the media, have forced our government to solve the problem. After *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, the central government and Wen Jiabao, then Chinese premier, enjoined Beijing municipal government to solve the problem. Soon, we saw that Beijing municipal government invested 10 billion RMB to solve the problem of rubbish dumps

surrounding Beijing. On a conservative estimate, among more than 500 rubbish dumps I investigated, more than 80% has been under effective control. Please notice my term “a conservative estimate”, so the result is quite satisfactory. About *Plastic China*, because this is still going-on and only certain video parts were released on the media, the obvious effects are still to come. But, we can see already that the sites we videoed have changed a lot. We received feedback that this business chain of imported waste has been changed. I don't want to overemphasize the role we played. But we know that because of our work some changes have taken place and that's enough. For example, in Tianjin harbour, those huge freight yards for the sale of waste materials are closed. Small factories for plastic waste processing are under regulation now — at least now they need to install pollution purification devices. Therefore, as the ancient Chinese myth, Old Fool Man Moved the Mountains, we see the progress little by little. How to evaluate my work? I think to make more people to see the facts that I've reflected would be my biggest success, because only when more and more people see the facts, would more changes happen subtly. In Europe, I cooperate with more colleagues and NGOs to tell the public the fact of waste exportation to China. I think my work is in two parts; internationally, I spread the information to people in waste exporting countries to trigger them to reflect critically on this issue; domestically, I convey the message to decision makers and people working in the waste recycle industry to foster positive changes to the current situation. The changes are coming. They may not happen so quickly, but just as the ice and snow melt, they are happening little by little.

ⁱ This interview with Wang Jiuliang was conducted on 2 March, 2016. The interview was originally in Chinese and translated into English by the author. The Chinese transcript was reviewed and approved by artist Wang Jiuliang and kept in the possession of the author.