



IWMC World Conservation Trust



Tiger Conservation

It's Time to Think Outside the Box

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Table of Contents

Editorial

Myth of Trade or No Trade

By Eugène Lapointe

Could Farming Save the Wild Tiger?

By Kirsten Conrad

Burning Bright

China tries to balance its tiger-breeding strategies and a thriving market in tiger bones

By Barun Mitra

Conservation of the Tiger

The Need for New and Radical Approaches

By Hank Jenkins

China's Tiger Farmers Put Their Case

Interview with Heilongjiang, Siberian Tiger Park and Guilin Xiong Sen, Bear and Tiger Garden.



Editorial

Wild tigers were supposed to have been put on the path to recovery in 1993 when trade in tiger products was banned. However, the numbers of wild tigers in its entire range, have continued to fall sharply, leading some experts to voice the opinion that the measure has failed. The big question of how to conserve wild tigers, they say, urgently needs to be answered. Different management options must be considered.

One suggestion is that the demand for tiger bones, which are used in traditional Chinese medicines, should be addressed by farming and renewed trade in captive-bred tiger products. The very idea seems odd to many westerners who think of farms largely in terms of cattle and trade in terms of manufactured goods.

Inevitably, it is drawing criticism from environmentalist groups and some in the western media. But the dire warnings that farming and regulated trade would quickly lead to the end for the wild tiger is perverse. After all, the wild tiger is on that path now. How can anyone be confident that maintaining the present course will reverse the downward trend? Is there a point at which reasonable people will say “Enough! This really isn’t working!”

With the CITES COP14 approaching, knives are already being sharpened. Activist groups are preparing for a full-blown assault on any consideration of alternatives to the tiger trade ban.

The reason for this is clear enough and it has nothing to do with tigers. NGOs will continue to advocate zero use of animals, as they do today, because their fundamental philosophy is based more in the field of ethics than conservation. To them, it is wrong for people to kill an animal, be it a tiger, a whale, an elephant, a shark or some other species. If we were to be precise, we would more accurately label them as ethicists rather than conservationists or environmentalists. They are largely making value judgments about what we, collectively, should or shouldn’t do. True conservationists are much more pragmatic, being concerned for overall stocks of wild species rather than individual specimens, and tailor their approach accordingly.

Where does this leave the wild tiger? The ethicists abhor all the elements that conservationists are now considering: farming, killing, commerce and trade. There is nothing here on which they could possibly compromise. And yet if they prevail and wild tigers do become extinct, they will take no responsibility for the result. Instead, they will blame everybody but themselves: the poachers, the law enforcement agencies, the purchasers of tiger products, governments, international institutions and mankind’s reckless ability to destroy living things.

This situation is unacceptable to IWMC. Our wish is to see wild tigers flourish. So we have invited a series of experts to present their perspectives on what needs to be done and we publish their comments below in this special publication, together with an interview with the principals of the two largest tiger farms in China. We hope you find the articles informative and thought provoking.

Myth of Trade or No Trade

By Eugène Lapointe

“Prohibition is not the solution, prohibition is the problem.”

Anthony Lewis, New York Times, 13 February 1996, with reference to drugs use in the United States

► In Defense of Trade

Throughout mankind’s history, trade has played an important role in the improvement of the human condition. It fosters relationships among individuals, communities, cultures and nations. It opens closed borders and closed minds, allowing people to jettison ignorance, suspicion and fear of one another. It provides wealth that in turn is used for food, shelter, education, health care, and individual and cultural advancement. Most importantly, it is a powerful tool in efforts to eliminate poverty, which is the greatest threat to wild resources and one of the chief causes of pollution.

Conservation of wildlife and wild places is not a priority for impoverished, desperate nation or people. Survival is. Field and stream alike are stripped of sustenance and more often than not befouled with human waste. Wildlife is consumed and habitat destroyed in hopes of scratching from the soil some (often barely) life-sustaining crop. It is a pattern that has replicated itself in nearly every nation, including today’s high-tech, highly developed superpowers.

Not until the United States was able to feed its people did unregulated predation of its wildlife cease and conservation of wildlife and wild places become a national priority. As recently as the dawn of the 20th Century, many species of wildlife in the USA were on the brink of extinction. Today, thanks to trade and the broad distribution of the wealth it created, that nation’s wild resources are flourishing. As that nation’s wealth grew, so too grew its ability to fund and manage conservation tasks.

► The Myth of No Trade

The tendency of extreme NGOs is to loudly proclaim that legal trade promotes illegal trade or, by re-opening even limited and controlled legal trade in products of one species, you open the door to illegal trade. Nothing is further from the truth. Legal activities are the best mechanism to fight illegal activities, as it is well known that illegal activities thrive on prohibitions. At the end of the prohibition era in the United States, how were the bootleggers eliminated? By legalizing and regulating the consumption of alcohol.

Opponents of trade have adroitly created a vision of the world in which the elimination of commerce leads to a Utopian world where animals abound; streams flow with cool, pure water; there are vistas filled with verdant fields and majestic mountains soar into crisp, clear air.

Nowhere is evidence of the hand of man. It is an alluring vision to be sure, particularly when it is juxtaposed with a bleak scenario where their projected images of legal trade beget illegal poaching, pollution, and denuding of nature's landscape. To be candid, the negative perception of trade, just like its positive counterpart, is based on a historical context.

Abuses are found when the distribution of wealth is closely controlled by a few. It is also found when the broadest range of a nation's people does not enjoy the benefits of trade. Certainly, the history of industrial nations is one filled with inconsiderate exploitation, and nature suffered the consequences. Today, however, the concept of sustainable use and the driving model for modern global corporations is one where economic prosperity is intrinsically linked with people's environmental compatibility and with social justice. This three-pronged approach does not tolerate environmental or social abuse.

Nevertheless, the vision of non-trade advocates allows no room for even the possibility of trade that is economically and environmentally sustainable and socially just. To non-use NGOs and nations alike, trade is evil, and in the message delivered by many of their spokespeople is that it must be ruthlessly destroyed.

The flaw in the "non-use" ideology is that it is a vision of the world as it ought to be, not as it is. The reality is that there is no such thing as "no trade". The cessation of legal trade eliminates the wealth that allows a country to afford to regulate, supervise, manage, and enforce conservation measures. By taking management and enforcement from the mix – as Kenya did when it cut its wildlife enforcement budget in half from \$600,000 in 1997 to \$300,000 in 1999 – illegal trade fills the void as poaching then did in Kenya.

The legal trader is replaced by the poacher. The conservation official is replaced by the black market entrepreneur. Wildlife suffers not from legitimate markets and community-regulated trade, but from underground, uncontrolled economies.

▶ Legal Trade at the Rescue of Wild Species

Two examples from the history of wildlife conservation illustrate this very simple equation: legal trade does not promote illegal trade, it annihilates it; and the lack of controlled legal trade drives illegal trade. (See boxes)

In the 1970s, wild populations of all crocodylians (alligators, crocodiles, caimans) were in serious trouble. Prohibitions at the national and, later, by international instances (CITES) relating to the use and trade of crocodiles skins were quite common. But these bans were no match for worldwide, highly profitable and flourishing illegal trade. In fact, in the 1970s, illegal trade in reptile skins was, by far, the most important illegal market of wildlife species (three million caiman skins per year from Bolivia alone). Scientists, politicians, officials, industries and traders developed conservation mechanisms for crocodylians whose cornerstone would be the legal trade. Now the wild species have recovered, ranching and hunting programs have been developed and legal trade is flourishing. According to the CITES Secretariat, no illegal trade whatsoever in crocodylian skins, has been reported for the last several years. People and wild species alike, are benefiting from this legal trade.

The Incas used to round up the wild vicuñas and pen them in stone corrals, where they were sheared for their wool. In modern times they were almost wiped out for their meat and wool. By 1960 there were only 6,000 vicuñas left in the wild.. Chile and Peru established protected national parks and put a halt to trade in vicuña wool which was also prohibited by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Prohibitions were no match for the profitable illegal trade. The vicuña was almost hunted to extinction for its beautiful soft wool. In 1988 CITES re-opened the international trade in cloths made of wool sheared from live vicunas of populations from Chile and Peru. Since then this trade has been expanded progressively to populations of Argentina and Bolivia, as well as to wool and luxury handicrafts and knitted articles. Now there are about 125,000 vicuñas, roaming in the ANDES.

On the other hand, take the situation of the five species of rhinoceros (three Asian, two African). Despite millions of dollars in conservation efforts, and despite – or maybe because of – complete national and international prohibitions against hunting or killing rhinos, possessing parts or derivatives and attempting to sell or otherwise dispose of parts or derivatives of rhinos, the species are dwindling, with a very few exceptions. But illegal activities such as poaching, smuggling or illegal trade are in full flower, despite the world’s best efforts to prevent them. Since prohibition is failing so dismally, maybe someone should consider selling the several tons of horn under government control in warehouses in Southern Africa and invest the proceeds into the destruction of illegal activities – so damaging to rhino conservation – while establishing realistic conservation programs.

This type of innovative approach to conservation, based on legal activities, is not welcome by extremists: legalizing trade in an endangered species? NO! They prefer the alternative of illegal trade. Their motives might seriously be questioned.

From a childhood of subsistence hunting in the Canadian wilderness through 14 years of government service to the position of Secretary-general of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Eugene Lapointe has learned and practiced conservation. He has continued this lifelong commitment by founding the International Wildlife Management Consortium (IWMC), known now as the IWMC World Conservation Trust, a global coalition of wildlife managers who believe sustainable use is the most powerful conservation tool of all.

Could Farming Save the Wild Tiger?

By Kirsten Conrad

The world's population of wild tigers has plummeted by 95% in just over a century, from an estimated 100,000 in 1900 to at most 5,000–7,000 today. Habitat and prey are critical to the long-term survival of tigers in the wild, but it is illegal trade in tiger parts that poses the most immediate threat of extinction. Despite legal protection over most of its range, prohibition of international trade, anti-poaching efforts, and millions spent by NGOs and governments, demand for tiger parts shows no sign of abating. In fact, pressure on wild tiger populations is escalating – the recent unveiling of a tent in Tibet made from the skins of 108 tigers underscores the sense of emergency. Yet the facts notwithstanding, little action was taken in October at the 54th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee.

Most of the tigers are bound for China and overseas Chinese communities. Tigers, associated with strength, vigor and vitality, are integral to Chinese culture. Many believe that a tiger's body parts possess therapeutic properties that can enhance human health and well-being in a wide variety of ways. Tiger bone has been used for thousands of years to treat rheumatism and to strengthen human bones, and is believed to have anti-inflammatory, and pain-killing effects. As China's population ages, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is experiencing a resurgence in popularity. Some TCM practitioners accept substitutes for tiger bone, but many others believe there is no viable alternative. In addition, an increasingly affluent middle-class can now afford tiger goods that were previously beyond their reach. In Tibet, tiger and leopard pelts have again become popular for use as costumes and in ceremonial events.

The conservationists' objective is clear: the continued existence of wild tigers roaming freely in their natural habitat. To date, conservation measures have focused on curbing demand for tiger parts, combating poaching, and securing the tiger's habitat. Unfortunately however, this approach is simply not effective. The numbers speak for themselves. The preferences of Chinese consumers cannot be changed overnight, and certainly not in enough time to save what few wild tigers remain.

Tiger conservationists must adopt a new strategy. Management of the supply side of trade in tigers and their parts remains largely unexplored. Although the mainstream conservation community holds that introducing a legal supply of captive-bred (farmed) animals to meet demand is neither feasible nor desirable, there is insufficient data to support this position.

If farmed tigers proved acceptable to consumers, and were sold at a lower cost than illegal tiger derivatives, consumers would make the obvious rational choice. (Tiger bones are also easy to fake; a captive supply could also be certified genuine). This hypothesis is something that can and should be tested before farming is ruled out as a conservation tool.

Quantitative and qualitative market research could tell us who is consuming tiger parts and whether farmed parts are or would be acceptable. Such research would provide fact-based estimates of potential demand, which in turn could enable production planning (no sense



stimulating demand if it can't be met), and captive population management. Cost analysis could reveal the relative cost of bringing captive-bred and wild products to market. Economic modeling could yield insights into the likely behavior of the illegal market in the face of legal competition, and indicate how farmed tiger products might be priced better to protect wild populations. In short, the proposed economic analysis would help to clarify whether in fact a policy permitting trade in captive-bred tiger products served to alleviate pressures on wild populations.

Other important factors need to be taken into account: precedent – the implications of limited trade in tiger parts in China for other endangered species such as rhino and elephants, and for other consuming countries; ethics – whether it is morally permissible to sacrifice tigers to save the species as a whole from extinction; law – as a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), China must comply with the agreement; and domestic legal issues. Animal welfare concerns, although distinct from conservation, would have to be addressed. Were China to trade in captive-bred tigers, adequate oversight mechanisms would have to be implemented (and independently audited) to keep wild tigers out of the legal channels.

It is important to note that tiger farming, if found to be advantageous, should be part of a broader program, for which many of the other components are already in place. Taxation revenue from tiger farming could fund existing conservation measures including: habitat protection, anti-poaching, law enforcement, and education.

While all this might sound cold-blooded to some – tigers are not tubs of margarine nor domestic livestock – conservationists do not have the luxury of ignoring the distasteful but possibly effective strategy of allowing trade in captive-bred tigers, at least not if they are truly intent on saving the tiger from extinction.

(Originally published in the Bangkok Post)

Kirsten Conrad has been working in conservation of wild cats in Asia since 1999. Her editorials, articles and research papers have been published in peer-reviewed journal and regional newspapers, and she has advised NGO's and conservation authorities. Before entering conservation she was a business consultant with Accenture and PWC Consulting (now IBM), and has a degree from Harvard University and an MBA from Duke. Through her experience she has learned that, in Asia, conservation must have a positive economic value and believes that alternative approaches need to be explored.

Burning Bright

China tries to balance its tiger-breeding strategies and a thriving market in tiger bones

By Barun Mitra

Every crisis is an opportunity. While it may provide an opportunity to explore new options in an attempt to end the crisis, it may also blind people to alternatives, making them cling to failed policy options that have contributed to the problem. China and India reflect these contrasting approaches in their efforts to save the tiger.

Since the 1970s, India has enacted tough laws and mobilised huge resources to prevent hunting and trading of tigers, but the present debate over a tiger census is an indication that the policy of prohibition has not secured the future of tigers.

India has the largest number of tigers in the wild—anywhere between two and four thousand. China probably has only 20 or 30 left in the wild. But it is in China that tiger parts, particularly bones, are in demand for treating severely arthritic patients as per traditional Chinese medicine (TCM).

China too adopted a similar policy of prohibition in 1993, but to no avail. In fact, the prohibition may have increased the suffering of Chinese patients who rely on TCM for relief. Conscious of this dual crisis, China is now experimenting with a range of radical policy options. The contrast with India—where there are news reports of enlisting even the army to protect the tiger—could not have been more glaring.

In China, over the past decade, special tiger-breeding bases set up both under the public and private domain have virtually perfected the art. There are over 4,000 tigers in captivity in China today, and an effort is on to build a genetic profile, so that the number of pure sub-species could be documented and increased.

There are around 20 tiger-breeding facilities in China. While most are small, some are quite large. A 40-hectare tiger and bear park in the town of Guilin houses around 1,000 tigers in enclosures and cages. This is a major tourist destination, but the revenue from tourism is nowhere near adequate to meet the cost (\$4,000 per year) of raising a tiger. The cost of the feed constitutes about 75 per cent of the total cost. To meet the expenses, this park has been completely mortgaged to banks. Some years ago, it had to destroy a stock of tonnes of bones from dead tigers, because the cost of refrigeration was too high.

Chinese entrepreneurs and wildlife managers look optimistic. An adult tiger leaves behind about 12 to 15 kg of dry bones, which could sell for \$ 500–1,000 per kg in the market for TCM. Apart from that, the skin, claws and some other organs fetch another \$10,000. In addition, there is a constant demand for pure-bred sub-species of live tiger cubs and young adults from zoos and other establishments around the world. Also, the cost of feed can be reduced substantially by substituting commercial meat with low-cost wildlife. Tiger farms are eminently viable financially. Clearly, commerce is no enemy of conservation.



China has, in fact, created a legal domestic market, and developed a computerised documentation system to track wildlife products like ivory and musk, from their stocks to manufacturing, retailing and customer documentation.

China is also experimenting with re-wilding techniques at a tiger valley in South Africa through public-private partnership. It hopes to master this art and train captive-bred tigers to survive in the wild.

There is a willingness in China to experiment even in internationally sensitive issues. From a limited domestic trade in tiger bones they hope to raise enough revenue to sustain their new tiger conservation strategies. The legal trade is expected to reduce the pressure on wild tigers, while helping Chinese patients. If this policy works, China may have, in a decade, over one lakh tigers in captivity and the natural death rate may be adequate to meet the demand for tiger bones.

For years, India has not discussed tiger conservation with China. The question is whether India will behave like a tiger, and bravely join China in search of new conservation strategies, or meekly sentence the tiger to inevitable extinction.

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Barun Mitra is director of Liberty Institute, an independent think- tank based in Delhi. He was a member of a team that was recently invited to China to witness their tiger conservation strategies.

Conservation of the Tiger

The Need for New and Radical Approaches

By Hank Jenkins

All wildlife conservationists want a common goal – that is to implement actions that will minimize the risk of tigers becoming extinct in the wild. Where factions differ is the means by which the goal will be achieved. This message does not need to be extensive because its message is simple but urgent. The solution, however, is complex because it will require a fundamental shift in the philosophical base that has characterized the current approach by the international community to tiger conservation. It is time to explore and test other management options before it is too late for the tiger. It is time to apply lessons learned from the conservation management of dangerous wildlife in other parts of the world and test their applicability to the tiger. Effective solutions may lie in applying two quite separate and different strategies. One strategy, currently being explored by the Chinese Government, is focused on addressing supply and demand through the regulated legal supply of material derived from captive bred tigers. The other strategy concerns implementing management that confers an economic value of tigers and their habitat by implementing limited sport hunting programs through which communities that coexist with tigers are principal beneficiaries. Both approaches are radical and inflame opposition who favour maintaining the status quo until there are no more tigers left in the wild to poach.

In the case of attempts to ban the use of tigers and their body parts, basic economic theory of supply and demand appears to have been disregarded. Quite simply, without removing the demand the prohibition on the use of any commodity, in the absence of acceptable alternatives, will not succeed. In this respect, tigers are no different to narcotics or any other banned substance. Countless millions of dollars have been expended in attempting to combat illicit substances, but, despite this effort, there are arguably more drugs such as heroine and cocaine in global circulation today than ever before. This experience should serve as testimony to the futility of attempting to impose trade prohibitions without addressing the demand side of the equation.

All subspecies of the tiger have been listed in Appendix I of CITES for nearly thirty years, and yet, despite the prohibition on commercial trade, there remains an illicit trade in their parts and derivatives – primarily for use as traditional Chinese medicines. As a consequence, populations in the wild continue to decline. Some non-governmental organizations, who have adopted tiger conservation as their cause would have the international community believe that illegal trade in tiger parts and derivatives is thriving in the absence of any concerted effort on government enforcement agencies. Although not doubting the persistence of an illicit trade in the species, the veracity of claims on its extent and volume is questionable. The estimated size of wild populations does not correlate to the alleged volume of illegal trade. Nevertheless, regardless of the volume of illegal trade, the problem it represents to conservation of tigers in the wild is serious and in need of urgent attention.

Rather than persist in attempting to successfully enforce a prohibition, an alternative, and feasible if not radical, approach is to breed the animal in captivity in order to supply the demand from legal sources. The concept itself is not radical and is provided for in the articles of the Convention. Well-regulated captive breeding has been applied to numerous other species as a means of reducing and removing pressure from the wild population(s) while, at the same time, supplying a demand. For some reason, when captive breeding is considered in relation to tigers and other iconic species, it becomes a radical approach – perhaps it is because the international community (those who do not have to share their lives with tigers) believe it is a crime to kill such a magnificent animal.

The tragedy is that tigers are technically not difficult to breed in captivity. In fact, just as with the domestic cat, under correct husbandry, tigers have proven to be prolific breeders under captive conditions. Furthermore, the technology exists to be able to effectively control and restrict use of tiger parts and derivatives to material derived from captive breeding.

It is time for the international community to ask the fundamental question. By our actions to date, are we attempting to save the tiger from extinction in the wild or are we attempting the change a culture that has been using tigers (as well as a range of other species) in its pharmacopeia for centuries. Or indeed, are we concerned about animal welfare issues of captive breeding and killing tigers. Although obviously related, these problems are fundamentally different requiring different solutions. Furthermore, many non-governmental organizations and some government agencies advocate the use of alternative medicines. From wildlife conservation standpoint, provided use of a particular species is sustainable, the purpose should not be questioned. The international community does not have the moral right to impose its ethics and principles regarding the use of wildlife on another culture. Cultural arrogance has no place in the twenty-first century.

Addressing demand by providing a regulated legal supply of tiger body parts from closed-cycle captive breeding will not necessarily result in effective conservation of tigers in the wild. For instance, it will not halt the encroachment by people into tiger habitat resulting in the destruction or modification of essential tiger habitat. Neither will it address mechanisms to ensure that the prey base for tigers is maintained in wild areas. Economic incentives to manage and conserve tiger habitat will only be created when tigers are perceived by rural communities that coexist with the species perceive it as an asset that contributes to their livelihood and not a liability. In this regard the management of sub-Saharan populations of leopard through well-regulated sport hunting has created a political incentive for governments to manage leopards as an economic asset in preference to an agricultural pest. The incidence of conflict resulting in the wasteful deaths of leopards has been reduced. Populations of leopard in sub-Saharan Africa are continuing to increase after more than 20 years of sustainable use through well-regulated sport hunting.

The need for open and objective dialogue on tiger conservation is pressing. Reputations need to be suppressed in the interests of identifying and testing new strategies to deliver sustainable conservation of the tiger before it is too late for the species.

Hank Jenkins - Wildlife biologist responsible for 8-year research program on salt water crocodiles in Kakadu NP. Employed with Australian government - head of CITES Management Authority. Served as Oceania representative on AC 1989-2000 and elected as AC chair 1992-2000. Formerly associated with IUCN Sustainable Use Initiative as Asia-Pacific Coordinator. Currently self-employed as managing director of Creative Conservation Solutions - international not-for profit NGO Species Management Specialists.

China's Tiger Farmers Put Their Case

▶ Interview with Wang Ligang, general manager of the Heilongjiang Siberian Tiger Park and Zhou Weisen, director of the Guilin Xionsen Bear and Tiger Garden

Q What are the establishments that you operate?

Both Heilongjiang Siberian Tiger Park and Guilin Xionsen Bear and Tiger Garden were established in middle of the 1980s. Their initial purpose was to provide resources for medicine production through the artificial breeding of tigers in a program called "supporting tigers through breeding". In 1993, the Chinese Government banned trade in tiger bones in line with wild tiger conservation efforts around the world. We have strictly enforced the ban even though it has placed severe economic burdens on us because we wish to contribute to world wild tiger conservation.

Q Are your tigers well cared for?

We are committed to continually improving tiger breeding conditions and welfare. Our tiger breeding is a success and our facilities provide space for the bred tigers that rival zoos in developed countries. The tigers are well cared for and the population has increased from 20 to 700 animals at Heilongjiang and the total at Guilin Xiong Sen is now up to around 1,300. We also employ researchers to prevent and control diseases, improve the living environment of tigers and boost nutrition levels. Many international experts and specialists who have visited our parks have been impressed by our standards. Even when times have been difficult for us financially, no tiger has died from lack of food. Our staff would rather delay their salary payment than cut the tigers' food supply. We are grateful to them for their caring approach.

Q What action have you taken to produce substitutes for tiger bones?

One of the conservation measures that has been advocated internationally is to find substitutes for tiger bones. We carry out research aimed at developing substitute products for tiger bones and have developed some products including "Bugujiu" and "Zhuanggujiu". So far, these have not been able to take the place of tiger bones but the research is continuing.

Q Has the tiger trade ban worked?

We feel we have made a significant contribution to the goal of protecting tigers all over the world because we have paid a heavy economic burden from the ban. And what are the consequences? We have been carefully observing international conservation efforts for wild tigers and have to question the outcomes that have resulted from the strategy advocated by some wildlife organizations. In the more than ten years since the world ban on trade in tiger bones, the decline in the wild population of tigers has not been stopped. Even worse is that governments are investing their financial and personnel resources and donors are contributing their money, but the way of life of people in the wild tiger range has been adversely affected and patients are suffering from having fewer choices when it comes to medical treatments. Meanwhile, poachers and smugglers are making huge illegal profits. It seems to us that the winners are the wealthy western NGOs who are busy raising money, earning high salaries, working in luxury offices and frequently flying here and there under the banner of “save the wild tiger”.

Q Some western NGOs have accused your of illegally using tiger bones. How do you respond?

We have never engaged in the illegal use of tiger bones and meat. We have implemented a series of steps that ensure the proper management of our tigers. We have established their complete pedigree and carefully documented each animal, we have implemented a microchip identification system and we have taken gene samples that are examined in line with government requirements. These strict monitoring and control systems ensure that we can determine the origin of each individual tiger and what happens to them. All of the bones and meat from natural dead tigers are frozen, stored and recorded. The bodies of animals that die from disease are burnt under strict supervision from government authorities. It is therefore impossible for them to be used illegally.

Q How could tiger farming help tiger conservation?

We believe there needs to be more discussion on how to improve the future of wild tigers all over the world at the same time that we advance public health issues and take care of traditional culture. A review of the current strategy for wild tiger protection and its outcome, as some experts have pointed out, shows that a greater poaching incentive for wild tigers has stemmed from the ban. This is because patients who have been unable to obtain their medicines legally have had no other choice but to go through illegal channels

for tiger bones. This has produced the opportunity for poachers and smugglers to make huge profits. If legal channels exist and patients can legally get tiger bone for their medicine, the motivations to purchase tiger bones from illegal sources can be greatly minimized. This can greatly compress the huge profits being made by smugglers and poachers. Poaching of wild tigers can then be made less attractive. This type of approach has already successfully worked with the conservation of some endangered species. We have to take into account the inputs of economists, management and multidisciplinary experts, etc. and carefully consider their remedies given that past efforts have failed to stop the continuous decline of wild tiger populations. We cannot blindly follow those NGOs who raised and spent a huge amount of money but could not live up to their promises.

We would like to emphasize that, throughout our work with tiger captive breeding, our efforts have been focused on wild tiger populations, public health and traditional culture. We believe we have to apply human intelligence to develop a sustainable way of reversing the decline trend in wild tiger populations while maintaining public health and traditional culture.

Q What do you think about the NGO campaign against you?

Despite their rhetoric about saving wild tigers, our enterprises have never received any financial support from NGOs for conservation. Instead, the NGOs produced so many stories that abuse our conservation efforts and never verified or checked the actual situation with us. So, we have to doubt their true motives because it is really difficult for us to understand their behavior. For example, several reporters surmised that we were engaged in the illegal use of tiger bones on the basis of their hearsay. Why don't they verify specific cases with enterprise managers or government authorities? It is obvious who the real beneficiaries of the current strategy are. It is easy to understand why some organizations fiercely oppose any discussion of a new strategy for wild tiger protection. A disgraceful stigma will be branded on conservation history if these organizations succeed with their ulterior motives through distorting facts and making up scandals. We hope that the conservation of wild tigers in the world has a bright future.