

Filmmaker brings story of resilience to Aurora with Last Harvest

By Brock Weir

Heading back to the place of her birth, Hui Wang found herself at a crossroads.

Back in China for research on an upcoming project, she found herself at a creative crossroads as the project ultimately fell through. However, following her instinct to stick around for just a little while longer, Hui Wang (Jane) found herself at another crossroads: that of age-old tradition and the rapid progress which has become a hallmark of the Asian nation.

The result of her forging ahead is 'Last Harvest', Jane's critically acclaimed documentary on the controversial South-to-North Water Diversion Project, a huge infrastructure project within China to channel billions of cubic litres of water to more arid areas of the country.

While proponents of the project said it would go a long way to solving water shortages in many parts of China, many ancient farming families were displaced by the project, leading them to form new lives and new communities far removed from home.

Last Harvest follows Mr. and Mrs. Xu, a farming couple who Jane just happened to meet by chance on her journey.

'I didn't know until I met Mr. Xu that I knew I was going to make a film,' says Jane. 'I was just blown away by who he is. He's very kind, genuine, very positive, cheerful and trusting. I wanted to make a film of his experience before or after relocation.'

The Xus have been farming the land for generations. They have known since the early 1990s they would eventually have to be relocated but didn't know until well over a decade later when the hammer would fall. They were in a holding pattern, but then the news came.

Not allowed to bring any of their livestock or even their dogs and cats with them, families had to sell off their animals at bargain basement prices to people who knew they had to get rid of them, then they had to pack up hundreds of years of lives well-lived and move on.

'There are a lot of documentaries about relocation, but not many of them show life after relocation and what they really faced in changes of lifestyle and urbanization,' says Jane. 'A lot of documentaries are about resistance and so-called heroes, but that is not the experience of the majority of people in China. I want to show the audience that the majority of people in China are like Mr. and Mrs. Xu. They had to do what they were put through, but they showed such resilience because they were always trying their best to prepare for what was to come and make the most of the situation.'

Jane brings Last Harvest to the Aurora Public Library for a screening followed by a question and answer session this Wednesday, October 4 from 7 - 9 p.m.

'I am really hoping to see some newcomers from China in Aurora,' says Jane of the event. 'I have shown the film in Toronto, Whistler and Paris, but there were not many Chinese audiences there. Most of the questions I got were from Canadians or Westerners. I am really curious to hear what a person who grew up in China would feel about the film. The audience reaction here was quite different from when I was in Paris so I am really looking forward to seeing what the Aurora audience will ask.'