

Water Crisis of 2020: Project Conclusion
Alternative Future Project
EGRS/EVST 373, Spring 2016

Stemming from California, the United States responded to the Water Crisis of 2020 by reinventing the socio-technical system which aimed to implement technology, policies, and behavioral changes to meet the challenge of water reuse. China, on the other hand, looked for ways to solve the issue with technology by further controlling the hydrological cycle. Though these are two radically different ways of trying to solve the freshwater crisis, both “answers” exposed ways in which we reveal, control, and mediate nature.

The first major interaction between technology and nature observed was how these different types of technologies revealed nature in more than just a positive and/or negative light. In California, suburban homeowners began to depend more on the natural cycle of the earth; reusing water for the irrigation of home gardens. Homes no longer have sprinkler systems or hoses and now solely depend on rainwater and greywater collection. The government also developed policies to help reveal the natural water purifying process within the hydrological cycles in order to best clean up the polluted water systems.

Citizens of the United States began to understand their role in the water cycle and how they can most sustainably use water from the cycle, through trial and error in grey water systems and educational programs in public schools. The agriculture industry began to grow crops only within their natural growing seasons, which reduced water consumption by over 30%. By using agricultural technology to emulate the natural growing seasons rather than control it allowed water uses to be drastically cut. Growing crops within their season helped the United States to reduce the amount of food they waste per year.

The United States does this with the new innovations seen in homes, such as dish racks which use runoff water to water plants, the incorporation of sinks and toilets so the sink water fills the bowl instead of fresh water each time, and the conversion of paper to digital has significantly dropped the amount of water used to grow trees and produce the paper used.

Across the Pacific, China is revealing nature and its fragility. Fossil fuels used to run the factories have created so much pollution on the coasts that plants cannot grow for a few miles.

Also the pumping of salt-water waste back into the ocean has caused a drastic increase in the coastal waters and has killed many forms of marine life. The technology that once used to look ideal now has become caked in smog and sludge and resembles the dystopian societies seen in movies.

Nature has thrived for billions of years before the existence of humans, and has gotten along just fine without us. Society's perception of water use and availability is what caused the crisis in the first place. The technological "fix" (desalination practices from China) results in the control of nature that won't lead to a difference in human lifestyle. Attitude changes in California resulted in the reshaping of how people live their lives, which was a huge step towards sustainable living and preserving the Earth's natural resources. Reinventing the socio-technical systems surrounding water systems and usages is the path to a future in which we use technology to mediate, reveal, and model nature, without controlling it to the point of depletion.