

## **Graduate Research Essay**

# **DAM BUILDING, DISSENT, AND DEVELOPMENT: THE EMERGENCE OF THE THREE GORGES PROJECT**

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In some places it [Yangtze River] is ten miles wide, in some eight, in others six, and in length it extends to 100 days' journey. Thanks to this river it [modern-day Iching, or as Polo called it, Sinju] is a city of innumerable ships, carrying quantities of goods and merchandise, and consequently a great source of revenue to the Great Khan [Kublai Khan, reign 1257-1294].<sup>2</sup>

The commercial importance Marco Polo ascribed to the Yangtze River for thirteenth century Iching, and its recent flooding, illustrate the twin-headed hydra of reward and destruction that the mighty river can bring. With the construction of the Three Gorges Project (TGP), the Chinese Government (CG) believes it can turn destruction to reward, harnessing the river to power China's modernisation. To explain the dam's construction one must look to the primacy China accords to economic development and the important boost the TGP will provide to national prestige. Drawing as it does its precedent from earlier, grandiose 'mega-projects', the TGP can be framed within an exploitative communist attitude towards nature.<sup>3</sup> Politicians such as Li Peng

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<sup>2</sup> Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, translated and introduced by Ronald Latham, London, 1958, p.180.

<sup>3</sup> Nationalism and communism, as Judith Shapiro demonstrates, are not mutually exclusive. Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China*, Washington D.C., 2001.

also attached their rising star to the project. The second part of this essay, describing how the dam's promoters garnered support for the project, illustrates the use of a variety of techniques to overcome political and rural opposition. Protagonists utilised words of support from eminent Chinese, such as those of Chairman Mao Zedong, to present historical validation for the TGP. Alongside the pro-dam commissions, the 'scientific' findings of 'red experts' provided enthusiastic support for the dam. By making ecological surveys uncoordinated and confused, vaguely defining the aim of reports and under-funding and under-staffing environmental bureau, dam supporters ensured that any potential opponents had little evidence with which to challenge the dam builders. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pushed for the construction of the dam by playing upon traditional, and well-founded, fears of Yangtze flooding and by offering locals generous re-settlement packages.<sup>4</sup> Central government's use of well-enshrined bargaining techniques also won over regional leadership. What opposition remained, though quite sizeable, was silenced after the suppression of the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations by branding opponents disloyal or unpatriotic. Nevertheless, in recent years opposition to the dam has increased. The last part of this essay discusses the nature of environmental protest in China, the reasons for its emergence, and its likely future.

## Modernising China

The 6,300 kilometre long Yangtze River has its source high in the plateau of Tibet. The TGP is designed to dam this river at a point just west of the city of Yichang (Hubei Province), upstream of the existing Gezhouba Dam.<sup>5</sup> The aim of the dam is twofold, although other secondary advantages will also accrue. Once completed, the dam will protect from flooding some fifty million people in all, and 533,000 hectares of agricultural land in the immediate downstream area of the dam, along with its twelve million inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> It will also produce an estimated 17,680 megawatts of electricity.<sup>7</sup> This electricity is invaluable for economic development and will help correct the north-south energy

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that the CCP was not a monolithic organisation – not all supported the TGP. However, for the sake of simplicity and recognising the success of the pro-dam lobby, reference to the CCP connotes a pro-dam stance.

<sup>5</sup> Baocheng Han, 'Three Gorges Project: Is It Feasible?', *Beijing Review*, 29, 29 (21 July, 1986), p.16.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Louis Edmonds, *Patterns of China's Lost Harmony: A survey of the country's environmental degradation and protection*, London, 1994, p.81.

<sup>7</sup> Lu Qinkan, 'Ten Controversial Issues on the Three Gorges Project', in Patricia Adams and John Thibodeau, eds., translated by Nancy Liu, Wu Mei, Sun Yougeng and Zhang Xiaogang, *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, London, 1994, p.215.

imbalances in China, evidenced by the transportation of fossil fuels 1,000 kilometres down the Yangtze.<sup>8</sup> The dam also offers secondary advantages including improved Yangtze navigation and water diversion. For instance, the dam will reduce river transport costs from Wuhan to Chongqing by 35 to 37 per cent.<sup>9</sup> It will also channel water to the water deficient North China Plain.<sup>10</sup>

The principle appeal of the dam, however, remains economic development. Modernising China's industries has long been a priority for its leaders, ever since the mid-nineteenth century; indeed, the exploitation of natural resources dates back millennia to *Shuili* (water management projects).<sup>11</sup> Only by detailing these early precedents can the developmental ethos of the CCP, and the construction of the TGP, be understood. The modernisation projects of politicians like Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong mirrored the Tongzhi Restoration's 'self-strengthening' programme of the previous century. In 1921 Sun Yat-sen first mentioned a project to dam the Yangzi River in his *Programme for National Construction*.<sup>12</sup> In the 1940s support for the dam came from the United States (US) and, more significantly, from the Great Helmsman himself, Mao Zedong.<sup>13</sup> In 1958, in the first of

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<sup>8</sup> Mark McDowell, 'Energy Strategies and Environmental Constraints in China's Modernization', in Michael C. Howard, ed., *Asia's Environmental Crisis*, Boulder, Colorado, 1993, p.184.

<sup>9</sup> Edmonds, p.82.

<sup>10</sup> Edmonds, pp.116-118. This section also gives more details on the acute water shortage in the North China Plains.

<sup>11</sup> For a brief introduction to the Grand Canal see Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History, a new edition revised and abridged by the author and Jane Caplan*, London, 1995, pp.291-292. On the exploitation of natural resources in the Yangzi area see especially Anne Osborne, 'Economic and Ecological Interactions in the Lower Yangzi Region under the Qing', in Mark Elvin and Liu Ts'ui-jung, eds., *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History*, Cambridge, 1998, pp.203-234 and the remaining environmental history essays on China. Ole Bruun, too, characterises Chinese attitudes towards nature as deeply pragmatic: Ole Bruun, 'Fengshui and the Chinese Perception of Nature', in Ole Bruun and Arne Kalland, eds., *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach*, Richmond (Surrey), 1995, p.173. Confucianism emphasised the management and control of nature, Daoism, 'accommodation to nature's way', and Buddhism, 'reverence for all living beings'. See Shapiro pp.6-11, 212-214. For a general discussion of religion and nature see articles in Holger Schleip ed., *Zurück zur Natur-Religion: Wege zur Ehrfurcht vor allem Leben*, Freiburg, 1986.

<sup>12</sup> Han, 'Feasible', p.16.

<sup>13</sup> For US involvement see, Gráinne Ryder and Margaret Barber, 'Damming the Three Gorges 1920-1993', in Margaret Barber and Gráinne Ryder, eds., *Damming the Three Gorges: What Dam Builders Don't Want You to Know. A Critique of the Three Gorges Water Control Project Feasibility Study*, London or Toronto, second edition, 1993, p. 3. For Mao's interest see, Dai Qing, 'The Three Gorges Project: A Symbol of Uncontrolled Development in the Late Twentieth Century', in John G. Thibodeau and Philip B. Williams, eds., *The River Dragon Has Come! The Three Gorges Dam and the Fate of China's*

three such ventures, Mao swam the Yangzi at Wuhan. To many his triumph over the river symbolised the desire of the CCP to transform the natural environment. Mao's poem of the same year hinted that a dam should be made over the Yangzi to complement the newly-constructed bridge:

*'Great plans are being made;  
... Walls of stone will stand upstream to the west  
To hold back Wuhan's clouds and rain,  
Till a smooth lake rises in the narrow gorges.  
The mountain goddess if she is still there  
Will marvel at a world so changed.'*<sup>14</sup>

Though Mao never lived to see the dam constructed, CCP policy reflected his attitude towards nature: the environment offered up inexhaustible resources to fuel economic modernisation and provided a repository to environmental waste. As Judith Shapiro notes, Mao's exploitation of the Chinese natural world mirrored that of its people.<sup>15</sup> It also followed Soviet precedent.<sup>16</sup> Based on these ideas the Great Leap Forward (GLF) of the 1950s, an ambitious attempt to overtake the industrial output of Britain and the United States, lurched China towards an unmitigated ecological and environmental disaster.<sup>17</sup> Mao whipped up the enthusiasm of the country with pithy phrases urging the populace to strive for economic development, setting unrealistically high, and scientifically impossible, production targets and punishing any critics of these.<sup>18</sup> Mao confidently expected that 'red experts' (Party scientific experts) would use science to meet such targets and propel China into the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>

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*Yangtze River and Its People*, New York, 1998, footnote (note: footnote not numbered, only asterisked), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from J. Gittings, *Real China: From Cannibalism to Karaoke*, London, 1996, p.98 in Christopher J. Smith, *China in the Post-Utopian Age*, Boulder (Colorado) 2000, p.396.

<sup>15</sup> See Shapiro.

<sup>16</sup> Shapiro, pp.50-51. For an introduction to Soviet policy and its impact on nature see Charles E. Ziegler, *Environmental Policy in the USSR*, London, 1987; Murray Feshbach and Alfred Friendly, *Ecocide in the USSR. Health and Nature Under Siege*, New York, 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: China's Secret Famine*, London, 1996; Shapiro, chapters 1 and 2, pp.21-93. See also sections in He Bochuan, *China on the Edge: The Crisis of Ecology and Development*, United States (n.p.), 1991; Vaclav Smil, *China's Environmental Crisis: An Inquiry Into the Limits of National Development*, New York, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Mao promised to equal Britain in industrial production within fifteen years. Mao Zedong, 'Speech at the Supreme State Conference', January 18, 1958, in Mark Seldon, with Patti Eggleston, *The Peoples' Republic of China, A Documentary History of Revolutionary Change*, New York, 1976, p.382.

<sup>19</sup> Trofim Lysenko, a semi-literate Russian peasant, claimed scientifically impossible goals, such as being able to alter Siberia's climate by afforestation. Mao introduced many of Lysenko's ideas into China. Becker, pp.65-69.

Large-scale dam projects offered one way to meet such targets.<sup>20</sup> During the GLF these dam projects ‘became more than just another kind of construction project; the campaigns promoting dam construction equated harnessing rivers with developing the country’.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, one of the main proponents of the TGP, Premier Li Peng, had first trained in the former Soviet Union as a power engineer before taking up politics.<sup>22</sup>

The TGP, then, continues the Chinese tradition of gigantic economic development projects. It still stands a leitmotiv of the ability of communism to transform nature. ‘The damming of the ...Yangtze,’ noted Party President Jiang Zemin in the late 1990s, ‘is a major event in China’s efforts to achieve modernization and also a remarkable feat in the history of mankind to reshape and exploit natural resources’.<sup>23</sup> The project is a cornerstone of China’s four modernisations.<sup>24</sup> In the words of dam supporter, Li Boning, it ‘will add great momentum to economic development’.<sup>25</sup> The TGP will help China attain its aim of quadrupling its GDP from 1980 to 2000.<sup>26</sup>

According to the dam’s proponents, the primacy given to modernisation means environmental deterioration is a necessary and inevitable cost of economic development. ‘The Three Gorges reservoir will destroy a vast amount of farmland,’ asserted Li Zhennan, a former chief engineer on the TGP. ‘That damage,’ he continued, ‘... is worthwhile because of the economic benefits the project will bring later on’.<sup>27</sup> Like earlier Maoist rhetoric, the CCP portrays itself as literally and metaphorically fighting a personified Yangtze.<sup>28</sup> These historical echoes can be heard in the recent Great Leap style campaigning of Lu Youmei, general manager of the Three Gorges Development Corporation. He urged the completion of the TGP a

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<sup>20</sup> Shapiro, pp.48-95.

<sup>21</sup> Shui Fu, ‘A Profile of Dams in China’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, p.18.

<sup>22</sup> On Chinese engineers and the TGP see Baruch Boxer, ‘China’s Three Gorges Dam: Questions and Prospects’, *The China Quarterly*, 113 (March, 1988), p.102. On Li Peng see ‘Bibliographic Glossary’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, p.224.

<sup>23</sup> Jiang Zemin quoted in ‘Yangtze Dammed’, p.4.

<sup>24</sup> These goals were announced in 1978, and are to develop agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology. Recently, these have included opening China up to Western investment through creating special economic zones. Johnathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, New York, 1991, pp. 653-659.

<sup>25</sup> Li Boning, ‘Opinions and Recommendations on the TGP: A Statement for the Third Session of the Seventh Standing Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference’, *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, p.90. Li sat in various governmental positions in China’s water resources bureaucracy, and has been pushing for the TGP since the 1950s. ‘Bibliographic Glossary’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, p.223.

<sup>26</sup> McDowell, p.181.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Han, p.22.

<sup>28</sup> Note the title of the following article. Pi Dawai, ‘A Trial of Strength with the Yangtze River’, *Beijing Review*, 40, 50 (December 15-21), pp.9-12.

year early, 'so as to turn 1997 into a year of double celebration! [Hong Kong would also be returned to China in that year]'.<sup>29</sup>

The symbolism of the TGO also extends from the state to the individual. While the Leap became a catch-cry for Mao's political personae and fortunes, the TGP serves the same purpose for Li Peng. With the failure of Mao's 'pet' project came temporary political setback. Li possibly fears a similar fate were the TGP to fail, particularly after he significantly raised the political stakes of the TGP higher by touting the dam 'as a symbol of self-reliance and diplomatic defiance' soon after the 1989 Tiananmen Square repression.<sup>30</sup>

As section three demonstrates, the TGP 'is a state-sponsored construction project of unusual importance' one therefore above the 'scrutiny of the country's environmental laws.'<sup>31</sup> Its importance clearly lies beyond the fact of economic development, improved navigation or flood control. The TGP has become symbolic of China's historical quest for modernisation, reflecting the mind-set of the CCP and its confidence in the ability of science to subdue nature for the benefit of communism, though, as the next section reveals such a view had its opponents.<sup>32</sup>

## Garnering Support for the Dam

Protagonists had to persuade a number of groups to support the dam before their dream of a controlled Yangzi River could be realized: The National People's Congress (NPC), those provinces to be affected by the project, environmental engineers, peasants who faced resettlement and international funding agencies. To do this proponents utilised established bargaining techniques, persuasion, repression, and appeals to nationalism to overcome opposition to the project.

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<sup>29</sup> Lu Youmei quoted Shi He and Ji Si, 'The Comeback of the Three Gorges Dam (1989-1993)', *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, pp.40-41.

<sup>30</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 3 May 2000, <[www.irm.org/programs/threeg/000503.scmp.html](http://www.irm.org/programs/threeg/000503.scmp.html)>.

<sup>31</sup> Jun Jing, 'Environmental Protests in Rural China', in Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden, eds., *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, London, 2000, p.158.

<sup>32</sup> Western-style democracies, such as the United States or Great Britain, have made similarly disastrous environmental impacts in their pursuit of economic development. See, for instance, John R. McNeil, *Something New Under the Sun: an environmental history of the twentieth-century*, New York, 2000. For a wider overview of Western attitudes to nature see Clive Ponting, *A Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations*, New York, 1993; Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, New York and Cambridge, 1985. With particular reference to the TGP note Edward Goldsmith and Nicholas Hilyard, *The Social and Environmental Effects of Large Dams*, San Francisco, 1984.

Until the NPC discussed the project many commentators had regarded the body as there to rubber stamp projects.<sup>33</sup> The congress, in fact, displayed a significant amount of opposition. In 1986 a report signed by one tenth of members favoured postponing the TGP until next century.<sup>34</sup> In 1992 even after the project had been approved ‘about a third of deputies registered reservations’.<sup>35</sup> Dam supporters overcame such opposition through established bargaining techniques, which had developed from necessity, for instance because of the need to circumvent the massive Chinese bureaucracy that lacks a co-ordinated decision-making process.<sup>36</sup> Bargaining is ‘a process of reciprocal accommodation among the leaders of territorial and functional hierarchies [and] ...occurs because these leaders believe that the gains to be made by mutual accommodation exceed those to be made by unilateral action.’<sup>37</sup> Such negotiating underlines the importance of informal politics in Chinese decision-making.<sup>38</sup>

Bargaining over the TGP occurred at three levels: local, provincial and state. Protagonists resolved intra-provincial differences in Sichuan between pro-dam Yang Rudai (then Provincial Party Secretary) and the anti-dam Zhang Haoruo (Governor). In return for supporting the dam Sichuan received 18.5 billion yuan in government investment, with the added bonus that its three poorest areas would be removed to form the newly proposed province.<sup>39</sup> At the inter-provincial level, Hubei province, benefiting most from power generation and flood control, assumed the refugee burden from

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<sup>33</sup> Smith, p.398.

<sup>34</sup> He and Si, p.24.

<sup>35</sup> Of ‘the 2,5888 deputies present, 1,767 voted in favor, 177 were opposed, and 644 abstained.’ Smith, p.398.

<sup>36</sup> Other factors include trying to overcome bureaucracies with their own culture and ideology, lack of market mechanisms and the relative inability of the centre to impose its will upon lower hierarchical echelons. Also, specific ministries can find their interests converging with, or diverging from, those ministries or actors who are accorded the same rank as them. With the Chinese emphasis on problem solving down to the lowest level and the nature of unresolved problems being transferred up the hierarchy, problems often remain intractable. Lastly, the notion of intra-bureaucratic ‘fairness’ - the theory and practice whereby an individual, locality or family is never allowed to be wholly disadvantaged as a result of a decision unless an overriding social interest can be demonstrated - means ‘just compensation’ is usually provided. David M. Lampton, ‘A Plum for a Peach: Bargaining, Interest, and Bureaucratic Politics in China’, in Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, Berkeley or Los Angeles, 1992, pp.38-39.

<sup>37</sup> Lampton, p.37.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, ‘Institutions, Informal Politics, and Political Transition in China’, *Asian Survey*, 36, 3 (1996), pp.230-245.

<sup>39</sup> Lijian Hong, ‘Sichuan: disadvantage and mismanagement in the Heavenly Kingdom’, in David S.G. Goodman, ed., *China’s provinces in reform: Class, community and political culture*, London, 1997, pp.214-215.

neighbouring Hunan.<sup>40</sup> The CCP wooed officials by providing guided tours of the proposed TGP site, while barring those who opposed the dam.<sup>41</sup> With the overt support of Premier Li Peng to back them, dam lobbyists hurried through the crucial 1992 NPC that was to decide the TGP's fate, hoping that speed and lack of information about the project would result in its successful resolution.<sup>42</sup> At the key 1992 NPC, protagonists helped to ensure the approval of the council by barring delegates from exchanging information.<sup>43</sup> In these negotiations dam supporters presented the project as a Chinese Manifest Destiny. Politicians bolstered their own position by citing the support of Mao and Deng Xiaoping for the dam.<sup>44</sup> China's former President, Jiang Zemin exemplified such boosterism: 'The age-old dream of the Chinese people to develop and utilize the resources of the Three Gorges of the Yangtze is close to becoming true.'<sup>45</sup>

Supporters reinforced their claims by utilising the 'rational infallibility' of science. As section one demonstrated, science was the tool with which communists transformed the natural environment. A pervasive language of rationality was used to support the project. According to Li Boning, thirty years of extensive scientific investigation and the urgency of the four modernisations testified that 'there is no alternative' to constructing the dam.<sup>46</sup> Experts reassuringly asserted that the environmental impact of the TGP would be minimal, while at the same time emphasising that 'the Chinese government is paying increasing attention to the environment when it plans the development of agriculture and the economy.'<sup>47</sup> Detractors, however, pointed up many problems associated with the dam, including social dislocation (see section three), serious health risks, ecological damage and archaeological losses.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Lampton, pp.46-47.

<sup>41</sup> He and Si, pp.28-29.

<sup>42</sup> He and Si, pp. 33, 36-37. 1,767 NPC members voted in favour, 177 opposed, 644 abstained and 25 did not vote. This means some sixty eight per cent outright approval was gained for the dam.

<sup>43</sup> Lawrence R. Sullivan, 'Preface: The Three Gorges Dam and the Chinese Polity', *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, p.xvi.

<sup>44</sup> Dai Qing, 'Symbol', p.13. Doyen of the 'four modernisations', Deng was the key CCP decision-maker from the 1980s until his death last year. For a detailed discussion of Deng see Richard Evans, *Deng Xiaoping and the making of modern China*, St Ives (England), 1995.

<sup>45</sup> Jiang Zemin quoted in 'Yangtze Dammed Successfully', *Beijing Review*, 40, 47 (November 24-30, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Li Boning, p.94.

<sup>47</sup> Baocheng Han, 'The Benefits of the Three Gorges Project', *Beijing Review*, 29, 30 (July 28, 1986), pp.22-25.

<sup>48</sup> On health risks see Adrian Sleight and Sukhan Jackson, 'Public Health and Public Choice: dammed off at China's Three Gorges?', *The Lancet*, 351, 9114 (16 May, 1998), pp.1449-1450 <[www.irm.org/programs/threeg/991228.health.html](http://www.irm.org/programs/threeg/991228.health.html)>. On ecological damage see Chen



The TGP thus offers a clear case study of how specialists ‘mine, manipulate and massage data to support or refute contradictory technical opinions concerning the project’s viability.’<sup>49</sup> To maintain a pro-dam scientific discourse the CCP loaded TGP committees with dam protagonists and barred dissenters. Of some four hundred and twelve experts sitting on the Leading Group for the Assessment of the Three Gorges Project, only one, an enthusiastic TGP supporter, was an engineer.<sup>50</sup> Protagonists also overlooked many leading specialists like hydrologist Huang Wanli and environmental protection advisor Huang Shunxing because it was known they held anti-dam views.<sup>51</sup>

Scientific decision-making was itself hampered by a confusion of research and assessment goals and a difficulty in establishing cross-disciplinary studies, such as ecology, a subject necessary to comprehend the totality of environmental effects of the project.<sup>52</sup> Dam builders nullified the threat of opposition from environmental agencies by under-funding, under-staffing, and locking them out of closed doors decision-making.<sup>53</sup> Hence official environmental impact assessments were piecemeal, unsatisfactory and, importantly, open to political manipulation.<sup>54</sup>

Officials and scientists were not the only ones who had to be persuaded; since the TGP involved re-locating approximately 1.8 to 1.9 million people it was important for promoters to convince re-settlers that their move was a worthy sacrifice. To achieve this, alongside a generous aid offer to re-settlers

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Guojie, ‘The Environmental Impacts of Resettlement in the Three Gorges Project’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, pp.63-69; Jin Hui, ‘Water Pollution in the Three Gorges Reservoir’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, pp.160-170; Luna B. Leopold, ‘Appendix B: Sediment Problems at the Three Gorges Dam’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, pp.194-199. On archaeological loss see *South China Morning Star*, 15 May, 1999 <[www.im.org/programs/threeg/990515.html](http://www.im.org/programs/threeg/990515.html)>; Elizabeth Childs-Johnson and Lawrence R. Sullivan, ‘Appendix C: The Three Gorges Dam and the Fate of China’s Southern Heritage’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, pp.200-210; ‘Appendix D: Priority-Level Cultural Antiquities in the Three Gorges Area’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, p.211; ‘Appendix E: Archaeological Sites to Be Inundated in 1997 by the Construction of the Three Gorges Dam’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, pp.212-213; ‘Appendix G: Major Cities and Sites to Be Affected by the Three Gorges Dam and Reservoir’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, pp.220; Dai Qing, ‘The Danger to Historical Relics and Cultural Antiquities in and around the Three Gorges Area: Interview with the Director of the National History Museum of China, Yu Weichao’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, pp.124-142.

<sup>49</sup> Boxer, p.94.

<sup>50</sup> Qing, ‘Symbol’, pp.10-11.

<sup>51</sup> Qing, ‘Symbol’, p.11.

<sup>52</sup> Boxer, pp.103-104.

<sup>53</sup> Edmonds, pp.237, 249.

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed critique of the findings of the CCP scientists, see Gráinne Ryder and Margaret Barber, ‘What Dam Builders Don’t Want You to Know: A Summary’, *Damming the Three Gorge*, pp.23-33.

the CG began an adroit propaganda exercise.<sup>55</sup> The official view recognised that, though ‘an arduous task’, those relocated ‘will be guaranteed a happy and peaceful life, free of poverty.’<sup>56</sup> Officials promised relocated settlers prepared agricultural and housing land, a new job in their old trade and financial compensation.<sup>57</sup> According to official sources, peasants could also take note of model resettled villages such as Honggguang (Wanxian County), praised ‘for achieving a moderate level of prosperity.’<sup>58</sup> As section three demonstrates, resettlement did not prove as smooth or as easy as promised.

Alongside such inducements, proponents of the TGP emphasised how the dam would protect people from devastating floods and how it was in the national interest of the country. President of the China Three Gorges Project Development Corporation, Lu Younmei, asserted that had the dam ‘already been completed, the problems of flood control would have already been solved’, the devastation of the 1998 Yangtze flooding in 1998 averted.<sup>59</sup> Protagonists continued to argue that the dam was crucial for national development and, in the atmosphere of suppression following the pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, quashed dissent. A nationalist rhetoric enabled protagonists to associate supporters ‘with the power and the glory of the Chinese state’ and to brand opponents as unpatriotic conspirators trying to infiltrate Chinese culture with Western values.<sup>60</sup>

Initially, this technique seemed to be successful. Non-CCP studies reinforced the observation made by a Fengjie businessman that ‘Though personally I am not looking forward to moving ... I am all for the project. Anything that I lose is nothing compared to what the country will gain.’<sup>61</sup> Similarly, an independent study found that sixty seven per cent of villagers in Qigang were ‘willing to move in the national interest.’<sup>62</sup> A recent survey supports this claim: 61 per cent of 470 migrant householders believed they would benefit from the dam building. As section three illustrates the

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<sup>55</sup> Smith, p.394 provides a lower estimate of the number of people relocated than Dai Qing, ‘Symbol, p.10.

<sup>56</sup> Wu Bian, ‘The Gorges Resettlement Project on a Sound Track’, *Beijing Review*, 40, 50 (December 15-21), 1997, p.13.

<sup>57</sup> Wu, pp.13-14.

<sup>58</sup> Wu, p.15.

<sup>59</sup> Lu Youmei quoted in Wendy Kan, ‘At War With the Yangtze’, *Time*, (August 17, 1998), p.37. Lu Youmei’s actions were nothing new. The severe 1954 and 1991 June-July Yangtze floods were also cited as proof of the need of the dam. Ryder and Barber, ‘Damming’, pp.3, 17.

<sup>60</sup> Sullivan, pp.xviii-xviii and footnote 8. For a comment on resurgent antagonism towards the West in the 1990s see Geramie Barmé, ‘To Screw Foreigners is Patriotic’, *The China Journal*, 34 (July, 1995), pp.209-234 reprinted in Geramie R. Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*, New York, 1999, chapter 10, pp.255-280.

<sup>61</sup> Wen Zuoyao quoted in Han, p.22.

<sup>62</sup> Ding Qigang, ‘What Are the Three Gorges Resettlers Thinking?’, *The River Dragon Has Come!*, p.76.

nationalistic ‘unity’ fomented by the CCP has been undermined by a series of rural environmental protests.<sup>63</sup>

Favourable propaganda helped foment support for the dam. In late 1991 Chinese newspapers carried pro-TGP publicity.<sup>64</sup> This contrasted with the CG’s banning of the anti-dam publication, *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, in 1989 and the imprisonment of its editor, Dai Qing, who had also been involved in the Tiananmen protests.<sup>65</sup> *Yangtze! Yangtze!* typified the growth of protest against the dam up to 1989. Its author was denounced in official media and arrested. (Her powerful patron, General Ye Jianying, however, effected her release.<sup>66</sup>) Many other protesters were not so lucky, as the CCP repression of the pro-democracy Tiananmen Square movement enabled TGP protagonists to silence most critics.<sup>67</sup>

The CCP used these methods because it feared that environmental protest could undermine the regime. Indeed, as Richard Louis Edmonds notes, ‘Once an environmental movement has been successfully established to fight one issue, it tends to gain momentum and often becomes the focus for political dissension.’<sup>68</sup> With the Tiananmen pro-democracy protest occurring concomitantly with the publication of Dai Qing’s *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, and with suggestions that the 1989 NPC attack on Li Peng’s TGP had fuelled the Tiananmen protest, this political dissension was precisely what the CCP leadership feared.<sup>69</sup> Dai Qing had stated in *Yangtze! Yangtze!* that she did not consider herself an environmentalist. Rather, she and her colleagues’ aim ‘was to push China a little bit further towards freedom of speech on the issue of government decision making.’<sup>70</sup>

To add to these concerns the recent collapse of the Soviet Union demonstrated to the CCP the danger of spontaneous movements and the need to suppress such organisations. In the Soviet Union, much as with the increase in free press in China before 1989, censorship relaxed and allowed public opinion to influence controversial environmental projects. Many Soviet citizens bordering the Aral Sea, a vast landlocked sea in Central Asia, for instance, criticised their leadership for polluting and draining this body of water.<sup>71</sup> Ethnic dissatisfaction, fuelled by economic and environmental

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<sup>63</sup> Li Heming, Paul Waley and Phil Rees, ‘Reservoir Resettlement in China: past experience and the Three Gorges Dam’, *The Geographical Journal*, 167, 3 (September, 2001), p.202.

<sup>64</sup> He and Si, p.29.

<sup>65</sup> Xiao Rong, ‘The Banning of *Yangtze! Yangtze!*’, *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, p.13.

<sup>66</sup> For a brief biography of Dai Qing’s remarkable life, see Geramie Barmé, ‘Enemy of the People’, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (August 10, 1989), pp.29-30.

<sup>67</sup> Edmonds, p.80.

<sup>68</sup> Edmonds, p.245.

<sup>69</sup> Ryder and Barber, ‘Damming’, p.14.

<sup>70</sup> Dai Qing, ‘The Struggle to Publish *Yangtze! Yangtze!* in China’, *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, p.8.

<sup>71</sup> Timur Pulatov, ‘Those Who Run Ahead of the Cart – Reflections on Problems Between Nationalities’, in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 40, (1988), p.8.

mismanagement, became focused around this environmental issue, a situation precisely what the Chinese leadership feared in its own country.

With all of these internal challenges, the CCP still had to maintain the support of foreign investors. Foreign investors, including US Government backed companies, Canadian firms and the World Bank, would provide an estimated (1994 figures) 8.6 billion yuan, mainly for foreign technology and equipment.<sup>72</sup> In contrast to the nationalism fomented at home, international literature, such as *Beijing Review*, and that provided to the international press, emphasised the need for international co-operation and the necessity of the dam's construction.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps of greater effect was the economic carrot offered to companies. Three foreign companies would receive special access to Chinese markets provided they made available finance for the TGP's construction, a privilege unprecedented in the history of the CCP.<sup>74</sup>

The CCP thus utilised a variety of tactics to garner support for, and silence dissent against, the TGP. It used enshrined bargaining techniques to curry local and national support for the project, while cracking down on dissent and emphasising to peasants the higher good of the project. The last three years, however, have seen growing opposition to the project, especially from rural areas.

### **Environmental Protest After 1998**

Since the initial success of dam protagonists in 1989, environmental protest against the project has grown, particularly in rural areas where resettlement has occurred and especially within the last four years. Rural environmental protest has focussed around issues of equity, in which protestors have complained against false promises, official corruption and duplicity. Such environmental protest, like that in Gaoyang, has been based around traditional and well-understood cultural practices. It reflects a general increase in rural protest, itself the result of economic, bureaucratic and legalistic changes introduced by central government. While the Government has shown increasing toleration of protest, and a willingness to stop corruption, it nevertheless continues to represses environmental protest. In contrast to rural activism, many urban-based non-governmental environmental groups have chosen non-confrontational means to emphasise their concern over environmental issues.

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<sup>72</sup> On overseas investment see Ryder and Barber, 'Damming', pp.8-9, 21. On the estimated loan figure see 'Some Issues Regarding the Preliminary Design of the Three Gorges Project', *Yangtze! Yangtze!*, p.283.

<sup>73</sup> For instance, in the 1991 floods world news repeated dam protagonists' assertion of the flood protection the TGP would provide. Ryder and Barber, 'Damming', p.17.

<sup>74</sup> Ryder and Barber, 'Damming', p.21.

According to a report published by the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) and the Ministry of Education over 60 per cent of people in a survey field of 10 000 'replied that they believe China's environmental problems are "very serious" or "fairly serious".'<sup>75</sup> Jun Jing asserts that the last two decades have seen 'an upsurge of environmentally related social protests.'<sup>76</sup> In rural areas protest has emerged over issues of environmental equity reflecting a general escalation in peasant protest and embracing 'culturally meaningful symbols and a politically adept language.'<sup>77</sup> In 1997 members of Gaoyang township (now part of Chongqing municipality) organised the first confirmed protest against corruption by officials of the TGP. Villagers organised a petition movement blaming township officials for embezzlement and corruption, levelling criticism on country officials for failing to distribute financial compensation for those resettled. Like many other villagers, Gaoyang's discovered that the reclaimed land promised to them which would enable them to stay in their township turned out to be scattered plots of land on poor quality soil along sloping ground. Petitioners also claimed that local officials had embezzled up to three million yuan of the land reclamation fund. 1,000 *mu* of the claimed resettlement land, they argued, had proved non-existent or unusable.<sup>78</sup>

An initial official investigation of corruption made little impact, so protesters sent a second petition to Beijing. Once that reached the capital a commission was sent to investigate the allegations. It sacked five high ranking officials and Gaoyang's Party Secretary (who was later jailed) but failed to address petitioners' grievances since it only jailed officials for bribe taking, not for their role in the resettlement.<sup>79</sup> In August 1998 local authorities, realising that petitioners' grievances had not been addressed, pressured villagers to disassociate themselves from the protest and tried to capture the local leaders. The leaders escaped and hand-delivered a petition to the Beijing Government.<sup>80</sup> As Jun Jing notes, the Gaoyang petition presents an instance of villagers strongly conscious of their civil and political rights, and strongly aware of the correct channels through which to direct their complaints.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Beijing Environment, Science and Technology Update*, 8 September 2000 <[www.h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trz=vx&list=hasia&month=0009&week=c&msg=gBRyaStpjtObvh9GNFvCkA@user=&pw&](http://www.h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trz=vx&list=hasia&month=0009&week=c&msg=gBRyaStpjtObvh9GNFvCkA@user=&pw&)>.

See also *Beijing Environment, Science and Technology Update*, 3 November 2000 <[www.usembassy-china.org.cn/englishsandtestnews1103.html](http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/englishsandtestnews1103.html)>.

<sup>76</sup> Jun Jing, 'Environmental Protests in Rural China', in Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden, eds., *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, London, 2000, p.143.

<sup>77</sup> Jun, p.154.

<sup>78</sup> Jun, pp.148-149.

<sup>79</sup> Jun, p.149.

<sup>80</sup> Jun, p.151.

<sup>81</sup> Jun, p.151.

It also demonstrates the way Gaoyang's citizens framed their protest in culturally understandable terms. Petitioners, for instance, planned to sew a hundred white gowns and write on them black characters complaining against corrupt local officials. Their choice of gowns was significant. In China white symbolises death and mourning.<sup>82</sup> As Jun Jing notes:

The transfer of funeral symbolism to social protests actually is an important feature of China's political culture. In Beijing, popular demonstrations at Tiananmen Square in 1976 and 1989 usurped the official mourning for a national leader, turning it into a forum to express anger with the political regime.<sup>83</sup>

The petition symbolised petitioners' willingness to die for their cause and emphasised their sense of grievance over the issue.<sup>84</sup> Following the betrayal of the plan to send gowns to officials, petition leaders used another culturally understood figure to underline the 'petition movement's unpredictable consequences.'<sup>85</sup> Many other movements within Asia and elsewhere have used culturally understood frames for environmental protest.<sup>86</sup>

The petition of Gaoyang citizens is part of a rising tide of rural protest against local and official policy. Increasing protests are partly the result of institutional reform in China which has allowed greater autonomy. Peasants, faced with increasing tax duties placed on them by more independent local authorities, have taken advantage of a more liberal political atmosphere to resist these burdens.<sup>87</sup> In the opinion of Yee and Wang increasing prosperity, greater autonomy and initiative, de-collectivisation and urban mobility have turned the traditionally obedient peasant into a more vocal and political creature.<sup>88</sup> Voting in local elections and formal contact with government officials, written complaints and lawsuits, destruction and uprisings, are all options now open to peasants who want to engage in political activity. Indeed,

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<sup>82</sup> Jun, p.155.

<sup>83</sup> Jun, p.155.

<sup>84</sup> Jun, p.156.

<sup>85</sup> Jun, p.156.

<sup>86</sup> Yok-shui F. Lee and Alvin Y. So, 'Introduction', in Yok-shui F. Lee and Alvin Y. So, eds., *Asia's Environmental Movements: Comparative Perspectives*, New York, 1999, pp.3-28. For a discussion of the sue of 'traditional' culture in India against a large dam see Amita Baviskar, *In The Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*, Delhi, 1997.

<sup>87</sup> Dali L. Yang, *Calamity and Reform in China: State, Rural Society, and Institutional Change Since the Great Leap Famine*, Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1996, chapter 7, pp.184-212.

<sup>88</sup> Herbert S. Yee and Wang Jinhong, 'Grassroots Political Participation in Rural China', in David C. B. Teather and Herbert S. Yee, eds., *China in Transition: Issues and Politics*, Macmillan Press: Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1999, pp.26-37.

as China prepares to draft a new Environmental Impact Assessment Law it is being encouraged to incorporate public concerns into environmental assessment.<sup>89</sup> In the 1990s the government, too, began to educate the Chinese public on environmental issues, reflecting, perhaps, its committed role to international environmental accords.<sup>90</sup> The paradox for the CCP is that while it often encouraged protest as a means of increasing ‘leverage over local agencies and their officials’, the Party fears that, like Dai Qing’s protest, too much political freedom may threaten the regime.<sup>91</sup>

The challenge for the Party to maintain its legitimacy is compounded by a freer media and corruption, which the press is only too eager to highlight. The liberal, Hong Kong based daily, *South China Morning Post*, for instance, has reported on ‘long-standing complaints that resettlement plans are ill-conceived, funds inadequate and that monies allocated for this purpose have been embezzled by corrupt officials continue to be ignored, while the date for filling the reservoir grows ever nearer.’ This particular article continued by noting that since ‘years of peaceful petitioning has brought no relief...frustrated residents are increasingly resorting to public protests, sometimes resulting in clashes with police or local officials.’<sup>92</sup> In September 2000 about 300 peasants from Gaoyang attacked officials from the county Resettlement Bureau. Elsewhere resettled farmers are returning to their old land because of receiving poor compensation.<sup>93</sup> According to Li, Waley and Rees urban ‘relocatees’ received better compensation and chances of gaining employment than those relocated to rural areas.<sup>94</sup>

The CCP is finding it increasingly difficult to suppress protest. Several Chinese responded to press reports of corruption and poor workmanship on the TGP, for instance, by sending anonymous e-mails to Chinese web sites. One e-mail implored the CP to ‘allow a democratic system that lets the people with their critical eyes assist with technical oversight. Only in this way,’

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<sup>89</sup> *Beijing Environment, Science and Technology Update*, 13 April, 2001 <[www.usembassy-china.org.cn/english/sandt/estnews0413.html](http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/english/sandt/estnews0413.html)>.

<sup>90</sup> In 1993, for example, the CG initiated an environmental publicity campaign designed to increase awareness of environmental matters and highlight serious cases of environmental pollution. Wong, pp.188-189. China, for instance, has signed the global warming agreements at Kyoto (1994) and Buenos Aires (1998). Smith, pp.383-384; See also K.K. Wong, ‘The Challenge of Sustainable Development’, in David C. B. Teather and Herbert S. Yee, eds., *China in Transition: Issues and Politics*, Macmillan Press: Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1999, pp.183-185.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, p.404.

<sup>92</sup> 29 September 2000, <[www.irn.org/programs/threeg/001003.advisory.html](http://www.irn.org/programs/threeg/001003.advisory.html)>.

<sup>93</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 9 June, 2000, <[www.irn.org/programs/threeg/001003.advisory.html](http://www.irn.org/programs/threeg/001003.advisory.html)>.

<sup>94</sup> 47 per cent of rural relocatees ‘did not view their relocation as a good chance to escape from poverty.’ Only 8 per cent expressed confidence in their future prospects. Li, Waley and Rees, pp.204, 206-207.

concluded the e-mail, ‘can the quality of projects be assured.’<sup>95</sup> Likewise, as Daniel Lynch demonstrates, the effects of market deregulation, technological reform and administrative fragmentation have undermined official Chinese ‘thought work’. It is no longer possible for the CCP to monopolise broadcasting, nor for it to control what its people listen to. Though he characterises China as an increasingly pluralistic society, willing and able to tune into Western media or purchase consumer products, this has not resulted in the accompanying economic and social changes which have led to political freedom and the emergence of a definitive civil society (a situation Lynch terms public-sphere praetorianism). Rather, the reality is a cacophony of different voices drowning each other out. Were the economy to fall into recession, Lynch warns that the CCP could lose total control over communications and thus plunge the party into a serious political crisis.<sup>96</sup>

With an increasingly dissatisfied, vocal peasantry and declining control over media, the CCP is understandably eager to remove potential sources of grievance, whether these be by addressing growing corruption among officials involved in the TGP, controlling environmental protest, or maintaining high levels of economic growth. As Jun Jing notes, the inability of the state to deal with re-settlers’ negative ‘publicity may cast serious doubts as to whether the Three Gorges Dam project can deal effectively with the many problems of rural resettlement in an already bleak ecological environment.’<sup>97</sup> The project as a whole has been beset by serious corruption among local and dam officials. Echoing Gaoyang villagers’ complaints, according to a report in the Guangdong weekly, *Nanfang Zhoumo*, Zhong country Land Bureau officials over-claimed 134 hectares from one village and forced peasants from their homes.<sup>98</sup>

In another case the manager of a subsidiary of the Three Gorges Economic Development Corporation, Jin Wenchao, embezzled money and sold official posts. He has since disappeared after being questioned by police. In January 2000 police charged Dai Lansheng, an executive of the Three Gorges Industrial Company, with embezzlement.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, officials found that

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<sup>95</sup> <[www.h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trz=vx&list=hasia&month=0009&week=c&msg=gBRyaStpjtObvh9GNFvCkA@user=&pw&](http://www.h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trz=vx&list=hasia&month=0009&week=c&msg=gBRyaStpjtObvh9GNFvCkA@user=&pw&)>.

<sup>96</sup> Daniel C. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and “Thought Work” in Reformed China*, Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1999. For an introduction to the role of media in Asian politics, see Aat Vervoorn, *Re-Orient: Change in Asian Societies*, Melbourne, 1998, chapter 10, pp.230-250. The emergence of a civil society is an interesting and contentious issue but one, unfortunately, outside the scope of this article. Footnote 119 provides an introduction to sources on this area.

<sup>97</sup> Jin, p.150.

<sup>98</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 20 June 2000 <[www.irn.org/programs/threeg/000620.scmp.html](http://www.irn.org/programs/threeg/000620.scmp.html)>.

<sup>99</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 3 May 2000 <[www.irn.org/programs/threeg/000503.scmp.html](http://www.irn.org/programs/threeg/000503.scmp.html)>.



\$57 million US dollars has been stolen from the resettlement relocation fund, almost half of it by a single contractor.<sup>100</sup>

To maintain support for the dam, officials have tried to clamp down on corruption by meting out punishment to high-level offenders and addressing smaller outbreaks. On 25 February 2000, for instance, the 'former director of the district construction bureau in Fengdu received the death sentence...for stealing 12 million yuan' (\$1.44 U.S. million dollars).<sup>101</sup> Some 100 officials have also been indicted on smaller charges of corruption.<sup>102</sup> This has not proved wholly successful, as the case in Gaoyang demonstrates. Anti-corruption activity in Gaoyang is a reminder that the Chinese state cannot be looked upon as a monolithic entity, with monopolistic powers of control. Rather, it comprises a rich cultural and geographical diversity that defies total central control.

Authorities in China have also tried to quash environmental protest. The International Rivers Network reported recently that officials arrested five representatives of a group that had organised petitions against the TGP.<sup>103</sup> Likewise, reports the *South China Morning Post*, police are believed to have arrested two farmers responsible for organising a petition against the project.<sup>104</sup> It is possible that, like Gaoyang's, local authorities elsewhere orchestrated these arrests fearing that protests to central authority would bring in a commission from outside to investigate corruption charges and thus undermine the authority of local officials.

Whether or not local authorities acted in this manner, it is clear that the CCP is unwilling to allow criticism of the principles of a scheme as politically important as the TGP. Since, as Christopher Smith observes, 'the current regime has tied its legitimacy to improvements in the people's well-being, which can realistically be achieved only by furthering the current push towards modernization,' stopping the project would jeopardise the credibility of the CCP.<sup>105</sup> As an anonymous senior Chinese engineer also admitted, 'From all angles this project has enormous problems ... Our leaders are worried that if it did [admit the failure of the project], the regime could fall.'<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, though environmental awareness and protection in China has grown in recent years, 'the personal ambitions of officials and agency politics often frustrate

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<sup>100</sup> *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 7 January 2001 <[www.irn.org/programs/threeeg/010201.3gproblems.html](http://www.irn.org/programs/threeeg/010201.3gproblems.html)>.

<sup>101</sup> *Agence France Presse*, 10 March 2000 <[www.irn.org/programs/threeeg/000310.corr.html](http://www.irn.org/programs/threeeg/000310.corr.html)>.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> IRN, 28 March 2001 <<http://irn.org/programs/threeeg/010328.arrestspr.html>>.

<sup>104</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 21 March 2001 <[www.irn.org/programs/threeeg/010328.petheld.html](http://www.irn.org/programs/threeeg/010328.petheld.html)>.

<sup>105</sup> Smith, p.380.

<sup>106</sup> *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 7 January 2001 <[www.irn.org/programs/threeeg/010201.3gproblems.html](http://www.irn.org/programs/threeeg/010201.3gproblems.html)>.

rational environmental policy.’<sup>107</sup> Indeed, some Chinese support the primacy given to modernisation because they believe that environmental degradation is an acceptable cost of economic development.<sup>108</sup> These fears and attitudes explain the vociferousness with which Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, for instance, allegedly ordered a former water resources minister, Li Rui, to stop criticising the dam.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, at a proposal to transfer water south to north, the Yangze River Commission Director urged that ‘everyone’s thinking must now quickly come around to the same view’ about the controversial project.<sup>110</sup>

The CCP has kept an equally careful check on non-governmental environmental organisations. As a means of controlling potentially troublesome parts of society, the CCP’s policy of monitoring environmental movements is similar to its registration of ethnic groups.<sup>111</sup> The first of these environmental organisations, Friends of Nature, which originated in Beijing in either 1992 or 1994, is typical of later groups. Friends of Nature is urban based and focuses on environmental education.<sup>112</sup> Environmental groups that have emerged on student campuses, likewise, stress voluntarism and education.<sup>113</sup> In other words, these urban environmental groups have

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<sup>107</sup> Abigail R. Jahiel, ‘The Organization of Environmental Protection in China’, *The China Quarterly*, 159, (December, 1998), pp.757-787. *Beijing Environment, Science and Technology Update*, 16 February 2001 <[www.cenews.com.cn/hjbweb/template/notemplate.asp](http://www.cenews.com.cn/hjbweb/template/notemplate.asp)>.

<sup>108</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 18 February 1997, quoted in Lee and So, ‘Introduction’, p.7. Indeed, a survey conducted among urban Chinese environmental protection officers found that, although sympathetic to environmental causes, they ‘aspired to develop material wealth.’ Wong, p.187.

<sup>109</sup> *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 7 January 2001 <[www.irn.org/programs/three/010201.3gproblems.html](http://www.irn.org/programs/three/010201.3gproblems.html)>.

<sup>110</sup> *Beijing Environment, Science and Technology Update*, 29 December 2000 <[www.usembassy-china.org.cn/englishsandtestnews1229.html](http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/englishsandtestnews1229.html)>. For recent news of this project see *The Economist*, 18 August 2001, p.23.

<sup>111</sup> Dru C. Gladney, ‘Salman Rushdie in China: Religion, Ethnicity and State Definitions in the People’s Republic of China’, in Charles Keys et al, eds., *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, Honolulu, 1994, pp.255-278.

<sup>112</sup> Smith, p.403 provides an earlier founding date than Jahiel, p.786 and Shapiro, pp.209-210. Global Village Environmental Culture Institute of Beijing (established in 1996) stresses environmental education. Green Earth Volunteers (1997) organises activities such as tree planting, whereas the Beijing Environmental Protection Foundation (August, 1996) focuses ‘on recycling and on educating women and children about the environment.’ Jahiel, footnote 84, p.786.

<sup>113</sup> With as many as 400 hundred members, and including an unofficial Green Forum which organises summer projects, these student-based environmental groups represent a significant movement. Jahiel, p.786 and footnote 85, p.786. See also Shapiro, p.210. For a discussion of environmental literature in China see Wu Dingbo, ‘Environmental Literature: A Chinese Perspective’, in Patrick D. Murphy, ed., and Terry Gifford and Katsunori Yamazato, contributing eds., *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook*, Michigan, 1998, pp.300-303.

deliberately shied away from associating themselves with controversial issues such as calls for democracy. Hong Kong environmental groups, similarly, disassociated themselves from democracy movements when authorities mounted a crackdown on them.<sup>114</sup> Like those in China, Hong Kong's environmental groups emphasise non-confrontational methods of mobilising support, such as environmental education projects and recycling.<sup>115</sup>

Yet this still has not silenced some academics' criticisms. In late 2000, the engineer Lu Qinkan led a panel of 55 experts, including hydrologists, historians and environmentalists, who issued a statement against the plan to increase the water height of the dam to 175 metres by 2009. They argued that raising the dam would present problems of re-settlement and increase down-stream silting of the Yangtze. Lu had earlier distinguished himself as one of only 9 experts out of 412 engineers to refuse to sign an engineering evaluation of the TGP in 1988.<sup>116</sup>

What is clear is that while the Government may be able to suppress some forms of environmental protest in China, it is not able to eradicate all. This underlines the argument put forward by Lynch and others: that the CCP no longer maintains absolute authority over the Chinese populace. In the wry words of the leader of China's liberal movement, China 'is a late totalitarian society in which you see the truth of the absolute corruption of absolute power.'<sup>117</sup> Its reliance on economic development to maintain a support base places added importance on the TGP.<sup>118</sup> To criticise this project is to threaten the very existence of the regime. The CCP is therefore concerned to address corruption and punish critics of the TGP. Ironically, many of the CCP's own reforms have created the problems it faces today.

Whether, as Dai Qing hoped, environmental protest will lead to increasing democracy, time will only tell. The reality of environmental protest in China perhaps reflects Lynch's categorisation of China as a state-society relationship dominated by public-sphere praetorianism, one in which the state no longer has the total control it had in the past but in which a civil society has yet to develop. The culturally based nature of rural protest is a reminder that what might have occurred in Europe or the United States need not necessarily

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<sup>114</sup> Su-Hoon Lee, Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, Hwa-Jen Liu, On-Kwok Lai, Francisco A. Magno, and Alvin Y. So, 'The Impact of Democratization on Environmental Movements', in Yok-shui F. Lee and Alvin Y. So, eds., *Asia's Environmental Movements: Comparative Perspectives*, New York, 1999, pp.245-246.

<sup>115</sup> Lee et al., pp.223-224.

<sup>116</sup> *Beijing Environment, Science and Technology Update*, 15 December 2000 <[www.usembassy-china.org.cn/english/sandtest/news1215.htm](http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/english/sandtest/news1215.htm)>.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Isabel Hilton, 'The Lost City', *Granta*, 73, (2001), p.248.

<sup>118</sup> Recent commentators, like Ching Cheong, have noted that instead of bringing greater stability, affluence is bringing increasing dissent. Ching Cheong, *The Straits Times*, 1 January, 2002, p.16.

occur elsewhere.<sup>119</sup> Yet China's leaders must be careful about managing the environmental and social impact of economic development schemes like the TGP. Some Chinese environmentalists think that government corruption 'is China's biggest environmental problem.'<sup>120</sup> As the case of Gaoyang demonstrates, environmental crisis could threaten social stability and, as Smith observes, even the modernisation programme itself.<sup>121</sup> The Gordian knot of the TGP appears to divide even the Chinese leadership.<sup>122</sup>

## Conclusion

Protagonists of the TGP hope the still waters of the TGP will reflect the success of China's historical quest for modernisation. Opponents of the project instead see the TGP as damming the free flow of ideas, a representation of all that is wrong with the China of today. Whether still or muddied, the TGP is symbolic of a long utilitarian attitude towards nature that can, in part, be traced to the great canal building of imperial China. Improved navigation and flood control, likewise, are not new demands, nor is the realisation brought out by the project that the Chinese state is not a monolithic entity, governed by one policy and one faction. Rather, bargaining and cajoling, repression and jailing, are as necessary to the success of this project as they were to many others in the past. Yet with the TGP the Chinese state faces increasing criticism of its resettlement policies, particularly from rural areas affected by re-location. Ironically, many of these protests are the result of its own rural policies.

It is difficult to predict the outcome of growing protest against the dam in rural China, though environmental problems have the potential to hinder economic development and magnify social tensions. The TGP, then, is not simply an engineering structure, but rather is an edifice infused with varied

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<sup>119</sup> See, for instance, Vervoorn's discussion of human rights, chapter 3, pp.46-63; Miranda Johnson provides a critique of the application of concepts of civil society to China. Miranda Johnson, 'Chinese Civil Society: A Case of Failure or Scholarly Obsfucation?', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 2, 2 (December, 2000), pp.107-135.

<sup>120</sup> *Beijing Environment, Science and Technology Update*, 12 January 2001 <[www.usembassy-china.org.cn/english/sandt/estnews0112.htm](http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/english/sandt/estnews0112.htm)>.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, pp.382-384.

<sup>122</sup> Rumour in Beijing has it that in 1999 Li Peng and Zhu Rongji 'had a fierce and bitter exchange during a Central Committee meeting over corruption in the Three Gorges project. Mr Zhu is believed to oppose Mr Li's push for the "develop the west" programme, which includes new dam projects along the Yangtze and Yellow rivers.' *South China Morning Post*, 3 May 2000 [?] <[www.irm.org/programs/threeg/000503.scmp.html](http://www.irm.org/programs/threeg/000503.scmp.html)>. For an overview of the environmental options facing China's leadership see *Clear Water, Blue Skies: China's Environment in the New Century*, Washington, D.C., 1997.

meaning and symbolism. What Polo would make of all this were he alive today to visit the TGP is anyone's guess. The practical businessman in him would probably warm to the innumerable ships, goods, merchandise and wealth the TGP is touted to bring to the Chinese people and, especially, to foreign investors.