Reservoir resettlement in China: past experience and the Three Gorges Dam

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This paper reviews involuntary resettlement resulting from dam-building, which has been ignored relative to the dominant focus of migration research in China, rural to urban migration. Reservoir resettlement in China has a long history, often of misery and hardship for those displaced. Relocatees affected by the Three Gorges Project (1994–2009) on the Yangtze River face a similar situation. In China priority has been given to building the dam to provide electricity, flood control and navigation. Less attention has been paid to the problems of the people affected by the reservoir inundation. The rural population forced to relocate and rural-urban migrants in general have been discriminated against by national policies.

KEY WORDS: China, reservoirs, resettlement, population mobility, Three Gorges Dam Project, Yangtze River

Introduction

This paper redresses an imbalance. Most Chinese migration researchers focus their study on the current rural—urban migration rather than development-induced forced resettlement. We undertake a general review of reservoir resettlement in China, focusing on population displacement caused by the Three Gorges Project and set it in the broader context of population mobility. The aim is to describe the recent history of reservoir resettlement in China, the problems it generates and to evaluate policy responses.

In the first part of the paper we place reservoir resettlement in the more general context of migration in China and review the characteristics of reservoir displacees as a special class of forced migrants. The second part of the paper provides an appraisal of the history of reservoir resettlement in the People’s Republic since 1949. The rest of the paper then focuses on the specific case of the Three Gorges Project under construction on the Yangtze River in Central China, one of the largest dam/reservoir developments in human history. The third part describes the project, its context in Chinese development and the nature of survey evidence gathered by the authors. The fourth part discusses the nature and problems of two official strategies, in operation since 1994, for relocation of inhabitants from the area to be inundated. The fifth part introduces and evaluates a third relocation strategy. The sixth part summarizes the findings of the research. It is important for social scientists removed from the immediate tasks and demands of such an important infrastructure project to provide a perspective on its consequences for the lives of the people most directly affected. This is the overall goal of the paper.

The research focus on rural-urban migration in China

Depending on the definitions given, several hundred million people have been on the move in China since the economic reforms launched in the late 1970s (Bakken 1998). Waves of temporary migrants, often referred to as the ‘floating population’, have streamed to the cities. The latest estimates show that the ‘floating population’ in China has reached 100 million, representing about eight per cent of the national population (Zhongguo qingnian 2000; Zhang 2000). Several aspects of population mobility in contemporary China have been investigated, including the magnitude and characteristics of the ‘floating population’ (Goldstein and Guo 1984; Chan 1988; Shen and Tong 1992; Chang 1996; Bakken 1998), the economic and social factors affecting migration
(Christiansen 1990; Chan 1994; Chan and Li 1999; Solinger 1999), the effects of migration on the economy and society (Nolan 1993; Qian 1996; Shen 1996; Davin 1997; Scharping 1997), and rural-urban mobility and urbanization (Ma 1993; Chan 1994; Yang and Xiao 1996; Chan et al. 1999).

The lack of attention to reservoir displacement
While the rural-urban migration stream, the so-called ‘floating population’, has caught most public attention, population displacement caused by environmental factors, and particularly population resettlement resulting from dam building has now attracted more attention both within and outside China. In the wake of a short-lived but heated debate about the Three Gorges Dam in the middle and late 1980s, Tian Fang, Lin Fatang and Lin Chunxi’s ‘Lun sanxia gongcheng de hongguan juece’ (A study of macro decision-making in the Three Gorges Project) (1987) and Dai Qing’s ‘Changjiang Changjiang: sanxia gongcheng lunzheng’ (Yangtze Yangtze: a debate about the Three Gorges Project) (1989) were published but soon banned in mainland China. In addition, the Research Group on Danjiangkou Reservoir (RGDR 1993) and Xu Hesheng (1995) studied population resettlement resulting from the Danjiangkou and Xin’anjiang dams respectively. Among Chinese researchers who have published in English, there has been only a limited literature on population resettlement as a result of dam construction and, almost all on the Three Gorges Project. Jing Jun (1997) has placed the Three Gorges Project on the Yangtze River in historical context, while Dai Qing published an English version of his book ‘Yangtze! Yangtze!’ in 1994, and a new book ‘The river dragon has come’ in 1998.

The political sensitivity of reservoir displacement
Why has so much attention been given to the floating population? Certainly, the numbers involved are enormous by any reckoning, and the geographical patterns of migration flows are varied. In addition, these developments are directly related to economic reform and social change, issues which interest researchers inside and outside China. The Chinese Government is also particularly concerned about the impact of such a huge population movement on the economy and society. By contrast, reservoir resettlement accounts for only a small proportion of the population and takes place in scattered locations. More importantly, many of the problems that emerged from past reservoir resettlement involved political factors that have remained unresolved. The suppression of any mention of the human cost of hydropower development has been state policy; about two-thirds of the ten million people uprooted by reservoirs are still living below the official poverty line (Jing 1996). New dams such as the Three Gorges Project are still sensitive because of disagreement about resettlement policy and environment impacts.

Thus, most researchers within China have tended to adopt a positive approach to the project (Liu 1990; Li 1994; Chen 1994; Zhu et al. 1996; Ma 1996), while critics have published abroad (Dai 1994; Dai and Xie 1996; Jing 1997; Dai 1998). In some circumstances, researchers have used pseudonyms for fear of potential reprisals. For example, the author of an article entitled ‘Sanxia yimin gongzuo zhongde zhongda wenti yu yinhuan’ (Major problems and hidden troubles in relocation of TGP) in the Chinese journal ‘Zhanlue yu fazhan’ (Strategy and Management) in January 1999 used the nom de plume ‘Wei Y’, meaning ‘for the displacees’. This remarkable article caught the attention of foreign media and was reprinted by a number of well-known NGOs such as the US-based International River Network and Canada-based Probe International. It is safer for the academic community in China to focus research attention on the ‘floating population’ rather than reservoir resettlement.

Reservoir displacees as one class of forced migrants
It is increasingly recognized that many migrants have no realistic choice but to move: these migrants are labelled ‘involuntary’ or ‘forced’ migrants (Boyle et al. 1998, Chapter 8). Three major categories can be identified: political refugees, environmental refugees and people displaced by infrastructure projects (including dams). These groups differ in the extent to which the migration can be planned and how much state and household aid is available. Political refugees often face forced migration at short notice and aid provided is reactive to the refugee crisis. Displacement as a result of environmental degradation may have the same attributes but usually the pressure and time to plan is over a longer period. Infrastructure displacees will have the longest warning time and public agencies the longest lead times to plan the forced migration.

People displaced by dams and reservoirs are a consequence of development (Scudder and Colson 1982; Cernea 1990). This migrant category also includes those forced to move by industrial, urban or transportation infrastructure projects. Cernea (1997) estimates that there were around ten million
development-induced displacees each year in the mid-1990s or at least 80–90 million over the previous decade world-wide. Compared with political and environmental refugees, people displaced by dams share some characteristics but also display differences.

First, like political and environmental refugees, people displaced by dams are forced to move against their will. However, resettlement schemes resulting from dam-building are usually planned by governments. Affected inhabitants assume that the state will take responsibility for re-establishing their livelihood after displacement. There is a social contract (sometimes explicit) between the many who benefit from the dam and the few who suffer. By contrast, political refugees have difficulty in gaining assistance within their own country and have to seek external protection, while environmental migrants usually have no rights to compensation for losses caused by natural disasters.

Second, unlike political refugees, people displaced by dams do not normally leave their country of origin and are settled internally. By contrast with political and environmental refugees, dam displacees have time to make the arrangements for their relocation, though their choice of destination depends to a great extent on the government planning of resettlement schemes. Because of the heavy costs of population resettlement, ‘seldom have relocatees become materially and socially better off than before their move’ (Parnwell 1993, 48) and some suffer from a ‘refugee-like’ situation.

Third, migrants displaced by dam projects have no chance to return to their place of origin (it is under water). Political refugees have a range of future options: to stay in the host country, to transfer to another country or to return to their home country, with hundreds of thousands of refugees repatriating without official assistance each year (Cunny and Stein 1989). China’s historical records show that, once the natural disaster, war or tyranny has ended, refugees generally would return home and continue farming (Ma 1997).

In order to further limit the migration of rural workers and their dependants to urban areas and to control population movement, state policy declared an end to free migration with the establishment of the Household Registration System (hukou). Under the hukou, every citizen must register with the local police and is not allowed to register elsewhere without the permission of the government. Each citizen has a permanent residence booklet, which he or she is assigned the hukou status ‘agricultural population’ or ‘non-agricultural population’ (Christiansen 1990).

There were other mechanisms to control population mobility: state control over housing, employment, education and a rationing system governing the supply of daily necessities (Lu 1994). The rationing system was extended from grain to most other foods as well as to cotton and cloth, and continued basically unchanged for more than three decades. The factors affecting migration (employment, housing, transportation and food supply) were completely controlled by the state. The hukou and ration systems became not only the drivers of migration policy but also served to redefine the rural–urban relationship. The key feature of migration policy in China was to control the volume of population migration into cities, to limit state obligations to meet urban rations.

It was in this context in which internal migration was strictly controlled by the state that population displacement driven by dam construction reached its high point. During the period of the 1950s and 1960s more dams were built than ever before in China’s history and about 7.8 million people were moved to make way for these water control works (World Bank 1997). Particularly in the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960), several major dams, such as Xin’anjiang (1957–60) in Zhejiang Province and Sanmenxia (1957–62) on the Yellow River were built and work was begun on Danjiangkou (1958–73) on the Hanjiang River (Figure 1). These projects were not the largest in the world in terms of size of dam and electricity generated, but each displaced more than 300 000 people (Liu 1990; Xu 1995; Cernea 1997). By contrast, the Itaipu dam, the world’s largest hydropower station, completed in 1982 by Brazil and Paraguay jointly, displaced 50 000 people while some 120 000 people made way for the Aswan High Dam built in 1970 (Pearce 1992, 155; Goldsmith and Hildyard 1984, 17).
From coins in the hand to resettlement with development

Four periods can be distinguished in state policy since 1949 towards those who are forced to abandon their homes and their means of production as a result of the construction of dams. Relocation schemes during the first period, from 1950 to 1962, were characterized by low compensation, semi-political mobilization and semi-coercion. During the second period, from 1963 to 1980, various consequences of reservoir relocation came to light and personal tragedies occurred, and the Cultural Revolution made the situation of relocatees worse. It was not until the early 1980s that the government and relocation authorities started to take a serious look at the problems of reservoir resettlement and attempted to deal with so-called ‘inherited issues’. With the launch of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River, the government has been pursuing a new approach to undertaking the world’s largest social engineering project.

Population resettlement neglected For a long time, government and project authorities viewed population displacement as an extremely important component of project construction but did not view population resettlement in a similar way. The major task of reservoir resettlement was to move people out of the flooded area regardless of property losses and willingness to relocate, not to mention the restoration of livelihoods. Almost all resettlement schemes were characterized by hasty relocation and accompanied by political mobilization, low compensation and militarized actions. In the Danjiangkou Reservoir on the Hanjiang River, in the first phase of project construction, 100 000 people in both Hubei and Henan provinces had to be displaced during a period of two years, but no

Figure 1 The provinces and four major dams in China
planning, no housing, and no farmland were provided for the settlers. All the resettlement officials did was to issue instructions and give some money to the displaced people in money bags. Little attention was paid to maintenance of the livelihood of the settlers. Two-thirds of the 100,000 returned to the reservoir area spontaneously because of inadequate resettlement conditions and lack of compensation for assets lost. Without exception, relocatees displaced by other dams suffered from the double burden of inadequate compensation and resettlement on less productive land either uphill in the vicinity of the dam or further afield, some with relatives and friends in other parts of the country.

Inherited issues addressed The Chinese Government and relocation workers came to realize that previous reservoir resettlement policy had created serious problems because of a lack of planning and forethought. One of the largest errors committed at this time was the failure to view relocatees as either contributors to or victims of water projects but to see them instead as an obstacle to dam construction (Cernea 1997). Relocatees were told to move in the interests of the whole nation. In practice, the greatest funding priority was given to construction costs. As a result, reservoir areas have long been characterized by economic poverty. These problems became so serious that they were affecting social stability.

To resolve these inherited issues in past reservoir resettlements, the State Council decided to provide special funding: 300 million yuan RMB (8 yuan RMB = 1 US$ at 2001 exchange rates) for the Danjiangkou area and 200 million yuan RMB for the Xin’anjiang region respectively. Several contracts were made between the Ministry of Water Resources and the provincial authorities (Hubei, Henan and Zhejiang) responsible for resettlement and economic reconstruction over a 10-year period. As a result, obvious changes have taken place in both of the Danjiangkou and Xin’anjiang reservoir areas since 1983:

1. food production has been raised;
2. economic income per capita increased; and
3. social services such as education and health care improved in parts of the region (RGDR 1993).

However, it is unrealistic to expect the 500 million yuan RMB to solve all problems since they occurred not only in big dam projects such as Danjiangkou, Xin’anjiang and Sanmenxia but also wherever dams were built and people uprooted. In a recent speech, Li Peng, the ex-premier and current Chairman of the National People’s Congress, admitted that there are still enormous ‘inherited problems’ with resettlement in Danjiangkou and Shixi and Wujiangxai dams (both in Hunan Province) and new problems have arisen in the Xin’anjiang reservoir area because of a higher flood water level in 1999 (Hubei ribao 2000).

A new relocation policy In the light of past experience in reservoir resettlement, China has begun to seek a new relocation policy, stressing the restoration of the livelihoods of relocatees after displacement. The resettlement scheme in the Xiaolangdi project, for example, was inspected and approved by the World Bank, which provided a loan of US$ 900 million for the biggest project in the Yellow River valley. It is reported that the project will benefit about half a million people and create about 75,000 full-time and about 37,400 part-time jobs (World Bank 1994). There is also empirical evidence that the relocatees displaced by the Shuijiau dam have benefited from the new approach. Close to Fuzhou City, the capital of Fujian Province and one of the cities that have developed most rapidly in China, most development programmes belonging to the project were incorporated into the economy of Fuzhou City, and commercial and industrial enterprises created a higher income than expected for migrants (World Bank 1997). This approach was later called ‘developmental resettlement’ or ‘resettlement with development’. The basic principle behind the approach is that relocation funds should be put into major developmental projects such as improvement of farmland, cultivation of cash crops and establishment of industrial enterprises rather than allocating relocation compensation directly to relocatees (Li 1994).

The consequences of reservoir resettlement

While the experimental projects of recent decades might improve the situation of a small number of relocatees, there is little doubt that the majority of people who have had to move home as a result of the construction of dams have suffered. The consequences of reservoir resettlement have taken three forms: economic impoverishment, social instability and environmental degradation.

Economic impoverishment Increased poverty was a common phenomenon in reservoir and resettlement areas. The direct reasons were the settlers’ loss of all their land, a decline in land area per capita and degradation in land quality. Based on a 1984 central government report, for more than 20 years in various resettlement areas in Shaanxi province the per capita daily wages in many villages ranged from only a few fen (1/100 of 1 yuan RMB) to several dozen fen. Many settlers were short of food and clothes (Jing 1997). The other reason for such poverty among resettlers is that compensation was
set at too low a rate for lost assets and failed to reflect the need to build a new family home and invest in production capacity to restore original living standards. Only 50 yuan RMB per capita were allocated as resettlement investment in productive assets in Hubei Province (Wang and Shen 1993). Compared with urban residents who were relocated by transport and urban development programmes, rural relocatees displaced by dams have had lower compensation and less protection from the government (World Bank 1997, 13). What made the situation worse was that even such a low compensation fee would be delayed or used for other expenditure by the relocation administration (Wang and Shen 1993). A further cause of impoverishment lies in the mismanagement of resettlement schemes. In the process of building the Danjiangkou dam, the scale of the project was changed again and again and the water level of reservoir storage was altered five times, causing untold anxiety to those affected. Experience of dam construction around the world suggests that inadequate compensation and frequent delays are a common feature in many developing countries. In Sri Lanka, those families being resettled in the Mahaweli Scheme received just £90 per family in compensation (Goldsmith and Hildyard 1984). In Africa, the Southern Rhodesian Tonga received no compensation at all except in the negative sense of being exempt from poll tax for two years following relocation (Scudder 1973). When the Bakolori Dam in Nigeria was built, the property of the 12,000 people displaced by the reservoir was still being surveyed as the water rose (Adams 1992).

Relocatees have faced a catalogue of difficulties in trying to restore their livelihoods. Some lost access to common property. Others faced food insecurity and shortage of water supplies. In many cases it was hard for the settlers to find means of transport and to send their children to school. In the words of one migrant, ‘we have electric lines over our heads but no power, water under our feet but nothing to drink and a road opposite us but we cannot cross it (because it was built the far side of a deep gorge)’ (RECC 1996). Housing for settlers has been another problem. Some have been living in cottages made of grass in the Danjiangkou reservoir area. More than 40,000 resettled relocatees in the Sanmenxia reservoir were so poor that they were unable to build their own houses and had to live instead in sub-standard temporary accommodation (RECC 1996). A situation of severe deprivation has inevitably led to numerous cases of personal tragedy (Wang 1997). In a review of a world-wide involuntary resettlement resulting from dam projects, Cernea, a sociologist at the World Bank, has concluded that displacement and resettlement leave people worse off, with a high incidence of landlessness, joblessness, and homelessness frequently seen (Cernea 1996a).

**Social instability** Severe hardship at the household and individual level has led to various instances of social instability. A reverse flow of reservoir relocatees has taken place in almost all reservoir resettlements caused by high dams in China. At Sanmenxia, 200,000 people were required to leave the fertile Yellow River Basin in Shaanxi province to make way for the water project during a very short period of time in 1956. Soon after they had been sent to other counties in western provinces, many of them struggled back to their home area. Relocation authorities and the police tried to block this reverse flow from the resettlement sites. In 1985 alone, more than 8000 people were successful in returning to their former homeland, where several serious conflicts broke out amongst the relocatees themselves or between the relocatees and their neighbours (Han 1997). In the case of Danjiangkou, the distant removal relocatees were dissatisfied with the environment and productive conditions arranged by the government. They had less income and a lower standard of life than before their relocation, viewing themselves as strangers in a new community. In addition, the relocation authorities made a number of mistakes, delaying payment of resettlement compensation, showing a hostile attitude towards the settlers and spending of compensation money on irrelevant activities. In order to return to their place of origin, some relocatees sold their assets including clothing, even having to beg along the road to get home, growing agricultural crops between the highest and the lowest water lines in the reservoir area. Some of them searched for officials with whom to discuss their conditions. Others accused local cadres of mismanagement and illegal behaviour. Several armed confrontations broke out between the settlers and the hosts, in which tens of people were killed and more injured (Wang and Shen 1993).

**Environmental degradation** Dam construction projects have led to widespread environmental deterioration, which in turn has had a deleterious effect on the conditions of relocatees. In a review of the literature on the ecology of large dams globally, McCully (1996, 30) has outlined the main environmental impacts of dams, including impacts due to patterns of dam operation. Environmental change impacts the livelihoods of displaced people and their traditional connection with the land to be flooded.

In general, locally resettled people were uprooted from a relatively flat and fertile area to...
steeper and infertile hillsides and upland areas. People relocated to distant places were moved to fertile plains or valleys with abundant resources, but these regions were more crowded because of a long history of development. In upland areas, the need for food and fuel made people cultivate steep slopes and destroy forestry and grassland, increasing water runoff and soil erosion dramatically. In the Xīn’ānjiāng reservoir area, conflicts over firewood often took place between settlers and hosts. In Chu’ān County alone, the government had to deal with 19 disputes over firewood in 1963. Those who returned from the resettlement region destroyed more than 110,000 trees during a very short period. Due to a lack of fuel, many settlers had to travel long distances to get firewood. Fighting ensued, resulting in 29 persons being badly beaten and 11 seriously injured. These conflicts grew so serious that the government had to send senior cadres to sort them out (Xu 1995).

More people and less land contribute to a deterioration in the livelihood conditions of the resettlers. In the Sanmenxia project, people had to be displaced a second time because of environmental hazards resulting from population resettlement. As the reservoir was being filled to its high-water level, inundation and landslides caused 93,000 more people to be moved from places above the inundation line (335 m), raising the total number of the displaced population (Li 1991). New geological hazards are created after impounding a big body of water in the form of a reservoir. Serious landslides stretching for more than 50 kilometres took place as a result of the Shuikou reservoir in Fujian province (RECC 1996). Mining activities, waste gas and water discharged by small-scale factories worsened this situation, causing more severe pollution in the environment.

Realization of and response to the problems of reservoir relocation It is only in recent years that research has revealed the sheer extent of the human suffering caused by resettlement resulting from dam construction projects. This was hitherto obscured by the scale of China, its political upheavals and a political philosophy that prioritized the interests of the state. However, it was confidently predicted by those who advocated the Three Gorges dam that it would be possible both to meet the defined objectives of state-led development and to avoid large-scale social impoverishment. Planners of the Three Gorges Project believed that the six years of trial projects (1985–91) had proved the success of the approach of ‘resettlement with development’ (Li 1994; CWRC 1997). More importantly, these trial projects were used as successful cases to convince members of the People’s National Congress to vote in support of the project (Liu et al. 1997).

The Three Gorges dam: the project, the context and field evidence

The project

The Three Gorges Project (TGP) was approved by the National People’s Congress (NPC) in 1992 and formally launched in 1994 on the Yangtze River, one of the longest rivers in the world. The Three Gorges is renowned for its beautiful scenery with high mountains and deep gorges, for its myths and culture, as well as for the quality of its oranges. The dam site is situated at Sandouping, Yichang County, Hubei Province. At the normal pool level (the highest water level of the reservoir) of 175 metres above sea level, the total length of the reservoir will be about 660 kilometres, with a total surface area of 1084 square kilometres (TGPDC 1996). If completed on schedule (2009), it will be the largest dam ever built in terms both of its hydropower generating capacity and of the number of people in need of resettlement; over 1.2 million people will be uprooted2. According to the latest official statistics, some 294,000 people had been moved by the end of 2000 (Zhongguo xinwen she 2001). With the raising of the water level of the Yangtze up to 175 metres, some eight county seats, and 106 towns will sink permanently under the reservoir water. Two cities, Wanxian and Fuling, two county seats Zhongxian and Changshou, and 34 other towns will be partly inundated. In addition, some 1599 industrial enterprises will be relocated. As a consequence, more than 484,700 urban residents will be displaced in these areas, constituting 57 per cent of the total migrants based on the 1991–92 survey (CWRC 1993). According to the resettlement plan, all urban relocatees will be settled in new cities and towns and engage in their original occupations. Some 361,500 rural relocatees live in 1353 villages along the reservoir shores. They will lose their housing and farmland to the reservoir. One of the greatest difficulties facing them is how to regain replacement land or whether to look for other jobs since there is only a slight possibility of reclaiming additional land to make up for the loss. Although the rural displaced population is smaller than the number of urban relocatees, settling rural relocatees has turned out to be a more challenging task for the relocation authorities.

The economic transition

The construction of the TGP and the consequent relocation are occurring during a transition period from a centrally-planned to a market-oriented
economy and from a homogenous and closed social structure towards a society characterized by diversity and openness. Large-scale economic reforms have been implemented in China since 1978. Government policies towards urbanization and migration were also changed in the reform period. Urbanization is now regarded as a positive process which can stimulate socio-economic development. Control over rural to urban migration has been relaxed but not abandoned (Ma 1993; Shen 1996). Now, with the erosion of some of the most important functions provided by the Household Registration System, more and more peasants are on the move (Wang 1997). Furthermore, Solinger (1999) argues that it is the interaction between markets, migrants and the state that is giving rise to the transformation of political institutions and social landscapes in urban China. New changes in economic structures and social organization have made population resettlement in the Three Gorges area more complex, especially in terms of the re-allocation of economic resources and social integration. Unlike past relocatees who could be easily mobilized in response to government calls, current migrants are more aware of their economic interests and political rights; many expect to benefit from the project (Zuo 1997; Li 2000).

Field evidence about TGP reservoir migration

To form a balanced judgement on the human consequences of reservoir construction and the adequacy of the policy response, it is necessary to seek views of the participants themselves, both the displacees and the project officials. During 1997–98, Li conducted a survey in the Three Gorges area. A full account of the survey is provided in Li (2000) and Li and Rees (2000). Here its main features are summarized.

Twenty undergraduates from Central China Normal University in Wuhan and Sichuan Three Gorges College in Chongqing were recruited to the survey team. The survey interviewed 470 migrant households of two types: those who had already been displaced; and those who had yet to be relocated. The survey employed a ‘location selection-centred’ strategy in order to achieve a representative sample. At the county level, the surveyed counties were arranged into geographical strata:

- urban districts;
- rural plains;
- nearby hills; and
- remote mountains.

Villages were sampled to yield representatives of each economic development level and each migrant displacement category: those who had been moved out of the reservoir area, those who had resettled in urban industrial enterprises and those who refused to move because of severe conditions in the resettlement regions. Respondents were chosen to representative numbers of males and females, the young and old and the rich and poor, identified through local people’s help and observation. Li also conducted in-depth interviews with officials and experts in charge of planning and designing the dam project, local cadres responsible for the resettlement schemes, and several particular groups of migrants (Li and Rees 2000, 450–1). We draw on the survey evidence in subsequent discussion.

Views of the displaced population

The results of our survey confirmed that, as the group affected by the project, migrants have taken it for granted that they should benefit from the dam-building and 61 per cent of respondents are looking forward to gaining benefits from the dam-building. The survey also showed that although relocatees feel upset at losing their home to the reservoir, becoming separated from relatives and friends and facing an uncertain future, many of them harbour high hopes for an improvement in living conditions as a result of the project (Li 2000). They look forward to sufficient compensation, better housing, and job opportunities in the cities (Chen 1998; Li and Rees 2000).

The Three Gorges dam: resettlement strategies and problems

Resettlement strategies

Three strategies have been used for resettlement of rural displacees:

1 settling migrants in nearby areas on land to be farmed;
2 allowing migrants to move to and live with relatives in urban areas; and
3 moving migrants far away.

We consider in this section the problems associated with the first two strategies, looking first at rural to rural resettlement and then at rural to urban resettlement. The new approach of more distant relocation will be discussed in the next main section of the paper.

The quality of resettlement land

Land for land was one of the major development strategies in relocation schemes, allowing the majority of rural migrants to engage in farming
activities after their relocation. Due to the inundation of the river valley, migrants lost rich and fertile land to the reservoir, which had been a major source of income. According to the official report, 23 800 ha of farmland and 4100 ha of orange orchards will be lost to the reservoir (REG 1988). In densely populated areas, the most intractable problem triggered by reservoir resettlement has been whether land of equivalent quality is available for relocatees. In India, for example, the Narmada Project is widely viewed as one of the worst reservoir resettlements in the world in terms of the lack of replacement land for resettlers (Fearnside 1990). As a result, the strong protests from those affected forced the World Bank to withdraw its financial support to the project. One of the major findings in our survey is that for the migrants in the Three Gorges reservoir region, the area of farmland after their relocation tends to be smaller and of worse quality than they had before: about 66 per cent of respondents regard their farmland after relocation as ‘worse-off’ or ‘much worse’ while 12 per cent report their situation as ‘the same as’ and 21 per cent say they are ‘better-off’ (Li 2000, 224). As a result, the problems associated with the land for land strategy led to a decline in income and became a factor contributing to the process of impoverishment of migrants affected by the project.

The particular problem of steep, infertile slopes
A specific problem in the TGP area is that relocatees are being moved to steep, infertile slopes. Some relocatees refused to move to uphill slopes above the future reservoir because of the more severe physical setting. In the case of Gaoyang village, Yunyang County, for example, the migrants voiced their strong opposition to settling in a nearby region where the slopes are very steep, the soils are thin and infertile, full of stones and sand. Funded by the migrants, each of whom donated one yuan RMB, several villagers secretly travelled to Beijing to voice their opposition to this treatment. They failed to find powerful persons to whom to report their situation and had to come back empty-handed. ‘How can we earn a living on the slopes?’ was the constant refrain of migrants in our interviews along the River Xiaojiang in July, 1998 (Li 2000, 219–21).

The effect of the household responsibility system on resettlement
The land holder-rights granted by the ‘household responsibility system’, whose implementation has been seen as a great success of rural economic reform in China, have a deep impact on resettling people both in nearby and distant-removal areas. Since the late 1970s, peasants have worked on their own property and devoted much more labour and their own funds to their land, fuelling greater output and higher income. Hence it is especially difficult for local people in the host communities to give up their rights to the fertile land. In our survey in Fuan Village, Dianjun District of Yichang City in July 1998, the head of the village complained

Redistributing farmland for the migrants is the most difficult thing to do in our village and simple political mobilization is not enough to convince local villagers to comply with the government’s requests. (Li 2000, 233)

Urban resettlement for rural migrants
The strategy of settling rural migrants in urban areas consists of finding relatives and friends to live with and arranging for rural migrants to enter the industrial sector. For elderly rural migrants this policy has proved effective as the majority of them were able to find kin to live with and no new job arrangements were needed. Settling younger rural migrants in industrial jobs was an important part of the government’s relocation plan and dovetailed with migrants’ own desire to move into small cities and towns. However, migrants from rural to urban areas found that they often soon lost their new urban jobs, though they did experience an improvement in infrastructure and social services. In Yichang County alone, some 2000 migrant workers had been laid off by April 1998, accounting for 60 per cent of the total migrant workers re-employed in county-owned, town-owned, and private-owned enterprises (Li 2000).

The problems of state and township enterprises
Economic reform in urban enterprises, problems with the relocation operation, and mismanagement of relocation funding combined to cause the poor performance of local enterprises and as a result unemployment among the migrants from rural to urban areas. Urban economic reform aims at improving production efficiency, especially in the industrial sector. Gu Xin (1998) has estimated over-staffing at between 15 million and 37 million people in the state-run enterprises, accounting for 30 to 50 per cent of total employees. Ten years after urban economic reform started in 1984, money-losing state enterprises increased to make up over 50 per cent of all enterprises, leading to unemployment of 30 million people, about 30 per cent of the total labour force (Wang 1998). According to official statistics, 80 million urban workers in state-owned and collectively-owned enterprises have been laid
off (CNSB 1997). Rural industry and township enterprises, which have been responsible for rural economic growth and labour transformation, face great challenges in terms of insufficient provision of finance and resources, lower technological levels and product quality. Thus these township enterprises are affected more than state-run enterprises and have more often to send their employees home with little or no pay. In the Three Gorges area, most rural migrants are resettled in township enterprises because large-scale and high performing enterprises are unwilling to receive rural migrants. Under such circumstances, it is unavoidable that migrant workers are being laid off. Many migrants who had been resettled in the urban industrial sector have experienced the stress of unemployment and a decline in income. Owing to the expropriation of their farmland and an inability to get their production resettlement funding back, these migrants tended to suffer more from inadequate resettlement and had less confidence in the restoration of their livelihoods than those who have been settled in the countryside. Our survey showed that some 67 per cent of migrant respondents in urban Yichang viewed the restoration of their livelihoods as ‘difficult’, while among rural migrants in Zhijiang County, 36 per cent of respondents think that they are able to recover their livelihoods and 31 per cent of them have a greater confidence in a ‘better life than before relocation’ (Li and Rees 2000, 458).

Competition for resources and locations

In the Three Gorges area, some migrants were able to find new economic opportunities by taking advantage of favourable locations, particularly in the dam site area, the regions around cities and towns and the areas close to main roads, rivers and local markets. However, because mass removal sends all the migrants searching for new opportunities at about the same time (Eidem 1973), the resettlers may face competition for favourable locations and lands of higher quality. Thus, the majority of the Three Gorges’ migrants face and will continue to face an inopportune economic environment since most displacement resulting from the TGP takes place in a concentrated area (along the Yangtze River and its tributaries from Yichang to Chongqing) and over an extremely limited period (over half a million people must be moved out before filling the reservoir by 2003). Owing to the scarcity of natural resources and the mass nature of the removal exercise, migrants have to compete for favourable localities and economic resources, greatly increasing the difficulties involved in resettlement.

Loss of resources, skills and networks

Migrants were also likely to suffer from the loss of special economic resources. For example, oranges were a fundamental source of income for displacees, particularly in Hubei’s Zigui, Yichang and Xingshan counties. They were also adversely affected by a complete alteration in business networks brought about by displacement, the disappearance of economic associations and credit relationships, and the loss of the production techniques and skills that they once possessed. All these factors have contributed to the process of marginalization of migrants affected by the dam.

Migrant views about outcomes of displacement

In our survey, some rural migrants expressed satisfaction with their new housing and some families were pleased to obtain replacement farmland equivalent to their original holding. However, 47 per cent of rural migrants who had been moved did not view their relocation as a good chance to escape from poverty while only eight per cent of them expressed confidence in an improvement of their standard of living after relocation. Some 45 per cent of respondents were reluctant to disclose their views straightforwardly on the question, indicating that among migrants after relocation there was a doubt whether the dam-building would create much opportunity for them (Li and Rees 2000, 458).

The Three Gorges Dam: the new approach of more distant resettlement

Unfortunately, the seven-year experience from 1994 to 2001 of population relocation in the Three Gorges area has proved that the strategies of rural to nearby rural relocation and rural to nearby urban relocation faced severe problems. Official corruption in dam construction, and environmental deterioration in the reservoir area have also caused concern not only among the people affected but also among government leaders. A new approach is being tried out.

The new policy

Premier Zhu Rongji has reprimanded officials for corruption and misuse of relocation funding in the resettlement operation. More importantly, he was dissatisfied with the quality of relocation programmes, some of which had caused erosion on uphill slopes at higher elevation and environmental pollution due to the poor performance of relocated factories (Renmin ribao 1999). In the wake of the failure to settle all relocatees in higher ground nearby, which had been the main principle of the relocation planning of the TGP (REG 1988),
China’s central government has launched a new plan to move 125,000 rural migrants in Chongqing Municipality and Hubei Province out of the reservoir area (China Daily 2000). Those displaced will be moved far away from their place of origin and settled in neighbouring provinces such as Hubei, Sichuan, Hunan and even more distant parts of the country such as Jiangxi, Anhui, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Guangdong and Fujian provinces and Shanghai Municipality (Yangcheng wanbao 2000; Changjiang ribao 2000). On 21 February, 2001, Premier Zhu Rongji proclaimed a new resettlement policy as a revision of the resettlement rules and regulations for building the Three Gorges Project on the Yangtze River promulgated by former Premier Li Peng in August 1993. The original policy of local resettlement has been replaced by a combination of local and distant resettlement. With regard to distant migrants’ choice for their destinations, the new rules suggest that the beneficiary regions below the dam should be responsible for sharing the task of resettling the displacees (Wei 2001).

Regions that benefit should help in relocation

There is no doubt that moving far away is a feasible alternative if the regions that benefit from the project including Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui, and Jiangsu provinces see the value of investing in resettlement. These regions are expecting to obtain cheap hydro-generated electricity from the project and have a safer production environment as a result of improved flood control along the middle and lower Yangtze. Furthermore, many peasants have come to believe that the good life can be attained by moving away (Croll 1994). Even in the reservoir area, a number of people travel a long distance as floating labour. In Kaixian County alone, there are 320,000 people leaving the county and working elsewhere, and more than 600 million yuan RMB are sent home as remittances each year (Gu and Li 1994). However, there are great differences between rural-urban migrants as a whole and people displaced by the TGP.

But people don’t like to move far

Although most migration in the post-Mao era is of a ‘voluntary’ nature (Chan et al. 1999, 429; Solinger 1999), given choice the population affected by dam projects would really have preferred to remain in their place of origin (Parnwell 1993). The migrants of the Three Gorges Reservoir area, for example, have to give up their home and livelihood, but prefer to remain close by. Among 279 relocatee households in our survey that are about to move, 64 per cent would rather settle on the higher ground of local mountains than move far away, while 32 per cent preferred the distant relocation option (Li and Rees 2000, 452).

Reasons for reluctance to be moved far away

Why are so many relocatees unwilling to be moved far away? Some four reasons can be suggested.

The difficulty of rebuilding livelihoods

The first reason is that dam migrants find it extremely difficult to rebuild their production systems and restore their capacity to earn a living in a distant region. Some examples from outside China help illustrate the difficulties involved. In major African dam projects such as Kariba and Aswan (Scudder 1973), water supplies in the new homes were initially unsatisfactory and new land-use systems were not ready at the time of relocation, so that government food relief was essential. Affected by the James Bay Project in Canada, the Cree Indians argued that the project would destroy the land, the animals and their means of survival (McCUTCHEON 1991). They considered that money and jobs do not last but land does. Living in the original physical environment, the agricultural techniques known to migrants, their business foundations, management experience, and even production tools can be still used, which can help restore their livelihoods (Li 1995). More than 150,000 relocatees displaced by the Sanmenxia dam on the Yellow River were forced to return to the reservoir area because of their inability to establish an adequate production system in their new locations (Hao 1993).

If moved far away, some migrants feel it difficult to change the mode of production and learn how to grow new crops. In our survey, some 80 per cent of rural relocatees expressed particular concern about a deterioration in production conditions (mainly farmland) and a decline in their income if they were moved far away. Some distant-removal relocatees in peri-urban Yichang and Zhijiang County complained they had been given bad land or less farmland than the government promised. A study of the migrants’ suitability for production after relocation revealed that some 78 per cent of distant-removal migrants from Zigui County were not used to growing grain and 81 per cent of them were not accustomed to growing cotton and vegetables (Jin 1998). This is not surprising: in Zigui County, the cultivation of fruits, especially oranges, has dominated the farming economy. With the limited land and lack of access to common resources, many relocatees have difficulties in restoring their standard of living.

The difficulty of integrating into the host community

The second reason for reluctance to move far away...
is the problem of fitting into the new community. People in host communities are usually unwilling to receive more resettlers owing to a shortage of farmland and growing population pressure. Studies of migrant experience over time have shown that the relocatees have difficulties in incorporating themselves into the host communities. Baboo’s study (1992) on the Hiakud Dam in India found that displaced households did not become properly integrated in host villages for many years after relocation. At the Sobradinho Hydro-Electric Project, after resettlement had been completed, it was found that approximately one-third of the population were in serious straits within ten years (Goodland 1973). Our survey showed, that although 82 per cent of respondents in host communities we interviewed expressed their support for the Three Gorges Project and 69 per cent expressed a welcome to the migrants displaced by the dam, some 29 per cent of them did not like the migrants coming into their community and 34 per cent of them were unwilling to share resources with resettlers. The greatest problem was seen to be ‘reallocation of farmland’ followed by ‘neighbourhood relationships’ (Li 2000, 269–71).

The loss of social networks A third reason for the reluctance of relocatees to move to distant locations is that relocatees pay a high socio-cultural price. Economic losses in personal income and property are visible and can be measured. Social well-being, however, is impossible to measure and cannot be compensated once it is lost through relocation (Cernea 1996). Moreover, involuntary relocation is highly stressful, involving, as it does, the destruction of the familiar things of everyday life and people’s social networks. Fear of a hostile reception can give rise to severe anxiety. Resettlement stress may continue and even intensify when relocatees have difficulty in restoring their living standards and integrating into host communities. More importantly, unlike rural–urban migrants who are willing to take risks in their migration and are able to return to their place of origin any time, those who are displaced by dams consider their relocation ‘government business’ and have no possibility of returning to their place of origin. Interviews with relocatees showed many migrants felt they had suffered a lot more than economic loss through the destruction of their orange groves and their removal to a distant location; they were unable to contemplate life without oranges, which represented not just a major source of income but also a way of life full of cultural, symbolic value. No longer could they enjoy gazing at the landscape of orange trees around their houses and celebrating a bumper harvest with their neighbours. The views of a migrant woman interviewed in Linbao village, in peri-urban Yichang City, were shared by many people interviewed. She said that she often dreamed of her old home and her orange trees, and she found herself with tears in her eyes when she woke up.

The difficulty of a new and strange environment A fourth reason for the reluctance of relocatees to move far from their origins is the strangeness of the new environment. So far there have been few successful cases of distant-removal practice. Under some circumstances, quite large numbers of displaced people are cast into a ‘refugee-like’ situation, and many of them are likely to leave the resettlement sites planned by the government. In the case of the TGP, moving relocatees to entirely different parts of the country has proved a failure. In 1995, more than 80 relocatees were sent to Hainan Island (see Figure 1), where they were put to work on a rubber plantation. The plan was for these relocatees to be settled permanently in Hainan after a period working on the plantation. But they were greatly dissatisfied with the working conditions and living environment, and in particular with the low pay and the hot, damp weather in Hainan. Within two months, all of them had returned to their homes. Another attempt to move relocatees from Fengjie County, Chongqing Municipality to Inner Mongolia (see Figure 1) also proved to be unsuccessful. The government of Fengjie County had to take back all these 200 relocatees after they had stayed in Inner Mongolia less than one month.

Policy discriminates against rural migrants A major characteristic of current TGP relocation policy is that it favours urban dwellers and discriminates against rural origin displacers.

Different funding standards for urban and rural dwellers Project authorities adopt a dual standard for rural and urban migrants in deciding on relocation compensation policy and relevant regulations. As Table 1 shows, there is higher funding for house rebuilding and infrastructure for urban migrants than rural migrants. In cities, county seats and towns, all the funding for infrastructure reconstruction is used in the rebuilding and upgrading of urban facilities such as roads, electricity, water, sewage and telecommunication. In rural areas, the funding is dispersed over a wider range of items and must cover not only removal losses and transportation but also subsidy for loss of income during the period of resettlement. As a result, there is less money available for construction of infrastructure in rural resettlement sites.
Table 1 Compensation standards for the Three Gorges Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>House-building</th>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>3953</td>
<td>4547</td>
<td>8500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County seat</td>
<td>3400</td>
<td>4100</td>
<td>7500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>1197</td>
<td>903²</td>
<td>2100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1 The figures are in yuan or renminbi per person.
2 This figure includes funds for losses incurred during transport fees, a subsidy for loss of work and funds for infrastructure development in the area to which migrants are relocated.
Source: REG 1988

Better guarantees to urban displacees According to normal relocation policy, urban migrants are moved to newly-built, nearby towns and cities, where they are able to enjoy greater living space, upgraded urban facilities and well-constructed housing and flats. They are provided with a job guarantee employing them in their original line of work while more and more urban workers are being threatened by unemployment. Under the new State Council directive, urban migrants do not have to worry about being moved far away since the new cities and towns are built near the old ones. By contrast, rural migrants are required to move out of the reservoir zone to areas that are likely to be already densely populated.

Rural migrants express a preference for relocation to urban areas Because relocation funding favours urban displacees, the majority of rural migrants displaced by the Three Gorges Dam express a preference for moving to urban areas because of the greater benefits, higher social status, job security and varied lives there. Our survey found that 52 per cent of rural migrants expressed a wish to change their rural household registration and 65 per cent of respondents preferred to move to small cities and towns, in particular, around the county seat (Li 2000, 166). For rural migrants, big and medium cities are attractive but entry to these cities is not easy. So the more realistic choice is a small city or town, especially the county seat, which is a regional centre of business and culture.

Fewer women are willing to stay in rural areas compared with migrant males. A survey of migrant women in four counties by the Women’s Federation of Wanxian indicates that migrant women hold high expectations for the improvement of economic conditions, living surroundings and lifestyle (Liao 1998). During interviews, some of them voiced their desires in terms such as ‘We are looking forward to the TGP’ and ‘We are thinking about the TGP and fond of the TGP’. For some rural migrants, moving into a town or city and working in urban enterprises can make their dreams come true. To their disappointment, however, as already discussed earlier, many of them subsequently lose their jobs and become a part of urban China’s army of the unemployed. What makes the situation worse is that these migrant jobless have greater difficulty in finding new jobs than the urban jobless.

Two examples of distant relocation in action

The problems associated with the policy of moving TGP displacees to distant locations can be illustrated by reference to particular relocations.

The case of resettlement from Gaoyang township In a trial distant resettlement project launched by the TGP authorities in 2000, people from Gaoyang township, Yunyang County were collectively resettled in Jiangsu province’s Dafeng city in the lower Yangtze – over 1000 kilometres downstream of their homes. They were extremely dissatisfied with their new conditions. Migrants complained that they had received less than the government had promised them before leaving their homes. To their outrage, migrants later discovered that compensation funds earmarked for their resettlement had been diverted by resettlement authorities for other uses. Knowing these facts, people who have yet to move out of Gaoyang township are increasingly cautious, requesting that the government give them sufficient compensation and fulfill its promises before they decide to leave. However, the government of Yunyang County turned a deaf ear to these requests. Instead, it decided to detain all representatives of migrants involved in appealing to higher authorities for help, accusing them of ‘disturbing the Three Gorges’ resettlement’. It was under these circumstances that migrants in Gaoyang township decided to send representatives to Beijing to seek justice. Three petitioners were arrested by police in Beijing for appealing to the highest authority for help (Probe International 2001, South China Morning Post 2001).

The case of resettlement to Yichang City Among distant-removal rural migrants, compared with those who moved in groups, scattered distant-removal relocatees suffer more from problems due to unfair relocation procedures. In Yichang City, for instance, no vehicles were provided for scattered distant-removal migrants to help them move and...
migrant families had to pay an additional fee of about 10 000 yuan RMB for hiring vehicles. These migrants are not entitled to a subsidy for their living expenses during the period of transition nor to an offer of three years free of farm tax. Economic and technical support after relocation is targeted at those who have been moved in groups. Moreover, many scattered distant-removal migrants were charged large fees in order to transfer their household registration to the places of destination. For example, several migrant families that moved from Xiangxi, Zigui County, into Shengnongjia Forest District, Hubei Province, were charged about 3000 yuan RMB per family for the transfer of household registration but no farmland and no jobs were provided for them. Another problem is that some scattered distant-removal migrants feel extremely isolated after relocation without social activities and personal ties with neighbours. Guo Nanying, one migrant woman who moved from Guojiaba, Zigui County, to Shuangxi village, peri-urban Yichang City, complained that she had nobody to talk to because only her family was resettled in the village.

Discussion and conclusions

Building large dams across major rivers is an activity that only national governments can undertake, not just because of the high capital costs involved but also because only the state can organize the fair distribution of benefits and costs across its citizenry. The Three Gorges Dam will provide enormous benefits to Central China in terms of flood control, power generation and easier navigation on the Yangtze River. However, there are costs that are borne in a much more restricted area by the inhabitants of the farms, villages, towns and cities that are to be flooded by the dam. Social justice demands that the benefiting majority should compensate the affected minority via government transfers and planned resettlement.

So in this context how should the TGP’s resettlement strategies be evaluated so far?

Past history is not encouraging

Our overview of reservoir resettlement has revealed that there have been many problems with past relocation schemes. The emphasis was on political education and coercion to achieve resettlement. Throughout the 1949–89 period, priority was placed on engineering issues and the interests of people directly affected were secondary. Impoverishment was a common outcome for reservoir migrants. Relocation needs to be planned with the consent of the communities affected. By and large our survey showed acceptance by TGP migrants that they were being moved to meet a worthwhile national goal. However, this goodwill could rapidly disappear in the face of official corruption or incompetence.

The problems of rural migrants resettled nearby

Those who have been settled in nearby areas at high elevation received a reduced amount of land, which was more difficult to farm because of steep slopes and poor soils. Further support in restoring their livelihoods will be needed for those in the worst situations. There seems to be acceptance by host communities that they have to play a role in the national project. However, the household responsibility system in rural areas has made farmers in receiving regions much more possessive of their land and commons, and there will need to be continuing negotiation to establish a fair balance between incomers and incumbents in these settlements.

Relocation of urban dwellers and settling rural migrants in urban enterprises

There have been fewer difficulties in reproducing livelihoods and settlements for urban dwellers than rural. However, the policy of moving rural displacees to urban enterprises has, on the whole, been a failure. A majority of migrants have lost their jobs, and with the future of so many state enterprises in jeopardy, their prospects of finding work in the urban state sector are small.

Distant removal migrants face acute difficulties

Migrants who were moved far away were given poor-quality land and denied their entitlement to common property. Distant-removal relocatees are likely to face economic hardship, loss of social networks and culture shock. Those distant-removal relocatees are likely to be shunned by host community residents who are increasingly aware of their individual interests and property rights.

Rural displacees are discriminated against and urban interests are protected

Generally, resettlement planning gives priority to urban areas. This is a result in part of the household registration system, which still has an impact on resettlement schemes. Rural displacees continue to be attracted to urban areas, but face restrictions in employment and the risk of expulsion. In Shanghai and Qingdao, for instance, some 23 professions and occupations including management positions, hotel attendants, cashiers, taxi drivers, telephone operators and guards are forbidden to the rural migrants (Cai 1997; Li 1998). In Beijing, the municipal government announced a new policy in
February 2000, according to which some eight trades and 104 professions remain closed to floating labour in order to provide more job opportunities for laid-off urban dwellers (jingji ribao 2000). Feelings of discrimination among rural migrants are exacerbated by the fact that they have no right to free or low-cost health care in rural areas and their children are not allowed to enter schools in urban areas (Davin 1998).

Institutionalized bias against rural population

It is apparent that rural relocatees shifted by dams and reservoirs represent an acute example of the problems faced by all rural–urban migrants, who are discriminated against by a series of urban-biased institutions. Despite great differences in motivation and aspirations between migrants displaced by dam-building and the ‘floating population’, both groups have been badly treated in the People’s Republic of China, reflecting an institutionalized bias against rural people embedded in political ideology, the economic system and cultural values (Gao 1999). Both reservoir relocatees in particular and the rural population in general have been sacrificed in the interests of rapid industrialization and urban prosperity (Ying and Jing 1999). The government has come up with neither a philosophy nor solutions in the new context of economic reform to deal with movement of population, of whatever type it may be. Rather, traditional approaches have still been employed, restricting the entry of rural people into the cities and moving rural relocatees far away, as has been done in the Three Gorges Project.

The state gains good marks for effort but needs to try harder to achieve social justice

Although Chinese Government policy for project-induced relocation has developed and great efforts have been made in search of new relocation methods and of solutions to problems, it seems that relocation practice in the TGP still needs to be improved to achieve full social justice.

Notes

1 For example, in Fengshui village of Xichuan County in Danjiangkou reservoir, four out of seven households lost a mother; one died from disease; another drowned in the reservoir while carrying water for cooking; a third drowned when she went shopping by boat; and a fourth left her husband and children behind and followed a travelling carpenter to go away after, so she later reported, losing confidence as a result of the severe survival conditions.

2 The results of the second survey conducted by the Changjiang Water Resources Commission (CWRC) during 1991–1992 show that some two cities and seventeen counties in Hubei Province and Chongqing Municipality would be affected and 846 208 people would be displaced to make way for the TGP (CWRC 1993). Taking into account ‘indirect relocation’ and population growth before the completion of the project by 2009, the total population to be settled would be 1 131 800 (REG 1988, 14). The latest official figure was declared in 1997 as 1.2 million by the CWRC (1997).

3 Before 1999, the relocation authorities organized rural migrants, moved them out of the reservoir area and resettled them within Yichang City, Hubei Province. Generally migrants living in the same village were resettled together in the same site. Few rural migrants were moved into other provinces of the country in the same way, although some migrant households individually looked for relatives to live with in other parts of the country.

4 According to the reformed household responsibility system, peasants were allocated farmland on an individual household basis and allowed to sell their farm surplus in market after delivering their national quota of farming products.

5 On 17 July 1998, we interviewed Guo Fengying who was settled in Linbao village, in a peri-urban part of Yichang City. Guo is from Xiangxi, Zigui County, where oranges have been a major source of household income. But in the new resettlement site in which she and her family live now, migrants can no longer grow oranges. What made the situation worse is that they were given bad land and had no right to exploit the mountain forest.

6 Both the Hainan and Inner Mongolia cases were provided by Wang Chengjun, official of the Relocation Bureau of Wamxian, on 28 May 1998.

7 Information provided by Li Dachun, head of Xiangxi township, Zigui County, Hubei Province, who showed us an official document on relocation policy for Yichang City dated in 1995. He also talked about distant-removal migrants’ experience. We interviewed Li on 11 September 1998.

8 We interviewed Guo in our in-depth interviews on 23 September 1998.

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