Chapter Eight

Resettlement in the Xin’an River Power Station Project

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The Xin’an River power station (Xin’anjiang dianzhen) was the first large-scale hydroelectric project designed and built in mainland China with domestically produced equipment. The Xin’an River originates in the Yellow Mountains in Xiuning and Qimen counties, Anhui Province, flows through Tunxi and Weng counties in Anhui and Chun’an County in Zhejiang, joins with the Lan River at a point southeast of Mei Township, Jiaode County, in Zhejiang, and then flows northeast into the Fuchun River. It is 261 kilometers long and drains an area 11,800 square kilometers in size. The river is full of twists and turns and can be quite turbulent at points. Between Tunxi and Tongguan Gorge in Jiaode County, a distance of 170 kilometers, the Xin’an drops a full 100 meters. For years, scientists and engineers had dreamed of building a power station on the Xin’an, but the dream was not realized until after the Communist revolution in 1949.

The Xin’an power station was first planned in 1952. In 1956, the initial design was completed and approved by the State Council. Construction began in 1957 and was completed three years later, when the first group of turbines began to generate power.

The Xin’an power station has an installed capacity of 662,500 kilowatts and generates an average of 1.86 billion kilowatt hours of electricity per year. Since the station’s completion in 1960, Xin’an has become an important part of the electrical grid and has provided eastern China with a reliable supply of power. By 1984, the dam’s total electrical output was valued at ¥2.27 billion—about five times the total cost of the project. The dam’s massive 580-square-kilometer reservoir (the Thousand Island Lake [Qiandaohu]) can store 17.8 billion cubic meters of water and has provided flood relief for the people living on the banks of the river and for
hundreds of thousands of mu of farmland in the lower reaches of the river. The dam has provided substantial benefits for the people of Jiande, Tonglu, and Fuyang counties.

Above the reservoir, the main stream of the Xin’an is 100 kilometers long, and its waters are deep enough to accommodate several hundred- ton ships. Below the reservoir, to the Fuchun River power station, 100–200-ton ships can now ply waters which, before the dam’s construction, were virtually nonnavigable. Fisheries and the tourist industry have also been developed in the reservoir area, and the climate has changed, making it possible to grow fruit trees and expand local forests.

But the project has had some serious adverse effects too. Two counties with very long and rich histories—Chun’an and Sui’an [sic, Lin’an]—were inundated by the reservoir. Seven townships, 1,140 villages, and 320,000 mu of arable land were submerged and 280,000 people were resettled. Centuries-old cultural antiquities, factories, and over 500 middle and elementary schools were also submerged along with some of the most fertile land in the area. (The value of the property lost by the 280,000 relocatees is beyond calculation, and many relocatees have yet to be fully compensated.) The effects on local agriculture were disastrous: Chun’an went from producing a grain surplus before the dam’s construction, to importing over two million tons of grain in one year after the dam was built.* The reservoir also flooded four major roads and destroyed the area’s transportation system. The navigation route along the Xin’an that led directly to Hangzhou was cut off by the large reservoir, causing a major increase in the price of goods and labor in the city. The light industry sector also suffered. By 1963, the total value of the sector’s output was down 86.7 percent from what it had been in 1957. Time has been slow to right the situation: By 1982, light industrial output was still 25 percent below the 1957 level, making Chun’an the poorest county of the seven that are part of the administrative area of Hangzhou Municipality. One of the many reasons for the county’s slow recovery from the effects of the dam’s construction is the fact that teachers, artists, and technical workers were forcibly resettled out of the area when the dam was built.

*XIn 1957, before the dam was built, 74,000 households produced 13.6 million kilograms of grain which was delivered to the state under the planned purchase and supply system. But in 1982, following the inauguration of agricultural reforms in 1978, even after a bumper harvest, 63,000 households lacked sufficient food and so the government had to provide them with 2.5 million kilograms of grain.

Xu Zhishi and the Decision to Dam the Xin’an

During the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–45), the man who would become the chief engineer of the Xin’an power station, Xu Zhishi, designed and helped build a power station near the city of Changshou in Sichuan Province. Following the Japanese surrender, Xu traveled with some of his coworkers to the city of Nanjing and then to Zhejiang Province where he coordinated studies of the Qiantang, Xin’an, and other rivers. In May 1945, three days after the city of Hangzhou was liberated by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), General Tan Zhenlin met with Xu and a group of his colleagues, complimented them on their great accomplishments in hydroelectric construction in Zhejiang, and voiced his support for similar projects in and around Hangzhou. Xu and his coworkers were excited to have a PLA commander so interested in their work so soon after the army had crossed the Yangtze. In 1952, after finishing work on another power station (the Huangtankou at Quzhou, Zhejiang Province), they started planning the Xin’an River power station. Xu felt that there were two possible designs for the project. The first, and relatively more attractive design, was a series of small, multi-tier power stations along the river. This design would prevent the inundation of large swaths of land and avoid the resettlement of large numbers of people, though it would submerge the major town of Tunxi, located in southern Anhui. The second design would see the construction of a single large dam and a vast reservoir.

After consulting with the affected provinces, the provincial Communist Party committees of Zhejiang and Anhui indicated that they would respect the will of the central leadership, and the decision to build a single large dam was made. Liu Lanpo, then the minister of fuel industry (Ranliaokegongye bu), was put in charge of the project, and throughout its construction he lived at the site helping the scientists and engineers study and design the dam, thereby gaining their deep respect. The Ministry of Fuel Industry also favored the single dam design, though it realized that support for the project among the local population was a key issue.

For two years, Xu Zhishi (with help from the students and faculty of the Zhejiang Finance and Economics Institute [Zhejiang caijing xueyuan]) conducted exhaustive surveys of the local population, arable land, housing, factories, mines, transportation networks, communications, local fauna and flora, and cultural sites and artifacts in and around the proposed reservoir area. Xu and his colleagues estimated that 300,000 mu of arable land would be submerged by the dam and more than 200,000 people
would have to be resettled. Since the population density of Zhejiang was high and the province had little undeveloped arable land, Xu concluded that the 200,000 relocatees would have to be resettled outside the province; otherwise their standard of living would suffer dramatically. Xu then undertook studies in the nearby provinces of Anhui, Jiangxi, and Jiangsu to determine whether the relocatees could be successfully resettled there.

Xu's work revealed that there were vast tracts of deserted arable land in Xuancheng, Ningguo, and Xi counties in southeastern Anhui. The land had been deserted since the end of the conflict between Taiping rebels and the Qing dynasty army in the mid-nineteenth century. Also, in nearby Jiangxi Province, there were 46 million mu of arable land which, at that time, supported only 20 million people. Anhui and Jiangxi provinces each agreed to take 50,000 relocatees and to build houses and other facilities for them. Jiangsu Province, however, refused to take anyone since authorities there believed that people from the mountains in Zhejiang would not adjust well to life by the sea. And so, Xu's original plan called for 100,000 people to be resettled outside Zhejiang in other provinces, with the remaining 100,000 staying in and around Zhejiang Province, mostly in nearby counties in Anhui and in Jinhua Prefecture in Zhejiang.

But the plan quickly ran into opposition. The Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee argued that the resettlers should not be moved out of the province because they were Zhejiang's "greatest resource." Since the central government believed that resettlement work was, ultimately, the responsibility of local governments, the authorities capitulated and agreed to allow all of the relocatees to be resettled in Zhejiang.

At that time, just after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, there were very few hydropower experts in China, and most decisions were made by the central leadership. Xu Zhishi's suggestions, made on the basis of years of experience and numerous in-depth studies, were not only rejected by the central government, but caused him to be personally criticized by the authorities as well. In the end, Xu had no choice but to follow orders and design a plan that would allow all 200,000 relocatees to be resettled in Zhejiang Province.

Resettlement for the Xin'an power station took place in three stages. The first was a trial project which lasted from 1956 to 1957, and saw 20,000 people moved. The second phase took place during the "Great Leap Forward," from 1958 to 1960, and moved 170,000 people. The third phase, called "readjustment," began in 1961 and involved the resettlement of 80,000 people (some for a second and third time). After 1974, the resettlement program was halted.

The Trial Phase

For the trial phase, two villages (Xiao in Chun'an County and Hukou in Lin'an County), and two townships (Tongguan and Chayuan), were selected for resettlement. Because property was collectively owned at the time, resettlement did not require the transfer of ownership rights.* The Ministry of Fuel Industry and local governments allocated ¥508 to each relocatee to cover the cost of shipping their belongings and the construction of a new house, and then forced them to move. Assets that could not be moved, or which relocatees found inconvenient to move, were also compensated for. Though the sums were small, most felt that the resettlement plan was fair.

During this first stage, the local governments took resettlement very seriously and approached the task with great care. Local officials explained the importance of the project to the people, which seemed to increase their understanding and support for the dam, and, in turn, led to a fairly high level of cooperation. Officials then traveled to the villages that were to receive the relocatees (primarily Fuyang and Tonglu) to talk with the locals about how many households and residents were to be resettled there. Each of these villages was to receive roughly two dozen people. The new homes were to have a considerable amount of land, and relocatees were to be provided with houses of similar design and quality as their previous ones. Cadres were respectful of both relocatees and the current residents in the areas designated for resettlement.

Many of the first people who were moved began to work in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Others, however, were put to work on the dam project itself. Resettlers from Baisha Town in Jiande County, for instance, helped clear waste from the soon-to-be inundated reservoir. What could not be carted away was burned or buried.

Overall, the trial projects of 1956–57 were successful. The relocatees

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*Since the dismantling of the socialist People's Communes in the early 1980s, farmers have been able to lease land, and they have developed a strong sense of ownership rights which in the case of the Three Gorges project now makes wholesale resettlement of large numbers of people more difficult. See Chapter Six.
were content, they got along with their new neighbors and with local officials, and they were employed. But those who were moved later would not be so fortunate.

Problems Emerge: Resettlement from 1958 to 1960

From 1953 to 1958, during the period of the First Five-Year Economic Plan, China followed the Soviet concept of economic development based on centralized economic planning, rapid industrialization, and the collectivization of agriculture. In 1958, the country struck a dramatically new path with the Great Leap Forward, which deviated from the Soviet model and sought modernization based on mass mobilization, decentralization of authority to the provinces and below, and a policy of economic self-reliance.* Virtually everything in China was done quickly, all under the slogan “more, faster, better, and more economically.” Countrywide, the people were obliged to carry out every order and instruction of the government without reservation or hesitation. They were ordered to eliminate traditions and break with past ideologies that had sustained the Soviet-style system, and to ignore the views of authoritative celebrities, especially those intellectuals and scientists who often opposed the new policy direction. In industry and agriculture, the Great Leap Forward introduced such innovations as “backyard furnaces” and the People’s Communes, which were designed to achieve massive increases in production. Unfortunately, however, things did not turn out quite as top Party leaders had hoped. During this time, scientific principles were systematically ignored and, instead, superstition and boasting were the rule and foolhardy instructions [from the top leaders] were encouraged. In agriculture, people competed against one another to launch “highly productive Sputnik communes” that boasted of massive increases in production through such dubious devices as the double-blade plow and the close planting of rice seedlings. Officially, the communes were exceptionally productive, but the figures were false, nothing but deceit and lies. Nevertheless, people believed that the grain surplus was so large that only one-third of all arable land needed to be devoted to grain production; the other two-thirds could be forested or even lay fallow. People were so caught up in the campaign that some claimed “an entire family could live off 0.3 mu of land” and public canteens sprouted up on the People’s Communes and in urban work units offering the people as much food as they wanted for free. An irrational optimism about the resettlement of dam oustees became part of the frenzy, as the slogan “boost our energy, launch Sputniks, and speed up resettlement” indicates.

In 1958, the Jiaode Prefecture Party Committee called for resettlement to be speeded up and demanded that an additional 53,000 people be resettled from Chun’an. (Originally, 24,000 people were to be resettled from there.) In total, 78,000 people were resettled to 14 counties in Zhejiang including Jiaode, Tonglu, Fuyang, Lin’an, Deqing, Kaihua, Lanxi, Jinhua, Quzhou, Wuyi, Suichang, and others. Another 60,000 people stayed in Chun’an but were resettled up into the hills near their current homes, or into the mountains in nearby regions. During 1958, then, 137,000 Chun’an residents were resettled. None of these people was told before they were moved where they were being sent or what the conditions were like there. Instead, they were forced to move with little or no notice as the drums rolled, bidding them farewell. The lessons of the 1956–57 trial projects were cast aside to the detriment of hundreds of thousands.

Given the speed with which resettlement work was taking place, settlers had little time to gather their possessions. Unconcerned, the Jiaode Prefecture Party Committee instructed people to “bring along more good ideology and less old furniture.” Resettlers were also told that resettlement should be abruptly accelerated like a “battle action” and that they were to create “combat-ready military style organizations” and adopt a “collective lifestyle,” taking along only a hoe and a quilt as they made their journey by foot.

Transportation is critical to successful resettlement. During this phase, relocatees who were being moved to other counties were given a cart with which to haul their belongings, while those moving within their home county had to travel on foot and could bring only what they could carry. Firewood, grain, and cooking oil could be carried but domesticated animals could not and had to be slaughtered. For many, the journey was so arduous that they discarded most of their possessions along the way. Among the peasants in Chun’an it was customary to store grain seeds in heavy pots. But when the time came to move, the officials in charge of resettlement would not reimburse the peasants for the full value of the pots, which were too heavy to transport. The peasants got so angry that they smashed the pots and declared that the rubble should be “devoted to

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the construction of the dam.” But most significantly, during this phase the policy for housing compensation was changed. Following class lines, poor and lower-middle class peasants were compensated, while those labeled higher class were not afforded such luxuries.

By this point, the project was proceeding so quickly that relocatees working in the reservoir area were unable to clear all of the waste out of the way of the rising water, and laborers were being sent from Hangzhou to dismantle the relocatees’ houses so that they would get out as soon as possible. Normally, resettlement should precede reservoir construction, but during the “Great Leap Forward” phase of the Xin’an project, the sequence was reversed—relocatees were literally chased out of their homes by the rising water. During the move, many of the relocatees were forced to camp outside without adequate food or shelter. Some became ill, some died, and pregnant women were forced to give birth during their journey. According to Chun’an resettlement officials, the relocatees were, in effect, being exiled. And as one relocatee commented, the situation was no different from the flight from the Japanese he had seen depicted in popular war films. During 1958 alone, 59,000 relocatees from the reservoir area in Chun’an County were resettled to other production teams within the same county. *

The haphazard resettlement process caused considerable anger, conflict, and resistance. There were arguments with local officials, smashed pots, and refusals to move. Some even set fire to their homes. But all the orders were implemented, by coercion where necessary. The hearts of the relocatees were broken; they realized they were not the masters of the country.

Privately, not all officials supported the resettlement program. There were local officials and Party members among the peasantry who disagreed with the policy and saw it as a violation of the masses’ interests. But these officials had no choice but to obey the orders of the top authorities. Since the 1957 Anti-Rightist Struggle [directed against intellectuals and scientists] was in full swing, all independent opinions and criticisms were suppressed and people were generally afraid to speak out. Anyone who dared voice an opinion was labeled as “anti-resettlement” and “anti-

Great Leap Forward” and was “subject to criticism.” Local officials were powerless to change the situation; the best they could do was help the peasants move their possessions.

As we noted earlier, relocatees were to receive ¥508 each. But that figure was later reduced to ¥478, and by the “Great Leap Forward” phase of the project it was lowered further to ¥150. In the end, most relocatees from Chun’an County received a mere ¥120.

Most of the compensation funds were earmarked for new home construction. But the houses the government built were too small and of poor quality, and many peasant families refused to move into them. The houses were only 9 by 12 meters in size and their walls were made of bamboo sheets covered with yellow mud. Because so many families refused to move into the new houses, the state lost a great deal of money. Qu County, for instance, lost ¥300,000. In the areas where “combat-ready military-style organizations” and “collective lifestyles” were promoted, housing was even worse. Again, many refused to move in, and the county had to convert the property to factory workshops at a loss.

Before the advent of the Great Leap Forward, resettlement of Zhejiang residents was supposed to be of four types: 65 percent of the relocatees would be resettled on barren, undeveloped land; 17 percent would be resettled to existing communes; 10 percent would be moved up the mountains and resettled in nearby areas; and 8 percent would be moved to newly built towns. But between 1958 and 1960, this plan was completely ignored.

Zhejiang Province already had more people than land and very little undeveloped, barren land in reserve. As a result, developing barren land for resettlement was not a viable option. Moreover, the lack of water and irrigation facilities meant that peasants who were moved to the area found it very difficult to develop the land. For instance, Shishandi Brigade** of Baima Commune had 61 households with a total population of 232 people and 159 mu of arable land, or 0.68 mu per capita. Fifty households comprising 171 people were then resettled in the brigade, reducing the amount of land per capita to 0.39 mu. Before receiving any relocatees, Daimaoling Brigade of Fuxi Commune had 59 households, a population of 250, and

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*In China at this time, “subject to criticism” could mean execution.

**The brigade was the second tier of China’s socialist agricultural system and usually consisted of a single natural village.
132 mu of arable land, or 0.53 mu per capita. Forty-seven households totaling 228 people were resettled there, thereby reducing the amount of land per capita to 0.28 mu. In the end, many relocatees simply moved elsewhere, exacerbating population problems in those areas.

The conditions for moving people up the mountains and into nearby areas were no better. A relocatee named Ye Jinggen moved up Chun'an Mountain with his parents in April 1960. Only 0.28 mu of land was allotted per capita. Before resettlement, most relocatees, including Ye's family, had lived along narrow strips of land next to the Xin'an River, but now they were being given pitifully small plots of land in the middle of the mountains—land that dried up quickly when there was no rain, or washed away during storms. The resettlement was being carried out without first determining how many people the mountain sites could support. Recognizing the problem, county authorities petitioned the provincial government to allow people to be moved somewhere else, but they were turned down. Instead, the provincial authorities called on people to overcome adversity and develop the land. The relocatees were understandably frustrated. And, in certain areas where schistosomiasis was rife, such as in Kailhua County, relocatees were very concerned, which made it even harder for them to settle down.

Despite all of these problems, 170,000 people were moved from the reservoir area between 1958 and 1960. The dam might have succeeded in controlling floods and generating electricity, but the problems with resettlement should not be overlooked. During this time, when the central leadership emphasized “planting grain everywhere,” resettlement was, in effect, nothing more than a means of spurring more grain production. After three years of the Great Leap Forward, the country was suffering enormous losses. As a result, the disastrous resettlement policy was made even more salient.

“Readjustment”: Some Relocatees Return to Their Old Villages

The second phase of resettlement (1958–60) was so disastrous that major readjustments in policy were absolutely necessary. With the start of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), more than 10,000 relocatees moved back to Tonglu, Kailhua, and Jiaode counties in Zhejiang. Those relocatees who had managed to stay in their respective counties but were unable to make a living after resettlement launched “rebellions,” not to seize power but to demand that they be returned to their original way of life. Others lashed out violently against the cadres who had been in charge of resettlement during the dam’s construction. A cadre named Zheng Baoxi of Zhenjia Commune was permanently maimed by angry relocatees. Another, Fang Wenlong, of the former Fangzhai Commune, was criticized for ignoring the plight of the masses and fearing the higher authorities. Fang was publicly humiliated in the village and, in the end, suffered a breakdown. Finally, the county magistrate of Kailhua County, who had embezzled resettlement funds, was captured by angry resettlers who threatened to drown him in the reservoir. Only the intervention of local army officials saved his life.*

The situation was frustrating for the regime. In 1968, twelve years after resettlement began, Zhejiang officials reconsidered their earlier decision to resettle everyone within the province and reached an agreement with Jiangxi to move relocatees there. As a result, 54,000 people were moved to Fuzhou, Jiujiang, and Ji'an prefectures. The resettlers brought with them the farming skills of the Zhejiang peasantry and produced bumper harvests. Many became model workers and most were well liked by the Jiangxi locals. For some relocatees, living conditions were improving.

Regardless of whether relocatees returned home, or resettled inside or outside the province, many moved more than twice. Statistics obtained by Chun'an County reveal that 80,000 relocatees were resettled at least twice between 1961 and 1970 at a cost to the government of ¥40 million. And, according to a study by the Ministry of Water Resources and Electric Power in the early 1970s, 86,000 relocatees who were resettled a second time were moved outside their home provinces after their first resettlement sites became uninhabitable or the land untillable. If we include 19,000 relocatees who moved to Jiangxi and Anhui voluntarily, the total number of relocatees resettled outside their native province constituted 40 percent of the total number of relocatees. Experience with resettlement proved that Xu Zhishu’s original proposal that half of the relocatees be resettled in Zhejiang and the other half be moved to nearby provinces was a sound approach to the problem.

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*Li Rui, a vice minister in the Ministry of Water Resources and Electric Power in the 1950s, reports that one top official in charge of resettlement work in China was murdered by angry petitioners during the Cultural Revolution. See, Dai Qing, Yangtze! Yangtze!, pp. 130–31.
After the dam's completion, mismanagement of the water levels in the reservoir led to further problems with resettlement. The water level was persistently too low, which encouraged people to refuse to move out of the area even though they were in danger of being flooded. It also encouraged those who had already moved, but were unhappy with their resettlement, to return to villages in the reservoir area. At that time, the State Council—set normal pool level for all large hydroelectric dams was 108 meters. However, according to documents provided by Chun'an County, between 1961 and 1980, the average water level at Xin'an was below 100 meters 93 percent of the time. During that same period, the average pool level was 90.1 meters.

Because the pool level was so low most of the time, significant amounts of land below the 108-meter level were left exposed. Between 1961 and 1965, the low water level lured about 20,000 homesick relocatees back to villages and towns in the 100-to-108-meter level. They were met, however, by government officials who insisted that they move again. Some refused to leave, while others complied only to turn around and try to return to the reservoir later. The relocatees were willing to accept the risk of being flooded off the land because every additional harvest they were able to eke out brought in much needed income. To make matters worse, public facilities, including permanent structures like factories, warehouses, docks, roads, railway lines, and train stations, were also being built below the 108-meter normal pool level. Meanwhile, some technicians and engineers were questioning the scientific basis of the 108-meter normal pool level. These factors strengthened the people's resolve to stay in the reservoir area, and made it increasingly difficult to resettle the roughly 60,000 people still living there; the people had strong arguments for refusing to move, their intransigence is what probably led the State Council to lower its standard 108-meter normal pool level [for large dams] to 103 meters in 1966.

Then, in June 1973, the waters at the Xin'an dam rose to over 106 meters. People were forced to leave the area, and nearby peasants lost their crops and other enterprises. The construction which had taken place below the 108-meter mark had proceeded despite the availability of resettlement funds to move people out of the area. The State Council had provided funds for relocatees living below the 105-meter water level, and, in January 1974, it granted an additional ¥300 million for relocatees living between the 105- and 108-meter levels. Zhejiang Province alone was granted ¥22.8 million for resettlers in the 105- and 108-meter zone, but it used the money for those living below the 103-meter water level instead. In response, the government chose to punish those living below the 105-meter mark and, in 1974, the State Council decided to resettle more than 10,000 people from the reservoir area to Jiangxi Province. But the political turmoil surrounding the "Anti-Lin [Biao] and Anti-Confucius Campaign" [1973–75] made it impossible to carry out this decision.*

In 1978, the Zhejiang provincial government stopped all resettlement programs and allowed people to stay below the 108-meter level. It also decided not to punish people who had built below the line, and allotted peasants grain requisition targets—a formal recognition of their settlement below the 108-meter line. This formal recognition indicated that the government had lost control of the resettlement situation.

In 1980, floods caused the water level in the reservoir to rise once again, this time to over 107 meters. The reservoir performed as planned, storing flood waters and protecting people and property downstream from the dam, but the flood was devastating for people living below the 108-meter line in the reservoir area. For the second time in seven years they were flooded from their homes. Numerous villages were submerged and all of the crops were destroyed; people were forced to high ground and were surrounded by flood waters without adequate food or fresh water. They had become refugees.

By the end of 1982, ¥224 million had been spent on resettlement—almost twice the original budget of ¥113 million. Then, in 1983, disaster struck again. Floods raised the water level over the 107-meter level once again. Tens of thousands of people managed to escape but about 10,000 people were caught in the water and most of them perished. This last flood proved once again that the 108-meter normal pool level approved by the State Council had been correct.** After the disaster in 1983, the government was forced to provide ¥50 million in emergency relief money.

*This phenomenon is also already evident in the Three Gorges project area.

**The "Anti-Lin Biao and Anti-Confucius Campaign" saw a struggle for power among the top leadership in the waning years of Mao Zedong (who died in 1976). The campaign pitted major bureaucracies and factions against one another and led to a slow down of government operations in China and an inability to implement policies.

**Though this policy of adopting a lower normal pool level and allowing residents to remain in the area between it and the crest of the dam was a dismal failure and led to many deaths at Xin'an, it is the same policy being proposed for the Three Gorges dam. See Li Boning's comments in Chapter Four, and Chapter Six.
Resettlement funds should have been invested in the relocatees' productive capacities so that they could make a living on their own. Instead, much of the money was used for emergency flood relief and to subsidize the daily needs of relocatees. As a result, the relocatees became dependent on social welfare. Though a great deal of money was spent, resettlement did not improve. Some relocatees were known to comment: "Funding this year and subsidies the next, yet we still suffer."

By 1983, according to the Chun’an County Resettlement Office, there were 65,000 relocatees living on 20,000 mu of arable land in the county, or 0.34 mu per capita. Seventy percent of the relocatees had less than 0.35 mu of land. For most, this was less than they had before resettlement. The county’s per capita income was ¥205, but 61.4 percent of the relocatees earned less than ¥200 per capita, and 28.2 percent of them earned less than ¥150. In order to make a living, many of them had to seek out work other than that to which they were accustomed, a task which they found very difficult.

Where transportation was convenient and training readily available, some farmers quickly learned to raise crops and animals in the new environment. In Chun’an County, however, transportation was generally quite poor and there were few connections overland or by water. People were scattered about on the many islands created by the reservoir and had little contact with one another. Technicians and experts were reluctant to travel to or work in the area, and university graduates would not accept jobs there under China’s labor allocation system. As a result, the poor peasants were left without any means to learn the skills needed to survive in their new environment, and many of them were forced to live off state-subsidized grain. They could not afford to buy it on the open market.

For Western tourists, however, the reservoir [known as the Thousand Island Lake region] seemed exceptionally beautiful. But foreigners had no idea how the lake had been created, and they knew nothing of the relocatees' suffering.

We once interviewed a relocatee named Wu Haiquan and his family. They had been moved four times because of the dam. After their initial resettlement, they moved back to their old home in 1962. Later they moved to Jiangxi and then to Anhui, eventually settling down on one of the islands in the reservoir. For twenty-five years, 17 families had lived on this particular island cultivating 14 mu of land. There were seven or eight houses, one made out of tile and the rest of mud and grass. Neither electricity nor gas was available on the island. In 1980, the government provided the locals with formal [rural] household registration (hukou) and a ration of three jin of kerosene for lighting. When the kerosene ran out they had to use candles and those who couldn’t afford them had to burn pine twigs. In the middle of the living room of Wu’s modest house was a portrait of then Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Chairman Hua Guofeng, who had succeeded Mao Zedong.

Wu used to have four children, but two of them drowned after falling from the steep cliffs along the island’s shore. The island did not have proper docks. The deaths of his children so worried Wu that he did not allow his other children to leave the island very often and, as a result, they were unable to attend school. One of Wu’s children, a daughter, was eighteen years old but illiterate. Though tourists had begun to visit the island, she found it difficult to engage with the outside world.

Lessons Learned from the Xin’an Resettlement

Resettlement for dam and reservoir construction is very different from voluntary relocation on the part of the masses. Because entire areas disappear from the map and new ones emerge, it must be well planned and well organized. This type of resettlement not only affects the lives of thousands of people and their offspring, but it can also affect the economic development, social stability, and ethnic unity of an entire area. Although the problems with resettlement at the Xin’an River power station are now history, the Xin’an experience should serve as a reference point for future large-scale resettlement. Some recommendations include:

Have a Clear Understanding of What Resettlement Is and What It Entails

By leaving their homes and lands, relocatees made a great sacrifice for the Xin’an dam. The many who will enjoy the benefits of the power generated by the dam should be grateful to the relocatees for their sublime spirit in supporting the decisions of the country.

Relocatees are average working people. They are farmers, workers, teachers, and artisans. Since they obeyed the decisions of the government and left their homes to resettle in new places, the government should guarantee them jobs and materials, while protecting their rights as workers, and respecting their choices as much as possible. In this way, people
will continue to contribute to the construction of the nation, they will be able to make a living and meet the needs of their families, and they will not suffer a decline in their standard of living. Relocatess should be reimbursed by the government for losses incurred during the resettlement process, and those seeking reimbursement should not be treated like beggars.

**Balance Responsibilities**

Those in charge of resettlement work should balance their responsibilities to higher authorities with an equal sense of duty to relocatees, minorities, and scientists. Operation of the reservoir and electricity generation must be balanced with planning and arranging new work for relocatees, guaranteeing new housing for them, educating them about the project, and making sure that resettlement is carried out on schedule. Fulfilling the tasks laid down by higher authorities and guaranteeing new and productive lives for the relocatees should not be mutually exclusive.

In the case of the Xin’an power station, however, this balance was not kept. There were major errors in resettlement, and many relocatees suffered greatly. Relocatees must not be made into welfare recipients. Those resettled for Xin’an felt swindled and unhappy and they have become an unstable force in society. As it now stands, whenever potential relocatees hear the words “water, electricity, and resettlement,” they can hardly contain their fear. In our future work, we must pay attention to these problems and try to solve them before they arise.

The interests of local minorities must also be balanced with the tasks assigned by the higher authorities. Our country is rich in water resources but, to date, hydropower still constitutes a very small percentage of the country’s total electrical output.* Most of our water resources are located in southwestern China, in areas heavily populated by minorities. For instance, the Jinsha River flows through Qinghai, Tibet, Yunnan, and Sichuan provinces. Its middle and lower reaches are located in the Tibetan Minority Autonomous Region of Diqing in Yunnan Province, the Naxi People’s Autonomous County in the Li River, the Bai People’s Autonomous Prefecture of Dali, the Yi Minority Autonomous Prefecture of Chuxiong, and the Yi Autonomous Prefecture of the Liang Mountains in Sichuan. Therefore, if the Jinsha River is developed, it must be done in cooperation with the peoples of those regions. The development of water resources can bring both material and spiritual wealth to people, but we must also respect their local customs and practices and protect their forms of production and lifestyles.

To achieve this balance in developing hydropower resources, we must also rely on thorough scientific and technical analysis. In other words, the enthusiasm for socialist construction on the part of our leaders must be integrated with the spirit of exploration, creation, and realism on the part of our scientists.*

The Xin’an River power station was a masterpiece of self-reliant design and construction by Chinese scientists and technicians. Our people were extremely happy and proud of the dam, which everyone agreed was well-built. But at the same time our understanding of the complicated nature of resettlement work was lacking.

The first national census conducted in 1953 provided the government with a rich array of data and facts. Zhejiang Province had a population density of 224 people per square kilometer which was more than twice that of Jiangxi Province (102 per square kilometer), and greater still than Anhui Province. These data clearly indicate that in Zhejiang there were more people than the land could support. After two years of exhaustive study by hydrologists and after extensive consultations with officials in Jiangxi and Anhui, all parties agreed that half of the 200,000 relocatees from the Xin’an reservoir should be moved to the two provinces. This scientifically based decision should have been respected.

But it was not. All the relocatees remained in Zhejiang, placing an enormous burden on the province. Three hundred thousand mu of arable land was submerged by the dam, without any improvements in agricultural production. The decision, in 1968, to resettle 50,000 people to Jiangxi Province alleviated the problem somewhat.

The conditions relating to resettlement in Anhui should also be recalled. Before 1949, Jingde County in southeastern Anhui had a population of only 56,000, but by 1987 the population had grown to 148,000. Anhui as a whole had grown by only 75 percent. When we were passing through southern Anhui in 1987, we happened to stay in Jingde.

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*In 1994, 19 percent of China’s electricity was generated by hydropower.

Jingde County has 169,000 mu of arable land. The rice paddies yield two harvests a year and produce about 750 kilograms per mu. In 1986, per capita income in the county was ¥500 and the county had a grain surplus. In short, conditions in the county were appropriate for receiving relocates. Indeed, if the original proposals of the scientists involved in the Xin’an project had been followed (to resettle one-half of the relocates in Jiangxi and Anhui), the relocates would have been of immediate use in areas such as Jingde where they could have contributed to national construction, and the government could have saved a great deal of money from its resettlement budget. All in all, the experiences in resettlement for the Xin’an River power station should serve as a lesson for political leaders on respecting the opinions and decisions of scientists.

*Well-Staffed and Responsive Project and Resettlement Offices*

In any large project such as Xin’an, project and resettlement offices must be established and staffed with officials who are willing to serve the people and who are able to integrate the people’s needs with their assigned tasks. Developing water resources, building power stations, and resettling people are large-scale tasks. Plans must be designed and implemented, but the opinions and sentiments of the relocates must also be understood. Their lifestyle and work must be maintained, and new avenues must be explored to increase their income. Relevant departments from the central and local governments must shoulder these tasks together in the spirit of serving the people, and ensuring that future generations share in the benefits. The offices in charge of the Xin’an project did not do a good job of fulfilling these tasks.

*Site Visits, Meetings, and Monitoring*

Listening to the opinions of the masses will lessen their suffering and help prevent “rebellions” by tens of thousands of people. It can also help reduce the costs of resettlement for the state. Regular meetings should be convened where representatives of the relocates can voice their views on problems with reimbursement, and the difficulties they are having maintaining their standards of living and work. Resettlement in the Xin’an project affected 14 counties and municipalities in Zhejiang and 16 counties in Jiangxi. Knowing how that work was carried out and at what stages problems and solutions emerged are all matters that need to be discussed. This type of communication can only benefit both relocates and resettlement officials.

Finally, it would be useful to organize units to visit the resettlement sites and learn about the lives of relocates following their resettlement. Delegates to the various people’s congresses, political consultative bodies, members of China’s democratic parties* and mass organizations, and scientists and experts should be asked to visit and help monitor resettlement sites after people have been moved. Since the offices overseeing resettlement work have little real power and the accounting and auditing systems in China are unsound, it behooves us to invite these people to learn about, monitor, examine, and help in this work.** Even if resettlement offices were strong and the auditing system sound, bringing outsiders in to oversee some of the tasks involved in dam construction would encourage a democratic spirit. People from all walks of life should be willing to participate in this process.

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*China’s eight major “democratic parties” are largely powerless organizations which did, however, express opinions on policies at odds with the CCP (especially on water conservancy and reservoir construction) in the 1950s and mid-1980s. See Dai Qing, Yangtze! Yangtze!.

**The State Auditing Administration and the Ministry of Finance have been given the authority to monitor expenditure of these funds. Xinhua, February 2, 1996.
Chapter Nine

The Danger to Historical Relics and Cultural Antiquities In and Around the Three Gorges Area

Interviews with the Director of the National History Museum of China, Yu Weichao

Dai Qing

Author’s Note

Yu Weichao is an archaeologist and expert on the culture of the Chu kingdom (700?–221 B.C.) and on the history of the Qin (221 B.C.–206 B.C.) and Han (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) dynasties. In 1961, Yu graduated from the History Department of Beijing University with a major in archaeology. He later received a master’s degree from the university, where he has periodically taught in its history and archaeology departments. Currently, Yu sits on the Board of Directors of the China Archaeological Association and the Chu Culture Association, and is director of the National History Museum of China. His archaeological digs include the Shang dynasty (1766?–1122? B.C.) site at Panlongcheng in Hubei Province, the Western Zhou dynasty (1122?–771 B.C.) site at Shaoshen in Shaanxi Province, the Neolithic (c. 15,000–1766?B.C.) Kayue culture site at Suzhi in Qinghai Province, and the Neolithic and Warring States (472–221 B.C.) period site at Zhouliangyuqiao in Hubei Province. Among his major publications in Chinese are Historical Legacies and Remnants of Grain Water Transport in the Three Gate Gorge (1959), Collection of Articles on the Pre-Qin and Han Dynasties (1983), and An Investigation of the Commune System in Ancient China (1988).*

First Interview, October 1994

Dai Qing: We all know that there are many archaeological sites in the region of the Three Gorges [Qutang, Wu, and Xiling gorges] along the Yangtze River. The possible inundation of their invaluable ancient relics concerns everyone. Among the 412 experts involved in the assessment of the Three Gorges dam project, there was not one sociologist, cultural anthropologist, or archaeologist—it’s beyond belief! Now that construction has begun, what do you think will happen to the area’s treasure trove of historical relics and cultural antiquities?

Yu Weichao: It is true that not one archaeologist was consulted during the project assessment. Earlier this year [1994], however, the Three Gorges Construction Committee (Sanxia jianshe weiyuanhui) and the State Bureau of Cultural Antiquities (Guojia wenwuju) formally designated two units to undertake preservation and protection of archaeological sites in and around the Three Gorges dam area. One unit is our history museum and the other is the China Cultural Antiquities Research Institute (Zhongguo wenwu yanjiusuo). We were assigned responsibility for subsurface sites, while the Cultural Antiquities Research Institute was charged with handling the aboveground sites. Preliminary planning and survey work was already begun in November 1993, and I have been chosen to be director of the work group. Twenty-eight other academic institutes have joined in the project. We now have a basic idea of what archaeological material will be submerged by the reservoir. The institutions were to work out their own proposals first and subsequently develop a comprehensive report intended to be submitted to the Three Gorges Construction Committee by June 1995.

DQ: Are you saying that in the past you were unsure about these historical sites, or that you have made new discoveries, or have become aware of new site locations?

*Excerpts from these interviews were published in Orientations (July/August 1996): 62–64, and Archaeology (November/December 1996): 44–45. For more on the dangers posed to archaeological sites in the Three Gorges area see Appendix C.