

(Source: British Embassy Beijing)

- 3.1 According to the National Tenth Five-Year Plan for Environmental Protection (26 December 2001), local governments and departments are requested to “strengthen environmental protection in close relation with the economic restructuring.”⁷ While this obviously leaves a lot of room for interpretation, clean and renewable hydropower is generally seen as a way of achieving this balance.
- 3.2 There is a host of laws and regulations which are applicable to dam construction, ranging from laws on water and soil conservation to regulations for land requisition. Equally checks and balances have been established to ensure a fair and transparent decision making process. According to a law passed in 2003, an Environment Impact Assessment study must be carried out for large projects. The result of the study should then be made public. The law also stipulates that public hearings must take place to establish a dialogue with the people who will be affected by the construction. So far, however, affected communities have not been consulted prior to

- 5.1 Dams affect the environment in several ways. Perhaps most significantly, the construction of a dam will substantially change the natural habitats in and around the river. More than half of the world's major rivers have already been dammed and as a result fresh water ecosystems have the highest proportion of threatened species.¹⁶ Furthermore, by blocking the flow of sediments dams also divert nutrients away from traditional agricultural areas and contribute to the erosion of coastal river deltas.
- 5.2 Dams can also exacerbate a pre-existing pollution problem by collecting the polluted river water in the reservoir. This leads to a higher concentration of chemicals or pollutants. In addition, the still standing water can also serve as a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other parasites. The reservoir can also produce a large amount of greenhouse gasses (estimates range from 1% to 28% of global emissions) due to rotting flooded vegetation and organic matters from its catchments.¹⁷
- 5.3 In addition to the environmental impacts the resettlement of large numbers of people and potential increased flood and/or drought risks. The high costs related to dam construction are often controversial. A report by the State Office of Comprehensive Agricultural Development, published in January 2005, suggests that 4 out of 17 inspected World Bank-funded dams in China had safety problems. These dams were Xiaotashan, Shilianghe (both in Jiangsu), Fenshuiling (Anhui) and Gutou (in Shandong).¹⁸

- 6.1 There are several NGOs which are actively opposing the way dam construction is carried out today in China. Many of these NGOs co-operate under the name of the China Rivers Network. The domestic NGO debate (by Chin6(s)9(t)-7.8 Td [(C)-3f tn ofn7(boteheor

In a rare act of defiance, 1/3 of the delegates either abstained from voting or rejected the proposition. While this caused some embarrassment to the government it did not, however, stop them from pushing ahead with the plans.

7.6 In addition to the Three Gorges Project the State Development and Investment Corporation plans to build at least six more hydro-electric power plants in Sichuan, on the upper reaches of the Yangtze. The Government, through the NDRC, has already started approving these plans but so far there is no set timetable for the construction.²⁶

8.1 Despite the fact that the dam construction has yet to be fully completed, it is already affecting the environment in the region. The dam has interrupted the natural migration patterns of the fish (requests from the Yangtze River Fishery Research Institute for a special fish ladder were turned down.²⁷) The construction has also severely impacted the living environment of the fish. The dam holds back sediments which contain nutrients which are important for the aquatic life downstream. In addition, it has affected the nitrogen levels in the water for up to 400 km downstream and lowered the water temperature.²⁸

8.2 The result of these factors are already becoming apparent. There are reports of a significantly lowered amount of fish in the Yangtze River and its tributaries. Some of the species that are affected, especially Chinese sturgeon, are already endangered.²⁹

8.3 Pollution is also becoming an increasingly urgent problem. Almost all industrial and domestic waste is still going untreated into the Yangtze River. Pollution will also affect the riverbanks, in particular those parts of the banks that become exposed when the water level is lowered before the flood season. Detritus and small cesspools where bacteria and parasites can breed are likely to be left behind in the porous riverbanks. This problem will progressively get worse as pollutants accumulate on the land.³⁰

8.4 According to one Three Gorges activist, a geological expert has also raised questions regarding the structural weaknesses of both the areas used for resettlement and of the structural weaknesses in the river valley that holds the reservoir. Even though the dam is only filled to its interim level these weaknesses have already manifested themselves in frequent mudslides and riverbank collapses in the area.³¹

²⁶ Yangtze river to get more hydroelectric plants, Asia Times Online

²⁷ Fisheries Scientists Fear Scale of Impact, By Bill Savadove, South China Morning Post, October 6, 2004

²⁸ www.dams.org

²⁹ <http://www.threegorgesprobe.org/tgp/index.cfm?DSP=content&ContentID=13052>

³⁰ <http://www.threegorgesprobe.org/tgp/index.cfm?DSP=content&ContentID=12989>

³¹ <http://www.threegorgesprobe.org/tgp/index.cfm?DSP=content&ContentID=14062>

8.5 In addition to the environmental consequences of the Three Gorges Project, and have also been controversial issues. The project will lead to the forced migration of a huge number of people (official figures are 725 000, estimates from NGOs are as high as 2.5 million).³² Furthermore, the project has been marred by corruption. Last year Beijing announced that 97 officials had been arrested for corruption and embezzlement of funds earmarked for the project (one was executed).³³ While this indicates that the central government is monitoring the project closely it is nevertheless worrying what implications such large-scale corruption will have on the quality of the construction.

9.1 The Nu River is one of China's last pristine waterways and it runs through an area which has been designated a World Heritage site by the United Nations. Nine of the thirteen dams proposed are being planned in National Nature Reserves and very near the World Heritage site.³⁴ Despite the fact that any consequences of a dam project would extend to downstream communities in Thailand and Burma people in these countries have not consulted.

9.2 The Nu River dam will produce more energy than the Three

“World Bank Funded China irrigated agriculture intensification III project – Dam Safety Report”, State Office of Comprehensive Agricultural Development, January 2005

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