

The River Dragon Has Come!

The Three Gorges Dam and the Fate of China's Yangtze River and Its People

By Dai Qing

EDITED BY JOHN G. THIBODEAU AND PHILIP B. WILLIAMS, WITH A FOREWORD BY AUDREY RONNING TOPPING
TRANSLATED BY YI MING
ARMONK, NEW YORK, AND LONDON, ENGLAND: M. E. SHARPE, 1998.
XXIX + 240 PAGES

China's Three Gorges Dam will be, when completed in 2003, the world's largest. In an era when large dams are widely regarded as environmentally insensitive, it has drawn opposition not only abroad but also within China. Leading the opposition in China is the investigative journalist, Dai Qing, who has edited two volumes of essays in an attempt, thus far futile, to persuade the government to redesign and scale back the project. The first volume, *Changjiang! Changjiang!*, was published in 1989, before the National People's Congress formally sanctioned the dam in 1992. The book, translated into English as *Yangtze! Yangtze!* (1994), was promptly banned and landed Dai Qing in jail for ten months. The unrepentant author's second volume was published outside China (in the then-British colony of Hong Kong) in 1996, prior to the beginning of construction in 1997.

The River Dragon Has Come! is a slightly condensed translation of this second volume, which in Chinese is entitled *Shei de Changjiang: Fazhanzhong de Zhongguo nengfou chengdan Sanxia gongcheng* (Whose Yangtze is it? Can a developing China carry out the Three Gorges project?). The order of the essays has been rearranged; the introductory essay by Dai Qing has been replaced by another essay of hers; a foreword by Audrey Ronning Topping (mostly about Dai Qing), an epilogue and several appendixes (including a letter of protest to Communist Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin, signed by over fifty leading intellectuals) have been added. Also added were a number of photographs and maps, explanatory and bibliographic notes, a biographic glossary, and an index. Uncredited, however, is Xue Weijia, the co-editor of the original Chinese volume. The translations from the Chinese, by Yi Ming, read very well, but in a few instances are not quite accurate. Concerning the Great Leap Forward, for example, one article states, "Countrywide, the people were obliged to carry out every order and instruction of the government without reservation or hesita-

tion" (p. 110), whereas the Chinese original says the precise opposite: "Countrywide, the people were encouraged to dare to think, dare to speak, and dare to act" (p. 172).

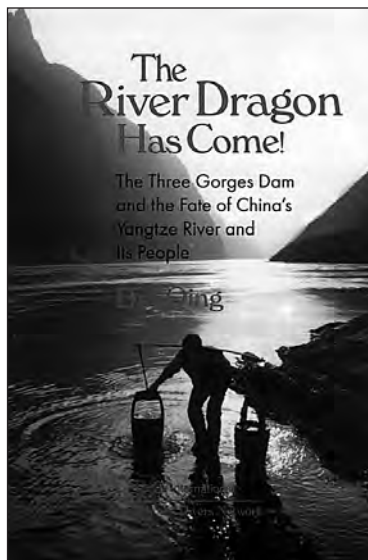
The book is unabashedly a work of advocacy. The government's case for the dam is presented in one paragraph in Topping's foreword: The dam will increase the output of electricity nationally by 10 percent, reduce pollution (by replacing coal with electricity), control floods downstream, and develop the economy of China's interior (by, for example, allowing 10,000-ton commercial ships to reach Chongqing). The rest of the book is devoted to criticisms, direct and indirect, of the project. Particular attention is paid to the resettlement of the more than one million people who will be displaced by the 590-kilometer-long reservoir to be formed by the dam, a problem that five of the book's thirteen essays take up. Other essays deal with the impending loss of important archeological and historical relics (which will be inundated before they can be rescued), the increase in both sedimentation and water pollution (which the dammed-up river will no longer be able to flush out to sea), and

the dam's vulnerability to military attack. What Dai Qing and other critics would like to see, in place of the single 185-meter-high dam across the Yangtze above Yichang, are a number of smaller dams built on tributaries or, if that is not feasible, at least a lowering of the dam. There is no evidence as yet, even after the death of Deng Xiaoping and the replacement of Prime Minister Li Peng, two of the dam's strongest supporters, that the government will change its mind.

In sum, not only does the book contribute to the growing literature on the Three Gorges project but, perhaps more importantly, it also offers some insight into the politics of post-Mao China, as ordinary citizens attempt, not always successfully, to influence the decisions of their government. The book will therefore be of use as a primary source reading in high school and college level courses on Chinese politics, modern Chinese history, and geography. For one exam-

ple of how it might be used, see Patience Berkman, "The Three Gorges Dam: Energy, the Environment, and the New Emperors," *Education About Asia*, 3.1: 27-35 (Spring 1998). ■

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