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**Expressing Dissent:  
Politics, Media and Environmental Issues in China--  
the Case of the Media Debate on the Three Gorges Project**

**Mei Wu**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Communication Studies**

**Presented in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**November 1993**

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## ABSTRACT

### Expressing Dissent: Politics, Media and Environmental Issues in China-- the Case of the Media Debate on the Three Gorges Project

Mei Wu

The centralized Chinese mass media system is infamous, at least in the West, for its practice of information monopoly. Perhaps surprisingly however, the Chinese mass media have never been truly monolithic, particularly in the last decade during China's tremendous market-oriented economic reforms. The following study will focus on one of the most prominent media debates in Communist China, namely the debate on the Three Gorges Project (the world's largest hydro-electric plant), in order to comprehensively examine the articulation of dissenting views within the Chinese media. Further, the relevance of the Three Gorges controversy to the conflicting concerns of developers and environmentalists makes it a particularly lucid case study of the Chinese media's treatment of environmentalist perspectives.

The basic intuition that underlies my argument concerns the fact that while the Chinese media are highly controlled by the Party, mass media discursive spaces also represent sites of political and ideological contestation between various oppositional groups. I will therefore examine the Three Gorges controversy through sustained discussion of three aspects of the larger issue: a) the continuously fluctuating connections between the highly politicized Chinese media and its vulnerability to the struggle in the top-level leadership; b) the connections between the discursive distance of a dissident perspective to the dominant discourse and the its articulation in the media; c) the space

in the media for the articulation of the environmentalist perspective.

My research findings of the Three Gorges controversy indicate that the media range for the dissident articulation in China is closely related to the level of consensus in the state leadership. It also depends on the discursive structure within which dissenting expressions are constructed. The possibility of the media space for those alternative opinions that are formulated in line with the dominant discourse is larger than that for those that are contradictory to such discourse. My study also indicates that there is a lack of environmentalist alternatives in the rhetoric of the Yangtze dam debate. Although the concerns for environment are the legitimate topic, there is a very limited space in the Chinese media for the articulation of the environmental views that contest the basic principles of industrialization and development.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

In this paper, I use *pinyin*, China's official phonetic system, to romanize Chinese names. Therefore, their family names precede their given names (for example, Dai Qing). For Chinese with Christian given names, I follow the western tradition (such as Godwin C. Chu).

For the names of the Chinese government agencies and media organizations, I generally follow the official translation normally used by the English media organizations in China. The following is a guide to the abbreviations of the Chinese organizations appearing in this paper:

- CPC: The Communist Party of China.
- CPPCC: The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.
- NPC: The National People's Congress of China.
- MWREP: The Ministry of Water Resources and Electric Power.
- YVPO: The Yangtze Valley Planning Office.

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PART I  
INTRODUCTION

Historically dependent on the Communist tradition of centralized social control, the Chinese system of mass communication is well known for its preoccupation with mass persuasion and monopoly over information dissemination. The fact that the Chinese mass media are closely linked to priorities and interests of the state and aims at maintaining consensus has contributed to the popular assumption that this media system is completely exclusive and monolithic; and any dissident expression or public discussion of national issues within the Chinese mass media is therefore conscientiously excluded. However, a closer examination of the Chinese media reveals that expression of different views is still possible under the rigid information control system.

One of the most prominent examples of the dissident voice in the Chinese mass media system is the ongoing media debate over the so-called "Three Gorges Project." The Three Gorges controversy concerns the Chinese government's plan to develop and build the world's largest hydro-electric generator on the Yangtze River. The opposition to the project first surfaced in the public media in 1986, and gained enormous momentum in 1989 owing to the publication of a collection of interviews and essays in book form, entitled Yangtze, Yangtze, opposing the building of the super-dam. Media coverage escalated the public debate to an unprecedented extent, leading to the Chinese government's decision to shelf the project for at least five years (Barber et al 1993, 13). Although the project plan was later revived and approved by the state in 1992 (owing partly to the strict political situation following the Tiananmen Square crackdown in

1989), the anti-dam opposition continued to be able to present their viewpoints to the public, at least in print, throughout the period from 1989-91.

This study will focus on the Three Gorges media debate in order to explore the space for expressing dissent within the centralized Chinese media system, with specific reference to development-related environmental issues. In order to more fully examine the above question, three sub-questions should first be considered: 1) the relationship between the Chinese political culture and the fluctuating space in the media system permitted for dissident perspectives; 2) the relationship between the discursive distance of a dissident perspective to the dominant ideological paradigm and its articulation in the media system; and 3) whether there is an opening in the Chinese media system for the environmentalist discourse, which is viewed as an alternative to the conventional definitions of development pervasive in both the ideologies of Communism and market-liberalism (Paehlke 1989, 5-6).

It is important to note at this juncture that in less than three decades, issues concerning the environment have moved from the fringe of public interest to the centre of international political and economic concerns. The environmentalist discourse contests dominant models of industrial development on the grounds that the natural resources are finite. At the same time, environmentalists take seriously the interests of other life forms and future generations, and attempt to incorporate these concerns into development plans. Environmentalism has been embraced by an increasing number of people in Western society as an alternative way of thinking about, among other things, human social development. It is therefore of particular interest to study how the Chinese media

construct the issue of environment, especially when it is associated with industrial development as is the case with the Three Gorges Project. In what context do the Chinese media formulate their discursive framework to provide terms for the debate on development-related environmental issues?

To begin to answer this question, it is necessary to go back more than a decade ago, when the Chinese government began to shift its policy priority from maintaining the revolutionary culture to the pursuit of economic modernization. This policy change prompted the Chinese mass media to become an enthusiastic promoter of development and modernization, in keeping with its traditional role of supporting the government policies (Lee 1990, 6; Warren 1986, 101). Thus, the theme of economic development and modernization based on market imperatives and material orientation, far from being treated as counter-revolutionary heresy as in Mao's time, has gradually become dominant within the mass media.

Further, the prominence of pro-development thinking in the Chinese media raises the question about the use of public media space for the expression of environmental concerns. On the one hand, media dissemination of environmental knowledge does not appear to be in direct conflict with government interests. Straight information pertaining to the environment does not explicitly contest the Communist rule and the state authorities. On the other hand, media coverage of environmental events tends to tell a story of unsuccessful human endeavour, which implies a critique of the ethos and logic of industrial development (Lowe 1984, 78) and of the wisdom of state planners. Since the Chinese political system is constantly concerned with maintaining consensus, the

study of the media's part in environmentalist critiques offers an interesting case to examine sites of ideological control and contestation within the Chinese media.

That said, exactly *how* the Chinese media shape environmental information to fit the dominant development paradigm which they themselves promote is a very complicated issue, open to interpretation from a variety of critical perspectives. In this study, I will explore the issue from the standpoint of hegemony theory.

The Chinese media are a highly centralized system dominated ideologically by the ruling society. Although this ideological dominance is characterized by the strict enforcement of its mandates by the political elite, the Chinese media system is not merely a coercive instrument. Ideological dominance is also accomplished at the unconscious level. This process may follow two distinct paths: a) ordinary people are indoctrinated with the language and the mode of thinking of the Chinese Communist ideology at the unconscious level even though they reject the ideology at the conscious level; b) the dominant ideology provides the language, and thus the parameters for public discourse, and any opposition must act in accordance with these terms of discussion.

As the preceding suggests, the opportunity for public dissident expression within the Chinese media is limited, yet not impossible. Because of an excessive degree of politicization of the system, the Chinese media is highly vulnerable to the power struggle among the elite classes. The "cracks" in the Chinese media allowing the articulation of perspectives other than the dominant ones are usually the result of political power struggles at the level of leadership.

In addition, the possible openings for dissent are mediated by the discursive affiliation of dissident perspectives to the dominant discourse. Dissident views that are formulated within the dominant discourse structure have more opportunities to be articulated in the media system than discourses that pose direct threat to the legitimacy of the authoritative interpretation.

Interestingly, the environmentalist discourse does not fit into either traditional ideological category, belonging neither to Communism nor capitalism. On the surface then, active discussion of environmental issues does not seem to pose as much of a threat to the Chinese ideological hegemony as liberalism or democratic capitalism. Thus, one might assume an enhanced possibility for environmental discussion in the Chinese media. However, on closer examination, it could be argued that the environmentalist discourse has considerable potential for challenging the fundamental principles of expansionism inherent in the Communist ideology (Paehlke 1989, 6). How then is the views on environmental issues positioned in a hierarchy of interpretations in the Chinese media? Are the environmental explanations marginalized by the ideological hegemony in the same manner as views of democratic liberalism? Or are they allowed to be articulated in the public media only if they are constructed within the established framework of discourse hegemony? These are a few of the many questions that this study will consider.

#### The Organization of the Study:

My study is composed of five parts. In Part I (Introduction) I outline the research questions, my organizational strategies, and the significance of the study. Also in this

chapter, I will discuss the methodology employed in this research. Part II will focus on the theoretical framework of the study, as well as containing a review of the major theories pertinent to this study. In Part III, I provide a general overview of the background information about the internal debate of the Three Gorges Project in the Chinese government and the emergence of the public debate in the media. Part IV deals with the discourse analysis of the media discussion on the Yangtze project. In the concluding section I sum up my research findings.

#### The Significance of the Study:

This study will examine the dissident expression in the Chinese media system using the theoretical framework of hegemony. Notably for the purposes of this paper, research in North America on the Chinese Communist media system before mid-1980's was mainly concerned with the close relationship between the mass media system and the political culture. Discussions dwelt extensively on the ways in which the Chinese Communist government made use of the media system to achieve its political and ideological dominance over the population (Yu 1964; Liu 1971; Chu 1978; Chu and Hsu 1983; and Chao 1985). After the mid-80's (particularly after the Tiananmen demonstration in the spring of 1989), Chinese media studies began to concentrate on the media's defiance of state control and the journalistic aspiration for more autonomy (Lee 1990; Tan 1990; Jakobson 1990; Porter 1992). Most of these studies, constructed within the liberal-pluralist paradigm, view the dissident movement in the post-Mao Chinese media system as a popular oppositional movement derived from outside the Communist

system. In other words, the articulation of dissident perspectives in the media is seen as a result of the external struggle between the oppressed and oppressor, the struggle of interest groups outside of the Communist umbrella against the Communist central authorities, the people's power against the Party's power.

The problem with the liberal-pluralist interpretation of dissident activities in the Chinese media system as an external struggle lies in its inability to give a satisfactory explanation when the following two factors are taken into consideration:

1. Most of the dissident activities studied by Western media researchers take place within the government structure of mass communication. In fact, some major initiatives to make the media more open to dissident expressions are sponsored by the Communist leadership (Lee 1990; Ran 1990; Liu 1990);

2. Most of the dissident expressions are confined within the discourse structure developed and controlled by the Chinese government. To a large extent, the opposition uses government-sponsored terms and definitions in its arguments (Wu 1993).

It seems clear that a liberalist study of the media dissident in the Communist system cannot provide an accurate understanding of the question of control and contestation in the Chinese media. If the Chinese media is a closed propaganda instrument subject to the complete control of the Party, as many studies indicate, then how is it that such a highly centralized system could generate as wide a range of dissident expressions as was seen in the 1989 Tiananmen demonstration? I will consider this and other issues in the light of the theory of hegemony.

This study is also an effort to examine the construction of environmental issues in the Chinese media.

The beginning of the Chinese media's construction of environmental issues was clearly under the influence of Western notions of environmental protection. The first time the Chinese government was exposed to Western knowledge of environmental problems was when Chinese envoys attended the Stockholm Conference of the United Nations on the environment in June 1972 (Vermeer 1990, 47). The terms "environment" and "environmental protection" were first translated and used in the Chinese print medium around that time.<sup>1</sup> Before 1979, environmental issues were interpreted in the Chinese media as some the problems endemic to the capitalist system. As a Communist country, China did not have such problems, unless of course its clean environment was being affected by the pollution created by the capitalist countries (Tian 1975, 29). One of the first examples of Chinese environmental problems appearing in the media was an article in the April 1979 issue of Geographic Knowledge. The article reveals the existence of air and water pollution problems in a number of Chinese cities (Wang et al 1979, 31).<sup>2</sup>

As China is presently engaged in rapid industrial development, the tension

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<sup>1</sup> Because of the difficult availability of the Chinese print medium in Montreal, I could not provide the detailed information on the exact time when the term "environment" first appeared in the Chinese media. The earliest environmental evidence I found was an article in the April issue of Geographic Knowledge in 1973, in which the author explains the term "environmental pollution." The estimated time period of 1972-73 is not too far off the mark.

<sup>2</sup> The information here was based on my sample research of one Chinese magazine Geographic Knowledge published in China. A large-scale study on the major organizations like the People's Daily or CCTV is recommended for future researchers interested in this topic.



between economic growth and a balanced ecological system has become more prominent. The Chinese media responded to the emergence of environmental issues by establishing national newspapers and journals devoted solely to the environment. There are eight newspapers and magazines of this kind, with a nation-wide readership (Xiong et al 1993, 16). However, several Western studies suggest that the institutionalized representation of environmental issues in the media entails anchoring environmental discussion in the dominant structures of discourse (Hansen 1990, 3-6).

The following study will focus on one of the most prominent media debates in Communist China, namely the debate on the Three Gorges Project (the world's largest hydro-electric plant), using discourse analysis as a base from which to comprehensively examine the role of the media in controlling and circumscribing the debate of development-related environmental issues. Further, while identifying the range for the articulation of dissent in a mass media system characterized by state ownership, party monopoly and intentional manipulation of information to serve the interests of the political hegemony, this study will examine in particular how the environmental perspective is situated in the discursive structure of the Chinese media in order to understand the complexity of the debate over economic development and environmental protection in China. The country is faced with an increasing tension between industrial growth and ecological deterioration. How China will sustain its economic development depends, to a large degree, on its efforts to communicate environmental knowledge to its huge population. From this point of view, communication of environmental problems

will become crucial issues for China in the coming century. By locating the space for dissident expression in the media, this study offers a conceptual framework for a strategic model of initiating change in China, with particular reference to the environmental movement.

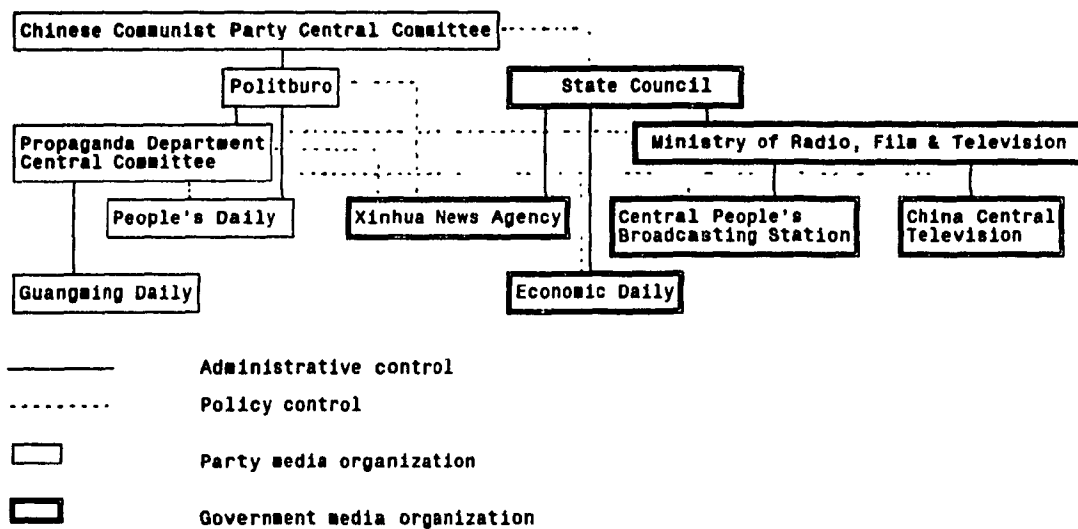
### The Methodology of the Study:

Discourse analysis of printed texts will be my primary basis for examining the possible opportunities for dissident expression through the Chinese media system. To demonstrate the importance of the print medium for my analysis, I will first give a brief introduction of the structure of the Chinese mass media system and how it is controlled by the central authorities.

The Chinese mass media are structured in a hierarchical system parallel to the political order. The core of the system is the centralized leadership of the party and government (Chang 1989, 165). This centralized power is maintained through the strict control of both policy and administration (Chang 1989, 165). The organization charged with supervision of the ideological correctness of mass media is the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC). This department determines policies and issues operational directives. These policy directives are executed via the party's complex chain of command, from the CPC to the various provincial, municipal and county propaganda divisions (Chang 1989, 165). Administrative control (budget, payroll, distribution etc.) is organized along similar lines. For my purposes in this paper, media organizations are divided into two main categories,

contingent upon the nature of their administrative links to the party or the government system. The organizations which are under the direct supervision of the party committees at the various levels are considered to be the party's "organs." More remote media organizations are considered as the "government media" because of their administrative affiliation with government institutions at various levels (see Figure I).

**Figure I: Administrative Structure of the Top Media Organizations in China**



References:

1. Zhang Xiaogang, "Directory of Chinese News Media," appendix in "Don't Force Us to Lie: The Struggle of Chinese Journalists in the Reform Era," by Allison Liu Jernow (New York: Committee to Protect Journalists, 1993), 141-153;
2. Won Ho Chang, Mass Media in China: The History and Future (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 165.

On the top of the media hierarchy, there are two organizations: the Xinhua News Agency and the People's Daily, both of whom have the status of separate ministries. Their directors sit on the Party Central Committee and have the rank of ministers in the Chinese bureaucratic system (Haggart 1992, 43). The Xinhua is at the summit of the government media system, with its leaders nominated by the Premier and approved by the National People's Congress. Predictably, Xinhua's daily operations rely heavily on

instructions from various levels of the Party bureaucracy, from the Politburo to the Propaganda Department of the Central Party Committee (Zhang 1993, 152). The People's Daily heads the Party media system, with its leaders appointed by the Central Party Committee (Zhang 1993, 149). The lesser press organizations are the Guangming Daily, which answers to the Central Propaganda Department, and the Economic Daily, directly controlled by the State Council. The broadcast media, including radio, television and films are also under direct government control, subordinate to the Ministry of Radio, Film and Televisions. The major broadcasting organizations are the Central People's Broadcasting Station and China Central Television. Another government agency, the Media and Publication Administration is primarily responsible for supervising the publishing business.

#### **The Print Medium:**

The "print medium" is defined in this study as newspapers, periodicals and books that are published through party and government-authorized institutions in China. There are two important reasons for me to focus my study on the print medium:

1. The print medium is pre-eminent in the Chinese mass communication system.

The print mass-media, particularly newspapers, are the most important information sources for the Chinese. The Beijing Audience Survey of 1982, indicates that newspapers are the most frequently cited outlet for news, followed in decreasing order by radio and television (Roger et al. 1985, 200-201). An earlier study in 1977 by the United States Information Agency also reports that the average Chinese citizen relied on two sources for news: the People's Daily (a national newspaper) and the broadcasts of

the Central People's Broadcasting Station (Staff 1977). Although television has attracted a steadily increasing number of viewers, only slightly more than half of the Chinese population watches television every day (China Daily 1991). Therefore the prestigious position of newspapers, particularly the People's Daily, remains un-challenged.

In the hierarchical structure of China's mass communication system, the People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency hold the highest rank, and accordingly are the most authoritative voice of the party. While Xinhua is empowered to act as an official agent in news dispatches, the People's Daily is the conduit for the party leadership's most important media messages (Tan 1990, 160). The format of these messages varies from "newspaper editorials" written by party leaders themselves or by the newspaper under the direct command of the central leadership (Tan 1990, 160), to excerpts from speeches and reprints of government regulations. The authoritative status of the People's Daily as a state power is one of the important characteristics of the Chinese media system.

The Chinese devotion to the print medium as their main information source reflects a prominent characteristic of Chinese cultural tradition. The Chinese have always attached great meaning and significance to the printed word (Pye 1978, 230). They believe in the power of words and have a tendency to respect written or printed words as statements of truth.

2. The print medium underwent a tremendous progressive transformation in 1980's, making this medium a more likely site for expressions of dissent than other forms of mass communication.

In the case of the media debate on the Three Gorges Project, the primary

discursive space is the print medium, as a more or less direct result of changes in the Chinese media system over the last 15 years. One effect of the various changes within the structure of the print medium is that it has become more diversified and heterogeneous than in the past. The potential for the articulation of diverse and even dissenting views is thus more likely in the print medium than in the broadcasting media.

Historically, the Chinese government controlled the print medium by centralizing both publishing and distributing activities. The press, publishing companies and magazines were government organizations bound to a hierarchical system in which media organizations were either state-owned or collectively owned, and were subordinate to the relevant party committee.<sup>3</sup> Since the late 1950's, private publishing has been practically non-existent. Virtually all of the publishing institutions were controlled by the government authorities and their publications were appropriately distributed through government-controlled channels, such as the postal service and the Xinhua Bookstore distributing system.

Beginning in 1978, the Chinese print medium underwent a large-scale transformation from a highly centralized and monopolistic institution to a more diversified and market-oriented business. The first obvious indication of this shift is the increased number of new titles of newspapers and periodicals. In 1968, the most rigid period of the Communist rule, there were only 42 newspaper titles in China, almost all of which were party newspapers. The number increased to 382 in 1980 (Wang 1988,

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<sup>3</sup> For detailed description about the structure of the Chinese media, see Womack 1986, 16-29.

269) and to 1534 in 1991 (Zhou 1991). During this time, the percentage of newspapers directly affiliated with the party committees was reduced to less than one third of the total number of registered publications.<sup>4</sup>

The next major change occurred in the mid-1980's, when the press and magazines were encouraged to establish their own distribution channels instead of relying on the heavily subsidized and overloaded government distribution networks. In the meantime, private retailers and wholesalers of the print medium emerged, whose business orientation was focused on market. Consequently, the market incentive pushed many publishing companies to test the ideological limits of the Communist system. By the end of the 1980's, an incredibly large variety of magazines and books were available in private book markets in Beijing. In 1986, there were 5,248 officially registered periodicals and magazines (Wang 1988, 283). Newspapers and journals began to be published not only by central and provincial party committees, but also by ministries, professional associations, research institutes and quasi-governmental social organizations. The old centralized system started losing the monopoly over the print medium.

In comparison, the government monopoly was not significantly challenged vis a vis the broadcasting media. Radio and television stations remained tightly in the hands of government authorities. Almost all Chinese broadcasting programs were pre-recorded and subject to previews of leaders in charge. The prime-time news of the CCTV was

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<sup>4</sup> According to Zhou Qing's story, the "organizational newspapers" accounts for about one third of the total 1,534 newspapers. Considering the fact that Zhou's "organizational newspapers" include both party newspapers and newspapers run by government, the People's Congress and the People's Political Consultative Conference at various levels, the real percentage of the party papers must be less than one third.

usually previewed by the minister of Radio, Film and Television. One report reveals that from 1985 to August of 1989, Minister Ai Zhisheng would routinely show up at the CCTV newsroom to personally preview the 7 pm national news (Jacobson 1990, 5).

#### **The Sources for the Study:**

The access to the information of the Chinese political culture remains one of the biggest problems for the study of the Chinese media. In this study, I benefit from the primary sources from some key players in the media debate of the Three Gorges Project. They include:

1. The articles and information provided by Dai Qing, a prominent journalist and writer in Beijing, who organized the anti-dam media opposition in 1989.
2. The article and information provided by Li Rui, a retired Communist official. Li used to be Chairman Mao's secretary and is a long-time opponent of the Yangtze dam.
3. The articles and information provided by Beijing journalists, Xiao Rong, Ji Si and Shi He (these are pen names; anonymity is preferred for fear of political harassment). These journalist were all active players in the 1989 anti-dam media opposition.

All of the above-mentioned sources are scheduled to be published in English under the title Yangtze, Yangtze in January 1994.

In addition, I rely on several secondary sources. These include:

1. The article "The inside story about the decision of the Three Gorges Project" by He Ping, an ex-chief editor of the Shenzhen Youth Journal in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province. He left China after the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown and resides in



Canada. He is a specialist on analyzing the Chinese politics, whose article was published in the Taiwan-based magazine Mainland China Monthly.

2. The article "Achievement Throughout Ages, Choice Made in a Hundred Years" by Du Yuejin and Lin Chen from the Chinese official news agency of Xinhua. The article, published in the Overlook Weekly, a Xinhua magazine, offers an authorized version of the history of the Three Gorges debate.

3. The book Damming the Three Gorges by Probe International, a Toronto-based environmental group. It is one of the very few English books available on the subject.

Finally, this study also draws upon reference from my personal experience as a journalist in Beijing during the period of 1984-1989.

#### **The Time-frame of the Study:**

The time frame I concentrate on in my study includes the span from January 1, 1985 to April 3, 1992. This period is generally considered to be the most important segment of the Three Gorges Project debate.

As Part III of this study suggests, there are some landmark events in the development of the debate in the Three Gorges Project. From the early 1950's when the Chinese Communist government started considering the proposal to dam the Yangtze River, to 1984 when the State Council first approved the project "in principle," the debate within the government was carried out exclusively through internal communication channels and rarely surfaced in the public media (He 1992, Dai 1994). One major turning point occurred in 1985, a year during which the various oppositional forces became organized into a coalition under the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

(CPPCC) umbrella (He 1992). The opposition gained momentum in late 1985, when it attempted to block the Yangtze project in the National People's Congress (NPC), just prior to project approval (He 1992). April 3, 1992 signifies another watershed. On that day the Chinese National Congress finally approved the controversial Three Gorges Project with one third of the delegates voting against or abstaining from voting (Du et al. 1992, 5; Ji 1994).

It is evident from these and other examples that the period between 1985 and early 1992 marks the most important period in the Three Gorges Project debate. During this time, government infighting about the project escalated to an unprecedented level. In the meantime, the media, particularly the print medium, became the public site of the Yangtze power struggle.

#### **The Print Materials to be Studied:**

Before examining the structure of discourse enunciated in the Three Gorges Project debate, the two defining types of Chinese media organizations require some brief elaboration:

1. The dominant media: As I alluded to earlier, I use this term in reference to national media organizations affiliated with party and government institutions ranked on the top of the hierarchical structure of the Chinese media system. These have an authoritative status as a voice of the state government and play a crucial role in constructing the dominant definition of meanings and in setting basic terms for problematic play. The mainstream media organizations in China include the People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, Central People's Broadcasting Station, and China Central

Television. In this study, I take the People's Daily to be paradigmatic of the dominant media.

2. The marginal media: I refer here to media organizations affiliated with government institutions peripheral to the centralized power structure. Although they are still associated with the government media system, the marginal media are situated at the middle or lower levels of the media hierarchy. They have a much smaller audience than the dominant media, and are not given official license to manufacture meanings and define terms of public discussion. Many Chinese newspapers, journals and publishing companies organizations fall into this second category. These are marginalized via the political structure, financial constraints, ideological censorship and even geographical location.

In the Three Gorges media debate, certain marginal media organizations have played important roles in providing space for those expressing oppositional views. These marginalized texts consistently offer interpretations of the Yangtze project markedly different from those expressed in the dominant media. The sources for my comparative study of dominant and marginalized texts may be summed up as follows:

1. The officially endorsed text: the articles about the Three Gorges Project published in the People's Daily between January 1, 1985 and April 3, 1992. All news, feature stories and commentaries published in the People's Daily during this period are included in this study. This selection has its basis in the fact that the People's Daily holds the most prominent position in the dominant media.

2. The marginal dissident text:

a) All articles about the Three Gorges Project published in Qunyan (Words of the Masses), a journal put out by the China Democratic League. This organization is one of nine non-Communist groups, associated with the Communist party in opposition to the Nationalist government in 1949, whom have retained a nominal status as party organizations under Communist patronage.

b) All articles in the book Yangtze, Yangtze, published by a company located in the peripheral province of Guizhou. This book is a collection of interviews and essays composed and edited by Beijing journalists.

My decision to choose the texts produced by Qunyan and Yangtze, Yangtze as representative of the marginal interpretation of the Yangtze project is based on the reasons cited below:

a) Qunyan was the first media organization to provide space for opponents of the Three Gorges Project to express their views. It is also the only media organization that routinely carried articles disagreeing with the dominant interpretation of the Three Gorges Project.

b) Yangtze, Yangtze is the first concentrated journalistic effort to break out of the government-sponsored media censorship on the Three Gorges Project debate. The dramatic events associated with its publication, distribution and later the ban imposed on it increased the popularity of the book and make it by far the most influential text from the dissident camp.

#### **Analytical Approaches in the Study:**

In what follows, I work with three basic analytical approaches to examine the

structure of discourse in my key texts:

**Approach I:** To examine a hierarchy of access to the media discourse by differentiating between actors, sources and narrators in a given text.

This approach draws upon Robert Hackett's study of the Canadian press and the peace movement (explained in detail in Part II). To understand the structure of access to the media, Hackett first addresses the "cast of characters" who appeared in the selected news reports, categorizing them as either "sources" or "actors". Sources appear in the news by virtue of their provision of information or viewpoints which are considered to be credible, authoritative, legitimate, and/or relevant. "Actors" appear in journalistic narrative on the basis of journalistic judgements that their actions are newsworthy. Actors are spoken about more than they are permitted to speak for themselves (Hackett 1991, 205).

I adopt Hackett's approach in my study of the Chinese media, albeit with some important modifications. For example, in my approach, the "actors" are equivalent to Hackett's "cast of characters." I identify 12 such groups of actors in the Three Gorges debate, all of whom are either affected by or have an interest in the dam project. To study the access of these groups of actors to the media debate, the terms "sources" and "narrators" are employed. The "narrators" are defined as producers of the media text who provide commentary of the events. The authors of articles, then, are considered to be narrators for my purposes in this study. The "sources" are defined as providers of information or viewpoints of the events who are NOT "narrators." The "sources" make their appearance in the text either by being quoted, or by being mentioned. The more an

actor group has an opportunity to become the "narrator" or "sources" in the media, the more this group is able to access the media.

The actor groups are defined in accordance with the role each group plays in the Yangtze project discussion and with the interests each has with the project. The groups include:

Top level leaders;

Provincial & ministerial leaders;

Leaders of Three Gorges Project feasibility study group (including leaders of Yangtze Valley Planning Office (YVPO) and Ministry of Water Resources & Electric Power (MWREP);

Officials in local governments (counties & townships);

Specialists & experts participating in the Three Gorges feasibility study;

Specialists & experts outside the feasibility Study of the Three Gorges Project (including deputies of NPC, CPPCC);

Specialists overseas;

Journalists;

General public;

Residents living in the neighbouring regions of the dam (including residents in Hubei, Hunan, and Sichuan provinces);

Residents in the dam area to be relocated.

In my study, both the officially endorsed and the marginal dissident text will be subject to the above-stated differentiation.

**Approach II:** To locate the discourse structure by first differentiating the rhetoric of the Yangtze debate into five perspective categories, where a perspective is defined as a set of views, arguments, explanations and policy suggestions organized around a given position. These five perspectives will be further differentiated into three discursive frameworks based on their underlying conceptual rationales.

This approach, which I apply to both the dominant and marginalized texts, borrows from studies undertaken by Philip Schlesinger, Graham Murdock and Philip Elliott on the treatment of terrorism on British television (Schlesinger et al 1983), and by Hackett on the Canadian press and peace movement (Hackett 1991). Both studies will be discussed more specifically in Part II.

Also central to my work are five distinct perspectives that underline the rhetoric of the Three Gorges debate:

1. The technical perspective: This perspective concentrates on the technical soundness of the proposed engineering of the Three Gorges Project. Arguments from this perspective are concerned with the feasibility of technical designs of the project, such as dam height, siltation treatment, flood control measures and so on.

2. The economic perspective: The focus here is on the economic soundness of the Three Gorges Project. The economic benefits and financial feasibility of the project are particularly germane.

3. The humanitarian/social perspective: This perspective deals with the effects of the Three Gorges Project on people's welfare and the society as a whole. Arguments from this perspective are concerned with the impact of the project on the livelihood of

local communities, surrounding areas and the nation as a whole.

4. The political perspective: There is much discussion of the political legitimacy of the decision making process of the Three Gorges Project. Arguments from the political standpoint are chiefly interested in the power structure of decide-making on the project, rather than the feasibility of the project itself.

5. The environmental perspective: This perspective focuses on the environmental impacts of the project. Arguments from this perspective are concerned with the ecological consequences of the project for other life forms, such as fish or birds, as well as on the natural environment of the Yangtze Valley.

To further examine the discourse structure of the Three Gorges debate, I will analyze the discursive relationship of these five perspectives to the following three frameworks of discourse:

1. Development framework: It is my view that both the technical perspective and economic perspective are related to the discursive framework of development rationale. On this account, industrial activities are justified on the basis of their material benefits- for example whether the activities can generate maximum material gains at the minimum cost; and whether the technology used is sound enough to produce the expected material growth. The development discourse is predicated on the notion that material accumulation and technological perfection are essential criteria for deciding on the efficacy of an industrial project.

2. State authoritarianism vs. liberalism framework: I recognize that the humanitarian/social perspective and the political perspective are derived from the idea



that human beings' activities may be justified by improvements in human and societal factors, and affected by the political arrangements of relevant interest groups. These two perspectives are directly connected to the ideological conflicts between Chinese Communist ideology and Western liberalism, which have different criteria for assessing the human and societal improvements, and different methods for legitimating political arrangements. For example, the dominant Chinese value system emphasizes the primacy of state interests over those of communities and individuals, promoting centralized decision-making procedures even on issues affecting the livelihood of a large population. The individual's knowledge of state affairs, and capacity to participate in China's government policy-making processes is thus circumscribed by the state authorities, to the extent that their interests may not be questioned or threatened. By contrast, Western liberalism holds dear the individual's right of access to information regarding government practices and policies.

3. Environmentalist framework: The environmental perspective is derived from the wider environmentalist discourse, as elaborated in the next part. The environmentalist discourse stands as an alternative to the dominant development paradigm. While pointing out that the earth's resources are finite, environmentalists view technological development as potentially contributing to extensive exploitation of these resources. Environmentalism is also concerned with the fundamental relationship of human beings to nature within the modern (and global) expansionist culture, offering unconventional interpretations of the world's problems which differ markedly from the tenets of both Western market democracy and Chinese Communism.

**Approach III:** After analyzing the discourse frameworks articulated in both the dominant and the marginal media texts, I proceed to identify a hierarchy of discourses in the Three Gorges debate by examining: a) the discursive distance of various perspectives to the dominant discourse of China; and b) the relationship between discursive distance and the media space for the articulation of the various discourses outlined above.

Following the identification of the discourse structure in the Three Gorges media debate, I will shift the results of my textual analysis into the broader political context in order to examine further the openings for dissent in the Chinese mass media. By studying the relationship between the Chinese political culture and the fluctuating space in the media system permitted for dissident perspectives, I will explore the issue of whether there are openings in the Chinese media system for the environmentalist discourse. I will then provide a detailed analysis of the possibilities for dissident articulation within the Chinese system, how such expressions are subject to the influence of the state leadership, and finally to what degree there is potential for change in the Chinese media system.

## PART II

### THEORETICAL STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

In this chapter I will discuss in a detailed manner the theoretical orientation of this study. My conceptual framework derives primarily from hegemony theory. Briefly stated, hegemony theory maintains that certain ideological formations are dominant in the production of meanings. This ideological dominance, or hegemony, involves the immersion of a society in "a whole system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that in one way or another supports the established order and the class interests that dominate it" (Hackett 1991, 57). Hegemony is accomplished through both persuasion from above and consent from below. On the one hand, the major institutions of ideological apparatus, such as schools, churches, and the media, are actively involved in disseminating dominant definitions of the world around us (Althusser 1971). At the same time, hegemonic ideology is accepted by ordinary individuals in such a way that it becomes naturalized as the "common sense" with which people navigate their lives and the world (Hackett 1991, 57). In my view, hegemony theory's concept of the structures of ideological control may be fruitfully applied to the Chinese media, a structure usually classified as a state-controlled media system which is fundamentally different from its Western counterpart.

With this notion of hegemony theory in mind, I will construct four propositions as essential to the theoretical structure of this study: a) mass media are a site of contestation of meanings, although they are structured in dominance; b) the correlation between ideological hegemony and the struggle over meaning can be

explained in terms of a "structure of discourses," which is defined as a hierarchy of interpretations present in the media's production of meanings; c) the Chinese media are a significant site of contestation of meanings, although they are themselves solidly embedded in dominant ideological structures, and thus the struggle over meaning and access is limited relative to media in the West; d) environmentalism, which challenges dominant ideology in both the East and the West, affords an excellent opportunity to study the control and contestation of meaning in, and access to, the media. Three notions are taken as underlying assumptions in the development of the above-stated propositions.

Assumption I: Media messages, or signifying systems, are subject to the framing power of their social and cultural context.

There are significant variations among theorists who conceive media more as a product of existing and conventionalized meaning systems than as a duplication of reality. These scholars vary in their accounts of the nature of the major social and cultural factors that frame media messages. Classical Marxism privileges economic factors as constitutive factors of the ideological superstructure. Other theorists argue for the primacy of contextual factors, ranging from the social institutionalism of Althusser to Lévi-Strauss and Barthes' understanding of language and semiology as "a key to the understanding of how social interests are structurally encoded and decoded" (Tehranian 1985, 6). For these theorists, media messages are no longer regarded as a mere reflection of external reality, but rather as symbolic vehicles

which define natural situations in terms of complex ideological structures subject to the dominant power of politics, society and cultural traditions (Bennett 1982; and Hall 1982).

Assumption II: Certain ideological formations exist, and are dominant in the production of meaning-systems.

In opposition to the liberal-pluralist view of the media as an institution divorced from the state and interest groups, with a mandate to safeguard the pluralistic values of the society (Gurevitch 1982, 1), the critical paradigm holds that modern society is deeply stratified, with power concentrated among the few. These ruling groups have common interests that are separate from, and in potential opposition to, those of the majority of the population (Hackett 1991, 56). Thus, the dominance of the ruling ideology, accomplished at both the conscious and unconscious levels, is a property of that system, and not the overt and intentional biases of individuals (Hall 1982, 85). The concept of "hegemony", Hall notes, implies that:

the dominance of certain formations was secured, not by ideological compulsion, but by cultural leadership. It circumscribed all those processes by means of which a dominant class alliance or ruling bloc, which has effectively secured mastery over the primary economic processes in society, extends and expands its mastery over society in such a way that it can transform and re-fashion its ways of life, its *mores* and conceptualization, its very form and level of culture and civilization in a direction which, while not directly paying immediate profits to the narrow interests of any particular class, favours the development and expansion of the dominant social and productive system of life as a whole. (Hall 1982, 85)

Although not achieved without legal and legitimate compulsion, Hall stresses

that hegemony is constructed primarily by winning the active consent of social groups who are nevertheless subordinate to the cultural leadership.

**Assumption III:** The concept of hegemony can be usefully applied to the understanding of the communist media system, which is characterized by direct state control, non-pluralistic orientation and coercive censorship of dissent.

Most media studies concentrate on societies characterized by political pluralism, market-orientated economy and semiautonomous institutions of media. In China however, where mass media are owned and controlled by the state authorities and used as an instrument to safeguard central government control of politics, culture and the economy (Schramm 1956), it is obvious that the media system is dominated by the ruling ideology. What remains at issue is exactly *how* the system achieves hegemony.

The communist system, though it is known for achieving its ideological dominance through threats and prescription, is not a mere coercive instrument. Gramsci notes that no ruling group or class could establish stable, long-term dominance over the rest of the population through physical compulsion alone (Hackett 1991, 56). As well, Servaes states that no authority "is able to operate effectively, to control, to censor, or to play the role of gatekeeper" in relation to all forms of communication networks in a society at all times (Servaes 1990, 69). Many cases, especially those demonstrated in some key studies of the Chinese communication system (Yu 1964; Liu 1971; Chu and Hsu 1983; and Bishop 1989),

indicate that the governing power of the state cannot secure ideological dominance over hundreds of millions of minds without winning at least the partial consent of the majority of the governed population. Finally, given ideology's function of generating systematic discourse (or the logic of social processes) rather than mere conceptual messages (or an intention of the individual as an agent), it seems plausible that the structure of Chinese communist hegemony is also accomplished at the unconscious level.

Thus, I believe the ideological dominance in China has a two-fold composition: a) ordinary people are indoctrinated with the language and the mode of thinking of Chinese Communism unconsciously even though they reject communist ideology at the conscious level; b) the dominant ideology provides the language and definitions for public discourse, requiring that opposing views "perform with the established term of the problematic in play" (Hall, 1982, 81). I will elaborate along these lines in the following paragraphs.

The dominance of Chinese communist hegemony was achieved through many institutions of hegemonic control, such as schools, cultural industries, work-place meetings, party members' assemblies. The mass media were the most visible site of manufacturing a social consent. The dominance in the mass media established, at least, a time- and space-bound language monopoly in China. On one hand, ordinary people used the state media actively in seeking, apparently out of the practical reason, information from the government, which had an enormous power over individuals' economic and political life. On the other hand, these people were

exposed to the official media in a passive manner because of the easy availability and extensiveness of the mass communication system. In such a way, individuals were constantly exposed to the language, which provided the initial definitions of meanings.

The following cited audience survey presents an evidence that the Chinese media still maintained their legitimate status as a manufacturer of meanings even after 33 years of the communist rule.

The first large-scale audience survey carried out in the People's Republic took place in 1982, in Beijing. This survey, conducted by the Beijing Journalism Association, indicated that the majority of the Beijing audience perceived Chinese newspapers as generally credible. About 83.4 percent of men and 72.5 percent of women surveyed rated the press medium as, on the whole, "credible" or "fairly credible" (Beijing Journalism Association's Research Group 1986, 110). About four percent of the readers surveyed rated the press as "not so trustworthy" or "not trustworthy," and some 13 percent of male and 24 percent of female respondents said they didn't know. Even if we allowed that, as a study on the Beijing audience survey suggested, that many of the "don't know" people might actually give a low degree of credibility to the press but "hesitated to say so" (Rogers et al 1985, 202), the percentage of readers who trusted the press was still incredibly high.

As illustration of the evidence that the Chinese were indoctrinated with the communist discourse at the unconscious level, consider the discourse study done by Wu Guoguang, a former People's Daily commentator currently studying in the



United States. Wu examines how the discourse of revolutionary radicalism underlying the ideological structure of the communist movement in China dominated the 1989 student protest in Beijing (Wu 1993, 67). He notes that the student demonstration, which was intended to challenge the dominance of the communist authorities, was largely influenced by the similar discourse as that of the communist movement which claims that social change can only be achieved through a bottom-up revolution.

Wu's key point here is that the student movement in Tiananmen Square, though aimed at achieving a politically democratic system in China, was strongly influenced by the communist tradition of radical revolution (which he terms "revolutionary radicalism"). Contrary to Western democratic societies, which emphasize debates, negotiation and compromises among contending interest groups, the revolutionary radical tradition concentrates on achieving power for disadvantaged groups by overthrowing the existing government as well as the established social and political orders (Wu 1993, 67). This discourse of radical revolution has historically been one of the most visible components of Chinese communism and served to justify the legitimacy of communist revolution and communist rule.

Wu suggests that the link between the student demonstration and the communist tradition was evident in the rhetoric of the protesting students as they advocated a mass uprising to overthrow the communist government. Further, the student leaders insisted on immediate revolution to completely destroy the establishment rather than adopting step-by-step social reforms. The political methods favoured by the students were old-fashioned strategies popular in the Chinese

communist movement, such as hunger strikes, street demonstrations, and mass mobilization. The textbook example of the connection between the Tiananmen demonstrators and the communist culture was the scene in which a huge crowd of demonstrators in the Square began singing the "Internationale" (the most popular communist song in the global communist movement), even as communist tanks rolled in. It is clear that these students who, at the conscious level, identified themselves as fighters against communism, displayed an unconscious grasp of communist jargon and modes of thinking.

Having briefly explicated some of the assumptions that underpin my examination of the Chinese media system, I will re-formulate my previous ideas in a series of four propositions that constitute my theoretical framework for this study:

Proposition I: The media, grounded in the dominant ideology, are a site of contestation where "openings" are possible for the discourses of dissident social groups.

Hackett notes that media scholars tends toward a "pessimistic" tone concerning the relationship of the media to social power structures. This pessimistic view holds that powerful forces, be they economic, political, institutional, or ideological, are able to shape media messages into accordance with ruling definitions, simultaneously excluding fundamental opposition (Hackett 1991, 85). Without abandoning the critical paradigm's notion of the complex links between power and

signifying systems, Hackett seeks to locate spaces within media systems that permit the expression of antimilitarist dissent, thus ameliorating the determinism and pessimism implicit in the critical paradigm. For Hackett:

the press is neither a closed, monolithic system effortlessly reproducing official perspectives and hegemonic definitions of reality, nor is it fully open to various oppositional perspectives. Rather, the press must be regarded as a site of contestation which is "structured in dominance." (Hackett 1991, 281)

On Hackett's account, hegemony is accomplished through both persuasion from above and consent from below. In the first instance, major ideological institutions such as schools, churches and the media are actively involved in disseminating "a whole system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that in one way or another supports the established order and the class interests that dominate it" (Hackett 1991, 57). On the other hand, hegemonic ideology is accepted by ordinary individuals in such a way that it becomes naturalized as the "common sense" through which people make sense of their lives and the world (Hackett 1991, 57).<sup>5</sup>

However, Hackett suggests that dominant ideology has internal tensions which make it possible for articulation of alternative discourses in the dominant meaning-system. In this claim, he echoes Jouet, who states that the dominant ideology is not a monolithic reflection of the norms and values of the rulers, "but an expression of its contradictions as well as of the complexity and dynamics of relations of

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<sup>5</sup> The media constitute an excellent hegemonic apparatus due to their distinctive characteristics: Their continuous availability and lifelong flow, their constant provision of definitional categories, their ideological similarity concealed beneath a diversity of forms, their appropriation of leisure time and pseudoresolution of people's needs in fantasy and entertainment, and their intermeshing with other hegemonic institutions such as the family and political parties (Downing 1980).

production" (Jouet 1981, 97). Hackett goes on to identify four elements in the North American society of democratic capitalism that allow for potential openings within ideological hegemony. First, the ruling group is divided into subgroups or fractions whose interests are not identical. Secondly, ideology is not produced and disseminated directly by the governing groups, but by professional groups which specialize in cultural and ideological production (such as educators, clergymen, and journalists). These groups, being somewhat outside the central power of the capitalist system, do not normally manufacture ideology and justify the status quo at the conscious level; "rather, the normal routines of their work lead them usually to reproduce the dominant ways of making sense of the world" (Hackett 1991, 58). Thirdly, the economic system routinely generates new ways of thinking that challenge or alter its own rationale. Finally, different elements of hegemonic ideology can be appropriated by opposing social forces and re-directed (Hackett 58). Hackett thus concludes that "Hegemony is almost always contested and resisted to varying degrees, and the possibility of radical change can never be entirely precluded" (Hackett 1991, 59).

Hackett's notion of the appropriation of dominant ideology by dissident social forces is reminiscent of the classical critical claim that ideological elements are not necessarily linked to class position. Instead, discourse can become an arena of social struggle irrespective of class affiliation, as Stuart Hall suggests (Hall 1982, 80). Hall realizes that dominant discourse can prevail by framing the world as a signifying system in which subjects are already fixed within a structure of existing discourses

(Hall 1982, 80). However, Hall suggests that the "struggle over meaning" can be played out in two different domains: a) in discourse, where different social interest groups disarticulate a signifier from one dominant meaning system, and re-articulate it within another, different chain of connotations; or b) in the nature of access to the very means of signification. Hall also recognizes that there is a unequal access to the production of meaning-system: on one hand, there are

those accredited witnesses and spokesmen who had a privileged access, as if right, to the world of public discourse and whose statements carried the representativeness and authority which permitted them to establish the primary framework or terms of an argument....(Hall 1982, 81)

On the other hand, there are those who must struggle to gain access to the world of public discourse; whose definitions are treated as partial, questionable, and illegitimate; and who must "perform with the established terms of the problematic in play" (Hall 1982, 81).

Proposition II: The correlation of ideological hegemony and possibilities of articulation/re-articulation of dissident discourses in the media can be understood in terms of a "structure of discourses."

As I mentioned previously, the notion of a media structure of discourses is developed by Hackett in his book News and Dissent: The Press and the Politics of Peace in Canada. In an attempt to locate the space for articulation of dissident discourses within the dominant paradigm, Hackett constructs a concept of "structure of discourses" or "hierarchy of interpretations." He recognizes that the articulation of differing discursive perspectives is possible even within the dominant media system

in North American society. However, the hegemony of dominant discourse is secured through the media treatment of various discourses, which is characterized by a "hierarchy of credibility (with respect to reality-claims) and legitimacy (with respect to normative or political positions)" (Hackett 1991, 227). In this hierarchical structure, discourses are deployed depending on their discursive distance to the dominant "we group" (Hackett 1991, 226). Dominant discourse occupies the top rung on the credibility ladder by virtue of constant media endorsement. Alternative perspectives are positioned on the basis of how discursively alien they are from the dominant ideology. The most alien discourse is thus firmly entrenched at the bottom of the hierarchy.

A. Schlesinger's study:

Hackett considers his work to be parallel in approach to the study done by Schlesinger, Murdock and Elliott in 1983. Schlesinger's study centres on the differing treatment of political violence within news and drama programming on British television. In assessing television representations of terrorism, the study first identifies four competing perspectives on political violence directed against the State (Schlesinger et al. 1983, 2-27).

The dominant official perspective, advanced by senior representatives of the state, defines such violence as terroristic, illegitimate, irrational, and criminal (Schlesinger et al. 1983, 2-3). The alternative perspective accepts the official view that political violence against a liberal-democratic state is illegitimate; but argues that the label "terrorism" in many countries could equally be applied to state activities

(Schlesinger et al. 1983, 16-17). On this account, insurgent terrorism must be regarded as a political phenomenon, rather than as simple irrational criminality, to allow for the threat of state repression under the pretext of combatting terrorism. One of the most developed critiques along this line is the work by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman. They conceive the term "terrorism" as having "become semantic tools" of the western power, co-opted into helping to define "the spectrum of acceptable or unacceptable bloodshed" (Chomsky et al 1979, 85).

A third position, authoritarian populism, calls for an all-out war against terrorism, disregarding the official view's concern with the legitimacy of the state as defender of laws and liberty (Schlesinger et al. 1983, 24-25). Finally, the oppositional perspective justifies the use of insurgent political violence against perceived state repression or colonialism (Schlesinger et al. 1983, 26-27).

The authors assess programs along two axes: their relative "openness" or "closure", or the extent to which they either contest, or operate within, the terms of reference set by the official perspective); and their "tightness" or "looseness", or the extent to which the program either converges upon a single preferred interpretation, or allows scope for alternatives, ambiguities, contradictions and loose ends (Schlesinger et al. 1983, 32).

Schlesinger's analyses suggest that the relative openness and/or looseness of programs varies with several conditions. For example, the potential for openness is greater when the political violence in question is more distant historically and geographically, impinges less upon the state's own national security imperatives,

and/or occurs in ideologically hostile or dissimilar regimes (Schlesinger et al. 1983, 56-61). Moreover, some formats and types of programming are less constrained than others (Schlesinger et al. 1983, 164).

**B. Hackett's study:**

In elaborating his account of discourse structure in the media, Hackett examines the Toronto press' treatment of the American bombing of Libya in 1986. He first describes the "cast of characters" who appeared in the selected news reports, then distinguishes them into two groups: "sources" and "actors." Sources appear in the news by virtue of their provision of information or viewpoints which are considered to be credible, authoritative, legitimate, and/or relevant. By contrast, "actors" are placed in journalistic narrative due to the journalistic judgement that their actions are newsworthy. Actors are spoken about more than they are permitted to speak for themselves (Hackett 1991, 205). Hackett believes that this distinction provides important clues to the "cultural map" which underlies the construction of news accounts, as well as helping to explain the differing attention accorded the various interpretations of the conflict (Hackett, 205).

Hackett argues that press treatment of the differing interpretations of the raid was characterized by a hierarchy of credibility (with respect to reality-claims) and legitimacy (with respect to normative or political positions). This hierarchy, according to Hackett, is not an independent "invention" of the media; rather, "the events, speakers, and meanings that provide the raw materials for news accounts are always/already the site of competing discourses" (Hackett, 227).



Hackett also notes that the access to media space afforded alternative discourses depends on their discursive distance to the dominant "we group." In his central example, the press privileged ethical and utilitarian critiques that did not question the general soundness and humanity of Western objectives, values, and institutions. Instead, these critical perspectives denounced the raid as a particular departure from, or threat to, those Western values and objectives. Hackett suggests that

an "alternative" (rather than fully oppositional") perspective which can speak from within the "we group" implicitly addressed by the news, which is consistent with mainstream values and understandings of the world, which can mobilize authoritative discourses, and which focuses on particular State actions or policies rather than "the system" as a whole, is relatively likely to receive respectful attention. (Hackett, 226)

Hackett concludes that the potential space for the expression of political dissent in the dominant media discourse is contingent on the structural needs of news organizations, the autonomous nature of the journalistic sub-culture, and the political and media systems which themselves generate openings for dissent and change.

Proposition III: The Chinese communist media, which emphasize unity and control, are not an entirely monolithic system, although the struggle over meaning and access admits of complex limitations and a restricted media space.

In China, the mass media are primarily an instrument of the state authorities, politically and financially dependent on the government even to the extent that they are "a mouthpiece of the party" (Womack 1986, 6). The relationship between the

mass media and the political culture in China has been the major focus of many North American studies in Chinese mass communications (Pye 1978, 221). Until the late 1980s, most academic research into the Chinese media concentrated on the communist government's use of mass communication systems to mobilize the population towards national integration, to convert the traditionally apathetic masses into loyal party members, and to dismantle the traditional fabric of the society for the building of the communist state (Yu 1964; Liu 1971; Chu 1978; Chu and Hsu 1983; and Chao 1985). In these studies, the Chinese media are treated as a politically monolithic, "single voice and a unified viewpoint" (Warren 1986, 11), although some work (like Chu's study of the Letters to the Editor of the People's Daily) does indicate that there is a limited legitimate media space where differing opinions can be articulated (Chu and Chu 1983).

For example, Chu's study, based on the sociological notion that any given society has structured institutions through which conflict may be channelled and resolved in a socially sanctioned manner, found that the letters column in the Chinese official press served as a major institution for conflict resolution. Chu examined a total of 557 letters published by the People's Daily in the periods from 1967-1968 (during the Cultural Revolution) and again from 1976-1978 (after the Cultural Revolution). His findings indicated that certain Chinese had taken advantage of the letters column to express their grievances and "claims to status and resources over and above those of their rivals" (Chu et al 1983, 176). However, Chu also recognized that this media channel functioned essentially as a safety valve for

releasing latent social tensions, or a divergent lens to direct public attention to conflict-laden issues at the grassroots level instead of at the state authorities (Chu et al. 1983, 215).

In comparison with the North American media then, the Chinese mass media may be seen as a closed and uniform system in which freedom of expression, at least insofar as Westerners understand it, is impossible (Markham 1967). However, the Chinese mass media system cannot accurately be characterized as a unified monolith. There *are* openings for dissenting views, although the forms that these expressions take are highly sophisticated and deeply embedded in Chinese cultural and political traditions, making detection and decoding difficult for the outsider. Lucian Pye, in particular, recognizes that the Chinese media system often seems full of riddles to outsiders, and points out some of the mysterious practices that support this popular conception. For example, the Chinese government makes routine use of the mass media to publicly discuss policy matters which in another society would be communicated along more confidential channels. As well, the Chinese media have become adept at using Aesopian language, historical allegory and code words to make the points of certain messages explicit to the public (Pye 1978, 221-226). The history of the Chinese communist media is never short of such examples. One of the classic cases of code-names obvious to the Chinese viewing public is the term "the capitalist roader No 2," used by the Chinese media to refer to Deng Xiaoping in the period of 1966-1971 at a time when Deng's favour with Chairman Mao was at a low ebb. Although virtually every Chinese at the time knew that the code-name referred

to Deng, the media refuse to mention Deng name directly during that period. This example, among many, raises the following questions: if the media are a mere instrument in the hand of the governing party, where lies the advantages in such ambiguous practices of information dissemination? Who is trying to say what, to confuse whom, and why?

By the late 1980's, particularly after the 1989 Tiananmen demonstration when the tightly controlled media emerged for a short period of time as a "virtual flagship" of the protest movement (Tan 1990, 152), Western interest in the Chinese media turned towards examining the media's defiance of state power structures, as manifested in the aspiration of Chinese journalists for greater autonomy (Lee 1990; Tan 1990; and Porter 1992). Firmly grounded in the liberal-pluralist perspective, most of these studies interpret the increasingly intensified journalistic discontent with state control that began in the in post-Mao period as a popular rebellion against the communist authorities, joined with the general Chinese public's aspirations for a more plural society. What remains interesting about the 1989 media rebellion is the lack of a clear explanation of the processes by which the tightly centrally-controlled Chinese media system managed to generate such system-wide openings for the expression of dissent. In other words why and how did the centrally controlled media system veer suddenly *out* of control?

My intuition here is that accurately addressing the preceding puzzles requires a significantly modified research orientation. To begin, instead of being viewed a monolithic organ of the state, the Chinese media should be seen as the site of an

intense struggle between various interest groups and the ruling elite strive for access and the control over meaning. In other words, the media are an arena where the internal struggle of the ruling classes over policy priorities and power is placed on public view. The "cracks" in the Chinese news media which allow dissident expressions are a direct result of the intra-class struggle within the elite society. In the following paragraphs I will discuss this theme in a detailed manner.

Pye has the distinction of being the scholar who first recognized that the Chinese media were the primary site where political leaders tested and solidified relations between potential allies or rivals (Pye 1978, 243). He stated that:

The press and the radio in China are not just instruments for ruling or the means whereby rulers influence the ruled, but they are also institutions towards which leaders have to react and which in turn reflect, albeit vaguely, the processes of politics within the political leadership. (Pye 1978, 222)

The history of the communist mass media in China abounds with cases in which difference over interests and priorities among the political elite first surfaced in the media, although most of these revelations ended tragically. A study by a former People's Daily journalist on the paper's news operations during the spring 1989 provides revealing evidence about the relationship between Chinese media organizations and political culture. Frank Tan disclosed that the People's Daily-- long considered a chief proponent of communist propaganda in Western studies on the Chinese media-- actually had an extensive history of resisting the authoritarian power (Tan 1990, 154). Two of its chief editors, Deng Tuo and Hu Jiwei, were in fact leaders of the communist resistance! Deng, a veteran journalist and devoted communist who headed the People's Daily from 1949 right up to the outset of the

Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), published many commentaries and satirical essays in the paper during the 1960's criticizing Mao Zedong's policies. His articles, together with essays written by Liao Mosha and a play by Wu Han, so enraged Mao that he later made the three primary targets of his Cultural Revolution (Tan 1990, Pye 1978, Cheek 1986).

Hu was another leader of the People's Daily who defied the totalitarian rule of the Communist party. Under his stewardship (1977-85), the paper devoted increasing space to issues that took seriously public concerns, and attracted broad public interest. During that period, the People's Daily became one of the most outspoken press outlets in China and reached an unprecedented circulation of 7 million copies a year (Hu 1993, Oct 4; Jernow 1993, 156). Later, while serving as a member of the Standing Committee of the NPC, Hu became one of the most enthusiastic advocates for press reform, even to the point of suggesting that the state pass legislation to ensure press protection. He lost his position in 1990, largely because of his public support of the student demonstration in the spring of 1989 (Tan 1990, 154-155).

The most recent illustration of the expression of dissenting views within the Chinese media is the so-called "three-day media freedom" in May, 1989 (Tan 1990, 153). Between May 16-18, nearly all the dominant media organizations in China including the People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, and CCTV devoted overwhelming coverage to the student hunger strike in the Tiananmen Square, as well as the public demonstrations in support of the students. This sudden opening-up

to oppositional voices in the national media, stood in sharp contrast to the news blackout imposed when students took to the streets on April 16, and was applauded in the West as a representation of "press freedom" in China.<sup>6</sup> However, few people are aware of the real story behind these heady days of media freedom. In fact, the media allotted space for coverage of the Tiananmen Square uprising only after top reformist leaders signalled a relaxation of government control in relation to media coverage of the events (Ran 1990, 125-126).

The limited potential within the Chinese media is not only a result of the internal struggles among the elite communities, it is also partly due to the contradictory elements built-in to the communist ideology. One such contradiction within Chinese communist doctrine is made manifest in definitions of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. In this sense, Chinese communism may be seen as a benevolent Confucian authoritarianism in Leninist disguise (Lee 1990, 7). Under this definition, proper government requires that benevolent rulers be true to their heavenly mandate to take proper care of their people (Lee 1990, 7-8). This concern of rulers for the interests of their people is legitimated within the dominant ideology, though framed in such a way that the primacy of the state and party authorities remain un-challenged. It is noteworthy that this imperative to "serve the people" constitutes the basic ideological premise for almost all major political oppositional

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<sup>6</sup> Liu Binyan, China's best known investigative reporter, in exile since the 1989 massacre, made a comment on these three days in a speech at the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis, Minnesota) on October 8, 1989. He said, "Press freedom in China existed for only three days." (Tan 1990, 153)

movements in Communist China, up to and including the press reforms of the late 1980's and the student demonstration in 1989.

**Proposition IV: Environmentalism offers a discursive perspective that challenges the dominant definitions of the world pervasive in both West and East.**

Concern for the environment has become one of the most prominent features of both political and cultural activity in the last three decades of the 20th century. The construction of the environment as a major North American social problem began in 1960, with the publication of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" (Paehlke 1989, 21). However, the shift of the term "environment" from its original meaning of conservation to its modern sense may be traced back to Raymond Dasmann's creation in 1959 of "environmental" as a comprehensive label for a new or a revitalized view of the interdependent relationship between human beings and nature (Schoenfeld et al 1979, 41). Today, the environment is generally understood to be "the system of interrelationships among society, economics, politics and nature in the use and management of resources" (Gold 1978, 227).

Environmentalism thus emerges as a new belief system in industrialized society amid the population's growing awareness of the hazardous consequences of industrialization and the fragility of the natural environment that has so far sustained the livelihood of humankind. As a movement, environmentalism is characterized by loose coalitions of various interests groups (Paehlke 1989, 3). Environmentalists do not view themselves primarily as an organized force working to undermine the



capitalist system, although they are clearly capable of articulating "complaint against capital's performance" (Lowe et al. 1984, 88). Moreover, the core beliefs and value systems of environmental activism differ substantially from dominant ones (Cotgrove et al. 1980). The basic principle of environmentalism, after all, is that "the earth-as-whole, for all time, must be seen as a 'commons'" (Paehlke 1989, 8). There are two key elements in this statement: a) that the natural resources on this planet should be shared with other species since the survival of different life forms is interdependent; and b) that natural resources also belong to future human generations, and should therefore be granted consideration in economic and resource decisions (Paehlke 1989; and Feinberg 1974). Taken as a whole, this perspective provides effective conceptual grounds for a challenge to the central values and beliefs of industrial capitalism and its existing definitions of human-nature relationships.

A diagram provided by Cotgrove et al. illustrates schematically the differences between the dominant and environmentalist paradigms in Western society:

	<b>Dominant social paradigm</b>	<b>Environmental paradigm</b>
<b>Core values</b>	<b>Material (economic growth) Natural environment valued as resource Domination over nature</b>	<b>Non-material(self-actualization) Natural environment intrinsically valued Harmony with nature</b>
<b>Economy</b>	<b>Market forces Risk and reward Rewards for achievement Differentials Individual self-help</b>	<b>Public interest Safety Incomes related to need Egalitarian Collective/social provision</b>
<b>Polite</b>	<b>Authoritative structures (experts influential) Hierarchical Law and order</b>	<b>Participative structures (citizen/worker involvement) Non-hierarchical Liberation</b>
<b>Society</b>	<b>Centralized Large-scale Associational Ordered</b>	<b>Decentralized Small-scale Communal Flexible</b>
<b>Nature</b>	<b>Ample reserves Nature hostile/neutral Environment controllable</b>	<b>Earth's resources limited Nature benign Nature delicately balanced</b>
<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Confidence in science &amp; technology Rationality of means Separation of fact/value, thought/feeling</b>	<b>Limits to science Rationality of ends Integration of fact/value, thought/feeling</b>

(Cotgrove et al. 1980, 341)

Essentially, then, environmentalism works from a belief that the earth's resources are finite in order to provide opposition to the dominant culture's attachment to economic growth and material accumulation as the primary source of

**happiness(Cotgrove et al. 1980, 339; Paehlke 1989). Environmentalism also seeks to raise doubts about technological achievement, and consequently the logic of science on which advanced industrialism is established (Lowe et al. 1984, 78). It contests the exploitation of the earth's resources that threatens the quality of human existence, and even human existence itself (Blackstone 1974, 1). Finally, environmentalist discourse takes issue with fundamental concepts of the human-nature relationship in Western thought.**

**O'Briant points out that historically there have been two main competing views on the relationship between humans to nature in Western thought. He characterizes these as 1) "man apart from nature" and 2) "man a part of nature." The former account, derived from the Bible, views human beings as supernatural entities made in God's image of his/her Creator, able to transcend the boundaries of nature and enjoying dominion over other creatures (O'Briant 1974, 79-80). The second view, based on scientific models, considers human beings as only one among millions of other creatures in nature. What distinguishes the person from other animals lies in certain abilities specific to humans, possessed to a greater or lesser degree relative to other creatures (O'Briant 1974, 81-82).**

**O'Briant argues that the environmental crisis is demonstrative of a failure within Western culture to cope with the fundamental contradiction in its concept of human-nature relations engendered by simultaneous reliance on both the Judaeo-Christian tradition and science. Thus:**

**Our religious views allowed us to be comfortable in raping and pillaging this earthly abode because we saw ourselves as not ultimately a part of this world**

and we failed to recognize that having dominion over the earth involved exercising responsible stewardship over it, while our scientific theories again and again proclaimed that we were part of nature and whatever affected any aspect of nature would ultimately have its effect upon us. (O'Briant 1974, 86)

What O'Briant fails to recognize is that his two traditions are in fact one; that is, in its development, science itself reflects the cultural tradition that conceives human beings as unique beings on the earth, endowed with unusual abilities to harness and exploit nature at will.

In sharp contrast to the Christian-influenced West, Chinese cultural traditions have always placed a great emphasis on maintaining a harmonious relation between human beings and nature. A central belief of the Chinese, for example, concerns the existence of a system of mutual interaction between the "Way of Heaven" (the law of nature)<sup>7</sup> and human affairs (Fung 1973, 8). This belief holds that human beings act in accordance with the natural universe only if they follow the "Way of Heaven" (Fung 1973). This human-heaven philosophy dominated the Chinese civilization for almost two thousand years, until the beginning of this century, when Western cultural influences became more prevalent.

It is noteworthy that the philosophy of human-heaven interaction is nowhere to be found in Chinese communist ideology. Instead, the Western discourse that teaches that human beings armed with technology and science can ultimately become

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<sup>7</sup> Ancient Chinese had a holistic view of the world. They believed that the whole universe was governed by a single rule of Nature. This law initiated changes in the natural world, such as the changes of seasons, the growing or withering of plants, the birth or death of a life. It also regulated the ever-changing world into an orderly, systematic structure. The human society was definitely under the command of this law of Nature.

the master of the environment dominates Chinese communist doctrine. This view of the human-nature relationship is epitomized by Mao's renowned statement that "man will conquer nature."

The reasons for the disappearance of the traditional human-nature view in the modern Chinese discourse requires far more extensive and specialized research than this study is able to provide. I do believe, however, that one cannot overstate the influence of Western scientific thought that first surfaced in China during mid-eighteenth century. The Chinese at that time were convinced that their Central Empire had been lost through a lack of technology that would allow them to compete effectively with the Europeans. In order to acquire this competitive edge, the Chinese shifted to a technology-centred scientific research program. It is not surprising therefore that the traditional Chinese philosophy of human-heaven interaction was labelled as "superstitious" and gradually lost ground to modern scientific method.

Moreover, at a fundamental level, Chinese communist platforms and policies reflect the influence of Western science. In the Chinese ideological framework, science and technology are conceived as tools to assist human beings in achieving their various goals. Nature, on the other hand, is perceived as an infinite resource to be exploited for human interests. It is in regard to this last tenet, interestingly, that Chinese communism shares a common belief with Western capitalism. And here too is where environmentalism contests the essential logic of the socialist system.

Paehlke illuminates this overlap between Chinese communism and Western

capitalism in his statement that both capitalist and socialist systems have an inherent tendency towards expansionism (Paehlke 1989, 6). Thus, state ownership, even when combined with state management of the production process does not eliminate the need for material growth. This forces the contemporary Chinese economic system, under the pressure of ideological infiltration by the West, to engage in a rapid economic development aimed at achieving maximum output and employment at lowest possible cost. As a result, the dominant Chinese ideology positions economic growth as the most decisive criterion in assessing the performance of the government and in legitimating the socialist system. Success in economic development and industrialization is considered vital to the survival of the Communist power.

Moreover, the current Chinese system tends to deter rather than encourage the economic use of natural resources. The pervasiveness of state ownership of a large percentage of the available land, lakes and forests actually helps to alienate people from their surroundings, diminishing their sense of attachment and responsibility toward their land and environment. This has resulted in the extensive exploitation of various natural resources in China. Environmentalism, which tries to restore the human attachment to the natural environment and revive the knowledge of interdependency of all life forms, seems to represent an alternative perspective to the communist ideology. By contesting the validity of everlasting material growth, the environmentalist perspective challenges not only the capitalist ideology, but also the basic tenets of Chinese socialism. Because of its non-partisan character, it has a potential to develop a "third way", or ideological path, capable of defusing the

ideological duality of the contemporary world, and rejecting the bureaucratic and extremist elements in both systems (Paehlke 1989, 5).

In sum, what I have tried to establish in this chapter is a hegemony theory-based conceptual structure which assumes that: a) media messages are framed as signifying systems by their social and cultural context; and b) that the very production of signifying systems is dominated by certain ideological formations. I have further pointed towards what I conceive to be two essential claims regarding media studies in general: a) although structured in dominance, media are a site of struggle over meanings; and b) The correlation between the ideological hegemony and the struggle over meanings can be understood in terms of the discourse structure. In addition, I have specified the preceding observations with sustained reference to the Chinese media system. In so doing, I have made a particular effort to position the Chinese media as not merely a mouthpiece for the dominant communist ideology, but as an important site of ideological contestation susceptible to the internal struggle of elite groups. Such high-stakes political struggles may well result in openings in the media for the articulation of dissent.

In the following chapters, I will examine closely the battles over ideological control of the Chinese media, specifically in regard to the debate on the Three Gorges Project. Because the issues at the heart of this debate are directly related to the tension between industrial development and concern for the natural environment, due attention will be accorded the openings within the Chinese media provided for the expression of environmentalist views.

**PART III**  
**INTERNAL POLITICS AND THE THREE GORGES**  
**MEDIA DEBATE**

The decision to dam the Yangtze River was hotly debated in the inner circle of the Chinese government for almost 40 years. In this chapter, I will supply background information about the internal discussions within the Chinese leadership on the Three Gorges Project, illuminating the connection these discussions have with the debates conducted publicly through the media in mid-1980's. I will introduce both the important players, and the central events of the Three Gorges controversy. A more detailed analysis of the perspectives and arguments of both sides will be conducted in the discourse analysis of the next chapter.

The Three Gorges Project is a US\$10.7 billion hydro-electric plan to build the world's largest dam in a spectacular reach of deep, narrow canyon on the Yangtze River, known as the Three Gorges (*sanxia*). From that point, the 6,300 kilometre-long river, springing from the glacial mountain of northern Tibet, widens and meanders across vast plains until it meets the East China Sea (Barber et al 1993, 1). The dam, from the point of view of hydro-electric authorities, will generate 17,680 Megawatts of much-needed electricity. It will also create a reservoir of 39.3 billion square metres, submerging 28,700 hectares of cultivated land, 13 cities and 140 towns. About 1.1 million people inhabiting the dam area will have to be relocated (Mo 1992, 15-16; Barber 1993, 33).      Needless to say, environmentalists fear that



damming China's largest river virtually promises adverse consequences for the Yangtze River Valley, which is the heartland of Chinese civilization. This area is inhabited by fully one-third of China's population and provides a livelihood for such endangered wildlife as the Yangtze River dolphin, the Chinese sturgeon, the finless porpoise and the Yangtze alligator (Mo 1992, 16).

Still, environmental issues were for the most part absent from the early stages of the debate, which had been fought behind the closed doors of the highest echelons of the Chinese higher leadership since 1954. A super-dam at the Three Gorges was initially proposed as a means to prevent Wuhan and other cities occupying the middle and lower reaches of Yangtze Valley from the heavy flooding which had proven so catastrophic in the past. However, as the 1980's progressed, arguments in favour of the dam increasingly emphasized the project's utility; namely the potential of the dam to generate energy for the Yangtze. The hydro-electric potential of the Three Gorges Project seemed particularly suited to the Yangtze region, an area characterized by rapid industrial development stimulated by the Communist Party's economic growth-oriented policies after Mao's death in 1976.

#### International Debate

The ensuing internal debate seemed interminable, but was in fact marked by four distinct phases, each closely tied to elite power relations, as well as to the relevant political and economic climates:

1. The first phase: 1954-1960

It was during this period that the idea of building a super dam at the Three

Gorges first became attractive to Mao Zedong. Fittingly, the Yangtze Valley Planning Office (YVPO), which has been the chief agency responsible for planning and organizing all feasibility studies of the Project, was established at this time. In 1954, floods ravaged the mid-Yangtze Valley, leaving at least 30,000 dead and one million homeless and isolating Wuhan City, the capital of Hubei Province, for 45 days (Barber et al 1993, 2; Mo 1992 15). This disaster engendered in the Chinese leadership an unprecedented sense of urgency for the project of damming the Yangtze River. Mao was told that damming the River at the Three Gorges would prevent the catastrophic flooding of the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze Valley (Du et al 1992, 6). Mao then decided to speed up preparation for the dam. In 1955, China invited Soviet scientists to join the geographic survey and feasibility studies. The former Yangtze River Water Resources Commission was re-organized into the YVPO in 1956 with a mandate to conduct feasibility studies specific to the Yangtze dam, while at the same time designing an overall plan for the water resource development in the Yangtze Valley (Barber et al 1993, 3; Du et al 1992, 6-7; He 1992, 8).

During this initial exploratory period, the internal debate within the Chinese leadership tended to focus on engineering particulars like dam site and height, rather than on the fundamental question of the efficacy of the project in the first place. In fact, there appeared to be no strong opponents to the dam in the top ranks of the leadership. The only persons to consistently oppose the project were found in the

lower echelons of the government, and included Li Rui,<sup>8</sup> the Director of the Hydro-electric Bureau of the Ministry of Electric Power, and Li Siguang,<sup>9</sup> Minister of Geography (He 1992, 8-9). In 1958, after lengthy debates and deliberations involving Mao, top-ranking officials and Soviet specialists, the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party finally passed a resolution on the Yangtze dam. This hard-won agreement held that, while it was "necessary and possible" to build the Three Gorges hydro-electric project, work on the dam would not commence immediately (Du et al 1992, 7). This somewhat equivocal resolution stands as the first authoritative statement of the Chinese government regarding the Three Gorges Project (Du et al 1992, 7). Since that time, YVPO has coordinated various government agencies and academic bodies in order to prepare many lengthy and detailed studies, covering all aspects of the super-dam project.

In spite of this formidable research effort, the Three Gorges plan was never carried out in the 1960-1970's. This failure of the project to get beyond the conceptual stage may be explained by a diversity of factors, including the economic disasters brought about by the failure of collective farming in the late 1950's, financial and technical difficulties arising from the rift with the Soviet Union, and

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<sup>8</sup> Li remains a leading person in the government opposing the dam. For more information on him, see the methodology section. His articles are one of the primary sources of this study.

<sup>9</sup> According to He Ping's article, Li Siguang, a highly respected geologist, persuaded Mao not to start the Yangtze dam by a suicide attempt. He told Mao that he would commit a suicide since he could not stop the dam project. Mao was moved by his resolution and finally accepted his opinions.

constant internal power struggles within the party leadership. One additional reason for the dearth of discussion on the Yangtze dam within the inner circle of the leadership during the 1970s apparently concerns the lack of interest that Chairman Mao had for the project (He 1992, 9).

## 2. The second phase: 1980-the spring of 1986

The Chinese government decided to resume the feasibility studies of the Three Gorges project in 1980 as part of post-Mao modernization plans, which included quadrupling the country's electricity output by the year 2000 (He 1992, 9). The Three Gorges dam's tremendous hydropower potential offered a strong selling point on the basis of which dam proponents hoped to recruit government endorsement and investment. By 1983, the YVPO released a feasibility study recommending that construction of a 175-metre-high dam with a 150-metre reservoir level begin as early as 1986. The YVPO's report was approved by the State Council (China's cabinet) in 1984, giving the green light for governments at various levels to start preparations for 1986, the year in which real work on the dam would begin (Du et al 1992, 8; He 1992, 9; Barber et al 1993, 6). Hu Yaobang, General Secretary of the Communist party of that time, emerged as a strong proponent of the project (He 1992, 9). Hopes for the dam were high: the central government went so far as to establish a new province encompassing the surrounding areas of the Yangtze dam site in both Sichuan and Hubei provinces in order to better coordinate the project (He 1992, 9).

However, before construction on the dam could get underway, opposition

from various government organizations escalated. For example, the Ministry of Communications joined with Chongqing municipality in opposing the 150-metre-high reservoir level, and asked instead for a 180-metre reservoir level in order to improve navigation (Barber et al 1993, 6). Perhaps surprisingly, the strongest opposition came from CPPCC, an honorary national assembly of academics, intellectuals, social celebrities and retired communist veterans serving as the consultative body to NPC. CPPCC conducted two field trips in 1985 and 1986 in an effort to gather opinions about the dam (He 1992, 9-10). In the 1986 trip, the CPPCC members visited eight cities that would be affected by the dam and convened 40 open forums where testimony was heard from ministries, bureaus, experts, scholars, local and national CPPCC members (Barber et al 1993, 7). At the end of the trip, the CPPCC group submitted their report to the State Council and the Central Committee of the Communist Party with the recommendation that the Three Gorges Project should not be rushed ahead without another round of comprehensive and detailed studies (He 1992, 10; Barber et al 1993, 7). In 1986, in partial response to this well-organized pressure, the Chinese government decided to commission another exhaustive feasibility study under the aegis of the powerful State Planning Commission. The 412-member Three Gorges Examination Committee was formed, consisting of 14 subject groups (Du et al 1992, 46).

### 3. The third phase: June 1986-1989

The Examination Committee convened the first meeting in June 1986 to start the new round of feasibility studies on 14 selected subjects. By November 1988, the

Examination Committee had approved all 14 subject studies. In February and March 1989, the committee submitted the new feasibility report on the Three Gorges Project to the central government, recommending that a 185-metre-high dam with a reservoir level of 175 metres be constructed beginning in 1992 (He 1992, 10; Barber et al 1993, 13). The studies were signed by 403 specialists and engineers who composed the Examination Committee. Nine members refused to sign (He 1992, 10).

Meanwhile, a Canadian consortium consisting of Acres International, SNC-Lavalin International, Hydro-Quebec and British Columbia Hydro was engaged in a separate feasibility study financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). CIDA announced completion of the Three Gorges Water Control Project Feasibility Study in February 1989. The study concluded that a 185-metre-high dam with a reservoir level of 160 metres was technically, environmentally and economically feasible, and recommended that the project go ahead (Barber et al. 1993, 12).<sup>10</sup>

But the matter was not closed. Beginning in mid-1988, China ran into serious economic and political problems. The leadership was locked in a fierce power struggle over economic policies, leaving The Three Gorges Project to become one of the many issues that the two contending high-level forces in the government used to test their strength. As a former hydro-electric engineer, Premier Li Peng was

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<sup>10</sup> CIDA stopped its assistance project to the Three Gorges dam after the Tiananmen events on June 4, 1989. A prominent Chinese scientist, Zhou Peiyuan, argued that the Chinese dam builders used the Canadian feasibility study to silence the domestic opponents (Zhou 1989).

particularly well-disposed towards the Yangtze project and a strong supporter of the YVPO. Zhao Ziyang, who was the Party's General Secretary of the time, favoured a more cautious approach. Zhao's comments at the end of a 1988 report submitted by Zhou Peiyuan (the Vice Chairman of CPPCC and a leading figure in the Yangtze dam opposition) recommended that the decision to go ahead wait until more solid studies were conducted (He 1992, 10). In addition, there was mounting protest against the dam organized by a lobby group of influential academics, journalists and veteran officials. To further complicate the proceedings, opponents to the dam from inside the government formed a coalition with liberal journalists in order to pursue the debate on the Three Gorges dam in public, via the mass media (He 1992, 11; and Ji 1994). Finally, at the spring session of the National People's Congress in 1989, 272 delegates signed a petition for the dam project to be postponed into the next century (Ji 1994), leading China's Vice-Premier, Yao Yilin, to announce that Yangtze dam project would not be discussed over the next five years (He 1992, 11; Barber et al 1993, 13).

#### 4. The fourth phase: 1990-1992

After the June 4 events of 1989, much of the anti-dam feeling within the high-level leadership was dissipated following the removal of Zhao from his top position in the party. For a time thereafter the party leadership maintained consensus through pursuing a hard-line political policy, marked in 1990 by nearly all of the top brass agreeing that the Three Gorges Project should go ahead as soon as possible (He 1992, 11). Amid this charged political atmosphere, Premier Li Peng called a meeting

of 76 specialists in July of 1990 to review the Three Gorges report produced by the dam Examination Committee (He 1992, 11; Du et al 1992, 46). Following this meeting, the State Council appointed a new Examination Committee, headed by Vice-Premier Zou Jiahua (Du et al 1992, 46). In the meantime, the government forged ahead with resettlement "pilot projects" in the dam site area in obvious anticipation that the project would be approved. By April 1991, 10,000 people had already been relocated (Barber et al 1993, 16).

Proponents of the dam project got a boost in the following summer, when the lower reaches of the Yangtze Valley witnessed some of the most severe flooding in 40 years. The floods of 1991, which took nearly 3,000 lives, gave pro-dam forces their best opportunity yet to convince the undecided in the government. More leaders began appearing in the public media making speeches in support of the project. In August 1991, the Examination Committee approved the feasibility study (Ji 1994). In November, the National People's Congress organized a large expedition to the dam site for a field study (Ji 1994). The State Council approved the project in January 1992. On April 3, 1992, the Chinese National Congress, with two-thirds voting in favour, gave the final go-ahead to the Three Gorges Project. It was recommended that construction of the project be in full swing before the end of this century. One-third of the NPC delegates registered their concern about the project by voting against the dam, or abstaining (Barber et al 1993, 20; Du et al 1992, 5).

How was the lengthy internal discussion on the Yangtze project as described



above presented in the Chinese media? How did the centralized media, with a long history of working to maintain the appearance of consensus interpret the Three Gorges controversy from the standpoint of divided factions within the elite political groups? In the following section, I chronicle the prominent events out of the media debate surrounding the project. A more detailed study of the mechanics of this discourse will be conducted in Parts IV and V.

### Media Involvement

Media involvement in the Three Gorges debate became a notable phenomenon mainly in the third and fourth phases of debate, particularly in the third period. During the first and second phases of the debate, discussion of the Yangtze project remained internal to the Chinese government, rarely surfacing in the public media except for two signed articles in scientific journals in 1956, questioning the wisdom of building the dam (Du et al 1992, 7). In the course of this study, with its exclusive focus on the media debate through the 1985-1992 period, I have found that although the Three Gorges Project was placed high on the agenda of the central government, it was largely untouched by the official media until late 1991 when the top-level government apparently reached a consensus on the project and directed the media to begin a "propaganda campaign" (He 1992, 11). Between 1985 and 1990, the People's Daily only carried six articles related to the Three Gorges Project. All of these were news stories reporting on the progress of various feasibility studies on the

project. In contrast, there were a number of articles published in the marginal media<sup>11</sup> opposing the building, or immediate building, of the Yangtze dam.

Qunyan (Words of the Masses), a journal put out by one of China's nine authorized non-Communist parties, was credited as the first Chinese media organization to publish material that openly opposed the Three Gorges Project (Dai 1994; Zhou 1989). This journal, established in April 1985 and devoted to political and cultural issues, is closely linked with the elite groups in CPPCC who had strongly opposed the Yangtze dam from the beginning. The first dissenting opinions in Qunyan appeared in the issue of October, 1986, four months after the central government decided to commission the second feasibility study. From 1986 to 1992, Qunyan was the only journal in China that provided a consistent space for dissident views about the Yangtze project. However, a detailed study of these Qunyan articles must wait until Parts IV and V.

Another prominent example of media opposition was the publication of a series of three books by the Hunan Science and Technology Publishing House. The first of these, entitled Discussion on the Macro Decision-Making on the Three Gorges Project was published in 1987. The second, Discussion on the Macro Decision-Making on the Three Gorges Project II, came out in 1989 and Discussion on the Macro Decision-Making on the Three Gorges Project III appeared in 1992 (Zhou 1989; He 1992, 10; Tian 1994). The authors of these books are researchers

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<sup>11</sup> For the definitions of "official media" and "marginal media," please see the methodology section.

and specialists with the central government organizations who nonetheless have their own opinions about the Three Gorges Project (He 1992, 10). Still, these books, aimed at professionals and high-ranking officials, have limited readership as far as the general public is concerned.

The most publicly accessible media event in the Yangtze dam was debate was the publication in February 1989 of the book Yangtze, Yangtze: The controversy Over the Three Gorges Project. This book is a collection of interviews and essays which express a common concern over the Three Gorges Project. The mastermind of this media project was Dai Qing, a noted journalist and writer in Beijing<sup>12</sup> (Dai 1994; He 1992, 10; Jing et al 1989, 18). In February 28, 1989 when the CPPCC and NPC delegates converged in Beijing for annual meetings in which the Three Gorges Project was featured on the agenda, Dai held a press conference in Beijing marking the publication of the book. About 100 people, including journalists from all major media organizations in Beijing, reporters from Hong Kong, Taiwan and some Western countries were present (Xiao 1994). Also at the conference, Dai solicited the audience for contributions to help defray the costs of the book's publication, paid for out of a small fund of borrowed money. About 100 academics, artists, private entrepreneurs and government officials made donations (Jing et al 1989, 18; Xiao

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<sup>12</sup> Dai Qing is one of the prominent figures in the dissident movement of the late 1980's. An adopted daughter of former PRC president and marshal Ye Jianying, she grew up as the elite of the elite. Her personal story may offer a clue to understand the relations between the dissident movement and the elite culture in China.

1994).<sup>13</sup>

The story behind the publication of the book as told by Dai Qing herself<sup>14</sup> offers a unique opportunity to closely examine the interplay of politics and media in the context of the Three Gorges debate. As a noted journalist with the national newspaper Guangming Daily, Dai was first exposed to the debate on the Three Gorges Project in 1986 when she was invited to a CPPCC meeting on the project. After the 38-day field trip to the Yangtze dam site, the CPPCC group expressed disappointment over the fact that they could not count on the mainstream media to report their dissident views. The deputy director of the group was a close friend of Dai's mother and was able to bring Dai to the CPPCC meeting in which the field trip report was read. Dai returned to her paper, ready to submit her story when she was informed by the director of the editorial office that there was an unwritten directive "from above" concerning reporting on the Three Gorges Project. The directive required that major media organizations use only the officially sanctioned Xinhua news stories as sources for stories on the Three Gorges Project (Dai 1994).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> As a journalist with the China Daily at that time, I also attended the press conference.

<sup>14</sup> Dai Qing's article about how she was able to publish "Yangtze, Yangtze" is included in the forthcoming English edition of "Yangtze, Yangtze" to be published by the EarthsCan Canada in 1994.

<sup>15</sup> My personal experience with "China Daily" confirms the existence of the unwritten rule from the Propaganda Department of the party's Central Committee. I was told a number of times by the leader of the paper about this "spirit" from "above." The practice of issuing unwritten directives on individual issues is a typical execution of press controls in China, which are not based upon codified censorship but are issue-specific (Zhang 1993a, 195-196)

Dai did not let the story drop entirely, however, and when she learned in 1988 from a Hong Kong report that the dam project would likely begin in the following year, she decided to take action against it. Under her leadership, a group of volunteer journalists based in Beijing joined together in order to conduct interviews with the nine scientists and specialists who had refused to sign the agreement on the feasibility subject studies. After the completion of this set of articles, Dai started searching for a publisher. No Beijing publisher would touch the material, forcing her to look for a printing house elsewhere. Eventually, Dai's group contracted for the printing of the book with the remote, provincial Guizhou People's Publishing House. 5,000 copies of the book were made available in March 1989 when CPPCC and NPC convened annual meetings in Beijing, handed out to delegates at key meeting places and hotels. (Dai 1994; Jing et al 1989, 18).

Not surprisingly, the publication of the book ignited immediate debate on the Yangtze project in the public media. Despite the unwritten directive, over a dozen major newspapers in Beijing and Shanghai reported the news of publication. These included the People's Daily, Guangming Daily, China Daily, Workers' Daily, and Wen Hui Bao (Xiao 1994). The Shanghai-based newspaper World Economic Herald devoted an entire page to excerpts from the book (Jing et al 1989, 18). And the June issue of the national magazine October carried a special report on the Three Gorges project. However, there was also press coverage supporting the project. The Guangzhou-based newspaper Asian-Pacific Economic Times carried an article on April 13, 1989 arguing that continuation of the Three Gorges Project was inevitable

given the direction of China's intended economic development (Xiao 1994). In addition, an article in the newspaper Books and Journals was critical of Yangtze, Yangtze's long route towards publication (Xiao 1994). In the Books and Journals piece, the author accused Yangtze's publisher of violating government regulations on the publishing process.

Meanwhile, several private book distributors in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, aware of the profit potential of the book, seized the opportunity to finance the printing of 50,000 new copies of the book. These copies were distributed immediately along the Yangtze Valley (Xiao 1994).

But Yangtze, Yangtze's success was not to last; the June 4 crackdown in 1989 rapidly changed the fate of the book. Shortly after the crackdown in the Tiananmen Square, Dai Qing was arrested and publicly denounced in the official media as one of the plotters of the 1989 demonstration.<sup>16</sup> In October 1989, the Guizhou Party Committee issued a ban on Yangtze, Yangtze, claiming that "it served to manipulate public opinion for the purpose of creating political disturbance" (Xiao 1994). About 30,000 copies of the book were recalled and destroyed. The executive editor of the book and other leaders in the Guizhou Publishing House were asked to make public apologies (Xiao 1994).

In the wake of the Tiananmen square debacle, the Chinese did not witness extended press coverage of the Three Gorges Project until late 1991, when the

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<sup>16</sup> Dai was released in March 1990 and has remained one of the most outspoken figures in China who criticize the Three Gorges Project.

official media was directed by the central government to launch a public campaign to sell the project (He 1992, 11). By that time, top Chinese leaders had reached a consensus on endorsing the super dam project. However, political formality required that the project be approved by the National People's Congress (NPC). The NPC general assembly was therefore scheduled to convene in March-April of 1992. From December 18, 1991, the People's Daily waged a three-and-half-month media campaign intended to garner support for the Three Gorges Project. The mass persuasion started with the Xinhua News Agency's round-up story on the 40-year history of the Three Gorges Project feasibility studies. Then, on December 21, the paper opened a special column entitled "Forum on the Three Gorges Project" where specialists and leaders who supported the Yangtze dam were able to express their opinions. From December 21, 1991 to April 3, 1992 when NPC finally approved the project, 12 signed articles were published in this column. In addition, a number of interviews and feature stories were also featured in the paper, showing massive bias in favour of the Three Gorges Project. Once again, the ideological ball was in the central government's court.<sup>17</sup>

To sum up, I have concentrated in this chapter on outlining a partial picture of media contestation on the Three Gorges Project. On the evidence, it becomes clear that the Chinese media is highly controlled by the central government for the

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<sup>17</sup> For the Chronicle of the Three Gorges internal debate and the media involvement, see Appendix I).

purpose of creating the appearance of consensus. However, as was demonstrated by the examples of Dai Qing and others, there remains space in the Chinese media available to viewpoints that oppose the dominant ideology. Further, there is a consistent link between the internal divisions in top-level Chinese leadership and the use of the public media as a tool to mobilize popular support for certain sides. To more clearly understand the mechanics of control and contestation over meaning and access as they function in the Chinese mass media, a detailed study of the debate discourse is required. In the next chapter, I will discuss in a detailed manner the discourse structure of the media debate on the Three Gorges Project.



**PART IV**  
**THE DISCOURSE STRUCTURE OF THE THREE GORGES  
MEDIA DEBATE**

In this chapter, I will identify the discourse structure underpinning the Three Gorges media debate along the lines of the methodology sketched out in Part I. My study of this discourse structure is composed of two steps: the analysis of media access in the debate, and the discursive analysis of the debate itself. In each case, I have chosen to examine a text representative of the dominant media, as well as a text exemplifying the marginal voice. The People's Daily, is an example of the former, while Qunyan magazine and the book Yangtze, Yangtze represent the marginal media.

I will begin my analysis by dividing the views, arguments and explanations articulated in the media debate regarding the Three Gorges Project into five perspectives, based on their underlying values and positions. Secondly, I relate my identification of the perspectives of these texts to the broader terms of discourse analysis, employing three discursive frameworks in order to unpack the structure of the media discourse surrounding the Yangtze dam.

**The Analysis of Access to the Media Debate:**

**The Analysis of Access to the Dominant Media: The People's Daily**

It is my view that The People's Daily is an accurate representative text of the dominant media. Between January 1985 and April 4, 1992, the People's Daily carried

altogether 30 articles addressing the Three Gorges Project. The first of these appeared on January 19, 1985, just after the Chinese leadership had first decided to proceed with the construction of the Three Gorges dam. Of the 30 articles, 22 were published during the government-sponsored media campaign to garner support for the dam, between December 18 of 1991 and April 4, 1992. Another eight articles were published before 1991's propaganda campaign. One article appeared in 1985. In 1988 two articles made it to press. In 1989 there was just one article, followed by two in 1990 and just a single piece in 1991 (two articles before the mass media persuasion efforts of December).<sup>18</sup>

Of the thirty articles that constitute the total number of pieces published in the People's Daily, 13 were sourced from Xinhua, the only official news agency in China. Reporters from the Daily contributed four stories after the pro-dam media campaign was launched in late December 1991. As mentioned previously, on December 21, 1991, the People's Daily opened a special column "The Three Gorges Project Forum" for experts and leaders to air their opinions on the Three Gorges Project. This column supplied several signed essays, 12 out of the thirty, to be exact. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all the authors of the column were proponents of the Yangtze dam. The group included party leaders and specialists involved in the feasibility study of the Three Gorges Project, as well as certain of the governors of the provinces most likely to benefit from the project.

Interestingly, close examination of the People's Daily articles indicates that

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<sup>18</sup> For the detailed list see Appendix II.

there was a marked shift in the stance of the official press towards the Three Gorges Project. After all, it was not until December 18, 1991 that the Daily began openly expressing support for the Yangtze dam. Before that time, the paper did not exhibit a clear preference for the building of the Yangtze dam. Nor did the paper report substantially about the Three Gorges Project, or the related internal discussion in the government before the media campaign got underway late December 1991. Instead, the previous few articles focused primarily on reporting on the stages of the feasibility study of the project. The principal message here, of course, was that the feasibility studies of the three Gorges Project were conducted in a very serious and scientific manner.

This pro-dam bias of the dominant press was evident in both the periods before and after December 18, 1991, the dominant press provided very limited information about the opposition against the three Gorges dam. In the few places when the oppositional viewpoints were mentioned, they were presented anonymously. In all 30 articles in the People's Daily, no names of the opponents to the Three Gorges Project were given, even though most of these were prominent scientists and social celebrities. The Daily avoided the use of proper names that might adversely affect the chances of the Project by substituting the pronoun "someone" always and only when views opposing those of the dam-builders were introduced. Clearly, the dominant press in China ought to limit discussion of the Project within the officially defined domain of the party-controlled media by not recognizing the significance of the opposition.

I will now make use of the methodology outlined in Part I, in order to identify 12 groups of actors who are defined by their concern or interest in the Three Gorges Project. First, I will briefly reintroduce this research strategy, adapted from the work of Robert Hackett. In studying the media access of these 12 groups of actors, I employ the terms "sources" and "narrators", where "narrators" are taken to be the producers of the text who provided commentary of the events and "sources" are defined as providers of information or viewpoints of the events besides the narrators. The "sources" make their appearance in the text by two ways: in being quoted, or by being mentioned. Thus, the more an actor group has an opportunity to become the "narrator" or "sources" in the media, the more this group is able to have their views expressed, with a consequently greater access to the media.

In my study of the actors, narrators and sources in the 30 articles of the People's Daily, I have found that the actors with the greatest access to the media (besides media organizations like the Xinhua News Agency) was the group of specialists and experts who had participated in the feasibility study of the Three Gorges Project. This group was represented as narrators in five articles, and functioned as sources for 13 articles. In second place was the group of top-level leaders, whose viewpoints were mentioned in 11 articles and quoted in six. The group with the third greatest media access was made up of specialists and experts outside the scope of the Three Gorges feasibility study, operating as the narrator in three articles and as the source in seven more. The media access of other groups were as follows, in descending order: the leaders of the Three Gorges Project study group

(one article as narrator, four articles as sources); the provincial and ministerial leaders (three articles as narrators and one as the source); the overseas specialists (two articles as sources); the officials in local governments (two articles as sources), residents living outside of the Yangtze dam area whose livelihood was likely to directly benefit from the construction of the dam (two articles as sources); and finally the residents in the dam marked for relocation (two articles as sources). The one group whose viewpoints were not presented either as a narrator or a source was the general public (for a detailed list see Appendix V).

From the preceding description, a hierarchy of access to the dominant media begins to emerge. Besides the top-ranking government officials (whose access to the dominant media is virtually guaranteed in the Chinese system), it was the specialists who participated in the feasibility study of the Yangtze dam who had the greatest number of opportunities to express their views on the project. Even specialists who did *not* participate in the feasibility study had a fairly good chance to articulate their viewpoints in the media. By contrast, the views of the general public on the Three Gorges Project were absent from media coverage of the debate. Local residents in the Yangtze dam area whose livelihood would be greatly affected by the construction of the dam also had a very limited access to the media. Out of the 1.1 million residents who would be relocated under the dam project, only one villager, Jiang Lin was quoted (and only once!) in a People's Daily story as being representative of the

viewpoint of the relocated population.<sup>19</sup>

This stringently enforced hierarchy of access to the media demonstrates a structural basis for the systems of credibility and authority underlying the media's construction of meanings and definitions with reference to discussions of the Yangtze Project. The greatest degree of credibility and authority was accorded those points of view articulated by top-level state authorities or recognized specialists in their respective project-related fields. There is no question that the opinions of party leaders or experts about the three Gorges Project were conceived by the dominant media as the most credible and authoritative sources in providing the meanings and definitions on the basis of which the debate was staged. At the same time, the general public's views on the Project were clearly the factor least relevant to the media's construction, and subsequent public understanding, of the Three Gorges controversy. Finally, although the displacement of 1.1 million people from the perimeter of the Three Gorges dam site was recognized by experts and leaders as one of the greatest concerns in the project, the opinions of the relocated population were not considered as important and relevant as those of government figures and expert authorities in providing legitimate and convincing arguments for the discussion of the project.

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<sup>19</sup> Jiang Shaogao, "A bright future for the development-based relocation," People's Daily, April 1, 1992.

**The Analysis of Access to the Marginal Media: Qunyan Magazine and Yangtze, Yangtze**

In the following paragraphs, I will examine two texts that accurately represent dissident articulations within the marginal media. I analyze respectively textual examples from Qunyan magazine, and the book Yangtze, Yangtze, printed by the Guizhou Publishing House.

1. Qunyan magazine:

Articles expressing disenchantment with the Three Gorges Project first appeared in Qunyan in the October issue of 1986, just a few months after the central government had decided to commission a second feasibility study of the project. The magazine's final article to openly disagree with the construction of the Yangtze dam was published in the April, 1991 issue. By that time, the plan to build a Yangtze dam had clearly gained support from the top level leaders to the point where the anti-dam groups in the government had effectively lost the internal battle. Despite the fact that it was not until April, 1992 that the project was officially endorsed by the state legislature, Qunyan had ceased publishing anti-dam articles by April of 1991. The shut-down of marginal media debate surrounding the project coincided with the termination of internal party discussion (upon a consensus to proceed with development), as indicated by the attention given the Three Gorges Project within the dominant media between late 1991 and early 1992. By then, it seemed, there was very little room for argument.

There were altogether 30 articles published in Qunyan between October of

1986 and April, 1991. More than half of the articles (16) were published in 1988 and 1989, a period when elite groups were engaged in a heated debate about the Three Gorges Project. As the leadership approached an agreement, the number of dissident articles shrank dramatically. Only three articles appeared in 1990, and just two in 1991 (see Appendix III).

All of these articles were signed essays, with the exception of one poem. Moreover, the authors were recognized academics and specialists, with the majority being deputies of CPPCC; two of the pieces in Qunyan were written by CPPCC's vice-chairmen, one of the most prestigious and honorary positions in China. Zhou Peiyuan, the Vice-Chairman of CPPCC and the most influential figure in the camp opposing the Three Gorges Project, contributed three articles. Three more authors were American professors with a Chinese ethnic background. And, except for one article in favour of the project contributed by the chief engineer of the Three Gorges feasibility study group, all of the Qunyan articles contested the validity of the super dam. In fact, two articles were contributed by the specialists who participated in the Three Gorges feasibility study, but disagreed with the study report.

In subjecting the Qunyan data to my analysis of narrators, sources and actors, it becomes apparent that the experts and specialists in matters relating to the dam comprised the groups with the most access to the magazine. Specialists outside of the feasibility study group were represented as the narrators in 19 articles, and as sources in six. The specialists from the feasibility study of the Yangtze dam were represented in three articles as the sources, and in 23 as the narrators. After the specialist groups,



the leaders of the feasibility study group were the next most likely to have their views presented (one article as the narrator and 13 as sources). Top-level leaders were represented in four articles as the narrators and seven as the sources. Least likely to have their views covered in Qunyan were the actor groups comprising the general public and the residents living in the dam's surrounding areas and in the dam site. Their opinions on the project were completely absent. Strangely, professional journalists were also not visibly involved in the production of the dissident texts in Qunyan magazine. In fact, there were no articles with journalists as the narrators (see Appendix VI).

Given the above, it becomes obvious that the arrangement of access to Qunyan magazine is based on an underlying structure of credibility and authority which informed the magazine's construction of the Three Gorges controversy. Within this structure, the specialists' opinions were conceived as the most credible and authoritative in justifying the validity and logic of the discussion. The leaders' opinions however, particularly those at the top, were not considered as credible and authoritative as those of the specialists. And, as was evident in my previous examination of dominant media access, the general public and resident groups whose livelihood would be affected by the project were not regarded as a legitimate or credible party to the debate.

It is noteworthy that the participation of professional journalists was kept to a minimum in Qunyan. All of the articles addressing Three Gorges issues were authored essays, where the authors were all scientists and specialists, not journalists.

This arrangement may have been a deliberate move by the magazine's editorial board to avoid a clash with the unwritten government policy limiting the right to write about the Three Gorges Project to a single media organization: the Xinhua News Agency (for the detailed account, see Part III).

## 2. The book Yangtze, Yangtze:

The book Yangtze, Yangtze included 22 articles. Of these, 11 were interviews and the rest were signed essays. The journalists who conducted the interviews and contributed articles were not working on an assignment for their respective media organizations, but operated as freelancing volunteers. Most of these journalists were employed by the major newspapers in Beijing including the Xinhua News Agency, the People's Daily, the Guangming Daily, the Liberation Army Daily, China's Youth Journal and The Workers' Daily. Some, like Dai Qing, Qian Gang and Wu Guoguang, were well-known writers. Twelve of the 13 interviewees were senior academics and specialists who had also contributed dissident articles to Qunyan magazine. Two articles in the book were reprints of articles which had appeared in Qunyan. Economists made up mostly the rest of the list of contributors (see Appendix IV).

In terms of their content, all of the articles were critical of the Three Gorges Project, with the exception of one piece which was included in the book as an appendix of different viewpoints. This pro-dam article was the transcription of a speech made by one of the leaders of the Three Gorges feasibility study group at a CPPCC meeting.

An analysis of narrators, sources and actors indicates that the actor group that had the most access to the book presentation was the group of specialists and experts outside of the Three Gorges feasibility study, which was represented in six articles as narrators and 16 as sources. The positions of the other actor groups in the hierarchical structure of media access were as follows (from top to bottom): the group of specialists and experts (one article as a narrator and 17 as sources), the journalist group (with 13 articles as narrators and one as the source), the leaders of the Three Gorges study group (with one article as narrator and 13 as sources), the top-level leaders (with one article as a narrator and six as the sources), the provincial and ministerial leaders (one article as a source), and the general public (one article as source). Once again, the actor groups made up of residents living in the areas surrounding the dam site were at the bottom of the media access structure. The views of these populations, whose livelihood would be most affected by the project, were wholly absent from the book (see Appendix VII).

The access arrangement of Yangtze, Yangtze proved similar to that of Qunyan magazine. The groups of specialists and experts both inside and outside of the Three Gorges study were perceived as the most credible and authoritative sources within the debate. The top leaders' viewpoints were treated as less authoritative than those of specialists in providing definitions for the Yangtze Project. The groups of residents surrounding the dam site, absent in the debate, were obviously conceived as an insignificant and irrelevant source for credible explanations of the controversy. However, one key divergence between Qunyan and Yangtze,

Yangtze saw the journalist group, which was absent in Qunyan, capture third place in the access order of Yangtze, Yangtze. This extensive participation of journalists in the articles of Yangtze indicated the defiance of the book's editors against the Xinhua's monopoly of the Three Gorges news. At the same time, the high concentration of journalist-signed articles in Yangtze pointed to the re-framing of the Three Gorges debate by the defiant journalists. I will elaborate on the Yangtze journalists' attempt to reconstruct the Yangtze controversy in the latter part of the chapter.

In sum, the groups of specialists and experts, both inside and outside of the feasibility study of the Yangtze dam, occupied a prominent place in the access structure to the Three Gorges media debate. In the dominant media, the top-level leaders held a similarly prominent position. The ranking of the leadership groups dropped in Qunyan and Yangtze, Yangtze, though still managing to capture fourth place in the access hierarchy. In both dominant and marginal media, the general public and the groups of residents most affected by the project were at the bottom of the access structure. Finally, local government officials also had limited access to the debate.

#### A Discursive Analysis of the Three Gorge Media Debate:

The central issue in the media debate over the Three Gorges Project was whether or not China should build the world's largest hydro-electric project on the Yangtze River. Proponents of the dam, whose opinions were primarily represented

by the People's Daily articles, justified their position with the following arguments:

The project would protect the low-lying plains of the Yangtze valley from chronic flooding; the dam had the potential to generate huge electricity output to meet the urgent demand of the fast growing industries in the Yangtze valley; and it would improve waterway transportation in the upper sections of Yangtze River. The anti-dam forces, whose opinions were represented in the marginal media via Qunyan magazine and Yangtze, Yangtze, disagreed with dam supporters on a wide range of issues. First, the oppositional groups raised doubts about whether China had the financial ability and technical expertise to build such a dam. At the same time these groups asked whether it was necessary to invest enormous money in a super-dam for electricity which could be produced otherwise for much less money, and whether the project's benefits were worth the potentially debilitating costs of human displacement and serious environmental damage.

To more fully explicate the discourse structure underlying the media debate on the Three Gorges Project, I will consider the texts from The People's Daily, Qunyan magazine, and Yangtze, Yangtze in terms of argumentative perspectives, following the methodology I sketched out in the first chapter.

All of the arguments presented in the 30 articles in the People's Daily were in favour of the mega-project on the Yangtze River. In contrast, most of the 30 articles in Qunyan and the 22 pieces in Yangtze, Yangtze disagreed in one way or another with the views of the dam proponents. In an effort to understand their underlying logic, I have identified five perspectives from which most of these

arguments are developed. These include: the technical perspective, the economic perspective, the humanitarian/social perspective, the political perspective and the environmentalist perspective.

1. The technical perspective: The focus here was on the technical validity of the Three Gorges Project as an engineering project. Arguments from this perspective were concerned with the soundness and feasibility of the technical designs of the project, such as dam height, siltation treatment, flood control and so on.

One of the arguments offered repeatedly in the People's Daily articles supporting the Yangtze dam was that the project was technically valid and feasible. To justify this argument, the credibility of the feasibility studies concerning the dam had to be addressed. Therefore, a number of People's Daily news report concentrated on reinforcing the credibility of these studies, usually by providing information on how the feasibility study was conducted, how many scientists and engineers were involved and how many renowned academics and experts had approved the study.

In contrast, the dissident articles in Qunyan and Yangtze, Yangtze developed their arguments primarily by questioning the technical soundness of the project and the credibility of the feasibility study. Most of these opposing arguments disagreed with the dam planners in regard to various technological aspects of the project, including questions about dam height, reservoir size, siltation treatment, the proposed flood control capacity, and other specific engineering designs of the project.

2. The economic perspective: This point of view was concerned with the validity of the Three Gorges Project as a profitable investment. Arguments from this perspective were directed at the potential economic benefits deriving from the project.

Several arguments in The People's Daily written in support of the Three Gorges Project had an economic basis. For example, some articles argued that investment in hydro electricity was more financially worthwhile than building nuclear energy and/or thermal power plants. Other articles argued that an investment in the Yangtze dam would reduce the possibility of disastrous flooding, and eventually yield substantial savings in relief efforts. Often tied to this line of argument was the suggestion that the Project should start as soon as possible, in order to minimize the compensation fees for the displaced population.

On the oppositional side, one of the oft-repeated arguments held that the Yangtze dam was an extremely costly project, requiring the central government to commit to a huge investment without any hope of revenue for up to twenty years. The opposition argued further that the same amount of money could generate much greater returns if it was invested in other fast-growing industrial sectors. Some articles suggested that building a number of smaller hydro projects on the upper, much less densely populated reaches of the Yangtze tributaries, would cost much less while producing the same amount of electricity.

3. The humanitarian/social perspective: This paradigm took a special interest in the benefits of the Three Gorges Project on people's welfare and the society as

a whole. Arguments from this perspective were concerned with the impact of the project on the livelihood of local communities, surrounding areas and the nation as a whole.

Many advocates of the dam argued along these lines. These supporters insisted that the Three Gorges Project would prevent the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze Valley from the chronic flooding catastrophes which had been historically responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people, leaving millions more homeless. Thus, although the building of the dam would cause a million people to be displaced, the project would save hundreds of millions of people from possible flood-related catastrophes. The main claim held that it was preferable to relocate 1.1 million residents under a well-planned program rather than allow tens of millions of people to be killed, and hundreds of millions to suffer in future flood disasters. The proponents of the dam also suggested that China as a nation would significantly enhance its self-esteem and national pride by building the world's largest hydro-electric project.

In response to these challenges, the opposition pointed out that the project would create a 1.1 million-strong displaced population, the largest ever encountered in such a dam. As well, there was no country in the world with a successful track record in relocating such a huge population. The opposition insisted that the relocation program (recommended in the first feasibility study) to move the residents in the dam site up the valley slope was severely compromised by the lack of arable land needed to sustain the life of over a million people. Moreover, such an abrupt



relocation effort could result in social unrest or popular revolt in the region. Eventually, these social disturbances would undermine the national stability and state interests.

In addition, the opponents of the Yangtze dam, far from viewing the project as an embodiment of national pride, maintained that the Yangtze dam would be a hotbed for national problems. Initially, the project would absorb a huge portion of state funds badly needed elsewhere in order to sustain China's rapid development. Then, once it was built, the dam would become extremely vulnerable to the attacks of belligerent foreign nations. An article in Yangtze, Yangtze warned that The Three Gorges dam would be the first strategic target that an attacking nation would strike, with the resulting flood would immediately engulfing and devastating many cities and towns in the lower reaches of the Yangtze Valley.<sup>20</sup>

4. The political perspective: The focus of this viewpoint was on the political legitimacy of the decision-making processes related to the Three Gorges Project. Arguments from this perspective tended to address the validity of the power structure in making the final judgement on the project, rather than the feasibility of the project itself.

This approach is evident in The People's Daily's practice of "name-dropping" during their coverage of the project; that is, the paper's constant reference to those government leaders who had announced support for the dam or attended the review

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<sup>20</sup> Yang Lang, "Super dam: the sword of Damocles," Yangtze, Yangtze (Guiyang: Guizhou People's Publishing House, 1989), 135-148.

meetings. The intention was obvious: the demonstration of support from top-ranking political authorities would provide the most legitimate argument to convince more people to support the dam. This tactic betrayed an underlying assumption of the Daily that the authority of the political leadership in making the decision of the Three Gorges Project was indisputable.

Another indication of the People's Daily's faith in the absolute legitimacy of the top political authorities in deciding the fate of the Yangtze dam was evident in the paper's repeated publication of letters from lesser bureaucrats to the Central Committee of the Party, exhorting them to settle the controversy once and for all. It was taken for granted in the pages of the Daily that the Communist Party had an indisputable right to be the final judge of the Three Gorges Project. Still, the authority of scientists and specialists was not to be excluded in the decision-making process. Three Daily articles took the remarks of late leaders like Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai on the Yangtze dam to be strong arguments for the validity of the project. Such citations were apparently based on the assumption that endorsement of the dam by the top political authorities was strong evidence of the validity of the project.

It is interesting to note that the Qunyan and Yangtze, Yangtze articles placed a different emphasis on the issue of political legitimacy in decision-making regarding the Yangtze project. The two sources differed in addressing the issue of who had the legitimate right to decide whether or not the super-dam should be built.

The articles in Qunyan emphasized the authority of scientists and specialists

in the fields related to the project. But at the same time, none of these pieces took explicit issue with the absolute authority of the top political power to make key decisions regarding the dam's future. Instead, the Qunyan articles tended to argue that the Three Gorges Project was not a political, but rather an engineering issue, and thus should have been decided by scientists and specialists. On this account, the political authorities retain the right to make a final decision, but this decision should first be based on the judgment of specialists and experts.

Also, the Qunyan authors, like their dominant media counterparts, frequently used the comments made by late Communist leaders like Chairman Mao or Premier Zhou. But in Qunyan, the citations chosen came out against the Yangtze project, thus supporting the anti-dam opposition.<sup>21</sup> Considering the fact that quite a number of the Qunyan articles were written statements submitted to the state authorities and the Communist Party via internal channels, or written speeches delivered in the CPPCC group meetings, it is hardly surprising that many of them carried an appealing tone to the top leadership. The tenor of the arguments offered in Qunyan seemed better suited to petitions aimed at winning support from the leading authorities than to rhetoric aimed at the general public. The legitimacy of the state authority in ultimately deciding the fate of the Three Gorges Project was never truly contested.

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<sup>21</sup> As I explained in Chapter III, both Mao and Zhou supported the idea of damming the Yangtze River in the mid-1950's. However, Mao changed his mind in the late 1950's, and so did Zhou. Therefore, either sides of the debate could find some comments made by Mao or Zhou that favoured its arguments.

By comparison, the book Yangtze, Yangtze demonstrated a much more confrontational attitude towards the political authorities. It explicitly contested the legitimacy of the state authority in being solely responsible for the final decision on the Three Gorges Project. In the Foreword by Wu Guoguang<sup>22</sup> and the Postscript by Dai Qing, the authors make it abundantly clear that they consider the Three Gorges Project to be an issue of national significance, whose fate should not be decided exclusively by the top political authorities. And the authors represented in the book go further still: in addition to the participation in the decision making process of specialists and experts in the related areas, they advocated that citizens' groups, and journalists in particular, should join the discussion, and accordingly the process of decision-making regarding the dam. Tellingly, Dai's postscript (containing her explanation of her involvement in publishing Yangtze, Yangtze) points out that she, as a tax payer and Chinese citizen, was entitled to a say in the decision because the plan concerned China's longest river and would cost a huge sum of tax payers' money. This rationale offered a new dimension in the Three Gorges debate in China, and was duly featured in the national media's coverage of the publication of Yangtze, Yangtze (Xiao 1994).

The book's contestation of the authoritarian command of the decision-making process in the Three Gorges Project is apparent in many of its articles. Most oppositional arguments contained in the book centred on whether the adopted

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<sup>22</sup> For information on Wu see Appendix IV and in Assumption III of the theoretic chapter.

format of the decision making process, which featured the ultimate authority of the party's power and the tight control over information and debate, were appropriate in the Three Gorges discussion, and whether the political authorities could be held accountable for making the right decision. It is interesting to note that the organizers of Yangtze, Yangtze used the genre of interviews instead of adhered articles to better emphasize their chosen theme of anti-authoritarianism. Eleven out of these 12 interviewees were also contributors to Qunyan. Even so, their articles in Qunyan, as I explained earlier, did *not* raise questions about the legitimate authority of the higher leadership in making the final decision on the Yangtze project. However, the interviews in Yangtze, Yangtze were arranged in such a way that criticism of the political monopoly over the Three Gorges study occupied a prominent place.

For example, instead of centring on the technical aspects of the dam debate, the interviewers (Beijing journalists) addressed their questions to the political legitimacy of the Yangtze feasibility studies. They inquired as to whether the feasibility study process was sufficiently democratic, and whether their own dissident opinions were adequately represented in the media. Thus the Yangtze contributors managed to shift the interests of the interviewees to the political aspect of the debate, forcing Zhou Peiyuan (Vice-Chairman of CPPCC) and other prominent academics and CPPCC members to talk much more critically than they had in Qunyan.

5. The environmental perspective: The environmental perspective brought to light the various potential environmental consequences of the project. Arguments

from this perspective were concerned with the impact of the project on the natural environment and ecosystem of the Yangtze Valley.

As expected, environmental arguments were limited in the People's Daily articles. However, these environmental concerns were not totally absent. Many articles in favour of the project recognized the adverse consequences the project would create on the natural environment, including the possibility of dam-induced earthquakes, as well as the consequent water pollution, soil erosion, deforestation and loss of farmland. However, dominant media articles suggested that these problems could be eliminated, or at least mitigated, by sophisticated technological and managerial approaches. One such article argued that the Project would actually contribute to a cleaner environment by substituting hydro-electric power for coal-burning. This would alleviate the atmospheric problems of excess carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide emissions, which at the time was believed to be the chief cause of the global warming phenomenon.<sup>23</sup>

It is noteworthy that environmental concerns featured prominently in neither Qunyan magazine nor Yangtze, Yangtze. The chief concerns of the environmental camp, including the potential submergence of arable land and historical sites, soil erosion and deforestation in the valley slope, threats to the survival of endangered wildlife (like the Yangtze River dolphin, the Chinese sturgeon and the finless porpoise), and the possible irreversible ecological changes in the Yangtze valley were

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<sup>23</sup> Yan Kai, "The Three Gorges Project viewed from the perspective of ecology and environment," People's Daily, January 15, 1992.

indeed expressed by the dam opponents. However, environment-based calls to shelve the dam were included in oppositional arguments primarily because their authors suspected that the approaches recommended by the feasibility study group were not equal to the task of dealing with these environmental problems. Other environmental arguments centred on the environment's impact on the function of the Yangtze dam. One of these hypothesized that the increasing silt content in the Yangtze caused by soil erosion and deforestation along the valley slope would introduce sediment into the reservoir, and consequently prevent the dam from operating at expected capacity.

Only one article in Qunyan (in 1987) sought to examine the limitations of technological approaches in solving the environmental problems (Chen 1987, 25). This piece pointed out that the ecological system was already very fragile in the Three Gorges region due to rapid population growth and development. It was therefore impossible for such an area to sustain the development of the world's largest hydro-electric project, while absorbing all of the displaced population locally. The article concluded that the tension between the environment and the human population in the region had reached its limit, and any further stretching of environmental boundaries promised ecological catastrophe. For the best interests of the local communities, there should be no further development of any kind (Chen 1987, 25-27).

To clarify the discourse structure underpinning the Three Gorges debate, I will now arrange the five perspectives identified above into three discursive

categories based on their underlying conceptual rationales: 1) the development discourse; 2) the discourse of state authoritarianism; and 3) the environmentalist discourse. Using this method can only illuminate the essence of the Yangtze controversy, which after all involves myriad diversified arguments, views and explanations.

1. The development category: I believe that both the technical and the economic perspective are related to the discursive framework of development rationale, which justifies the logic of industrial activities by assessing benefits on material criteria: whether the activities can generate maximum material gains at the minimum cost; and whether the technology (equipment) is sound enough to produce the expected material growth. The development discourse is premised on the notion that material accumulation and technological perfection are essential bases for decisions relating to proposed industrial development.

It is evident that this development discourse occupied a prominent place in the dominant media, as demonstrated by examining the People's Daily. The economic benefits and technological validity of the Three Gorges Project were an oft-repeated theme in the People's Daily's coverage of the project. A majority of the articles in the Daily centred on the advantages of the Yangtze project for China's economic development, as well as the potential status of the technological achievement resulting from the project.

The development discourse also dominated the coverage of the dam within marginal texts like Qunyan and Yangtze, Yangtze. Although the marginal media



disagreed with the dominant media on the feasibility of the Yangtze project, the arguments of both groups were primarily constructed along the lines of development discourse. The logic of development criteria like economic benefits and technological soundness was rarely contested in the arguments opposing the dam. Instead, what the opposition questioned was the credibility and accountability of the dam's planners in strictly observing these development criteria. Therefore, the most consistently repeated arguments of the anti-dam factions were those that raised doubts about the financial and technological feasibility of the project, and about the professional credibility and competence of the dam planners. Put simply, the opposition merely argued within the domain of the dominant development discourse.

2. The state authoritarianism vs. liberalism category: In addition to the development discourse, I also recognize that the humanitarian/social perspective and the political perspective are derived from a discursive framework based on the conception that the logic of human beings' activities should be justified by improvements in human and social conditions, and informed by certain of the political arrangements of the interest groups involved. These two perspectives are directly connected to the ideological conflicts between Chinese state authoritarianism and Western democratic liberalism. The two ideologies have different criteria for assessing human and societal improvements, and also with regard to legitimating political arrangements. It is therefore with reference to social and political factors that the legitimacy of state authoritarianism can most effectively be contested.

As I have pointed out previously, the Chinese political value system emphasizes the primacy of state interests over those of local communities and individuals. Further, the Chinese system privileges the centralized power structure in decision-making process, even with regard to issues that concern the livelihood of a large population. The individual's right to know state affairs, and to participate in their nation's political life and government policy-making process is limited to the extent that the state's authority and interests may not be threatened. By comparison, Western liberalism places more emphasis on the individual's right to have access to government information and to actively participate in political life.

In the case of the Three Gorges debate, the discourse of state authoritarianism was prominent in the dominant media. State interests were primary consideration in weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the project. The provincial and regional interests came a distant second. At the bottom of the list were the interests of the local communities that would be relocated under the project; the upheaval of this group apparently seen as an intelligent sacrifice for the benefit of the state and various outlying regions. The individual sufferings of the relocation, either physical and/or mental, were never discussed in the dominant media. It is obvious that the individual welfare and personal suffering of this potentially massive displaced population were of little significance to the proponents of the Yangtze dam.

With reference to media texts, the discourse of state authoritarianism clearly dominated the People's Daily's arguments, predicated, after all, on the notion that

the state<sup>24</sup> was absolutely legitimate in taking on the role of sole judge of the project's fate. The authority of the myriad experts and specialists in judging the validity of the project was also recognized by the dominant media; subject, however, to the supreme command of the state leadership. In this discursive framework, the participation of other social groups outside of the state bureaucracy (such as media, citizens' groups, and community organizations) in the decision-making process was considered unnecessary. The state leadership was in the wholly-legitimized position of making the decision for its people; once the decision was made, the role of the people was to follow.

This discursive framework also infuses the rhetoric of Qunyan. In the magazine, the supremacy of state interests in determining the fate of the dam was recognized and respected. The advantages and disadvantages of the project in terms of state interests were the primary concern of the Qunyan authors. Briefly stated, the key difference between Qunyan's writers and the dam proponents featured in the People's Daily was that the former were convinced that the dam would, in the long run, undermine and not further state interests. In fact, few articles anywhere argued from the point of view of the local communities who stood to be literally submerged by the proposed Yangtze reservoir. Although a number of articles expressed concern about the displaced population, these tended to fixate on the potential effects of the relocation fees on the state budget, and the consequences of this staggering financial

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<sup>24</sup> The top level leadership was/is conceived as the personalized representation of the state.

burden for national stability rather than focusing on the impact of the relocation on the well-being of the local communities and individuals.

In terms of which group should bear the ultimate decision-making authority, Qunyan did not question the legitimacy and credibility of the state authorities in having absolute control of the project, although some pieces did indicate that the state's final decision should be based on the judgment of specialists and scientists and not on the caprices of politicians. Moreover, the "petition style" of the Qunyan articles suggested that the authors positioned themselves as subordinate to the state authorities. The state authority was therefore not only respected, but also conceived as the supreme judge with regard to the Three Gorges controversy. The underlying conviction of Qunyan clearly was that the key in blocking the Yangtze plan lay in persuading the state authorities to shift allegiance towards the anti-dam camp. The Qunyan rhetoric carries a latent message to the state authorities: "Please support us, because we can provide the plans that will better serve the interests of the state, rather than those of the dam proponents".

By contrast, the rhetoric of Yangtze, Yangtze was strongly influenced by liberal discourse. Central to the Yangtze articles was the concept that state leaders had no legitimate right to make the final decision on an important national issue without soliciting the opinions of other social groups. In making this point repeatedly, the Yangtze contributions advocated the right of the tax-paying individual to have access to information about state affairs, and to be able to take part in the decision-making process. Far from adopting the petitionary tone of Qunyan, Yangtze,

Yangtze explicitly defied state authoritarianism by positioning itself face-to-face with authoritarian power and challenging the legitimacy and credibility of the state monopoly in the Yangtze dam decision-making process. Even further, the rhetoric of the book clearly implied that public pressure mobilized by the media was the only way to stop the government from making a mistake in the Three Gorges decision.

It is noteworthy that, even though Yangtze, Yangtze contested the authority of the state, the book raised little doubt about the primacy that the state's interests should hold when considering a development project. No views of the residents on the dam site who faced displacement were represented in any of the articles in the book. Thus, there was scarcely any argument mounted in defence of the interests of the local communities. One of the messages of the book, it seems, was that opposition to the Three Gorges was intended to preserve the best interests of the state.

3. Environmental category: the environmental perspective is derived from the environmentalist discourse which, as I explained previously in Part II, stands as an alternative to the dominant development paradigm. While the development discourse advocates wholesale economic growth and material accumulation, environmentalists urge restraint and conservation, based on the belief that the earth's resources are finite. Environmentalism also raises doubts about technological achievement, and the extensive exploitation of the earth's resources made possible by technological development. Central to the environmentalist discourse is the fundamental concept of the human-nature relationship in modern expansionist culture, in both the West

and the East. In this sense, environmentalism offers an unconventional interpretation of the world and the world's problems, differing from that of either Western market democracy or Chinese communism.

Although concerns for the adverse impact of the Three Gorges dam on the environment and wildlife were exhibited on both sides of the debate, views deriving from the environmental perspective did not attempt to question the rationale of industrial development. In the dominant media, the potential environmental problems engendered by the dam project were conceived as technical and engineering problems, easily solved by more sophisticated technology and better planning. At one point, an article by the Governor of Hubei Province even suggested that the greatest danger to the environment and ecological system would not come from the industrial project, but from the natural disasters like flooding and poverty (Guo 1992). He reiterated the view, popular in Chinese communist ideology, that an important mission of the human race was to conquer nature by remoulding and making full use of it.

In the marginal media, textual evidence of environmentalist viewpoints was also limited. A majority of the environment-related arguments were constructed on assumptions similar to the dominant media's; namely that environmental problems are more the failure and incompetence of the existing technology and planning than the inevitable outcome of industrial development. Nevertheless, the articulation of environmentalist views was not totally absent. For example, the article in the November, 1987 issue of Qunyan was openly suspicious about whether industrial

development could really solve the problems in the Three Gorges valley, suggesting that there was a limit to the capacity of the natural environment to sustain the livelihood of a certain population size and certain degree of industrialization.

### The Discourse Structure of the Media Debate:

My analyses of both media access and discursive analysis lead to the conclusion that there was a hierarchy of discourses in the media debate of the Three Gorges Project. The dominance of the development discourse was evident: development rhetoric prevailed not only in the dominant media, but also in the dissident marginal media. The dominance of development discourse was guaranteed by the preeminence of specialist and expert groups in the access structure, though there was some variation in the access of specific expert groups to the media debate. The specialist groups outside of the feasibility study of the Three Gorges Project had less access to the dominant media than the experts who participated in the Yangtze study. In contrast, the specialist group outside of the feasibility study was most prominent in the access arrangement in the marginal media. Nevertheless, this variation in the access of the specific expert groups did not signify any fundamental conflicts in terms of the discursive framework. Both specialist groups constructed their explanations primarily along the lines of development rationale.

The discourse of state authoritarianism, which justifies human decisions on the basis of the primacy of state interests and state authority, was extremely visible in the dominant media texts covering the Yangtze controversy; its prominence

guaranteed by the high profile of top-level leaders in the dominant media's access structure, and by the low position in the access order accorded the resident groups in the dam area and outlying regions. Although it was these very residents who would bear all the inconvenience of the relocation and become vulnerable to the many possible adverse consequences of the Yangtze dam, their access to the dominant media was extremely limited. It is evident that even token representation of the opinions of the local communities and displaced individuals was conceived as unnecessary by the dominant media. In addition, the general public (at the very bottom of the access structure) was also excluded from the debate.

At the other end of the media spectrum, the marginal media's treatment of the necessary priorities, and the legitimacy, of the decision-making process was complicated and diverse. On the one hand, the dominant access structure which featured the preeminence of the state leadership and marginalized the general public and resident groups, also dominated the marginal media, although the state leadership did not maintain its stranglehold on access within the marginal media. Given this structure, the primacy of state interests in decision-making could not be seriously contested, because there was a virtual absence of representation of the very interest groups (regional groups, community groups or other grassroots citizens' organizations) whose interests might conflict with those of the state authorities.

On the other hand, the book Yangtze, Yangtze explicitly advocated a new interpretation of the Yangtze debate. The book's reconstruction of the term of the debate was obviously grounded in the discursive framework of Western democratic



liberalism. For example, while interrogating the legitimacy and credibility of the state monopoly in deciding the Yangtze dam, the book espoused the right of the individual (as a tax-payer) to participate in the decision making-processes of the Three Gorges Project. Comparison with Qunyan magazine, which rarely questioned the legitimacy of the state leadership, suggests that the confrontational rhetoric of Yangtze, Yangtze was a function of the involvement of defiant journalists. These journalists were primarily interested in reframing the debate as a contestation against state authorities, rather than merely the fussy debate over an engineering project.

The media penetration of the environmentalist discourse was very limited in the Three Gorges debate, though concerns were expressed in both the dominant and marginal media over the impact of the dam on the natural environment and wildlife. For their part, the dominant media constructed the potential environmental problems not as an inherent attribute of industrial development, but as a finite series of technical obstacles that could be overcome by improved technology and management. Interestingly, this rhetoric prevailed in both the dominant and marginal media. However, the marginal media did provide some space for views that questioned the justification of industrial development as the only solution to the poverty problem at the expense of the natural environment and wildlife.

## PART V

### CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I have examined the political context of the Three Gorges debate (in Part III), as well as the discourse structure underlying the debate rhetoric (in Part IV). While making extensive use of the terms and definitions developed in the preceding chapters, I will now analyze the *connections* between the political context of the Yangtze debate and its underlying discourse structure. My discussion centres on three aspects of the Yangtze media debate: a) the relationship between high-level Chinese politics and the range in the media for dissident perspectives; b) the links between the discursive distance of the dissenting expressions from the dominant discourse as articulated in the media; c) the space for the articulation of the environmentalist discourse within the Chinese mass media.

#### Chinese Politics and the Media Space for Dissent:

The range for dissident articulation varies in the Chinese media, and is closely related to the level of consensus in the state leadership. When the top leadership is clearly divided and locked in an intensive battle over power and policy priorities, the media become vulnerable to these conflicts. At such times, a wider range of dissident articulation in the media becomes possible. When the state leadership once again reaches consensus, the range for the expression of dissent shrinks.

As well, my discourse study of the Yangtze media indicates that the Chinese media has a tendency to restrict access to elite groups. The social groups that have

most unimpeded and sustained access, whether in the dominant or the marginal media, are members of elite groups. As I have shown in earlier chapters, the Yangtze debate was exclusively conducted within elite groups composed of the leaders of the central government, prominent academics and specialists, dominant media organizations and high profile journalists. Ordinary people, and the groups of residents to be directly affected by the hydro project, had almost no voice in the media debate. The media access of officials of the lesser ranks in the state bureaucracy was also very limited.

The fact that access to the Chinese media is available only to the elite classes does not exclude the media from becoming significant site of contestation between various interests and powers, but actually makes the media more sensitive to the clashes in the elite society. The media debate on the Three Gorges Project clearly demonstrated the interplay and influence of politics and the media in state decision-making.

The first expressions of anti-dam rhetoric appeared in the media in October of 1986, soon after the state leadership revised its initial decision to build the dam and commissioned a second round of feasibility studies. The division in the government was clear: the anti-dam forces were concentrated in the CPPCC, while the dam's leading supporters were represented by the Ministry of Water Resources and Electric Power, which led the feasibility study. During the entire period between 1986 and 1991, when the state leadership had not reached the final decision on the dam, the dominant media maintained a low profile in the debate. The coverage

devoted to the Yangtze dam was very limited, and nearly all of the news stories focused on the progress of the feasibility study instead of on the project itself.

In the marginal media, it was the CPPCC opposition who initiated the media campaign opposing the dam, principally in the magazine Qunyan; which was, after all, under the administrative control of the CPPCC. The Qunyan arguments were written in the style of the adhered essay, a genre which is generally used in addressing elite readers, and is unsuitable for the general public. By the end of 1988, as work on the second feasibility study was coming to a close (with the recommendation to go ahead with the dam), the extent of the divisions within the top leadership became evident. Premier Li Peng was a strong supporter of the dam, but Zhao Ziyang, then the General Secretary of the Party, was widely perceived to be more cautious about the dam construction.

In an attempt to escalate the media pressure on the state leadership to shelve the Yangtze project, the anti-dam leaders in the CPPCC joined with a loose coalition of journalist groups, who were discontented with the non-participatory stance of the dominant media on the Three Gorges debate. The defiant journalists composed a book on the Yangtze controversy (Yangtze, Yangtze), and organized a media event for the book's publishing intended to converge with the NPC's 1989 conference, at which in-depth discussion of the Three Gorges Project was slated to take place. Right after the publishing of the book, the central government announced that the plan would be put aside for a five year period. In the stretch from from March to June of 1989, the media's discussion of the Three Gorges controversy was carried out on

a larger scale than before.

The conflict within the top level authorities over the Three Gorges Project ended when Party leader Zhao Ziyang was removed from the leadership following the Tiananmen protests of June, 1989. Following Zhao's dismissal, the state leadership reached a consensus in favour of the project, in accord with the wishes of the dam builders' patron, Premier Li Peng. Subsequent to this decision, the book Yangtze, Yangtze was banned and destroyed. Though Qunyan magazine continued to carry essays disagreeing with the dam builders, the number of articles became fewer and fewer, and the wording of objections more moderate. After April 1991 Qunyan ceased criticising the dam altogether, apparently because the top leadership had made a decision to go ahead with the dam.

With the disappearance of both Yangtze, Yangtze and Qunyan from the scene, by mid-1991 the dominant media were the only players in the media debate. Beginning November 1991, the dominant media, abandoned their previous attitude of non-involvement, and launched a massive media campaign calculated to win public support for the Yangtze project in time for the NPC's annual assembly in 1992. A number of high-level state, provincial and ministerial leaders, along with prominent academics and specialists, were given significant space in the Peoples' Daily to voice their support for the project. Notably, this campaign served as more of a way to test and organize potential allies within the elite classes than as a massive persuasion tactic aimed at the general population.

From the above analysis, a close link between the articulations of the anti-dam

opposition and the internal power struggles in the top echelons of the Chinese leadership becomes evident. The space in the media accessible to views opposing the dam was a direct result of the division within the central government. When the split within the leadership finally became evident, the opening in the media for the articulation of different perspectives widened considerably. As my previous examination of the discourse structure of the Yangtze media debate indicated, during the escalation of the media debate extending from 1988 until June 1989, there was even room in the Chinese media for the articulation of the perspectives in direct conflict with the dominant discourse of state authoritarianism. As illustration of this relative "media freedom", consider the views put forward in Yangtze, Yangtze advocating the right of the individual to know about, and to participate in, state affairs. However, when the political infighting had diminished and consensus been restored, the room for the articulation of dissident views in the media shrank and eventually disappeared.

It is noteworthy that during the period from fall, 1988 until June of 1989, the Chinese media seemed more tolerant of dissent. The unwritten rule from "above" about media coverage of the Three Gorges Project was rarely observed in practice. The book Yangtze, Yangtze, an obvious attempt to defy (on at least one count) the secret media restriction, was allowed to circulate without encountering official condemnation until October 1989. The explanation for this seeming hands-off approach may be found in the power and control structures of the Chinese mass media. Put simply, the Chinese media system is a highly centralized hierarchy, with

ultimate power residing in the hands of top-level leadership. As a result, the state's control over the media can be very effective when the central power is in a state of consensus. However, when the top leadership is at odds, it's difficult for those in command of the media system to exercise their usual control. During such periods of internal political strife, there will be a much greater potential for the articulation of alternative perspectives in the media.

The kind of explanation provided above about the oppositional expressions and political power within the Chinese mass communication structure offers a new way to understand the dissident movement in the Chinese media. In this model, the articulation of dissent in the Chinese media is basically the product of elite groups, reflecting the overwhelming lack of media access available to the social groups at the lower strata of Chinese society. More space would be available for the expression of different opinions in the Chinese media system if the conflicts within the higher leadership reached a point that precluded the possibility of compromise.

#### The Discursive Distance and the Articulation of Dissent

The space in the Chinese media open to dissenting expressions is in a large part dependant on the discursive structure within which such opinions are constructed. There is more space for those alternative opinions that are formulated in line with the dominant discourse structure than for those that are contradictory to the basic principles of the dominant discourse.

Two discursive frameworks that dominated the Yangtze debate rhetoric were

those of the development discourse and state authoritarianism. The dominant media, by advocating the Yangtze dam on the grounds of technological viability and potential economic benefit to the state, defined the basic conceptual framework of the debate. The marginal media constructed their arguments against the project largely within the framework of the discourses established in the dominant media.

However, to a certain extent, the marginal media were also able to contest the established definition of the Three Gorges controversy and reconstructed it in line with other discursive paradigms in conflict with the dominant ones, namely Western democratic liberalism and environmentalism.

To understand the relationship between the discursive distance and the space for the dissident articulation, it is necessary to study how the two major marginal media representations of the Yangtze dam opposition, as manifested in Qunyan magazine and Yangtze, Yangtze, were treated in the Chinese system. Qunyan, the pioneer of the anti-dam press movement, became critical of the Yangtze project starting in 1986, and continued with its oppositional stance until April of 1991. These halcyon days for Qunyan marked the first time that any media organization in China had provided a forum for the dam opposition, and the magazine remained the only one that continued to express anti-dam sentiments after the Tiananmen incident on June 4, 1989. Despite the fact that Qunyan provided a consistent space for opponents of the dam, the magazine has never been banned. It is obvious that the brand of opposition contained in Qunyan is permissible in the centralized Chinese media system. On the other hand, the same system showed an extremely limited tolerance



for the oppositional views of Yangtze, Yangtze, a book that was banned just eight months after it was first published.

It is my view that the reason that these two oppositional media texts were treated so differently lies in the fact that there exists in the Chinese media system a closely monitored "range of permissibility" guiding the expression of different opinions in terms of their discursive frameworks. Thus, differing views which are argued along the discursive lines of the dominant media are more likely to be permitted than those that are constructed from discourse paradigms in conflict with the dominant structure.

Qunyan's oppositional rhetoric lies within this permissible range of the media system precisely because Qunyan constructs its anti-dam principles within the framework of dominant discourses. The discursive analysis conducted in the previous chapter indicated that the Qunyan's arguments were premised on the development discourse that conceives technical perfection and maximum economic advantages as the legitimate justification for industrial activities. Therefore, the magazine's rhetoric merely questioned, and did not explicitly threaten, the technical and economic validity of the Three Gorges project. Further, Qunyan's criticism of the dam centred on the disapproval and disagreement between the leaders of the Yangtze feasibility study group and the Ministry of Water Resource and Electric Power, without taking to task the state authorities. Thus, the magazine managed to direct its petitionary rhetoric, obviously influenced by the dominant discourse of state authoritarianism, to the top level leadership without being sanctioned.

On the other hand, the book Yangtze, Yangtze contained views that contested the basic principle of the dominant state authoritarian discourse, calling into question the very legitimacy of the exclusive stranglehold on the decision-making process enforced by the state authorities. As noted previously, Yangtze made a strong case for the individual's right to be informed and to take part in the debate on national issues like the Three Gorges Project. The discursive distance between the book's rhetoric and the dominant discourse made it too radical to be accommodated in the Chinese media system. The banning of Yangtze, Yangtze was an obvious indication that the rhetoric of the book was out of the permissible range allowed for the expression of dissent in China. The fact that such dissident perspectives as Western democratic liberalism were able to be articulated in the Chinese system at all is, as I explained earlier, a result of the then unreconciled contestation at the top-level leadership.

#### The Space for the Environmentalist Discourse:

The media space allocated to the environmentalist discourse was very limited in the Three Gorges Project debate. The fact that environmentalist ideas were at a significant discursive distance from the dominant discourse of development apparently contributed to the marginalization of these ideas. However, the research findings of this study indicate that a wider opening for the expression of environmentalism may still be available in the Chinese media. On this subject, two points observed in the Three Gorges debate deserve extended attention:

First, concerns for the environment are accepted as a legitimate argument in a debate over a high-profile industrial project. Environmental concerns were expressed in the Yangtze dam discussion in both the dominant and the marginal media. Perhaps surprisingly, the dominant media did not contest that the environmental impact of the Yangtze dam should be taken into consideration. Instead, papers like the People's Daily tried to mould the pro-dam arguments to fit into the language of environmental protection. All the same, though the dominant media indeed recognized the adverse consequences of industrial projects on the natural environment as problems inherent to large-scale industrialization, they tended to construe the environmental problems as something that would be soon solved by improved technology. Still, generally speaking, discussions of environmental concerns were well within the permissible range of the Chinese media.

At the same time, my analysis of the discourse structure of the Three Gorges controversy indicated that the Chinese media were dominated by both the development discourse and the discourse of state authoritarianism. Despite their discursive distance from the dominant development paradigm, the environmentalist views did not contest as directly the fundamental principles of state authoritarianism as they did notions of democratic liberalism. It is therefore entirely possible that more space may be available for the articulation of environmental critiques if the environmental groups can avoid ideological clashes with the dominant discourse of state authoritarianism. They may be able to do so by constructing the environmental problems as a threat to the economic prosperity and political stability of the nation-

state.

It is interesting to note that the only anti-development view put forward by environmentalists in the Three Gorges debate was constructed in such a way that the non-development strategy was urged as more beneficial to the state interests. This viewpoint, published in Qunyan magazine, did not generate as much furious reaction from the state government as that of the more radical anti-authoritarianism propounded in the book Yangtze, Yangtze. This disparity suggests that the environmentalist discourse, in comparison with that of democratic liberalism, may be more readily tolerated in the Chinese media.

Second, as I have already explained, the media space for dissident articulation is also affected by power struggles at the top level of the government. Thus, there exists the possibility for increased media space open to the articulation of dissident views contradictory to dominant discourses, provided that the opposition is able to take advantage of these instabilities in the higher echelons of the government. During those times when the division within the top leadership become visible and the power clashes impossible to reconcile, the media system becomes particularly vulnerable to political power struggles. This suggests that an unusual amount of media space might be generated for the articulation of more radical views and concepts-- space that would disappear in normal times when consensus at the leadership level is maintained. This characteristic of the Chinese media system indicates that the potential exists for a much larger range of environmentalist articulations in the Chinese media, if the environmentalist groups could make use

of the opportunities arising from future top-level power clashes, or at least be prepared to have their views presented by elite interest groups at the top level.

It is somewhat ironic that although the book Yangtze, Yangtze was usually regarded by the Western media as the first outward manifestation of the Green movement in China (Barmé 1989, 29), it did not provide any environmentalist interpretations of the Three Gorges Project. The findings of this study suggest that the oppositional movement against the Yangtze dam led by Yangtze's liberal journalists in early 1989 was more a political movement aimed against the state authoritarian power than an environmental movement in its truest sense. The lack of a clearly defined environmental perspective in the anti-dam movement may indicate that the environmentalist philosophy has not yet succeeded in attracting the interest of Chinese intellectuals, who are more concerned with fighting the foes of Communism than doing battle with the forces of industrialization and development.

The reasons for the low profile of the environmentalist outlook in the Yangtze media debate requires a far more rigorous and detailed analysis than I am able to provide here. However, I think one possible explanation resides in a more complete understanding of the power struggle between the Chinese media and the state over the course of the past decade. A prominent feature of the Chinese mass media in the reform period of 1980-1989 was the journalistic aspiration for greater press autonomy (Zhang 1993a; Jernow 1993; Porter 1992; and Lee 1990). In the Yangtze controversy, it became evident that the liberal journalists played an important role in challenging the state's monopoly of information. According to Zhang Xiaogang, a former China

Daily editor, one of the principal factors contributing to the press corp's struggle against state media control was the institution of the new Chinese market economy. The move towards a market economy has prompted the proliferation of approximately 4,000 press outlets, resulting in an information market with several hundred- million dollars in annual revenue, and a total of 600,000 employees (Zhang 1993a, 200, 206).<sup>25</sup> This boom in press activity has meant that more and more media organizations have become financially independent from state subsidies,<sup>26</sup> and consequently have obtained more autonomy than ever before.

These media organizations have not only benefited from the market economy, they have become vigorous advocates of market economy and development themselves. Zhang notices that the non-dominant media used pro-market and pro-development arguments to contest the state's monopoly over the economy, particularly in the post-Tiananmen period when the opportunities for such debate in the public media were greatly reduced (Zhang 1993a, 204-212). In other words, in the Chinese situation, pro-market and pro-development rhetoric has become a legitimate language, available for the use of media organizations to defy the state authorities. As this study has demonstrated, the development discourse holds a dominant place in the Chinese media. Thus, opposition-minded journalists seeking increased press autonomy had to construct their language of struggle within the dominant discourse structure in order to maintain their legitimate status in the media

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<sup>25</sup> The figures above are only related to the press and publishing industry.

<sup>26</sup> One third of China's newspapers were reported to have achieved financial autonomy as of 1992 (Zhang 1993a, 206).

system. Zhang's study indicates that most non-dominant media concentrated on debates over economic policies, and used the arguments of pro-market and pro-development as a rhetorical weapon to fight against the centralization of the state power. In such a context, it is quite understandable that the environmentalist outlook, which was contradictory to the principles of market and development, held little appeal for the defiant journalists.

In sum, one of the dangers arising from the lack of attention paid to the environmental perspective in both dominant and alternative media is the possibility that the Chinese media may be unable to effectively raise public consciousness about the adverse consequences of industrial development and market economy on the natural environment. If they are left in the dark about the potentially catastrophic environmental consequences of major industrial projects like the Three Gorges dam, the Chinese public may lack the sorts of damage-control methods necessary to take effective action in the face of an ecological breakdown caused by such unsustainable industrial development. This frightening scenario looms ever larger as China continues to push its economic development to an unprecedented scale. Sadly, the centralized media system, with its several trenchant ideological agendas, dependence on government favour, and severely limited space for the articulation of dissent and alternative perspectives, may cost China its future.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix I: Chronicle of the Three Gorges Debate &  
Media Events (1984-April 3, 1992)**

Date	Internal Debate	Media Involvement
04/84	The Central Committee of CPC first approved the YVPO's feasibility study and planned to start the Yangtze project in 1986.	
19/01/ 85		First story in <u>PD</u> on the TGP.
02/85	The Central Committee of CPC decided to set up a special province "Sanxia Province" including areas previously under the jurisdiction of Sichuan and Hubei provinces to coordinate the preparation for the Project.	
Summer 85	CPPCC made the first 58-day field trip to the Three Gorges area and submitted a report opposing the immediate start of the Project.	
Spring 86	After the second 38-day trip to the field, the Economic Construction Group of CPPCC submitted a report to the State Council and CPC demanding another round of comprehensive and detailed study of the Project.	
06/86	The Chinese government decided to commission another exhaustive feasibility study under the aegis of the powerful State Planning Commission. The 412-member Three Gorges Examination Group was formed, consisting of 14 subject groups.	



- 10/86                      The first article in Qunyan disagreed with the TGP feasibility study.
- 87                                The publishing of the first academic book disagreeing with YVPO's feasibility study Discussion on the Macro Decision-Making on the Three Gorges Project by the Hunan Publishing House of Science & Technology.
- 04/88                      The Examination Group approved 12 of the 14 subject studies of the TGP feasibility study.
- 31/05/88                      The second story in PD on the TGP.
- 11/88                      The Examination Group approved all the 14 subject studies of the TGP feasibility study.
- 11/88                      Zhao Ziyang made a comment on the report submitted by Zhou Peiyuan, Vice-Chairman of CPPCC and a leading figure of the TGP opposition, recommending that a more cautious position be adopted in making the TGP decision.
- 03/12/88                      PD carried the third story reporting the stage of the TGP study.
- 12/88                      10 CPPCC members submitted a report to the Central Committee of CPC demanding that the Project be postponed.
- 23/01/89                      Dai Qing and other Beijing journalists convened a meeting deciding to publish the views of the opposition in a book.

2-3/89	The Examination Group approved the TGP feasibility study.	
28/02/ 89		Dai Qing held a press conference in Beijing announcing the publishing of <u>Yangtze, Yangtze</u> , a collection of interviews and essays opposing the TGP.
08/03/ 89		Fourth story in <u>PD</u> reporting the TGP study.
03/89	272 NPC members signed a petition calling for the postponement of the TGP.	The book <u>Discussion of Macro Decision-Making on the Three Gorges II</u> published in Hunan.
03/04/ 89	Vice-Premier Yao Yilin announced that the TGP would not be started within the next five years.	
3-6/89		Ample media discussion on the TGP involving several influential press media.
04/06/ 89	Tiananmen massacre	
07/89		Dai Qing was arrested on the accusation that she was one of the chief plotters of the Tiananmen demonstration.
10/89		<u>Yangtze, Yangtze</u> was banned and accused of being engaged in preparing opinions for the chaos and riot.

- 01/90      The State Council organized a high level meeting in Guangzhou to discuss the TGP. Nearly all attendants expressed support for the Project.
- 07/90      The State Council held a meeting to solicit opinions from specialists on the TGP and appointed a new Examination Committee to review the YVPO's feasibility study.
- 09/90      Qunyan started another round of criticism of the TGP. However, the wording became much milder than the previous year.
- 02/91      A conference was held in Guangzhou attended by two "old guard" leaders: Vice-President Wang Zhen and Vice-Chairman of CPPCC Wang Renzhong. The meeting issued an internal document strongly supporting the dam.
- 04/91      The last article in Qunyan disagreeing with the dam project.
- 08-91      The Examination Committee approved the YVPO's feasibility study recommending the Project be included in the state investment priority plan of 1996-2000.
- 10/91-03/92      MWREP organized several large missions to visit the dam site, including high level NPC and CPPCC delegations, a provincial governor delegation, an academic and educator delegation and a media delegation of over 100 journalists from 50 major media organizations.
- 18/12/91      PD launched a media campaign to advocate support for the TGP

- 01/92      The State Council's vice-premiers conference agreed to build the Yangtze dam.
- 02/92      The Standing Committee of the CPC Politburo convened and agreed to include the TGP in the state 1996-2000 investment plan provided that enough financial resources be available.
- 03/04/  
92          NPC assembly approved the resolution to construct the TGP before the end of this century with 1,767 voting in favour, 177 against, 664 abstaining and 25 not casting their votes.

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- Sources:      1.      He Ping, "The Inside Story about the Decision of the Three Gorges Project," Mainland China Monthly, April 1992, 7-12.
2.      Shi He, "The Last Four Years (1989-1993)," in Yangtze, Yangtze. Chinese original changjiang, changjiang, ed. Dai Qing. Guiyang: Guizhou People's Publishing House, 1989. English translation with additional 12 articles. Toronto: EarthsCan, forthcoming.

Note:            PD:    the People's Daily;  
                  TGP:    the Three Gorges Project.

**Appendix II: Articles on the Three Gorges Project  
in The People's Daily  
(January 1985-April 4 1992)**

No	Date	Narrator	Article type	Note
1	19/01/85	Xinhua/PD	News	The state government had already made the first decision to go ahead with TGP.
2	31/05/88	Xinhua	News	By April of 1988, Examination Group 1986 had approved 12 of the 14 subject studies in the TGP feasibility study.
3	03/12/88	Xinhua	News	On Nov. 30, Examination Group 1986 approved all the 14 subject studies in the TGP feasibility study.
4	08/03/89	Xinhua	News	In February-March, Examination Group 1986 approved the TGP feasibility study.
5	07/07/90	Xinhua	News	By that time the top leadership reached a consensus to go ahead with TGP.
6	15/07/90	Xinhua	News	
7	15/05/91	Xinhua	News	
8	25/11/91	Xinhua	News	In August 1991, the new Examination Committee approved the TGP feasibility study and submitted it to the State Council. Meanwhile, NPC organized an expedition to visit the dam site.

No	Date	Narrator	Article type	Note
9	18/12/91	Xinhua	Feature	The article reviewed the 40-year history of TGP feasibility study. This marked the beginning of the TGP media campaign.
10	21/12/91	Zhang Guangdou	Signed essay	The author was a leading hydro-electric specialist in China. His essay was the first to appear in the PD's special "TGP Forum" column.
11	27/12/91	PD	News	For the first time since 1988, PD ran its own story on TGP.
12	28/12/91	Xinhua	News	
13	29/12/91	Tao Shuzeng	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The author was a specialist on water conservancy engineering.
14	04/01/92	Chen Bangzhu	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The author was the Governor of Hunan Province.
15	11/01/92	Guo Shuyan	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The author was the Governor of Hubei Province.
16	15/01/92	Yan Kai	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The author was a specialist on water conservation engineering.
17	26/01/92	Shen Gencai	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The author was an electric power specialist.
18	30/01/92	Xinhua	News	

No	Date	Narrator	Article type	Note
19	02/02/92	Tang Guoying et al	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The authors were specialists with the Ministry of Transportation.
20	16/02/92	Mo Wenxiang et al	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The authors were committee members of NPC.
21	20/02/92	Liu Guoguang	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The author was a leading economist.
22	22/03/92	Xinhua	News	
23	25/03/92	Li Boning	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The author was a leader of YVPO.
24	29/03/92	Zhu Xun	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The author was the Minister of Geology and Mineral Resources.
25	31/03/92	Xinhua	News	
26	31/03/92	<u>PD</u>	News	
27	01/04/92	<u>PD</u>	Interview	
28	01/04/92	Li Jingwen	Signed essay	A "TGP Forum" article. The author was an economist.
29	03/04/92	<u>PD</u>	Interview	
30	04/04/92	Xinhua	News	The article announced that TGP had been approved to be included in the 10-year development plan (1990- 2000).

Note: PD: The People's Daily; TGP: The Three Gorges Project.

**Appendix III: Articles on the Three Gorges Project  
in Qunyan Monthly  
(October 1986-April 1991)**

No	Date	Narrator	Article type	Note
1	10/86	Deng Congming	Essay	In June 1986, the Central government appointed the Examination Group to review the TGP feasibility study. Starting in this issue, <u>Qunyan</u> devoted a special section "TGP Study" on the Yangtze dam discussion.
2	10/86	Shen Ganqing	Essay	The author was a specialist in water conservancy.
3	12/86	Li Rui	Answers to reporter's question	Li used to be Chairman Mao's secretary. He was reported to be the key figure in pursuing Mao to give up the TGP plan in late 1950's.
4	02/87	Huang Wanli	Essay	Huang was a professor of water conservancy engineering at Qinghua University.
5	02/87	Pan Jiazheng	Essay	Pan was the Chief Engineer with Ministry of Water Resources and Electric Power.
6	04/87	Feng Zidao	Essay	
7	09/87	Zhou Peiyuan	Foreword for Tian's first book	Zhou was a leading Chinese physicist and the Vice Chairman of CPPCC.
8	09/87	Tian Fang et al.*	Essay	The authors were researchers with the State Planning Commission. They published three books opposing TGP (For detail, see Part III of this study).



No	Date	Narrator	Article type	Note
9	11/87	Chen Guojie	Essay	Chen was a professor of geology with China's Academy of Sciences.
10	01/88	Zhou Gucheng	Poem	A scholar and Vice-Chairman of NPC.
11	02/88	Wang Ganchang	Book review	Wang was a nuclear physicist. This review was on Tian's book.
12	3-4 /88	Sun Yueqi	Essay	She was a specialist in mineralogy who attended the Yangtze dam study of 1940's under the Nationalist government. He was a special adviser for Examination Group 1986.
13	04/88	Hou Xueyu	Essay	Hou was an ecologist and one of nine specialists who participated in the TGP study and refused to sign an approval.
14	05/88	Sang Yuankang	Essay	The author was a Chinese-American economist.
15	10/88	Sun Yueqi	Essay	
16	12/88	Feng Pingguan	Essay	The author was a Chinese-American professor of physics.
17	12/88	Hong Jun	Essay	
18	01/89	Zhou Peiyuan	Foreword for Tian's second book	
19	03/89	Sun Yueqi et al*	Essay	This essay was signed by 10 specialists with CPPCC who attended two of the Examination Group meetings.

No	Date	Narrator	Article type	Note
20	04/89	Zhou Peiyuan	Essay	
21	04/89	Chen Zantang	Essay	The author was a Chinese-American engineer.
22	05/89	Shen Jianzhong	Essay	
23	05/89	Ma Dayou	Essay	The author was a member of the Standing Committee of CPPCC.
24	06/89	Wu Baosan	Essay	The author was a CPPCC deputy.
25	11/89	Chen Guojie	Essay	
26	09/90	Sun Yueqi	Essay	
27	11/90	Yang Jike	Essay	The author was biophysicist and member of the Standing Committee of NPC.
28	12/90	Lu Qinkan	Essay	Lu was a hydro-electric expert and one of nine specialists who participated in the TGP feasibility study and refused to sign an approval.
29	02/91	Lin Hua	Essay	The author was a CPPCC delegate and ex-deputy-director of the State Planning Commission.
30	04/91	Qian Weichang	Essay	Qian was the Vice-Chairman of CPPCC.

**Note:** CPPCC: The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference;  
Tian Fang et al.: Also include Lin Fatang and Ling Chunxi;  
Sun Yueqi et al.: Also include Lin Hua, Xu Guangyi, Qiao Penxin (an ex-Vice President of the People's Bank of China), Chen Mingshao (a professor of civil engineering), Luo Xibei (a hydro-electric specialist), Yan Xinghua, Zhao Weigang and Lu Qinkan.

**Appendix IV: Articles in the Book Yangtze, Yangtze**

No	Narrator	Source	Article type	Note
1	Wu Guoguang		Essay	Wu was a journalist with <u>PD</u> and closely connected with the reform camp of the Chinese leadership in 1980's.
2	Zhou Peiyuan*		Letter to CPC leaders	
3	Sun Yueqi et al *		Report to CPC leaders	
4	Lu Xinkan*		Essay	
5	Li Boning		Speech at CPPCC	Li was a Deputy Minister of Water Resource and Electric Power, a strong proponent of TGP. His article was included in the book as a representation of the other side of views.
6	Dai Qing	Li Rui*	Interview	Dai was a journalist with the <u>Guangming Daily</u> in 1989.
7	Qian Gang	Zhou Peiyuan, Lin Hua*	Interview	Qian was a journalist with the <u>Liberation Army Daily</u> .
8	Zhang Aiping	Sun Yueqi*	Interview	Zhang was a journalist with the <u>Guangming Daily</u> .
9	Li Shuxi	Qiao Peixin*	Interview	Li was a <u>Guangming Daily</u> journalist.
10	Fang Xiangming, Li Weizhong	Peng De	Interview	Peng used to be the Deputy-Minister of Transportation. Fang and Li were reporters with the <u>China's Youths Journal</u> .
11	Chen Ying	Wang Xingrang*	Interview	Chen was a journalist with the <u>Workers' Daily</u> .

No	Narrator	Source	Article type	Note
12	Chen Kexiong	Lu Xinkan*	Interview	Chen was a journalist with Shanghai-based <u>Wen Hui Bao</u> .
13	Zhu Jianhong	Hou Xueyu*	Interview	Zhu was <u>PD</u> journalist.
14	Wu Jincai	Luo Xibei*	Interview	Wu was a Xinhua journalist.
15	Gang Jian	Chen Minshao*	Interview	Gang was a <u>Guangming Daily</u> journalist.
16	Zhang Shengyou	Tian Fang, Lin Fatang*	Interview	
17	Yang Lang		Essay	Yang was a journalist with the <u>China's Youths Journal</u> .
18	Qian Jiaju		Essay	Qian was a leading economist and Standing member of CPPCC.
19	Mao Yushi		Essay	Mao was an economist with China's Academy of Social Sciences.
20	Wu Jiaxiang		Essay	Wu was an economist closely connected with the reform camp of the Chinese leadership in 1989.
21	Jiang Hong		Essay	Jiang was an economist.
22	Jing Jun		Essay	Jing was a researcher of sociology with Peking University.

Note: An asterisk (\*) indicates that the person(s) also contributes articles to Qunyan;  
**PD: The People's Daily**;  
**CPPCC: The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference**;  
**CPC: The Communist Party of China.**

**Appendix V: Analysis of Narrators, Sources and Actors  
in the People's Daily Articles  
on Three Gorges Project**

Actors	Number of articles	Sources		Narrators
		Quoted	Mentioned	
Top level leaders	17	6	11	
Provincial & ministerial leaders	4		1	3
Leaders of TGP feasibility study group (including leaders of YVPO and Ministry of Water Resource & Electric Power)	5	2	2	1
Officials in local governments (Counties & townships)	2	1	1	
Specialists & experts in TGP feasibility study	18	2	11	5
Specialists & experts outside TGP feasibility study (including NPC, CPPCC deputies)	10	3	4	3
Specialists overseas	2		2	
Journalists	18			18
General public				
Residents living in the neighbouring regions of the dam	2		2	
Residents in the dam area to be relocated	2	1	1	
<b>Total number of articles</b>				<b>30</b>

**Appendix VI: Analysis of Narrators, Sources and Actors  
in the Qunyan Monthly Articles  
on Three Gorges Project**

Actors	Number of articles	Sources		Narrators
		Quoted	Mentioned	
Top level leaders	11	3	4	4
Provincial & ministerial leaders				
Leaders of TGP feasibility study group (including leaders of YVPO and Ministry of Water Resource & Electric Power)	14	1	12	1
Officials in local governments (Counties & townships)	1		1	
Specialists & experts in TGP feasibility study	26		23	3
Specialists & experts outside TGP feasibility study (including NPC, CPPCC deputies)	25	1	5	19
Specialists overseas	5		2	3
Journalists				
General public				
Residents living in the neighbouring regions of the dam				
Residents in the dam area to be relocated				
<b>Total number of articles</b>				<b>30</b>

**Appendix VII: Analysis of Narrators, Sources and Actors  
in the Articles in Yangtze, Yangtze**

Actors	Number of articles	Sources		Narrators
		Quoted	Mentioned	
Top level leaders	7	5	1	1
Provincial & ministerial leaders	1		1	
Leaders of TGP feasibility study group (including leaders of YVPO and Ministry of Water Resource & Electric Power)	14		13	1
Officials in local governments (Counties & townships)	1		1	
Specialists & experts in TGP feasibility study	18	2	15	1
Specialists & experts outside TGP feasibility study (including NPC, CPPCC deputies)	22	9	7	6
Specialists overseas	5	1	4	
Journalists	14		1	13
General public				
Residents living in the neighbouring regions of the dam				
Residents in the dam area to be relocated				
<b>Total number of articles</b>				<b>22</b>