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A discreet arrival in the economic capital of China

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Displacement From the Three Gorges Region

A discreet arrival in the economic capital of China

Florence PADOVANI

- ¹ "Contemporary population movements have, to a large extend, been a question of water", according to Nancy Green¹. In fact, the vocabulary that describes population movements by referring to ebbs and flows, tides, currents and waves can be literally applied to those persons displaced from the Three Gorges² region. Their fate is bound up with water. Living as they did near the Yangtze or one of its tributaries, the river played a vital role, since it provided them with the water indispensable for daily life and irrigation. It also connected the villages; indeed, as the road network has developed only since the late 1990s, many villages still remain accessible only by boat or on foot along the hillside tracks. Few people now live from fishing, but some still work on the boats that ply the river, and life is organised around it.
- ² Residents primarily affected by the rising waters have been those who had previously benefited the most from the advantages linked to the river, particularly those who worked the most fertile lands and who supplemented their income with a small business carried out around the wharf area. Since the construction of the Three Gorges Dam, a huge reservoir has slowly been formed and the water level has been rising inexorably³. In the process, peasant farmers have been expropriated from their land step by step and with their families they have been relocated according to a plan drawn up by different administrative offices.
- ³ The State Council laid down the guidelines of expropriation, which were subsequently passed on Chongqing municipality as well as Hubei province. The local functionaries were then charged with applying the national directives in the prefectures and townships. The administrative machinery leaves little room for initiative. Yet, the cadres who have to deal with the reality on the ground are often faced with unsolvable dilemmas between the claims of displaced persons and orders from above. They are generally the target of discontent, being accused—rightly or wrongly—of corruption, inefficiency and bad management⁴.

- ⁴ This article presents the situation of the 7,500 migrants who arrived in three successive waves in Shanghai and for whom this city is a mythical place, an unhoisted-for chance to turn the drudgery of their daily existence into an easier life. Yet while cadres sang the praises of Shanghai to the peasants who knew it only from television, very few out of the some two million displaced persons there are happy⁵. Even if there is a discrepancy between the dreamed-of life in Shanghai and its reality, they deem themselves to be fortunate. Some of their neighbours or relatives left for other provinces like Jiangxi, Guangdong or Shandong where the conditions on offer are far from satisfactory. Quite a few of them have returned to the Three Gorges region, unable to get used to their new environment, which is not the case for those resettled in Shanghai.
- ⁵ Several factors contributed to the choice of this research project. On the one hand, that Shanghai was the city to receive these people from the countryside is interesting, for the gap between the glamorous economic capital and the displaced persons arriving from a poor area. On the other hand, the Chinese government has presented Chongming Island, offshore from Shanghai, as a model, an example of a successfully displaced population. Finally, as the three stages of migration were completed by July 2004, some evaluation of them can be made.
- ⁶ For this research, we carried out a study in each of the ten villages where migrants from the Three Gorges region have been resettled. Non-directive interviews were done with some twenty families with whom we had several meetings over the course of three years. Moreover, we went into their home villages and interviewed the members of the families who stayed behind. We also met with certain cadres from Chongming who had overseen the selection and subsequent arrival of the migrants. Additionally, we made use of research completed by Chinese colleagues. As the subject matter is deemed sensitive, much statistical data is inaccessible to foreigners. Thus, we can use only what data is reported, which explains the limited amount of statistics we have been able to refer to.
- ⁷ This article presents the socio-political effects of forced migration to Shanghai by considering the example of a small number of displaced persons. We begin with a description of their initial situation by looking at where they come from and how they were selected. We then examine where they have been settled and how they are adapting to their new environment.

From the mountains of the Three Gorges region to the plains of Shanghai

- ⁸ After a week going down the Yangtze by boat, three successive groups of peasant farmers from the municipality of Chongqing reached Shanghai. The first wave arrived in August 2000, the second in July 2001 and the last in July 2004. As the maximum level of the dam has not yet been reached⁶, remaining families will be displaced at a later date, although none of them will be sent to Shanghai. For the Shanghai authorities, the city's intake of migrants from the Three Gorges region was complete in July 2004.
- ⁹ The new arrivals are from Wanzhou and Yunyang two adjoining prefectures from the municipality of Chongqing⁷. Although neighbours geographically, they have very different levels of economic development. These differences are to be found in the manner in which the displaced behaved after their resettlement. Since the late nineteenth century Wanzhou has been an important port on the Yangtze between Wuhan and Chongqing. This prefecture quickly developed industrial and commercial activities related to the river. It forms part of the development zones (kaifa qu), and in this capacity benefits from financial facilities⁸. Its total area is 3,457 square kilometres.

Before displacement, Wanzhou had a population of about 1.6 million, 217,000 of whom have been resettled either on lands above the flood limit or outside the prefecture. Of the population 75% work in primary industry. The prefecture covers mountainous terrain, the highest point being 1,762 metres. Each year there are victims of numerous landslides that occur in the rainy season.

- ¹⁰ Yunyang had a population of 1.25 million residents prior to the forced migrations. About 120,000 have had to resettle on land above the new watermark, or else leave the prefecture. The overall area of this prefecture is 3,640 square kilometres, two-thirds of which are made up of hills or small mountains (the highest point being 1,809 metres). The prefecture is regarded by the Chinese authorities as being below the poverty line⁹. 90% of Yunyang's workforce is involved in primary industry. The prefecture is all the more affected in that several of the Yangtze's tributaries contribute to the flooding of the best agricultural lands. Finally, Yunyang, already suffering from a lack of arable land, is an annual casualty of the landslides that occur during the rainy season. These are due in part to the clearing of new land on the higher ground. Faced with the increasing rapid development of the dam, some people who had to move to higher ground have been resettled outside the prefecture¹⁰. In Yunyang, as in Wanzhou, the severity of the landslides is alarming. Furthermore, a new administrative category has been created to take account of this situation, that of the "persons displaced owing to landslides" (huapo yimin). The residents affected remain where they are while the bureaucrats make a decision¹¹. They are regarded as a sub-category of migrants from the Three Gorges region. However, as no budget has been allocated, they can only wait for the municipality to receive the necessary funds from the central government.
- ¹¹ The difference between the two prefectures is due to the fact that Wanzhou was throughout its history able to establish itself as a point of contact between the two main trading towns of Chongqing and Wuhan that lie on the middle stretch of the Yangtze. Accordingly, it is at the heart of an important communication network (with new motorways, an airport and port activities). By developing economic and administrative activities, it has been able to modernise, unlike Yunyang.
- ¹² In spite of some important disparities in development between the two prefectures, the populations they have sent to Shanghai are very similar: all of these people used to work the land, which was one of the selection criteria used by the municipality of Shanghai¹². According to the cadres interviewed¹³, these families had to be able to adapt quickly to their new environment.
- ¹³ The Shanghai cadres came to the areas to carry out studies in order to make a final decision. In this regard, the residence certificate (hukou) is of vital importance. Admittedly, it is commonly accepted that this piece of paper no longer has the power it had up until the mid-1980s. However, in cases as important as a change of permanent place of abode, it remains indispensable. Indeed, it is on the basis of this document that the selection was made.
- ¹⁴ The population selected by the municipality of Shanghai satisfied four criteria¹⁴: families¹⁵ having fewer than three children; people without a police record; families whose house and fields were both flooded; the mentally or physically impaired, as well as old people, provided that there are three adults in the prime of life (and holding an agricultural residence licence) capable of providing for their needs.
- ¹⁵ While one may be surprised by the first criterion in a country advocating the one-child family, the second and third criteria do not pose any major problem. This is not the

case with the final point: many elderly and handicapped people have found themselves in impossible situations. Mr Chen, who comes from a village in the prefecture of Wanzhou, moved into a new home in Jiading, a rural district to the north of Shanghai. He lives with his wife, daughter and mother. His brother-in-law is mentally impaired, and he had to choose between bringing either him or his mother. Thinking that he could easily put the situation in order once he had settled in Shanghai, he entrusted his brother-in-law to the care of neighbours (distant relatives). Since his arrival in Jiading in July 2004, he has not stopped making overtures to the various administrations in Shanghai as well as in Wanzhou and even Peking, but all without success.

- 16 Mr Tan, who had a leg amputated during the Cultural Revolution following an accident, continued to cultivate the family hillside plot of land. In 1994, before the residents of his village were informed that they would be affected by the rise in the water level, Mr Tan changed hukou. At that time, as land was in short supply in his village, officials offered to give 10,000 yuan in compensation to anyone who gave up their land to the community. This enabled a redistribution of land in favour of the poorest families. By accepting this transaction, Mr Tan moved into a different administrative category. He is no longer regarded as a peasant farmer, and he now has a non-agricultural licence (fei nongye hukou). Some village residents who found themselves in the same situation have been able to buy back their agricultural worker's certificate by reimbursing the administration, allowing them to leave for Shanghai. Mr Tan has not managed to find the money needed. The remaining family land (his wife's and son's shares), as well as his house, will be flooded by the end of 2006. His wife and son—a migrant worker in Dongguan (Guangdong province)—both have an agricultural licence, but this was not enough for the doors of Shanghai to open for them.
- 17 Another example is that of Mr Wang, aged 50. He has stayed single, no doubt because, without any land, he was too poor to find a wife. His house was destroyed and he has received some small compensation, but there is no question of him dreaming of settling in Shanghai. He is therefore employed as an agricultural worker in a family which provides him with board and lodging.
- 18 A counter example is to be found in the villages along the river where one can see houses clearly above the limit of the rising waters which are in ruin. These once belonged to villagers who managed, thanks to their connections with the officials in charge of the migrations, to be enrolled on the list of those leaving for Shanghai. Those who have remained point to the houses with a certain bitterness, advising that here once lived the cousin of a high-ranking official from Wanzhou, there the brother-in-law of a director, etc. People talk in veiled terms of corruption and injustice, but the whole operation is now finished, and Shanghai no longer accepts migrants from the Three Gorges region.
- 19 There are thus many "non-standard" administrative cases that the local officials will have to deal with before the next rise in the water level. As far as Shanghai is concerned, nothing has been left to chance and the arrival of migrants has been well orchestrated.
- Promoting the "model of successful migration"
- 20 Shanghai is one of the eleven provinces¹⁶ required by the central government to receive displaced persons from the Three Gorges region. Although the representatives from Shanghai voted against the dam project¹⁷, the local authorities had little choice but to accept it once it was adopted.

- 21 Between 2000 and 2004, the new arrivals, whether from Wanzhou or Yunyang, were split among seven rural districts—Songjiang, Jiading, Nanhui, Fengxian, Jinshan, Qingpu and the island of Chongming—all very far from Shanghai's mythical downtown areas. It takes at least two hours by public transport to get from any of them to the Bund. For those living in Chongming, buses crossing the island are few and far between and the boats across the Huangpu are expensive.
- 22 A quarter of the migrants were relocated in Chongming: 639 people in 2000, 540 in 2001 and 300 in 2004, divided equally between those from Wanzhou and Yunyang. The other districts only accepted a single wave each but always with a certain percentage of the two groups. Analysing the situation in Chongming enables an appreciation of the process of adaptation over the course of the past five years. Furthermore, as the island has been decreed “a model of successful migration”, it is all the more interesting to see how it works.
- 23 Chongming is an island situated in the mouth of the Huangpu River. Its area doubled during the course of the past half-century under the effect of the reclaiming of land from the water and the accumulation of alluvial deposits carried by the river. Today, at 1,200 square kilometres, it represents one-fifth of the area covered by Shanghai. It has a population of about 725,000, but a large part of this is non “resident”. Young people, while keeping the benefit of a residence certificate in Chongming, have gone to the city centre in search of work¹⁸. Chongming has been declared a “green zone” by the government bent on protecting the island's ecology (it has, for example, a reserve for migrating birds). The residents of Shanghai readily come to spend a weekend in Chongming, regarded as one of the lungs of the city¹⁹. As there is little industry, the air is less polluted there than in the city centre. Agriculture and fishing are the main activities²⁰. As in quite a number of agricultural regions in China, many young people have gone to the urban zones to look for better-paid work. They have rented out their land to economic migrants who have come mainly from the provinces of Sichuan and Anhui, or have simply abandoned them. When the forced migrants arrived from Chongqing, they received fields that were attributed to them after a redistribution of land. It was therefore indispensable that the displaced people were peasant farmers. Thus two types of migrants are to be found side by side in Chongming alongside a sparse and rather indifferent local population.
- 24 If Chongming has been set up as a model, it is because officials were able to impose drastic selection criteria and because they have made commitments to the displaced populations. At the time of negotiations between the officials from Shanghai and representatives of the populations of Wanzhou and Yunyang, the former undertook several commitments:
- 25 Each holder of a hukou²¹ will benefit from a mu of land (1/15th of a hectare).
- 26 Families will be distributed in groups of two or three among the various villages of the island. They will not be settled more than three kilometres from a school or clinic.
- 27 Residences will all be standardised, single-storey. Only the size (150m², 180m² and 200m²) will differ in relation to the number of occupants, five being the maximum. The cost per square metre is between 285 and 550 yuan.
- 28 A private cement path will lead to the houses.
- 29 For school-aged children, the first two years are free and they will also receive a new bag for school.

- 30 All displaced persons will benefit from free medical services up to 5,000 yuan.
- 31 Retired people will receive the same sum as the inhabitants of Chongming. Those aged 58 years or over will get 20 yuan per month, changing to 75 yuan at age 65. If they have worked in a factory or for the administration, their pension will continue to be managed by the office in charge of migrations in their home prefecture.
- 32 It is undeniable that six of the seven points constitute positive measures for the migrants. The size of the allotment of land is greater than what they had in their home village (on average six fen—10 fen make 1 mu). The proximity of the school and the clinic is also a great change. In the Three Gorges region, it is common for the village children to go to school on foot along small mountain tracks, which takes several hours. Thus, they lodge where the school is and attend classes for ten days at a time before returning home for a day and a half. Since the start of the 2006 school year, school fees have been reduced in the poor regions in the west of China²². The advantage offered by Chongming is therefore now equivalent to what parents would have had if they had stayed where they were. As to the clinic, there is one in the neighbouring townships, but it too is several hours' walk from the villages. In case of any major problem, the hospital is located at the main administrative centre of the prefecture that can be reached by boat or bus, both of which operate one service daily. The private cement path is a real luxury in the countryside where the only access to the houses is via dirt tracks²³. People from Chongming often have only a simple dirt track leading to their homes. The last point, relative to the partial provision of free medical services, is very important. Admittedly, the ceiling of 5,000 yuan is quickly reached in cases requiring hospitalisation, but this is at least a considerable improvement. In the Chinese countryside, there is no medical assistance and medical costs are the primary cause of debt. If the family is not rich enough or if the children cannot assume responsibility for the expenses, the peasant farmers cannot receive treatment.
- 33 All these points undeniably represent some progress for migrants, although the one regarding pensions does present a problem. It is the lack of employment outside the agricultural sector, however, that is the gravest cause for concern. As reported by Chongming bureaucrats, once the houses are built and the migrants settled in after a small welcome party, the file is closed and the operation finished. Here we reach the limit of the Shanghai model, while for the migrants themselves it is just the beginning.
The break-up of the networks of sociability and marginalisation
- 34 In every migratory process, the period of adaptation is a tricky one. The displaced people from the Three Gorges region are experiencing this situation all the more acutely in that there is no possible turning back. Their lands have been flooded and their homes destroyed. Their integration is proving to be difficult for several reasons.
- 35 The allocation of a mu of land constitutes an important step forward, all the more in that unlike Chongming, the terrain is flat and there is therefore no problem for irrigation; nor are there any landslides sweeping everything away during the rainy season. The migrants have to work on new ways of cultivating the land and get used to a new climate, but according to the interviews this does not seem to them to be an insurmountable difficulty. On the other hand, they unanimously say that after allowing for what the family itself consumes, there is practically nothing left to sell, and in any case the vegetables sold at market do not bring in enough to provide for the family's needs. Even if they have more land, the question is how they can live solely from their

- agricultural produce? Finally, everything seems to them much more expensive (for example, electricity, gas, water²⁴).
- 36 Some families have been separated, with certain members remaining in the Three Gorges region and others leaving for various destinations. For the local officials, the fact of putting only a maximum of three families together allows for a better integration into the host society, but this is experienced as a hindrance to the networks of community aid that are so important²⁵. People are isolated from each other and the whole thread of social life is destroyed. There is no longer any community life or religious rituals (especially important for those people from Yunyang²⁶). We were struck during the 2006 New Year festivities in Chongming by the reduced number of guests and the lacklustre atmosphere. Similarly, the people remaining in the villages of Wanzhou complain about the break-up of community networks.
- 37 The standardised houses are also far from enjoying unanimous support, as indicated by the fact that the migrants make alterations everywhere, such as an extension to the house for the kitchen²⁷ or another wing for family... This work is undertaken without official approval, but so far no fines have been levied. Everyone laments the size of their home, which is much smaller than what they had before, and the poor quality of the construction materials. In fact, as they did not receive any direct compensation, they have no rights with regard to the layout of their new environment. The money was given as a single amount to the Chongming officials who had the houses built. A number of migrants complain that officials have taken their cut in the process. When the amount was insufficient, the migrants had to borrow money from the bank (interest free, however). They will pay this off when they can, but there is no mortgage, either on the house or the land.
- 38 While the private pathway marks an improvement, it was paid for by the migrants themselves. In cases where, on their arrival, there was no such access path, they fought to obtain one.
- 39 Free education for children lasts only two years. There have already been cases of children being taken out of school because the parents could not afford the fees. On the whole, these cases are rare for the families interviewed because in general the parents do their utmost for the education of their children. They are aware that, without a good standard of education, it will be difficult for the next generation to integrate.
- 40 As regards pensions, the problem concerns especially those who are waiting for a transfer from the Three Gorges region. Such transfers are notified by mail and some people have to bide their time for several months before they receive their meagre pension. This is the case for Mr Tan and his wife who are reduced to collecting cardboard boxes and plastic wrappings at the end of each day for resale according to their weight. Mr Tan is 80 years old and, like all migrants, including his wife, he has received a mu of land. His wife (75 years old) works the land and leaves in the morning with her husband to make a tour of the neighbouring townships. Mr Tan worked for the administration in his home township for several years; upon retirement, he opened a small shop near the harbour. This provided not a negligible supplement to his income. Now that he is settled in Chongming, his pension does not reach him on a regular basis and he does not have adequate funds to set up a new business. Finding work on the island is no easy matter for migrants who do not understand the local dialect, are isolated and in whose fate the local bureaucrats show no interest. For these marginalised people, joining the workforce is very difficult.

The question of employment

- 41 A job, first and foremost, allows the material survival of the family. It is also an important factor of integration. The responsibility assumed by the various administrations is only one element of the process, as the displaced person is in a passive situation with respect to the institutions deciding for him or her. On the other hand, in the workforce the displaced person must be active, interact with the local population and earn a certain social recognition. Relations are a matter of reciprocity between equals.
- 42 In this, the situation is very different between Chongming and Jiading. Jiading's economy is diversified, unlike that of Chongming which is still defined by agriculture. In contrast to the difficulty in leaving Chongming Island, in Jiading access roads and means of transportation are well developed. Chongming has few industries and the local population itself has trouble finding employment. Moreover, voluntary migrants from Sichuan and Anhui already fill the jobs that the displaced people could have aimed for, working on the very few construction sites that there are, cultivating the fields of local peasant farmers that they rent, or doing jobs in the small ports...There is, moreover, very little in the way of an informal economy in Chongming.
- 43 The contrast is striking with Jiading where no displaced person is cultivating the land. Migrants there have also received one mu each, but they have rented it out to peasant farmers from outside, often from Sichuan or Anhui. They have just kept a small vegetable garden for the production of spices and vegetables that are not grown in Shanghai. The bureaucrats in Jiading have offered work to all the displaced persons. This often means a tiring and uninteresting job, such as construction site labourer, night watchman in a factory, or packer in a warehouse, but those interviewed seem happy enough to have a job at all and a regular salary.
- 44 Mr Tan, aged 45, is a night watchman, a job he found by himself. Officials had offered him work as a packer, but it was too exhausting for him, so he chose to change. He and his wife, who does shift work on the production line of a factory, have been able to put aside some savings. Adding to this the small rent that they receive from the agricultural workers, they decided to increase the size of their house by building a dormitory for their workers and two independent rooms for the couples. Mr Tan did not ask for permission to undertake these extension works. The rooms are rented out for 120 yuan a month and beds in the dorm for 80 yuan. Mr Tan declares himself to be happy with his situation which is much better than that from before.
- 45 Mr Tan's success, like that of his neighbours, is drawing a new influx of migrants from their home village. The majority of these are young men who also come to try their luck in Shanghai. Having a family in the area is of great assistance in finding work. Thus, in October 2005, a young cousin of Mr Tan had just arrived, but steps had already been taken for him, too, to be hired as a night watchman. Of course, the cousin will not be able to obtain a residence permit and so will remain in a precarious situation, but that does not seem to bother him. At 22 years of age, he has already made a tour of China and has decided to try his luck in Jiading, since his uncle is there and he has free accommodation, but he already knows that he will not be staying. According to him, Guangdong province, in particular Dongguan, holds more worthwhile possibilities as well as much more attractive salaries.
- 46 The situation is very different in Chongming. There is no question there of displaced persons renting out their fields and finding a job on the island. They are up against stiff

competition for jobs in their fields of competence with migrants from Sichuan and Anhui who have been settled there for several years. The fact of having a new hukou and being considered by the administration as residents of Shanghai gives them no advantages in finding work. Nor can they gain access to jobs requiring a minimum of higher education in college. Finally, they all complain about communication problems: as each person speaks a different dialect, mutual comprehension is no easy matter²⁸. So, the only way of earning enough to support the family is for one member to leave and find a job off the island. According to the local bureaucrats, the majority of young men aged between 17 and 30 left within the first year. In the homes we visited, we found in particular elderly people, children and couples over the age of 40, a similar situation to that in the rest of rural China. Couples say that once they turn 40 they are too old to compete with the younger ones for jobs requiring physical strength. They can thus be seen wandering about during the day without any particular aim. Those who leave do not look for work in Shanghai, but rather return to the cities where they had previously been employed. For them, being resident in the Three Gorges region or in Chongming does not make much of a difference, since in either case they have to go and earn their living outside in order to support the other members of their family.

- ⁴⁷ Displaced persons run into difficulties in a very competitive environment because they do not have a better level of education that could work in their favour. If we compare the level of the inhabitants of Chongming with that of the migrants, there appear great similarities (Table 1). Many of those from the Three Gorges region have an educational level that is quite low—42.3% have at best finished primary school, as against 32.6 % for the residents of Chongming. In general this concerns those aged over 40. Young people today tend to stay longer in the education system, although the majority do not go beyond secondary, whatever their origin, the figure being 37.4% for migrants from the Three Gorges region and 38.1% for the locals. In fact, they quit studying as soon as it is no longer compulsory. Those who go on to high school are a little more numerous in Chongming, 13.4%, as against 4.6% in the Three Gorges region. The educational level of migrants does not therefore make them competitive in the local job market. On the other hand, those who live in Jiading and who have a comparable level of education are advantaged by the fact that they can take jobs that the locals do not want, keeping for themselves positions which require a higher level of education. Moreover, Jiading is one of those districts undergoing rapid development and many industries are being set up there, with the result that competition for jobs is much less severe.

1. Level of Education in Chongming

	Illiterate	Primary school	Junior secondary	Senior secondary	Higher education
Migrants from the Three Gorges region resettled in Chongming	2%	42.3%	37.4%	4.6%	2.5%
Original population	11.4%	32.6%	38.1%	13.4%	2.3%

Sun Yang et Zhang Yangming, "Sanxiaikuku waiqian yimin tedian yu wenti yanjiu - Shanghai Shi Chongmingxian yu de migrants from the Three Gorges Dam - Regulations concerning emigration to the prefecture of Chongming in

- ⁴⁸ The level of education has a visible impact on the work people do, as shown by Table 2 which draws a comparison between jobs done before and after migration. We can see a reduction in the number of people working in the non-agricultural sector (from 228 to 171), with a parallel clear increase in the number of those with agricultural jobs (154 before and 222 after). People employed in non-agricultural activities had either already

left their home villages to earn their living outside, or become involved in the informal economy, thanks to mutual assistance networks that no longer exist.

2. Activities of Migrants from the Three Gorges Region before and after their Arrival in Chongming

(654 people, 149 families)						
	Agricultural workers	Employees in industry and the service sector	Employed	Children in school	Children not yet in school	Other
Before	154	228	51	142	18	1
After	222	171	52	158	50	1

Sun Yang and Zhang Yanguang, op. cit.

Some successful cases—the experience of a previous migration

- 49 The first thing that migrants arriving in Chongming ask for is a job. Thus, Mr Wang, aged 50, is very insistent. He has worked hard all his life, either in the fields or the factories of Guangdong province. Now settled in Chongming, he is having trouble supporting his family, his wife and his grandson, as his son and daughter-in-law have left. "The government made the decisions, so there isn't much that can be done about it. We didn't choose to leave, but there was no other solution. However, the government now has to take care of us, that's only right. If they [the authorities in Peking] knew what's happening here, they would help us"²⁹. Mr Wang and the other migrants are asking the local authorities to help them find work. They blame them for considering the whole the matter finished once they were unloaded from the boat, without any follow-up to see how they were. They just had to rely on themselves and the goodwill of their neighbours, who often compensate for what was lacking, for example by helping them adapt to their new cultural environment.
- 50 Those who have managed to integrate into their new environment are the ones who had a small amount of capital or who were able to borrow enough money to set up their own businesses. Mr and Mrs Huang, for example, opened a small butcher's shop. Neither of them had any experience of this line of work, both worked in the main administrative centre of the prefecture of Wanzhou. She was a waitress in a restaurant before setting up her own canteen, while he worked on construction sites before helping his wife. On arriving in Chongming, they opened a small restaurant but without success, so they tried their luck as butchers and their perseverance was rewarded. Another successful example is the case of Mr Zhang who was an interior decorator for more than seven years in Zhuhai, a Special Economic Zone located on the border with Macao. He had his own business, but had to sell it and go back to his village to be a part of the group of migrants sent to Chongming. He immediately noticed that interior decoration was not a lucrative market, as the island does not have enough potential clients for this type of business. He therefore chose to start a piggery and today owns about fifty. In answer to the question whether he misses his business in Zhuhai, he says that life is different, and he has fewer worries as a boss. He can now live rather comfortably from the piggeries. Furthermore, his close family—his father, his two brothers and a sister—have joined him in Chongming. His son has gone to work in Zhuhai and he and his wife raise their grandson.
- 51 We could cite other examples of couples who are successfully integrating by finding work, thanks to their own initiative. On the other hand, those who have a wait-and-see attitude have trouble surviving. Everyone we interviewed had had a more or less long experience as an economic migrant which enabled them to take advantage of the experience they had gained outside the village. Those who had never left their village

- have much more trouble getting used to the new situation. They are often afraid to take the initiative and rely on the good will of the local bureaucrats.
- 52 In spite of these difficulties, they all consider it a chance for them to be in Shanghai. Parents put their hopes in the education of their children. As often happens in the case of immigrants, the second generation carries the expectations of the first, and school is the most important factor for successful integration. While the young people interviewed say that they remain a group apart and more easily take part in the activities of other migrant children, they are nonetheless adapting to the new pace of learning. They also complain that some teachers use the local dialect and not Mandarin, which puts them at a disadvantage. Their teachers consider their level of education to be lower than that of the children from Chongming, but that does not present any major obstacle to following the classes. Their weak point is English because they began to learn it only in early high school, whereas in Chongming children start in primary. They all have catch-up classes at weekends. At home, they continue to use the Chongqing dialect, but at school they speak Mandarin riddled with expressions in Chongming dialect. While the situation remains difficult for the parents, there is reason to believe that within a short time the children will be integrated into their new environment.
- 53 The three waves of migrants to Shanghai from the Three Gorges came about, admittedly, through a decision over which the individuals concerned had no control, but it also received their tacit consent. On the one hand, the central government did not leave them any choice as to the destination, but on the other, the mirage of economic development in Shanghai could only be an attraction. Going to settle in Shanghai was much more enticing than a new life in a poor province. Those who left for Shanghai therefore consider themselves the privileged ones. While the situation on their arrival was very different from the one they had imagined, some have had better fortune than others.
- 54 One of the fundamental principles adopted by the Chinese government, following the recommendations of the World Bank³⁰, is that displaced people have to obtain a higher standard of living than the one they formerly had. Such resettlements must allow those concerned, often living in very humble circumstances, to escape poverty. For the migrants moved to Shanghai, the results are mixed. On Chongming Island what has been achieved remains below declared expectations. The island that was so lavishly promoted by the authorities turned out to be an environment that is unfavourable to the new arrivals.
- 55 In many respects, their material situation has improved. They have running water, electricity, a bathroom and toilets. They also have ready access to health services and education. Nonetheless, all these elements are not sufficient to create an environment that is conducive to their integration³¹. Several non-material factors are holding back harmonious integration, such as the break-up of mutual assistance networks, the problems in communication with locals and the difficulty of finding a non-agricultural job. The Chongming migrants are for the most part still going through the adaptation phase. On the other hand, those who were relocated to other rural districts such as Jiading have seen their income increase and their economic situation improve. We can talk today of assimilation as far as the Jiading migrants are concerned, with access to employment being the main factor in this integration.

⁵⁶ Chongming represents for the authorities a model, as both the preparation for and the actual process of the relocation of those concerned have been carried out smoothly. The quota fixed by the central government has been filled and everyone settled in Shanghai has been given land, so one could say that the contract has been fulfilled. The fact that the operation is regarded as a success makes one think that the resettlements in other areas have taken place under very bad conditions. Once the action of the local administration is carried out, it is up to the migrants to be inventive and find new ways of providing for their needs. As in the case of the resettlements of people previously undertaken, there is no post-migration follow-up. Yet, this is surely the most traumatic phase for those people finding themselves in an unfamiliar environment. Not only did they not have any possibility to say what they thought before the authorities took a decision concerning them, but they are also without any means to have their voices heard after the fact. The situations highlighted in this article may admittedly appear limited with regard to the two million people who have been displaced in the wake of the Three Gorges Dam project, but it does give some insight into the constraints and the issues at hand, as well as the hopes raised by the resettlements. In any event, it clearly appears that, irrespective of the conditions on offer, Shanghai exerts an extremely strong pull on all migrants and gives rise to hopes for the future of the younger generation.

⁵⁷ Translated from the French original by Peter Brown

NOTES

1. Nancy Green, *Repenser les migrations* (Rethinking Migrations), Paris, PUF, 2002, p. 1.
 2. For a study of the dam's history, see Thierry Sanjuan and Rémi Berreau, "Le barrage des Trois Gorges – entre pouvoir d'Etat, gigantisme technique et incidences régionales" (The Three Gorges Dam – between State power, large scale technological projects and regional impact), *Hérodote*, No. 102, 2001, pp. 19-56, and Florence Padovani, "Les effets sociopolitiques des migrations forcées en Chine liées aux grands travaux hydrauliques – l'exemple du barrage des Trois Gorges" (The socio-political effects of forced migrations in China related to major hydraulic works projects – the example of the Three Gorges Dam), *Les Etudes du CERI*, No. 103, April 2004.
 3. The maximum level will only be reached in 2008, which means that the last people to be displaced will be evacuated more than thirteen years after the first wave of forced migration, which took place on May 28th 1995.
 4. This makes them all the more worried when a foreign researcher arrives in their district to undertake a study.
 5. The official figure, which has been upwardly revised several times since the start of works in 1992, is one million. See, for example, the official website in English of the Three Gorges region (www.3g.gov.cn/english/index.asp). International NGOs, like Probe International, put forward the figure of two million (www.threegorgesprobe.org). It will be impossible to know the exact figure as long as the migration process is not complete.
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6. There is a four-stage plan for migrations related to the gradual rise of the water level: 1993-1997, 1998-2003, 2004-2006 and 2007-2009. According to the declarations of some national leaders, the final stage should be less significant, and the whole operation should be completed by 2008.

7. Since March 1997, Chongqing has been separated from the province of Sichuan and raised to the rank of autonomous municipality, to be like Peking, Tianjin and Shanghai. However, it is over-sized, since it covers an area of 82,000 sq. km and has 32.5 million inhabitants. By way of comparison, Peking has an area of 16,800 sq. km for a population of 13.8 million, Tianjin 11,300 sq. km for 10.4 million inhabitants and Shanghai 6,340 sq. km for a population of 13.2 million.

8. In order to attract Chinese and foreign firms, the government of Wanzhou offers tax exemptions, loans at preferential rates, land, etc.

9. Less than 635 yuan a year. By comparison, the World Bank norm is 7.5 US dollars a day.

10. In 2001, a regulation was adopted on the Three Gorges dam, article 25 of which stipulates that it is formally forbidden to settle or cultivate lands on gradients of 25% or more (*Changjiang sanxia gongcheng jianshe tiaoli*). This has forced the local leaders to organise the displacement outside of the prefecture of a greater number of people than anticipated, but without any increase in budget.

11. According to the people interviewed in the area, the phenomenon is growing and the ground seems to have become more unstable on account of the rising waters.

12. To my knowledge, the government of Shanghai is the only one to have been able to introduce such drastic selection criteria.

13. Interviews with the Chongqing cadres in charge of the migrations (May 2005).

14. Liu Zhongqi, Xie Jie, Qiu Jue, Li Zhenya, 'Sanxia nongcun waiqian yimin de shiying yu ronghe – dui Shanghai Chongming Sanxia yimin de ruogan diaocha yu sicao' (Adaptation and assimilation of peasant farmers displaced from the Three Gorges region – study and analysis of a certain number of migrants from the Three Gorges region settled in Chongqing), *Xibei renkou*, No. 6, 2004, pp. 16-19.

15. We are talking here of the nuclear family, that is, a couple and their children. A family in the broader sense (several generations or clan) is not taken into account by the officials, a fact that undermines the networks of mutual assistance among families.

16. This concerns the provinces of Hubei, Sichuan, Anhui, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shanghai, Shandong, Hainan, Hunan, Jiangxi, Fujian and Guangdong.

17. In April 1992, at the Fifth Plenary Session of the Seventh Congress, the project for the construction of the Three Gorges dam was adopted by 1,767 votes in favour, with 177 against and 644 abstentions.

18. Many taxi drivers (especially from the Dazhong company) come from Chongming.

19. The island is also known by people in Shanghai for its "May 5th schools" where certain young people were sent for re-education during the Cultural Revolution. One can still see dilapidated buildings in which agricultural workers from other provinces are currently living.

20. It is planned that the agricultural part of the World Fair, to be held in Shanghai in 2010, will be organised on Chongming Island.

21. That is, only adults receive land, minors are not concerned.

22. School fees are the full responsibility of the government. As the children are housed on the spot, the related expenses are constant. This is a considerable outlay for poor families.

23. This is a foolproof means for the investigator to locate the homes of displaced persons.
24. In the villages of Wanzhou, the cooking is done in a great oven heated by wood that is collected from the nearby hills. As for water, either there is a well or people get it from the river; in both cases it is free.
25. According to Mr Wang, in charge of displaced people in the north-west of the island, the bureaucrats also wanted to avoid families staying together and making demands, as has happened in some other provinces. Having already had this experience, the bureaucrats wanted to have the migrants blend in as much as possible with the rest of the population.
26. See the article by Katiana Le Mentec, "The Three Gorges Dam Project. Religious Practices and Heritage Conservation", *China Perspectives*, No. 65, May-June 2006, pp. 2-13.
27. The kitchen must be a separate space. What, in the beginning, had been conceived by the authorities as a kitchen was converted into a bedroom or store room and an annex, even a makeshift one, was often built next to the house.
28. The migrants from the Three Gorges region speak a dialect close to Sichuanese, whereas the inhabitants of Chongming use a form of Shanghai Chinese. They both try to understand each other by using Mandarin, but with very strong accents communication and understanding is difficult.
29. Interview in Chongming, February 2005.
30. See Michael M. Cernea, "Risks, Safeguards, and Reconstruction: A Model For Population Displacement and Resettlement", in Michael M. Cernea and Christopher McDowell (eds.), *Risks and Reconstruction: Experiences of Resettlers and Refugees*, Washington, D.C., The World Bank, 2000, pp. 11-55.
31. Integration into a new community implies a deliberate policy on the part of the government. Adaptation is the response of the migrant, and integration is achieved through social life, particularly through work. The final stage in this process can be integration, which involves relations with the locals on an equal footing.

RÉSUMÉS

The Three Gorges dam project has caused the displacement of many people. Among them, three identified groups have arrived in Shanghai. Originally from rural areas in the municipality of Chongqing, they have all been settled on the outskirts of the city, where they have been given a home and land. This article considers those who have arrived on Chongming Island. It highlights, through their situation, the problems that these forced migrants are having to face, and the limits of the government's planning when many new plans for relocating people, both in urban and rural areas, are being developed in China.