

Table: Summary of the arguments in favor of and against the dam

Issue	Criticism	Defense
Cost	The dam will far exceed the official cost estimate, and the investment will be unrecoverable as cheaper power sources become available and lure away ratepayers.	The dam is within budget, and updating the transmission grid will increase demand for its electricity and allow the dam to pay for itself.
Resettlement	Relocated people are worse off than before and their human rights are being violated.	15 million people downstream will be better off due to electricity and flood control.
Environment	Water pollution and deforestation will increase, the coastline will be eroded and the altered ecosystem will further endanger many species.	Hydroelectric power is cleaner than coal burning and safer than nuclear plants, and steps will be taken to protect the environment.
Local culture and natural beauty	The reservoir will flood many historical sites and ruin the legendary scenery of the gorges and the local tourism industry.	Many historical relics are being moved, and the scenery will not change that much.
Navigation	Heavy siltation will clog ports within a few years and negate improvements to navigation.	Shipping will become faster, cheaper and safer as the rapid waters are tamed and ship locks are installed.
Power generation	Technological advancements have made hydrodams obsolete, and a decentralized energy market will allow ratepayers to switch to cheaper, cleaner power supplies.	The alternatives are not viable yet and there is a huge potential demand for the relatively cheap hydroelectricity.
Flood control	Siltation will decrease flood storage capacity, the dam will not prevent floods on tributaries, and more effective flood control solutions are available.	The huge flood storage capacity will lessen the frequency of major floods. The risk that the dam will increase flooding is remote.

Political motives

Given the evidence that the dam may not achieve its stated aims and may in fact cause irreparable damages, many critics wonder why the Chinese government continues the project. Their conclusion seems to be that the primary motive is political. The dam would be the world's largest hydroelectric dam, which would confer prestige on China and confirm its technological prowess and the superiority of socialism.

The dam seems to have been shepherded along by hardliners, who would presumably have their power reinforced by the completion of the dam. Bureaucratic and regional politics may also play a role as agencies in charge of building the dam or provinces believe that they will benefit from the dam and outmaneuver their opponents. Corruption may be involved as well. But whatever the reason, the project seems to have generated its own momentum, and the further along it gets, the harder it would be to stop.

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