The Politics of Water:
Power and Place in a Reservoir Migrant Community in South China

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how people maintain, change, make, and remake their relations with certain places in a long process of displacement. Based on the life experiences of the reservoir relocatees who live in or pass through Xingang, the major pier of Xinfengjiang Reservoir in south China, it offers a historical and ethnographic description of how the displaced people make place in Xingang, which has been closely linked to the ever-changing politics of water in recent decades: from dam construction to water transportation, to eco-tourism, and to water supply schemes.

This dissertation suggests that questions on memory and movement are central in understanding place-making in Xingang. By portraying the various strategies the reservoir relocatees play with memory and movement, in their effort to make place under constraints and exclusions in a continuous process of displacement, I argue that by keeping distance of both the past (submerged memory) and fixed relations (fluid community), they gain flexibility and power to respond to the ever-changing state ideology.

In addition, this dissertation examines how social relations and identities at various intersecting levels are influenced by displacement with a particular angle of the mobility of people under the reality of rural-urban division in post-reform China, and calls for a new direction in Chinese studies to focus on the places in between: those that are not urban nor rural, but awkwardly both.
DECLARATION

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores place and people: it is about how people maintain, change, make, and remake their relations with places in a long process of displacement. Through the life experiences of displaced reservoir relocatees who live in or pass through Xingang, the major pier of the Xinfengjiang Reservoir in the northeast Guangdong Province in southern China, I try to understand what place means for the displaced people and how displacement constitutes their identities under the background of China’s rapid and dynamic development in recent decades. Since early twentieth century, the so-called development-induced-displacement has created millions of displaced populations around the world (Cernea & McDowell 2000, p. 2). In China, development projects, including water supply infrastructures (dams, reservoirs, and irrigation), displaced more than 40 million people in the last 50 years (ibid.). As we can see, a great amount of people continue to be displaced in contemporary China because the state needs to clear its way in marching into modernity: massive land is being taken for new urban development and renewal projects and to build dams, mines, water pipelines, roads, and railways. Although the conflicts and violence in the process of the displacement have never stopped being a hotspot in media reports in the past two decades, the life experiences of those displaced have hardly been studied. In an effort to understand what place and displacement means to the displaced and how certain meanings related to identity and belonging are produced and strategically used in everyday practices of place making, this thesis analyses the process of dislocation of the reservoir migrants in Xingang, the continuous resettlements they have gone through, and the making of place in Xingang. Through this analysis, I hope to show that the experience of
displacement extends beyond personal feelings but is closely linked to the local and regional political, economic, and social dynamics; and might have a more long-lasting influence than the state is willing to address. Also, movements of culture and people on a worldwide scale (what David Harvey described as a “time-space compression” and what others have formulated in the language of globalization or transnational process) have increasingly been of central significance to anthropology (Harvey 1989, Massey 1991, Tsing 2001), I hope this research provides a case in point to understand movement, exclusion, belonging, and identity in a general way.

I begin the discussion with a brief introduction of Xingang and my fieldwork experiences at the place that led me to focus on issues such as movements, connections, and water projects in my attempts to understand the relation between people and place.

Xingang

Regional Setting of Fieldwork

Xingang Town lies on the southeastern edge of the Xinfengjiang Reservoir, which is about 6 kilometres west of Heyuan City, Guangdong Province. Guangdong is located in southern China and joins the Jiangxi and Hunan provinces to the north; Fujian Province is to the east, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is to the west, and the island province of Hainan is to the south, across the Qiongzhou Strait (see Maps 1, 2, and 3). In maps of Guangdong, Heyuan is a city located in the northeastern part, about 200 km from Guangzhou, the provincial seat.

Heyuan, which literally means ‘the origins of water’, was so named because the East River that flows around the place was previously known as Headwaters
Stream (heyuan shui河源水) (Liu 1975[975], 1715). As a prefecture-level city, Heyuan now covers one urban district and five counties in an area of 15,800 square kilometres with a population of 2.95 million,\(^1\) namely Yuancheng District, Dongyuan County, Heping County, Longchuan County, Zijin County, and Lianping County. The municipality is situated in the Yuancheng District (Map 3). Being a major city along the East River, before the gradual development of overland transportation in recent decades, Heyuan had long been pivotal in the transportation network in the area’s history. Shipping on the East River was once the most important mode of transport for eastern and northern Guangdong cities.

Guangdong’s growth revived in the early 1980s under China’s national economic reform and Open Door policy. Since then, Guangdong has been one of the fastest growing regions in China, with its GDP increased from RMB 18.585 billion in 1979 to RMB 5.27 trillion in 2011, growing by a factor of 285 in 32 years. As the primary destination of the international-invested factories, the Pearl River Delta (PRD) of Guangdong became known as the ‘world factory’, and for many years, it accounted for over 80% of the province’s productivity and has always remained Guangdong’s most economically important region.\(^2\)

Compared with the massive urban development and industrialization of the PRD, the northern and eastern parts of Guangdong, within which Heyuan is located, have been largely ignored in the economic boom of the province.\(^3\) Therefore, Heyuan launched its tourism industry to stimulate the economic development of the city in the 1990s. In 1995 the Xinfengjiang reservoir was developed into a tourism site, which was renamed the Evergreen Lake (wan liu hu万绿湖). Of the more than 10 promoted tourism sites in Heyuan, the Evergreen Lake, receiving over nine hundred
thousand tourists per year, has been the most successful in attracting tourists and has contributed to over 50% of the city’s entire tourism income. Xingang, where the touristic pier of the Evergreen Lake is located, has thus become a tourist site.

Xingang has served as a transportation centre for passengers and freighted goods for the inner-reservoir people since the Xinfengjiang Hydropower Station was established in 1958 (Map 4). Before the damming, this place was just a rest stop in the middle of a hill. Except for the trained band settling at the watchtower and two tea stalls serving the travelers passing by, it was rather desolate and uninhabited. Through years of development, Xingang has become a township, a stark difference from the desolate hill land it once was. The latest census in 2010 recorded 5,026 residents and 1,062 locally registered households in the town.4

First Encounter

I knew almost nothing about Xingang when I decided to visit the place during the Easter Holiday in 2001. Although I grew up in Heyuan City, which is merely six kilometers away from the town, I had only been to Xingang once before, when a relative invited my parents to have dinner there. To most Heyuan people like me, Xingang usually means a tourist attraction due to its hydropower station and reservoir. When Heyuan people talk about Xingang, they mostly refer to the food (especially reservoir fish) or the reservoir or tourism, but seldom do they mention the reservoir immigrants. Therefore, when I visited Xingang on that trip, I did not expect to encounter a community of reservoir migrants there.

As I described in my M.Phil thesis (Ou 2003), when I was beginning to carry out my research in Xingang, I brought an assumption, which I had learned from ethnographies on Chinese villages in anthropology class, that I need to first find the
centre of the place under study, which could be a temple, an ancestral hall, or even a tree. However, when I arrived at Xingang, I found nothing. There were no temples or ancestral halls. I did not find any building acting as a communication centre, nor could I find any societies there. This was a community without a public gathering space, such as park, tea house, or even a book store; except for several dairy stores, I could only see restaurants and shops selling local products to tourists. That was my first impression of Xingang. Even from my personal experiences, I could not find another village or community like Xingang in Heyuan. While doing my fieldwork there during 2001 and 2002, for more than six months, I never encountered religious rituals, weddings, funerals, or other ceremonies that are usually discussed in ethnographies on China. In addition, the Xingang people have as many as 92 different surnames (Xinfengjiang Forestry Bureau Compilation Group [XFBCG], 1993, p. 74); hardly any kinship relationship is a dominant factor in the community. Some key informants of mine, which I thought might be important people in the community, such as the retired Party secretary, also proved to have much less influence on village affairs than I had expected; for instance, people regarded the retired secretary primarily as the man in charge of the water supply and not as a community leader. They had so little interest in town affairs that, when I asked them who the town mayor was, few people could give me an answer.

Although the Xingang people are all reservoir migrants, this does not necessarily mean that they have developed strong bonds with each other or that they have close relationships with other community members. Instead, this community is organized very loosely: daily life revolves around the family unit. People have little interaction with their neighbours. I remember that, when I first told Jiang, one of my
main informants, that I was going to live in the town for a period of time, he was surprised. But what puzzled me more was that he did not know where my host’s house was. I had taken for granted that my host, Mr. Gu, who was the father of the acting town mayor at that time, would be known by most people in town. But Jiang did not know where Gu lived, even though Gu’s house was not far from his store. To him, Gu was a person he had no interaction with. He did not know who the acting mayor was, nor did he have any interest in knowing. It seems to me that people in Xingang have not tried to unite themselves into an organized collective. Instead, they communicate with each other on a rather superficial level.

This first fieldwork experience in Xingang proved to be an unpleasant one. I sensed apathy, mistrust, and distance from the community. Often, people would just watch me walking down the street but refuse to talk with me. The community’s lack of distinct social organization, its lack of collective identities, and its lack of remembering the past (unlike other ‘typical’ or ‘ideal’ traditional villages) confused me for a long time and almost caused me to give up this project. Nonetheless, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and archival materials gradually helped me learn more about the society, and I tried to focus on ‘the absent’ rather than avoid them. I suggest that this kind of community, which lacks the social historical basis needed to develop a collective social memory, responds to the state projects by means of personal social networks and in terms of personal interests, which are largely based on shattered personal memories (Ou, 2003).

Re-entering Xingang

After almost ten years, in 2010, I got a second chance to visit Xingang as an anthropology researcher. Although I had carried out fieldwork in Xingang once
before, knowing how sensitive the topic of reservoir migrants would be in local politics and how hard it was in Xingang to broaden the network of informants without any help, this time I did not go straight to the field but through a top-down route before the fieldwork began. I went to the provincial city (Guangzhou) first to visit Sun Yat-sen University, where I had studied and worked before. I was planning to obtain an official introduction letter from Sun Yat-sen University, which I could take to the local authority in Heyuan. In the introduction letter, I was not only a research student from abroad but also a visiting researcher at the university, a credential that the local authority would accept. Once my primary identity was a visiting fellow from a domestic university, the sensitivity of ‘foreign relationship’ would be less prominent and I therefore had more freedom to attend different activities in the field site.

With the introduction letter, I went to government of Dongyuan County in the summer of 2010, to gain approval to conduct research in Xingang town. After a brief talk of the purpose of my research, the county official added a red stamp on the introduction letter, assuring official support from the county. He then rang the mayor of Xingang town and asked him to assist me with my work. I was then introduced to the mayor on the phone and learned that he promised that the township government would assist me with my research needs.

Although I had received verbal approval from the mayor, I knew that a researcher is not always welcomed by the local government. Indeed, local officials were often very suspicious and wondered whether a researcher from outside would have any ‘hidden agenda’ because they did not want to risk their job by allowing a stranger to expose anything that would cause problems. Many topics would be hard
to broach because the local government might make it difficult to talk to key actors regarding certain issues.

The next morning, Mayor Chen picked me up in Heyuan City and drove me to Xingang’s government office, which was about 15 minutes away. When he introduced me to the town’s party secretary, the most important role in the township government, I was surprised to discover that he was the son of my former host, Mr. Gu. Gu’s son was the acting town mayor during my first visit, but he lived in Heyuan city, so I did not know him well, nor did I have much interactions with the local government then. Still, he was surprised and happy to see me again and to learn that I was still interested in conducting research in Xingang—but he sadly told me that his father had passed away. Secretary Gu helped very much in reestablishing my old network and later setting up the new one in Xingang, partly because he regarded me as an old friend of his family. Gaining the support from Party Secretary Gu could be crucial to the process of the fieldwork; at least, these relationshiops would very much mitigate the local government’s interference.

Later that day, I asked for their recommendation for a new host. The mayor insisted that the government building would be the best and safest place for me to settle down. It seems to me that they did not take the idea of my living at Xingang seriously because they themselves did not live there but instead went back to Heyuan City every day. No one seemed to want to stay in Xingang. At their insistence, I had to take an office in the government while trying to find a suitable host by myself. In the following months (September 2010 to January 2011), I lived in the city of Heyuan and traveled by the mini-bus, which transported the government staff every day between Heyuan and Xingang. It was very close—just a 15-minute-ride—but I
made friends with the government staff during the ride. I heard their stories and complaints and answered their questions about me, especially about life in the UK. I was also quite involved in the government activities in the first few months. They offered official statistical data for me, invited me to attend the field trips to the countryside (xiaxiang 下乡), drove me to some remote areas around the reservoir to show me the big picture, and introduced me to the local leaders in different villages. It was quite an unexpected way for me to be familiar with the governments and their staff and to have the stories by the other side (as opposed to the villagers’ point of view).

As for the local community, I was also quite surprised that I entered it smoothly this time, compared with my experiences in 2001. Although several of my old informants had passed away, their family members were very hospitable to me. I was like an old friend of theirs who returned to town after a long absence. This time, people welcomed me to visit them; or at least, they did not refuse to talk with me. No one stared at me with cold eyes any more. I thought of two reasons for this unexpected change. First, many local people respect the title of a ‘doctor’ (boshi 博士). They were very proud of hosting a ‘doctor’, even though I had not yet graduated. Some told me that I was the first boshi they had ever become friends with in their lifetime. They were curious and asked many questions about my family and life abroad. Second, and more important, I had proved to them that I was not a government spy. In my first visit in 2001, many suspected that I had been sent by the government. But after all these years, they saw that I hadn’t done anything to hurt them and, therefore, I had earned their trust. Still, I could sense that, for certain people, my close relationship with the staff of the town government raised some
doubts and mistrust. Nevertheless, I was able to get in touch with many more people this time, and most of them treated me as a friend.

After living in the city of Heyuan for several months, I moved into the community in February 2011, before the lunar New Year holiday, and stayed there until July. I lived in a four-level, cement-structure house located in the centre of the community. On the ground floor of the house, there was a dairy store run by my new host. My new host, Aunt Tao, was living in the house with her husband and one of her daughters, Jing. She has four daughters in total, three of whom are married and had moved to Heyuan, although they often come back to see her. Her husband is actually another member of the Gu family, the younger brother of the Party Secretary Gu. But since he gambles all the time in Heyuan and seldom comes back home, he doesn’t have a good relationship with aunt Tao. And the other family members tend to ignore his exist. I lived in this house and helped out in the store when I had time. This is one of the best places I could find in the community to conduct research, since various people and information come in the store through different ways. Tao is in her late forties and has been lived in Xingang for over 30 years since she got married. She has a good relationship with people of the community and is willing to share with me stories of the old days when we were sitting in the store.

Look back to my fieldwork experiences, I should note here that, although I might be categorized as a ‘native anthropologist’ for I come from the same area and speak the same dialect with the Xingang people, my obviously different experiences of two fieldworks are suggesting that this could not just been explained by the origin of the researcher. As Kirin Narayan (1993) strongly asked, ‘How ‘native’ is a native anthropologist?’ I agree with her that the ‘The loci along which we are aligned with
or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux’ and, therefore, that we should focus on ‘the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views, and dilemmas—people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise?’ (Narayan 1993, p. 671-672). The Xingang people are never only my ‘informants’ who provide me with fieldwork materials; they study me as well and choose what information they are ready to share with me. In a community like Xingang, which lacks of solid social structure and collective identities, it is not easy to trace the fragmentations of the local society and to understand the fluid, partial, and dynamic connections and separations that occurred there. It might not be possible for just anyone to conduct research at such a place. Therefore, I regard my background to be a resource rather than hindrance to research. Being a heyuan ren (Heyuan people) who has been studied in Hong Kong and is studying in the UK allowed me a good inside–outside position, an ability to ‘relate to’ as well as to ‘reflect’, in Yael Navaro-Yashin’s (2012) terms (p. xii).

In the next section, I return to the theoretical discussion of place and displacement.

Place and Displacement

The word place seems to speak for itself. A place is any point, building, or area. But it is far more than just that. Humanistic geographer Yi-fu Tuan (2001[1977]) linked space to movement and place and to pauses in his work. He
reminded us that, *place* is the ‘stop along the way’ (p. 6). His description of the relationships between space and place is informative:

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. . . . The ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.

Therefore, when meaning has been attached to space in some way, it becomes a place. Tim Cresswell (2004) elaborated on this point and treated place as a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world:

When we look at the world as a world of places . . . we see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experiences. . . . To think of an area of the world as a rich and complicated interplay of people and the environment—as a place—is to free us from thinking of it as facts and figures. (p. 11)

Seamon (1980) also saw place as a central concept, but instead of looking only at place itself, he emphasized people’s everyday practices and suggested that bodily mobility rather than rootedness or authenticity was the key to understanding place. For him, it is through everyday practice that we get to know and feel a place.

But one then might ask, what are the constraints on everyday practice in places? Freedom and constraints become the main focus of researchers influenced by structuration theory. Structuration theory tries to conceive the relations between social structure and human agency by concluding that our actions are determined neither completely by structures nor totally by free will, but a balance between the two. For example, Allan Pred argued for a notion of place that is developed through
the interaction of structure and agency—places are never ‘finished’ but always ‘becoming’ (Pred, 1984, p. 279). Michel de Certeau, in his inspiring work, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (de Certeau, 1984), pointed out that the provided structures of certain place could be manoeuvred by people’s everyday practice, which are not predetermined.

The work of Seamon, Pred, and de Certeau, among others, shows us how place is sensed and performed through social practice rather than rooted in notions of the authentic. But researchers influenced by Marxism, feminism, and poststructuralism later challenged their view of place as an idea and a concept and claimed that place was a social construct (that is, they did not view place as natural but as a product of society and culture). These later scholars engaged places as socially constructed and focused on how these constructions are founded on acts of exclusion. Lefebvre (1991) showed that we cannot treat space simply as a neutral container for people, events, and social institutions. He urged us to instead think of space as an ongoing social production of spatial structures and conceptions as well as bodily incorporations of space. Harvey also argued that places don’t just exist: ‘Place, in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct’ (Harvey 1996, p. 261). He pointed out that the threat to place brought by globalization actually makes place more important because people start to value their own place:

Those who reside in a place...become acutely aware that they are in competition with other places for highly mobile capital... Residents worry about what package they can offer which will bring development while satisfying their own wants and needs. People in places therefore try to differentiate their place from other places and become more competitive (and perhaps antagonistic and exclusionary with respect to each other) in order to capture or retain capital investment. (Harvey 1996, p. 298).
Therefore, Harvey contented that the politics of place could be quite exclusionary; that is, one group of people use place against another group of people.

In contrast, Doreen Massey (1991) thought of place in a more open way, hinting place as an inclusive site of social life. She suggested a ‘global sense of place’, which considers how places are constructed by outside objects and processes. She questioned the anxiety provoked by globalization, such as Harvey’s view above, and regarded that as a result of seeing the global circulation only according to capitalism. Massey uses the term *power-geometry* to describe how complicated people’s movements are related to various forms of power (not only power related to capital). In her definition, *place* is not unique to distance itself from other places but constitutes the ever-changing elements of the outside world. In brief, a place is a ‘meeting place’ where a particular ‘constellation of social relations’ comes together (Massey 1991, p.28).

Harvey and Massey’s approaches led them to different theorisations of place. I largely agree with Massey; but in my opinion, her approach needs a more grounded, ethnographic observation. What seems missing here is the local residents’ ideologies about place, who use their own ideas of *place* to invent and define the place they are living in.

Anthropologists make ‘ethnographic inquiry into cultural constructions of geographical realities’ (Feld and Basso, 1996, p. 53). In *Senses of Place* (Feld and Basso 1996), many attentions have been drawn to the instability of place-making and the way places are differently marked and bounded by the people who refer to and live in them. To such anthropologists place is a meaningful and complex experience and senses of place are precarious. Anthropological place, as Marc Augé (1995) put
it, ‘is a principle of meaning for the people who live in it’, as well as ‘a principle of intelligibility for the person who observes it’ (Augé 1995, p.42). Augé argued that the facts of ‘supermodernity’ point to a need to rethink the notion of place: ‘if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place’ (p. 63). With the term non-place, Augé is referring to sites marked by mobility and travel, such as the airports and freeways. If conventionally figured place assumes boundaries and traditions, non-places demand new mobile ways of thinking. Gupta and Ferguson (1997b) and others have pointed out that, mixed populations with different homing references living on the same territory but crossing it through different landmarks and resorts that they consider to be their own. In other words, people are never alone with their places and never constitute them as places entirely on their own.

China has not been discussed very much in recent anthropological analyses of place and space. Feuchtwang’s (2004) edited book, Making Place: State Projects, Globalisation and Local Responses in China, offers us the chance of observing on the question of a distinct perspective drawn from the history and anthropology of a large society that is not western. The studies in the book engaged with history and China’s own path to modernisation and showed the readers that globalisation does not inevitably cause ‘detroitotalisation’, instead, there are various ways ‘in which place is re-made out of such emptying in the service of state and capitalist projects’ (p.1). Feuchtwang’s definition of place is open, but with a centre. He defined placemaking as ‘the centring and marking of a place by the actions and constructions of people tracing salient parts of their daily lives as a homing point in their trajectories’
In sum, the chapters in the book broadened the comprehension of place and space by introducing the ‘historical Chinese gestures of movement and layering’, ‘the intense embrace of capitalist-style development in China,’ and ‘the emergent forms of cultural and local reclamation’ (p. 195).

Within the literature of Chinese studies (though not directly engaged in the literature of place), many researchers use demographic, historical and ethnographic data to explain unity and diversity in the cultural patterns and identities of late imperial and modern China, linking localities with institutions beyond (Fei & Chang, 1946; Hsu, 1967; Freedman, 1958; Ward, 1995; Skinner, 1964-1965; Wolf, 1974; Watson, 1985; Faure & Siu, 1995; Crossley, Siu, & Sutton, 2006; Shepherd, 1993).

For example, Oakes and Schein (2006) used the word translocal to highlight a simultaneous analytical focus on mobilities and localities. Translocality, they argued, ‘draws our attention to the multiplying forms of mobility in China without losing sight of the importance of localities in people’s lives’ (p. 1). The authors treated space not as a passive repository of social content but as a series of material and symbolic forces that interact with regional histories, livelihoods, subjectivities, and political contestations.

Studies on contemporary China put a special focus on the urban-rural division in place-making. For example, Zhang (2010) focused on the complex dynamism and contingencies in the spatial restructuring of Chinese society and subjectivity in today’s urban China. Zhang used the concept of the ‘spatialization of class’ to explore how wealthy individuals are now able to converge in residential communities and cultivate distinctive ‘life-worlds’. ‘Such emerging places,’ she says, ‘offer a tangible location for a new class to materialize itself through spatial exclusion,
cultural differentiation, and lifestyle practices’ (p. 3). However, Siu (2011) doubts that. She asked, ‘Would such civic activism lead to new and sustainable class consciousness and trigger fundamental structural changes in power relationships? Or is today’s urban revolution a process of ‘state involution?’ (Siu, 2011, p. 9). According to Siu’s research, despite an upsurge of new freedoms and mobility, several decades of market reform in China have not eased the overwhelming power of the state (national or local). She regarded that the class identities of urbanites and villagers at urban edges actually reinforce the Maoist structures that have long locked them in their restricted positions.

Anthropological research on other post-socialist places has also paid attention to this kind of ‘rural–urban’ spacial division and its entanglement with the state. For example, Harms (2011) introduced and exercised the binary structure of Vietnamese society to demonstrate how districts such as Hóc Môn and their residents blur the lines between rural and urban, traditional and modern, inside and outside, and wealthy and poor, at the same time playing into and reinforcing these binaries in their everyday lives. His work described an in-between status of people who are desperately seeking the benefits of urban transformation, but also cherishing for an often romanticized old world; and also an in-between of a place, which is ‘neither country nor city but uncomfortably both’ (p.238).

Harms did explain why he chose to support a explanatory model of binary oppositions to discuss Vietnam’s binary framework (a binary spatial and temporal idioms for imagining the world as a set of rural versus urban and inside versus outside oppositions), despite its limitations—he argues that it is his responsibility as an anthropologist to accurately convey to the reader the usage of language in creating
Vietnamese society and to explain the persistence of Vietnam’s binary framework. It is true that ‘to dismiss these binaries as false would be to ignore a fundamental element of the social landscape’ and ‘they [binaries] do something’ (p. 226), but instead of using a binary scheme to explain binaries, one could have asked why the binary framework remains active in current Vietnam. Do they have any other possible way to look at this place? If not, why are they so single-minded?

Also, Harms discussed the way that people in different social and historical contexts move between Ho Chi Minh City (urban) and Hoch Môn (rural), that is, as if these places were two fixed endpoints. This makes me think, does Hoch Môn, as a place, only establish its meaning in relation to Ho Chi Minh City? Have any other spacial social connections and links formed and functioned here? This brings me to the connections and links I am going to explore in Xingang, which place this thesis is about.

Over the years I spent conducting fieldwork in Xingang (2001–2002, 2010–2011), I spent most of my time around the pier. It is there I saw people coming and going: daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly. Initially, when I began fieldwork in Xingang, I shared the idea of treating this place as a fixity, while focusing on the movements of the people. Based on my previous research at Xingang (Ou, 2003), I had some knowledge about how people in Xingang retain somewhat shallow relationships with each other. Looking inward at the community to find a single centre did not seem to be possible in Xingang. Inspired by Feuchtwang (2004) that what constitutes a centre could be of huge varieties and centres could be mobile and multiple, when I was conducting fieldwork in Xingang again in 2010, I decided to ask questions beyond the area itself. I took Xingang as a starting point and tried to
follow the different outward movements: Xingang to Heyuan, Xingang to the reservoir, Xingang to Xinfeng, Xingang to Hong Kong, and so forth. I wanted to trace the flows of people, things, and meanings and to map the movements in and out, without singling out Xingang from these flows and routes.

But over time, I realized that my map might be a little different from that of the relocatees. Although Xingang is definitely in the centre of my map, it might not be the centre in theirs. I realized this when I followed the Xiao lineage to worship their ancestral grave in the inner reservoir area in 2009. The clan council of Xiao hired five ships to transport them to the place where their ancestral grave is located. Each year, members of Xiao clan came from everywhere to gather in the pier of Xingang. But for most of them, Xingang is just a place to pass by, a pier where they board the ship. For some of them, Xingang was also a place they lived once, but ultimately it was just a stepping stone for moving to a better place. They lived in Xingang before, but Xingang was not their home—their homeland is where the ancestral grave is located. And for Xiao Jun, an officer in Xingang township government who invited me to join their worship, Xingang is just a workplace. He lives in Heyuan City with his family but goes to Xingang everyday for work. As I spent more time in Xingang, I gradually discovered that, during the last decade, many families I knew have left Xingang and many new families have moved in. There are also families who moved out from Xingang to Heyuan several years ago but recently moved back. People come and go. I started to realize that Xingang might be a centre, which forms many connections and links, but it is not the only one; there are other centres as well, such as the ancestral grave of the Xiao clan. And there is no starting point: relations form and separate and then recombine again. It is a
process, not an end. It was not until sometime later, after I read Marilyn Strathern’s work, that I came to realize that this pattern is ‘partial connections’ in Strathern’s terms; that is, everything is partially connected, once it is recognized that multiple perspectives are possible, and therefore there are no stable centres (Strathern, 1991, p. xx).

This thesis explores those ‘connections’ in the long process of displacement of the reservoir migrants living in Xingang. I used the stories that people told me, as well as data from archival materials and ethnographic participation, to show different processes of connections and separations. I argue that, in this case, questions on memory and movement are central in understanding place-making in Xingang. I will discuss in part I (Water and Power) how the Xingang people evoke strategic use of remembering and forgetting to realize some kind of flexibility in response to the ever-changing conditions they were facing. By movement, I mean the routes of people, things, and meanings in and out of Xingang, which I explore in part II (Flows and Connections) and Part III (Water and Place). Before I further elaborate on this point in the chapters following, the next section provides a general background to understand the reservoir migrants’ community in a larger context in China’s path to modernity.

Reservoir and Reservoir Relocatees in China

The use of large-scale reservoirs to generate electricity is an established feature of central planning in the People’s Republic of China (Greer, 1979; Jing, 1989; Smil, 1984; Tian & Lin, 1986). The number of reservoir construction developments is striking. In 1949, the country had no more than 40 small hydropower stations and only a handful of large-scale reservoirs that exceeded a
hundred million cubic meters. According to *Bulletin of First National Census for Water* (Ministry of Water Resources and National Bureau of Statistics, China 2013, p. 3), by the end of 2011, the state had succeeded in building over 46,758 hydrostations and 97,246 reservoirs on behalf of hydroelectricity, irrigation, and flood control. The construction of these reservoirs has created large resettlement populations all over the country. After years of damming the country’s major rivers and their tributaries, over 25 million people in China today are what the government calls ‘reservoir relocatees’ (*shuiku yimi* 水库移民), including over 4 million people who were forced to relocate for the construction of the world’s largest hydroelectric project, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River (Li, Waley, & Rees, 2001; Jing, 1997; Gleick, 2008). However, as a consequence of the loss of means of production (especially farmland) and low compensation, reservoir relocatees were considerably poorer afterwards and worse off than their neighbours who were not moved, and most of them remained mired in poverty (Zhang & Shi 1998; Tian & Lin, 1986; Dai, 1998; Ying, 2001; Jing 1996, 1997).

Dam construction for electricity supply has been popular all over the world for the past several decades. Attention has been paid to the long-term consequences of the construction of large dams all around the world ever since the 1970s (Scudder, 1973; Ackerman, 1973; Greer, 1979; Oliver-Smith & Hansen, 1982; McCully, 1996; Oliver-Smith, 2009, 2010; Diaz-Briquets & Jorge, 2000). However, studies on large dams in China have been rare for a long time, partly because of the political sensitiveness of talking about dam displacement in China. In 1992, a magazine in Beijing was shut down for publishing an article discussing the government’s crackdown on the reservoir migrant protestors. In recent years, many studies on the
Three Gorges project have been published (Water Conservancy Committee of Yangtze River, 1997; Li, 1992; Huang, 1998; Wei, 1999) and a new kind of reservoir resettlement, called ‘development resettlement’ (kaifa xing yimin 开发型移民) has been explored (Li, 1992; Huang, 1998). However, the life experiences of the reservoir relocatees over the past several decades have not yet been brought to the public’s attention.8

Jing Jun’s book The Temple of Memories: History, Power and Morality in a Chinese Village (1996) studies a community of reservoir migrants in Gansu Province in northwest China, whose village was flooded by a huge socialist reservoir project in 1961. This book, focusing on the rebuilding of a local Confucius temple in the village of Dachuan, reveals how the historical memories helped the Kong people to reconstruct their social authority in the village after the Confucius temple, together with the whole village, was submerged by the hydropower station construction. In another paper, he further points out that the collective memory movement of the reservoir migrants has served the migrants’ demands of ‘repossession’ to gain back what they had lost in the damming (Jing, 1999).

Ying (2001) is one of the first studies published in Chinese on this topic. Focusing on a reservoir migrant’s community in the Yangtze River, Ying provides a most vivid scene of the interactions between the government and the local people in the process of ‘appealing to the higher authorities for help’ (shangfang 上访). However, this book was banned by the government soon after coming off the press.

Common in these two studies, reservoir relocatees’ using their collective memories of the past to appeal, to protest, and to repossess is the most significant element. However, what is different and valuable about the Xingang case is that the
memory of these relocatees seemed to be submerged with their village too. There was no memorial movement in Xingang; people did not like to talk about the evacuation and relocation; and as a consequence of this, younger generations in Xingang did not know the history of the eldership’s. In addition to that, compared with the collective memorial movement in the two reservoir relocatees’ communities studied by Jing and Ying respectively, Xingang has a rather aloof social organization for its lack of collective activities. By comparing with these two studies, this thesis analyses the political and social struggles surrounding the construction and exploitation of the Xinfengjiang Reservoir, from electric power generation in the 1960s, to ecotourism project in the 1990s, and to drinking-water supply scheme currently. I explore how the reservoir relocatees in Xingang conceptualized and negotiated changes in both landscape and community against the backdrop of sociopolitical transformations and examine how the villagers face the dramatic changes in the reform era with a legacy of the Maoist revolution. As many studies of dam-related displacement are journalistic (Li, 1992; Luk & Whitney, 1993; Dai, 1998; Huang, 1998; Li, Waley, & Rees, 2001; Heggelund, 2004) or emphasizing heroic struggles of united villagers against the state (Lin, 2007a, 2007b; Litzinger, 2007; Chan & Zhou, 2008), in this project I bring a historical and ethnographic perspective to villagers’ experiences of shifting relations to nature and community, and provide a historically grounded and culturally embedded view that takes into account the historical formation of places and identities.

**Thesis Structure**

This thesis is going to tell the stories of the displaced people in Xingang. I spent lots of the time at Xingang to participate, observe and record their daily life. I
collected archival materials from the Archives in Heyuan and Guangzhou respectively, as well as conducting documentary research in the issue of water supply in Hong Kong. The history of Heyuan, Xinfeng, and the neighbouring areas is researched through local gazetteers (difang zhi) in Qing Dynasty and new local gazetter (xin fang zhi) compiled in the 1990s. In addition, old maps collected in the Provincial Archives of Guangdong Province are used to reconstruct the local history. The official archives of Guangdong Province also help to understand the state and provincial government’s policies and consideration on the construction of Xinfengjiang reservoir and the resettlement after 1958. Government files of Heyuan County and Heyuan CCP Committee on the resettlement affairs in the Heyuan Archives reveal the local resettlement policy. Local archival documents of Heyuan and Huizhou, which were collected from the Heyuan Archives and Huizhou Archives during 2000 to 2001, fill the blank of the life condition of the reservoir relocates in post-relocation period which they are most reluctant to recall. Together with in-depth interview data gathered in my fieldwork in Xingang, these sources form the basis to analyze local residents’ past life experiences.

Since the construction of the Xinfengjiang hydropower station in 1958, the fate of the reservoir relocatees in Xingang has been closely linked to the ever-changing state ideologies and policies on water: from dam construction in the Mao era, to water transportation in the Deng era, to eco-tourism project from 1990s, and to clean water supply scheme recently. Through their life experiences, their daily practices and their fantasies about future, I discuss displacement and emplacement, mobility and immobility, connectivity and exclusion, by analysing specific place-making practices in detail. In the context of Chinese studies, through the material of
Xingang, I also tend to show ‘how ordinary people attached to an entrenched socialist order are forced to come to terms with market insecurities and fragments of their own historical baggage’ (Siu, 2006). Paul Farmer once warned that ‘Anthropological inquiry often starts with current events and the ethnographically visible. When we study the social impact of a hydroelectric dam, of terrorism, or of a new epidemic, we run a great eliding risk. Without a historically deep and geographically broad analysis, . . . we risk seeing only the residue of meaning’ (Farmer, 2004, p. 309). Following this call, the history of the relocatees serves in this thesis less as background and more as a frame to show how different state ideology and policy continue to form significances for my ethnographic subject, and how they struggle to achieve their life and aspirations.

I divide the discussions into three parts. Part I (Water and Power) is about those relocatees who have lived through the displacements and how they are constituted by their displacement; Part II (Flows and Connections) explores place-making in Xingang and how the movements in and out of Xingang makes Xingang a place of connections; Part III (Water and Place) continues to discuss the place-making process through two water projects, to show how new opportunities are pursued, boundaries remade and enclosures reinforced with desperation and ambivalence in state development projects.

Chapters 2 and 3 form part I (Water and Power). I aim to understand what displacement means to the displaced—how it is experienced, both for those who experienced the relocation (the older generation) and who did not experience the relocation by themselves (the younger generation). Through a constant relocation process in twenty years, the relocatees felt repeatedly let down by the state. They
regard themselves as ‘abandoned people’. I suggest it is from this repeatedly let
down that the trust of the relocatees to the state had lost and a sense of betrayal, of
being left behind by the state, has generated. I argue that displacement thus not only
means dislocation for them, a sense of ‘misplaced’ could be strongly felt at the same
time. But in the meanwhile, they also see themselves could never be ‘properly placed’
because they believe the land where they belong to has been submerged. So no
matter where they are, they are always being displaced and at the same time,
misplaced.

Chapter 3 turned attention to the younger generation who did not experience
the relocation, especially those who were born in Xingang, and the knowledge
transmission between two generations. I found ‘forgetting’ in the place but not the
‘remembering’. However, it is not forgotten, but rather not wishing to remember. I
use the term ‘submerged memory’ to describe a condition differ from ‘forgotten’. I
argue that they evoke strategic ignorance to realize some kind of flexibility in
response to the ever-changing and power rendering state power.

Part II (Flows and Connections) examines how social relations and identities
at various intersecting levels are influenced by displacement. Chapter 4 shows the
struggle to make a place in Xingang, a place ‘which makes action meaningful
through shared understandings and a shared interpretation of action’ (Xenos, 1996, p.
243). But again, the Xingang people do not develop a deep rooted relationship within
the community or with the place, to keep their flexibility in response to the ever-
changing and ruthless state policy.

Chapter 4 examines this ambivalent sense of the place through movements.
By looking at different movements in and out Xingang and different routines in
everyday practice, I tend to understand the ambiguous sense of place and the
ambivalent identities of the Xingang people. Following Marilyn Strathern’s
insightful theory on ‘partial connections’ (1991), I argue that Xingang could be
regarded as ‘a place of connections’. Connections developed, established here; and
separated, divided here. In other words, place-making is a process but not a product
in Xingang.

Hence, different kinds of movements need to be explored to understand this
place. But not to forget, there are different powers that can affect the mobility or
immobility of the people, which is the same power that can make the place visible or
invisible. Part III (Water and Place) demonstrates this point by inquiring into two
water projects, the eco-tourism project (chapter 6) and the clean water supply scheme
(chapter 7), to show that while the reservoir had apparently become increasingly
visible, Xingang had become increasingly invisible, having been cutting off all paths
related to both development projects. Through examination on the social conditions
that have shaped the relocatees’ responses to contemporary environmental and water
issues, this part shows how the local people’s ‘submerged memory’ of the submerged
community helps or hinders people’s participation in today’s water projects.

Looking at the changes in life and in place in Xingang during the past several
decades, one finds that ‘things changed, but remain the same,’ as Green (2005)
showed in her research on the Balkans. After several decades, their displacement is
still ongoing. The connections, the separations, the divisions, and the recombinations,
both with people and with place, were different but also the same. In Green’s (2005)
words, ‘it was the ambiguous sameness that made the difference, not the differences,
as it were’ (p. 14, emphasis original). Displaced or emplaced, mobility or immobility,
they are increasingly ‘prisoners in the context-producing activities of the nation-state’ in Appadurai’s (1996) sense. But what I am going to portrait is the various strategies they play with memory and movement, in their effort to make place under constraints and exclusions in a continuous process of displacement. And this gets me back to how they are constituted by their displacement, which I am going to discuss in the first part. Let me begin the story from 2011, when I was carrying out my fieldwork in Xingang.
Part I Water and Power
CHAPTER 2 ABANDONED PEOPLE

One sunny afternoon in March 2011 at Xingang, I was chatting with several women porters outside a store near the ferry pier. The conversation suddenly went to the Great East Japan Earthquake, which had just happened not long before, as Mei asked me, ‘Donghong, do you believe the prediction saying that the year of 2012 would become the end of the world? The horrible disaster just reminds me that maybe we are not too far away from the end, the end of the world. What would happen next?’ All the others laughed, as if it is the most naive question to ask. But at the same time, they showed great interest on it. Not even expecting my answer to it, they started saying that if the end of the world is coming and a disaster would destroy the world, they would pretty much prefer the dyke of the Reservoir to be broken first, so that the huge amount of water would flood ‘the lower reaches’: the Heyuan city and the PRD cities, where, in their impression, the rich and powerful people live, especially many corrupted government officials. They giggled, ‘wouldn’t it be nice to let those people die before we do?’

They all knew that was a joke; but even talking about the possibility of an imagined disaster made them smile and pleased. I can remember their joyful faces vividly until this moment of writing. Jing (1996) suggests the memories of the past sufferings could contain highly explosive energies: ‘memories of suffering can be grounded in internal contexts that beget revenge’ (p. 167). While in Jing’s research, the accumulated energy of personal grievances and collective frustrations in Dachuan was unleashed against an ultimate symbol of the Maoist era – the former Party boss, here in Xingang, people blame the government officials who represent the ruthless
state. But what this fantasy of ‘revenge’ also expresses is that, for these women porters, experiences of uprooted and displaced have been associated with an image of ‘disaster’. The awful trauma like the Great East Japan Earthquake links them with the grief of the past immediately and evokes the feeling of revenge. Their smiles remind me so deeply about their sufferings.

As I later discovered, in fact, they all have terrible experiences with earthquakes. Xinfengjiang Reservoir has triggered China’s largest and most famous reservoir-induced seismic (RIS) event (a 6.1 magnitude earthquake) in 1962 which had even slightly cracked the dam. It is the earliest RIS recorded in China and one of the four examples of RIS worldwide with a magnitude greater than 6.0 (Chen 2000; Ding 1989). Since then, small and medium earthquakes occurred from time to time until recently. Grandma Li once recalled that, in the year of 1962 when the quake took place, it was so horrible that all the houses in the village were destroyed and at least three villagers she knew were dead. ‘We dared not go back to our houses and had to sleep in the open for several nights’. To the reservoir relocatees, the mention of earthquake is surely a reminder of how the terror and pain have been inscribed into an abruptly changed landscape.

Returning to the conversation: after talking about the flooding of the lower reaches and the ‘evil’ government officials, Mei added, ‘What’s more, when the water has gone and the land dried out, maybe I could go back to my home place, to check that if our old house would still be there. I bet it would. What an amazing thing! Donghong, you should write about the world underneath. It is much more interesting than the boring life here in Xingang’. Another woman agreed and said that if her family still owned the houses and the farm land in the submerged area, she
would never end up by making a poor living on porterage: ‘We lost everything. My empty hands are all I have left’.

According to my field notes, this is one of the few moments when the Xingang people expressed resentment on the hard life they had experienced after being displaced without my asking. Usually they would not talk about it unless I ask, because ‘it is bitter and no fun’. But apparently, the disaster happened in Japan had evoked their memories about those personally experienced earthquakes and a nostalgia about the submerged home. How did they perceive the change of the landscape after the reservoir was constructed at their home place? How did they struggle to recover from being uprooted from the home place? Why do they keep distance of a past that is still lingering in their current life? To answer these questions, this chapter explores the process of dislocation in the social and political context that generates it. Trying to understand their condition of being uprooted from the homeland and displaced in a completely different environment, I ask how the displacement affected the relations between people and place, and the social power relations played in this process.

Over the past years, much work has been done asking the hidden political agenda of water and water circulation (Allan 2000; Selby 2003; Swyngedouw 2004; Mehta 2005; Castro 2006). These works suggest that transformation of hydrological cycle at different scales are closely linked to political, economic, and social and cultural relations, and that water issues should be explored as a combined physical and social process. Following this approach, in this chapter, I discuss how the natural environment in China was reconstructed through political processes in the Maoist era and how the displacement of the reservoir relocatees was entangled with this process.
Through archival materials and Xingang residents’ personal experiences, I try to understand what displacement means to the displaced people in Xingang, regarding how it is experienced and how it is perceived. I unveil that displacement does not only mean dislocation for Xingang residents, but a sense of ‘misplaced’ is strongly felt at the same time. Echoing Helen Siu’s call that we should not equate displacement with physical mobility (2007), I suggest that during the constant displacement process which the Xingang people had experienced, it is not the movements that displace anything, but instead it is ‘cultural and political incarceration’ (in Siu’s term) that defines the condition of displacement.

**Losing Home**

Xinfeng River (*xinfeng jiang 新丰江*) is the main tributary of the East River (*dongjiang 东江*), which originates from Xinfeng, from west to south, flowing into the East River at Heyuan. To meet the national industrial development, under the reconnaissance of the Ministry of Water Resources, it was decided in 1956 that a hydropower station to be constructed in the Xinfeng River area, west of Heyuan city. Lai, in his twenties when the evacuation begun, recalls an episode during a conversation:

In 1955, when the measurement started, we know this thing [the construction of the reservoir]. However, many began to speculate that the water in Xingfeng River would not come up, so we might not have to leave. Some elderly people had refused to go until they saw the flooding. I remembered that even the flooding started, one grandma in our village still refused to leave her house though her children and her granddaughter urged her to. She said, no worries. But you know, once the water come up, it’s impossible to stay! You have to listen to the government!
Except the reluctance to leave home, what I have been told again and again in Xingang is that, in the Maoist era, against the government is not an option. They had to do what the state told them to do. ‘What’s more, it is correct to fulfill the interest of the majority of people, and to sacrifice ours (the minority)’. An old man in Xingang once assured me. It seems that Mao’s legacy is still lingering in a post-socialist current and affects the way how the displaced people perceive their past as well as their contemporary conditions.

**Human Can Conquer Nature**

Water control has always been an important issue in China. The importance in Chinese history of the problem of controlling the Yellow River and the Yangtze River is quite well studied in the field of policy studies and environment studies (to name a few: Elvin 2004; Elvin and Liu 1998; Dodgen 2001; Economy 2010). To tame the water and control the flood is one of the most important criteria for Chinese rulers. Even though been criticized by many researchers such like Joseph Needham, the word ‘hydraulic civilizations’ coined by Karl A. Wittfogel (1957) to describe civilizations whose agriculture was dependent upon large-scale waterworks for irrigation and flood control did bring out the importance of water control in societies like China. In Maoist era, not only water, nature was seen as the enemy to be conquered. One of Mao’s famous slogans is: ‘To struggle against the heavens is endless joy, to struggle against the earth is endless joy, to struggle against people is endless joy. (yu tian dou, qi le wuqiong; yu di dou, qi le wuqiong; yu ren dou, qi le wuqiong 与天斗，其乐无穷；与地斗，其乐无穷；与人斗，其乐无穷)’ Throughout the Maoist era, people were mass-mobilized to bend the will of nature to meet the needs of the people.
As Žižek points out: ‘It is essential to the realization of socialism to depart from the past and the periphery, and moving to a new historical condition was to revolt against the past. Things had to be destroyed, and an often specified number of enemies had to be killed’ (Žižek 1999:40). Mao was anxious to push China from an agrarian society to an industrialized country, and he insisted that based on the laws of historical materialism, everything serves for the revolution: timbers must to be cut to make steel, mountains had to be cleared to transform into cultivable fields, and rivers had to change their natural paths to provide electricity and irrigation. Not only hydraulic projects but also other activities such as steel-making campaign (dalian gangtie 大炼钢铁), ‘fill the lake into farmland’ campaign (tianhu zaotian yundong 填湖造田运动), and ‘change the barren mountain into fertile land’ campaign (rang huangshan bian liangtian yundong 让荒山变良田运动) were Mao’s ‘war’ to transform the physical world to suit human.11

On the other hand, ‘human’ in the dominant role, is treated as the most valuable element in the world. Manpower and willpower can overcome scientific truths to attain an ideal society (Shapiro 2001, p67). Mao believed that ‘many hands make light work’ (renduo liliang da 人多力量大); and it is human beings that can create miracles, and, for that matter, everything. Therefore, only the masses could develop China, through the power of their will and their obeisance to the state.

Thus, controlling floods and hydropower by constructing large dams is not only crucial to solving the agriculture problem and to promoting industrialization, but also to the process of mass mobilization of the state after 1949. Shapiro rightly points out that ‘abuse of people and abuse of nature are often interrelated’ (Shapiro 2001, p. xiv). The large-scale projects, based on the state’s ideas of ‘change the
heaven and remake the earth’ (*gaitian huandi* 改天换地) and ‘man can conquer nature’ (*rending shengtian* 人定胜天), were not only projects aimed at controlling nature, but also projects that set out to ‘conquer’ human beings in terms of mobilizing the masses to make sacrifice for the state.

Mobilizing people into campaigns to smooth land and eliminate vermin, among other things, the landscape of China was reshaped in just a few years. Both nature and the people were destroyed; the strained relationship between human and nature became worse. The expansion of the population in the late 1960s forced people to clear the forest on the frontier to create more living space. Finally, misguided policy, land abuse and class struggle led to the Great Famine of 1958-1962, which was responsible for tens of millions deaths.\(^1^2\) People in Xingang, like others in the state, experienced this lesson through coercion, terror and violence. Only what made it more misery was the fact that the construction of the reservoir started at the same time, which means they lost their home land during a nation-wide great famine.

*The Resettlement*

The construction of the Xinfengjiang Hydropower Station was started in May 1958 and at the rapid pace to which the Great Leap Forward was aspiring, it was able to generate electricity by August 1960. During this 15-month-long period, not only was the construction completed, but also over 120,000 people had been evacuated from this region. These evacuated people are mainly from three different counties: of the 107,870 people in Heyuan County, 8,433 people in Xinfeng County and 3,696 people in Lianping County (Map 4). Take Heyuan County for example, there were altogether 12 big villages (*xiang* 乡), 289 small villages (*cun* 村) and 9 local markets
that were submerged (XFBCG 1993, p179). These migrants were relocated to other villages in Heyuan, as well as villages in neighboring counties in Huiyang and Shaoguan.

Although it was tough for the relocatees, the local officials called people to conquer nature and overcome their difficulties. Human beings were regarded as being the most powerful, as in the propagandas, for they could conquer difficulties in adapting a new environment or exploiting a barren field. The officials urged people to move out and clean the submerged area at a rapid pace, finishing the evacuation of over one hundred thousand migrants in only one year under the principle of ‘move out first’. However, thousands upon thousands of migrants found themselves without a place to settle down after relocation; and to make matters worse, they were always facing a remote place with lean soil in the resettlement arrangement, which reflecting the idea that ‘man can conquer nature,’ fundamentally encouraging Mao’s mentality on ‘opening up the wasteland’.

As Lai, one of the relocatees from Xichang, recalls, ‘It only took two months to clear up the reservoir area. Pigs and chicken and other portable things, you can bring them with you. But for the houses, they remained under the water. Just leave everything there – once the water comes up, everything disappeared’. He continues, ‘The local leaders came to mobilize us. They made clear arrangement plans: there is arable farmland in the new settlement, and also money for transportation. But money is assigned to the collective, not to the person. We built the collective housing together and distributed later. Because of time constraints, many moved in to the new settlement place when the houses were still not completed. What is worse, the
compensation money was not enough: not every family could get a house to move in’.

Huang, the retired Party secretary of Diaolou Residents’ Committee in Xingang, shared with me, though hesitatingly and little by little, his resettlement stories through our many conversations in his spacious house with a cool yard. He was born on 1949, the same year that the People’s Republic of China established. When the reservoir started to construct in 1958, he was 9 years old. ‘I only went to Grade two in primary school. We lost our opportunities to go to school because of the evacuation. Life as being a reservoir relocatee is very difficult.’ He sighed. He is from Xichang market, where the whole town had been submerged by the flood in 1958, included his family house, the ancestral house, and the ancestral hall.

There were totally eight members in my family then. We moved out only when we saw the water was coming up. I remembered clearly that at the time, water had come above our front door when we were about to leave. When the water came, all things submerged, and all of the things disappeared. The Family house and the ancestral house were flooded. So was our ancestral hall. [Donghong: Regrets?] No personal thinking. It’s all by government arrangements.

As to the resettlement plan, it was called ‘bolish the old houses first, and then build the new houses’ (xian chai wu zai jian wu 先拆屋，再建屋). This was carried out by different groups at the same time. One group of people stayed in Xichang to blow down the houses, while another group of people were sent to Puqian, the resettlement place, to build the new ones. It was not conducted on a household basis but collectively: the commune as a whole. For the purpose of mobilization, some houses had already been built in Puqian by the winter of 1957; but after our arrival, it turned out that we were not to settle down there. Instead, we were told to go much northern. I gave all my portable properties to relatives in Puqian and went to the north on empty hands. Your personal things, if they are gone then they are gone. No one thought that personal interest values then. Since our own homes had
been demolished by the state, we get to live in local people’s houses along
the way, by authorization of the local governments: at that time, everything
was collectized and owned by the state; therefore we had every right to do
that (living in other people’s houses). Under Mao’s leadership, who dares to
resist! No way. The state needs your place, you must make place for it.

The construction of new houses was also carried through based on the ‘man
can conquer nature’ principle. A document released by the Heyuan county
government says:

Work hard for 100 days to complete the construction of houses for reservoir
relocatees by the end of this year. ...We have created many new precedents
in house building. As we know, few people could have built their house in
the rainy season of spring ever since ancient times; we are promoting the
adventurous (ganshuo ganzuo 敢说敢做) spirit of communism, exploding the
superstition of building new houses in the rainy season.13

We can see clearly in this document, human being’s creativity has been put in so
high a statue that the natural rule of avoiding house construction in the rainy season
could be totally ignored. The houses built in this way proved not endurable and they
deteriorated quickly. It was this way at managing the resettlement, which greatly
underestimating the difficulties reservoir migrants would encounter in a new natural
environment as a consequence of overestimating human being’s capabilities, that
resulted in a series of problems whose impact was felt even in the subsequent
decades.
Promises and Loss

Grand Promises

The difficulties for the people to make ends meet for many years after resettlement form a sharp contrast with the government’s lofty promise to the relocatees that their anticipated problems of making a living in the post-relocation period would only be temporary and they would quickly enjoy a better life as a result of the country’s overall economic development. A document, which local Party cadres used as a guideline to mobilize people, says:

There are six major benefits we can gain after the hydropower station is constructed: power generation, flood control, irrigation, fishery, shipping, and assistance to develop industry.

1. Power generation. ... [The construction of the hydropower station] will be the beginning of our eternal happy life. Once we have electricity, the dream of electrification, mechanization, and building a new country will come true. When that time comes, we can break away from burden of manual labor and enjoy the advantages of modernization.

... 

6. Assistance to develop industry. If we have electricity, we can build new factories, manufacturing many new things. We will be able to change stone to fertilizer, and change stone to clothes. After we have the hydropower station, we can have sugar-refineries, paper mills, wineries, cement plants, iron and steel factories, and synthetic fibre factories.  

Recalling these promises, an elderly man in Xingang said, ‘The officials from the Relocation Bureau said if we evacuated our village, it would take no time before we could be just like city folks, living in two-storey buildings installed with electric lights and telephones and having rice to stuff our stomachs and tap water to drink at
any time’. This account conforms many of the oral stories I recorded in Xingang about the government’s promises of a future of modernity and abundance, which for a brief time was extremely appealing to village cadres and local youngsters. After all, this was the first time that the central and provincial governments had given these Heyuan villagers so much attention, with promises of dream-like improvements to their life. They have been told: ‘The nationally renowned Xinfengjiang Reservoir is built in our County. That is a great honor’.

However, the submerged area was a grain production centre prior to the damming and had provided 40% of the grain needed for the whole of Heyuan County (Resettlement Office of Heyuan [ROH] 1996: 10). It was a heavy burden for the local people to see their rich fields being submerged, not to mention their ancestral homes. There were some who did not want to make the sacrifice. Hence the local government was convincing people of a splendid future:

These people [who did not want to move] have not realized that the interests of our relocatees from the reservoir did not contrast with what the construction of the hydropower station would bring. Let us count. After the station has been built, by controlling the flood for one million mu of fields and irrigating 600 thousand mu, it could increase grain production by one million and sixty thousand dan, which would account for 60% of the total grain production in 1956 and more than the total production of all the fields within the reservoir area. Secondly, the fishing industry will bring us an income of eighty million yuan, which is 3.2 times twenty-five million yuan, which equals the collective income of the peasants in our county in 1956.\textsuperscript{15}

It then mobilized people to place their individual interest behind obedience to collective interest and to place the local interest behind obedience to the national interest:
Xinfengjiang hydropower station can supply the industry and daily use of electricity in Guangzhou city; can provide power to the mines in Jiangxi Province; supply the electricity demand of Shantou Administrative Area; and also supply the electricity usage in Huiyang Administrative Area and that in rural villages. The hydropower station has been built in the interest of all, in the interest of the whole nation. We are only denying the interest of eighty thousand people temporarily to get a return in the interest of the whole nation, especially to shine the three million people in Huiyang District. How can we not be obedient to the state’s interest? We move because of the whole nation’s interest, so wherever we go, the local people will welcome us warmly: as we are the glorious people!\textsuperscript{16}

This mobilization turned out to be ironic, for this hydropower station really became a ‘benefit-to-the-others’ hydropower station after it was built. Heyuan people received no benefit from it, not even an electric power supply. In fact, the Heyuan government specially sent a request to the Guangdong provincial government in the year of 1960, asking for an electric power supply from the Xinfengjiang hydropower station to Heyuan County, for ‘there is only one small power plant in Heyuan’ and ‘it was technologically poor so cannot meet the demands of electrification’.\textsuperscript{17} It adds, ‘when the construction of the hydropower station began, the Party committee promised the mobilized masses that the station would provide a commercial and domestic power supply to the reservoir relocatees. Now, the masses are longing for this promise to be carried out’.

After years of pleading, Heyuan finally got the power supply. But, as a matter of fact, it was not until 1991 that the people living in the reservoir area had their dream of a power supply realized (XFBCG 1993, p195). To the reservoir relocatees, the grand promises of the government were like a dream that were barely recognized. This sweet dream of conquering nature seems that, contrary to the
promise of prosperity, has brought a life of endless misery to the reservoir relocatees.

Post-relocation Hard Life

In the government’s resettlement policy, relocatees were guaranteed that they would only face temporary difficulties and there would be better life ahead after they resettled: they would have spacious house, farmable land, and electric facilities which would bring them a modern new life. However, in fact, the reservoir relocatees faced much more difficulties than they had imagined.

When the resettlement started, a major famine had already taken its toll on this part of Guangdong in late 1958. The famine, made worse by flooding of farmland and the resettlement, claimed numerous lives among the relocatees. Most of my informants lost family members at that time. Here, let me return to Huang’s story, who is the retired Party secretary of Diaolou Residents’ Committee in Xingang:

During 1959 – 1961, we only got 0.3 jin rice per person per day. How was that supposed to be enough! Yet, you have nothing to do with it. In 1958, when the People’s commune was established nationally, the cultivated fields and draft animals sill in private hands were collectivized. All things belonged to the commune then. We relied on the state for food. But then, in the Great Leap Forward, the local cardres began to exaggerate the numbers (bao da shu 报大数): the annual production of 1 mu land is under 1000 jin, but it would be reported to be 10,000 jin! Even it was short of food, the local cardres reported as abundant food. Once you began boosting, the state got poor and lack of grain gradually. However, that was the rule: if you do not boast, you cannot get through it. Some local cardres got punished (some even could not go back home for New Year gathering), just because they did not boast but report the facts. The displacement only started in late 1950s, but by the year of 1960, many had already died. We ate chaff, leaves from the trees, and banana head: you could not imagine how we get through all
these and still alive. Some people helped to bury the bodies in the morning, but got buried instead in the afternoon.

My mother died in 1958, during our displacement to Puqian. In early 1959 [Huang was 10 years old], the resettlement plan changed, so I went to Linhe by myself. I herded cattles and did farm work there. Sometimes I went with the adults to cut woods and sold them to the state owned timber station.

In the spring of 1960, I went back to Longxi, my home place, to join my father and little brother there. The big family of eight was then only three members of us alive, the others all passed away. [sad] We were short of foods. Extremely short! [emotional] (Donghong: Were there any other people live in Longxi then?) No, we were the only family who lived in the valley. We built a thatched shack. I brought a little grain with me from Linhe, and my father had kept some seed-grain by himself, and I could plough. We thought we could hold together to move on. However, my father died that autumn. He died of oedema, hunger oedema. During the famine, many had to eat vegetable roots to allay the hunger, which caused oedema. You could not help it: food was extremely short.

When my father passed away, I was 11 years old and my young brother was only 4. I had to take him with me, wandering and homeless. We ate whatever we could find, we slept in the open air. We managed to climb over the mountain and arrived at Qingxi village, but no one lived there anymore. Then we went to Shekeng, Zhangxia, Doubei, Shuangtian, Litian, all the way to Bailingtou, and finally arrived at Heyuan market! We begged for food and lived in the streets for two or three years in Heyuan, before we got to Puqian. We continued wandering in Puqian for almost another year, until we met and recognized one fellow villager of Longxi in 1963. Under his help, we joined the reservoir relocatees’ camp (yimin anzhi dian 移民安置点) in Puqian and finally got a shelter.

It was probably the first time Huang told someone his experiences as a homeless and a beggar, even his two sons did not know this period of his life. He was always very reluctant to recall the past. I understand that the past is still full of
misery and terror for him when he got emotional for several times during the conversation.

Officials in Heyuan County also conducted some surveys of the relocatees in those resettled places, which reflected the suffering of the relocatees and their hope for returning to their rich ancestral homelands:

Native residents are complaining about the coming of so many reservoir migrants. They even call the relocatees ‘relocatee spooks’ (yimin gui 移民鬼); to the relocatees in new resettlement village, they are complaining about why the government has assigned them to a new and unknown place out of Heyuan. They said if the government had guts to construct a reservoir, it should show its capability of feeding the reservoir migrants well. 20

Some migrants were very disappointed about the living condition of the resettled place: ‘Our ancestral home place has abundant production; we lived a self-sufficient life and had our joy times. Puqian [the new resettlement] has only barren hills and dry rivers; it is so hard to earn a life here. We are so depressed’. People to be resettled on higher ground were facing fresh water shortage; those to be arranged into other villages concerned about the discrimination by host family. Young girls resettled in the ‘new immigrant village’ were longing for a marriage back to the reservoir area. They said they only seek boyfriends who live in the reservoir area. Some migrants said Puqian had nothing worthy to eat and nowhere worth living. A folk song expressing the suffering was circulated among them21:

The dark clouds flow around in the sky,  上天乌云团团转,  Reservoir relocatees migrated disorderly on the earth.  地下移民翻翻乱。  I relocated in the south [Puqian],  人在下来  But my heart remains in the north [the reservoir area],  心在上,  Ah, my soul, when can you settle down?  魂魄啊！何日才生根?

The reservoir migrants lived in a poor condition in their post-relocation life; in almost every case, much poorer than before. A 1961 document pointed out that
the reservoir migrants had fallen victim to the conditions of ‘family were broken up and members were died’ (jiapo renwang 家破人亡), ‘becoming destitute and homeless’ (liuli shisuo 流离失所) and ‘suffering hunger and coldness’ (jihan jiaopo 饥寒交迫).

Even in 1985, a report on reservoir relocatees in Heyuan County mentioned, ‘quite a lot of relocatees could still not support themselves, as the living standard was too different from their previous life-style’ (Compilation Committee of Heyuan Gazetteer [CCHG] 2000, p352). In the Xingang case, the resettlers were moved from productive farmlands to smaller and lower-quality land. Before relocation, they had farmed 2.8 mu fields per head. Because 180,000 mu of farmland was flooded, a 1996 survey found that the resettled villagers among Heyuan City possessed only 0.4 mu of farmland per head, and 18,000 of the settlers living in the hill land in the reservoir area had no land to farm at all (ROH 1996, p10).

**Constant Relocation**

Few people in Xingang will now recount the resettlement process on their own initiative; it is clear that this topic made them feel sorrowful, in thinking about the hardships they and their families had experienced. But in the conversations when asked about this, the informants’ first response was always to complain about having moved so many times.

The first phase of population resettlement started in 1958. The first resettlement plan was set out as showed in the table below (XFBCG 1993, p183), under the state’s guide of ‘relocating the majority outside while a small quantity to be relocated locally’ (tuoshan anzhi, shaoliu duoqian 妥善安置，少留多迁).
Table 1 The Resettlement Plan of Xinfengjiang Reservoir in 1959

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Village, Location</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Village, Location</th>
<th>Number of relocatees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xinfeng</td>
<td>Nanhu</td>
<td>(outside Heyuan) Shaoguan Municipal Area</td>
<td>10,395</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinfeng</td>
<td>Lixi</td>
<td>(outside Heyuan) Huiyang Municipal Area</td>
<td>5,126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Guling</td>
<td>Boluo County, HuiYang Municipal Area</td>
<td>10,860</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heyuan, Lianping</td>
<td>Dengta, Dongpu, Shuntian, Qiaotou</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Dengta</td>
<td>13,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heyuan, Xinfeng</td>
<td>Dengta, Dongpu, Huilong, Duntou</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Dongpu</td>
<td>16,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heyuan, Xinfeng</td>
<td>Shuntian, Nanhu</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Zengtian</td>
<td>2,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinfeng</td>
<td>Huilong</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Yihe</td>
<td>5,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinfeng</td>
<td>Lixi, Xichang, Huilong</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Puqian</td>
<td>10,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinfeng</td>
<td>Nanhu</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Lankou</td>
<td>2,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinfeng</td>
<td>Guling Market, Huilong Market</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Yuancheng Town</td>
<td>1,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Dengta, Chuantang</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
<td>Chuantang</td>
<td>4,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>94,331</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can see that the people from the same village were often assigned to different resettlement places. For example, people from Huilong were assigned to Dongpu, Yihe, Puqian and Yuancheng town respectively. And only some people from Dengta and Dongpu (in grey shades) could be resettled near the original place.

At that time, Heyuan was a county under Huiyang Administrative Area in the East of Guangdong. The original resettlement plan called for sending most of the relocatees out of Heyuan but to neighboring counties within Huiyang. However, at the end of 1958, when the resettlement had already begun, the Huiyang Administrative Area was abolished and Heyuan County was redivided under the administration of Shaoguan Administrative Area in the North of Guangdong. This unexpected administrative change brought about chaos to the resettlement. Plus to the intense demand of labor force during the Great Leap Forward, relocatees who had already been displaced into counties within Huiyang were called back suddenly.
and assigned to resettle locally instead, mainly in the higher but barren hill lands alongside the reservoir. Huang had mentioned this sudden change as well, ‘We first moved to Puqian in 1958, went there on foot; over a hundred people altogether, not in a household basis but with other fellows from the commune. Yet after only one month we were sent back, heading to the north of Xinfengjiang instead’. During this repeating process of moving, people mentioned, they lost almost all of their possessions other than whatever clothes and bedding they could carry to the designated resettlement sites. What is more, during this process, many relocatees were separated from the productive teams they were originally from and in the chaos lost touch with each other. This resulted in the disintegration of former social groups among reservoir relocatees, which have lasted for a few decades due to their constant moving afterwards.

The changing resettlement policy encountered resistance from the relocatees, but they had no choice, as another man Lai said, ‘We lost our farmland; we lost our ancestral houses; and even our lineage relationships in the village. We owned nothing at last, so we had no choice but to accept the government’s plan’. What he tried to express is that at last they had no political, economic and cultural resources to fight against the state. They were under control by the state because the state had taken everything from them.

Jiang, who was doing tourist business in Xingang when we met, told me that he had moved 13 times before settling down in Xingang. Other cases I know, people moved seven to eight times at least. Jiang came from Changjiang, a production brigade (shengchan dadui 生产大队) under the Xichang People’s Commune (renmin gongshe 人民公社) when the construction of the reservoir was being planned. Before
the damming, he and his wife owned eight *mu* of fertile land which could produce 2,000 kg grain per year. During the slump season in farming, he earned money in other ways, such as selling timber in neighboring villages. The construction of the reservoir halted his self-sufficient life. At first, their brigade was told to move to higher land near the village. But when the water came, their resettlement site was almost flooded and the place had to be abandoned. The resettlement office called them to move to Puqian instead. But not all of them accepted a second resettlement. Some chose rather not to move but stay uphill illegally. For those who were willing to move again, no conveyance was provided. It took Jiang and his family several days to get to Puqian on foot. Once on the road, many of the evicted families like Jiang’s had to eat and sleep in the open air or in makeshift shelters. When they finally arrived at Puqian, there were no accommodations, either. But when they began to build houses by themselves, soon they were called back again because of the revision of the administrative area; and were assigned to resettle in higher hill lands within Heyuan. Hence, before they could settle down and start a new life in the early 1960s, they had already moved for three times and lost all the family belongings during the unplanned displacement process.

About the same time, though they did not know each other then, Huang, who lived in the reservoir relocatees’ camp in Puqian, also made several moves:

I lived at Puqian until 1964, when we began to move back to the reservoir area: this is called ‘reverse flow’ (*daoliu* 倒流) in government’s term. [Donghong: Why?] It was permitted by the government. We had difficult access to drinking water in Puqian, which made us want to leave. Those we could get were all water in the river, water in the field, how can you drink that kind of water? The natives wouldn’t allow us to take the water from the well. They kept bullying us. If we go to cut the woods for cooking, they would rip the machetes from us. The relationship was really tense.
And then rumours were spreading that the dam was leaking, it would be a failure. We wanted to go back when we heard this. If you could find a place where was above the 116-meter-water-level and there was enough paddy field (0.2 mu per head), then you could go back. There were about 50 households from Longxi settled in Puqian, and 20 of us went back. Plus the production of the paddy field, we could get grain ration of 15kg per head per month from the state, as a reservoir migrant compensation.

I went back Longxi in 1964 with my little brother, and built a shack to live in. I was 15 and he was 8. But life was too hard there, we had to move again in the next year. This time, I took my brother to seek refuge with my uncle in Linhe.

When we arrived at Linhe, the team leader refused to accept us, because my brother was only 9 years old and could not count as a labor force. I had no way but to give my brother to another family. I was working in the production team as a teller until 1969; we were called to move yet again.

This time it was because the nation called on the ‘Down to the Countryside Movement’ (shangshan xiaxiang yundong 上山下乡运动) in the late 1960s. This movement forced the urban youth to ‘go down’ to the remote countryside, so that they could get ‘re-educated’ by peasants there. Many fresh high school graduates were then forced out of their city homes and exiled to remote areas of China. These people were called as ‘the educated youth’ (zhishi qingnian 知识青年). Ironically, a lot of reservoir migrants in Heyuan had been sent down as ‘educated youth’ and ended up living for a decade or more in new resettlement villages.

In Heyuan, as higher land around the reservoir was limited and the number of returning relocatees had increased year by year, the problem of settling the reservoir relocatees had never been solved. To balance the pressure of the reservoir area, the resettlement office decided to send the reservoir immigrants to other villages as the ‘educated youth’, assigning them to productive teams in the communes throughout
the County. Over six thousand reservoir immigrants were re-displaced to 13 communes in Heyuan that year. Jiang’s family was among them. They were assigned to settle in the Liucheng commune in the northern part.

The social connection among the reservoir relocatees has been further broken during this process since they were separated again and to be assigned into different productive teams, not as a whole household but as individuals. Usually 1-2 families would be assigned into the same productive team, but their family members had to be separated in different households, which made it very difficult for the relocatees to adapt to the new environment and to overcome local residents’ discrimination. Life was so hard that within the first year, many relocatees were forced to move away, again. A large amount of them returned to the higher land around the reservoir, as well as Jiang’s family. They moved out from Liucheng commune in 1971 and returned to the hinterland of Changjiang brigade.

The Jiang family lived in the inner reservoir area for over ten years, enduring several short distance moves due to the constantly changing water level of the reservoir. When the water line rose, they had to move higher, and vice versa. This unsettled life finally came to an end in 1983, when Jiang’s son-in-law left a house for him in Xingang and asked him to move in. By the time Jiang finally settled down at Xingang, he had moved 13 times already. Jiang said he would not oppose the state, because it is too powerful to fight against. He followed the tide all the time, and was satisfied with his current life in Xingang. ‘This is the best time in my life’. He said,

Jiang's story is representative of other reservoir relocatees' stories. A common thread between the relocatees from Xinfengjiang Reservoir was the constant moves during the past several decades. Until recently, some of them are
still in resettlements arranged by the government and facing many difficulties to adjust to the new lives.\textsuperscript{23} Through years of repeatedly settling, moving, resettling, and moving again, their old social ties died away gradually; and for the same reason, few newly established resettlements could reconstruct new social structures within their constantly changing societies. This greatly contrasts with the life experiences of villagers in Dachuan, Gansu Province, who had moved only once as the whole village, and had successfully rebuilt their social structure in their new settlement by rebuilding a Confucius temple, as documented in Jing Jun (1996)'s monograph. But this process of repeated relocation helps us to understand the condition of ‘displacement’ of the Xingang community. I suggest that this community, made up of relocatees who experienced constant life changes dispersedly, had experienced the suffering of a community breakup more keenly than the Dachuan villagers and therefore had more difficulty in re-establishing a sense of belonging to the community.

\textit{Returned migration}

The reality of post-relocation life was totally different from what the government had promised to the relocatees. The villagers were angry about the meager government compensation they had received and the fact that some new houses built by the local government were too small and so poorly constructed that cracks had already appeared in the foundations and load-bearing walls when they moved in. This hard life resulted in many initiative returned-migrations, in which the relocatees left the assigned resettlement and returned to their place of origin in the reservoir area.

Aunt Zhu told me that her boys, then were little, often got bullied by the local
children in the resettled place. The hardships and the discrimination the family faced caused her husband to make the decision of returning home. ‘Even though there is little land in our home place and we did not know what our life would be if we return to the reservoir, at least there was hope’. Her husband said,

A letter written by a relocatee in Xintian commune who was assigned to settle in the commune as an ‘educated youth’ in 1969 reveals some of the poor living conditions of the reservoir migrants and why they returned:

As to the food supplies, it cannot afford us. After we moved to Xintian, one person got less than 400 jin of grain per year. We overspent our work points on food and living expenses every year. Life was so difficult for us. The Xu family overspent on over one thousand jin of grain last year. There is no family that has sufficient food. Overspending on 300-400 jin of grain is average. Several families had no rice to eat even in the Spring Festival, and it was the same for some native families. Some families sold all their furniture but still could not make ends meet. We reported this situation to the local leaders but received no feedback. So there were people returning to our ancestral home place, ever since the second year we settled here. Altogether 40% of us have returned and in some productive teams, it even reached as high as 80%.

Because of the suffering in the resettled place, lots of migrants were rather going back to their home place to make their living on fishing and fruit planting, although there were little lands to be farmed. There were altogether seven large-scale reverse flows among the relocatees of the Xinfengjiang Reservoir during the 1950s to the 1970s, which bought back over twenty thousand migrants.

However, returning was not as good an idea as the relocatees had hoped. In the same letter, it said,

After returning, some of these people cut wood in the hills around the reservoir and ran a contraband timber business which was highly profitable
and they could get food supplies in return. These people live well. But those families who lacked force labors do not live so well. They eat one meal while without knowing where the next one would be coming from. Some could only eat wild plants they foraged for in the hills. One man called Ali could not feed himself and therefore had to beg for food; while another person Yu who also could not feed himself resorted, with his son, to stealing. When they were caught by the police, his son could not deal with it and committed suicide at last.

At the mean time, life in Liucheng was not unlike, according to Huang:

In the year of 1969, the state mobilized us to move again, because there were too little arable field and too many people living in the inner reservoir area which costs the state extra 500,000 kg grain ration cupon to subsidize the relocatees every year. On the other hand, Liucheng has plenty of field. Hence the state mobilized us to resettle again, so no extra money and grain need to be spent on us. There were altogether over 300 people to be resettled and we were separated and to be assigned to different productive teams. One native productive team in Liucheng normally has several hundred of members, hence when ten or dozens of us to be assigned into one large team, there wouldn’t be a big problem: the farmland would be enough. But in a large picture, the state’s burden has been released: people could help people.

(Donghong: What about the response of the native villagers?) Under Mao, no one could say NO. Even they would of course against us, they would not be allowed to against the state policy of sending us there. Everything has been collectivized at that time, so the farm lands belong to the people, not a single person. Hence they don’t have the right to refuse us. If we were to be refused, the leader of the productive team would be punished or dismissed. Only after Deng’s reform in 1978, the local people began to show their discriminations to us.

In Maoist era, everything is ordered. During the resettlement, you didn’t get to choose when or where to go; it was arranged by the leaders. You have to trust them, trust the higher authorities. Even brothers could not be assigned to the same team, according to the ‘one family in one team’ principle. I
could not be in the same team with my uncle’s son, because we were regarded as from two families.

However, this ‘one family in one team’ principle became one of the main reasons when the state mobilized the relocatees to move again in 1979. Huang continued, ‘Even brothers were separated in different teams, no one to consult when there were something come up, how could we live like that? Therefore when the state mobilized us to go back to the reservoir area, I decided to go back’. The reason for coming back in 1979 might be that they suffered in the redistribution of land during decollectivization. As outsiders who had long been discriminated against by native residents, they were at a disadvantage during decollectivization, which was accompanied by a fierce struggle for top-quality farmland, draft animals, fish ponds, production tools, and building materials, little of which they could claim had ever belonged to them.

Maybe it was for this reason that people in Xingang insisted that when they decided to go back, they thought they must go back to Xingang and no other place. For Xingang, on the one hand, is ‘close to our own land. We are reservoir relocatees and no one could discriminate us in the reservoir area;’ and on the other hand, as a major transportation port, Xingang would have more jobs than other places in the inner reservoir and they wanted to avoid the possibility of suffering again.

**Out-of-place People**

The experiences of the evacuation and relocation over the past several decades form a sad history of the reservoir relocatees. In their stories, people felt that they were repeatedly let down by the authorities in terms of their promises for
compensation for what was lost, and many felt the sense of loss and betrayal. In the process of resettlement, neither the economic recovery (such as matters of compensation, guarantee of productive resources such as farmland) nor the community recovery (e.g., the community break-up, social adjustment to the host communities) has been paid attention to. The neglect of these basic concerns has also been compounded by the Great Leap Forward, during which, ‘rapidity’ was the most important criterion. The government rushed through the resettlement plan and the relocatees often found themselves being displaced into a new place without shelters, among other difficulties. What is more, many relocatees were suddenly been called to a ‘secondary resettlement’ (erci anzhi 二次安置) while in the process of facilitating the first one. Plus the ‘reverse flow of reservoir relocatees’ (shuiku yimin daoliu 水库移民倒流), the movements of the reservoir relocatees are at large scales. But this mass geographical mobility did not correspond to social mobility. Like one man in Xingang said, they are ‘bugs’ to the state and all the government attempts are to make them invisible, make the ‘problem’ invisible. So they have no control over the whole process. ‘They revolved on fortune’s wheel, rather than pursued a fate’ (Sassen 1999, 45). This reminds me of Mary Douglas’s theory of purity and pollution. Douglas defined dirt as ‘mater out-of-place’. To be ‘out-of-place’ depends on pre-existence of a classification system of some kind:

Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dinning table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing, similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room; clothes lying on chairs. (Douglas 2002 [1966], pp. 44-45.)

The unsettled reservoir relocatees are ‘pollution’ to the state order, thus made them dangerous. To maintain a clear national order, they must become invisible or better,
disappeared. In this sense, Xingang is just the case in point of what Douglas called ‘matter out of place,’ a place that causes despair specifically for the ways it represents ‘that which must not be included for a pattern to be maintained’ (ibid, p.50); ‘a threat to good order, and so are regarded as objectionable and vigorously brushed away’ (ibid, p. 197).

In a similar way, Liisa Malkki (1992) argued that ‘there is a tendency in the modern world to locate people and identities in particular spaces and within particular boundaries’. People without place had thus been looked upon in negative ways. Malkki suggested that the conceptions of fixity and rootedness are linked to a ‘sedentary’ way of thinking, which not only territorialize identities in place, but ‘simultaneously produce thoughts and practices that treat mobility and displacement as pathological’ (p.36).

In the Xingang case, the process of constant relocations shows the anxiety of the state to the people ‘being without a place’ (or ‘pollution’ in Douglas’s term). The state reacted to this anxiety by identifying them and regulating them. However, the more the government tried to pin them down to ‘a place’, the more the Xingang people felt they had lost ‘the place’ they belonged to and would never be placed ‘properly’. Therefore, displacement is not simply a one-time process of physical movement that would come to an end when the relocatees have been settled to a place, but may become a lasting state. The condition of being displaced does not necessarily change with the termination of movement; rather, it can be maintained ongoing over time and reproduced through generations, as long as there are concerns with a separation from ‘home’. Displacement is thus more likely to be related to people’s self-perception of being out of place. Over 50 years has been passed since
they had been forced to move their homeland, been settled at another place, and then been lived at that place for generations, it is not surprise to hear that the person still being referred to (or refer by himself) as a displaced person: a reservoir migrant.

I found it useful to borrow the recent discussions on ‘refugee studies’ here. Anthropology’s engagement with ‘refugee studies’ is recent. Malkki (1995) explored the construction-in-progress of refugee and displacement as an anthropological category and suggested that in writing anthropologically about refugees, the facts of movement and displacement could be used as a lens to examine the supposedly ‘normal’ condition of being attached and identifiable. In other words, it would be useful to put refugee in the context of ‘national order of things’ (p. 516). In Mistrusting Refugees (Knudsen and Daniel, 1996), Knudsen and Daniel argue that, to minimize the distinction between the ‘internal refugee’ and a ‘proper refugee,’ ‘the moment the nation-state that is supposed to protect fails to do so, or even worse, colludes in inflicting suffering on a person in its care, the germ that constitutes a refugee is formed’ (Daniel 2002, p. 279). In this sense, I suggest the reservoir relocatees have become ‘refugees in their own country’ and with this angle, we can better understand that they are not simply people moved out for a state project, but they are people who are constituted by their displacement. In an extreme way, when the ‘trust’ is collapsed, the displacement began. In the next chapter, I shall add the lens of social memory, to further examine how the ‘submerged memory’ actively constituted the condition of displacement.
One afternoon in March 2002 at Xingang, I was sitting on a chair outside Aunt Zhu’s house in Xingang, chatting with her. On the television inside the house was the national news and it was showing some houses being blasted. It was saying that one of the important sections of the Three Gorges Project had started on that day, therefore the houses which blocked the way would be demolished. Watching the news intently, I stopped talking with Aunt Zhu. The news attracted me and I took it for granted that Aunt Zhu would also be interested in it because, for the construction of the Xinfengjiang Reservoir in the 1950s, her family house within the reservoir area had also been demolished, over forty-four years ago. But I was wrong. While I was watching, Aunt Zhu stood up and said, ‘It is time for me to irrigate my vegetable plot. You stay here watching and I’ll be right back’. Then she walked away and left me. Although, through several months’ fieldwork experience there, I already knew that people in Xingang did not like to talk about their displacement experiences, I was still somewhat shocked when Aunt Zhu showed no interest about other hydraulic projects such as the Three Gorges Dam project.

Unlike the village of Dachuan (Jing, 1996) where the reservoir relocatees have tried to make sense of the community’s history ‘not only by thinking about it but actively recording it, passing down oral accounts over generations, producing extensive written genealogies, inscribing temple ornaments, writing commemorative plaques, making spirit tablets, and performing religious rituals of commemoration’ (Jing, 1996, p. 163), Xingang residents avoid to think back to the relocation. People have rare engagements with their history of displacement in daily lives, not to
mention collective or religious activities to memorize the past. Even when I asked them directly about it, they usually keep the answer very simple and explain away.

This is one kind of avoidance I have experienced in Xingang over time. I figure out that there is an apparent distance between them and their past. They choose not to be too close with their past, by keeping a distance with it, by avoiding talking about it, by not to educate the younger generation about it. This is a displacement by one’s own. Is it on purpose? As we can learn from other studies on how people survived the trauma of forced migration (Ying, 2001; Kleiman, Das, & Lock 1997; Jing, 1999), the healing of a wounded culture may depend on the collective determination not to forget, but what we find in Xingang will be a young generation not knowing about their family’s or community’s history at all. How do we understand the ignorance evoked here? I suggest that we should take ‘not knowing’ to be as much as a social construct as knowing. In this chapter, I continue the discussion of what displacement means for the displaced by adding the angle of remembering and forgetting.

The Propaganda

In 1956 Mao wrote the poem ‘Swimming,’ expressing the grand vision of building the Three Gorges Dam. 24 This is its second stanza:

Sails move with the wind. 风樯动，
Tortoise and Snake are still. 龟蛇静，
Great plans are afoot: 起宏图。
A bridge will fly to span the north and south, 一桥飞架南北，
Turning a deep chasm into a thoroughfare; 天堑变通途。
Walls of stone will stand upstream to the west, 更立西江石璧，
To hold back Wushan’s clouds and rain, 截断巫山云雨，
Till a smooth lake rises in the narrow gorges. 高峡出平湖。
The mountain goddess if she is still there,  神女应无恙,
Will marvel at a world so changed.  当惊世界殊。

For Mao, not only each dam represents another episode in the long-running struggle of man against nature, but it also adds the beauty of the landscape. David Blackbourn (2006) has described the same ‘reservoir-romanticism’ in Germany in his research on the conquest of nature in German history. The enthusiasts saw the reservoir as ‘a wonderful picture of quiet and peace’ (p226). Blackbourn points out that ‘they do not tell the whole story’:

You can see a lot of things when you look down at them from above, but you miss a lot as well. So I have also made a point of going down to ground and water level: to the fisher people whose lives are so easy to sentimentalize when they are seen from a great height, the construction workers who paid with their health (and sometimes their lives) to accomplish the feats that others rhapsodized about from a distance, the farmers on reclaimed fens who took generations to establish themselves and were never free from the fear of flooding, the moorland colonists whose lives were no less precarious.

This seems rather familiar in Xingang. As the tourists come here to see the ‘natural beauty’ of the man-made lake, as the local government stresses ‘it is the only clean drinking source in the Guangdong Province’ and try to sell fresh water, but the local residents sees it as a way of make living (tourism business, fishery, water transport): all are not telling ‘the whole story’ in Blackbourn’s term. For Blackbourn, this is not only different perspectives, but ‘two different ways …that history occurs in space as well as time. Real Space and imagined space’ (p14). While Blackbourn rightly points out that there are different spaces one can feel or ‘imagine’ and hints that there is a ‘whole story,’ but he does not ask why certain parts of the story are to be told while others are not. In other words: why we see the world as we see? Or put
it more specifically: What does our environment allow us to see? Focusing on place and memory, Cresswell writes: ‘Clearly places have many memories and the question of which memories are promoted and which cease to be memories at all is a political question. Places become sites of contestation over which memories to evoke’ (2004:89-90). Chris Healy (1997), noticing the lack of Aboriginal perspectives in Australian social memory, argued that the active effacement of Aboriginal existence in colonial histories, which is ‘a violent task of memory work,’ could not be described as a ‘silence’ (p.45). He rightly pointed out that: ‘It is not a silence but a silencing’ (Healy 1997, p.45). This links me to the points that Gupta and Ferguson have made about the way power always becomes involved in the constitution of places (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997c). In the following discussion of this chapter, I tend to trace what is seen and unseen in the reservoir from different positions, to explore the power relations which make places visible/invisible, and what role remembering/not remembering is playing in this process. Let me start from the government’s narratives related to the reservoir.

Through propaganda, schools, and the media, hydraulic projects have been glorified for their contributions to central planning, industrial growth, power generation, and the general development of river valleys. By contrast, the official accounts have pointedly ignored the suffering of tens of thousands of relocated villagers.

In the Xingang case, the intense and persistent problems arising from the resettlement have never been publicly acknowledged by the government. In the public propaganda, through the years under local governance, the relocatees are living a wealthy life that they never had before. The Xinfengjiang Forestry Bureau
had concluded the condition of the reservoir relocatees as ‘[the relocatees are] living a stable life, developing production, improving their living environment, and are raising their living standard through the economic development’ under the Bureau’s management for years (XFBCG, 1993, p. 192). As for the relocatees who still have no land to farm or no tap water to drink, the government did not mention them publicly at all.

Not only did government itself conceal the harshness of the resettlers’ lives, they also suppressed the freedom of the newspapers to report these situations. When I visited another reservoir immigrant resettlement only one mile away from Xingang, the inhabitants there suspected that I was a reporter. They quickly gathered around me and clearly hoped that I could help to expose their poor living conditions through public media. They said that newspapers had visited them before, but due to political pressure they never published the article at last. In a calculated way, the mainstream voice created by the party-state legitimized an arbitrary event by keeping any newspaper accounts, visual records, and other documents on these events from the public.

When the Xinfengjiang Reservoir was developed into a tourism site in 1990s, the state’s narrative of glorifying the Xingang people’s life had a new context. *Heyuan Express* is a local government paper under the lead of the Propaganda Department of the Party Committee of Heyuan. In 1995, when the tourism site was going to open to the public, a series of articles promoting the eco-tourism were published. One of them said,

All around us, in the nation’s rich Pearl River Delta area, the growing wealthy class love to travel. Especially after the newly implemented policy of double-day off per week, the city dwellers who are under stress desire
relaxation to escape from pollution and the noisy clamour of the city. This generated many small ‘return to nature’ weekend getaways. However, they do not know that they have a ‘back garden’ here in Heyuan. It is a beautifully forested lake-side town, a great place for picnics, travel, and getaways. (C. Li, 1995a)

Here, cities are viewed as industrialized, polluted, noisy, and fast paced, where people live in an unnatural environment. In the meantime, the Evergreen Lake was constructed to appear rural and natural, a very own ‘back garden’ for everyone. Governmental propaganda makes every effort to make tourists to remember the word green while making the ‘reservoir’ invisible. In the local government’s propaganda, everything can be exaggerated for the purpose of making it green. Changing the name of the reservoir is one example. It can be said that Xinfenjiang uses ‘green’ to attract travellers, thus it was named ‘Evergreen Lake’. Not only does this name represent the natural beauty of Xinfenjiang, but it also attracts city travellers with a sense of ‘returning to nature’. The newspaper illustrates further:

That was the reason for using the name ‘Evergreen Lake’ to replace ‘Xinfenjiang Reservoir’. It would increase the attraction of Xinfenjiang’s tourism, and compel people to come and visit. What are the most important properties of the dam? That would have to be its natural beauty, a green world, and an unpolluted place in harmony with the earth. Established perennial forests and crystal clear water are the main attractions. Due to these properties, travellers can have a chance to experience a pure and exquisite environment. (C. Li, 1995b)

Behind the ‘green’ advertisements, there is a hidden strained relationship between the Xingang people and nature, as well as the suffering that the relocatees had to endure, namely losing their homes and living a rough itinerant life. As Cresswell (2005:94) reminds us, ‘Naming is one of the ways space can be given meaning and become place’. To rename the Xingfengjian Reservoir the ‘Evergreen
Lake’ and promoting the natural beauty among it makes a past of human conquering nature invisible in an ironical way. For the relocatees, the Reservoir does not represent harmony between people and nature, but instead, it rather represents an artificial product under the rule of ‘man can conquer nature,’ which caused them to lose their homes decades ago.

To promote the ‘eco-tourism’ project, life in Xingang was also reconstructed as a ‘green’ life. The Xingang people are said to be good friends of the nature: they help to keep the environment clean and the water in a good condition; and they have sacrificed themselves (once again) to serve the water needs of the downstream cities including Hong Kong. the Xingang people always look upon these flowery narratives coldly—never try to challenge it with their beautiful memories of the abundant ancestral home place. Nonetheless, this fragile facade could be broken easily.

One time, a tourist from Dongguan, one of the riches cities in Guangdong, told me that he was somewhat envious of the people living in Xingang. He said,

Although we Dongguan people have a much more prosperous life than people here, I am eager to live in an environment like Xingang. I hate the thick smog in Dongguan; it is badly polluted and makes people sick. Not to mention the black water that has also been heavily polluted by all those factories. The air here is so fresh and the water here is so clean. This is rare in China now, don’t you think? People are very lucky living here.

When I repeated this conversation to Jiang, he said sarcastically: ‘Then you can tell him I am very glad to exchange with him. Let me live in Dongguan, I don’t care about the air at all, or the water; as long as I have rich opportunities to make money’.

I thought the word ‘lucky’ that contradicted the reservoir relocatees’ suffering hurt Jiang badly. Actually, by propagandizing the positive aspects of the resettlement
and glossing over the misery and inequitable treatment the relocatees had endured, the government is rewriting the history of the reservoir resettlement. In propagandas, the Xinfengjiang reservoir ‘is famous all over the country’; ‘it is the biggest reservoir in south China’; has ‘the biggest population of reservoir relocatees, the quickest in construction, the lowest cost and the best benefits’; and the construction of the reservoir is ‘a splendid achievement’ which deserves eulogizing. But the suffering that the reservoir had brought to the relocatees is constantly overlooked.

As Ci Jiwen (1994, p. 4) put it,

History is the institution for the social regulation of memory. Those who control the means of regulating collective memory direct the course of future history. Not surprisingly, one of the biggest psycho-political projects undertaken by the Communist Party has been the restructuring of the Chinese memory through the rewriting of Chinese history.

In the Xingang case, the rewriting of history serves not only to promote the state’s image to also to neglect the reservoir relocatees. Neither the local propaganda nor the discourse in the tourism program mentions the past when nature was treated as the enemy of the human beings, nor do they mention the relocatees whose lives were cruelly disrupted by these hydroelectric projects. The Xinfengjiang reservoir is more and more being looked upon as the ‘Evergreen Lake’ as a beautiful tourism site rather than a reservoir.

**The Good Old days**

Thayer Scudder (1973, 1982) suggests among the reservoir relocatees communities in Africa, people who were forced to abandon their homes were likely to generate a ‘grieving-for-lost-home syndrome’ characterized by profound disillusionment with the present and romanticized views of the past. What I
gradually learned in Xingang is that they did not like to recall the suffering of the displacement but very much liked to recall the good days before the evacuation. Whether in individual interviews or group conversations, the Xingang people are excited to talk about the old days as being a happy life. They recited exactly all the village names according to the direction of the river flows (shui lu ge 水路歌), corrected inaccuracies in one another’s accounts. Although their hometown was forever erased, the submerged world did not disappear in the minds of the Xingang people.

For people who had lived there, the world under the lake was indeed a real world for them. There had not only memories relating to the family such as the ancestral house, the ancestral temple, and family activities with extended family; but also those relating to the community such as the Guanyin temple, the Xiangshui temple (xiangshui miao 响水庙) and the cult of Fairy Flower in the Mid-Autumn Festival.

In the market place there was the Dragon’s Mother’s Temple (longmu miao 龙母庙) worshiping the Dragon’s Mother (longmu 龙母), and twenty meters away there was the Wenchang Temple (wenchang miao 文昌庙). The businessmen in the market would go to worship the Wenchang Deity to pray for good sales. They remembered the Pangu temple (pangu wang 盘古王) and the Shiyuan Temple (shiyuan miao 石园庙) as well, although could not recite what deities were worshiped inside.

Among these temples, Xiangshui Temple seems to have been the most important one to the local society, for almost all the people I talked with knew about this temple. They recalled that, Xiangshui Temple, two miles away from the market
place of Xichang, was owned by local bosses. In front of the temple there was a stream called the Xie Water (xiewu shui 谢屋水) and a huge banyan tree. People remembered there were dozens of deities inside the temple and in the Jiao Festival (dajiao 打醮) in the sixth month of the lunar calendar; the Guanyin Bodhisattva would hold a parade nearby. The three clans of Jiang, Huang, Xie would then perform a ritual to ask with which clan the deity would like to take rest in the evening during this four-day ritual.

There was much fun for the local people during this festival and they remember vividly the programs played out by the priests (fashi 法师) and the rituals such as climbing up the ladder of blades (shang daoshan 上刀山), crossing through the burning circle of fire (guo huohai 过火海), and placing the hand into the hot oil boiler (xia youguo 下油锅). Usually there would be a village elder of good reputation in charge of the festival rituals and activities. Gambling joints would also be set up and provisions made for setting up small booths for local businessmen.

All those accompanied the Xingang people’s upbringing. To them, the reservoir is not a lake but their home place: a multi-layered, inter-growth, and co-prosperity society where people, nature and supernatural powers enjoyed a gratifying order of relations. What in contrast is their attitude on the tourism site, the Evergreen Lake.

At first, I took it for granted that the Xingang people must be very familiar with the scenery of the Evergreen Lake. But as I gradually know more about them, I found out that many people living in Xingang had never paid a visit to the neighboring tourism site. Jiang once asked me back: ‘What is worth seeing at that site? I came from there and lived there for decades, why do I need to visit that place?
What’s more, what can we see today? All is submerged’. To Jiang, the submerged place is forever his home place. Although it was submerged; what he saw was not the lake but the society under the water, a place still alive in his memory. And more important, to him, what is beautiful and worth seeing is not the lake but the world beneath the water.

Jiang said that in the old society, everyone had tillable farmland so that people could feed themselves as long as they worked hard. Many relocatees yearned for the rich and happy old days of farming fertile land with family members and doing some small business in the slack seasons. One told me that:

It was a really good place before it was dammed. The hills were good and water was good (haoshan haoshui 好山好水), they were both abundant for production. If not submerged, the natural environment under the water was much better than this lake. Every year on the 14th of lunar July, every household went out to the fields and worshipped the deity of land (tiandi bogong 田地伯公). That time was really bustling and lively.

All these memories of the ‘good old days’ is not uncommon in the displaced communities around the world. Peteet (1995, p. 181) found Palestinian refugee camps and communities ‘hierarchically interconnected with the space/place of both origin and exile’, while the development uprooted show this same ‘grief for the lost home’ reported by Gans (1962) of those displaced when Boston, Massachusetts planned a massive redevelopment. It reminds me what Renato Rosaldo (1989b) has called ‘imperialist nostalgia,’ a kind of ‘innocent yearning’ for the passing of what people have themselves transformed. As Litzinger (1998, p. 233) asked, ‘Was this simply the conceit of those who now claim to occupy the space of modernity, a kind of reverential posturing, an idealized fantasy toward a traditional society that works to gloss over violence and suffering?’ (Berman, 1982). The force of nostalgia resides
‘in its association with (indeed, its disguise as) more genuinely innocent, tender recollections of what is at once an earlier epoch and a previous phase of life’ (Rosaldo, 1989b, p. 108). The landscapes of the Reservoir past, a past presented as predating the displacement and fragmentation of local social worlds, were indeed objects of tender embrace.

**Fengshui as Strategy of Memory**

How do I find voices in Xingang, then? At the initial stage of my field work in Xingang, I ask, listen, and try to trace how the past are blended with people’s current life. I realize gradually that the answer is deeply inscribed into the landscape, but not in people’s narratives or writings. Fentress and Wickham (1992) claimed that memories guide to social identity. Based on the material gathered in Xingang, I argue that communities like Xingang, which lack of social, political, and economic resources to make the ‘commemoration’ (in Fentress and Wickham’s definition, i.e. the action of speaking or writing about history) happen, could have another way of negotiating their identity and history. In Xingang, this has largely to do with the way how people conceive the transformed landscape. I use the concept of *fengshui* to demonstrate this point.

Fengshui, meaning wind-water, is traditional Chinese geomancy. The Chinese encyclopaedia *Cihai* accounts for *fengshui* as follows: ‘Fengshui, also called *kan yu*. A superstition of the old China. Considers wind directions, water streams and other topographical features in the surroundings of a house or a grave site to indicate the inhabitants’ disaster or good fortune. Also way of directing residences and graves’ (quoted from Bruun, 1995, p. 173). Bruun considered *fengshui* to be the Chinese art of placement and discussed it as a system of statements on the human–nature
stresses the linking and connecting in the art of *fengshui*, which connects
cosmological elements with the shape of the lived landscape. He suggests that the
particular *fengshui* of a place could be used to take advantage of its positive ‘energy’,
and to adjust to it. He writes:

> The principle of making links is also the work of the geomancer in choosing
> the best site for a dwelling. . . . The dweller is placed to maximum advantage,
> where advantage is an accumulation of material energies (*qi*) that flow
> through the raised forms and the depressions, including the waterways, of
topography. (p166)

I heard ‘*fengshui*’ from time to time during my stay in Xingang. People
always refer to the water and the hills when they talked about *fengshui*. So, to my
understanding, talking about *fengshui* is talking about the landscape. While the
government promotes ‘natural beauty of water’ in the reservoir area, the local
people’s retrospection on the past could build up a powerful challenge to it. In fact,
for the relocatees, to appreciate the natural beauty is to know about ‘*fengshui*’. They
regarded *fengshui* as the knowledge about nature. Ever since the beginning of the
resettlement, some people were unwilling to move because of ‘*fengshui*’:

> Some elders thought that for generations and generations, their ancestors
> were living in this place; and now they had to move to other places. They
> were most afraid that the *fengshui* in a new place would not be good. They
> believed that people could not make their living in a place with no good
> ‘*fengshui*’.

For them, dwelling in a place with good ‘*fengshui*’ would bring fortune to one’s
family. Jiang once told me that there was a girl from his village, a relative, who was
one of the interpreters for the then Prime Minister, Mr. Zhu Rongji. He was very
proud to see her sat behind the Prime Minister in the TV news. And then his wife
said, ‘The fengshui of her family ancestral grave is really great!’ And it is believed that the good fengshui of the ancestral tomb could bring wealth and rank to the descendants. In Hunan Province, the ancestral grave of Mao Zedong’s family has attracted nation-wide tourists to admire the fengshui.

I then asked whether there is good fengshui in Xingang, Jiang shook his head. After a while, he continued, mysteriously, ‘but there’s a really bad one: the location of the Xinfengjiang Forestry Bureau. It was facing two steep mountains, which seems very fierce and pushing the Bureau into the corner. The Bureau got bad luck in that layout. Many officials there had cancer and then died’. He then introduced some example of good fengshui: ‘Before the damming, the house of the local boss in Nanhu was facing a group of hills in the distance. That is Bijia Shan, the penholder mountain. The three main peaks formed a penholder. If your house is facing the penholder mountain, there would be high government officials in your family’.

Another story is about a geomancer: dili xiansheng (地理先生), which literally means the master of the geography. Long time ago, this dili xiansheng found a good dwelling for Xiao clan’s ancestral grave in the reservoir area. It was believed that ever since then the Xiao lineage is prosperous. In the recent decades, the most famous figure from the Xiao clan is Mr. Xiao Yang, the former President of Supreme People’s Court of China (1998-2008). When I went with the Xiao Lineage to sweep the ancestral grave and contribute food offerings in the Chongyang Festival in 2010, I noticed that the grave of the geomancer was just around the same place, under the main graves of Xiao, and the clan members also lay out offerings in front of his grave. One of the Xiao clan told me that they are very grateful for the blessings from the ancestors: ‘You know? This place has got the best fengshui in the reservoir area.
Only though the graves used to be at the top of the high hill, and after the damming, it is just 20 metres above the water line. We don’t need to hike any more, we take boats. But you see the mountains over there: the dragon vein does not break’.

The knowledge of fengshui stayed alive in fengshui stories, and through these stories, the landscape of the place was preserved. Some believed that although their home place was submerged, the fengshui in it would keep. In one of my boat trips on the reservoir, Jiang’s son showed me quite a few mountains which he said had good ‘fengshui’. For him, this place has never changed. Another one mentioned to me that his home place was a precious place with good fengshui (fengshui baodi 风水宝地), it was a rich place. He said that in front of the ancestral hall there was a mountain which had five peaks stood, and looked like a huge lotus. ‘The lotus mountain is a rare and good landmark. It is a real fengshui baodi’. To him, what had lost after the resettlement was not only the fertile land but more important, the life of living at a ‘fengshui baodi’. Therefore, despite a poor natural environment containing as high as 80% untillable land in the reservoir area, he chose to return home, where he has the knowledge of the landscape.

For the reservoir migrants, although the state could submerge their homes, it could not submerge their vision of the natural environment. They prefer to see the old places that they knew but not the transformed landscape. It is quite paradoxical that after the Maoist era which promoted conquering nature and had reshaped the earth according to its own design, the local people were still finding the old structure of nature in it. It is at this point that I begin to think about the power of the ‘absent’. The lost clearly has influence into the Xingang people’s life, but in a rather unnoticed way. Lars Højer’s (2009) discussion is useful here to start the discussion.
Højer (2009) explores the precious religious knowledge that has been lost during socialist Mongolia and argues for attention to the ‘creative aspects of absent knowledge’. When discussing about the purges in the 1930s in the Mongolia, he wrote,

[S]ocialism’s attack on its imagined enemy backfired, because not only did socialism’s imagination of superstition serve to eradicate such superstition, but it did—while eradicating it—bring it into existence as superstition: that is, as something which was important and powerful enough to necessitate destruction. The point is that the force of destruction and the sheer amount of energy expended on superstition mystified ‘mystification’. It fashioned an entity and gave it potential life. Much ‘superstition’ was lost, surely, but simultaneously an imagined space of absence was created. People were made to know that certain things existed of which they did not, and should not, know, the negative came into being and gained power by virtue of being subject to destruction. (Højer 2009, pp. 578–579)

It is more like this way that fengshui and the related knowledge is still active in people’s life. The great efforts in Maoist era to fight against nature and claimed fengshui as a ‘Feudal Superstition’ (fengjian mixin 封建迷信) ironically makes people take it as important thing after Mao. The absent gained power through its absence. Let me illustrate this point more thoroughly in next part.

**Submerged Memory and Knowledge of Loss**

On one of the several boat trips I had on the reservoir, the man who operated the boat was a reservoir relocatee himself. Once on the lake, he could tell me where a street was, where the market was, where the temples were, where there was a big house and where the roads led to. He said when he was a little boy he frequently walked these roads, which directed him to the centre market on market days. Therefore even dammed, he would never forget the route and of course the
community he had lived in.

These temple and local markets are today entirely absent from the landscape. They thus exist only as remembered sites as places and ritual events. In the place of these remembered sites today are wide, calm water, which recall the massive displacement decades ago. The relocatees look at the reservoir as a rich place with layered memories, various senses (of home, of dangers, of happiness, of terror, etc.), and different orders (different deities were in charge of different places), while the tourists looked at the reservoir and saw only plain and calm water. In other words, the people of this region see a landscape, but one that is no longer visible to people who do not remember or know it. These were memories not of something that had gone, but of something that was still there for them, ‘partially hidden’ (Green, 2005, p. 33). In short, these remembered sites invoked images of a landscape haunted by absences.

How do we understand the ‘partially hidden’ landscape here? I suggest we could pay our attention to the submerged, the invisible, and the absent, which are hidden but functioning. By paying attention to this, we learn that agency not only results from having knowledge but more importantly, from choosing a relationship to knowledge. Ignorance can transform knowledge to power.

Ignorance

The history of the resettlement is not known by many people. The government propaganda, which we can see today, conceals the suffering of the reservoir relocatees by glorifying the achievements of the reservoir construction. Except the government documents, research reports done by the government and the lately finished gazetteer of reservoir resettlement (yimin zhi 移民志), this past has
almost disappeared from Xingang. It is very hard for an outsider to get to know the history. However, the young generation’s ignorance of this history was somewhat unexpected. The old generation used some vague phrases to describe their recent past when being asked, such as ‘the days were very tough,’ ‘our life was difficult at that time,’ but were quite reluctant to recount the details. Younger generations seldom hear about it from their elder family members. In fact, quite a lot of young people in the community did not even know which year their family had moved to Xingang. When talking about this, they said they had never been told of the family history and actually had little interest in it. To them, the most important things are to look forward and make money, but not to dig the past. The local young people did not understand why their history attracts my interest and were gossiping me as ‘a strange person who likes talking with the old people’ during my early staying at Xingang. Gradually, they become my friends and instead, even expecting me to write the stories out so that, as they said, ‘we can know our family’s history from your story then’.

According to Colson (2003), remembering or even creating the past is an important means for the refugees or forced migrants to create a new identity. Thirty years after Dachuan Village was inundated with the damming of Yellow River in 1960, the Kongs still mourned their flooded village and those born after the flooding could point to sites, now deep under the waters of the reservoir, where their parents had lived and worked (Jing, 1996, p. 78). Gwembe Tonga still refer to themselves as ‘People of the River’ decades after their river disappeared, and they make claims for special treatment based on their knowledge that they were moved even though the majority now were born in the new areas. They too can be precise about what lies
below the water, and as dry land re-emerged when Kariba Lake fell during the
droughts of the 1980s they reclaimed fields which, they said, had been cultivated by
dead kin (Colson 1971).

Different from these communities, or even Ying’s (2001) research on a
reservoir relocatees’ community which appealed for just treatment from the
government for decades, Xingang seems to be a community of ‘collective forgetting’
and just a good example of ‘harmonious society’ which promoted by CCP. But it
does not mean that their history disappeared without any trace. I argue, ‘forgetting’ is
in fact the same important as ‘remembering’ on revealing the influence of the past.
Silence on recounting the past, at the same time, does not mean that it is less
powerful than talking about it. The Xingang people are using their own creative ways
to make their voices.

But certainly these memories are not straight forward remembrances, rather,
they are interspersed with forgetting: individuals do not want to remember, families
do not want to recall bad times, people attempt to avoid the stigma of being a
relocatee and the nation state wants to focus on the glorious achievement. The pain
of remembering and the desire to not tell the next generation about the earlier
hardships combine to create an active forgetting. And the active forgetting has
resulted in the next generation’s ignorance.

To my understanding, the distance they keep to the recent past and the
avoidance to remember we are seeing here is a self-evoked ignorance. Ignorance, as
D.S. Raj (2000) puts it, is the state of not knowing, the absence of knowledge.
Ignorance is the presence of an absence. Hence, I use the term submerged memory to
describe this absence of knowledge. This memory is submerged and cannot be seen
by the people who do not know it, but it is not lost. This state of not knowing is
different from forgetting, which is an erasure of the knowledge. The Xingang people
could still use it when bargaining with the government, although it is not seen in
daily life. I argue that they evoke strategic ignorance to realize some kind of
flexibility in response to the ever-changing and power rendering state power. An
angle on the ‘submerged memory’ allows reflection on an important but neglected
aspect of social and cultural change. But more important, the interstices of memory,
forgetting, and ignorance determine how cultural identification changes through a
traumatic historical event. By exploring how people evoke ignorance in responding
to displacement gives insights into how people create post-relocation identities.

Loss

To end this chapter, let me quote Marilyn Strathern (1991, pp. 96–98) at length:

However, Barth seems to accept Jack Goody’s observation (in the foreword)
that silent knowledge is lost knowledge, and its implied sequel, that lost
knowledge is no knowledge. ...Yet this must surely cancel any lingering
anthropological notion that ‘tradition’ only survives if it is kept intact as a
positive tracery of connections between events, images, meanings. We have
to, as he stresses, get our ontology right. On this evidence, that exercise must
surely include loss of knowledge as part of the data, not as loss of the
data. . . .

But I have suggested the knowledge that they are lost is not, so to
speak, lost knowledge, it is knowledge about absence, about forgetting and
about an unrecoverable background. That sense of loss stimulates the
Baktaman initiators, it would seem, to making present images work -- not to
filling in the gaps, for that cannot be done, but making what is present do all
the differentiating work it has to do, and thus creating information for
themselves. (my emphasis)
This ignorance is not of the unknowable; it is of what has been dropped from the repertoire, the intervening particles that once completed what is now left. . . . The important thing is that the gaps are preserved.

Following Strathern’s point, I argue that the submerged, the invisible and the absent I encounter in Xingang, they are not nothing. On the contrary, they perform functions. They are the ‘gaps’ that cannot be filling in—even the state has been trying hard to. And it is exactly these gaps that organize people in an invisible way. While Kai Erikson (1995) argues that trauma can create community, by referring that in a traumatic community, it is the violence they have been through together that gather them; I argue that, the ‘submerged memory’ and the knowledge about that absence play a vital role in organizing Xingang. Therefore, they are not that ‘fluid’ as it seems to be: the loss could be very productive, and it is precisely from this loss that power emerges. In the next part, I discuss how they use that power to (re)make place in Xingang.
PART II Flows and Connections
CHAPTER 4 MAKING PLACE

It was a hot summer afternoon. When I arrived at Huang’s house, he and his friends were playing cards—a locally popular gamble game that involves three players at a time. His house was spacious, and with a high tree outside the yard which blocks the sunshine, it was feeling comfortable inside. While they were playing, another man sat aside watching. That was the first time I met him, Lai. Lai was a strong man of medium stature in his 60s. He has been a close friend with Huang for decades. Lai was a little bit embarrassed to meet me at the first time while gambling. He started to explain why four middle-age men were gambling on a weekday afternoon: ‘We are now not productive at all—no work to do; although I am still strong enough to work. It was totally different back to the 1980s, when we just arrived here, lots of work waiting for us. We could not even take a break for lunch; often, we need to get up at midnight because the timber craft had arrived. But now, as you can see, Xingang (new pier 新港) has become a kong gang (empty pier; 空港) indeed’.

Lai was a leader of the porters in the 1980s. Like the other reservoir relocatees who came to Xingang in late 1970s, Lai had to offer porterage service in the pier to make a living, for Xingang is geographically located in the middle of a hill and there was no land to farm. As a dock worker leader, Lai organized his teammates to unload the timber shipped from the forestry station in the inner reservoir area and upload them onto the trucks which transport the timber to other cities. When the economic reform was carried out in China from the 1980s, the timber trade in the reservoir area was flourishing. During that time, almost all families in Xingang joined different porterage teams to work. These reservoir migrants, who were living
at the edge of the Heyuan city and at the edge of the reservoir as well, at the first time of their life, abandoned their earth-bounded life as a villager and took part in another kind of life, which is, in their words, ‘a life with quick cashes’. They could earn over one hundred yuan in a month, much more than the urban people living in the city of Heyuan whose average salary would be around 20 yuan. However, this occupation declined in the 1990s. As a result of several decades’ deforestation, there were very few timber can be traded then. Due to the lack of business, the last porterage team had disbanded in the early 2000s. Lacking of other sources to make a living, most of the dock workers are now out of work. Some helped to raise their grandchildren and some infatuated in gambling. Xingang now looks like an empty pier to them, without any working opportunities. Nonetheless, the time of porterage formed a most important part of history in Xingang. The development of porterage was at the same time the developing history of the community.

After twenty years of constant displacement, these relocatees finally find a resettled place at Xingang and gradually established a new life there in the post-Mao era. This chapter discuss the process of making place in Xingang. Malkki (1995) critiqued the approaches on discussing displacement which only focus on the ‘uprooting’ and ‘fleeing’ away of the people but do not pay attention to the place left behind. She reminds us that except focusing solely on the terror and loss of ‘displacement,’ it is also useful to look at the process of ‘emplacement (the flipside of displacement)’ on the place; otherwise, we are risking to treat the displaced as purely ‘victims’ who are lacking what it takes to be social agents and historical subjects (Malkki 1995, pp. 515-518). Turton (2005) agrees this point: ‘the experience of displacement is not only about the loss of a place, and the pain and bereavement
this entails. It is also, and inevitably, about the struggle to make a place in the world’
(p. 278). From the materials in Xingang, one finds that the displaced are far from just
‘victims’ who respond to the forceful and strong state power passively, but rather,
they are creators of new world. In discussing the process and politics of
‘emplacement’ in Xingang, this chapter continues to explore how displacement has
influenced the social relations and identities at various levels.

Further, as China launched its economic reform from the late 1970s, the state
ideology of treating nature as an enemy also came to an end. How did the Xingang
people make their place in a new era while living in the shadow (to use X. Liu’s term)
of the Maoist era? How did they make their best to follow the national march of
economic development with a heavy legacy of Mao’s collectivization? Engaged with
previous studies of socialist transformation in postreform China (Yan, 2009; Zhang
& Ong, 2008; Liu, 2002; Siu, 1989a), I try to figure out how these reservoir migrants
reinterpreted the power structures and try to make the best of their resources when
the ‘national order of things’ (in Malkki’s term) seems uncertain and uncontrollable.
This chapter argues that personal relations or personal networks are the crucial factor
for the relocatees, whether for coming back or for making a living in Xingang.
Furthermore, in building new networks during the creation of the new town,
relationships constructed in the original home places were used flexibly by the
resettlers as resources to identify themselves.
Returning

Xingang

Before the reservoir was constructed in the 1950s, Xingang was just a rest place, in the middle of the mountain road, for passengers travelling on foot on their way to the county seat of Heyuan. Its name was Diaolou (碉楼; means ‘watchtower’, literally). 26

After the Xinfengjiang Hydropower Station was constructed in 1958, this place was selected as the major port in the reservoir area for both freight and passenger transportation. From 1959, people selected from different communes within Heyuan County, including some reservoir migrants, were assigned to move to Diaolou to work as boatmen, dock workers, and porters, as well as some staff of the state-owned timber station for the operation of the pier. These men were all state employees (guojia zhigong 国家职工). The fleet for transportation (yunshu chuandui 运输船队), the porterage station (banyun zhan 搬运站), the grain supply centre (liangzhan 粮站) and the supply and marketing agency (gongxiao shougou she 供销收购社) were gradually established in Diaolou. Records show that over 400 employees were living in Diaolou in 1970 (XFBCG 1993, p. 72).

At the outset of the 1960s, with the gradual local development, the Xinfengjiang Forestry Bureau [XFB] (xinfengjiang linye guanliju 新丰江林业管理局), which was directly under the Guangdong Provincial Forest Bureau, was established in September 1964 to manage the forestry development; and in addition, in charge of the administration of the whole reservoir area which includes five communes: Banjiang, Shuangjiang, Jiantou, Xichang, and Huilong (Map 4). Since the Bureau was located at Diaolou, Diaolou became the political and economic centre in the
reservoir area as well, besides acting as the transportation centre. However, this place was still hill land and largely unoccupied. Only the government staff and the state employees worked at Diaolou could stay there, living in the dormitories. At that time, as the nation was starkly divided between the rural and the urban and free migration was banned, even the family members of the employees were not allowed to live in Diaolou, because at most cases, they had their household registration under their hometown villages and were not allowed to move outside the village.

Diaolou was renamed as Xingang, which means ‘new pier,’ in 1968 during the Cultural Revolution. But to Lai, of course, it is ‘empty pier’ now.

Liucheng

Lai was living in Liucheng, when the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of CCP started in Beijing in late 1978, which brought Deng Xiaoping’s reform and tremendous transforms on China, as well as Lai and his fellow townsmen. More than 300 people, they were moved to Liucheng from Linhe village in 1969, because the local government called upon another displacement and urged the reservoir migrants to ‘settle into the communes’ \(\textit{chadui}\) like the urban youth. The local government manipulated state’s policy of sending urban youth to the villages to be ‘re-educated’ and made the reservoir migrants displace again, to reduce the population of the relocatees and ease up the increasing conflicts within the inner reservoir area. What must point out here is that, treating them as the urban youth, the reservoir relocatees, who moved from Linhe as a whole productive team, were divided into very small groups to settle down in the assigned place, as small as one or two persons in one family. This had caused lots of difficulties for the relocatees.
Lai was assigned to live in a peasant’s house, alone. His family members and relatives were living far away from him. He had to walk for at least two hours to visit his sister. Communication among the former production team members was very difficult under these circumstances. The production team members who had experienced separation from the original resettlement arrangement were re-separated from each other. This greatly ruined the social network among them and resulted in forming new connection circles that were small-scale and on a family basis.

When Deng Xiaoping started the economic reform in China in 1978, the new Production Responsibility System encouraged the process of decollectivization in rural area. The decollectivization brought a higher degree of personal freedom and local autonomy. The state implemented policies to untie the administrative control of agricultural production, therefore free certain peasants from the land and encourage their engagement in commerce, small-scale enterprises, manufacturing and service industries.

At this point, everything in the country seems ready to welcome a change. Rumours came and said that because of the irresolvable conflicts between the reservoir relocatees and the indigenous people, and to follow the state’s call to lose control of the rural population, the local government at that time might approve on a policy of mobilizing the relocatees to move back to the reservoir area, on a voluntary basis. When learning of the rumours, Lai went to see Yang at once.

Lai wanted to leave Liucheng ever since he had got there. Because they were assigned dispersedly in different places, the original working relations between him and his team members were interrupted. Yang, also an active team leader like Lai, was once a policeman in the reservoir area. But due to the shortage of labour force in
his family, he had to quit his job and migrated together with his family, first to Linhe and then Liucheng. Lai and Yang, using their good connections in the resettlement office as well as the local administrative, confirmed that the government at least would not prevent the returned migration at the time. He kept this news to his own productive team and did not want relocatees from other places to know. When talking about other relocatees, he was on the same side of the fence with the government:

It is for sure that this news should not be released to the public. If this policy was confirmed by the government, you cannot imagine how many relocatees would return to the reservoir area. The situation would be out of control at that time.

Lai met Yang for several times, they concluded that the higher ground inside the reservoir was not a viable place for them to return. Hence they decided at last: ‘If we ever return, it must be Xingang; or we will not move’. Lai elaborated,

To me, the Xinfeng River was dead after the reservoir was constructed, so were the mountains. So, we would not return to the higher ground above our home place as other reservoir migrants had done. To peasants like us who were used to farming, the hill land inside the reservoir does not hold any attraction at all. We missed the fertile soil that was submerged forever. … Why choose Xingang? Since Xingang is a port; a transportation centre with many opportunities. It is a lively place because of its fluid population. It seemed to have more opportunities there than the inner reservoir area.

Going Back

The move back to Xingang was by no means smooth. At that afternoon in Huang’s house, Lai seems to become excited when he recounted to me how they fight with the officials who tried to stop them. At this point, even the other men who were playing cards stopped, and joined him with great interest. At the winter of 1978,
after weeks of planning, they packed their stuff and were going to leave by boat. When they arrived at the pier early in the morning, one of the migrant officials in Liucheng turned up suddenly. ‘We were frightened at first, but she was a woman by her own’. Lai smirked and continued,

We were much stronger than her, so we were not afraid of her at all. I tried to convince her that we must leave, but she did not accept our reasons. At last, since we did not want to waste much time quarrelling with her, we pulled her away by force and jumped into the boat one by one. I told her firmly that we were leaving, and she could look for me if she wanted any trouble about it. I do not believe we were wrong to leave a place where we could not make a living and to try to survive by finding a new home. She shouted at us when our boat left, had no choice but let us go.

Lai smiled again, ‘In fact, I knew her personally, though she might not recognize me. She grew up in a village just next to ours. I was sure she would not treat us harshly for she was a reservoir migrant, too’.

However, Huang seemed to have a different perspective on their success and the attitude of the local government at that time. In another personal conversation with Huang, he believed it was because the local authorities, especially the Xinfengjiang Forestry Bureau, encouraged the relocatees to come back, in principle; so that they could eventually succeed in this battle. Huang said in a persistently cagey tone that if returning to Xingang was supposedly disallowed, how could Lai and the other guys settle down here without the connivance of the local authorities? As he always did, Huang emphasized the iron hands of CCP ruling and how people were to scare to fight the state.

According to Huang’s understanding, the local authority, viz., the Bureau, expected that this wasteland would be populated someday. But because of limited
space, Heyuan County did not encourage people to move there. Huang suspected that there must have been some conflict between the local government and the Bureau on the issue of permitting the relocatees to stay in Xingang or not. ‘Why do I think in this way? The Bureau had over 50 staff here at the time, and these people wanted to be reunited with their families. Almost all the staff asked their families to come to Xingang in 1979; this explains my judgment.’

Just as Huang said, except their people (Xichang people) who returned from Liucheng under Lai and Yang’s leadership, according to the data collected by the Bureau (XFBCG 1993), the family members of the state employees initially accounted for the largest percentage of the population of Xingang town. And of course, there were other people who managed to settle down as well. Huilong people, who based at the Huilong Shipyard in the pier, had managed to find a place at Xingang as well. Liu was their leader.

Liu was a high official himself who was working at the CCP committee of the Reservoir Commune. He had the authority to read files that were not released publicly. Liu said,

I moved to Xingang after I read this news in a government document. In fact, when I decided to return, many people were planning the same thing. However, most of them meant to go back to the inner reservoir area but not Xingang. Quite a lot of them decided to stay at Xingang just because when they were passing by Xingang to take a boat back, they learned that it was much easier to make a living on the pier than in the inner reservoir.

Liu told me that transporting one log from the pier to the market could earn 0.2 yuan; if one person could transport 50 logs in one day, he could earn 10 yuan and 300 for one month. In a time when most local government officials were getting a salary of less than 30 yuan per month27, this was very attractive. Although the government had
clearly stipulated in a document that settling at Xingang (rather than in the inner reservoir area) was not allowed, Liu did not care about this regulation. ‘At that time, violating this regulation would only be regarded as an ‘internal conflict among the people’ (renmin neibu maodun 人民内部矛盾). Since Mao had said that internal conflicts among people were resolvable, from years of working experiences under the CCP in the political struggles, I knew that this return would not be treated severely’. Liu later became the first person to build a house at the Xingang pier. He managed it as an inn, which became the main lodging place for the dockworkers and a transit point for passengers for an overnight stay, either waiting for the boats going to the inner reservoir area or buses going to the County centre at Heyuan.

As I learned more stories from the Xingang people, I get to the point that, except for economic motivation, a more fundamental reason for the reservoir relocatees to return was the increase of hardships in the resettled place which Deng’s reform had brought to them.

Luo, another returner in the wave of 1978 who now runs a restaurant in the main street in Xingang, said that from his point of view, what actually happened during Deng’s Reform was to distribute the land (fen di 分地). ‘To obtain some land from the collective was a good thing for us, of course. But this change also resulted bad things and made us move again’. In the collectivization time, lands were collectively owned, the native people had no choice but to accept the relocatees to join them and work together with them, though the discrimination against them seldom stopped. When the Production Responsibility System was carried out in the countryside, conflicts of interest between the native people and the relocatees increased rapidly. Since the end of 1978, according to Luo, whether or not the
resettlers had the right to land and what kind of land they should be given had become hot topics. Luo said the reform in 1978 painfully reminded him his awkward identity: they do not belong here (the resettled place) and also do not belong there (the home place). Therefore, when the collective system ended, they found themselves not only had to face the badly treatments from the host villages, but also were stunned to find out that if they decided to go back to the inner reservoir area, how little land they would get once the hill land were to be divided to each household. Although in the resettled village, there would much more tillable land than villages inside the reservoir, the relocatees were at a disadvantage in the scramble for top quality land and construction materials. A woman in Xingang once told me that, back at then, her family could only allot barren and dry land at the margin of the village which could hardly harvest any grains. Because of the tough living conditions in the resettlement and the hope for a better life in Xingang, Luo at last moved to Xingang in 1981.

Of course, not all the relocatees could finally settle down in Xingang successfully. I do not get to know the stories of those failed, but when Luo talked about his return in a way that as it just happened, I know that he did not mention the whole story. At least he did not mention Wei, one of his closest friends and a main help that allowed his smooth return.

*An Official Migrant*

Wei, a retired officer from Xinfengjiang Forestry Bureau, is an important person in Xingang. Almost all my informants knew him. He had been one of the major officials in charge of the migrants’ affairs in the reservoir area since the construction of the reservoir in 1958. He was first the specially appointed security
officer since the reservoir commune was newly established. In 1960, he was the head of Public Security of the Reservoir Commune. Then in 1962, he was promoted as the director of the Armed Forces of the Reservoir Commune. He migrated to Shuntian Commune with his fellow townsmen in 1968 and was assigned as the deputy head of the Commune. Eventually he transferred to Xinfengjiang Forestry Bureau in Xingang in 1973 as the head of the police.

Wei retired from the Bureau in 1986 and is now living in Heyuan City. He recalled that in 1973, different organizations and offices handling everyday affairs in the port were operating well. There was the Grain Supply Centre, the National Drugstore, the People’s Clinic, the transportation fleet, the porterage operation station, the supply and marketing agency, the Timber Station, the Local Product Station, the Aquatic Product Station, the General Office of Xingang and the Police Station. There were over 400 workers and staff living there in the time but no families; Wei’s family members as well: they stayed in Shuntian Commune.

‘It was the winter of 1978 when the relocatees returned to Xingang in droves, among them were Lai and Yang, I remember’. At first, the officers and the policemen tried every tactic to drive the migrants out under orders. Wei told me that the police often accompanied him to seize the migrants who furtively built shanties in the outlying mountain valleys. Except for the main lane in the middle, Xingang was full of mountains on both sides. Therefore the returned migrants might be dwelling in the deep side of the mountains and evade order of the local authorities.

Those who were arrested by the police would be sent back to the commune one had come from. ‘The principle was to go back to where you came from. Social mobility is under strictly control’. Wei said, ‘But besides shipping them off, we
would not treat them too bad. I thought the reservoir migrants were the most miserable people in our country’. Wei did not conceal his compassion for the reservoir migrants. As he said, he was a reservoir migrant himself so he could empathize with the suffering of the migrants. He said,

Before the forced migration, people living in the reservoir area had fertile field and plentiful grain. They used bran and chaff to feed their pigs and chickens; they produced edible oil themselves by frying the pork fat and pressing peanuts. They had their self-sufficient life. As long as you work, you would not starve; as long as you walk, you could reach any place. But after the construction of the reservoir, everything changed. They did not have enough grain to eat and they could no longer improve things just by working hard in the fields. They had no fields and had to buy grain. How to earn money to feed up themselves was a big problem. The worst problem was that all the roads were submerged and they had to go by boat; they could not get to other places on foot anymore. The world had turned upside down for these self-supported people.

Wei told me frankly that it was hard for him to arrest his fellow villagers. After all he and the returned migrants were of the same people. They suffered the same pain of losing their homeland. ‘The living condition was extremely bad in Xingang at that time. It was dark and chilly inside the mountains. If they were not at the dead end, if they only had another choice, they would not be living like that, inside the remote mountain passes’. Not only Wei, but also the majority of the police and staff in the General Office were reservoir migrants as well. They shared Wei’s compassion for their fellow townsmen, their friends, and even their relatives. Consequently, the act of banishment was softened and some people eventually succeeded in remaining in Xingang.
Luo also benefited from his close relationship with Wei which had started in the early days when they resettled in the Shuntian Commune together. He managed to bring his whole family with him to Xingang and settle down in the 1980s.

*Personal Connections for Resettling*

Just like in the case of Luo, close personal relationships with the staff of the Bureau was an important factor for staying in Xingang. The Bureau moved into Xingang in 1963 for the convenience of managing affairs in the reservoir. There were about 40 staff working for this most important organization in the reservoir area. After 1978, following the trend of the return-migration, family members of most of the staff moved into Xingang. Due to the Bureau’s privileges, this group of people occupied the central area of Xingang, living in better conditions than the others who living inside the hill land. Jiang’s family, who own a total of three stores in the central commercial area of the pier now, settled down at Xingang depending on this kind of relationship.

The Jiang family also lived in a wooden shanty in the first few years of their stay in Xingang. But the police did not drive them out because his son-in-law worked at the Bureau. In the early 1980s, the Bureau used the reservoir relocatees compensation fund to construct a main road linking up to the migrants’ settlement. Jiang’s son-in-law gained the long-term leases for three blocks of land on both sides of this new main road, with a very small rent. When he moved into the suburb area of Heyuan city in 1983, he gave his old house as a present to his father-in-law, Jiang, enabling the family moved out from the rough shanty. Just like this, under the help of the staff from the Bureau, some people could get better locations in the community. Although most of the Bureau staff had moved out to Heyuan city for a better living,
people have close relations with them could benefit from the relationship, being able
to stay in Xingang quickly and in more comfort.

To put it briefly, after 1978, more and more migrants returned to Xingang. Some of them depended on their relatives; some of them depended on their fellow villagers, some on their friends. Personal networks were the most important factor in their success. Another feature of this settlement was that they came family by family; there was no large-scale migration. Every family had its own network which helped them to settle in. I argue that this is because during constant moving, the solidarity of the people had been weakened. And the other way round, moving again at the unit of single household has deepened the fragmentation of the community in Xingang. Hence, although the framework of the former productive teams could still be seen, the relationships between the community members were much cooler. Personal networks became the key elements dominating their life in Xingang, sometimes a sticking point in competition for their settlement and later the making of a living in the pier. It was so important that the Xingang people keep their networks a secret, to avoid their privileges in the competition being revealed to others.

**New Comers and Old Dockers**

Back to that winter in 1978. Lai and Yang left Liucheng to seek their fortune in Xingang. Except the bustling port, Xingang was still a desolate place when they arrived. There was no place for them to live. The conditions were so poor that they had to live in a plastic shed for several years. They built the shack in a valley behind a hill, where Huang’s house is located today. Huang’s neighbours are actually all from Xichang. Lai told me that since more and more Xichang people in Linhe followed them to return, they built shacks together in the valley. After Xingang was
officially a town and they had the hill bulldozed, this place gradually got a name, the Returned Lane (daoliu keng 倒流坑).

Not long after they have settled down, the returned relocatees found out that, except the local government, there was another group of people in Xingang who did not like their returning. They were the dock workers who were the state employees working at the porterage station.

Porterage in Xingang

The first batch of workers came into Xingang during late 1958 and early 1959, after the reservoir was dammed and Diaolou (Xingang) became the major port. Different kinds of organizations had been set up to maintain the daily operation of the port. The dockers working in the porterage station were state employees, who were selected and appointed from different communes in Heyuan County. The living conditions in Diaolou were then very rough because the place was totally underdeveloped before the construction of the reservoir. At first, they had to sleep in boats at night like the boatmen. Later, when things improved they moved onto a barge. It was not until the mid 1960s that they could live in bunkhouses on land and later a brick house as a dorm.

Bearded Liu, who owns a booth in Xingang Food Market, was one of the early porters working in the pier. He was 75 years old when I first met him in 2001. His booth is located inside the market building, just next to the wet market, selling dried foods and sundries. The booth is used as his home also. The place is tidy and it would not be larger than 5 square meters. It was constructed of wood and divided into two parts with a board. Several shelves loaded with foodstuffs and flavourings were in the front of the store, whereas behind the board was a bed.
Bearded Liu lived in Xichang before he came to Xingang. His father moved from Xinning County to Heyuan County for business. He was selected to work at the port in January 1960. Like the other porters’ families, in 1980 his wife came to settle in Xingang also. Unfortunately, after a short period of time, his wife had an accident and became paralyzed. To take care of his wife, Bearded Liu stopped working as a docker and began managing a small business in the market.

In fact, working on the pier is very dangerous, especially to people with no experience at all. Loading and unloading cargos demand acquaintance of the operation of the pier, knowledge about the equipment, and proper skills dealing with various, sometimes dangerous, goods. Of course, workers must be tough strong. Therefore, many women I talked with have horrific memories of the injuries during the time of porterage. One woman showed me her injured thigh which could not carry heavy things any more. I have also learned that Huang’s first wife died in a pier accident in the early 1980s: although, he did not tell me by himself. Having shared with me his misery experiences in the early 1960s including several deaths in his family, he chose not to tell me his wife’s accident. I gather that this trauma was too heavy for him to speak of. People referred to his late wife as a kind person who had good relationships with people and also had a harmonious marriage with Huang. They felt deep sorry about her miserable death: She was crushed by a crane since she was not so familiar with the working environment. ‘People there shouted at her: ‘Run! Run!’ But she just stood there, too shocked to move one step’. One who witnessed this tragic accident was still full of horror when she recounted the story to me.

But porterage seemed to be the only and the most important way to make a living for them notwithstanding the danger. They soon managed to establish their
own organizations, copying the operating mode of People’s Commune. Like the production team they used to belong in the village, they set up porterage teams to organize people. They also initiated the ‘work point’ (gōngfēn 工分) management scheme to calculate one’s work load, exactly like the way they did back in the villages under the collective economy system. All jobs are convertible into points and all get work points for their job. Job was assigned by the porterage team leaders and everyone obeyed the rule. One failed to get point by doing which was not been assigned for. The head(s) of the porterage team thus has the sole power. It is not surprising to find that the organization of the porterage teams are much alike those organizations in the Mao era.

Almost all families in Xingang had one or more members, if not the whole family, transporting timber and other cargo at the port every day. They had made tremendous efforts to compete with those early dock workers on the port to gain work there.

New Porters

Lai confessed that he had no idea about life in Xingang before he returned. To escape the pursuit and capture by the police, they lived in remote mountain valleys. Lai told me that ‘the living environment was so dreadful that the police were disgusted by entering there and usually would not come more than once a day. So we could stay if we successfully evaded the police once a day’. Despite this, the migrants and the policemen were actually acquainted with each other. ‘Because we came from the same village, it was a tricky relationship between us and them’. For one time, Lai was caught by the police, but he did not give in and argued with the police:
If I had a home to go back to, I would have been there already. I will not go back to Liucheng; that is not my home. If you police have to take me away by force, then send me back to my own home, which is under the water. Push me into the water! If you do not dare to drown me, then I have to stay here.

But even if he could successfully evade the police, how to make a living in Xingang was still a big problem. ‘We were farmers. Indeed we could do nothing except cultivate the field. But the natural environment had changed—we had no land any more, instead we got water. Many of those among us were planning to learn how to fish’. However, they soon found porterage was a much better way to make quick money.

More than one relocatees mentioned ‘tianshi, dili, renhe’ in discussing why they could successfully stay in Xingang. They thought it was because of the ‘appropriate heavenly timing, location advantage, and harmonious human relations’ (tianshi dili renhe 天时、地利、人和). According to Feutchwang (2004, p. 166):

In the cosmology of Chinese geomancy such disruption is conceived as the result of a disordering of the harmony of a universe of three powers: those of heaven, humans, and earth. Disorder in this conception is due to lack of attendance by humans to the principles of heavenly movement and earthly formation. Of the three powers, it is the responsibility of humans to centre and disclose the dynamic order of heaven and earth by ritual.

‘Appropriate heavenly timing means that after the economic reform in 1978, the state encouraged a higher degree of personal freedom and local autonomy in the countryside. At a time of contingent, the local authorities could not figure out what kind of policy should be carried out in the days following. As Gao said, those years were of much commotion, both the state and local government were exploring a new direction in development, therefore state control was loosened somewhat.
Furthermore, after the reform in 1978, economic construction developed rapidly and thus the Xinfengjiang reservoir area, as one of the major forestry centres in Guangdong Province, became more and more important.

‘Location advantage’ refers to the dominating status of Xingang in freight and passenger transportation over the reservoir area. Because Xingang is the main pier in the reservoir area, with frequent flowing of passengers and freight in the pier, the returned migrants found more opportunities here than those returning to the higher ground inside the reservoir. They could work on the dock, or run an inn for the workers; some opened retail stores or small restaurant. Xingang is the only pier for timber transportation and the lumberyard of the reservoir forest centre. All timber conveyed from the reservoir forestry station were loaded onto trucks here and then transported to other places. So, a more flourishing timber trade meant more work opportunities for the Xingang people.

As for the ‘harmonious human relations’, Huang regarded it as the most crucial element. At first, harmonious relationships among the Xichang people helped them set up a porterage team to compete with other people in the pier.

Starting from the late 1970s, under the rapidly increasing demand for timber, the dock workers could not adequately handle all the work. Although they worked night and day, there was still more timbers flowing on the water waiting for them to transit. It was also at this time that Lai found some opportunities in the pier. One day when he was wandering around the dock, he happened to be asked by a timber-owner to help him unload the timber, since the workers in the porterage station were too busy and he had no time to wait. After doing this first business, Lai discovered that the supply of porters fell short of demand. Thereupon he went to the pier and looked
for work that the porters of the porterage station could not handle. However, the
porters soon realized what he was doing and arrogantly regarded Lai and his fellow
villagers as troublemakers. They reported them to the police in the hope of driving
them out of the docks. ‘Almost starting at that time, we were excluded by the porters
from working in the pier. We quarrelled almost every day, and even sometimes
fought. We needed to evade not just the porters but also the police while working.
We struggled for this work, as it was the only way we could support our family and
ourselves. And after all, the remuneration was considerable’. Although the conditions
were tough at that time, the high income attracted more and more of the returning
migrants. ‘At the peak, we earned around 10 yuan per day. I still remember there was
one month our family got 500 yuan, which was my record, while the government
officials at that time were only receiving a monthly salary of less than 100 yuan in
average’.

Connections and Conflicts

Given that hill land occupies most part of Xingang, it is impossible for the
residents to make their living by farming as they used to be. Most of the Xingang
people depended on dock work and the fishing industry for their basic livelihood
after they returned.

From the establishment of the port in the 1950s, timber transportation had
been the most important business. There are altogether six piers in Xingang. The old
tourism pier in town was abandoned and replaced with a new one two miles away in
1998. Of the other five, four are mainly for timber transportation. The reservoir area
has in total 1,697,164 acres of forest (XFBCG, 1993, p. 77). All the timber cut in the
hills were conveyed to Xingang by water and then to other places overland. The
timber trade had thus become an economic mainstay for the reservoir migrants here, who had lost their farm land. A woman dock-worker told me about the blossoming timber trade in the 1980s:

In the 1980s, when we first came here, there was so much timber that flowed from the forestry centre in the inner reservoir to the transportation pier every day that you could hardly see the water from where you stood in front of the pier. The surface of the water was all covered in floating timber rafts. The untreated logs were bound together as rafts at the forestry centre, and then they would be floated to the pier with the boatmen guiding their direction. When they arrived, we hauled them up and transported them to the trucks waiting at the top of the long slope to convey the timber to other places.

When talking about the changes to her life style after the decline of the timber trade, she greatly missed the old days when there was a lot of work:

Do you know how much timber there was on the water and how busy the pier was? Just imagine! The dock-workers could continue working all day if they wanted, without a break. We didn’t find the time to eat our lunch in most days. Work was waiting for you. You did not need to worry about having no work to do; just the opposite, you were worried there was too much.

The attractive reward from porterage brought more and more migrants to join the teams conveying timber on the dock. The pier was soon in chaos. Not only did the conflict between the migrants and the old dockers continue, the conflict among different groups of migrants also emerged. And the loyalty to certain ingroups among the migrants were getting clearer and clearer due to disturbances.

People who returned to Xingang had differences from the beginning. People of Xichang mostly depended on their personal relationships with the local authorities to secure their stay; while people from Huilong were mainly dependent on relationships with the workers in the boat manufacture factories in Xingang. The
shipyard, held by the Huilong Commune, became a base for the returned Huilong people. Gradually, Huilong people were mostly living near the shipyard while the Xichang people were mostly living around the Return Lane. The distinction is still clear even today. To get ahead in the competition, Lai organized the Xichang people into a porterage team; and later, a Huilong porterage team was founded. The founding of these two teams definitively confirmed the divide among the returned migrants in Xingang. In addition to these two teams, another team from Xudong led by my host Gu, had joined this competition in the 1960s. Therefore, including the original team of the porterage station, there were total four porterage teams on the pier.

The teams used work points (gongfen 工分) to account for the work of each member, the same way as the production team in Maoist era used to do. The average number of points for a male worker per day was 10. If one did not turn up for work, he got zero point for that day. Female workers usually got fewer points than the males. They would normally get 9 points for one day, and fewer for those looked less able, i.e., 8.5 points. The team members held meetings to evaluate the work points one could earn per day.

People who did not join either of the teams were regarded as ‘doing secret work’ (gan sihuo 干私活) and would be stopped and excluded by the four porterage teams together. It would be impossible to find work on the pier if one did not join one of the teams. If a person had no link with any of the four teams, he had to seek approval of a team leader to join a porterage team. These people would have to turn in 25 yuan per month as membership fee.
The pier’s operation became more orderly once the porterage teams were set up. But it was still hard for the newly-found porterage teams to compete with the porterage station. The porterage station had then worked on the dock for over 20 years and had many regular customers, especially the state-owned enterprises; more importantly, the station had government backing and had the trust of the timber-owners. Lai said their porterage team could only get some low paying work at first. ‘The dockers in the porterage station had priority, so they could select works with high rewards and less tough, and we had to pick up what was left’.

Under these circumstances, another important ‘harmonious relationship’ with the timber-owner was crucial. Lai told me that the porterage team could not survive long-term having lower priority than the porterage station. He thought of many ways to break this condition. The best idea he could think of was to transfer the battlefield out of the pier.

We were not able to beat them on the dock, but we could beat them with the help of the timber-owners. Our only advantage was that we came from the reservoir area, but the workers in the porterage station did not—most of them were not even reservoir people (shuiku ren 水库人). While the timber-owners were mostly reservoir people, we persuaded them to let us, their fellow villagers, load the timber for them.

Lai lassoed many timber-owners using the relationship of ‘laoxiang’ (老乡 fellow villagers). Once the timber-owners decided to give their work to the Xichang porterage team, the team did not need to scramble with the porters in the porterage station. With more and more work coming their way, the Xichang porterage team became the biggest team on the dock. ‘The porters in the porterage station were assigned to work here by the government; hence most of them were not reservoir people. They could not compete with us [here, he meant the other three porterage
teams which had relationships with the reservoir people]. The porterage station was
dismissed eventually and it was the first porterage team dismissed in Xingang’. Lai
smiled as a winner.

However, although Lai had succeeded in organizing people from Xichang to
form a team to gain the opportunity to earn money, there was no way he could
organize all the residents in Xingang into a cohesive community. People had been
divided into four porterage teams, although within those teams, the members usually
had just superficial working relationships with each other. In other words, these
teams were just short-term interest groups with little solidarity. Lai mentioned that
there was no other collective activity for the team members other than work. With
the decline of the timber trade in the early 1990s, and finally the disbandment of the
porterage teams, Xingang further became divided into a loosely organized
community in which individual households are the basic unit of production and
social network.

A Fluid Community

*Mid-Autumn Festival*

The 15th of the 8th lunar month is the Mid-Autumn Festival, an important
festival for the Chinese people as a family day. As Xingang residents had mentioned
to me before, the Mid-autumn festival was crucial to them for reinforcing one’s
personal network by visiting ‘meaningful’ relatives and friends. However, few visits
could be seen going on in the town on that day. I had dinner with Jiang’s family after
they finished the day’s business in the tourism pier. Business had to be stopped in the
evening for there was still no provision for night-time activities at the tourism site.
No collective celebration was held in Xingang that night and every household celebrated the festival by themselves. The Jiang family worshiped the moon deity after dinner and then he and his wife talked about the collective activities their old village would held in the night of mid-autumn:

Girls and young women in the village would gather together after dinner. They would sit in a circle, waiting for one of them being chosen by the flower fairy and then the others could ask the girl who represented the fairy at that time, about their future. The fairy would answer their questions using different flowers. If a pregnant woman got a ‘peony’, she would have a daughter; a ‘tea flower’ would mean a son. As for the other villagers, especially the boys, they played ‘Kongming Lamp’ (kongming deng 孔明灯). People play Kongming Lamp in the Mid-Autumn Festival to commemorate Mr. Kongming, a wise scholar of ancient China. When the candle inside the paper-made lamp was fired, the lamp would rise to the sky. We had much fun in making a good lamp which could rise the highest in the sky.

‘However,’ Jiang said sentimentally, ‘those old friends of mine have spread over different places now. People who live here are from various places and I am not sure what kind of customs they follow’.

The different backgrounds of the community members were certainly one of the factors that have obstructed the development of communication between them. More important, after the former social networks had been destroyed, the following twenty-year of constantly being relocated had made the construction of a new social network hard for these people. Compounded by the different ways each of them settled in Xingang, this has allowed people to make few links in terms of their social connections. To some extent, they are accustomed to this kind of independent lifestyle, which helps them to maintain a feeling of security in facing a constantly changing environment. In my point of view, living in Xingang for just ten to twenty
years is too short a time for these reservoir relocatees to cultivate a feeling of security about this place and a belief that they will live here for generations. So this kind of loosely organized community could be treated as another way of dealing with the trauma of a broken community for the Xingang people.

Social Differentiation

Although the porterage teams established in the 1980s had united with the Xingang people based on a fellow townsmen relationship, this kind of union, developed under the competitive pressure of porterage, could not endure. Beginning in the early 1990s, the state banished woodcutting for protecting the country from deforestation, as the porterage of timber in Xingang declined day by day. Many youngsters in the porterage team left for the PRD to look for jobs in the factories and the porterage team were successively dismissed.

After the decline of porterage, the economic development in Xingang diversified. Some opened restaurants to attract tourists and gradually became rich; some operated stores selling special local products to the tourists; some retired from the Bureau as an officer; and the inn business run by some of them declined rapidly as there are few workers on the pier now and the transportation is much convenient now; some still involved in the lumber business, conveying limited timber from Heyuan to the PRD cities; some bought mini-buses and joined the public service vehicle team; some run the tourist ferry on the lake. Still, there were some women dockers in the pier, who were mostly the late comers in the 1990s. They did not have any influence in the community.

With the economic conditions polarized among the residents, the community further divided against each other. The process of othering went multiple ways.
Individual households worked hard to develop new ways of gaining a better life; however, for their own sakes, they tried their best to keep the knowledge to their own. This individual way of developing economic condition has reinforced the insular nature of the households.

Jiang’s son, Liang, and his neighbour, who is also a relative, became adversaries after his neighbour also opened a local-product store. They seldom speak to each other. One time, to meet the tourists’ demand for the fingerlings out of season, Liang decided to purchase fishing gear and go fishing by himself, not only relying on his suppliers in the reservoir. When the neighbour went fishing as well, he thought his neighbour was just copying him and he had to be alert about the relative’s future copying of his business skills. The relations between the two families got worse after that. The competition between the two also extended to the inner reservoir. I once followed Liang to the inner reservoir area to collect sun-dried fish. He pointed out to the fishmongers the tricks his neighbour had used in business, to get more trust and then more fish from the fishmongers. To Liang, the relationship with the fishmongers was obviously much more important than his relationship with the neighbour, although they are close relatives.

Xingang is the transportation centre of the reservoir area. Passengers and businessmen come and go everyday. This fluid environmental characteristic ensures that the residents develop a network not based within the community itself, but a network extending both inside and outside the reservoir area. This outward personal network in reverse intensifies the fluidity of community relationships.
Conclusion

Developed under complex personal networks, Xingang has become a loosely organized migrant community in which individual households are the basic unit of production and the social network. Generally, the success of an individual household does not rely on the community but on outside relationships and social networks. The personal network of the community members is not based on relationships developed within the community but extends to the outside world.

Like Jiang, after 13 times of relocations, he and his clan members, fellow villagers and close friends were separated by great distances. Actually, a large number of his clan members are now living in Shaoguan Municipal City in north Guangdong Province. Those who grew up with him are now living in a place several hundred kilometres away from him, a place he has never been to. The clan of Jiang reconstructed their ancestral temple in Shaoguan; and Jiang’s son, Liang, represented Jiang to attend the opening rituals of the temple in 1998.

For these reservoir relocatees, they have stuck to their life experiences of living in their old social communication circles before the damming in response to the constant changing environment after the evacuation. Although the villages have been submerged forever, it was the memory of them that has ensured that the relationships of the old society would never change. Therefore, although living together, every family regards their former social network, such as family relationships, as more reliable than a newly developed relationship with other community members. However, they do not regard each other as strangers. The relocatees could use these unchangeable relationships of the old society flexibly from time to time. Just as when they were planning to return they would go to find persons
in power and when they formed porterage teams in Xingang, it was on the former village basis. However, this kind of close connections somehow fails to develop into a solid long-term relationship between the community members, which would be a basis to form a stable community. I hope to show that the lack of security feelings, the lack sense of belonging are resulted from twenty years of constant relocation and the broken social structure in this process of displacement.

Trust is especially problematic for the forced migrant given the loss of familiar social cues. Oliver-Smith (1991:2) calls forced migration and resettlement ‘totalizing phenomena’ that: ‘The process is invariably difficult and painful, engendering feelings of powerlessness and alienation as people are uprooted from their familiar circumstances. Whole communities suffer acute degrees of disintegration as community structures, social networks and even kin groups may be dispersed to different resettlement sites. The affective ties between individuals and communities and their material environments are destroyed by uprooting and resettlement’.

In another way, Zygmunt Bauman’s brilliant work, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, is helpful here to understand the fluid community like Xingang:

Social forms and institutions no longer have enough time to solidify and cannot serve as frames of reference for human actions and long-term life plans, so individuals have to find other ways to organise their lives. They have to splice together an unending series of short-term projects and episodes that don’t add up to the kind of sequence to which concepts like ‘career’ and ‘progress’ could meaningfully be applied. Such fragmented lives require individuals to be flexible and adaptable—to be constantly ready and willing to change tactics at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret and to pursue opportunities according to their
current availability. In liquid modernity the individual must act, plan actions and calculate the likely gains and losses of acting (or failing to act) under conditions of endemic uncertainty.

The Xingang people do not want to develop a deep rooted relationship within the community or with the place, to keep their flexibility to response to the ever-changing and ruthless state policy. Borrowing Bauman’s term, I argue that the Xingang people exist in a ‘permanent temporary state’ which does not allow them to develop a coherent relationship but a fluid community. In chapter 5, I will further develop this point by examine people’s senses of Xingang, trying to understand the making of Xingang as a place through the movements of people, things, and meanings.
CHAPTER 5 SENSES OF THE PLACE

A Historical Sense of Place

As I have showed in chapter 4, most of residents in Xingang are from two places in the reservoir area, Lixi and Xichang. These places in fact are two major market places (xu 墟) within the reservoir area before the construction of the dam. In his seventies, Luo drew out his mental map of the market towns in the reservoir area based on his memory:

![Map 10 Places before the Damming](image)

(Drawn by Luo at his restaurant in Xingang)

According to the map of Luo, there were a lot of marketplaces in the area submerged. To the north of Xichang, there were the Zhixi and Banjiang markets; Linhe in the west; Changjiang, Lixi, Gengwei, and Longmen in the southwestern part of Xichang and Huilong, Duntou, Diaolou, and Heyuan in the southeast.
These flourishing market towns greatly benefited from the convenient transportation network in the region. In 1937, a provincial road from Guangzhou to Meizhou was constructed. This road went through Heyuan and Diaolou, and then wound its way to Nanhu and Shuangjiang villages where had been submerged in the centre of the reservoir. Peddlers from neighbouring counties such as Meizhou, Xingning, Wuhua would also come and do business at the area. Some of them even stayed on afterwards, such as Bearded Liu, whose father came from Xingning in the neighbouring area in the 1930s and opened a store in the Xichang market.

People remembered that, before this area was submerged, not only was the overland transportation good but also the water course was flourishing for there were lots of boats distributing goods throughout the Xinfeng River area. The boatmen were mostly Xinfeng people, they said, and they were using a different dialect to that of the Heyuan people. But most of the Xinfeng relocatees in Xingang talk in Heyuan dialect very well now.

The Xinfeng River originates from Xinfeng County and joined the East River in Heyuan. These two rivers flow through Heyuan County and played a vital role in the economy and people’s social lives. According to the recounts of the local people, daily necessities from different places such as tea, tobacco, bamboo shoots and agaric from Fujian Province; ceramic and house-hold products from Dapu; piece goods and towels from Xingning; wood and colophony from Longchuan, Liucheng and Lankou were all transported by the East River from the east. The East River was also used to convey fowls, oil and beans from Puqian and Shiba from the south. From the north, melon seeds, tobacco and tungsten from Jiangxi; pigs from Xinfeng; garlic from Lianping; and corn, radishes, mushrooms and agaric from Xichang,
Huilong, Guling and Nanhu on the west all depended on the Xinfeng River for transport. Most of these products were processed and packed in Heyuan and then transported to Huizhou, Guangzhou and Hong Kong via the East River. (See Map 2 for reference) At the time when overland transportation was mostly underdeveloped, this circle made Heyuan an important business port in Guangdong.

But to people who lived in Changning (viz. Xinfeng. Changning was renamed as Xinfeng during the Cultural Revolution), they had another circle of marketing system. Longmen was the economic centre for them. The distance from Changning to Longmen was much shorter than that to Heyuan. People lived in Changning (Xinfeng) thus had more links and communication with Longmen than with Heyuan. Almost all the informants from Xinfeng mentioned Longmen to me, but Heyuan is never in the stories.

Jiang indicated he was Xinfengese (Xinfeng ren 新丰人) in our first conservation. He said he had never been to Heyuan before he settled down in Xingang. He recounts:

When I was young, I went to Longmen to sell woods or other things on market days. Heyuan is too far away for me; I never thought I would move here one day. But now, I have lived in Heyuan, in Xingang, for decades. Destiny is such an intangible thing, you see.

Before the damming, Xichang and Lixi were both villages of the Changning County which lies east to Heyuan. In the local map (Map 8) during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), we can see that Heyuan was much smaller than it is now (map 3). In 1958, when the provincial government decided to set up a hydropower station, the area where Heyuan bordered Xinfeng was considered as the most suitable place. After Government reconnaissance, it was decided that the entire submerged area would be
under Heyuan County. From then on, most of the Xinfeng people who had lived in
the affected area were resettled to Heyuan and been re-identified as Heyuan people.

Zeng was from Xichang. He said he went to Longmen to work as a bricklayer
since he was a teenager as there were many opportunities. He worked there for
several years until the ‘liberation’ in 1949. Although he was allotted some land to
farm after that, he continued to do small business during the market days in Longmen.
‘I purchased goods from Xichang or Lixi, and then I went to Longmen on market
days to sell them. The local market in Longmen was flourishing, so the goods would
soon be sold out with a good price’. Except this, Longmen was also a cultural centre
for the Xinfeng people. Another man from Xichang had mentioned to me when he
was preparing his wedding, he went to Longmen to hire drummers. He said people in
the nearby area could find ritual experts in Longmen when there were celebrations in
the villages.

The construction of the reservoir has profoundly changed the economic and
cultural connections centred at Longmen. When the water began sluicing into the
reservoir, Xichang and Huilong (including Lixi) were fundamentally affected. In
1959, Heyuan County took the administration of all submerged and semi-submerged
area. After that, communication with Longmen was stopped and a closer relation
with Heyuan was gradually built. New economic connections were constructed
according to the changes in the natural environment. The old boundaries were
blurred. The reservoir area became a new political and economic space.

During my staying in Xingang, many people told me that the reservoir
submerged a lot of thriving markets throughout the countryside and they remembered
vividly the market days (Fei 1948, 1949; Skinner 1971) in different market towns—
even after 50 years. Several temples were repeatedly mentioned in their stories. The
temples were located in different water areas; each main branch of the Xinfeng River
would have its own temple. The rituals conducted in these temples seemed to be the
most colourful memories for these old men.

These rituals, the markets, and the moving between different places remind
me to think their relationship with the place: besides obvious nostalgias on the
vibrant old times, it is true that in a time when they were peasants and rooted in the
earth, they seems to have high mobility; while after they become an urban citizen
(jumin 居民) in Xingang and got rid of the peasant life, they seems to be grounded
more at the place and have no space to move. Although Lai considered Xingang as
an ‘empty pier’ now, they were still trapped there. An examination on the mobility
might help us to understand this.

The renowned Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong, described Chinese
society as essentially ‘earth-bound (xiangtu 乡土)’. He concluded several elements
that are crucial for the constitution of traditional Chinese society:

Rural people carry the smell of the earth; they do because they depend on it
for their livelihood. The land-based community rests upon interpersonal
relationships, governed by custom rather than law, dependent upon an oral
rather than a written tradition. It consists of clusters of families, may best be
described as a mini-clan, and is essentially closed to outsiders. (Fei, 1948, p.1-7. Quoted from Faure and Siu 2006, p.36)

However, Faure and Siu (2006) argue that this kind of rural society is an ideal and
most of that is imagined (p.37). They showed that the cultural construction of
peasant community was anything but local:

Lineage charters and settlements narratives started with histories of
migration. The hierarchy of marketing systems, higher order lineages,
temple networks, academic and official mobility provided maximum
circulation of translocal resources and cultural imageries. War and natural disasters triggered other waves of circulation, be they demographic, economic, social or cultural. Resources reaching far beyond the local were used to make and legitimize locality. Multiple state and local agencies are involved in constructing this vibrant complex. (Faure and Siu 2006, pp. 50-51)

Further, they regarded the cellularised, grounded existence of villages as a Maoist creation: ‘It took the massive organizational and ideological powers of the Maoist revolution to ‘ground’ the Chinese peasants to administrative cells, after significant layers of social life beyond these cells were truncated, marginalized, destroyed’ (2006, p. 51). Faure and Siu’s inspiring observation of Chinese rural society is useful in this chapter. In my opinion, how did the traditional rural life which was mobile, multi-layered and vibrant turn into a grounded, flat and lifeless current is the key question for us to understand contemporary Chinese society. Following Faure and Siu, this chapter continues to examine how social relations and identities at various intersecting levels are influenced by displacement, with a particular angle of the mobility of people under the reality of rural/urban division. Being at the edge of the reservoir and the edge of Heyuan, Xingang awkwardly find itself stands in between rural and urban. How do the relocatees produce locality (in Appadurai’s term) in Xingang with both the experiences before Maoist revolution and the impact of the Maoist state? By examining different movements in and out Xingang and different routines in everyday practice, I tend to understand the ambiguous sense of place and the ambivalent identities of the Xingang people, who, as the Appadurai (1996, p. 186) said, ‘are increasingly prisoners in the context-producing activities of the nation-state’.
The movement of people has been strongly controlled ever since the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949. The state has used several means to control every aspect of its people: urban citizens worked and confined at different unit of state owned enterprises, while rural residents were bound with collective land ownership and grounded on earth. In 1958, household registration (hukou 户口) system was introduced to enforce the public control. People should mainly stay at the place they registered and it was very hard one can change the registration card from rural to urban. Without proper paper documents while being away from the place registered, a rural person would be forcibly sent back to the original place by Police. Not long after the establishment of People’s Republic of China in 1949, a huge wall between the urban and rural space have been successfully set up. And while urbanites were viewed as modern and open, the peasants were viewed as backward and inward. To get rid of the identity of rural were many people’s dreams at that time.

Except the efficient hukou system to control the nobilities of people, the language of the state continues to provide an ordering framework culturally. Town families and their rural neighbours both ‘locked into caste-like statuses defined by the language of an organized state machinery,’ in Faure and Siu’s (2006, 47) words.

However, regarding to the stories I learned in Xingang, although the control of movement was rigid, many of the reservoir relocatees managed to move from place to place since the 1970s. Fleeing out from the registered rural household, people in Xingang formed the ‘floating population’ (liudong renkou 流动人口) in
official term in the 1980s. Ironically, in my opinion, their relatively ‘free’ status could only suggest that they were not included in the ‘national order’ at that time. This again reminds us their ambivalent identities: not belong to here, not belong to there. They were out-of-place people in an ordered state system.

Many women I met and talked in Xingang told me that, actually, men from the reservoir area were not to worry about seeking a wife. Women from nearby villages around their resettlement place were very pleased to marry to a ‘reservoir guy’ although they were in such poor condition. Moving with their husbands from villages to the pier in Xingang, these women had their dreams of changing their status from rural villager to an urban citizenship. Although at that time, they could hardly see the status in their household registration card would be changed soon. One woman told me that she was so excited to leave the village and had a new ‘town’ life: ‘That means I was not a peasant anymore!’

Mei and her husband Hu, both in their fifties, are living in an apartment with their grandson in Xingang. They have two sons. The elder one is mildly retarded and the younger son left the family, leaving behind a child with autism to the couple. They are the only income resource of the whole family. When talking with me about her whole life, Mei was usually sad and blue. Only when she talked about the 1980s, she seems to be happy and excited. She raised her voice unconsciously: ‘It’s hard to say the life here was very good, but actually it’s quite good, from my standard. I didn’t need to farm on the land any more. And it’s cash we earned—when you had the paper money of 5 yuan in your hand for just half an hour’s labour, you are actually thrilled about that! In the farm field, I work for a whole year and could not see money earned’.
In the 1970s, before she got married with Mr. Hu and moved to Xingang, she lived in a small village in Longchuan County, just next to Liucheng, where Mr. Hu had been displaced there together with Lai and Huang. She told me it was actually quite popular that the women in her village to marry to the reservoir migrants in the early 1980s, because that means they could leave the small village and move to a place much more near the city, and most important, to a place with no farming. Although life was not easy for the new returnees like Hu, he had managed to save some money to build up a new shack and had his newly married wife moved in. ‘Although it was built with wood and tarpaulin, but it was not bad at all!’ Mei was smiling and trying to convince me how comfort the shack was. ‘Back in my home village, I had to work from day to night for a whole year, but without seeing anything exciting—the price of the farm production was cheap and we could hardly earn any money after a whole year’s hard working at the field. Life seemed desperate to me. But it was quite different in Xingang. Sometimes, you got the payment right after you finish the job. It’s rewarding. I hate the life in the village: working hard day and night to provide to the citizens and at last, earned their discriminations. We are the same people, not lower than you. Don’t you think? Our life in the 80s was satisfied. But now, there is no porterage work for us. We had to go fishing but the catches are not always good’.

But the truth is, migrating to Xingang could not get her an official identity as ‘urban citizen’. Xingang is a tricky place that is not rural, but not urban either.

Politics of being Urban and Rural

Mao’s government took over two decades of institutional force to take over the once rich layers of social lives in Chinese society and build up a social structure
of a rigid rural-urban divide. The *hukou* system maintained urban bias and the political, cultural and economic framework continued to against rurality until current. After Deng’s reform in 1978, people enjoyed more freedom and mobility in general. However, researchers found that ‘the language of the socialist state was so totalizing that the bureaucratic presence of the part-state and its categories were reproduced in the reform era’ (Siu 1989). Although culturally the language of binary division may still guide people’s conception and action, but in fact, various state development projects have transformed the landscape of the country and profoundly blurred the dividing line between rural and urban. I argue that our focus should move from studying villages or cities. With the rapid development of China in recent years, there are many places which could not been labelled into either category. We need to learn more about what are happening in the land that are in between. What Xingang fits in this literature is that this place contributes to our understanding of this kind of places, that are both urban and rural, and at the same time, both are not urban and not rural. It is, as Anna Tsing mentions, ‘sites from which to see the instability of social categories’ (Tsing, 1994, p. 279).

When the relocatees arrived at Xingang in 1980s, they found themselves in an environment which cannot fall in the clear categories of urban or rural. The position of Xingang is, to borrow Victor Turner’s classic phrase, ‘betwixt and between’. Or, using Erik Harms’s (2011) term, it is ‘social edginess’. And it is also ‘matter out of place’ as describes by Mary Douglas: a place that causes despair specifically for the ways it represents ‘that which must not be included for a pattern to be maintained’ (Douglas, 2002[1966], p. 50). The experience of Mr. Bao helps illustrate the ambiguity the relocatees found in their life in Xingang.
Bao is a retired worker from the Forest Station under the Forest Bureau. He told me that, to become an urbanite, he had spent several thousand yuan to buy an urban household registration in the secret market in late 1980s. He said, ‘I just want my daughter to get a better education. You know, village schools are poor. If one gets into a village school, then it is no way one can go to college when grows up. Village boys will always be village boys and the city lady will remain to be the city lady’.

Bao: Where do you go to school?
Donghong: Xiacheng Primary School and Heyuan Middle School. [Both are best schools in Heyuan]
Bao: No wonders! You got into a good primary school, so that you are studying abroad now! My daughter can only serve other people in the restaurant at the moment. But of course, we can’t compare with you: you are from a good background.

I was a little bit embarrassed. I did not realize before that my role as a student studying in the UK would also bring a hierarchical relationship into the fieldwork: that I am from the urban Heyuan and they are from rural Xingang. But at the same time, they do not think Xingang is the same rural area as those in the inner reservoir area. They would tell me that they are town people, not village people. In time, I gradually realize that ‘town people’ as in the middle of city (urban) and village (rural) is some place we have ignored for long time; and I will get to this point later. Back to Bao’s story now. Bao realized that with a rural household registration, his daughter could not be admitted in the schools in Heyuan. Hence, he spent all the family savings in the secret market and got his daughter an urban registration. However, the family failed to enjoy the identity. His daughter could not stand the
discrimination by her classmates in the school and moved back only one semester after.

Dramatically, the state’s policy on villagers’ entitlement had been changed in the 1990s. Villagers began to receive a small account of compensation to which the townsmen were not entitled. Bao discovered that it was no good to live in a city margin where you have no access to all the resources in the city but wearing a citizenship that prevents you from the village entitlement. So he had to pay some extra money to change the house registration back to rural. He never catches the policy and never has enjoyed either identity.

Being in between rural and urban could bring benefit from both sides, but as the Bao case shows, it also could be dangerous (Douglas, 2002 [1966]). The meaning of that position depends on the context within which one construes social relations. Thus, the sense of the place—whether promising or despair—depends on the hierarchical positions of the actors in question. But one should bear in mind that this ability has a context. There are symbolic, political, economic, and social-structural constraints on the ability to manipulate the ambiguity of categories.

*Ambivalent Identities*

At the outset of the 1960s, with the gradual local development, Heyuan government decided to set up a committee to manage daily affairs in the pier. The Diaolou Administration Management Committee [DAMC] *(diaolou xingzheng guanli weiyuanhui碉楼行政管理委员会)*, which was under the County, was established in June 1963 and consisted of three members. In the same year, the Xinfengjiang Forestry Bureau [XFB] *(xinfengjiang linye guanliju 新丰江林业管理局)*, which was directly under the Guangdong Provincial Forest Bureau, was established to manage...
the forestry development and administration of the whole reservoir area including five communes: Banjiang, Shuangjiang, Jiantou, Xichang, and Huilong (Map 4). Thus, the position of the Diaolou committee was ambivalent since the beginning. The Bureau (administratively ‘county’ level) was one level higher than the Diaolou Committee, and its administrative area was much bigger, but their function overlaps some time, especially on the affairs of the pier and state compensation fund for public facilities for reservoir relocatees. This caused a lot of ambiguous space in the administration of Xingang, which will be discussed later.

In the Cultural Revolution in 1968, the name ‘diaolou’ was changed to ‘xin gang’—the new pier, instead. Since then, the place was called Xingang by most of the people.

Short after the Bureau had been set up, the previous Diaolou committee was merged into the Bureau in September 1964. But with the return of the migrants and the economic reform in China, Xingang developed quickly in the 1980s. Local government sensed the need to restore an independent administrative organization in Xingang. In September 1981, the Xingang Administrative Precinct (xingang guanli gu 新港管理股) of Heyuan County had been set up. Later, the first meeting of the Xingang People’s Congress Council was held in April 1984, which announced the establishment of the People’s Government of Xingang Town, Heyuan County. In 1986, Xingang Town was upgraded from being a village level government administration (xiangji zhen 乡级镇) to a district level government (quji zhen 区级镇) and took charge of ten villages nearby, namely Qingxi, Yangmei, Shuangtian, Bankeng, Longzhen, Bitou, Doubei, Zhangxia, Litian, and Xiaodong. From then on, the pier area, which locates the Bureau and the town government, changed back to its
old name Diaolou, and the community residents’ committee (CRC) that manages local affairs changed its name to the ‘Community Residents’ Committee of Diaolou’ (diaolou jumin weiyuanhui 碉楼居民委员会). Although the place officially got its old name back, people are used to call this place Xingang. For this reason, I use Xingang to describe this place as the native do. In other words, ‘Xingang’ primarily refers to Diaolou, the town seat, in this thesis, but not the whole of the Xingang town municipality which includes ten villages.

But talking about Xingang ren (Xingang people) instinctly evokes a sense of ambiguity. From an administrative way, although Xingang Town has 10 villages, but people from neither village would call themselves Xingang people. Only people live in Diaolou, where the township government relocated, would call themselves as, or being refered to, Xingang ren. And no one would use Diaolou as a place name, either. The pier and the nearby area, where the relocatees settled down, would be called as Xingang. So, when people are saying Xingang, they refer to Diaolou most of the time, but not the entire town area including the 10 villages.

But this does not mean whoever lives in Xingang will be regarded as a Xingang ren. Of course people would not claim ‘I am a Xingang ren’ in daily conversations with me, but when being asked why some people are not Xingang ren, many people gave the same answer: ‘Because we are the same people, the reservoir relocatees. But they are not’. A few people from places other than the reservoir area have lived in Xingang for long time, but they are still not regarded as Xingang ren. Fang is one of them. She has been married to Xingang for almost ten years, and has lived in Xingang ever since she married a ‘reservoir guy’. She is from Hu’nan Province and has worked as a ticket collector on the shuttle bus from Xingang to
Heyuan after her marriage. Although she has been living in the community for a long
time and has learned to speak the local dialect fluently, people in Xingang did not
regard her as a *Xingang ren*. Instead, people always refer to her as the ‘Hu’nan
woman’ (*hu’nan po* 西南婆). At the same time Jian, Jiang’s grandson who does not
live in Xingang right now, is still be regarded as a Xingang ren with no doubt. He
grew up in Xingang and moved to Heyuan in the early 1980s, but no one doubts he is
a *Xingang ren*. It seems that to be a *Xingang ren*, the first principle is being a
reservoir migrant who lives or has once lived in Xingang. Local people would not
regard people who are not reservoir migrants as *Xingang ren*.

To make it more complicated, the Xingang people are not only *Xingang ren*:
the name need to be attached to other places. Seldom people would say they are
‘*Xingang ren*’ (just *Xingang ren*), even the younger generations who were born and
grew up there, but rather, they would attach another label to it, such as the home
place. People say ‘I live in Xingang,’ and then usually add: ‘we are from the
reservoir’. Or ‘We are *Lixi ren*, but we have been in Xingang for very long time’.
Hirschon (1989) found Greek refugees from Asia Minor seventy years after exile still
grounding their identity in their old locale. Green finds that ‘Pogoni’ people are not
only ‘pogoni’ people but possess a variety of other identifying (or nonidentifying)
labels as well, such as being just ‘Greek’ (Green, 2005, pp. 17–18). Here in Xingang,
they also rely on the home place to identify themselves, but not the place they
currently living.

Aside from the life experiences as reservoir migrants, to be a *Xingang ren*,
the other knowledge one should know is the development of the town. Xingang was
barely fit for human habitation before the relocatees settled. They witnessed the

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development of Xingang and they participated in the whole process in one or another way. They knew what Xingang was like before the two main roads were built; some of them had lived in the barren hill lands before the Forestry Bureau commissioned the roads in 1983. They contributed to the work to hasten the building of the roads, and through this participation, they thus confirmed their identities as builders of Xingang. When talking about this topic in interviews, they provided details of what Xingang was look like before the roads were constructed and how the roads were built. They were proud of their efforts to help construct Xingang into a township, in a way to claim that they had the right to live in Xingang. Those who had come to Xingang after this time of construction at least have friends or relatives involved, otherwise they would always be thought of as new-comers by the community.

Even for those who came to Xingang in the late 1970s, their identities remained ambiguous from the start. Were these people to be regarded as ‘coming home’ (reservoir migrants coming back to the reservoir area) or as ‘illegal migrants’ (people registered at another county moved to this place without official authorization)? I suggest that the participation in the town construction, moving the mountains and opening the roads, has become an important resource to develop the identity of Xingang ren. The social identity of the Xingang people is not based on the old societies before the damming, or the life of constant relocations in the past several decades, but on the construction history of the Xingang town. In this way, to compare Xingang with the Dachuan Village (Jing 1996), the memory of constructing their own society serves not for appealing to the government as the Dachuan people did, instead, it has a function of legitimatising their settlement in Xingang. Coming in Xingang in a time when free migration was illegal, the participation on
constructing the community by themselves helps them affirmed their resettlement right and mark the boundary excluding those living inside the reservoir and those who are still struggling for resettlement. Therefore, the forming of Xingang ren is not based on fighting for deprived community interest, but an attempt to legitimatize the settlement right in Xingang town.

Using it more to exclude people but to identify themselves, the name of ‘Xingang ren’ will be remained in a condition of undefined, and ambiguous. But the ambiguities of identity—which seem to generate constant uncertainty and conflict—also allow for flexible, even rotating, possession that accommodates a condition of very scarce resources.

**Place of Connections**

I lived in Jing’s house when I was in Xingang. Jing’s grandfather was my host when I visited Xingang for the first time in 2001. At that time, she was a teenager. When I was back to Xingang in 2010, she had already graduated from middle school and run a store in the ground level of her parents’ house. It is a four-level cement house which located near the passenger pier in Xingang. I can see the reservoir from my window, as well as ships and passengers coming and going every day. But initially I saw nothing about the moving people and the moving goods, which happened in front of me day by day. It took me some time to realize that, the movement in and out of Xingang is a key to understand the place.

Anthropological discussion has long been focus on ‘indigenous people’ and ‘local context’ as opposed to studying the movement and travel routes of people. This approach sees place from an introverted and inward-looking lens, hoping to dig
deep in local history to construct the internalized origin of place. Responding to this approach, Massey suggested that:

[I]t is possible to envisage an alternative interpretation of place. In this interpretation, what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalised history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus. (Massey 1991, p. 28)

Massey sees place as ‘a particular, unique, point of their intersection. It is, indeed, a meeting place’. And then, she argued, ‘[this] allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local’ (Massey, 1991). Echoing with Massey, in this concluding part, I will show different kinds of links and connections of Xingang through the movement in and out this place, and then discuss the politics of these movement.

People come and go. From the inner reservoir to Xingang, from Xingang to Heyuan, from Heyuan to Xingang, they have different directions. Some coming and going every day; some once a week, some once a month; some once a year; they have different frequencies. Some transport by ship, some by bus, some by private cars, and some by government cars, they have different tools of coming and going. These movements seem to be just daily routines of people. How do the mundane practices of everyday life produce a particular sense of place? In what ways does people’s sense of belonging relate to their social/political/economic connections across the reservoir area? The periodic rituals of ancestor worships of Huang lineage are particularly good examples of place-making because of the ritual link they make between the original places and Xingang.
In one casual visit to Huang’s house in April 2011, I discovered a newly placed golden statue in the living room. It shines out the house. Huang later told me that this is *Wu bogong* (the fifth Grand Uncle 五伯公), a deity as well as an ancestor from the Huang family. In Longxi, they conduct grand rituals (*dajiao* 打醮) every year to celebrate *Wu bogong*’s birthday and pray for his protection. The Huang clan has a committee to run this ritual and Huang is in charge of the Xingang section. Huang said, every year, they spent over 10,000 yuan to prepare. Everyone from the Huang clan contributes their offerings, at least 40 yuan per person but not limited. This is not only an event for the Huang clan, it is also well known in Xingang. People talk about it with me, the Huangs are very proud and some others are missing their own lineage rituals in the past days. The temple of the *Wu bogong* has not submerged in the damming, and this is the most important reason that the Huang clan can continue the rituals. They said it only stopped for a few years during the Cultural Revolution. Huang said *Wu bogong* is very powerful that during the evacuation, many people from other villages have been drowned since they were not familiar with the water, but none of the Huang clan lost life because of that. He said it was all because *Wu bogong* was protecting them. Therefore, even those who were displaced to far away villages would come back to worship *Wu bogong*, every year.

For many relocatees, going back Longxi to worship the ancestors is very important. Hence, every year in the Qingming Festival and the Chongyang Festival, the pier in Xingang is crowded by the relocatees who come back from everywhere to sweep and offering the ancestor graves.

Different from the people who visit once a year, Ling visits Xingang several times a week. Ling is Jing’s elder sister who married to Heyuan, living a leisure and
rich life. She has a private car and drives to Xingang by herself. She goes to Xingang for ‘fresh air’, besides visiting her sister and mother. We often go hiking together in the afternoon. Ling said she misses the place very much: the clean water, the landscape, and the mountains. She thinks Xingang is a good place for living.

Moving in an opposite direction, Mr. Hu and his wife go to Heyuan everyday, to make a living. They had to raise their grandson by themselves so they went fishing in the reservoir from midnight and go to the wet market in Heyuan to sell the catches. ‘We can sell with much higher price in Heyuan’. Every day when they get back from Heyuan, it is already 2 o’clock in the afternoon. And then, they could finally sit down for a lunch, but a quick one. After lunch, they have to fry the fishes which are left unsaled on that day and then sell the dried fishes to the local store which are doing tourist business.

Of course, there are many who don’t move. Some are enjoying life in Xingang. Tao is opening a mini store in the pier for over 20 years. Manhong moved from the inner reservoir to Xingang not until 1990s but has already built three estates in Xingang. People call her as ‘landlord’. Lin is the owner of a big restaurant in town, a successor in tourism business. He stays at the restaurant, which is also home for him, everyday. Also, those who stay put include people too poor or too old to move.

How to understand different moving/not moving in Xingang? Mobility or immobility, these processes must be contextualized historically and culturally. As Jansen and Löfving (2009) argue:

Taking seriously the experiences of persons who move and of those who (sometimes, have to) stay put, and studying them as social agents, implies that we uncover the linkages between the changes in polities and social
contexts through which they are moving with transformations in their individual and social life trajectories. (p14)

Thus, whether or not they moved, how they move is an important question to ask. It was the way that they moved, not the fact that they moved, that make the difference. Just as Green sharply pointed out that, ‘not all movement is the same; in fact, movement does not mean anything in itself, so it is not movement as such that displaces anything’. She continued to elaborate this point:

That realization led me to explore how movement was always involved in a network of relationships with, as well as separations from, other things, places, people, and events, and how that seamlessly combined the way things seem (narratives, rhetoric, representations, images, numbers, etc.) with the way things are (the political economy of life, borders and passports, social relationships, being forced or being free to stay or move). (Green, 2005, p. 29, emphasis original)

Not only movements are various from each other, different people have different relationships with mobility, too. Bauman (1998) regarded mobility as a sign of privilege and wealth in the globalisation process, which is similar with Massey’s caution about the power-geometry of mobility:

Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don’t; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it. (1991, p. 26)

It is true. And we can see different mobility in Xingang. But what I am further asking is, what Xingang means to the relocatees during their different mobility. Sassen (1999) also suggests that some migrants have no control of their mobility: ‘The struggle for survival consumed their energies rather than a coherent narrative of ambition. For the new masses of migrants and refugees, the geography of movement
became a vector of change without a secure destination. They revolved on fortune’s wheel, rather than pursued a fate’ (Sassen, 1999, p. 45). Hence, there is another question to ask, is Xingang just some place which they had no choice but just been pushed by the ‘fortune’s wheel’?

Based on the material of Xingang, I suggest that the reservoir relocatees have chosen to move their way back Xingang because they had connections (or were able to establish new connections) in Xingang. Xingang could be regarded as what I call ‘a place of connections’. Connections develop and form here (and also divide and separate here). But in contrast with those who make many different efforts to forge connections in a place to realize a sense of certainty, stability or belonging, I argue, the Xingang people formed tentative and flexible connections. Also, the connections formed here are not for settling down, but for further movement: moving to a better place. As I discussed in details in chapter 2, displacement constitutes these people. They could always be elsewhere. I was once talking with a middle age man who worked in Xingang market about the re-election of the Diaolou Residents’ Committee, which I suppose would be an important issue for him (several villages nearby had violent conflict during the re-election). But as calm as other Xingang residents, he showed little interest in it. He said,

I told you, I currently live here; but this place? I don’t belong to this place. My home place is submerged so I had to move back to Xingang. But if I got chances, I go to better places. There is no future in Xingang. So nothing happens here is bothering me. Plus, I don’t have the right to care about those things (happening around me). You asked me about Lantang [DH: the village which had a conflict in re-election], we were so different from them. They never move to another place, but just to higher land. The conflict between the Lan clan and the others have at least hundred years of history. They are people of their own place ---- they of course could fight for
themselves. But here in Xingang, we are all guo ke (passing travellers). We don’t have root in this place and are loosely organized, you won’t see those conflicts here.

This kind of expressing is not uncommon when I get to know some people well. This can be seen from their distance with the public affairs in the community, and from their apathy on talking about official corruption in town. As mentioned in chapter 2, during my several visits to other reservoir migrant community in Heyuan, I was surrounded by people appealing the corruption of the government once I showed up. This situation never happens in Xingang. I was told that being an official (zuo guan 做官) in Xingang is much easier than in other places in Heyuan, because people do not ‘make trouble’ here.

Also, a lack of sense of belonging could felt here from time to time. As discussed in the previous part, no one attach themselves to Xingang. They are from elsewhere. Even the younger generation thinks the same. They constructed their connections with the home place through family activities, festival rituals, and regular gatherings with relatives elsewhere, etc. All of these links and connections have constructed a network for them, in which Xingang is just a temporarily point, though sometimes a very important one. More than one time, I have been suggested by the Xingang people to go to Heyuan to find something really important: ‘Xingang is only a pier. We don’t have history here’. To many of them, Xingang is a stepping stone, not a destination. When I returned to Xingang in 2010, I found that many people I knew in my first visit in 2001 have moved to other places. For example, Jiang’s son Liang had moved to Dongguan, with the whole family. And the store they hold, which I spent much time there talking with Jiang and his friends, was
closed. The stories of moving and resettling, they have never stopped. Things changed, but they remained the same (Green 2005, Zhang 2001).

In sum, what we saw is a history of government’s different efforts trying to pin things down, trying to make everything in place in a national order, for they are facing a group of ‘out-of-place people’ in a ‘out-of-the-way place’ (which is ‘dangerous’ in Douglas’s term): things must be clear. But the relocatees have their ways of constructing the sense of place. They can never be pinned down to Xingang. They are ‘reservoir people’ and they get involved in different issues inside and outside the reservoir area.

People come and go. They passing through Xingang, some stay only a while, some stay much longer. They form flexible relations the place and separate from the place. Xingang is about connections. We can understand the place of connections through movement in and out of the place. In ‘connection,’ I mean ‘partial connection’ in Strathern’s (1991) sense: the interrelations and separations of things. It is more about the flow of different interrelations in a totality than about the fixed connections between different parts.

In Part III, I continue explore this partial connection in two water projects. Both, again, make and remake links and connections with people and place.
PART III Water and Place
CHAPTER 6 WATER AND NATURE

Part III deals with the new opportunities and challenges to Xingang. I am going to explore two water projects developed here, the eco-tourism project and the fresh water supply scheme. With different state projects going on around the reservoir area, more attentions have been paid to the reservoir. However, it does not mean the same to Xingang. On the contrary, the importance of the water reiterates the ‘out-of-the-way’ feelings in Xingang. I explore people’s participation in these projects, as well as their cynicism and distance, to show how new ideologies have helped to transform this place and how the ideological fragments of previous phases continue to form significance here. Using a popular song which I learned from the young generation in Xingang, their stories are just like the lyrics: duoshao ren zouzhe, que kunzai yuandi (Quite a number of people, they move, but still restrained in the same place. 多少人走着，却困在原地)²⁹

Let me begin this chapter with Jiang, of whom I have told several stories in the previous chapters. Jiang was the first person I knew in Xingang. I met him in my first visit to Xingang dating back of 2001. Jiang, a man then in his sixties, was lean and dark, which is the typical image of Chinese peasant as can be seen in TVs and magazines. His family owned a store at the main street. When I stepped into the store, Mr. Jiang rose from his seat quickly, giving me a pleasant smile, and asked how he could help for my shopping. This response presents him as an experienced businessman as well. The store was mainly selling special local products, especially dried food from the reservoir. Dried shrimp and dried fish were the main goods in the store, which were said to have come from the fresh water of the reservoir. ‘All products here are mainly from the reservoir, they’re not polluted. You can feel safe
eating them’. Jiang was trying to market his goods to me, focusing on the ‘green’ side, which is most welcomed in a background of China’s increasing crisis of food safety.

Later, Mr. Jiang told me that people who live there are all ‘reservoir relocatees’ (shuiku yimin), so are their families. Although he complained that reservoir relocatees like themselves were the most miserable people who have had to leave their homelands and live an unstable life for the past few decades, Jiang admitted that he was satisfied with his current life. He said, ‘I have to tell you that most of the reservoir relocatees in the inner area are still living in very poor conditions. Our lives in Xingang are much better than theirs—at least we have the tourists. Tourism brings changes and tourist business brings us money’.

From the beginning of the 1990s, tourism took a new and important role in the Xingang people’s life. The growth of tourism since the 1990s has totally transformed the lives of the Xingang residents. Different from ‘conquering nature’ in the 1950s and ‘making use of natural resources for economic development’ in the 1980s, new discourses of ‘preserving nature’ has been promoted in Xingang. The state, the local government, local people, and even environmental NGOs from Hong Kong, are participating in this process of construction. When tourism provides a new stage for environmentalism, the contestation among different participants is also reinforced. In this chapter, I am going to explore how the Xingang people, who encountered the tourism project and new ideology of environmentalism with their memory and experiences of the past, looked upon these environmental concepts. Under these officially promoted ideas of environmentalism and commercial practices
by the local government, how did the past experiences help or hinder the people’s participation in the current project of commercializing the environment today?

Furthermore, as environmental concerns have come to occupy a more and more important place in local struggles and debates, what conflicts have emerged between protecting the natural environment and developing the local economy by the ecotourism project? And how did these activities reshape the community structure in Xingang? I would like to point out that the tourism economy has accelerated the differentiation of the local community while at the same time providing certain possibility of forming new interest groups.

**Deploying an Image of Green**

Environmentalism as an international force has nurtured respect for nature. People are likely to treat under-developed or poor areas as natural places. Before Evergreen Lake’s tourism propaganda appeared, Xingang Town had once been a fashionable place to have a meal of fresh shrimp and fish for the people in Heyuan City during the early 1990s. People living in the city went to Xingang to seek natural and unpolluted food. Now, the tourists from the PRD, Hong Kong, and Macau are seeking a so-called ‘natural’ environment in Xingang.

However, when the environments in rural landscapes seem to present themselves as self-evident states of ‘nature’, we should warn ourselves of the constructed character of rural landscapes. The construction of a green image of Heyuan and the Evergreen Lake serves as a good reference for us to understand how nature is constructed to be ‘rural’ and is separated from ‘industrial’ and ‘urban’.

Tourism exploitation in the Evergreen Lake is mainly based on several big islands within the reservoir. The place in which the reservoir was constructed was
full of hills before. After being dammed, a lot of semi-submerged hills become islands standing in the water of the reservoir. These islands stand in a large calm blue lake of different shapes and features form a grand sight to attract tourists. Tourists in the Evergreen Lake can take a boat from the tourism pier to look around the scenery on the lake and stop at some of the islands that have been developed by the travel agencies and have programs such as hiking, swimming, singing and dancing, and photography.

Propaganda agents on the Evergreen Lake are just constructing natural surroundings to attract neighbouring city travellers. However, the construction of a natural, unpolluted image points to Xingang’s underdevelopment. Not being urbanized and modern is hard for the Xingang people to accept. In the eyes of the Xingang people, they are striving for better living conditions and modernization. They would rather use tourism as a stepping-stone towards better development because there are many travellers coming from the cities, but not to attract tourists with their rurality and backwardness. One day, when I was taking pictures of the morning markets in Xingang, a scene rarely seen by tourists, a mini-bus driver who happened to be in the picture was very angry and stopped me: ‘Why are you taking pictures here? Do you think we are very backward?!’ Wrapped in a natural and unpolluted veil, Xingang likes to show their beautiful scenery to the outside world, but dislikes the underdevelopment and backwardness implied by the word ‘rurality’. Although Xingang cooperates in promoting nature together with the local government, they differ greatly in what counts for ‘nature’.
The name ‘Evergreen Lake’ is also not accepted by the Xingang people. The director of the Heyuan Tourism Bureau told me why they named it the Evergreen Lake.

In the rich and colourful Guangdong Province, Heyuan would like to represent the green colour. We see ‘green’ as a characteristic of Heyuan city’s history, culture and natural environment, constructing a green image of Heyuan City to show to the outside world. As to the name, since everywhere within the lake is green and everyday is green, therefore we named it the Evergreen Lake. I believe that anybody who hears this name would have an image of Heyuan’s green tourism. That is exactly what I want this name to evoke.

However, in Xingang, nobody ever called that man-made reservoir ‘Evergreen Lake’. They always referred to it as ‘the reservoir’. As we have discussed in chapter 2, for the relocatees, Xinfengjiang Reservoir does not represent harmony between nature and people, but instead, it represents an artificial man-made product which caused them to lose their homes decades ago.

**Environmentalism and Development:**

**Commercializing the Natural Environment**

Environmentalism in Xingang is not only used to promote travelling for nature, but also legally expands the travel businesses, so that the entire town can benefit economically. The mayor of Heyuan City once said that, ‘Make the reservoir into a treasury reserve (ba shuiku bian jinku 把水库变金库)’. This is the goal of the Heyuan Government for developing the Xinfengjiang reservoir. To develop its economy, Heyuan has had to change its focus from industry to tourism.
Although stressing green tourism development, the standpoint of the local
government on developing ecotourism is rather different from officials in Hong
Kong and PRD cities, who also raise the environmentalist flag about the reservoir.
On the tourism pier, a propaganda board says,

The Evergreen Lake (Xinfengjiang Reservoir) is not only a community
housing over seven thousand people, but also a water resource protection
area for Heyuan City, the East River area and the Pearl River Delta
(including Hong Kong). ... [It] mobilizes and organizes the power of the
people to pay attention to, support, and join in the protection of the natural
environment in this area. On the one hand, through keeping the natural
environment especially the water free from pollution, and on the other hand,
through developing green industry, the lake has promoted the economic
development of this area and sought to achieve sustainable development.

We can deduce from this that the reservoir is mainly ‘a water resource
protection area’ today, for the focus of the PRD is not power generation but water
supply. For this reason, it is most important to ‘protect the water from pollution’. Protecting the environment in the reservoir, for Hong Kong and PRD cities, means protecting the water. However, for the local government, as we can see, the point was ‘to promote economic development in this area’. Different in those from Hong Kong and PRD cities, the reservoir means opportunities of economic development for the local people. One of the slogans in front of the entrance of one tourism site in the lake says: ‘To protect environmental resources is to protect tourism resources’. Perhaps, what environmentalism really means for the local government can be understood in this sentence.

What the government was also hoping for is to solve the economic problems
of reservoir immigrants by developing the reservoir into a tourism district. Hopefully the economic difficulties of the immigrants could be alleviated along with the growth
of tourism. The local official in the tourism bureau claimed that ‘how to combine the tourism expansion with the development of immigrants’ economy is a big challenge. Agriculture tourism could be a good point, such as farm visiting. At the same time, there could be a series of tourist products, such as souvenir, in addition to some local food’. Xingang, as a major tourist site, thus became the first town to be developed as a window of Heyuan opening up to other cities. To the local people, what has become of their lives is largely the result of the dominant popular ‘green’ representation that turns the reservoir into a commercialized place for leisure and waterscape consumption.

**Xingang as a Tourism Pier**

One of my informants once told me that Xingang had been called ‘a big garbage dump’ for a long time because of its dirty environment. After the development of tourism, Xingang became much cleaner and more organized; and the area surrounding the reservoir was even named Guangdong’s base of environmental education. This is quite different from being called a ‘garbage dump’ not too long ago.

Just like the sudden coming of the dam construction which did not seek the locals’ opinions in 1958, after decades of being ignored by the local government, the Xingang people suddenly found themselves being placed in a tourism development project, again without any consultation. Everything on the project was conducted by the government in Xingang, without asking the residents’ opinions. Since the 1990s, Xingang has been transformed by extensive environmental cleaning, roadwork construction, and tourism development. In 1995, the government began to clean up all the poorly constructed building in Xingang; then in 1998, the road from Heyuan
to Xingang was rebuilt; even the local delicacies and special local products were extensively supported by the local government.

Xingang people, especially the younger ones, were very receptive to this change. Once I was walking in Xingang with Jing, the granddaughter of my host Gu, I was complaining to myself about there being no light as we walked through a very dark road. Jing responded to me quickly: ‘Of course it is impossible to have this in Xingang! But to tell you the truth it has already changed a lot during the past two years because of tourism. Without the tourism pier, Xingang would just be a dead town’.

She imagined there will be lights everywhere in Xingang in the future and there would be booths selling snacks by the roadsides at night. Of course it is only her imagination; however, I could tell that she was eager for that kind of city nightlife. Jing is the third daughter in her family. Her eldest sister went to work in Guangzhou after graduating from middle school. She buys fashionable clothes in Guangzhou for Jing and teaches her popular things that girls in Guangzhou would do. Since her elder sister taught her how to make cucumber salad with Thousand Island dressing, it has become Jing’s most favourite food. ‘I feel like Guangzhou is so much more fun, although people from big cities like here. I think there is not much to see around Xingang—we live in Xingang every day’. Jing said to me.

To Xingang residents, tourism brings development to them, or more specifically, brings better construction of the community. How do these Xingang residents feel about the environmentalism that the government advocates? What point of view do they hold as to the natural environment and how does it differ from the government propaganda?
Environmentalism and Development: Different Views

To Huan, who ran tourist boats in the reservoir illegally, environmentalism was the government’s disguise to cheat tourists. Since all the officially run tourist boats have to be environmentally friendly by using liquefied petroleum gas, this resulted the high price of the fare. Because of the high ticket price, many regular tourists would not take those boats but instead contact private boat owners, such as Huan, whose boat is not environmental friendly but offering much lower price. Huan stated that the local government did not have enough capital to support environmentally-friendly tourism. He said, ‘The government tolerates our existence just because we know their tricks clearly: the government itself is not protecting the environment’.

Other informants seemed to be very much in agreement with Huan. I was surprised to discover that the Xingang people never drink the water from the dam, even though the reservoir is said to have the purest water in Guangdong. When I asked why they do not drink it, Mr. Jiang’s wife Wang Po said ‘the water is just too dirty to drink’. Dirty wastewater of the community flows directly into the reservoir daily, therefore the reservoir water was never regarded as ‘clean’ in Xingang. Wang Po told me: ‘We only drink the water from the valley. It flows all the way from the hills, no pollution at all, and you don’t need to filter the water before drinking it’. I was told that the local government had spent several hundred thousand yuan to place filtration equipment in the waste pipes, but after half a year it did not work anymore, and no effort was made to fix it. This was indeed another example for the local residents to reason that the government did not protect the environment.
Another informant who has moved to downtown Heyuan also doubted the environmentalism which the government propagandized. ‘It is just false to say environmental protection. If one really believes in that, he will never develop tourism which will definitely destroy the environment. It is such an obvious thing to conclude’. In his opinion, environmental protection is just like any other slogan that the government uses to cheat people. He said,

We can see from the news that the environmental protection demonstrations are usually organized by local people to protest against the government. As you are studying abroad, you must know more about this than I do. They are really fighting for their living environment. Have you ever seen any protection for the reason of tourism development like Heyuan? Have you seen anything done by the government to protect the environment here? They are only advertising for the natural environment, not protecting the environment. If advertising a natural environment that is not polluted could be called ‘environmental protection’, if people then go into the reservoir every day and produce a lot of trash, how can that not to be destroying the environment? So what is the true meaning of environmental protection?

In response to the doubts about environmentalism and development, one Heyuan officer of local tourism bureau notes:

If there is a good environment, then we can develop good habits to protect our nature. Talking about environmentalism can educate travellers and local residents to care for the environment and keep the region clean. We give tours to travellers, and introduce them to these environmental concepts, which is very educational. We want to use these opportunities to also let them appreciate and understand the importance of this water supply (the importance to protect the water from pollution).

This officer was explaining how the use of environmentalism could educate tourists to protect the environment, but not tourism itself. At a time when public concerns on environment are circulating widely, environmentalism could be a threat
to the government, for its demand a high priority on environmental protection; but on the other side, the ideology could also be manipulated as useful tools to serve for the government’s agenda. Therefore, constructing a green image in Heyuan serves an important role in swaying public opinion and to reassure the concerned public especially those from Hong Kong and PRD cities, that the tourism industry in Heyuan is being carried out on a sustainable basis.

The head of Heyuan Tourism Bureau also told me the reasons for emphasizing environmental protection. He said,

Environmental protection can be used in education. The cement factory in Xingang was laid down in 1996; however, we are now going to make it an environmental protection museum. As a factory polluting the natural environment became a basis for environment education, we can improve the awareness of local residents and hence there can be less and less polluting behaviour. But first of all and most importantly, environmentalism can make people richer. What do our residents need most right now? It is to be rich. But how? It is through environmentalism. Do you know how much the mandarin fish (guihua yu 桂花鱼) sold for before 1995? It was only a few yuan. But now, it can be sold at 80 yuan. How many opportunities are there for people to make money since the Evergreen Lake has been developed? Special local products, tour cruises, restaurants, these are the reasons for today’s better life.

Just as this official said, so far, we can see that during the process of tourism development, ‘nature’ has been commercialized. Government encourages local people to develop ‘green’ industries, such as mentioned previously; mandarin fish is much more valuable when we call it ‘non-polluted mandarin fish’. As long as the local product has been labelled ‘natural’ or ‘green’, the price of it can be increased many times. This process is making the concept of ‘nature’ a product.
Commercializing Nature, Selling History

Being in Xingang links the seller with the idea of the clean water from which these ‘green’ foods are supposed to come. It mediates between the imagined rural sellers and the urban tourists in the tourism business, but it also stressing a difference and scarcity here. The difference and scarcity have made the exchange desirable. Urbanites want to buy from imagined ‘local people’ specifically because they link certain foodstuffs with imagined ideals of peasant purity. And the reservoir water assures them that this is the purity they could not afford to have in the urban life.

Jiang, who owns three special local product stores, is one of the local people who are selling green product to tourists. Here is a list of his product in store, showing the place of production of each item:
Table 2 Green Foods in One Store in Xingang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Green Food’ claimed to be reservoir product</th>
<th>Actual Place of Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
<td>Fujian Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xihuang herb tea</td>
<td>Guangxi Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ligu herbs</td>
<td>Guangxi Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dried string beans</td>
<td>Heping Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dried mushrooms</td>
<td>Heping Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wu zhi mao tao</em> (a special local product, one kind of tree root)</td>
<td>Heping Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dried bamboo roots</td>
<td>Heping Town, Heyuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evergreen Treasure: sweet and sour Preserves</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rice vermicelli</td>
<td>Heyuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dried turnip slices</td>
<td>Jiangxi Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sweet potato vermicelli</td>
<td>Jiangxi Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dried sweet potato</td>
<td>Jiangxi Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dried vegetable</td>
<td>Luofu mountain, Huizhou City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakka sweet wine</td>
<td>Mei County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dried haw</td>
<td>Reservoir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>fei tian qin luo</em> (a special local product, a kind of plant grow in the hillland)</td>
<td>Reservoir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dried fish</td>
<td>Reservoir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dried shrimp</td>
<td>Reservoir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black funger</td>
<td>Reservoir (xichang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood sandal</td>
<td>Xinfeng Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakka wine</td>
<td>Zijin County, Heyuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo shell tea</td>
<td>Zijin County, Heyuan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The items in table are all said to be ‘green food’ or ‘special local products from the reservoir’. We can see from it that in fact quite a lot of them are not from the reservoir area. They are just very ordinary products from various places. However, since they are sold in Xingang, they have become the most natural, healthy product, which cannot be found elsewhere, especially in those polluted industrial cities.

Not only nature, but also the history of this area was regarded saleable to the Xingang people who were engaged in the tourism industry. When we talked about the fabricated story of ‘water-bestowing Guanyin Bodhisattva’, which forms a sharp contrast to the life experiences of Xingang immigrants, they thought it was interesting. They told me that such a story sounds good, and may attract tourists. In addition, they wanted me to embellish the interview to further attract tourists. Jiang’s son, Liang, was deeply interested when listening to his father’s story about social life before the area was submerged and the stories of immigrants of his generation:

I do not know most of the events that happened back then, although I was reservoir immigrant myself. The stories that you write would be the most exciting—a world beneath the water. Underneath the peaceful lake was once filled with lively people, their society, and religious activities. The Offering Ceremony (dajiao 打醮), which you are talking about, is so interesting! If people can learn about the society beneath the water, and then explore the scenic and magnificent lake, it would definitely attract more tourists.

Liang has applied his analysis to justify my fieldwork and interviews in Xingang. Just as the propaganda used to promote green culture, he used his reasoning to further decorate the tourist attraction, thus promote more sightseeing travel in the area.
However, not all the Xingang people welcome this kind of ‘nature’ (as in the tourists’ eyes). The following is a poem, which is Bearded Liu’s favourite:

East River flows all the long, long way. Heyuan is such a good place, with green mountains and clear water.

When the harvest time comes, a golden world of rice is seen.  

To Bearded Liu, this is the ‘real nature’. When this more-than-70-year-old man intonated this poem, he closed his eyes to recall the past, enjoying his memories.

To people like Bearded Liu, the old natural world as described in the poem was far better than the environment of today. However, after building the reservoir, he thought that ‘a rich land has become a land short of grain’. This change of environment is what Bearded Liu did not like to talk about. He was quite piqued with some community members who call themselves ‘environmentalists who protect nature’. He said,

Although cutting is banned now, I admitted that I cut a lot of trees in the reservoir area in the past. I had no option because I am poor and I need money. In order to live, you have no time to think of the environment. However, I believe the natural world is just for people to live. Nature sustains human beings. I believe that it is appropriate for humans to depend on natural resources. Our ancestors also made their living in this way. I am not that ‘good’ in talking about environmental protection. Look at Ye Cai, he has cut much more trees than I did, but he is talking about protecting the environment now—for the sake of his business.

Ecotourism and Social Mobility

Mr. Ye Cai is the owner of Harmony Restaurant, which is one of the two major restaurants doing tourist business in Xingang. Managing this business successfully, he has quickly become one of the richest persons in Xingang in recent years. Actually, the development of tourism has resulted in the differentiation of the
society in Xingang and accelerated the disintegration of social groups based on the porterage crew.

Under the development of the tourism, family income resources have become diversified. To make money in the new situation, different families have different experiences and stories. Their economic development is, however, not interdependent among community members; instead, they are competitors to each other. This further exaggerates the differentiation and shapes the characteristics of Xingang that have basically been organized on the household unit.

In addition, the new economy has also caused social mobility in this community. Those who were in leading positions in the former porterage crews, such as team leaders, have become less and less important; while at the same time those who grasped the opportunities of tourism development have gained great profit and achieved high status in the community.

The head of the Tourism Bureau in Heyuan also talked about Ye to me as a representative of the Xingang people who had changed his way from destroying nature to protecting it: ‘He made a living by cutting wood before and destroyed the environment; now he is protecting the ecosystem, and is making a living from ecotourism business’.

When most of the Xingang people were still unaware of the money opportunities to be made from the tourists, Ye had already opened a restaurant and soon dominated the tourism business. Jiang’s wife Wang Po told me: ‘He was so poor when he was young. It was us who lent him several thousands’ jin of rice to help him to set up the food booth when he had not a single penny’. Also according to Wang Po, in the main street of Xingang, there are up to ten stores renting land or
houses from Ye to do business. ‘Of course, the land is actually owned by the Forestry Bureau, but he was very cunning and rent them all at a very low price for a very long term, even before the tourist project begun to attract tourists. Now, he sublets the land to others and charges much higher. He has earned a lot of money from this way’.

Wang Po’s family maintained a good relationship with Ye until now. If her son is going to buy food from the restaurants, he always goes to Ye’s where he get a 10% discount, but he never goes to Qu’s which is just opposite to their house.

Ye had also been working at the porterage crew as a leader for a long time, so a lot of people knew him. But it seems to me that he never succeeded in managing good relationships with his fellow townsmen like Lai and Huang did at the Xichang crew. Not many people in Xingang would consider him as a friendly leader. Besides, partly because of his quiet personality, most of people feel uncomfortable or even scared when talking to him. Only a few people call him Cai directly, which implies a familiar relationship. The former head of Huilong porterage crew Liu once told me:

At first, my son was the team leader. Ye was only a normal docker, but he never satisfied with the income. He later ran a food booth to make some money. What actually brought him his first pot of the gold is through cutting trees and bamboos in the reservoir area and then sell it. He earned enough money from that and finally opened his own restaurant. Meanwhile, my son left Xingang to take the position after me since I retired from my work at the Reservoir Commune in the early 1980s. At that time Ye got his chance to become the main team leader. But I have to say that he is very greedy indeed. Part of the land where his restaurant is located is mine, but he took it over.

It would be easy to suppose that the success of Ye came from his status of once being a porterage crew leader. Nevertheless, out of other porterage crew leaders in Xingang, he is the one of the few who has made money from tourism. Other former leaders of porterage crews seem to be living ordinary lives now. Liu, the
former leader of Huilong porterage crew, owned a small inn at Xingang in the 1970s. He was once a rich and powerful person in the community since the lodging business was very prosperous during the 1980s, a time when the transportation was not so convenient and passengers passing by Xingang often had to live in the inn to wait for buses to the down town or wait for ships to be back their home in the inner area of the reservoir. However, now there are hardly any lodgers by the convenience transportation between Xingang, the city and the reservoir. Liu could do nothing but to spend the rest of his life in his inn. He is very upset about not turning it into a restaurant at the proper time and making profit just like Ye did. Mr. Gu, the team leader of Xudong porterage crew, has never changed his course; he continues the timber business by transporting wood to PRD cities such as Dongguan. However, nowadays he makes very little money doing this hard job. The former leader of the Xichang porterage crew, Lai, ended up going back home and taking care of his grandson.

From the changes of social status of these characters in Xingang, who were once important persons in the community, we can see that social mobility is flexible in Xingang. No stable social structure could help certain people, or group, to keep their authority. Success in gaining a high status in the community is not based on the former social status, but required being sensitive to the changes in the outside world, such as Ye.

Qu, another rich business man in Xingang, is also a good case in point to examine the social mobility of Xingang. He managed the public toilet in Xingang with his wife in the early 1980s, and later opened a small restaurant. His restaurant mostly hosted people from downtown Heyuan City. The restaurant was especially
famous for its ‘salty baked chicken’, which has now become one of the ‘ten-famous-dishes’ in Heyuan city. Later, Qu bought the land next to the restaurant and expanded it into a four-floor restaurant, the biggest in Xingang at that time. In the season of tourism it was said to earn more than ten thousand yuan in just one day. Qu was said to be so wealthy that even the Bureau and the cement factory borrowed money from him. He had two cars ---- which were considered luxury for Xingang people when most of them cannot dreamed of buying one ---- one for himself, and another for his son who works at the police office in Heyuan. People all say that he could succeed because of his wife: she has many relatives who work at government departments in Heyuan and later become regular customers at the restaurant. It is because of the success of ‘guanxi’ (personal connections) brings the success of the business. Jiang also told me that Qu used money and his ‘guanxi’ with the officials in Heyuan to buy the government position for his son.

Qu’s home is in Heyuan City. He usually spends the daytime at his restaurant, which is just opposite to Jiang’s store. His restaurant has an entrance with lots of stairs which make it much higher than the floor of the street. Looking from Jiang’s store, the restaurant seems just so arrogant with its high entrance. However, the gate of the restaurant is made of glass, so he can see what happens in the street. Qu usually sits inside the building and seldom says hello to his neighbours, even to Jiang, whom he can see everyday. Qu likes to play mahjong, but never play it with local people; he likes to use it as a social tool, playing with his guests from Heyuan who are usually government officials. But all the other people in Xingang do not want to play with him either. It seems that he has isolated himself in Xingang.
As the richest person in the community, Qu may have the potential to be a community leader. However, he rose from obscurity as a toilet manager; this made him few social resources within the community. He always distanced himself from other community members, gaining him no good reputation.

Although Ye has much wider connections among the Xingang people than Qu, his methods of generating profits have resulted in having a shaky relationship with the community. He is one of the richest people in Xingang, and has more local connections than Qu. However, he has no more credibility than Qu. Since his success has been involved with different interests groups, he also does not have the ability to act as a leader in the community.

Jiang represents the well-off families in Xingang. Likewise, Jiang has few local connections other than those neighbours who play mahjong with him at night. Jiang’s success depends largely on his son-in-law’s help, for he had left Jiang and his son a house in the centre of the township, which Jiang used the ground floor to open the store. These kind of well-off families, which have few relationships with other community members, are not welcomed by other people either. Grandma Li once told me that the Jiang family looks down upon her and others, the neighbours who have less money.

However, we can say, there is no stable and dominant social structure in Xingang community that could assure any person’s status in the community. Those who were powerful in the porterage crews have no certainty in maintaining their status in the tourism industry. The individualist nature of the tourism business had resulted in social polarization within the community. While someone have largely benefited from the ecotourism, others are still experiencing the hard consequences of
the decline of porterage. However, what deserves our attention is that social mobility in Xingang is not based on a fixed, stable, solid social structure which enables certain kinds of people to have advantage when facing changes in the environment. Rather, people have used their own different ways to develop their higher living standard.

Conclusion

Local communities like Xingang do not respond to the global circulating, sometimes hegemonic, ideologies such as environmentalism passively; on the contrary, they adopt, mobilize, or manipulate elements of environmental discourse in many creative ways. The stories showed here are like chorus, many people raised their voice, some strong and some weak; some changed their positions, while some were regarded as cacophony. In environmental debates and conflicts, what counts as nature changes over the time and for different groups of people. The discourses of environmentalism have shaped Xingang residents’ interpretation of nature and place, initiated a set of practices of commercializing the environment to attract tourists from urban cities. ‘Ecotourism’ has become a new lens for Xingang people to look at the place today.

Further, this new way of making living has reinforced the independency among Xingang people, for it provided many opportunities and possibilities for each family. People who chose to respond actively had tasted success from tourism business, while some of the families hesitated to join the current tourism project because of yearning for the old society. In addition to historical reasons that made it hard for the Xingang people to reconstruct a community with a stable structure, the tourism economic has ensured an environment that needs little interdependence among community members.
CHAPTER 7 WATER AND FUTURE

Xingang is just like Hong Kong, in both places ‘local people are running local affairs on their own’ (gang ren zhi gang). This was what a local cleaner in Xingang told me. ‘gangren zhigang’ (Hong Kong people running Hong Kong) is not new to most of people living in China. Even before China resumed sovereignty of Hong Kong in 1997, it has been propagandised in medias and newspapers that Hong Kong would become an autonomous Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China after 1997 and the Basic Law guarantees its autonomy for 50 years, and this is usually been understood as the principles of ‘One Country, Two Systems’ (yiguo liangzhi), ‘a high degree of autonomy’ (gaodu zizhi) and ‘Hong Kong people running Hong Kong’ (gangren zhigang). Literally, gangren means people living at the port (here refers to Hong Kong), but since Xingang and Hong Kong (xianggang in Mandarin Chinese) both have the same Chinese character, ‘gang’ (port), in their names, the cleaner borrowed this famous slogan to describe the situation in Xingang: to complain to me that they were highly ignored by the local government, so that they felt they were running the local affairs by themselves as well—another kind of ‘autonomy’ in his words. At first I thought that it was just a very innovative way to introduce the local situation to me, rather than to make connections between the two places—linking a small town of Xingang with Hong Kong, an international city and a financial hub in Asia. However, as I later discovered, Xingang residents did mention Xianggang (HK) in their conversations and while being seen as two totally different places, they thought they related to each other. This is mostly because of the water in the Xinfengjiang Reservoir.
Whenever the issue of water has been discussed in our conversation, Hong Kong would be mentioned. I have been reminded for many times that the Xinfengjiang Reservoir is supplying water to Shenzhen and Hong Kong. Some local residents thought Hong Kong is drinking fresh water directly transported from the reservoir at the time; while some told me that Hong Kong is currently using the fresh water from the lower reaches of the East River but they are going to buy water from the reservoir directly in the near future, because water in the lower reaches are badly polluted. Some even mentioned that by that time, maybe Heyuan will get rich by selling water to Hong Kong ‘because Hong Kong is so rich and they pay good price for the water’ and they are also hoping that Xingang can benefit from the water supply project so that in the future, they can ‘live a modern and rich life just like the Hong Kongnese’. A seventy-year-old man told me, ‘It should be the case—because we scarificed our homeland to build the reservoir and it is time for the Party (Chinese Communist Party) to benefit us. They promised us a better future when we were forced to leave our ancestral land; however, what we had been through was not a better future, but rather a bitter future. The Party owns us, so much so, that I do not think you could imagine, young lady’. There are others who are less optimistic about the water project, who do not see the water would bring the wealth to them. ‘This reservoir is nothing to me. The government cheated my father and I certainly do not believe it. The best way is to earn enough money and leave this dead place’. A man in his middle age disagreed with his father when we were talking about the relocation process back to the 1950s. But he added, ‘I do think Hong Kong people should thank my father, thank us—the reservoir people. Because we suffered, so that they get the clean water they need’.
Although Xingang residents like to link Hong Kong with the water, as a matter of fact the water from the Xinfengjiang Reservoir has not yet been transported to Hong Kong or any other places. Although Heyuan government promoted this idea of selling water since 1993, it has never been approved by the provincial government of Guangdong (Xie & Huang, 2008).

So why do Xingang people tend to believe Hong Kong is buying or going to buy the water? Why do they mention Hong Kong so often (but not other cities which are the main targets of Heyuan government to sell the water to, such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen) and in such a natural way, despite their huge difference and long distance? In addition, in the daily conversations with local residents, I can feel that people in Xingang tend to think Hong Kong is a place that they have kind of relation with. Does Hong Kong have a special meaning for them? What does the talking about Hong Kong tell us about Xingang? The relationship between the two places is interesting and requires our analytic attention. In pursuing these questions, I aim in this chapter to address theoretical discussions in anthropology with regard to space and place, and to use the theories to understand how the sense of place imply a sense of time as well as space in Xingang, as several generations of local residents experienced major transformations in the political economy during the last half-century.

Anthropologists have been rethinking and reconceptualising the understandings of culture in spatialized ways in recent decades (for example, Appadurai, 1986, 1988b; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003 Hannerz, 1987; Rosaldo, 1988, 1989a). Most scholars agree that space and place can never be ‘given’. Gupta and Ferguson point out that ‘people have the ability to
confound the established spatial orders, either through physical movement or through their own conceptual and political acts of re-imagination’. Therefore, they argue that, ‘an anthropology whose objects are no longer conceived as automatically and naturally anchored in space will need to pay particular attention to the way spaces and places are made, imagined, contested, and enforced’ (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, pp. 17–18).

The study of inscribed spaces increasingly acknowledges the depth and complexity with which people construct meaningful relationships with their surroundings (Feld and Basso 1996) and the study of contested spaces makes clear the inextricable and reinforcing connection between the meaning of place and identity (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). These theoretical materials are useful to understand how Xingang people deploy their position in space and in time.

Symbolic representations of space have potential material effects on the different socioeconomic positions of social actors within space. But this works the other way as well: the way people interpret and attach symbolic meaning to space depends on their different socioeconomic positions. A form of social, economic, and political power emerges from one’s relative ability to negotiate social relations situated in both space and time. As Harvey has written, ‘The assignment of place within a sociospatial structure indicates distinctive roles, capacities for action, and access to power within the social order’ (Harvey, 1990, p. 419). Yet, as Erik Harms argues,

[T]he negotiation of these categories is not fully open to the limits of imagination and free will. This negotiation is constrained both by historical transformation and by the political-economic status and power relations between social actors, who in turn assert their own competing visions of spatial relations and temporality. The contest over the meaning of time and
space is thus political and economic, connected to the very practical reality of how people hope to organize social action and relations of production within society. (Harms, 2011, p. 122)

The Xingang people described places with a time orientation. When they were talking about Hong Kong, they were also talking about the modern life that attached in Hong Kong. Although they often critique the Communist Party, but they seem to agree with the Party’s linear development ideology. Today, Xingang is neither rural nor urban, but a future orientation allows one to imagine what it will be like once it becomes urban. Where Xingang was and where it was going always evoked a sense of when it was; the question of where it lay in space was also a question of where it was in time. Using the lens of time and space, I explore the issues of water supply in the East River and the relationship between Hong Kong, Heyuan and Xingang in relation to the process of ‘development’ or urbanization.

Water Stories

Hong Kong

Hong Kong has always had a lack of fresh water since it is surrounded by sea. There were water crises several times in history especially in the 1950-1960s. To resolve this problem, the Hong Kong government negotiated with the central government of China in 1964 to transport fresh water from Mainland China to Hong Kong, and at last set up the ‘Dongjiang (East River)-Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme’ to pipe the water to Hong Kong. The Dongjiang-Hong Kong Water Supply Scheme has an 83-kilometer-long pipe, which transports the water from the East River to Hong Kong, passing through cities like Huizhou, Dongguan and
Currently, around 70-80% of Hong Kong’s fresh water comes directly from the East River, and 20–30% comes from local catchments. An agreement between the Hong Kong SAR Government and the Guangdong authorities ensures the stability of the water supply to Hong Kong, with the water quality meeting the national standard of Type II.

The East River originates from Jiangxi Province and flows from northwest to southeast into Heyuan. It flows through Huizhou and finally enters the Pacific Ocean in the Humen district of Dongguan City. It is one of the three major tributaries of Guangdong’s Pearl River. The Dongshen Project pumps water from Huizhou and Dongguan, which are located in the middle and lower stream of the East River, because of their short distance from Hong Kong. The East River Basin takes up only 6.3% of Guangdong Province’s total land area, but it shoulders the burden of providing industrial and domestic water supplies to nearly half of Guangdong’s population (which produces 70% of the province’s total GDP), as well as exporting water to Hong Kong.

Heyuan is located in the mid to upper reaches of the East River. The city’s total land area is 15,800 square kilometres, of which the East River basin takes up 81.6%. Many waterways flow through Heyuan, including 47 with drainage areas of 100 square kilometres or greater. Of these 47 waterways, 39 are part of the East River basin. Heyuan is also home to the two largest reservoirs in Guangdong, the Xinfengjiang Reservoir and the Fengshuba Reservoir. There are 1,257 water extraction points in the East River Basin, and almost half (622) of them are located in Heyuan. Thus Heyuan has the most important water resources in the upper stream of the East River and is accurately described as the East River’s faucet. The water that
flows from Heyuan is intricately intertwined with the security of the entire river basin’s ecosystem and human population.

Water from the East River has long been placed on a pedestal on the cross-border relationship between Guangdong and Hong Kong and has been regarded as ‘water of politics, water of life and water of the economy’. But not until recent years has the city of Heyuan been paid attention to, simply because water in the middle and lower stream had become badly polluted. Those cities located along the lower reaches of East River, especially Shenzhen, Dongguan and Huizhou, have brought pollution to the river as their industries expanded quickly. Ever since the 1990s, environmental protection organizations in Hong Kong have noticed this phenomena and started to interfere by giving pressure to the government of Guangdong on the issue of protecting water sources and controlling the development of industry (Gao, Wang and Yang, 1998, pp. 55-56).

Although the water transport to Hong Kong is not directly taken from Heyuan, the Advisory Committee on Water Resources and Quality of Water Supplies (ACRQWS) under the Water Supplies Department of Hong Kong pay regular visits to Heyuan since the mid-1990s to monitor the water condition in Xinfengjiang Reservoir. In a recent visit, the members of the committee seems satisfied with the condition of water: ‘After a stroll on the top of the main dam, the delegation took a boat ride in the Reservoir and noticed the pristine condition of the water in the Reservoir, which was a convincing proof of the continuous efforts and actions taken by the Heyuan Municipal People’s Government in protecting the water source’.35 Another report from an independent research organization in Hong Kong concludes: ‘How Heyuan manages its water is critical not only to the security of the Dongjiang,
but also the entire Pearl River Basin. Any crisis that strikes the Dongjiang will be a crisis for all of Guangdong, as well as Hong Kong. Without a doubt, Heyuan must be a focal point of attention and protection for Guangdong and Hong Kong’ (Liu & Bian, 2012, p. 26).

**Xingang**

In my conservations with residents in Xingang, people always referred to the Dongshen Project as ‘selling water’. They stress for many times that Heyuan has nothing but this lake of water, and the development of Heyuan, including Xingang, is all depends on how the government exploit the water resources. In spite of fact that the fresh water supply project has not been realized, Heyuan did achieve some scope for its economic development through developing ecotourism centred on the reservoir. Although few local residents seem to care or talk about the ecotourism or the promoted ‘relationship of harmony with nature’, many people do see the construction of the tourism site and the other related projects such as a new highway to Xingang, as a symbol of social progress and transformation. Not only does the exploitation on the reservoir promise the gradual integration of Xingang into a popular tourism site for tourists from Guangdong and Hong Kong, from a local perspective it especially seems to promise the transformation of a nonplace into an important place in Heyuan. When discussing the new highway, the tourism pier, and the newly established 5 star international hotel, people emphasize progress and development, how these construction projects will bring jobs, facilitate transportation, and improve community environment. In this sense, the reservoir stands for the forward progress of a move into the future for them.
Yet such optimism obscures another tendency that emerges when people discuss the water related issue in a less direct fashion. Most people do indeed marvel at the progress of the ecotourism project as a successful development; the only 5-star international hotel within Heyuan is something to be proud of; and the plan of supplying fresh water to Hong Kong is a promise of a better future. But they also seem to see it as something outside of themselves, something uncontrollable and unpredictable. Whether it will be good or bad, they have little role in what the plan will be. And the older generation still remembers the trauma of the relocation resulted from the construction of the reservoir, they expressed a silent resignation that no one would know the end result (of the ecotourism and water supply project) until all was said and done.

A man working in a roadside store described this sense of not knowing with a combination of worried foreboding and idealized hope. On the one hand, he pointed out the construction of the new pier would make the old pier, where Xingang people are living, become a dead place—because tourists do not need to pass by the old pier anymore. He also pointed out that employers in the newly established international hotel would increase the floating population of Xingang, which would definitely ruin the peace of the town. In fact, during my year-long stay in Xingang from summer 2010, I experienced the noisy nights myself—the hotel workers went to local stores for beers and food after midnight and some get drunk and shouting loudly.

With all this talk about the negative consequences of the exploitation projects, I asked the man if he thought there was a negative side to development. This question prompted a change in his narrative. He stopped his critical stance and began to make a point of saying he was grateful for the development and rich people from
Hong Kong should really invest in the water supply project, but not just join the tour of sightseeing.

In this discussion, the speaker expressed his reservations about the exploitation projects around the reservoir and yet remained positive and idealistic about the general idea of development. Our discussion again ended with the expectation of Hong Kong. The water and the spaces along the East River produce an important social space of encounter and interaction between Xingang and Hong Kong. To the local residents, Hong Kong is not only the destination of the reservoir water; but also an origin of the investment money. Hong Kong and Xingang, though have no relation in fact, has linked up by the water of the East River.

**Uneasy partner**

*Heyuan and the Water*

Heyuan has been the poorest city in Guangdong Province ever since it has become a city in the administrative system in 1988. We can see from table 1 that the GDP of Heyuan was far below those of Guangzhou and Shenzhen for the last ten years. As to industrial production there were great disparities between Heyuan and these cities. While Shenzhen had a per capita GDP of 94,296 yuan in 2010, that of Heyuan was only 16,301 yuan, which was also under the provincial average line of 44,736 yuan. The Heyuan government always has the pressure of developing its local economy.
As pollution in the lower stream of the East River increased, the main function of the Xinfengjiang reservoir has been changed from generating electricity for Guangdong to maintaining the water quality of the East River. Discussions have begun about the possibility that Xinfengjiang Reservoir could provide water directly to Hong Kong and other cities in the Guangdong province (Liang 1997, p.136; Sun 2006).

However, the Guangdong government has always imposed legal limits on the development of industries in Heyuan. Consequently, the demand for building up big industrial projects in Heyuan has always been opposed by the government. In 1994, one of Japan’s biggest paper-mills intended to invest 100 billion yuan in Heyuan and set up the biggest paper making factory in Asia with an annual production of 300 thousand tons. Heyuan government believed that if this happened, it would increase not only its GDP by 3,000 billion but also its taxable income by 600 billion. However, it was opposed by the Guangdong Government because this project would bring pollution problems and did not meet the requirements of environment protection.37

Ironically, while Heyuan people felt that the industrial development of Heyuan has been under restriction, the industrial development in the lower reaches of the East River like Dongguan and Shenzhen are continuing. Because of the pollution
in the industrial zone in the lower reaches of the East River and the PRD, the supply of drinking water is shrinking, which leaves Xinfengjiang reservoir as the major source of drinking water. Heyuan people think that the environmental problems incurred by the other industrial cities have actually been paid by Heyuan, while at the same time the city was not able to develop its industries because it has been given so many restrictions to maintain water quality. Rigorous regulations for protecting the natural environment are making environmentalism a hegemonic discourse limiting the development of Heyuan city. In fact, for Heyuan people, the discourse of environmentalism is becoming a plot for developed areas to limit the development of underdeveloped places, like Heyuan.

Heyuan finally decided to exploit its water resources for its own economic development, even under such a pressure from both the PRD and Hong Kong’s environmental protection organization. One of the strategies is to develop the ecotourism project centred at the Xinfengjiang Reservoir.

Hence, ecotourism, which promotes a harmonious relationship with nature, has been an important way to develop the local economy in Heyuan since the 1990s. The secretary of Heyuan Municipal Committee of the CPC once emphasized that Heyuan should take tourism as a golden opportunity to develop its third industry, to increase the reputation of the city and stimulate its economic development, and to lead the formation of a local green culture. Tourism is going to be active in raising the economy in Heyuan (Li 1995a).

In fact, this is exactly what the local government thinks—to turn the reservoir of water into a reservoir of wealth. The idea of developing the reservoir into a tourism site emerged as early as in the 1980s. However, this project was not executed
until the 1990s due to a lack of investment capital. In 1995, the reservoir was finally opened as a tourism site named the Evergreen Lake (wan lü hu 万绿湖). Green Tourism, or ecotourism, is undoubtedly the dominating theme of the Evergreen Lake. Environmentalism propaganda is everywhere on the pier and islands within the tourism site. Tourist boats are called ‘environmental-protection boats’ (huanbao chuan 环保船); garbage bins are named ‘environmental-friendly garbage bins’ (huanbao lajixiang 环保垃圾箱); and even the tourist guides are called ‘environmentalist messengers’ (huanbao shizhe 环保使者) who carry around bags named ‘environmental-protection bags’ (huanbao dai 环保袋) to collect the rubbish left by the tourists while sightseeing on the lake.

The stores in the tourism pier are also doing a hard-sell on ‘green Heyuan’ to the tourists. There are over ten stores and twenty stalls on the tourism pier, selling local products and souvenirs. All the special local products are claimed to be natural and pollution-free. Sun-dried reservoir fish that is said to be cultivated in the clean reservoir water is the favourite product of the tourists. One of the storekeepers told me that by stressing these local products as being ‘green food’ resulted in good sales.

Another theme in the tourism pier is water. The tourist guides in the pier would tell the story of water to the tourists:

A long time ago, there was a village in Heyuan called Nanhu. That area is mostly uninhabited, due to its remote location and dense woodland. Refugees from the central part of China (the Hakka people) later settled there, they cultivated fields intensely and later lived a prosperous life as farmers. However, due to three straight years of drought, the rivers ran dry, and the crops withered. These Hakka natives could not stay there any longer and thus decided to leave. A young couple, who prepared their last meal before leaving, was cooking the last few remaining wild vegetables at home while an old lady beggar came to them. Upon glancing at the poor old lady,
the couple decided giving their last remaining meal to her, for she was on the verge of death. The old lady accepted the couples’ last remaining meal and was grateful for their kindness. She floated off the ground, ascended up into the skies, and revealed herself to be Bodhisattva Guanyin. With a jar containing pure water in her left hand, she dripped some water from the jar and it began to rain. This rain lasted for three days and water in the rivers run eternally afterwards. Nanhu area became a fertile place again, and the people prospered from cultivation. People were grateful to Bodhisattva Guanyin and renamed the river as Xinfengjiang (New Prosperous River), signifying that Bodhisattva Guanyin gave new life and prosperity to the people living in this region. A temple was constructed on the top of the hill, so that future generations can come and pay tribute to Bodhisattva Guanyin.

The story ends here, but then, the tourist guides will usually add:

The legend of the water being bestowed by the Bodhisattva Guanyin has been passed on for generations, and it reflects how precious and invaluable water is to the residents of Heyuan. When they go to the temple to pray, it is to pray for abundant water. In the past, Bodhisattva Guanyin gave the gift of water to the people of Heyuan, and now the people of Heyuan pass this gift onto the people of Shenzhen and Hong Kong. Hakka people are as selfless as Bodhisattva Guanyin and the river has forged a firm bond between the Hakka people and people from Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

But as I asked for Xingang residents about the story, none of them had heard of it before. The relationship between Heyuan and Xingang has been publicly constructed through propaganda in the tourism site.

In an article entitled ‘The Evergreen Lake: Constructing a Tourism Image’ which was published by the main local newspaper of Heyuan in 1995, the writer reveals how the meaning of the Guanyin statue was altered for the purpose of building up tourism in the Lake, especially a ‘green culture’ (Li 1995b):

The environment is the main theme behind the Evergreen Lake. In the process of constructing this environmentally friendly image, there should be
suitable cultural references and background. Thus, the ‘Songzi Guanyin’ (child bestowing Bodhisattva 送子观音) has been turned into the new ‘Songshui Guanyin’ (water bestowing Bodhisattva 送水观音).

Actually the origin ‘Songzi Guanyin (Child bestowing Bodhisattva 送子观音)’ was built to attract tourists who wishing to have children (Gao et al., 1998, p. 71). However, since water had become the theme of the tourism site, the statue was changed into ‘water-bestowing Guanyin Bodhisatta’ to emphasize the nature-culture relationship in the site.

Not only the change of the name of the Guanyin statue expresses the importance of water, it is stressed in the same article that the main reason for the construction of the reservoir was to supply water (Li, 1995b):

Xinfengjiang Reservoir has become a huge lake, supplying water for millions of people who live downstream in Shenzhen and Hong Kong. For this reason, one hundred thousand residents of Dongyuan County [in Heyuan City] were forced to relocate, and all business and development of the region was slowed or virtually stopped to assure water supply be made possible for others. (my emphasis)

The function of ‘water supply’ of the Xinfengjiang Hydropower station is emphasized by the author but not the original ‘power supply’ purpose. However, though Heyuan government put great effort to construct an image of ‘Green’ of the tourism site and emphasize the element of water, the attention from Hong Kong has become more and more intensive, worrying about the water source would be polluted by the tourism industry.

*Hong Kong and the Water*

Hong Kong’s strong influence in Guangdong has put much pressure on the exploitation projects in the reservoir. Hong Kong’s status has been even stronger
since its return to China in 1997, as has its influence in South China. From the 1990s, environmental NGOs in Hong Kong had already noticed that the middle and lower stream of East River was polluted and they started to suggest taking the water from the upper reaches of the East River. Therefore they paid close attention to water issues in Heyuan. HKCA is one of the first nongovernment organizations for environmental protection that monitor the water quality in the upper stream of the East River. In 1998, HKCA, cooperating with the local government in Heyuan, organized more than five hundred environmentalists from Hong Kong and Guangdong to plant trees around the Evergreen Lake area for the sake of water protection.

At the same time, HKCA conducted a survey in Heyuan and claimed that the construction of the Evergreen Lake had greatly affected the natural environment of the reservoir, leading to pollution of the natural resources. Based on the survey, they asked the Guangdong Government to control the tourism development at Heyuan. In November of 1999, the Guangdong Provincial Government issued a resolution which commanded Heyuan to close the newly established hotels, restaurants and villas built inside the reservoir area.

This was no doubt a huge blow to tourism development in Heyuan. The Xingang people remembered this conflict clearly and can always account some stories about the demolishing of the new hotels. Even though the Provincial Government allowed some of the tourism site to remain, rumours still spread quickly in Guangdong that the tourism development has been strictly prohibited and a significant drop down of tourists number has been witnessed. People hardly knew the details of this event, not even the Xingang people. When talking about these
obstacles of the exploitation of the reservoir, many had told me the story as following:

‘The Hong Kong people cherish the water in the Reservoir very much. To make the water clean and out of pollution, Li Ka Shing, the richest HongKongnese, had purchased the whole reservoir in the year of 1999. Hence, the water you saw here is his and it is going to be transported to Hong Kong soon—just wait for the transporting pipe to be ready’. Of course it was not true. But the reaction of the relocatees showed a deep sense of insecurity, as well as their imagination about the ‘great power’. To use their own words, it is power from ‘shang bian’ (the upper 上边). If you have got people from shang bian (shang bian you ren 上边有人), then you get benefit or protection. In their power-geometry (in Massey’s term; Massey 1991, p.28), Hong Kong is not only the future, but also the upper.

*The Politics between the Two Places*

Hong Kong people have been drinking the water from the East River for decades. Heyuan as a major city in the upper reaches of the East River has received much attention from Hong Kong since the 1990s. A big black marble stele standing at the main entrance of the tourism pier says ‘yinshui siyuan (drink water but remember the source 饮水思源)’. It was supplemented by a line of smaller characters saying: ‘Set up respectfully by compatriots from Hong Kong, October 2000’. This stele could be treated as a symbol of the relationship between Heyuan and Hong Kong.

Aside from this big stele in the main entrance, there are many small ones in the tourism sites, which have been erected by different groups from outside reservoir, indicating their contribution to the sustainable environment in the reservoir area and to show their support of the conservation of the environment. Many groups from
Hong Kong could be found in the names of the steles, including China Travel Service (Hong Kong), Hong Kong Standard, Messengers of Green Consciousness, and the Hong Kong Conservancy Association (HKCA). Cheung Lai Ping, the Deputy Chief Executive of Hong Kong Conservancy Association (HKCA), once asserted that (Gao, Wang, & Yang, 1998, pp. 55–56):

The development of Hong Kong has a very close relationship to the East River. It is from Evergreen Lake that the East River gets its pure water. There would be no exception for any people, including the people of Hong Kong, to take the responsibility of protecting the Evergreen Lake.

Cheung’s statement that Hong Kong has such a close relationship with the protection of the natural environment in Evergreen Lake shows that Hong Kong has been concerned about the eco-environment of Evergreen Lake while the tourism development of Evergreen Lake would always attract attention. So if any of the water interests of Hong Kong were affected, there would definitely be some environmental protection organizations who would come to intervene in Heyuan. As discussed before, Hong Kong has requested Guangdong Province to close down all tourism establishments within the reservoir despite the fact that they were all newly built. In this context, in the eyes of local people, those steles claiming protection for the environment set up by Hong Kong groups in the tourism district are more a symbol of power than a reality of environmental protection support from Hong Kong.

**Water, Space and Identity**

In Xingang, I find Hong Kong and Xingang are at the two ends of this story. In space, Hong Kong is beyond the lower reaches of the East River; in time, it represents a future for the Xingang people: a kind of modern and abundant life which forms huge contrast of their current life. The spatial relationship could often been
transformed into a temporal relationship in the narratives of local residents—often, when they are talking about the reservoir, they are hinting a time of the past; and the mention of Hong Kong often implies a sense of future. Where it is in time was a key indicator of what kind of place it was. The sense of place implied a sense of time as well as space. Spacial transformation gave clues to history, to the political distribution of power in the here and now, and let to anticipatory ideas about the future and what it might hold. In an imagined relationship with Hong Kong, they have established a kind of linkage to the future that they are longing for.

Despite the divergent subjective feelings among the relocatees about Hong Kong and Xingang—whether it evokes optimism or despair, power or a sense of exclusion—both interpretations depend on the fact that it lies between categories: the binary categories of rural and urban (and the assumption that urban space is modern and rural space somehow belong to the past). These categories still inform the way people imagine space. Looking carefully at time orientation of these binary framework gives us an understanding of how political legitimacy builds upon a notion of ‘urbanization’, ‘development’, and progress that promises a forever-arriving better future. The feeling of regarding Hong Kong as modern resonate the assumption that urban space is modern and rural space somehow belongs to the past. This translates to social categories that associate different people with different places mapped onto time. People in urban areas often look down on rural people as uncivilized and crude, lacking restraint, and uneducated, all implicit signs of being backward. Raymond Williams (1973) famously describes this situation on his work on the country and the city in Britain, and Rigg (1997) demonstrates the extension of this form of ‘temporal exclusion’ throughout Southeast Asia and goes on to argue
that it represents the ‘hegemony of the development discourse’ that emphasizes the modernity of development and the backwardness of agriculture.

Over 50 years ago, it is the electric power generated for Guangzhou that made up their dream of modernization, and now, it is the water transported to Hong Kong that makes them think they are related with the future that they are long for. These reservoir relocatees were unwittingly placed in a subordinate role and could only accept the life designed by other people on their behalf. People regard the fresh water supply plan as a promise of social progress and transformation. As they are supplying water to the developed places such like Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Hong Kong, it seems to promise the transformation of an unimportant place into a vital place. In this sense, for Xingang people, the water transportation in the East River stands for forward progress. However, as the material shows, the process of paying more and more attention to the water does not necessarily bring the Xingang people to a more central place. It is more likely the case that it is the process of being more and more marginalized. This is just as Green (2005) points out, ‘the relative position have been reiterated’, or as Zhang (2001) concludes, ‘as things change, the more they stay the same’.
CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

In an article by actor Lao Liu about his role in the recent Chinese movie *Detective Hunter Zhang*, he wrote,

The city of Beijing, as we know of and as we live in, has a much longer distance with any village in China (including those in rural Beijing) than its distance with New York or London. In a similar manner, between a skyscraper and the slum next to it, is the furthest distance in this city. Different people converge here, but they are as far away as the stars in the sky: distant and unknowable.

Another novelist, Ah Yi, stated, ‘I live in this society, but I do not specially feel a close relationship with it’. The coldness and distance they describe is not uncommon in contemporary China. After over three decades’ economic reform, the state has showed its tremendous power to reshape the landscape of China in its path marching to modernity. But the social distance among different groups of people is also broadened and deepened. I encountered this distance and coldness from the moment I began fieldwork in Xingang. Local residents maintained their distance, thinking I was a ‘government spy’. The women dockworkers in the pier observed me every day to ensure that I had not been sent from the Xinfengjiang Forest Bureau to investigate whether anyone had illegally rented boats to the tourists to earn benefit. During the six months of my first stay in 2001–2002, I often found myself under the intense gaze from the local residents, who would not talk with me but just watch. This high level of suspicion from community residents shows their deep-seated feelings of insecurity and their mistrust of the government (because they always regarded me as a government representative). After I had been present in the community for a long time and people had gradually become willing to share their stories, I still worried
that I might not grasp what was happening there, because the local residents could be so distant and cold, not only with me but also with other community members and toward local affairs.

Green acutely wrote about a feeling about the place she researched (Epirus, Greece): ‘a sense of a general lack of distinction; an underlying, never quite explicitly acknowledged, lack of clarity; but it did not matter all that much—it made no difference (literally)—because the place and the people were ordinary’ (Green, 2005, p. 23). Although the key word would not be ‘distinction’ or ‘clarity’ in Xingang, I strongly sensed something similar there; specifically, it is an ‘underlying, never quite explicitly acknowledged’ feeling, but it did not trouble the local residents, because ‘it made no difference’. This is a sense of detachment and irrelevance: the residents are detached from the place (both where they live and where they are from), either by themselves or by the powerful forces. Therefore, no matter how prominent or bad their currently living place is, it made no difference. It is irrelevant with them, because they are an abandoned people; and they do not have the power or resources to control things happening around them. Consequently, the residents see no point in being attached or actively involved.

As discussed in chapter 4, trust is especially problematic for the forced migrants given the loss of familiar social cues. Daniel (2002) pointed out that the moment the nation-state that is supposed to protect fails to do so, or even worse, colludes in inflicting suffering on a person in its care, the germ that constitutes a refugee is formed. . . . The loss of this trust in question is triggered by a radical and violent disjunction between a person’s familiar way of being in the world and a new reality of sociopolitical circumstances that not only threaten this habitual way of being in the world but also force the affected person to see his world differently. (p. 279, emphasis original).
The state has deprived their trust, as well as the meaning of life for them during the constant displacement. They are not attached to any people or any place. In their stories, they are displaced and misplaced, people who can never fit in. Therefore, they do not care what the government has done to develop the area, but at the same time they are always alert of government’s next move.

Based on materials given by local residents, archival material, and my ethnographic participation and in an effort to understand how people in Xingang make sense of their life and how they maintain, change, make, or remake relations with place and people, I have explored the nexus of meanings in the Xingang people’s life in different times. Three points of the Xingang material merit special attention and are discussed below: submerged memory, fluid community, and place of ambiguity.

**Submerged Memory**

To place the Xingang case in the wider context of similar reservoir relocatee communities in China, forgetting is more the case for the people in Xingang as opposed to the collective remembering in other communities (for example, Jing 1996; Ying 2001; Scudder 1973, 1982; Colson 1971, 2003). These latter communities show that the healing of a wounded society may depend on the collective decision of not to forget. But Xingang seems to be a community of ‘collective forgetting’: having experienced community breakup, loss of homeland and family members, the great famine, and the constant relocations after the evacuation, an intentional forgetting seems to be an important way to cure the suffering of the Xingang people.

However, all of this does not mean that their history disappeared without a trace. ‘Not-remembering’ is in just as important as ‘remembering’ in revealing the
influences of the past. Silence about the past is not less powerful than talking about it. The Xingang people are using their own ways to make their voices heard. They keep the old structure of nature in their fengshui (geomancy) stories; they keep the identity of their old communities alive by using the names of the places that have been submerged forever. Silence does not mean agreement, either. In many other ways, the Xingang people express their views of the human-nature relationship which is different from that of the state’s. Being suppressed, such as being kept out of public propaganda, the discourse of the relocatees’, together with that of the state’s, is contesting in the space provided by environmentalism. For the reservoir migrants, they saw the old place that they knew: they still found the old structure of nature in it. To them, although their homeland was submerged, what they saw was not a lake but society under water, a place still alive in their memories. Although the state could submerge their homes, it could not submerge their vision of the natural environment. In this sense, I suggest that it is more accurate to understand the ‘forgetting’ in Xingang as concealment of remembering or a silenced knowledge. I use the term submerged memory to describe this condition of social memory in Xingang.

The reservoir triggered my imagination. The first time I visited Xingang, my eyes were immediately attracted to the reservoir with clean and calm water. Later, after having lived in Xingang for some time looking at the reservoir each day, it no longer excited me. The reservoir is just there and seems to contain nothing but water. But over time, I began to realize that it is not nothing: the reservoir actually conceals the past and connects to the past (or even to the future, as discussed in chapter 7). Therefore, to people who know, the reservoir is more than a lake of water. I argue that, in social memory, there is something I call submerged memory that functions as
the reservoir does. It is a concealment of remembrance, but it is not forgotten. This memory is submerged and cannot be accessed by the people who do not know it, but it is not lost. This state of not-knowing is different from forgetting, which is an erasure of the knowledge. The submerged memory is also a memory, and the Xingang people could still use it when bargaining with the government (as they did when settling at Xingang), although it is not visible in daily practice. In many ways, this submerged memory could also be the ‘gap’ in Marilyn Strathern’s terms: a gap that is represented as containing nothing by those who focus on distinctions (what things in themselves are), but that is not at all empty in the view of those who focus on connections and interrelations (Strathern, 1991, pp. xxii–xxv; quoted from Green 2005, p.88). To approach remembering and forgetting in this way allows reflection on an important but neglected aspect of social change.

I argue that submerged memory plays a crucial role in structuring everyday life in Xingang. By exploring how people evoke certain ignorance/not-knowing in responding to displacement provides insight into how people create post-relocation identities. I suggest that the distance (the gap) they keep with their past, which they use strategically, offers them flexibility to move between different categories, and that this strategic forgetting gives them the power to turn a lack of knowledge into the knowledge of lack (chapter 3).

Previous studies on social memory have profoundly pointed out that ‘when we remember something from the past, it comes forth largely constructed on the basis of present needs. Hence, when we think we have remembered a particular event from earlier in our lives, we may not be remembering it as it actually happened but recalling only a recent and highly stylized interpretation of it’ (Gross, 2000, p. 3). In
other words, people remember the past for the purpose of the present. My observations indicated that the local residents in Xingang did not like to remember the suffering past but very much liked to recall the good days before the evacuation. I understood that nostalgia was an important way of curing the suffering of a broken community, but, I argue, the ‘forgetting’ of the miserable past could also be seen as a kind of protection against the traumatic experiences. Here, the not-remembering also serves for the purpose of the present.

Furthermore, as studies on historical memories have showed, a retreat to the past is not only an attempt to make sense of the present, but often an orientation towards the future. Davis (2010) explores how the displaced Palestinian communities because of the 1947-1949 war have since carried their village names, memories, and possessions with them into the diaspora, transforming their lost past into local histories in the form of ‘village memorial books’ and how they considered the purpose of the history is to ‘remember for the future.’ (p. 52) I suggest that, in reverse, the loss of a link to the future simultaneously prevent a link to the past in Xingang. This is related to the feeling of abandonment that the community expressed.

The Xingang people feel that they are an out-of-place people who are being overlooked by the government for decades (chapter 2). Although different state projects have been implemented in the community, the residents tend to feel cynical about the efforts. Some relevant comments by residents were: ‘Xingang (new pier) is kong gang (empty pier) now’ (chapter 4); and ‘Xingang is just like xiang gang (Hong Kong): both place is gang ren zhi gang (local people run local affairs on their own)’ (chapter 7). When Green talks about the abandonment and people’s cynicism in her book *Notes from the Balkans*, she argues that being conscious of the constructed and
even inaccurate character of state stereotype does not axiomatically lead people to resist them. They might instead simply be cynical or ironic while in practice supporting the stereotypes that essentialise them because such stereotypes might literally be the source of the income they need to live. Green writes, ‘It was not that they [people in Epirus] were “automatons” and knew it; it was more that they were irrelevant and knew it, while at the same time acknowledging that this ideology which rendered them irrelevant had teeth; they had to live with it, whatever they thought about it’ (Green 2005, p. 125). It is inspiring to see the submerged memory from this angle: they knew too well that they were ‘irrelevant’ to what happened around them; therefore, they maintained their distance. Not knowing is sometimes not caring to know. People who do not see themselves with a place do not need to restore (or recreate) the past for the purpose of the present or the future. That is why the Xingang people, feeling abandoned by the state, make no effort to remember. I argue that, the submerged memory enables people to keep a distance from the ‘fantasy with teeth’ (using Green’s terms), and that distance creates a type of flexibility that cannot be controlled by the state. Furthermore, the memory that has been submerged (the loss) perhaps does not really matter; what does matter is that the submergence (the knowledge about loss) creates the basis for relationships: the fluidity and partiality of connections and interrelations that happened here.

**Fluid Community**

Through their accounts of the social structure and family lives before the construction of the dam, we can see that the Xingang people once lived in a traditional farming society that was stable and structured and had a self-sufficient economy. However, life in Xingang today completely contrasts the former
community. A distinct feature of the Xingang case is that relationships among community members are fluid, in terms of being unstable and changeable. After experiencing the first resettlement, they were often subjected to subsequent resettlements, which became a constant breaking, organizing, rebreaking, and reorganizing process. This history of constantly moving had greatly broken the old social structure and authority among the reservoir migrants. After every move, a percentage of the original group would move again to join new social groups. Then, a portion of this newly established group would leave once again to find a new place to settle. During this repeated separation-division-recombination pattern, reservoir relocatees organized and reorganized their social groups with members joining and leaving.

Also, community members in Xingang today have come together through different means and are of varying social backgrounds. After 1978, more and more migrants returned to Xingang. Some of them depended on their relatives and some of them depended on their friends to help them succeed in moving to Xingang. This personal network had been the most important factor in their success. Another feature of this resettlement was that they moved on a household basis; there was no large-scale migration. Every family had its own network that helped them settle in. After constant moving, the solidarity of the people had been weakened. Although the framework of the former, productive teams could still be seen, the relationships between the team members were much cooler. Personal networks became the key elements dominating life in Xingang, sometimes becoming a sticking point in competition for their settlement and later being essential for them to make a living at
the port. It was important that the Xingang people keep their networks a secret to avoid others discovering their advantages in the competition.

For these reasons community members in Xingang have not tried to unite themselves into an organized collective. Instead, they communicate with each other on a rather superficial level. Personal networks with the outside world are more important to them than relationships with community members. The constant relocations had greatly broken down former social groups among reservoir relocatees and left no basis for constructing a stable social structure in the newly established community. In this way, Xingang became a loosely organized community with little cohesion, consensus, or solidarity (see also Ou, 2003). Furthermore, the development of the tourism business in the 1990s reinforced the independence of each family in making their living and intensified social differentiation in the community.

Xingang is the transportation centre of the reservoir area. Passengers and businessmen come and go daily. This fluid environmental characteristic ensures that the residents develop a network that is not limited to the community itself but that extends both inside and outside the reservoir area. For example, Liang and Huang, two businessmen in Xingang, had little contact with each other because they are competitors in the tourism business. However, their competition has extended to the inner-reservoir in their attempts to collect more sun-dried fish from the fishmongers. To them, the relationship with the fishmongers was much more important than their relationship with each other. Such reversed outward personal networks intensify the fluidity of community relationships.

Xingang still has a large transient population that moves between the inner-reservoir, the township, and Heyuan city frequently. To these people, they call not
only Xingang home but also the other two places, as their family members live in all three places. For these people, Xingang is a stepping stone for the whole family. They would leave their house in Xingang available for other family members from the inner-reservoir to move into while they themselves would move to Heyuan. This shifting population contributes to the fluid way in which community members communicate with each other.

Not only are the members floating, the place has an inherent fluid nature, for it is the transportation centre of the reservoir area. This feature has reinforced the fluid communication style in Xingang because it provides multiple opportunities for community members, which is quite different from traditional rural villages, where community members depend more heavily on each other. The convenience of transportation increased the community members’ contact with the outside world, which, at the same time, weakened the cohesion within the community.

More important, making a living in Xingang no longer depended on the cooperation between community members. Xingang had few tillable lands. This forced the community members to give up their traditional lives as farmers. When making a living does not depend on resources within a community, the collaboration of those community members is far less important. In an economic sense, the individual’s ways of making a living became more diversified with the development of tourism. Community members have become increasingly interdependent of each other in their work. They treat each other as potential competitors in the contest of earning a better life. Personal relationships outside of the community are a crucial factor for succeeding in this competition. The self-sufficiency of each family has
significantly loosened connection among the Xingang people. This factor has
principally shaped the fluid style of relationships among community members.

Moreover, politically, fluid organization is a strategy in response to the fluid
type of the government’s environmental discourse. For the reservoir migrants, who
have been constantly moved over the past few decades and have experienced huge
lifestyle transformations resulting from the changes in the state’s ideology on the
human–environment relationship, being a fluid community is the best way to
minimize the impact of continually breaking familiar social networks. Although the
Communist Party recognizes that festering rivers, denuded mountains, and skies
without stars have become a political liability, it still restricts ordinary people from
pressuring for change. In a time when environmental activities are located in a
contingent political context that does not allow environmental ideology to threaten
social stability, fluid communication is the best way for the Xingang people to keep
to themselves and preserve a feeling of security.

However, we should look at fluid communication in the community in the
context of Xingang’s short history. As a newly established community of just more
than 30 years (1980s–2010s) of existence, it is not surprising that the community
would be fluid rather than one with a stable social structure.

Place of Ambiguity

Researchers have described a prerevolutionary peasant world full of
connections and links situated in a cultural nexus of power and identity in traditional
China (for example, Skinner 1964; Faure & Siu, 1995). By highlighting how the
shared cultural features incorporated ‘a cosmic vision’ (Cohen 2005, p. 8) that
extended not only beyond the local community but also to Heaven and the
underworld, Cohen (2005) joined the aforementioned literature in appreciating the historically layered, translocal mappings of village life, both in material means and cultural imaginations. It was an ironic, historical twist, Cohen rightly asserts, that urban-based, nationalist elites rejected such traditions as ‘backward and feudal’ and created an earthbound China with villagers as objects of modern transformation.

Faure and Siu also argued that ‘the localized peasant community was but an image for the convenience of imperial rule. It was a means to make spaces and their occupants legible for officials. The various incarnations of xiangtu Zhongguo in the twentieth century served similar functions for the Republican and Communist regimes’ (Faure & Siu, 2006, p. 50). But the cellularised (in Siu’s term), grounded existence of villages was a product of Maoist revolution. Mao’s government used more than twenty years of institutional force to take over the once rich layers of social lives in Chinese society and build up a social structure of a rigid rural–urban divide. The hukou system has maintained urban bias and the political, cultural, and economic frameworks that continue to work against rurality today. Rurality has long become a label of backwardness and poverty, which must be avoided. China’s new premier, Li Keqiang, mentioned, in his first press conference after taking office (March 2013), that the rural–urban divide and the goal of urbanization were important issues on the government’s agenda. He said, ‘All the villagers want is to live in a good life like the urbanites . . . The scale of China’s urbanisation is unprecedented in human history. The initiative is not only crucial to the development of China, but also has implications for the rest of the world. Therefore, it is only natural for people to pay close attention to its details and progress’.

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After Deng’s reform in 1978, people had more freedom and mobility in general. However, researchers have found that ‘the language of the socialist state was so totalizing that the bureaucratic presence of the part-state and its categories were reproduced in the reform era’ (Siu 1989). Scholars have termed such process ‘state involution’ (Siu 1989), or more recently ‘socialism from afar’ (Zhang & Ong, 2008). Culturally, the language of binary division might still guide people’s conceptions and action, but in physical terms, various state development projects have transformed the landscape of the country and have profoundly blurred the dividing line between rural and urban. Although many ethnographies on China have dealt with this issue through the lens of cities (Zhang, 2001, 2010; Fong, 2004; Gaetano & Jacka, 2004; Siu, 2007, to name a few) or villages (e.g., Yan, 2003, 2009; Mueggler, 2001; Liu, 2000), few ethnographies have focused on the ambivalent places that are neither rural nor urban. I argue that, in a background of rapid urbanization in China (especially that strongly pushed by the government of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang), the studies on this kind of place can offer us a perceptive view on what happened in people’s life when they are thrust into state-promoted modernization with a long and influential historical legacy. Of course, contemporary China enjoys much more freedom today than in the Maoist era, but we know very little about the condition of ‘heterogeneous presents’ in what may be perceived as a fragmented China. Many peasantry communities, which lost almost all their farmland due to the state’s development efforts, are living in conditions very similar to those experienced by the Xingang people. These places and people need our attention, and I hope that this study on Xingang has provided a case to begin the discussion.
APPENDIX

List of Main Characters

Xiao, Jun  An officer in Xingang Township government; from Nanhu village (submerged); currently lives in Heyuan City with his family.

Jiang  A store owner in Xingang whose store sells special local product to the tourists; from Changjiang, Xichang People’s Commune; moved to Xingang because his son-in-law, who worked at Xinfengjiang Forest Bureau, left him a house in Xingang when the man himself moved from Xingang to Heyuan.

Liang  Jiang’s son, who runs the tourist business along with his father; brought his family to Dongguan for a better life in 2006.

Gu  Head of Xudong porterage team; father of the acting town mayor and my host during my visit in 2001–2002; relocated to Xudong village after the dam construction and later led a team from Xudong to Xingang to join the porterage business in the 1960s.

Huang  The retired Party secretary of Diaolou Residents’ Committee in Xingang; from Xichang market; one of the first group of returnees who followed Lai and Yang by moving from Liucheng to Xingang at 1979.

Lai  Head of Xichang porterage team; a close friend of Huang; had been team leader of the Xichang people who resettled at Liucheng; partnered with Yang, they tried and succeeded to lead some Xichang people to resettle at Xingang; established and led the porterage team of Xichang in Xingang in the 1980s.
Yang  An active team leader and partner of Lai; was once a policeman in the reservoir area; died early.

Liu  Former leader of Huilong porterage crew; was once a high official who worked at the CCP committee of the Reservoir Commune; moved to Xingang before his retirement from the place and became the team leader of the Huilong people for a period of time; built an inn at the pier, which was once the only lodging place in Xingang; after his retirement, he lost his influence and leadership among the Huilong people in Xingang and was replaced by Ye Cai.

Luo  Owned a restaurant on the main street in Xingang; joined neither the Xichang nor Huilong team; moved to Xingang because he was close with Wei, who worked for the Xinfengjiang Forest Bureau.

Wei  A retired officer from Xinfengjiang Forest Bureau; former head of Public Security in the Reservoir Commune; moved from Shuntian (as deputy head of the commune) to Xingang (as head of police station in Xingang and reservoir) because of a job transfer; has lived in Heyuan City after retiring.

Bearded Liu  Was once one of the state employed dockworkers in the porterage station in Xingang; from Xichang; stopped working at the porterage station after his wife had an accident in the pier and became paralyzed; runs a booth at the market to make a living.

Hu and Mei  A couple in their fifties who live in Xingang; both worked as dockworkers in 1980s and now sell fresh reservoir fish in Heyuan
City to earn a living. Mei married Hu when he was in Liucheng and followed him to Xingang in the early 1980s.

Ling and Jing Gu’s granddaughters. Ling married a man from Xingang, but both of them are doing business in Heyuan. They live in Heyuan but return to Xingang frequently. Jing stays at Xingang and runs a dairy store at the pier with the help of her mother. With the opening of the new 5-star hotel at Xingang in 2010, many workers from other parts of China were streaming into this place. Jing married one of them, a man from Guangxi Province who does not have properties in Xingang. They have lived at Jing’s parents’ house since getting married.

Ye Cai A main leader of the Huilong porterage crew; became one of the richest men in Xingang because of the success of his restaurant business.

Qu Another man who gained wealth from the restaurant business; was once a public toilet manager in Xingang and has few connections with the Xingang people; he succeeded in the restaurant business because he maintained good relationships with people outside Xingang.
NOTES

1. Data from Statistics Bureau of Heyuan City: http://stats.heyuan.gov.cn/yearbook.aspx#
3. With the increasing importance of the northeastern part of Guangdong, Heyuan has been reborn as a transportation hub for Guangdong in recent years, linking the PRD cities with other cities throughout the eastern part of Guangdong and with Jiangxi Province in the north. It not only provides the waterway of the East River for hundred-ton cargo ships to sail to Huizhou, Dongguan, and Guangzhou, but both the Beijing–Hong Kong Railway and the Beijing–Guangzhou Railway pass through the city, with a marshalling station at Longchuan County, the largest such station in South China. The Heyuan–Guangzhou Highway, Heyuan-Meizhou Highway, and Yue-Gan (Guangdong–Jiangxi) Highway interact in Heyuan, and National Highway 105 (Beijing–Guangdong) and National Highway 205 (Hebei Province–Guangzhou) through the whole city.
5. Instead, a few wedding ceremonies and manyue jiu (满月酒, a ceremony to celebrate having a new baby when the baby is one-month-old) were being held at the city of Heyuan. And to my knowledge, the guests were mainly from outside Xingang.
6. This is why I reluctant to call them as “informants.”
7. A magazine named Stratagem and Management (zhanlue yu guanli) has been shut down for publishing Wei Xin’s article. Xin Wei, ‘Fatal Social Problems Brought with the Reservoir Relocates Resettlement of the Three Gorges Dam,’ in Stratagem and Management (Beijing, 1999), 2.
8. This is not uncommon in the literature on human displacement. See Turton 2005, p.276.
9. The RIS occurs when a full reservoir creates extra pressure in the micro-cracks and fissures in the ground under and near the reservoir, in essence lubricating them. When the reservoir is drawn down, the friction caused by the mass of the reservoir relaxes, allowing slippage to occur.
10. A M4.8 quake occurred on February 16, 2012 and could be felt in Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Hong Kong. Helen Deng, ‘Heyuan earthquake sends tremors to Shenzhen,’ Shenzhen Daily, Feburary 17, 2012.
11. Judith Shapiro details these unscientific utopian policies that led to unprecedented environmental destruction and social repression in Mao’s War against Nature (Shapiro 2001).
12. The number of death caused by the famine is controversial in different studies. For recently published introductory discussion of the Great Famine, see Frank Dikötter 2010 and Yang 2012.
13. Heyuan, County Committee of CCP. 1959. “Kuzhan yibai tian, wei niandi qian wancheng jianfang renwu er fendou! (Work hard for one hundred days to complete the construction of houses for reservoir relocatees in the end of this year)"(September 23, 1959), Heyuan Archives: 56-A12.10-12-2.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
18. 1 jin = 500 g. 0.3 jin = 150 g.
19. 1 mu is about 666.6667 square meters.
23. There were five new relocatee’s resettlement places (yimin dian) in Heyuan which were constructed by the local government in the year of 2000 to resettle the reservoir relocatees who lived in inner reservoir and lacked natural resources such as tillable field to make their living. The life in these newly established residences are deadening, without any facilities or schemes to help the relocatees to establish ways of make a living. I visited the two of them for several times, and their despair could be easily felt.
26. As a valley resting among the surrounding hill area, this place was named Zhongkeng (Zhong Pit 坑 ) before the 1930s. It was a remote place, without any people living there, which made it a convenient place for brigandry. In order to get rid of the robbers and bandits who often appeared in this area, two nearby villages, the Liyu village (liyu xiang 鲤鱼乡) and Hongxi village (hongxi xiang 红溪乡), collected money to raise a militia watchtower in the valley (see Map 9 for reference). The peace preservation corps of the Liyu Village was quartered at the watchtower from 1930, looking after public security for the area. The population of this place had thus begun. Gradually it was called Diaolou (碉楼 watchtower) instead of Zhongkeng because of the watchtower. However, except for the trained band settling at the watchtower and two tea stalls serving the travellers passing by, Diaolou was still rather desolate and uninhabited for the following decades until the Xinfengjiang reservoir was built in the 1950s.
27. According to Xingang people, as a staff doing paperworks in the office, in the early 1980s, the average salary was around 30 yuan; in the late 1980s, it was around 100 yuan: still much lower than the money they could earn from porterage.

28. In Chinese, city-town-village is 市-镇-乡 respectively.

29. Wang Feng, Cun Zai (存在).

30. In Chinese, it reads: Dongjiang shui chang you chang 东江水长又长, Heyuan shi ge hao defang 河源是个好地方, qingshan liushui hao tiandi 青山绿水好天地, yipian daogu jin you huang 一片稻谷金又黄.

31. Also majiang 麻将, A Chinese game which usually needs four players.

32. Also named by people as “Dongshen Project”. From 1960s to 1990s, Hong Kong totally signed five water-purchase contracts with Guangdong government, which amount has increased from 2.3×10^8 m³ water per year in 1960 to 6.1×10^8 m³ water per year in 1989. See Liang 1997, p133, 135.


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