



Non-Fiction

Group 1

The Yangtze River

Nick Choi, 8, Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School

The Yangtze River is the longest river in Asia, and the third longest river in the world. It flows for 6,418 km, from the Tibetan Plateau in Qinghai eastward across southwest, central and eastern China before emptying into the East China Sea at Shanghai. Even its Chinese name means 'long river', being next only to the Nile in northeast Africa and the Amazon in South America. The Yangtze River drains one-fifth of China's land area and its river basin is home to one-third of China's population. The Yangtze River is an important physical and cultural dividing line between north and south China.

In recent years, the Yangtze River has suffered from industrial pollution, agricultural runoff, and the loss of wetland and lakes, which exacerbates seasonal flooding. It feeds the great Chinese nation, so it is considered to be the 'Mother River' of China. For over two centuries the Yangtze River has served as a transportation highway and commercial thoroughfare. The Yangtze River is also used for sightseeing.

Every year the Yangtze River deposits massive amounts of silt that helps make up the Jiangsu Province, a large plain used to grow rice. For thousands of years, man has used the river for water, irrigation, sanitation, transportation, industry, boundary marking and war. The Yangtze River is near the Huang He River. The Yangtze River is also home to some rare and endangered fish species. The climate ranges from 96 degrees in the summer to cold, brisk temperatures in the winter. Precipitation is high due to the height of the mountains.

In 1995, construction began on the Three Gorges Dam near Yichang and was completed in 2008. It is about 600 feet high and about 1.5 miles long. The dam is expected to help control the flooding of the Yangtze River Valley. The Yangtze River is revered for its role in providing sustenance to those who inhabit its banks. For thousands of years, these people have tilled its fertile plains, fished its deep pools and navigated its channels, reaping its benefits as a conduit of trade. It is no wonder the river is considered 'China's lifeline'.



Non-Fiction

Group 2

An Amazing Encounter by the Yangtze River

Bettina Tiannan Pan, 11, Lingnan University Hong Kong Alumni D.S.S. Primary School

Research station by the river bank

I cannot forget what I witnessed by the river bank a few summers ago. We went to a vegetable research station for a special assignment with my dad and some visiting scientists. It was located up-stream of the Yangtze River.

It was a sunny day with a friendly breeze dancing through the trees and flowers. My sister and I did not have much to do while my dad was working on his projects in the greenhouse. So we went to the dock to fish in the late afternoon.

Incredible catch

After a long wait and lots of chitchat with my mum and my sister, the fishing line suddenly had a very strong pull! I almost lost the rod and luckily my mum was there to help. However, the pull was so strong that she also had difficulty hanging on!

Suddenly, there was an old nervous worried voice pleading, "Please help...!" We were very surprised and terrified to hear the voice from the bottom of the dock without being able to see who it was.

Mum quickly asked, "Who are you and where are you? What happened?"

"I am Esther, queen of the Chinese sturgeons. My little naughty grandson is trapped on your fishing hook. Please release him and do not eat him! Little Junior is only a baby although he weighs more than 30 pounds." We were all stunned to hear a giant talking fish.

Esther continued, "We have been living and evolving in this mighty river for more than 100 million years. We are the largest ancient fish here, living on earthworms and river clams. We can live for 50 to 60 years and grow to reach 5 metres long, weighing up to 1,000 pounds. Please release my grandson and I will tell you about what has happened to our kingdom."

We quickly promised to release little Junior as the great sturgeon is harmless, and we continued to talk to Esther.

Kingdom of the Chinese sturgeon

We learned that the Chinese sturgeon fry grow up after hatching, swimming down-stream towards the river mouth of the Yangtze River. After reaching maturity they will migrate about 3,200 km upstream to lay eggs in clean waters. Year after year, generation after generation, the cycle continues, and the Sturgeon kingdom has lived happily in this abundant river for millions of years.

Silence killing

"Until recently, when the human race began catching us for their big dinner. This ancient cycle has been blocked by the Gezhouba dam and other subsequent dams," continued Esther. "All the relatives and families were separated by dams and now we never get to see each other. These dams caused great hurdles in our upstream path for egg-laying in a suitable environment, therefore putting the future of the species into serious trouble."

She told us that heavy shipping traffic, over-fishing, and water pollution from nearby factories have also plagued the Yangtze River waters, which is bringing down the great sturgeon population tremendously.

Making a difference

In a very deep voice, Esther said, "If mankind and the environment continue to threaten us as it is now, we will become extinct very soon."

We asked, "Why do you tell us your sad story and what can we do to help?"

Esther replied, "We know that this is a research station with lots of kind-hearted scientists and they very much value nature and life. We believe that you are also kind-hearted and willing to help in our survival."

We felt very sad hearing the story of Esther and her kingdom and promised her that we would tell the story to more people so that they can join the effort to help in the survival of this great talking fish.

To the rescue

Over dinner that night we shared this encounter with my dad and other great scientists of the country. They were all very touched by the story of the Chinese sturgeon going extinct. They all promised to help preserve the lives of the sturgeon in the Yangtze.

Many more visiting scientists every year passed by this station and many more people heard of the story and some even met with Esther and heard from her.

Many of the scientists had promised to help and talked to lots of politicians and businessmen, then came up with many programs and policies to protect the Chinese sturgeon. The programs include setting up conservational educational aquariums for the sturgeon; pollution reduction at factories; genetic breeding programs in up-stream areas and dams of the Yangtze.

As for me, I will continue to tell more people about the story of my encounter with Esther and be more careful of what I eat and appreciate nature more.

The Heart of China

Elise Chen, 11, Yew Chung International School

Water is very important and precious to humans, from drinking to washing. However, nowadays if you ask children, "Where does water come from?" they will probably answer, "From a tap!" I am not saying that this answer is wrong, but why can't you think further? ... I am sure that this story starts from a river. If you travel back to ancient Egypt, people there needed the Nile for their existence, as they grew crops and they drank from it. Even now, though technology is much more advanced, the Nile is still the main source of drinking and fresh water. The Nile also helps Egyptians earn money through tourism.

How about the largest river in China and the third longest river in the world? From the mountains on the Tibetan border, the Yangtze River flows 3,988 miles over the countryside and cities before meeting the East China Sea. The Chinese people believe that China's four great rivers were formed by dragons. Before that, there was only the East China Sea, and there wasn't any rain for days. The four dragons helped the people to get water, but God was not happy about this, so he punished them by trapping them with four big, heavy mountains. Imprisoned as they were, they never regretted their actions. Determined to do good for the people forever, they turned themselves into four rivers. From this legend, you can see that water is priceless. If we don't take care of it, we will not have enough for our needs. And this is the case right now.

Pollution is the big enemy of our rivers and seas. Environmental experts fear that pollution from untreated agricultural and industrial waste could turn the Yangtze River into a "dead river" within five years. Pollution is mainly caused by toxic waste from factories, overfishing, the huge population of China, and the poor arrangement of the waste management system in the country. All of these will make flooding worse, which is definitely not a good thing.

On the other hand, building a reservoir is a problem itself. This is because the dam stops any of this material being washed out to sea. Water quality in the Yangtze has become much worse since construction of the dam began. The Yangtze River often overflows its banks and fills huge plains with large amounts of water, causing terrible flooding. There are floods every year during the June-September rainy season. On average, at least several hundred people are killed in Yangtze River floods every year. Some years there are shocking floods. The Yangtze is responsible for 70-75 percent of China's floods, and that's why we need to control the pollution.

It also affects the life inside the river, like the Yangtze River dolphins, which can result in tragedy. In 1979, the baiji was classified as endangered. In August 2007, it was officially declared extinct. Why didn't the government take action earlier? Allowing a beautiful large mammal that has evolved over millions of years to disappear forever is such a waste of God's creation.

It was over 100,000 years ago that human beings first lived in the Yangtze drainage area – Lantian man, Changyang man and Yunxian man are all prehistoric Chinese ancestors. The ancient human remains and skeletons of the Old and New Stone Ages have been discovered along the river. People have been living there a long time, so we must save the river and give our future generations a safe and peaceful place to grow up in. Let us not forget the four dragons that helped us...

The Yangtze River

Meghana Vasantharao, 10, Singapore International School (Shanghai)

The Yangtze River is located in China. It is the third longest river in the world and the longest in Asia. It flows for 6,418 kilometres from the Tibetan Plateau. There are many states along the river, for example Qinghai, Tibet, Yunnan, Sichuan, Chongqing, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui and Jiangsu.

The Yangtze River is used in various ways. Here are some of them: for hydroelectric power, fishing, transportation, watering crops, drinking and for washing clothes. These are only a few of the many ways to use this river.

This river also provides an ideal habitat for species like the Chinese alligator, the finless porpoise and the Chinese paddlefish. Many species become extinct in the Yangtze River and the dire situation has raised some concern for environmentalists. The finless porpoise were counted in 2010 and scientists found that there were only about 1,000 left. Contributing factors for the extinction are tourists and pollution. In December 2006, the Chinese river dolphin was declared extinct; fortunately, one was sighted soon after.

The Yangtze River has also caused trouble for the people along the riverside in the form of floods. This caused a lot of damage and injuries to the people. As a preventive measure, the Three Gorges Dam was built in order to minimize floods.

The three gorges are tall in height. They each have a name. The first one is called the Qutang Gorge. It is 8 kilometres in length. The next one is called the Wu Gorge. It is 45 kilometres in length. The last one is called the Xiling Gorge. It is 66 kilometres in length. It took a very long time to build the dam over these gorges. It is also the largest hydro-electric power station in the world!



Non-Fiction

Group 3

The Three Gorges

Arthur Wong Hon Sang, 15, St. Joseph's College

Some say we can see the Great Wall of China from space, but we all know that isn't really possible. On the other hand, can you spot me?

I am the rapids of the Himalayan foothills; I am the steep gorges below the hilly terrain; I am not the Yellow River, I am the Yangtze River, the third longest river in the world! For decades, my body has toiled to bring people and goods back and forth. My backbone has been supporting the neighbouring cities. My hands have been nurturing the agricultural land. My spirit has been bringing prosperity to the entire region.

Judging by its Chinese name, 'Yangtze River' is read as 'Long River'. It is long, really long. It is a 6,418 kilometre stretch of constantly flowing, rushing water. Putting it into perspective, it is the longest river in Asia and the third longest in the whole world, over 120 times the width of Hong Kong! Isn't that amazing?

Where did the name 'Yangtze' come from? Actually, this river is named after one of its cities along the lower part of the river, called Yangzhou. Yangzhou is one of the riverbank cities that has been benefiting from the abundant offerings of the Yangtze River. Throughout the years, Yangtze River has been the place for trade, transport and spiritual pilgrimage, it has symbolised the development of China, from sustenance to affluence. For thousands of years, the people of China have been reaping benefits from this conduit that is 'China's lifeline'.

In 1994, China embarked on the damming of the Yangtze under a 15-year project that would result in the world's largest dam and hydroelectric power plant. The construction of the Three Gorges Dam reminded people of the building of the Great Wall of China in the Qin Dynasty. The mighty 'wall of defence' marked the early stages of Chinese development. Thousands of workers lost their lives in the process – a colossal task, built with wisdom, dedication, blood, sweat and tears. The dam is the greatest engineering challenge since the construction of the Great Wall. Like the Great Wall, the Three Gorges Dam stands for the same unbeatable willpower in the face of bitter conditions. The spirit that shaped the Chinese people continues to drive modern China today.

"The river is no longer seen as an unstoppable force but as a dragon which can be tamed with science."

PBS, 'Great Wall Across the Yangtze'

The construction of the Three Gorges Dam has not been popular amongst civilians. Locals have even referring to it as the most socially and environmentally destructive project of all time. The building of the Three Gorges Dam marked the aims of modern China to become a civilised, competent and technologically advanced country in the world. Is it true? That is the controversial question.

The Three Gorges Dam of the Yangtze River aimed to provide around one-ninth of the total electricity for consumption of China, having a great effect on energy supply. It promised to propel the nation's economy into the 21st century. The significant power generation with improved flood control would bring immense benefit to the region. While the plan sounded attractive and construction was carried out with the help of professionals, the consequences of building large dams across rivers are largely irreversible. They deeply affect the ecology of the whole river, the food chain of regional and endangered animals, and even interrupt the exchange within the ecosystem. The outcome has not been limited to animals, but has represented a 'ground zero' largest peacetime evacuation in world history. Over a million people have been relocated, over a thousand archaeological sites were submerged beneath the reservoir, and endangered species have been driven to extinction. The monumental dam has been called the 'New Great Wall of China'. But now, has the powerful flow of Yangtze River been stopped by the flow of development?

China's leaders and officials are optimistic that the operation of the Three Gorges Dam will unleash the potential of undeveloped areas, boost trading and modernise China, as engineers believe the power generated from the dam will be equivalent to 15 nuclear electricity generating plants and the price is worth paying. These expectations are yet to be met, but the enormous social and environmental costs have already been paid. Nevertheless, many people in China believe that the building of the Three Gorges Dam has been a great undertaking, that it will be a symbol of national pride, a stepping stone for China to evolve into a country of international recognition, a modern, developed and advanced place, and a leader in global economy.

Emerging from the glaciers and snow of the Himalayas, sculpting gorgeous gorges on the way, the Yangtze River has served locals in the region for thousands of years, providing them with fertile plains, deep fishing pools and extraordinary scenery. And now, paying an enormous price, it has continued as a medium of trade, development and become a world focus. This is a new chapter for the Yangtze River, a new era for 'China's lifeline'.

The Yangtze River moved on from being a strip of raging ribbon connecting the East and the West to a significant development of national pride and a chance to gain ground over other countries. Once again, it told the story of remarkable sacrifice and technological advancement in the face of modernisation and globalisation.

“This equilibrium is the great root from which grow all the human acting in the world, and this harmony is the universal path which they all should pursue.”

Confucius, Doctrine of the Mean

Every single day, the new story of Yangtze weaves on: building versus nature; heritage versus modernisation; change versus conservation; a complex string of contending forces are striving to co-exist. We need the foresight and courage to confront problems that are brought about by the wheel of changes. We shall take heed of what we destroy in the process of what we achieve. The Yangtze River is a pivot between environment and industry. We ought to make use of our wisdom in the act of progress. This is the 'New Tale of Yangtze River' – to preserve, to progress and to balance.

The Yangtze River

Charles Leung Tik Ho, 13, Yew Chung International School

For thousands of years, the Chinese civilization has depended heavily on the Yangtze River. Although now not very significant in culture, the Yangtze was one river the Chinese could not live without. Along with the Yellow River, the Yangtze can proudly assert that it is the most important river in the history and culture of China.

If you are Chinese or are of Chinese descent, you can be sure that you would not exist if it were not for this river. Allow me to show you the enormous cultural impact on your lives the river has, which you may not even know about.

Human activity dating to about 27,000 years ago was found near the Yangtze River, long before the ancient Chinese civilization. Those humans were the ancestors of all Chinese people. After a few thousand years they began to spread to all parts of ancient China, bringing their diverse culture, which would be known as one of the earliest civilizations in history. Many of the settlers used the Yangtze River as a transportation method to move to places in China that their descendants are still living today.

By about 3,000 years ago many people had settled into cities. They set up a dynasty ruled by an emperor. They could stay in one city and depend on their major source of food and water: the Yangtze.

A large portion of the ancient Chinese civilization depended on the Yangtze's irrigation system for farming. Because the Yellow River frequently has severe floods, most farmers chose to use the Yangtze. As a result, nearly all food was produced in this region. Agriculture was very productive and China became wealthy, and the area close to the Yangtze was especially rich.

It has been recorded in the Qing Dynasty that the Yangtze area generated nearly half of China's annual revenues, proving its significance in China's economy.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says: "In the Yangtze River, waves push other waves ahead; as in life new people constantly replace the old ones." And indeed this is true, even for the entire Chinese civilization. The Yangtze has undeniably pushed the Chinese civilization from a primitive settlement to a huge, budding civilization with a diverse culture that survives to this present day.

Today, the Yangtze is the home to two huge hydroelectric dams, and one of them, the Three Gorges Dam, is the largest in the world, and there are more being constructed. The dams generate about five per cent of China's total electricity. Here, we have another great use for our river – a green energy source. This dam, and also the river, has a great responsibility – it also serves as a backup in case of power plant failure.

The Yangtze is also home to some unique species of animals such as the Chinese alligator and the now extinct Chinese river dolphin.

The Yangtze brought us here. However, we are destroying it with our industry. Every year, thousands of tonnes of pollution and chemicals are pumped into the Yangtze, and if that wasn't enough, the Yangtze is a major shipping channel. As a result, the Chinese river dolphin is extinct – and other unique species critically endangered.

I am not asking you, dear reader, to personally save the Yangtze, though I would kindly ask that you, now aware of the significance and importance of the Yangtze, use your knowledge and utmost ability to tell others about it. Ask them to spread the word and perhaps one day many people will realise that the Yangtze is very important, not only economically and industrially, but it is home to some of the world's most exotic and unique animals. That being said, I wish that the Yangtze and its inhabitants will have a promising future that will be preserved by the efforts of all China.