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LETTERS TO THE TIMES

Relocation

I have one comment on David Halley's excellent article "China Dam: Scenic Loss, Power Gain" (Part I, July 20). He deals fully with the benefits of hydroelectric power and flood control, but minimizes the costs of relocating the nearly 3/4 million people. Holley states that "they will be happy with their new conditions," but this has not been the experience of my colleagues and me, who have looked at resettlement projects, in connection with dams in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

There is now inescapable evidence that involuntary relocation is always accompanied by stress and anxiety, and often by physical illness, and even death. This has been called the "grieving for a lost home" syndrome by Prof. Morton Fried, and it particularly affects the elderly, and other vulnerable people. Even with China's capacity to plan and to provide new homes, even entire new settlements, I still believe that many of those moved will suffer, some in ways that are not easy to measure.

The human costs of such massive projects are often overlooked by the planners, who emphasize "development" and increased energy sources at the expense of local people, and, as Holley states, of their environment.

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