



# Resettlement and Social Integration of Migrants in the Three Gorges Reservoir

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**Abstract:** The implementation of the Three Gorges Project has enabled millions of residents in the reservoir area to be resettled. After years of policy implementation, significant results have been achieved, and immigrants have generally integrated into the new settlement environment. Immigrant integration has become a microcosm of China's social structural transformation. With the rapid development of the socio economy and the acceleration of urbanization, China is facing a transition from a traditional rural society to a modern urban society. This article delves into the issues of resettlement and social integration of immigrants in the Three Gorges Reservoir area, aiming to analyze how large-scale water conservancy project immigrants adapt to the new environment and achieve social integration in the face of the modern transformation of China's social structure in the new era, including the process, challenges, and strategies. Therefore, the following suggestions are proposed: establish and improve a policy system that is compatible with the transformation of social structure; Improve the social security system and enhance the level of social security; Implement regional coordinated development strategy; Promote the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries; Implement more proactive employment policies; Improve the level of public services.

**Keywords:** Three Gorges Reservoir Area; Resettlement of immigrants; Social integration; Social structural transformation

## 1 Introduction

The Three Gorges Project is one of the largest water conservancy projects in China and even in the world. Its construction is of great significance to the economic development, flood control and disaster reduction, and navigation improvement of the Yangtze River Basin and even the whole country. The frequent occurrence of floods and waterlogging in the Yangtze River has always been a concern for the people along the river. The completion of the Three Gorges Project has effectively improved the flood control capacity of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. By regulating and controlling the water flow, the Three Gorges Dam can significantly reduce the peak flood and flow in downstream areas, thereby greatly reducing the threat of flood disasters. The Three Gorges Dam also has a strong water supply capacity, providing reliable water resources guarantee for industry, agriculture, and residents' lives along the Yangtze River, and effectively promoting the economic prosperity and development of the region.

In the context of the new era, China's social structure is undergoing a profound modern transformation. This transformation is not only reflected in the adjustment and optimization of economic structure, but also involves changes in various aspects such as social class, cultural concepts, and lifestyles. With the acceleration of industrialization and urbanization, the traditional social structure is gradually disintegrating, and new social classes and groups are constantly emerging. The social structure is showing a trend of diversification and complexity.

The migration of people from the Three Gorges Reservoir area is an important component of population mobility. The large-scale relocation of immigrants has broken the original geographical boundaries and population distribution patterns, promoting the redistribution of population and the adjustment of urban-rural structure. This population mobility not only increases the population size of resettlement areas, but also brings about cultural exchange and integration between different regions. After years of effort, significant results have been achieved in the resettlement of immigrants in the Three Gorges Reservoir area, with a large number of immigrants being properly resettled and their living standards gradually improving.

After being resettled in the resettlement area, immigrants will gradually integrate into the local society, forming new social classes and groups. The emergence of these new classes and groups has enriched the diversity of local society and had a profound impact on the social structure. The young and middle-aged labor force among immigrants has become an important force for local economic development, while elderly immigrants may face difficulties in social integration. In the process of integrating into the local society, immigrants will experience cultural integration and conceptual changes. They not only need to adapt to the new living environment and lifestyle, but also accept and integrate into the local cultural traditions and values. This cultural integration and conceptual change contribute to promoting the diversity and inclusive development of social culture, and also have a positive impact on the modern transformation of social structure.

In summary, the integration of immigrants in the Three Gorges Reservoir area deeply reflects the transformation of China's social structure through population mobility and urban-rural structural changes, social class and group differentiation, cultural integration and value concept changes, as well as policy support and institutional guarantees. This



process is not only an important component of China's modernization process, but also a microcosm of the global changes in social structure.

## **2 Literature review**

Social integration refers to the process of mutual communication, infiltration, and integration between different individuals, groups, or cultures, aimed at building a harmonious society. Its theoretical foundation includes theoretical support from multiple disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and economics, such as social identity theory and social exchange theory. The government should formulate and improve relevant laws and regulations to promote the implementation of social integration policies. The policy objectives include promoting fairness, justice, and harmony, while the principles include equality, respect, and inclusiveness.

For many countries, as the proportion of retired elderly population continues to rise, the proportion of working age contributors is decreasing[1]. In the modernization process based on industrial civilization, traditional livelihoods are constantly rapidly transforming due to multiple internal and external forces such as policies, markets, population growth, and natural environment[2]. Constructing a flexible modern social structure and adjusting the interest pattern reasonably is the only way to promote the reform and innovation of rural social governance system[3]. The changes in family structure and intergenerational living patterns have led to a reduction in family functions, and family elderly care is facing a crisis as a result[4]. The social upheaval in the 35 years since China's reform and opening up is the transformation of its social structure from a traditional agricultural, rural, and semi closed society to an industrial, urban, and open modern society[5]. The increase in urban-rural social mobility has led to the influx of rural population into cities and the formation of a new social class between rural and urban areas[6]. Every fragment of production and life in a society should return to the basic characteristics of the overall social structure, and pay attention to the different spiritual and material needs of each generation [7]. The issue of water engineering immigration has become a highly valued and widely concerned livelihood and social problem by the country, which not only seriously restricts the sustainable development of water conservancy and hydropower industry, but also relates to the stability and harmony of society[8]. The key to the success or failure of the Three Gorges Project lies in immigration, and the key to the success or failure of immigration lies in social integration. The social integration of immigrants is conducive to the construction of a harmonious society[9]. The Three Gorges Reservoir Area has achieved great success in infrastructure, environmental protection, science and technology education, and resettlement of immigrants. As the world's largest water conservancy hub project and the largest reservoir migration in human history, it has also made significant progress with the support of various national policies[10]. The policy has important implications for the resettlement of migrants in the Three Gorges and is closely related to the environment and natural resources[11].

The above literature deeply analyzes the important role of social integration in the process of economic development. In order to promote the integration and development of immigrants, the Chinese government has formulated a series of policies and institutional safeguards. These policies and systems cover multiple aspects such as employment support, education security, and social security, providing comprehensive support and assistance for immigrants. The implementation of these policies and systems not only promotes the social integration and economic development of immigrants, but also reflects the positive role and responsibility of the Chinese government in the transformation of social structure.

## **3 Economic Development Trends in the Three Gorges Reservoir Area**

The measures for resettlement of Three Gorges immigrants are closely related to the current trend of social development. The measures taken for the resettlement of Three Gorges immigrants reflect a deep concern and comprehensive consideration for immigrants. Through comprehensive resettlement strategies and environmentally friendly development models, the resettlement work of Three Gorges immigrants not only creates better living conditions for immigrants, but also makes positive contributions to the sustainable development of the entire society. The close correlation of this trend is reflected in the comprehensive consideration of social justice, economic development, and environmental protection, jointly promoting the development of a more harmonious and prosperous society.

The economic development of various districts and counties in the Three Gorges Reservoir area has made great progress in recent years. As per capita GDP can usually reflect the trend of regional economic development, per capita GDP is selected for analysis. To better analyze the economic development status of the 26 districts and counties in the Three Gorges Reservoir area, the natural breakpoint classification method of ArcGIS software was used to analyze the spatiotemporal evolution of per capita GDP in each district and county of the Three Gorges Reservoir area, with data sourced from the China Statistical Yearbook. From 2005 to 2022, the per capita GDP of each district and county in the Three Gorges Reservoir area has gradually increased. Due to the long span of years, we selected 2005, 2011, 2017, and 2022 for intuitive comparative analysis, as shown in the following figure:

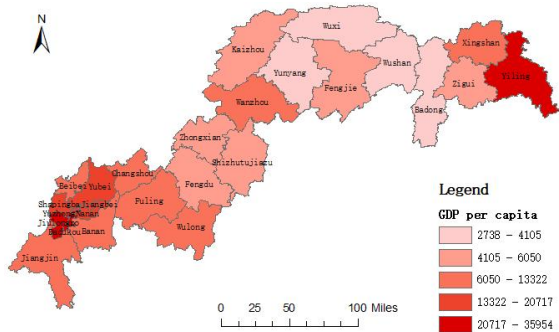


Figure 1 Per capita GDP of the Three Gorges Reservoir Area in 2005

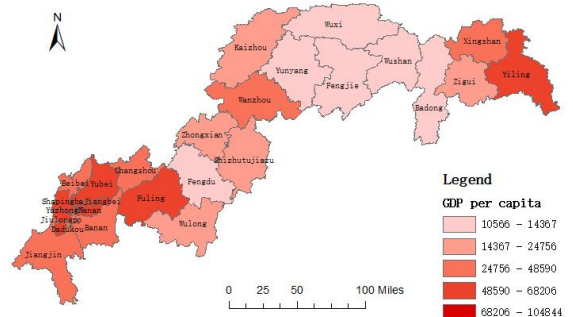


Figure 2 Per capita GDP of the Three Gorges Reservoir Area in 2011

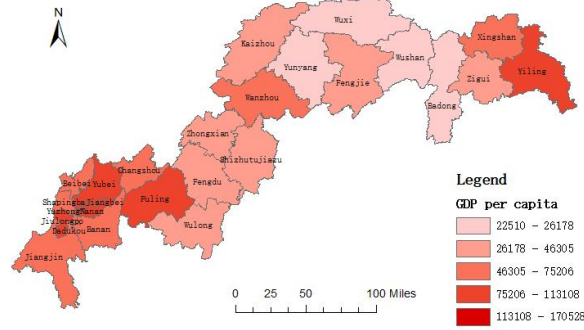


Figure 3 Per capita GDP of the Three Gorges Reservoir Area in 2017

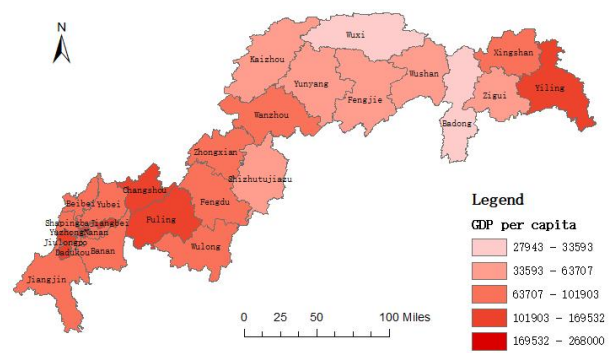


Figure 4 Per capita GDP of the Three Gorges Reservoir Area in 2022

From the evolution trend charts of per capita GDP in Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4, it can be observed that the per capita GDP of the 26 districts and counties in the Three Gorges Reservoir area has been increasing year by year, reflecting the overall economic strength of the Three Gorges Reservoir area. Moreover, the gap between districts and counties is narrowing, indicating that the Three Gorges Reservoir Area has achieved results in promoting regional economic integration and coordinated development. This helps alleviate the problem of uneven development within the region, promote the optimization of resource allocation in a wider area, and improve overall economic efficiency and social welfare levels.

Economic development can create more job opportunities and help immigrants find stable jobs in resettlement areas, thereby achieving economic self-reliance. This helps to reduce immigrants' dependence on their original place of residence and enhance their sense of belonging and identity in the resettlement area. With the development of the economy, the income level of immigrants will also increase accordingly, which will help improve their quality of life and meet their basic living needs. A higher standard of living will also promote communication and interaction between immigrants and local residents, further promoting social integration.

#### 4 The Current Situation and Path of Resettlement and Social Integration in the Three Gorges Reservoir Area

##### 4.1 Background of Resettlement and Social Integration

The resettlement of immigrants in the Three Gorges Reservoir area has adopted a combination of on-site and off-site resettlement, centralized and decentralized resettlement, and other modes, effectively alleviating the contradiction between the population and land carrying capacity in the reservoir area, and expanding the resettlement capacity. These models have been validated in practice, providing immigrants with diverse resettlement options and helping them better adapt to new environments. In the specific resettlement process, the government has taken various measures to ensure the smooth resettlement and integration of immigrants. The government provides immigration funds for infrastructure construction and industrial development, helping immigrants improve their living conditions and guiding them to develop characteristic agriculture and rural tourism. These measures not only promote the development of the local economy, but also improve the living standards of immigrants. With the support of the government and the care of society, immigrants have settled and worked in their new homes, making positive contributions to the local economy and social development. There are cultural differences and psychological barriers between immigrants in the Three Gorges Reservoir area and residents in resettlement areas, but cultural integration and psychological adaptation have gradually been achieved through various means such as cultural exchange, education popularization, and psychological counseling. Immigrants actively accept and integrate into local culture while preserving their own cultural traditions, forming a diverse and symbiotic cultural atmosphere. This cultural integration not only helps immigrants adapt psychologically, but also promotes social harmony and stability.

During the resettlement process, immigrants rebuild a stable social network through the reconstruction of geographical, kinship, and quasi kinship relationships. This new social network not only provides emotional support and assistance for immigrants, but also promotes their integration into society, economy, and culture. Immigrants gradually adapt to new

lifestyles and social environments by actively participating in community activities and establishing new social networks. During this process, a large number of rural population migrated to new resettlement sites due to the needs of engineering construction, resulting in significant population mobility. This population flow not only changes the original urban-rural population distribution pattern in the reservoir area, but also accelerates the urbanization process and promotes the transformation of urban-rural structure. This change in urban-rural structure is one of the important manifestations of China's social structural transformation, reflecting the trend of transitioning from an agricultural society to an industrial society, and from a rural society to an urban society.

In the process of integrating into the local society, immigrants not only need to adapt to new living environments and lifestyles, but also face the exchange and collision of different regional cultures. The immigrants in the Three Gorges Reservoir area come from different regions, ethnic groups, and cultural backgrounds. They need to learn from each other and draw lessons from each other in their resettlement areas. With the development and progress of society, the values of immigrants have also undergone profound changes. This cultural integration and value change also require cultural integration, which should be promoted through improved public services.

#### 4.2 Impact of Resettlement on Social Integration

In the process of modern transformation of social structure, the government will introduce a series of policies and systems to support the integration and development of immigrants. These policies and systems include employment support, education security, social security, and other aspects, providing better living and development conditions for immigrants. The implementation of these policies and systems helps promote the social integration and stable development of immigrants. The modern transformation of social structure is often accompanied by rapid economic development and industrial restructuring. This provides more employment opportunities and development space for immigrants. Immigrants can achieve their own value and development goals by participating in local economic activities and social construction, thus better integrating into the local society.

With the deepening of the modern transformation of social structure, the social identity and sense of belonging of immigrants in resettlement areas will gradually increase. By establishing new social networks and support systems through communication and interaction with local residents, we can integrate more closely into the local society. The enhancement of social identity and sense of belonging contributes to promoting social harmony, stability, and sustainable development. The immigration project has promoted the flow of population from rural areas to cities and accelerated the process of urbanization. This helps to break the urban-rural binary structure, promote integrated urban-rural development, and achieve optimized allocation and complementarity of urban-rural resources.

The resettlement of immigrants and the construction of reservoir areas have driven the development of related industries, such as infrastructure construction, real estate development, tourism services, etc. The development of these industries not only injects new vitality into the local economy, but also promotes the optimization and upgrading of the industrial structure. In the process of integrating into a new environment, immigrants promote communication and integration between different regions and cultures. The collision and integration of these cultures contribute to enhancing social cohesion and inclusiveness, forming a diverse and symbiotic social and cultural atmosphere. Immigrants received vocational skills training and re education during the resettlement process, which improved their skills and employment competitiveness. This not only helps solve the employment problem for immigrants, but also provides strong human resource support for local economic development.

#### 4.3 Changes brought by social integration to the transformation of social structure

The transformation of China's social structure in the future will present a series of complex and profound trends and changes. These changes will involve multiple aspects such as population structure, urban-rural structure, social class structure, and social organization structure. The specific trends can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The urbanization rate will continue to increase, with a large number of rural populations shifting to cities, forming more concentrated urban clusters and metropolitan areas. Population mobility will become more frequent and diverse, with cross regional and cross-border population movements becoming the norm.
- (2) With the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy and the promotion of urban-rural integration development, the gap between urban and rural infrastructure, public services, and other aspects will gradually narrow.
- (3) The economic vitality and living standards of residents in rural areas will be significantly improved. A closer economic connection and interactive relationship will be formed between urban and rural areas, making it possible for industries to develop in synergy and for resources and factors to flow freely.
- (4) The integrated development of urban and rural areas will promote the formation of a new type of industrial agricultural urban-rural relationship and promote common prosperity between urban and rural areas. With economic development and social progress, the middle class will further grow and become an important force for social stability and development. The expansion of the middle class will promote the upgrading of social consumption structure and the transformation of economic growth mode. Education, employment and other opportunities will be more fair and open, and social mobility will be significantly enhanced.
- (5) The boundaries between social classes will gradually blur, and the social structure will become more diverse and inclusive. Social organizations will further develop and grow, becoming an important force in social governance. Various social organizations will play an active role in areas such as elderly care, education, healthcare, and environmental protection, promoting social progress and development.
- (6) Community governance will continue to innovate and improve, forming a more democratic, scientific, and efficient governance model. The enthusiasm and initiative of residents to participate in community governance will be enhanced, and community cohesion and sense of belonging will be strengthened.

## 5 Summary

### 5.1 Research Conclusion

The social integration of immigrants in the Three Gorges Reservoir area is a long-term and complex process that involves multiple levels such as economy, society, and culture. Although significant progress has been made, there are still some problems and challenges, such as economic difficulties and low social participation among some immigrants. Therefore, continuous attention and efforts are needed to promote the deepening and development of the process of immigrant social integration through various means such as policy adjustments, resource investment, and social support. Faced with new living environments and challenges, immigrants should maintain an open and inclusive attitude, be brave enough to try new things, and actively adapt to new lifestyles. We also need to understand and accept different cultural backgrounds and values, and promote communication and integration between different cultures.

The integration of immigrants reflects the increasing emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness in Chinese society. In traditional social structures, geography and household registration are often closely linked to an individual's identity, resources, and opportunities. However, with the advancement of modernization and urbanization, this social structure is undergoing changes. The integration of immigrants breaks the original geographical restrictions and household registration constraints, allowing people from different regions and cultural backgrounds to coexist harmoniously in the same society. This trend of diversification not only enriches the cultural connotation of society, but also provides more impetus for economic development and social innovation.

The integration of immigrants also reflects the pursuit of fairness and justice in Chinese society. In the process of resettlement, the government has taken a series of measures to ensure that the rights and interests of immigrants are protected, such as providing public services such as education, employment, and healthcare, as well as formulating relevant policies to promote the social integration and economic development of immigrants. This reflects the society's respect and attention to every individual, and is also an important foundation for building a harmonious society.

Immigration integration is also a microcosm of China's social structural transformation. With the rapid development of the social economy and the acceleration of urbanization, China is facing a transition from a traditional rural society to a modern urban society. In this process, how to properly settle and handle the immigration issues arising from various engineering projects is an important issue that Chinese society must face and solve in order for them to smoothly integrate into the new social environment and become an important force in promoting social development. The practice of integrating immigrants from the Three Gorges provides us with a typical example, demonstrating how to achieve effective integration of immigrants and optimization and upgrading of social structure while maintaining social stability and promoting economic development.

### 5.2 Policy Suggestions

The integration of immigrants from the Three Gorges can be seen as a trend of transformation in China's social structure, including the pursuit of social diversity, fairness and justice, the wisdom and comprehensive ability of the government to handle socio-economic relations, as well as the opportunities and challenges faced in the process of urbanization. These elements together constitute the complex and dynamic social structure landscape of China today. Faced with the transformation of China's social structure, the country should take a series of comprehensive measures to address challenges, seize opportunities, and promote social harmony, stability, and sustainable development. Specifically, as follows.

(1) Establish a sound policy system that is compatible with the transformation of social structure. The reform of registered residence system, land system, social security system, education system and other aspects will provide institutional guarantee for the transformation.

(2) Improve the social security system and enhance the level of social security. We should pay attention to the livelihood security issues of low-income groups and special disadvantaged groups, promote a new type of urbanization centered on people, promote the urbanization of agricultural migrant populations, and improve the quality and level of urbanization.

(3) Implement regional coordinated development strategy. Promote the coordinated development of the eastern, central, western, and northeastern regions of the Three Gorges Reservoir Area, increase support for underdeveloped areas, and narrow the regional development gap.

(4) Promote the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries. Cultivate strategic emerging industries, extend industrial chains, improve the modernization level of industrial and supply chains, and enhance the endogenous growth momentum of the economy.

(5) Implement more proactive employment policies. Pay attention to the employment issues of key groups such as youth and migrant workers, strengthen vocational skills training, encourage entrepreneurship to drive employment, increase employment subsidies for groups facing employment difficulties, and strengthen employment guidance work.

(6) Improve the level of public services. Increase investment in public services such as education, healthcare, and elderly care, improve the quality and efficiency of public service supply, meet the growing needs of the people for a better life, promote the refinement and professionalization of social governance, and leverage the role of diverse entities such as social organizations, communities, and volunteers to effectively enhance the level of public services.

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