

WUHAN and the YANG TSE River.

Flowing over 6300km from the Himalaya to the East China Sea the YANG TSE is the longest river in Asia. Its source has been located at Jan Hill in Quin Hai, a province of Tibet, at an altitude of 5170m. Its name changes according to the provinces it is crossing as well as with the people who describe it. The upper part of the Yang Tse was called the Blue river by the British and is known as the Red river by the Tibetans whereas its lower part is called Chang Jiang (long river) by the Chinese.

Due to the strong declivity of the Himalayan relief the Yang Tse is a very wild and rapid river. From an altitude exceeding 5000m at its origin, it flows at a level lower than 1000m when entering Yunnan, 305m at Yibin, Sichuan, and 192m at Chongqing where it becomes navigable and one of the world busiest waterways. Still with the Three Gorges to be crossed the Yang Tse is far from taking a quiet attitude in all aspects. The Three Gorges' length is about 120km, in its narrower passes the river is more than 100m deep and with a flow reaching some seasons more than 40millions cubic meters per second its power is tremendous.

Below Chongqing especially when approaching Wuhan the Yang Tse enters a very much industrialized valley with coal mines and factories from shipyards to cars makings and high tech products. Within such environment as soon as the wind drops the sky is obstructed by a thick smog and even by a clear day a pure blue sky remains unknown over the valley and its surrounding.

The Three Gorges have given their name to the dam that stands at the end of them. This is the world's biggest hydroelectric project which can generate up to 22.5 GW. The dam itself has a length of 2335m and a height of 185m. The water capacity of that huge project is of 39.3 cubic km. The positive effects of the dam are felt over flood control, irrigation, navigation and energy supply whereas the negative ones are landslide, ecological problems and water pollution on its upper side due to the slowing down of the current. The same could be said for practically all dams but this one is the world's largest and the comments the project attracts are proportional to its size.

At the confluence of the Yang Tse and the Han River stands the city of Wuhan. There were actually 3 cities located between the 3 branches of those rivers, with, for names: Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang . These 3 cities were nominatively united in 1929 and called Wuhan (from the combination of their first syllabuses), although they did not become administratively combined until 1949.

As early as the 4th century AD Wuhan was renowned for arts and intellectual studies. Later on, due to its location on the Yang Tse and a propitious environment Hankou became in the 18th century one of the four most important trading places in China. Foreign traders took interest in it and five concessions were established. They were from Germany (ended in

1917), Russia (end. 1920), UK (end. 1929), Japan (end. 1945) and France (end. 1946). The French concession of Wuhan was the second in importance after Shanghai. It is at Wuhan that started the uprising which led to the end of the Qing Dynasty and the proclamation of the Republic of China. On that occasion Wuhan became for a short while the capital of China. Again, during the Sino-Japanese war, the Chinese capital which had been transferred to Nanjing fell into Japanese hands and in turn was transferred to Wuhan which was also captured by them a few months later.

In 1931 Wuhan endured one of the worst flooding the world has ever known during which hundreds of people found themselves homeless. This calamity has been used as a positive point put forwards to support the construction of the Three-Gorges Dam in order to protect the city against such events.

Today the population of Wuhan exceeds slightly 10-million people. In normal time it is a very active and dynamic city of which the prosperity was built thank to the Yang Tse. That has not always been the case. During some dynasties China has been split up in two parts, North and South, with the Yang Tse taken as a border line. It is true that before the venue of modern ships the Yang Tse could be generally considered more as an obstacle rather than a means of transportation. There has been no bridge built over the Yang Tse until 1957. There are now 11 bridges and one tunnel crossing the Yang Tse at Wuhan alone. To give an idea of the size of the river the Second Bridge, a cable suspension bridge, is 4657-meter long. It is designed to allow the passage of 50.000 motor vehicles a day.

I travelled down the Yang Tse valley some years ago, observing its furious water from the land for its upper part and got sailing down from Chongqing through the Three Gorges, Wuhan and Nanjing. On that occasion I took two videos of the most salient points. For those interested here are the links:

Video 1

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/kavtkf7qlej7oo/Wuhan%20and%20the%20Yang%20Tse%20Jiang%20%281%29.mp4?dl=0>

Video 2

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/gp19hvfpu26sd7/Wuhan%20and%20the%20Yang%20Tse%20Jiang%20%282%29.mp4?dl=0>

B. Leroy