

Thirsty dragon at the Olympics

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After the Olympics, how will Beijing's insatiable thirst for water be satisfied? asks Chinese environmentalist **Dai Qing** in this week's *New York Review of Books*.

The water-strapped city is pumping water from ever-deeper underground and piping in water from increasingly resentful neighbouring provinces, all to create opulent water follies and provide drinkable tap water to Beijing residents for the first time ever. Decades of incessant damming of rivers and environmentally destructive policies have left Beijing in a desperate state: its rivers are running dry, its aquifers are being mined faster than they can be replenished, and the Guanting Reservoir—once the city's main source of drinking water—is nearly empty.

Dai Qing, whose father-in-law was project manager at Guangting and oversaw the building of a number of major dams, describes how he once whispered to her husband in disillusionment, "Build a dam, bleed a river dry." She warns that amidst China's newfound wealth, its plains, forests, and rivers are silently dying. "This is the silence of China today. It is a silence that speaks of the grave."

Dai Qing has been speaking in defense of China's rivers and environment since the 1980s.

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