



NEWSLETTER

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The Laotian government's latest decision in June this year to halt large land and mining concessions is one worthy of celebration after years of complaints being made by villagers affected by large-scale rubber plantations, developments which lead to the loss of large amounts of land and to the harming of local peasants' livelihoods. The Laotian Minister of Planning and Investment, Somdy Duangdy, has told state media that the government will not allow any new mining investments nor grant any further land concessions for use by rubber plantations until December 2015, amid concerns about the environmental and social impacts on local communities. According to the Minister, all existing projects will be reviewed, with thorough land surveys conducted before any future projects can be considered for approval. This decision follows a series of visits a few years ago by high ranking officials, including the Prime Minister, to large plantations around which local communities were complaining about a loss of land and livelihoods.

EDITORIAL

After years of complaints from such villagers, the government finally seems to be on the right track in terms of emphasizing the importance of the need to review existing projects and put in place mechanisms to ensure appropriate land allocation mechanisms are used, and that the participation of affected villagers is included in any decision-making processes.

Though right activists remain sceptical about the Laotian government's recent decision, given its tardiness at enforcing a previous moratorium in 2007, administrators should be praised for their review of current policies and their assessment of the effectiveness of existing projects. In a state where rubber has become a key developmental tool, one used to draw people out of poverty, the government also faces a dilemma - wishing to promote economic expansion while recognizing that this may happen at the expense of local people's livelihoods. In a case such as Laos', such a decision, to halt a large-scale development project which has the support of both the Vietnamese and Chinese governments, is a tough one to make given the close ties that the country has with its two larger neighbors.

Since the 1990s, rubber plantations have mushroomed in the peripheral areas of China, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Burma. In Laos, where monoculture rubber plantations have been set up in most provinces, Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai companies have so far been the most important investors in such schemes. However, the development of the rubber sector in Laos has been complex, as it has involved small-scale farmers, aid agency-supported

development projects and foreign direct investment initiatives, though in most cases, developments have taken the form of joint ventures between private foreign investors and their Laotian counterparts, or entirely foreign initiated projects.



In a Vientiane Times report published on 19th February 2007, the Committee for Planning and Investment was quoted as saying that 17 large companies had already obtained 200,000 hectares of land concessions in Laos, specifically for the purpose of setting up rubber plantations. The awarding of large-scale land concessions for rubber production has become a common event as rapid agrarian change takes place in the country. According to another more recent report in the Vientiane Times, the Laotian government has approved nearly 25 billion US Dollars worth of investment since 1998, mainly in the mining, hydropower and agricultural sectors.

The latest decision by the Laotian government has set the tone for other countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), and the message is clear; the rapid changes in landscapes and local livelihoods associated with large-scale rubber plantations mean they require careful consideration. Given that these changes can lead to chronic problems, GMS governments should also reconsider their economic approach towards monoculture rubber plantations. Studies conducted by local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as scholars, have shown that large rubber concessions in Laos frequently overlap with agricultural and forest land, significantly and adversely affecting agrarian livelihoods. A lack of adequate surveys has meant that in some places rubber plantation expansions have resulted in encroachment on to environmentally vulnerable and protected areas.

This is of particular concern for areas allocated as rubber plantations, as the majority of people in such areas are made up of ethnic minorities whose livelihoods depend on access to and the use of land around them. In certain areas of Cambodia and Laos; for example, local ethnic minority villagers have complained about the loss of common property land, communal forests and pastures, and in Cambodia, villagers are being displaced from land used for burial grounds. Likewise, there have been reports of agricultural rituals related to rice harvesting having to be abandoned in some villages in Laos, because people are no longer able to grow rice due to the encroachment of rubber plantations. Worse still, one report by an anthropologist working in the northern part of Laos states that upland ethnic minorities have become increasingly involved in human trafficking and other forms of exploitation, as a result of the rapid changes taking place in terms of their landscapes and livelihoods due to rubber plantations.

Praiseworthy policies aside, what remains to be done for the Laotian government is to devise what the Prime Minister here once called "a more comprehensive strategy" in relation to the development of rubber in this country, so as to address serious environmental and livelihood impacts as well as the shortcomings of the previous strategy, and taking into account economic returns as well as the social and environmental impacts. Of equal importance is to ensure that various provincial governments agree on a national policy for the development of rubber. As rubber is being developed in a variety of ways in Laos - including as a small-scale livelihood option or involving large-scale plantations - it is important for local communities to be fully informed and guaranteed meaningful participation in all key decision-making processes prior to any approval being given for further investment.



ON THE ROAD TO MUANG SINGH

Dr. Wasan Panyagaew,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
Chiang Mai University



One day in late June 2003, I left Chiang Mai in northern Thailand heading for Muang Singh in northwestern Laos, arriving at the Chiang Khong border checkpoint at about ten past five in the evening. The checkpoint was due to close at six, but I was still able to board a boat crossing the Mekong and sleep on the other side of the river that night. When I arrived in Laos, the sun was not yet down and I had about an hour to survey the town of Huay Xai. Walking along its main street from the north to the south, I saw a few groups of tourists, some still looking for a cheap guest-house, some just wandering along the town street. Just a few seconds before I had connected to the Thai mobile phone network, some Laotians who were sitting in a small retail shop on the right-hand side of the street smiled at me and said “Hi, Sa Bai Dee”, then invited me to share a drink with them. The Laotians consisted of one guy and two girls, probably around 25 to 26 years old, and this was the first time I had drunk Beer Lao - which tasted great! We soon became friends, and many stories arose from our drink/chat about the Huay Xai night life, gambling and how to get to Muang Singh.

From Huay Xai to Nam Tha

The next day, at Huay Xai morning market, and after buying a bus ticket to Nam Tha at the town’s transportation center, I wandered around in search of breakfast and ended up eating Kao Soi Gai. I then caught a four-wheel drive pick-up truck at about ten

past nine leaving for Nam Tha - a journey of about 200 kilometers. Whilst on the pick-up I got to know two Lao women, one of whom was from Muang Singh - which was excellent! The other passengers included some Lue men, one or two local Lao, and a few others who were perhaps Khmu or even Musur (Lahu) - anyway they spoke Lao, plus there were also two backpackers - one Japanese and a German. When we stopped at Nam Nguen for lunch, about ten to fifteen kilometers north of Vieng Phu Ka, the driver told us we were halfway there

We arrived in Nam Tha at about four-forty that afternoon, where I found out that there was still a bus due to go to Muang Singh that day, which looked like one of the mini-buses I had seen in Xishuangbanna in China. A Tai vender told me this would be the last bus, so rather than stay in Nam Tha like the two backpackers, I decided to head straight to Muang Singh.

On the Road to Muang Singh

On the way to Muang Singh, the bus was boarded by a number of people, most of whom were Tai from Muang Singh, but a few of whom came from Xishuangbanna. Another who joined us at this point was a Lao-Chinese man from Huay Xai, whom I got to know later in Muang Singh and who, according to his own testimony, was an imported car dealer (importing cars from Hong Kong into Kunming, via Thailand and Laos).

The Tai passengers on the bus all seemed to know or be quite familiar with each other, and one female vendor even asked an old man (who looked a bit drunk) to sing *Kam Kap* (Lue oral poetry) – as she recognized him as a former singer. After receiving several requests, the Tai singer began his love songs, and many of the passengers responded to his singing and expressed their appreciation of his improvisational skills. The performance got louder and louder, and the bus seemed to transport us into a Tai world, as the Lue poet did not stop his narrative until we reached the next district checkpoint, which meant we were now arriving in Muang Singh. Arriving in town at about 7 p.m., the driver dropped me in front of Muang Singh Guesthouse – a place that a friend of mine in Huay Xai had recommended and which cost about 80 baht per night.

In Muang Singh

The next morning, my first task was to explore the town and visit the tourist center there. In the center, there were many exhibits such as a map of the old, walled town, a short history of the town and details of particular trekking packages – all written in English. My plan was to go and see the contact I had previously got to know in Muang Mang (located about 26 kilometers from Muang Singh, but on the Xishuangbanna/Chinese side) – a Lue abbot (but only about sixteen or seventeen years old) at one of the four Chiang temples in the area. At the time, he was still studying in Muang Singh High School – Grade 11, but despite this, he was able to help me a great deal; reading the legend of Muang Singh (written in the Tai script), introducing me to the locals and taking me to visit the town’s sacred pagoda: Tad Chiang Thuem, where he complained about the opening of a new hotel/resort named after the pagoda (Chiang Thueng Resort and Restaurant), which had just been constructed close to the pagoda, but downhill slightly and southeast of the town. He told me that the four guardian spirits of the pagoda had been so angry about this, that they refused to live there anymore.

I still had many things to inquire about, given that in Muang Singh’s lowland areas the inhabitants are mostly Tai (there are about seventeen Tai Lue villages; five belonging to the Tai Neua, most of whom originate from Chiang Tung in present-day Burma, and one belonging to the Tai Dam or ‘black Tai’, who moved into the area from northern Vietnam,

perhaps as late as the 1980s). The Tais in fact represent only one-fifth of the total population of Muang Singh District; the Akha account for three-fifths and the remaining fifth is made up other ethnic groups, such as the Hmong, Lahu and Yao.



Muang Singh Today

I found that Muang Singh at night is just like many rural villages in Mae Sa Leang; it becomes dark and silent soon after the sun sets. A guesthouse owner told me that in the past all electricity had to be turned off at around eight or nine at night, but that since April 2003, when the Chinese Government had started selling electricity to the area, the night life in this town (I found a few karaoke bars) had expanded somewhat.

The transport links to Muang Singh, both from Nam Tha and from Muang Mang, are very good, and a local mini-bus runs from the town to Xishuangbanna three times a day. In addition, a few local buses run to Nam Tha in the morning – returning during the late afternoon. According to one mini-bus driver, there were about 25 to 30 mini-buses and 24 six-wheeled buses operating in the town at that time, most certainly a consequence of the development of the so-called ‘Quadrangle Economy’, and a side-effect of global tourism. However, I could not help wondering whether this transportation system would benefit the locals, the government or tourists the most.

Muang Singh now receives a lot of visitors from countries such as Germany, Australia and Japan, but only a very few from Thailand – a neighboring country. Despite this, Thai television is broadcast here every day by satellite, and I was told that many Tai households buy televisions as their first household item if they are able to afford it, whether such cash-income

is derived from trade, tourism or the selling of agricultural products. This is not simply because the Lao TV signal does not reach this area, but also because this new technology represents to them a new conduit for the passing of information, knowledge and entertainment; a window into another world in these globalizing times.

Six months earlier, they could probably have only watched the odd Thai news program with the help of the town's generator, or have stayed-up a bit longer to see a Thai game show or soap opera using their own batteries, but since receiving hydro-electric power from Xishuangbanna, they have been able to watch Thai TV 24 four hours a day, seven days a week - if they can afford it and if they wish to.

What is taking place within Tai households here; can you imagine?

For me, the image of Muang Singh today conforms neither to what has often been described in romanticized Thai tales - through books, newspapers and magazines, nor to the 'others' narrative of scholarly papers and journals, but is simply one of a small town being forced to change due to the influence of a regional economy - a changing Tai world within a global age. Few or none of the backpackers that come here, at least none I had the chance to talk to, seem to care much about the history of Muang Singh, nor do they seem much interested in the old walled town (composed of four 'Chiangs': Chiang Lae, Chiang Yuen, Chiang Jai and Chiang Inth), of which the young abbot there told me the legend, and whose original location he kept pointing out to me. What they are interested in seems to be poppy fields, exotic local scenes, ethnic villages, treks and smoking opium (if they are able to); some of them just pass this way because they have been told to do so by the Lonely Planet travel guide!



OUR LECTURERS



Dr. Pinkaew Laungaramsri has a Ph. D in Anthropology from the University of Washington, Seattle. She is the head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, giving lectures and carrying out research related to sociological and anthropological fields. Recently, she has finished her research on the red shirt movement in northern Thailand. She also has a number of publications, including a book titled "Redefining Nature: Karen Ecological Knowledge and Challenge in Modern Conservation Paradigm".

She is one of the academic staffs from RCSD who fly to the National University of Laos at weekends to teach for the IDS program. When asked to offer an opinion about IDS in a recent interview, she said "Many students coming to IDS are from NGOs. They have to fund themselves to attend the program as they don't get any help from their government. That is why in this program, we have students who have a strong interest in what they are studying. This is one distinctive part of the program that I notice".

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Dr. Wasan Panyagaew is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the head of Center for Research and Academic Service at the Faculty of Social Sciences as well as a member of Graduate Committee for RCSD's master program. He earned his Ph. D in Anthropology from the Australia National University (ANU). His research interests include anthropology, border studies, and Southeast Asian studies (such as the state and the minorities of mainland Southeast Asia region). He has several papers published on these topics. Recently, he conducted a research on the border lands of Upper Mekong that covers Yunnan, Eastern Burma and northern parts of Thailand and Laos. He is currently involved in the research project related to Mae Sai - Tachileik border of Thailand and Myanmar.

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT

I am Kolakoth Phommalin, a lecturer from the National University of Laos, and I am going to share with you some of the personal experiences I had while working at RCSD, Chiang Mai University. This was the my first time in Chiang Mai and my first experience of academic life at RCSD. First of all, I would like to acknowledge and thank all the professors and staff at RCSD for welcoming me, as well as my classmates for helping me with my studies.

The RCSD program has provided me with a number of development theories and concepts, each of which has helped me to understand development projects from a different perspective and provided me with up-to-date information on the state of development in South East Asian countries today, especially in Laos, and what needs to be considered within development projects aimed at creating. I have also learned that it is not easy to achieve this. Development projects at the national or regional level aimed at supporting economic growth and grow GDP need also to improve human well-being and local livelihoods. In addition, I have also learned that within a sustainable development approach, one should not ignore local rights and local knowledge. At present, the national objective of socio-economic development is leading to a loss of local rights and resources - and thus an increase in food insecurity, the creation



"Nothing is easy,
but success can
be yours if you do
not hesitate."

Mr. Kolakoth Phommalin, RCSD Student (2011)

of unsustainable livelihoods and increasing disparities in society. So what paths should be followed in relation to development? To this I think there is no simple answer; it is still open to debate.

However, RCSD runs a very interesting international program in English, and this provides students with a great opportunity to share ideas, experiences and different perspectives with students from a variety of countries, such as Indonesia, Myanmar, Japan, Laos and Thailand. The program has really helped my English language skills as well enhanced my academic knowledge, as the professors who teach on the program are highly knowledgeable and have great experience on a range of issues.

IDS STUDENTS YEAR 2011

Ten students were admitted to the 2011 IDS Program, with three non-Lao students.

- Ms. Akiko Komiyama, Japan
- Mr. Benjamin Le Noury, UK
- Mr. Chanthy Khounkhamphane, Laos
- MS. Dalaphone Bounsavanh, Laos
- Ms. Nami Yamamoto, Japan
- Ms. Manichanh Keoviriyavong, Laos
- Mr. Phanthavilai Nouanehoune, Laos
- Ms. Phonhdala Somsanith, Laos
- Ms. Somsangoune Keovilay, Laos
- Ms. Sourivonexay Prommala, Laos



MA THESIS - RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

The Livelihood Strategies of Ethnic Households in Phoukhaokhouay Resettlement Village, Thoulakhom District in Vientiane Province (Phimmasone Thongphataysack, IDS Student - Year 2009)

There have been numerous studies carried out into how relocated communities adapt and how they formulate new livelihood strategies, but most, if not all, have been about the livelihoods of those resettled into areas that have greater accessibility to public services such as transport, markets and health care, as well as better economic opportunities. Few studies have been conducted into communities relocated to areas which have limited livelihood opportunities. This study; therefore, differs from others in that it focuses on the livelihoods of people relocated to a remote area which has limited access to both public services and economic development opportunities.

The objective of my research is to explore and examine the livelihoods of ethnic people resettled as a result of the development process, in this case as a result of the construction of a hydro-electric dam. The study focuses on the different types of livelihood activities carried out and the different strategies developed by the resettled villagers in order to survive in their new location, plus aims to examine the livelihood activities of the resettled people and those factors affecting their livelihood adaptations.

In order to help with my data collection activities, I decided to focus on the 'scope of livelihoods' concept, the theory of access and the concept of power relations, and my research methodology was qualitative in nature. The data and information were collected through in-depth interviews carried out with five households of varying economic statuses – from the poor to the better-off, as well as of mixed genders in terms of the household heads. I interpreted the data using a narrative method, so as to be able to provide a clear picture of the diversified livelihoods of the resettled villagers. My field research was conducted in Phoukhaokhouay village, focusing on villagers relocated from the area of the Nam Mang III Hydroelectric Dam project which began in 2004, a village which is located close to the border of the Phoukhaokhouay National Biodiversity Conservation Area.

Based on my field research conducted between March and May 2011, I have come up with some interesting

findings in relation to the livelihood activities of the study population. To survive in their new situation, the resettled villagers have had to develop livelihood strategies suited to the new environment and the new context, strategies related to tenancy arrangements, shifting cultivation, herbal medicine sales, seasonal migration and wage labor. These new livelihood activities have been formed in order to generate income and produce food for their households' consumption.

I found that the formulation and development of new strategies and activities have been influenced by a number of factors, such as the limited access to livelihood resources, the scarcity of agricultural land, as well as the scarcity of resources themselves due to the location of the new village. In addition to resource scarcity and limitations, livelihood strategies have also been influenced by social and kinship networks, as well as the social relations developed with neighbouring villages, especially in relation to the sales of herbal medicines. In addition, I also found that power relations and negotiating power have played an important part in the adaptation and development of new livelihood strategies, such as in the process of negotiating access to livelihood resources through



the village head, who represents the focus of power in the village.

In addition, the unequal allocation of unfertile agricultural land has limited the potential of the resettled villagers to diversify their livelihood activities, and has resulted in villagers having to deal with the significant risk of food insecurity. This factor has forced a number of the resettled families to shift away from agricultural activities into non-farm activities such as herb businesses and wage labor. Many families now leave their land uncultivated and instead rent it out to people from other villages, while others practice shifting cultivation, reducing the sustainability of their rural livelihoods.



Source: lampdevelopers

In addition to these issues, Phoukhaokhouay village is located very close to the NBCA, and this fact limits the displaced villagers' level of access to natural resources - a major obstacle for people wishing to continue their previous and traditional livelihood activities. Although the road that runs through the village is not an all-season road, it means the village is quite accessible; however, many people - particularly those who do not have their own vehicle - are unable to benefit so much from this.

Development processes have slowly changed the way of life of rural people, and to some extent rural livelihoods no longer depend only upon natural resources (Bouapao 2005:51). The livelihoods of the villagers in Phoukhaokhouay are slowly integrating into a more urban context, perhaps due to the influence of the developments taking place and the changing context of the area. I discovered this changing livelihood context during my research, supporting Bouapao's

statements on the subject. Many of their livelihood and income generation activities are linked directly and indirectly to the market, both regionally and globally. The selling of herbal medicines is a clear example of regional and global integration, since the income generated depends on regional and global demand. Job placement in the local factory also links with regional and global demands for cheap labor and cheap garments; furthermore, the demand for electricity regionally has required the government to develop dams and this dam development process has had a direct impact on villagers and their livelihoods.

Given the poor level of access to livelihood resources and the scarcity of many of the important resources needed to carry out rural livelihood activities, the

villagers have been unable to continue certain practices. In Phoukhaokhouay village, where agricultural land is scarce, the resettled villagers can no longer use the land intensively and/or extensively; an important strategic loss for villagers wishing to improve their livelihoods.

The livelihood strategies used by villagers in Phoukhaokhouay have had to adapt to a more regionalised and globalised

context, as their activities are now linked to market systems and the entirely rural context lost. Wage labor such as fabric work, that not often found in a rural setting, has gradually increased in significance in the village since the relocation took place, and livelihood activities have become more diverse. Many new activities with an urban character have replaced the old rural activities, such as canned fruit factory work, construction work and the selling of herbal medicines.

Even though many changes have taken place along with the developments, Hmong people in general, and in particular in Phoukhaokhouay village, have maintained their strong relationships and especially their kinship networks. For example, their knowledge of herbal medicines has retained its importance within their daily lives, and along the development path has increasingly become a source of income for many of the households.

Even though new livelihood activities have been developed, as mentioned above, in order for the resettled villagers to survive the difficult conditions and contexts, a numbers of other activities have had to be dropped - as unsustainable. Other activities have not been dropped but integrated more closely into the market system and urban society; for example, herbal medicine sales and factory wage labor.

This study contributes to the knowledge that exists on the livelihoods of those resettled to remote areas where livelihood development opportunities are limited, and also provides a different perspective on resettlement activities caused by development projects, and in particular by the construction of dams.

GMS RESEARCH PROJECTS

The Structure and Pattern of Border Trade between Thailand and Laos: A Study in Nan Province

By Pimsiri Pitchawong, Master of Economics, Chiang Mai University

The two key aims of this study were: 1) to examine the structure and pattern of the border trade taking place in Nan Province, Thailand, and 2) to study obstacles to and factors influencing the business operator's investment decisions.

My study employed both primary and secondary data collected between 2007 and 2009, a time during which the trade imbalance that exists between the two countries (with Thailand as a net exporter) resulted in Nan Province becoming more of an exporter than an importer of goods and services. The higher trade volumes in the area have created value for the local business sector - promoting investment, tourism and consumption and expanding economic and social systems. In the past, mostly consumer goods were traded between the two countries, such as natural and forestry products; however, nowadays, many types of product of an increasing value are be-

ing traded. This has led to large companies entering the market for capital goods such as fuels, loaders, backhoes, tires, construction materials, automobiles, electrical devices and low-cost technological products, and these companies have received much of the benefit from such border trade. However, my sample group, mostly small and medium enterprises (SME), still import and export goods of a lower value, such as forestry products, lumber, logs, wooden furniture, charcoal, local agricultural products, weaved fabrics and long-grain sticky rice.

According to the data I collected on the perspectives and attitudes towards investment, business opportunities and profit-oriented activities are the most influential factors, followed by the chance to expand business into China and Vietnam, through Laos. This is because my respondents see Chalerm Phrakiat and Tha Thung Chang Districts as having the potential to become important border trade centers, since roads have been extended from here into China and Vietnam (Baan Huay Kone in Chalerm Phrakiat is a gateway to Indochina). Furthermore, Laos' promotion of a "blue line" international checkpoint, one which facilitates border trade, has led to enhanced business and tourism activities in both countries. In addition, the ongoing improvement of roads passing through Laos has facilitated travel between China/Vietnam and Thailand, and this will create further business and investment opportunities for all countries involved.





Movement and Potentiality of Trans-boundary Civil Society in Protesting the Blasting of Mekong Rapids on the Thailand-Laos Border

By: Duanghatai Khewsakul, MA Student,
Faculty of Political Science, Chiang Mai University

The purpose of my thesis is to study the causes behind the establishment of a trans-boundary civil society network set up to protest the blasting and clearing of rapids on the Mekong River around the Thailand-Laos border, and to analyze the methods used by that network as well as the factors contributing to its formation, in order to predict the potential for future movements to develop.

I employed qualitative research methods in order to collect my required data, using semi-structured interviews, participant and non-participant observation and a review of the relevant literature.

I found that the Mekong-Lanna Environmental and Cultural Conversation Network - a trans-boundary civil society movement founded in response to the potentially adverse impacts of rapids clearance activities carried out along the Mekong River, acted as a challenge to the relevant governments' distortion of the facts and enhanced the negotiating power of the locals in terms of their discussions with the Thai Government. The network's activities included the holding of panel discussions in Thailand as well as overseas, cooperation with civil society movements in Lao PDR and the Mekong sub-region through the use of networking and the media, as well as the submission of petitions to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Thai Government, the Chinese Embassy and the United Nations.

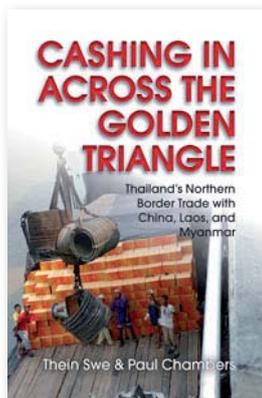
I also found that the cooperation that took place through networking activities at the local, regional and national levels, and with the support of NGOs, at the cross-border level between Thailand and Lao

PDR, and at the international level between the Mekong sub-region and overseas countries, was key to the success of the operation to oppose the blasting of rapids on the Mekong, which as a result was temporarily halted in 2004.

Regarding those internal and external factors that affected the potential effectiveness of the trans-boundary civil society movement, one important internal factor was the communist governments of China and Lao PDR, which in general restrict people's right to protest against them and their actions, and an important external factor was globalization, as this has enabled economic cooperation to take place between countries in the region, leading to exploitation of the Mekong River, but which in turn has also encouraged the exchange of knowledge and cooperation between Mekong civil society groups, through their networking activities.

As a result of these findings, I believe the government of every country involved must consider the Mekong River's environment to be a national issue, and should promote cooperation in order to discuss and identify solutions across the different sectors involved, as well as establish a network to monitor the River, with the aim of preventing further exploitation from taking place. I predict that people within the Mekong region countries will unite to form a trans-boundary civil society movement; a 'Mekong People's Council', which will use the great variety of local cultures present as a mechanism to increase trans-national cooperation through a variety of cultural activities, as well as raise consciousness regarding the need to preserve the ecology of the Mekong region.

BOOKS ON THE GMS



Cashing In across the Golden Triangle: Thailand's Northern Border Trade with China, Laos, and Myanmar

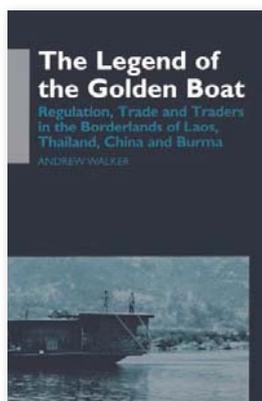
By Thein Swe and Paul Chambers

Published 2011

ISBN 978-616-90053-4-6

Historically, the 'Golden Triangle' area on the Mekong River was a strategic yet largely impoverished crossroads between Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and southern China, and during the latter half of the twentieth century, was known as one of the world's key opium producing regions. The new transnational 'economic corridors' connecting northern Thailand and southwestern China via key border towns in Myanmar and Laos, have greatly increased the volume of trade and trans-shipment taking place in this area, and in the region, yet this transformation of the area's economy, although ongoing, has been relatively uncharted, leading to a number of questions, such as: To what extent has border commerce grown since 1990? what has facilitated or hindered this trade? And, what have been the social and environmental costs of this changing economy? By combining official data with that drawn from observations of and interviews with a wide range of participants involved in this new border economy, this book provides an important and unique perspective on the impacts the new economic linkages in this region are having on the people living there.

Reference: <http://www.silkwormbooks.com/catalog/info/cashing-in/>



The Legend of the Golden Boat: Regulation, Trade and Traders in the Borderlands of Laos, Thailand, China and Burma

Author: Andrew Walker

Published: 1999

ISBN: 978-0824822569

This book provides us with a new approach towards the study of Southeast Asia's northern borderlands. Based on extensive travel carried out in the upper Mekong hinterland, it gives a fascinating account of the lives of transport operators, traders, entrepreneurs and government officials, those who are contributing to the contemporary revival taking place in terms of upper-Mekong cross-border connections. This ethnographic study is set against the intriguing backdrop of war, revolution and reform, providing one of the most detailed histories of the upper Mekong borderlands ever written.

Reference: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Legend-Golden-Boat-Archaeology/dp/0824822560>

The Second International Conference on International Relations and Human Rights (ICIRD 2012)

Date: 26-27 July 2012

Venue: The Empress Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand

This conference aims to provide a deeper and more rounded understanding of regional development under the AEC, to challenge the premise of economic integration and trade liberalization, to examine the human landscape and the humanization of development, and to offer a forum for concerns to be heard and tackled seriously. Over 100 speakers across 32 diverse and engaging panel sessions will challenge participants with expert analysis of and insights into emerging issues and concerns on ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).



www.icird.org/2012

RESOURCE CENTERS



<http://www.mrcmekong.org>

The Mekong River Commission for Sustainable Development (MRC) was founded in 1995 by the governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, its mission being to promote and coordinate the sustainable management and development of water and water-related resources for the countries' mutual benefit and the people's well-being. With a vision to create an economically, socially and environmentally prosperous Mekong River basin, the MRC is committed to the development of work programs and strategies that make sure natural and water resources in this region are maintained in a sustainable way.

Contact details:

Office of the Secretariat in Vientiane (OSV)
P.O. Box 6101, Unit 18 Ban Sithane Neua, Sikhottabong District,
Vientiane 01000, Lao PDR.
Tel: +856 (0) 21 263 263
Fax: +856 (0) 21 263 264
Email: mrcs@mrcmekong.org



<http://www.iseas.edu.sg>

The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) is a regional research center based in Singapore dedicated to the study of socio-political, security and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geo-strategic and economic environment. It aims to nurture a community of scholars interested in the region and to engage in research on the multi-faceted dimensions and issues of stability and security, economic development, and political, social and cultural change. It also intends to create better public awareness and understanding of the region and facilitate the finding of solutions to the varied problems confronting it. ISEAS conducts a range of research programs; holds conferences, workshops, lectures and seminars; publishes research journals and books; and generally provides a range of research support facilities, including a large library collection.

Contact details:

30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace,
Pasir Panjang, Singapore - 119614
Tel: (65) 6778 0955
Fax: (65) 6778 1735
Email: admin@iseas.edu.sg

IDS Program Coordinator

NUOL Office

Ms. Kesone Kanhalikham
Post-Graduate Office, National University of Laos,
P.O.Box: 7233 Vientiane Lao PDR
Office: +856-21-770389
Cell:+856-20-2222 11 79,
Email: kesone2009@gmail.com

Our Website

www.ids-nuol.webs.com, www.ids.nuol.edu.la

CMU Office

Ms. Nisaporn Boonchaleo
Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable
Development, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai
50200 THAILAND
Tel. 66-53-943595
Fax. 66-53-943596
Email: rcsd@cmu.ac.th