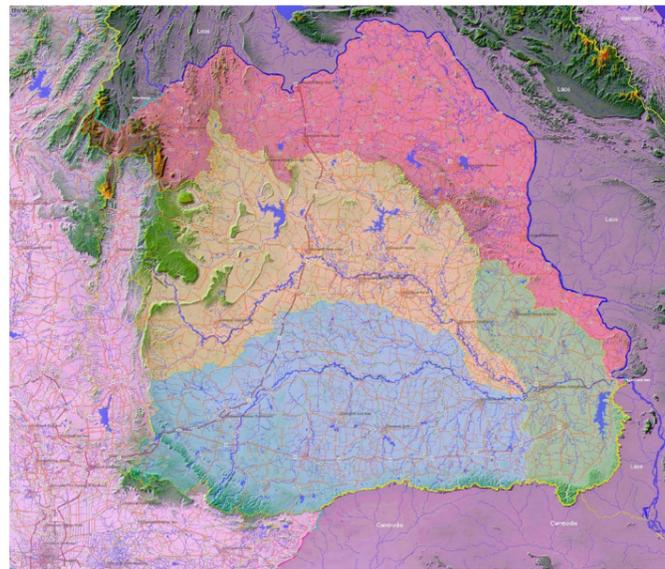


1. The Pak Mun Dam

“As a rule, don’t ascribe to malice what is more likely the outcome of incompetence (or perhaps idealism)”



Contemporary map of Isan

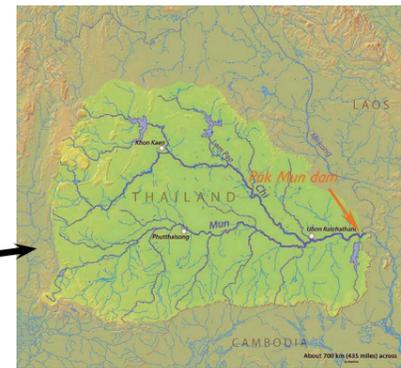
source: http://www.geocities.jp/shinji_th4/isan/isan.jpg

Isan อีสาน (alternatively Isaan or Esan) is the northeastern region of Thailand. It is located on the Khorat Plateau, bordered by the Mekong River (along the border with Laos) to the north and east, by Cambodia to the southeast and the Prachinburi mountains south of Nakhon Ratchasima. To the west it is separated from Northern and Central Thailand by the Phetchabun mountain range. . .The Lao-speaking population of the region, who comprise the majority, distinguish themselves not only from the Lao of Laos but also from the central Thai by calling themselves Khon Isan or Thai Isan. Production lags behind the rest of the country due to the socio-economic conditions and the exceptionally hot, dry climate. Isan remains Thailand’s poorest region. The main language is Isan, which is a dialect of the Lao language, currently written with the Thai alphabet (instead of the slightly different Lao alphabet). The people are aware of their Lao ethnic origin, but Isan has been incorporated into the modern Thai state.

source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isan>

During (and even prior-to) the Second Indochina War (1955-1975), Isan was a hotbed of the Communist Party of Thailand—then in armed rebellion against Bangkok. In keeping with the dominant pro-Western ideologies of that era, the solution to Isan’s perceived dissatisfactions, backwardness and under-development was agricultural intensification through irrigation and extension services; electrification leading to industrialization; and the “fundamental transformation” of a marginalized subsistence-based rural economy into the future wave of globalizing marketized commodity production.

This great task was given over to technocrats, engineers, agronomists and administrators —mostly coming from outside Isan— professionally capable, and committed to their mission civilisatrice; and having little respect for, or patience with, obstructive and ignorant traditionalists. USAID and the World Bank were in the forefront of partnering and encouraging the Thai government toward these ends.



Mun-Chi Basin, Isaan (Northeastern Thailand)
119,180 km² (46,016 sq mi)

Pak Mun Dam Mekong River Basin Thailand

Final Report: November 2000

Prepared for the World Commission on Dams (WCD) by:

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The Mun/Chi watershed forms the largest watershed draining into the Mekong River in Thailand. The large catchment area of 117,000 km² of Pak Mun Dam by its location close to the confluence between the Mun and the Mekong rivers virtually covers the whole Mun/Chi watershed. The Pak Mun project was mentioned in the 1988 Power Development plan and presented to the Cabinet of Ministers as a multipurpose project during the same year.

EGAT [the Electric Generating Authority of Thailand] did not use the type of overall system planning tools that can calculate the system-wide benefit of a power-generation investment. Based on this premise, calculating the project’s direct benefit from power included irrigation and fishery benefits as originally estimated by EGAT. The [WCD’s 2000] findings question the economic justification of the project assumed and presented to the Cabinet of Ministers in 1989.

The new features of the Pak Mun Dam for Thailand and the impacts of existing and ongoing developments and activities in the Mun/Chi watershed, all in a situation where there is little knowledge of aquatic ecology in the Mekong Basin had implications for the quality of the environmental impact assessment of the dam and reservoir.

Carrying out an EIA for complicated developments such as hydropower projects and addressing the issues of aquatic biodiversity in a short available time frame is a task not easily accomplished. The EIA carried out in 1981 predicted changes in aquatic populations as a consequence of the riverflow regime. Even without installation of a fishpass, the EIA predicted an increase in fishing yields in the reservoir area.

Fishermen, through their daily observations at work develop a knowledge and common sense. In the engineering world such knowledge of fishermen or common sense is often falsely identified as anecdotal evidence. In the Mekong Basin where limited fisheries research has been carried out, and research activities have produced little fisheries base line data, all existing fisheries laws, rules and regulations are therefore based on anecdotal evidence or common sense. During interviews, fishermen estimated their decline in fish catch upstream of the dam in the Mun River since the completion of the Pak Mun Dam between 60% and 80%.

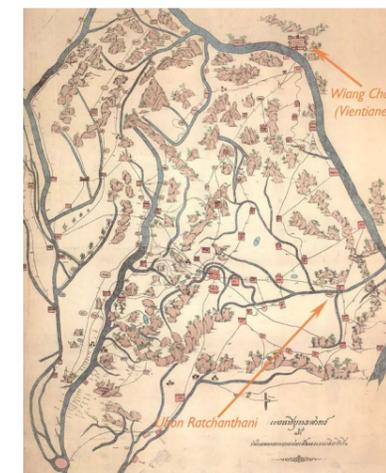
source: Pak Mun River Dam Study, World Commission on Dams Final Report 2000)



Figure 12. Close-up of fish ladder looking down from the dam. Current in reservoir outflow favorable but current in fish ladder far too strong. 15 June 1994 (courtesy of Prapant Phanaram and ISEA).



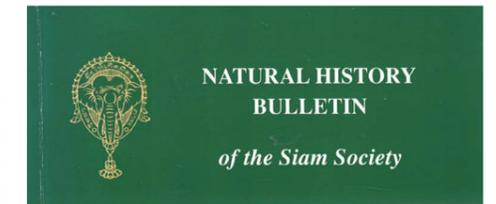
Figure 16. Gravid *Catlocarpio siamensis* caught in the Pak Mun Dam reservoir outflow in July 1999 after repeatedly butting its head on the foot of the fish ladder (courtesy of Assembly for the Poor).



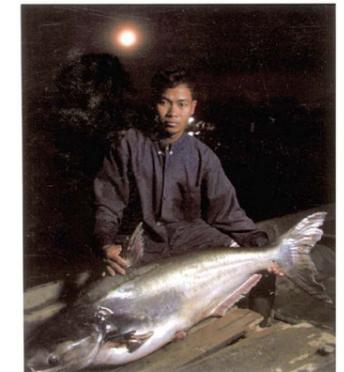
Northeastern Siam and Southwestern Lao during the Third Reign: until 1996, the only known, archival 19th century topographical map.

Following the expeditionary campaigns against Lao Lane Xang, with the razing of Vientiane in 1827, the former Lao Mekong right bank provinces have been incorporated into Siam—now modern Thailand—only relatively recently... and not without some resistance and *ressentiment* even now.

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2010_09_19_red_shirt_protest_bkk_09.JPG



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“Those who do not learn from the mistakes of the past are doomed to repeat them.” This applies to the World Bank and its stance on hydropower development in the Mekong basin. The Bank firmly supported Pak Mun Dam on the Mun River in Thailand, insisting that it would provide numerous benefits and serve as a model for much larger hydropower installations on the Mekong mainstream. The Bank insisted on the importance of monitoring Pak Mun so that the lessons could be learned from it and applied to other dams.

But then Pak Mun turned out to be a financial failure and an ecological, social, and political disaster. Bank officials have not acknowledged that Pak Mun turned out badly—they still describe it as a successful project. The Bank has yet to learn the lessons taught by Pak Mun.

source: Tyson Roberts, *Fluvicide*. Bangkok (2004)



2. The Pak Mun Museum +



The Pak Mun Dam Museum as prototypical for major Mekong Basin Water Resources Management (WRM) projects

In the 1990s, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) implemented a development model for Thailand's poorest region, with its linchpin a major hydroelectric project on the Mun river just above the Mekong confluence. The "Pak Mun" facility was avidly supported by the World Bank (WB), which —subsequent to finalization of the dam's design, and with construction already well underway— compelled improvements intended to prevent, or to compensate, the impending isolation of theretofore bountiful migratory fisheries throughout the ~ 120,000 km² Mun-Chi Basin.

However, the failed fish ladder was soon abandoned; as were most other elements of the WB's socio-ecological mitigations with one notable exception: the creation by the "Assembly of the Poor" (a Thai NGO), of a purpose-built museum near Pak Mun to archive, albeit post-facto, and display some of what had been lost. We have recently been digitizing and translating interpretive materials there, and videoing and translating new oral histories of people whose lives were changed willy-nilly by Pak-Mun and by subsequent "water resources management" (WRM) projects throughout the catchment: towards developing and mounting an online presence for a conceptually-brilliant but regrettably underutilized and mouldering educational institution which we strongly believe should be prototypical and emulated for every large-scale WRM scheme built (or in the pipeline) for the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Not least so those now widely touted as "sustainable, environmentally responsible, fish friendly, run-of-river" hydropower (and also, not least, the larger irrigation project) dams. Transparently archiving their pre-project situations —in terms of ecology, geography, culture, and aesthetics— is essential to credible environmental assessment, post-facto evaluation, and institutional memory.



"Lost way of life murals": fish species identification keys, left and right



Hua Na irrigation project: main barrage

Many of the large dams, the Hua Na Dam included, were referred to as "faai yang" or small rubber weirs that could be inflated to raise water levels during the dry season, though not exceeding the river banks, and deflated when no longer required in the rainy season. Numerous villagers in the local area of the Hua Na Dam expected the small rubber weir that was described and are still very frustrated with the fact that a massive cement dam was constructed instead.

A few noted that they would not have supported the project had they known the truth. Villagers, believing the flooding from the weir would not exceed the riverbanks and would help provide water, were once generally in support of the project.

The lack of transparency reflects the problems of conventional top-down policy and decision-making processes. The government was responsible for the entire process of planning and implementing the project, but did not make room for locals to become involved. There were no public hearings, participatory EIAs or other mechanisms to enable community feedback to reach the decision-making table.

source: *The Social and Environmental Impacts of the Hua Na Dam and Khong-Chi-Mun Project*, Kerry Shannon (2006), IIAA Symposium, Siem Reab



"Regarding the proposed local livelihoods museum. . . The planned museum was mostly blocked as a result of factionary politics at the village level, where some land had been bought by a prominent historian who had conducted part of the EIA back in the mid-1990s and been blown away by the local fisheries-based culture still active. which he named "Watana-thaam pla daek" (i.e., Fermented Fish Culture). The prof donated the plot of land in question to make a small museum, which proved impossible due to local in-fighting between factions in the village who were pro- and anti- wetlands + rivers + aquatic resources conservation as a development strategy. to win the war of words in the corridors of power. That's why evidence-based science has little hopes of succeeding in such a climate of fear, ignorance and loathing." source: private communication [adapted freely] from Dr. David Blake (October, 2013)



New oral history videos (29 March 2013)

Gan: The state of the river was good. The condition of making a living was easy and convenient, and as far as the culture and traditions and the like went, because there was no real conflict. An elder brother (phi) could go fishing and would share with his younger brothers/relations to eat, and stuff like that. It was close relationships, like that in the past. The fish were abundant, there were lots of fish. The conditions, in the past, were really good. If I think about the past, at that time, then I feel sorry about the present.

DB: And what was the social atmosphere at that time?

Gan: The social climate at that time was, say the village headman (phu yai baan) spoke, then we would accept it. If one built a house, then you wouldn't have to hire others. One didn't have to think about money. Suppose tomorrow you were going to build a house. Then today you would gather together your friends and relatives (phi-nong). You would go and catch fish together and make goi (spicy raw fish) and not use money. Do it together. Go and call them, "eh, today we'll build a house, come and help." That's how it was. The house of Phor Yai Suphan, before there was a dam, a really big house, didn't have to pay a single baht at all. He gathered us Tai Baan. "Oi, Villagers come and help build a house! today we need some wood...."

DB: So fish were used instead of money, right?

Gan: Yes.

Cultivate Understanding Multimedia + Digital Conservation Facility, Laos



3. Orwell's Memory Hole

...a slot into which government officials deposit politically inconvenient documents and records to be destroyed in order to serve the propaganda interests of the government. For example, if the government had pledged that the chocolate ration would not fall below the current 30 grams per week, but in fact the ration is reduced to 20 grams per week, the historical record is revised to contain an announcement that a reduction to 20 grams might soon prove necessary, or that the ration, then 15 grams, would soon be increased to that number. The original copies of the historical record are deposited into the memory hole...

"In the walls of the cubicle there were three orifices. To the right of the speakwrite, a small pneumatic tube for written messages, to the left, a larger one for newspapers; and in the side wall, within easy reach of Winston's arm, a large oblong slit protected by a wire grating. This last was for the disposal of waste paper. Similar slits existed in thousands or tens of thousands throughout the building, not only in every room but at short intervals in every corridor. For some reason they were nicknamed memory holes. When one knew that any document was due for destruction, or even when one saw a scrap of waste paper lying about, it was an automatic action to lift the flap of the nearest memory hole and drop it in, whereupon it would be whirled away on a current of warm air to the enormous furnaces which were hidden somewhere in the recesses of the building."

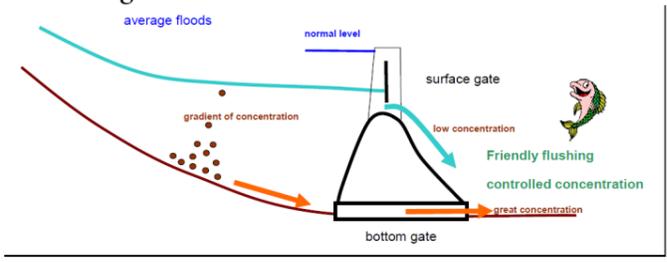
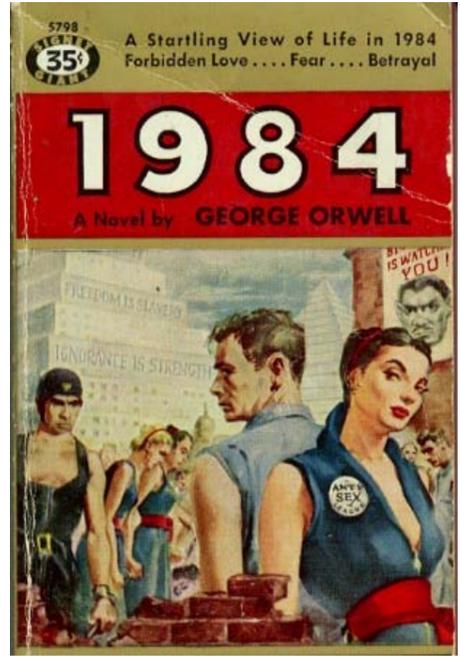
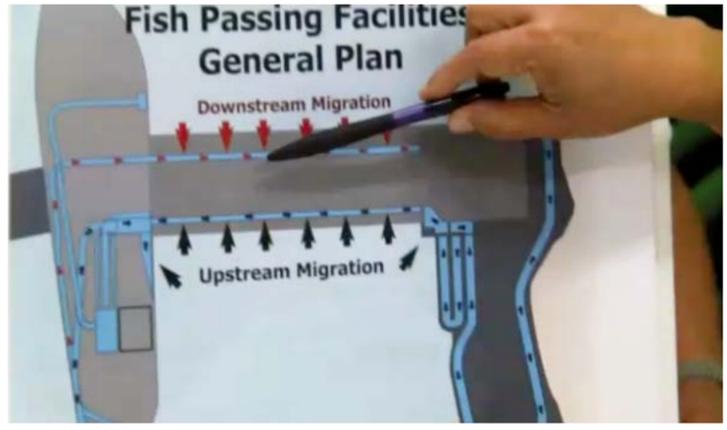


Figure 28 - Friendly Flushing principles Pöyry Finland Oy, Jyväskylä

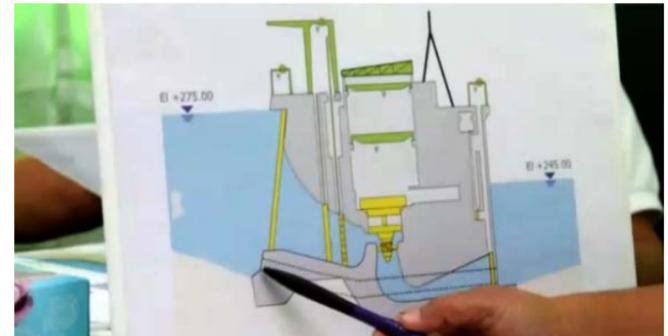


Fish passage not a problem, dam builders say Vientiane Times, 26 March 2013 [adapted]

The Xayaboury dam developers have unveiled technical drawings relating to the fish passage tunnels that will be incorporated into the dam, the first on the Mekong mainstream, which is scheduled for completion in 2019. Fish will be able to swim freely up or downstream through the Xayaboury dam, they say, as a sophisticated series of tunnels and passages has been incorporated into the design. A group of Vietnamese reporters visited the construction site last week, and one of the things they were keenly interested in was the fish passage arrangements.

Lead Engineer of the Xayaboury Hydro Electric Power Project, Prat Nantasen, explained the basic principles of the tunnels using a diagram [above]. The red arrows represent the downstream migration tunnels, while the black arrows represent the upstream ones. It is anticipated that all fish species will be able to pass through the tunnels, each of which is three metres wide and six metres high. The upstream tunnel will wind its way gradually up to the height of the dam wall, to ensure that the current is not too strong for the fish to pass, while the downstream tunnel will divert fish to the side of the dam in order to avoid the turbines. Two internationally-recognized consulting companies - Poyry of Switzerland and Compagnie Nationale du Rhone of France - have been employed to oversee construction and ensure the dam is built in line with internationally accepted standards, particularly in relation to sediment flow and fish passage.

Poyry's senior project manager, Mr Rene Schmidiger, backed the comment, saying he was confident the fish passage and sediment flushing facilities will work well. They had recently observed a large fish in their camera trap near the dam. The fish was over two metres long, but they did not know what species it was. The Vietnamese reporters were happy with the information they received. The dam is scheduled for completion in 2019, with the bulk of the electricity to be sold to Thailand. Since the government announced its intention to build the dam based on the principle of sustainability, it has taken action accordingly.



The use of propaganda is important, for it helps bring about both history and imagery to those of interest. Whether it be videos, art, articles, etc., the propaganda made helps bring followers to the cause. And so, it is of the utmost importance to ensure the correct use of propaganda for our work.

Long Live Communism and the Proletarian Struggle!
Long Live the People's Democratic Republic of Laos!

cause. [source: <http://laospdrnews.wordpress.com>]



abandoned Pak Mun Dam fish ladder, installed at the insistence of the World Bank, but not predicated on elementary ecological knowledge of local conditions.

From the 1970s to the mid-1990s, the World Bank created a monumental imbroglio of the entire hydroelectric dam sector, and worse, denied there were any shambles; and even if there were, the WBG was not responsible for them. Although the World Bank's charter mandates that it be guided by economic principles, it had suspended many of these principles by externalizing many costs of dam building and operation to local or downstream communities and to the environment, in effect forcing them to subsidize the hydro projects.

source: Goodland, R. 2010. Viewpoint – The World Bank versus the World Commission on Dams. Water Alternatives 3(2): 384-398



Mega First Berhad (Malaysia), Don Sahong hydropower project, Lao PDR (approved, 2013)

Escaping Foreign Donor Nature Worship

No question that throughout monsoonal Asia, preservation of urban waterways is a very tough sell. In 1995 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) published its definitive "Wetlands of Laos". The survey of Nong Chanh marsh in Vientiane showed several hundred families, mostly semi-aquatic squatter households, being supported in part by harvesting the nong's living aquatic resources (fish, frogs, invertebrates, plants), and that the ecological production value of Nong Chanh could approach \$1 million annually. IUCN proposed that Nong Chanh ought to be conserved as an irreplaceable scientific and educational natural study area in the heart of the Capital; and also for its "free infrastructure services": i.e., wastewater processing, flood detention and groundwater recharge, microclimate amelioration.

In due course, the Danish International Development Agency (Danida)—a bilateral funder noteworthy for its high-concept environmental projects in Laos—stepped up to the plate. Between 2001 and 2005, the Danish government largely completed the ponds, earthworks and replantings, plus—as a requirement for being granted the Lao lead ministry's permission to undertake the restoration scheme—had at great expense resettled and rehabilitated hundreds of the former residents, many of whose families had been living on Nongchanch as undocumented immigrants since the 1960s. But by 2007, the Danish wetlands restoration was off and the Sino-Malaysian waterslide park was on.

A minor Orwellian touch was the dispatch of a hit team to take down the defunct Danida project site signage the very day that the first article appeared on the new waterslide theme park in the Vientiane press; the 7 March 2007 cover story in the government-controlled, French-language Le Renovateur: "a refreshing dream soon to become a reality... a charming greenspace even drawing tourists from Thailand... So get ready to work on your breast stroke... The dog days of summer are about to take a soaking."