

## **Cultural Mobilization: Environmental Movement and Articulated Collaboration at the Burmese-Thai Border Areas along the Salween River**

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### **Introduction**

On July 13, 2009, a public meeting on local people's anxiety to the proposed Salween dam projects took place at Muang Mean village nearby the Burmese-Thai border along the Salween River. The subcommittee who was set up by Thai government came to the village to investigate and gather information, particularly from local people around the proposed Hatgyi dam. The dam will be located about 47 kilometers from the confluence of Moei River and Salween River on the Thai border and inside the Karen State of Burma with the 1,200 megawatts capacity. In the meeting, local people expressed that they do not want Salween dams to be built. Regarding to the meeting, I will analyze and examine the significance underling the meeting. This includes what this event means, showing the connection of place, identity, and the movement.

Theoretically, I draw upon an Anna Tsing's notion of "cultural mobilization" (1999). Anna Tsing (1999) approaches culture and natural resources management through "cultural mobilization" believing that conflicts over natural resource management are related to "culture". It is not only because groups of people have opposing perspectives, values and ways of life against each other, but they also require the "mobilization" of their own position in (re)formulation of the problem, and the appropriate forms of representation through which the argument should be addressed. In the case of Kalimantan, Indonesia, community leaders, ethnographers, activists, and program officers have special responsibility for representing group interests and identities. Cultural mobilization, thus, refers to the process of (re) assembling a way of life or a set of practices, knowledges, legacies, values, organizational forms in the midst of challenges – from other groups, from new ways of thinking, or from the condition of the environment itself (Tsing 1999). For Tsing, social movement could be understood for strategically effective moments of interconnection among negotiating parties<sup>1</sup>

1. What Anna Tsing (1999: 2) means by negotiating parties is "national resource bureaucracies" that they are not only powerful shapers of environment themselves; they are also perhaps the most important sites of struggle over environmental classification and regulation. They engage the expertise of international agencies, the negotiations of transnational NGOs, and the corporation protest, and resistance of communities.

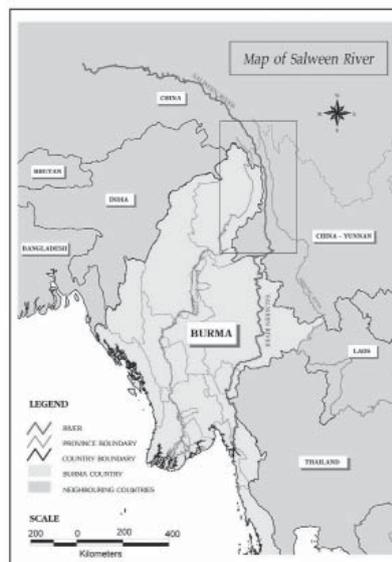
that make powerful environment projects, which is not necessarily positive for everyone whom concern, come to life. These projects, thus, reshaped through interactions with corporations, international agencies, and local people (Tsing 2005), (p. 2-7, 13-14, 246-248).

In this regard, the life of the border people at Burmese-Thai border areas along the Salween River is the center of my study in which I apply the concept cultural mobilization to examine the transnationalized environmental movement against the proposed Salween dam projects. In doing so, I focus on how the border people who travel across the river as the border make sense their own space of negotiation that everyday practices of ordinary people as resistant practice is not limited within a given local context, it would be expanded to a context of contemporary transnational world as well.

### **1. Background of study**

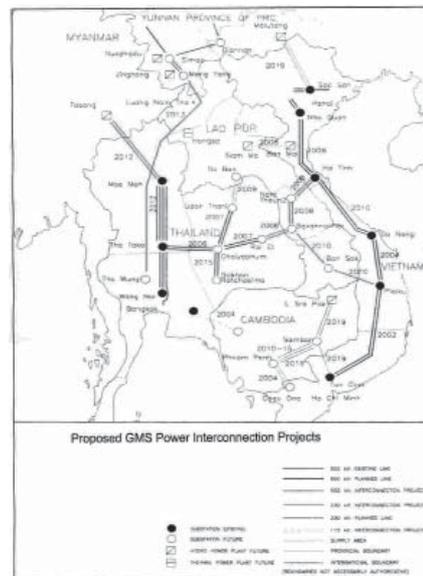
The Salween River is the world's 26th longest river, and the longest and free-running international river in Southeast Asia. It originates in the Tibetan plateau (China's Qinghai) of the eastern Himalayas and passes through western Yunnan of China, Burma and the forms a 127-Kilometers-long border line between Burma and Thailand (between Karen State and Mae Hong Son province) before draining into the Andaman Sea with the total length of 2,815 Kilometers. Its river basin covers a total area of 324,000 square kilometers

Stories about the Salween River and inhabitants are hardly known to people from the outside world. In many instances, development projects have simply been imposed into the region without taking into account the values of lives. Eventually, the Salween River was seen only as resource supply for economic development. Hence, Asian Development Bank (ADB) aims to promote the mainstream of state-led cooperative economic development between



**Map.1 Salween River**

**Source: [www.salweenwatch.org](http://www.salweenwatch.org)**



**Map 2. Greater Mekong Sub-region Power Grid**

the six countries sharing the Mekong River Basin<sup>2</sup> and facilitate increased interaction and economic activities; economic growth, trade liberalization and infrastructure installing. Along this line, the Salween River Basin was pulled to be part of Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS programs).

In terms of geographical-regional space, Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) can be understood as “geo-body” (Thongchai 1994) entity which encompassed Yunnan province (China), Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam that a common set of natural and social conditions are shared vision of a prosperous, integrated, and harmonious among a number of societies and associated with global funding agencies (Diokno and Chinh 2006), (p. 2-3). In this regard, the Greater Mekong Sub-region Power Grid programs were initially planed by ADB to connect both the Mekong River Basin and Salween River Basin together as an energy resource supply for the need in the SEA region (Asian Development Bank 2007; Sokhen and Sunada 2008; Wong 2003). Precisely, the project of Tasang Dam in Shan State was planed by the hydropower consultancy Norconsult in 2002 and it will be connected to

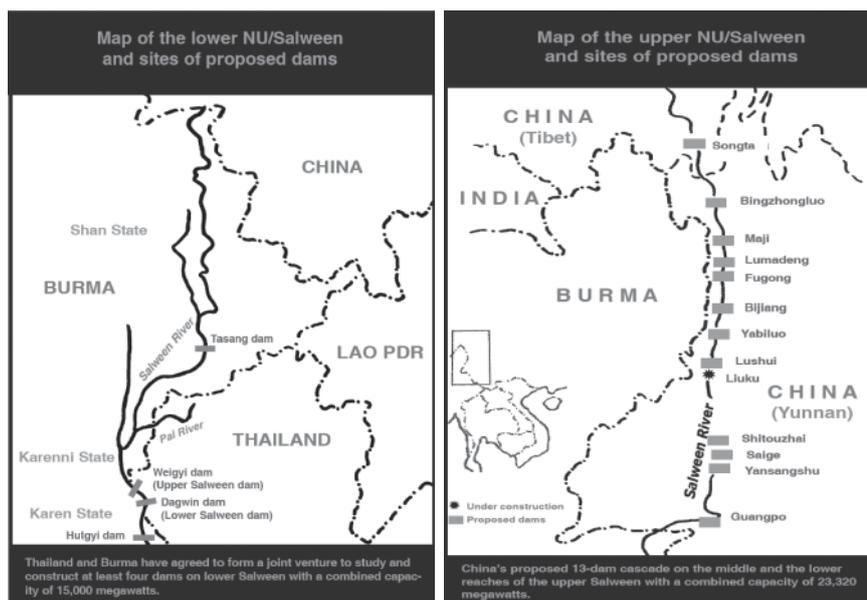
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2.The Mekong River (Lancang Jiang) comes from Qingxai province and passes through Tibet. The Salween River (Nu Jiang,) comes from Xiqang Ziqiou (Tibetan Plateau – politically called as Tibetan Autonomous Region). The river flows through Yunnan, after then leaves China and meanders through Burma (where it is known as the Thanlwin) and Thailand (where it is known as the Salawin, Thai: สาละวิน) on its way to emptying in the Andaman Sea by Mawlamyaing (Moulmien). Salween River is 2,815 km long, which is home to over 7,000 species of plants and 80 rare or endangered animals and fish. UNESCO said this region "may be the most biologically diverse temperate ecosystem in the world" and designated it a World Heritage Site in 2003 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salween\\_River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salween_River), 08/02/2009).

Mae Moh coal power plant via transmission line in 2012 (International Rivers Network 2009; Wong 2003).

In this sense, GMS is enclosed by the riparian countries who cooperate with transnational organizations to determine the way of economic development and resources exploitation that will have benefits and profits for them through development projects. On the one hand, the ADB presents the GMS as shared prosperity for the common and Thailand presents in its the foreign policy as a way to making friend with neighboring countries in the region. On the other hand, the competition among the riparian countries to access to and control over natural resources as an underlying logic is not represented. Since, enclosure redefines the resource as “property” this transforms it to a tradable commodity in a market system and links with profit in the same way of “development” is managed. The Salween River is, thus, put into the enclosed condition of inter-states exploitation “that each country faces a decision about how much of the resource to use and management by whom and for whose benefit” (Yos, et al. 2009).

The power failures in the summer 2004 in 16 out of China’s 31 provinces highlighted the problem. Hydroelectricity at upper Salween was viewed by the Beijing government as a solution – an absolute necessity for a rapidly expanding economy (Butler 2004). They believed that hydropower is clean energy which is cheaper than building power plants using sources of coal and oil energy. In doing so, China has planned to “develop” the projects of 13 dams on the Nu River (Nujiang); Songta, Maji, Bingzhongluo, Lumadeng, Fugong, Bijiang, Yabiluo, Lushui, Liuku, Shitouzhai, Saige, Yansangshu, and Guangpo (Agence France Presse 2007; The Epoch Times 2004). Such those dams would have a combined capacity of 21,320



Map 3. The proposed Salween Mainstream dam projects

Source: [http://www.terrapower.org/demo/key\\_issues/Salween%20website/MAP%20-%20Salween%20dams.pdf](http://www.terrapower.org/demo/key_issues/Salween%20website/MAP%20-%20Salween%20dams.pdf), (2007).

megawatts, and they were expected to be completed in 20 years (Kultida and Praiwan 2003).

Hydroelectricity on lower part of Salween River Basin (dam and divert water on Salween River) projects has been planned by industrial dam builders since 1980s (TERRA 2006). All of the feasibility studies and other forms of technical assistance for dams and other water diversion project on the Salween River have been conducted by Electric Power Development Company, Japanese government agency (Living River Siam, et al. 2008), (p. 171).

The proposed mainstream Salween dam projects are joint undertaking of the Burmese, Thai and Chinese governments (Butler 2004; Silp 2007). Recently, a memorandum of understanding between Thailand's Energy Ministry and Burma's Ministry of Electric Power was signed in May 2005 for the development of five hydropower dams in the Salween River Basin and Tanaosri River Basin – Tasang Dam (7,110 megawatts), Ywathit Dam (4,000 megawatts) on the upper part of the Salween River inside Burma (Shan State), Upper Salween Dam or Weigyi Dam (4,540 megawatts), Lower Salween Dam or Dargwin Dam (792 megawatts), and Hutgyi Dam (1,200 megawatts) about 47 kilometers from the confluence of Moei River and the Salween River on the Thai border inside the Karen State of Burma, and Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) (Apinya 2007; Tunya 2007). Thailand will invest in the US\$5.5-billion project by the Electric General Authority of Thailand (EGAT). Under the existing plan, the dam is due to start supplying electricity to the EGAT by 2013 (TERRA 2006).

While governments worldwide are restricting aid to Burma regarding to human rights abuse by Burmese military government, both Japan, China and Thailand still openly invest inside Burma regardless the violence against human rights and environment destruction. At least 45 Chinese Multinational Corporations (MNCs) have been involved in approximately 63 hydropower projects in Burma, including several related substation and transmission line projects. China's involvement in the damming of the Salween River is not limited to the Tasang dam project. In 2006, Sinohydro signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Burma for the US\$ 1 billion, 1,200 MW Hatgyi dam along the Thai border. In April 2007, Farsighted Group, now known as Hanergy Holding Group, and China Gold Water Resources Co. signed MoUs with Burma for an additional 2,400 megawatts hydropower project on the upper Salween, an area which Yunnan Power Grid Co. reportedly surveyed in 2006.

In April 2008, Sinohydro, China Southern Power Grid Co., and China Three Gorges Project Co. signed a strategic cooperation framework agreement for the development of the hydropower potential of the Salween River. Despite China's involvement in these large-scale dams on the Salween, most of the electricity is destined for export to neighboring Thailand. Of these hydropower projects, the largest is the 7,100 megawatts Tasang dam on the Salween River, which is to be integrated into the Asian Development Bank's Greater Mekong Sub-

region Power Grid. A groundbreaking ceremony for the Tasang dam was held in March 2007, and China Gezhouba Group Co. (CGGC) started preliminary construction shortly after (EarthRights International 2008), (p.5-6). In addition, on September 14, 2009, China Huaneng Lancang River Hydropower Co., Ltd. and the Union of Myanmar HTOO Group signing ceremony was held in Yangon, jointly sign the Myanmar Salween River Basin hydropower project investment and cooperation agreement. Co-signing of the agreement, the two companies will lay a solid foundation for an orderly development of hydropower resources in Myanmar. Through bilateral cooperation between China and Myanmar, both countries will promote economic and social development and “brotherhood friendship” (Anonymous 2009).

Increasingly, large scale hydropower construction on the Salween River is an “essential elements” to develop an ASEAN power grid which would stretch across Southeast Asia (Wong 2003), (p. 6). The ADB is promoting a multi-billion dollar regional electricity scheme powered in part by the Tasang dam. Moreover, Thai political leaders intended to push ahead on the construction of dams on the Salween River and promised to hand any remaining funds from a 4 million Baht (US\$127,000) soft loan back to Burmese government to strengthen economic ties between the two countries (Cho 2008)<sup>3</sup>.

Up to now, ADB, transnational corporations, such as Sinohydro Co. and the EGAT inter. Co., and Chinese, Thai and Burmese states conspired to give the proposed Salween mainstream dam projects are alive. In doing so, the reason of whether the Salween dams will be built or not is neither what intention of local people is nor the individual state desire is. The power for decision making is, nevertheless, handed by various parties combine together. In this regard, the power is not easily seen and strict at any one person or group at one level, but it is deeply hided in somewhere else and it secretly works that local people might be difficult to see through and fight against its domination.

## 2. Operation of the EGAT

“I don’t want the dam. If the dam is there, how can I live?”

Mue Kha Yae (old Karen woman, Muang Mean village, July 13, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

To operate the proposed Salween mainstream dam projects, one of the key operators is

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3. According to Former Foreign Minister Noppodon Pattama, Thailand opposed economic sanctions against the junta, preferring “negotiations rather than punishments” could lead to more positive developments in the country that has been run by the military since 1962 (Cho 2008).

4. To be sure that this ethnography will not make more trouble to local people, I change the names of location and my key informants which I describe their role play below.

the EGAT in Thailand. The EGAT hired Environment Research Institute of Chulalongkorn University (ERI of CU) to study the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Hutgyi dam. It referred that there are 6 villages will be affected by the flooding from water storage of dam building. This point will be accepted if no one reject. However, NGOs recognized this point which is the wrong information. Toward Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA)<sup>5</sup>, Living River Siam, and Salween Watch) discussed with local people to make the correct information rather than believe the EGAT's EIA report.

After then INGOs, NGOs in exile, and local people submitted their complaint to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to investigate this case. A couple of year ago, the NHRC arranged a survey to collect information from the people. After they finished their investigation, they summarized the results and submitted a report to Thai government for making-decision into whether the Hatgyi dam project should be stopped or not. Precisely, the report suggested that government should stop the dam project regarding. War fighting has been still happening in Burma side and the effect will impact Thai people too. By law, the government has to come up with a solution within 90 days. During that time, Thai government set up a subcommittee to gather more information from various groups of people again.

The subcommittee planed to have a public meeting at the village that would be affected from the Hatgyi dam. Numerous persons joined this meeting; the members of subcommittee who participated in public meeting comprised of a representative from the prime minister office, a representative chairman to gathering information, a representative from the national human rights commission, a representative from the Karn Fai Fah (EGAT), and a representative from civil society.

During the public meeting, the EGAT staffs had no chance to publicly talk and explain their work. However, the EGAT quietly worked underground. Meanwhile, various people were coming in the meeting place, the EGAT staff talked to Mr. Temayaw and Mr. Decha who are NGO workers. Both of them told me that one guy from the EGAT talked to them. He asked them to tell the truth to the foreigner who went along with us. "Please tell your foreigner friends that we will not do anything destructive. Oh please tell her the good things

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5. TERRA is a project under Foundation for Ecological Recovery (FER). FER is a non-profit organization based in Bangkok, Thailand, and established in 1986. FER's institutional mandate is to conduct research and produce research based documents regarding ecological issues with the perspective of sustainable development and greater participation of local communities within the Mekong Region. TERRA was established in 1991 to focus on issues concerning the environment and local communities within the Mekong Region. TERRA works to support the network of NGOs and people's organizations in the Mekong Region, encouraging exchange and alliance-building, and drawing on the experience of development and environment issues in Thailand (<http://www.terraper.org/home.php>, 2010).

about the project. So it will help to the good image of our country,” the EGAT guy said.

As my understanding, the EGAT cares a lot about their image, because the EGAT has been strongly criticized by the public in Thai society. They are regardless to environmental protection and health issues. In Thailand, its image is not good; the company has been producing pollution that has destroyed local people’s health and way of life, such as Mae Moh coal power plant in Lampang province, Northern of Thailand, and Pak Mun dam in Ubon Ratchatani province, Northeastern of Thailand. In doing so, they try to improve their image to be a good organization.

Recently, the EGAT has done on ground the Karn Tam Moun Chon (mass public propaganda) that try to convince local people to agree on the proposed Salween mainstream dam projects in many ways. Local NGO worker, Mr. Sanan, mentioned to the public relation of the EGAT the following dialogue takes place;

PH: Hatgyi dam project will be revised so that the Karn Fai Fah can’t run further the project, right?

SN: Yes! But they don’t stop even they can’t start it now. They try to Dueng Moun Chon (gathering the people who will support them) at the border areas during this time.

PH: Oh! What did they do?

SN: Last year, you know, they gave the people in Burma side the mosquito nets. And then later, they knew that those gifts belong to the Karn Fai Fah. Hundred of them were sent back.

PH: Why not?

SN: They Mai Aow (did not want) the Karn Fai Fah.

Another example is that they try to collaborate with local NGOs and local government. What they did is explained it below.

Early year 2009, I have conducted my fieldwork; I joined the 7th Stateless Children’s Day festival held by local NGOs and took place on 6-8 January 2009. The day before the festival starting day, I talked with some local NGO workers. One of them was Ai Birm (AB), told me about the festival that people from many communities along Salween River will participate. The EGAT’s goal is to convince them to support the Salween dam projects. Therefore, the Karn Fai Fah wants to join the activity – to “give the gift” in this festival. The EGAT’s staff came three times to meet him at the Development Center for Children and Community Network (DCCN) office, but they did not meet him. So they deposited their intention to DCCN’s staff telling to Ai Birm. However, he did not communicate back with them. Until the EGAT’s staffs were coming to communicate with the Nay Amphoe (Head of District) (NAP) and he was calling and asking Ai Birm about the festival the following

dialogue takes place;

NAP: When will it start?

AB: It will be on this 6-8 January. And I've already also planned to invite you to join the festival.

NAP: Right now I stay with the Karn Fai Fah's staff. They also want to join the activity and organize boots. May you let them attend the festival? What do you think?

Ai Birm kept quiet for a second during the communication because he worried that the EGAT will use this chance to do a public relations campaign about the Salween dams to the people who will come to join the festival. Suddenly, the Nay Amphoe was responding to him and Ai Birm kept in mind and made reservedly a noncommittal statement during the critical situation.

NAP: There isn't another issue. It is just only give the gift.

AB: Maybe Mister! Let me bring this matter to consult with colleagues in our network.

After then Ai Birm raised this issue in the meeting of NGOs' network. Mr. Arm who is working on the same issue of citizenship gave the idea to him.

Arm: Don't think too much! It doesn't differ from the prior project of Por Tor Tor<sup>6</sup> that arranged the ceremony for the winner of the Rangwan Luk Lok See Keaw<sup>7</sup>. Someone who got the Rangwan Luk Lok See Keaw from Por Tor Tor grew forest trees overlap the land of the villagers<sup>8</sup>.

At the moment, a question came in my mind that whether or not NGOs should collaboratively work with the state agency or corporation. This is a big debate among NGO workers. Increasingly, Ai Birm gave me an example that Thai Fund Foundation<sup>9</sup> also got the

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6. Petroleum Authority of Thailand has three abbreviation letters (PTT) or "Por Tor Tor."

7. Green Globe Award or "Rangwan Luk Lok See Keaw" is the project of PTT that was set up in 1999. Until now there were 249 persons got this award (<http://pttinternet.pttplc.com/greenglobe/history.html>, accessed July 24, 2009).

8. Actually, he mentioned the name of people, but I do not want to put the name here. Because it might be make more tension among them.

9. Networks of NGO organizations; NGO-Co-ordinating Committee on Rural Development (NGO-CORD), Rural And Social Management Institute (RASMI), Thai Volunteer Service (TVS), Local Development Institute (LDI), Thai Development Support Committee (TDSC), Development Cooperation Foundation, and The Asia Foundation, set up a Development Support Cooperation Partners (DSC) in 1996 for supporting the works of civil society organizations. In the year 2000, DSC was registered as Thai Fund Foundation (TFF) by Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (<http://www.tff.or.th/?q=node/10>, accessed July 28, 2009).

money from the Karn Fai Fah to organize the training course for the staff. In this fashion, “NGOs might be bought by the sponsor,” Ai Birm Added.

Finally, they allowed the EGAT to participate in the festival without doing propaganda about Salween dams. During the festival, the EGAT will do public relations only focusing on saving energy. Mr. Fukang (FK), who is a candidate lawyer working for DCCN, will be in charge of communicating with them.

For Ai Birm, it is difficult to reject the intention of the Nay Amphoe, because they have been working collaboratively on the issues of citizenship for many years and they also have a good relationship within each other. The EGAT was aware of their relationship. Strategically, they asked the Nay Amphoe to be the linkage that the EGAT can send the message of their intention to local NGOs. That is a good approach for the EGAT because they succeeded in dealing with local NGOs and joined the festival. This means they can go forward one more step on their work to support the proposed Salween mainstream dam projects.

In the meantime, Mr. Fukang told me that he got news that the EGAT contacted Muang Mean school teachers, asking for participation in the national children’s day festival at the school, as well as at Bon Bea Luang village. After then I ask Mr. Fukang go to the village with me. The next day morning, the Mr. Fukang drove me up to Bon Bea Luang village by motorcycle. We arrived at the village after one and half hour. The village was located nearby the Salween River and its area is very narrow and deep compared to the water level of the river. We slowly walked up to reach the school which set up on the top of the hill behind the village. Children day festival had already started when I went over there. The stage was set at the earth-flatted field of the school for performances. The gifts comprised of many kinds of Khanom (snack) and study materials; notebook, pencil, and the like. There were a lot of villagers, both adults and children came to watch and participate in the festival. I also met some of them, who joined the 7th Stateless Children’s Day festival at the DCCN, yesterday. The schedule was programmed by the teachers at the school. They lead and conduct the children’s performance on the stage. There were many sets of performance, but one set of performance impress to me, which is each ethnic children group dance; Karen dance, Shan dance, and Muslim dance. They express their own culture which is different from other groups.

During the festival, I cannot identify from among of them who are the EGAT’s staff. But I was sure that the EGAT’s staff was attending the festival because I saw a silver color car of them was parking under the shadow of a big tree along the main road of village. Mr. Fukang told me that the EGAT is trying to work not only with his organization, but also state agencies in the community, particularly the school teacher (and Border Soldier?). The following dialogue takes place;

FK: Do you know, the EGAT also make friend and work with school? They gave them

the money as sponsor to support school activities, particularly the children day festival. As you have already seen in this village, that right!

PH: Why do they act like this? They want to do propaganda, right?

FK: Yes. They try to get support from the villagers. But the villagers, they know the Karn Fai Fah. They don't like Karn Fai Fah.

From NGOs' perspective, the EGAT themselves, cannot work well in the community level. They are opposed at against from the villagers. The EGAT then ask other groups of people or organizations who are more closely associated with the villagers. The people listen to them as well contact and work with the villagers instead. Therefore, local NGO, local authority, school teacher, and even border soldier were approached by the EGAT.

In general, the role of the EGAT was not contract with others. But it became a part of them during the festival. It seems to me that the EGAT was trying to represent their role, which is not involved with the political, as the government officials giving the gifts to the people. In my mind, they played the same role of patron in relation with client like in the past. It is the same role of government officials that they went to remote areas along with material things and foods to give to the people. The EGAT might be looked at as a good organization in the eyes of the people who participating the festival.

For the local NGO, they avoided to invite from EGAT join this activity, but they really wanted to invite the local officials to participate the festival. Head of District was invited, but he has a meeting in Chiang Mai. Thus, the district clerk participated in this festival instead. Both of local NGOs and local officials also enjoyed and collaborated on the issues of citizenship. Local government got an advantage of their jobs as a good result and NGOs also can run the project of advocacy on citizenship.

This event is not their main job that they can give up. The year later, DCCN ran the same festival in another village out of the cover areas of the Salween dams. The EGAT and the Border Soldier Unit 36 did not participate in the festival this year like before. I called to Mr. Fukang the following dialogue takes place;

PH: Will the EGAT and Soldiers participate in the festival?

FK: They disappear! They did not contact us anymore. The leader of Thahan Phran who we closely work with already move to the other place. The new one we did not know well. So they did not join our festival this year.

PH: Oh! I see.

### **3. Knowledge contribution**

On the part of spokespersons providing information and expressing their opinions in

public meeting, both NGO activists and local people were represented. There were diverse people to be part of speakers; three representatives from various villages, a leader of local government (Tambon Administrative Organization – TAO), a chairperson of local civil communities, as well as a lawyer who was a secretary of Northern NGO-CORD and also works for Community Rights Recovery and Protection Center.

There were also villagers from Thai and Burma in attendance, but the Burma side did not represent themselves openly. But Among the local people, there were some Karen Soldiers from the Karen National Union (KNU), but they did not dress uniform. In addition, there were many kinds of organization during the meeting. The EGAT staff also joined in the meeting, as well as a lot of Thahan Phran (Rangers) and border soldiers dressing uniform came to observe. However, there were few media and journalists and no international journalist. There were many people videotaping the meeting, most of them came from the representative of the government offices and the NHRC.

Referring to the process of EIA study, the local people were excluded out of the space. The EGAT and study team did not open up space to provide the people was opportunity to participate in the study. The people and NGOs came up with unappreciative feelings. It easily leads to meet the conflict between policy maker and the people who would be affected. The un-disclosure process of the project normally happens as Mr. Danai mentioned in the public meeting;

Danai: Previous 4-5 years, we have heard Weigyi dam will be built at the border around Saw Myin Dong village in Mae Sariang. At the time the surveyors came to survey area and water. They measured the level of the Salween River. People have doubts of what they were going to do. There was a problem that they did not tell the true to people. They said that they do survey for making road for the villagers. They did not tell that they will build the Weigyi dam. Later we heard about the Hatgyi dam project.

In addition, The EGAT's EIA reported that there has not been fighting in Burma for 10 years. But P'Somjit (PSJ) strongly opposed the report. She was telling the truth that:

PSJ: The report mentioned that there was no fighting in Burma about 10 years. But now, fighting is still happening. This is not the war, isn't it? The life of one person in Burma is the life like us. It is only that we did not see their fighting. This is the point that the subcommittee should consider, because the fighting inside Burma is still happening. The people in Burma have fled to Thailand to avoid the danger by crossing the river. We have to receive and take care of them anyways. Thailand has to bare those refugees for sure.

The border people from both sides of the Salween River have secretly gathered their own information day by day. The name lists of village were made and the numbers of villager were counted. In the meantime, they made hand-drawn map which is based on the topographic map. This is a map of the dam site that local people associate with Northern Thai NGOs drew completely finish in 2 weeks. It was also represented in Thai version, because the main audience is Thai people and the government.

What the point of the map is that they try to carry out the name of the villages. How many villages are along to the Salween, and the place of agricultural production, and fishing? The map is already on the EIA, Why is this hand-drawn map different? EIA just mentioned 6 villages; but exactly 31 villages, 506 households, 3,550 persons. Therefore, we can see how the map can be tool of power. People who have power to make the map, the map have power to make decision over people. If the EGAT make the map to show 6 villages in local area, it is a great map. The villagers they make their own map showing over 30 villages that will be flooded. This is the way of reclaiming by using a tool of the map taking that power. This map came out of local knowledge combining with modern science knowledge.

#### **4. Knowing their place**

Recently, an archeological research in borderland of the Salween River has been done by the archeologist teams led by Dr. Rasmi Shoocongdej, archeologist from Silpakorn University. Archeological evidences, such as earthenware from Lanna (Northern Thai) oven sources, were found in the mountainous areas on the west of Thailand and on the east of the Salween River. Dr. Rasmi Shoocongdej and staff excavated the skeleton in the river branch of the Salween River. The age was 12,000 to 13,000 years old. With diversity of community, the Salween areas become an important route of travelling in Indo-china.

One of the main research sites is the area in Saw Myin Dong village. The excavation study in Saw Myin Dong village located nearby the Salween River found many archaeological evidences, such as ceramics, pipe components, and stirrup polished stone tools. They are in pre-history and history periods, during 20-22 Buddhist centuries. This confirmed that there were many communities have stayed along to the Salween River and river branches in the past for a long time. This area is meaningful in terms of the history of humanity. It intimately associated with the history surrounding communities. These archaeological data suggested that the Salween River is an important key of Thai history. This area is the meeting point of other Asian countries such as China, Burma, and Malaysia. It is deplorable if these civilization clues might be lost because of the Salween dams building (Pitsanu 2006).

Regarding to the archeological excavation and research, villagers knew what their living place was in the ancient time. Previously, they also found some archeological evidences, but

they did not know what they mean. After then, they learn from the professional the important of those archeological evidences. And both the professional and villagers agreed to set up the museum in the community. Some archeological evidences and information were put in the museum. This museum is used by the spokesmen to explain the history of community to the outsiders who visit the village. The headman of the village also brought me to visit the museum when my friends and I went to the community. Additionally, in terms of public learning, the finding of archeological study was put as on of contents in the book published by the NGOs network in Northern Thailand.

By showing the archeological information, the villagers strategically legitimate themselves as the successor of the past, introducing their place continually has long history and was very old village. This information became their mean to gain the legitimacy power as local people have stayed in this area for a long time and the village area also belongs to them. This is a good way in their eyes that they can claim over the place by giving the meaning of history to the physical place.

## **5. Anxiety about lost territory**

“Do the flooded areas belong to Burma? The Khet Daen (borderline) between Burma and Thailand are not identified yet. The problem of Din Daen (territory) that eight northern provinces adjacent to border will happen if the dams are built.”

Mr.Danai (spokesman of Su Mo Ke village, July 13, 2009)

I interviewed an old Karen woman during the public meeting. Her name is Mue Kha Yae and she is 60 years old. She did not agree on the dam project. When I asked her about dam, the following dialogue takes place;

PH: Aunt, do you think about dam?

MKY: I don't want the dam. If the dam is there how can I live? Because I grow vegetable and tobacco at the river bank.

PH: What is the importance of that?

MKY: I stay with my husband, just only two of us. We did not have any children. I am already old, look at my teeth almost gone. I do not have enough energy to grow rice. So, I exchange tobacco for rice and sell it to money sometimes.

There were also some Burmese villagers coming by boat and attend the meeting. They told me that they cannot say anything to the military government so they want to come here and tell their relative here to help them stop the dam project. Otherwise, their lives will be

affected if the dam was built because they cultivate and fish. If the dam happens, water will submerge their village area, they will lose their job.

For the people, they have concerned very much on their life and livelihood. A spokesman presented his concern in the public meeting.

Danai: Even though, Hatgyi dam would be built inside Burma, the flooding area will come into Thai side. The paddy fields of villagers may be more submerged than before. What is the size when water flooded in rainy season? Even though, Pee Nong (brothers) cannot read, Pee Nong knew that they solve the problem in wrong way. Is the Salween River, half of Burma, another half of Thailand? People want to know that if the dam will be built, whether our are lives secure or no. If the dam is built, Mae Sariang town will be flooded. Pee Nong worried about this.

By lacking information, the selective people were brought to look at what the problem of dam exactly is. Concerning this, Mr. Danai was explaining to me that;

Danai: So, Pra Cha Chon organized the study tour to visit Bhumibol dam, Sirikit dam, Lam Ta Khong dam, Pak Mun dam. I already went there. They got a lot of effect from Pak Mun dam. Their grand children even become divided and separated to the different way. Some came to Mae Sariang town to sell noodle at the bus station. They were used to stay at Pak Mun before. Now they come to stay in my hometown.

Local people alone cannot visit many dam sites by themselves or they might not know that the issue of visiting dam site is important to understand and learn the lesson from the affected people. The process of the study tour was, thus, monitored by NGOs and they also supported some money for the trip.

However, the issue of the border people's livelihood is not the main concern of Thai authorities. The lost territory issue is, rather, their anxiety. During a trip when I was traveling in the border areas this month (February 2010), I heard the story from a local NGO worker, Mr. Sanan. He talked to me about the situation and movement of Hatgyi dam in Thai side the following dialogue takes place;

PH: What is going on about Hatgyi dam project after the subcommittee did the public meeting at the Muang Mean village?

SN: Oh! They already submitted the paper to Abhiset's government. The paper said that the project should be revised because of main reasons; Human Rights issue, Din Daen (territory) issue, Health issue, and Environment issue. Prime minister Abhisit signed the letter on 11 Jan this year. The government did not dare to make a decision whether Hatgyi dam would be built or not. They Sue Vala (buy the time).

PH: What is the Karn Fai Fah concern about?

SN: The Karn Fai Fah is afraid of the issue of international agreement. Because they have to follow Thai constitution 2007, article 190. Any Thai agreement in national level with other country has to be proved by the parliament. Particularly, the issue of Din Daen, you know, the security authority who is in charge will closely watch.

In the warfare situation and national security, the people, who have stayed in this area for a long time or were just coming, were identified as “the Other”. They were excluded to be neither people of Thailand nor Burma. Concerning to this marginalization, they try to identify themselves by using the border areas to deal with predominant. Once I asked the spokesman of Saw Myin Dong village, Mr. Sanong (SN), about how he perceives the border areas the following dialogue takes place;

PH: What do you think when somebody said this area is Chai Daen (border)? Chai Daen is fence of the nation!

SN: Yes, exactly! Here is Chai Daen. If Chia Daen is fence, we are the pillar of fence. You know?

I was surprising his answer. During the talk, I thought that his idea would be different from the Chai Daen idea or opposite. Instead, he has the same idea and supports the idea of border as fence. However the fence cannot stand alone. The fence really needs the pillar to hold and fix together. Otherwise, it cannot be the fence to protect inside property from outside. Therefore, they identify themselves as the pillar of the fence which means that they are the important element to make the border function to protect the country for the state. If they their lives are not wealthy or they face the terrible difficulty, the border as fence of nation-state will get the effect that the state insecurity might happens.

However, Thai state authorities more concern to national security than local livelihood then. At the border areas, many soldiers came in the public meeting to take care of and guard the participants at Muang Mean village. By doing so, there were a lot of intelligence authorities trying to get information as well. They were trying to check all of us and identify all of outsiders as much as possible. Mr. Fukang talked in a whisper to me that the Thahan Phran who was taking VDO is a leader of the Border Soldier in charge to cover this area. He ordered his subordinates ask Mr. Fukang get our name lists. Mr. Fukang has to follow their rule. For him, there is no way to reject. Normally, outsiders come to visit the border villages, the leader person has to sign his/her name to the Thahan Phran at the check point before enter the village. It became the normal rule in the name of security. Thus, he asked me write down my name and our friends' name. Some gave them the fake names though. Finally, they got our name lists and they also took our photos during the meeting. This is the process of

documenting that, maybe, I guess those information were put in the confidential file of Border Soldier Unit 36.

During the public meeting the spokesman, Mr. Danai raised the issue of Din Daen that might be loosed if the flooding areas expanded over Thai territory. By the treaty between England and Siam in the colonial time, the Salween River was identified as borderline. The sovereignty power of both Thailand and Burma legally end at the edge of the river. The body of Salween River actually has no any state has authority to take over.

If the river, nevertheless, burst its bank, submerging the entire lands, those lands will be gone down that state can not bring them back. It makes sense for the state authorities that try to keep all pieces of land like their own life. Therefore, the issue of lost territory is the anxiety of the state authorities, particularly soldiers and army. They worried about territory that might be loosed if Hatgyi dam will be built. As a result, the subcommittee put the issue of Din Daen in the report submitted to the government. This is the powerful argument that both NGOs and the border people made to challenge the state authorities. When they recognize to the issue of Din Daen, they might not agree with the EGAT to build the Hatgyi dam.

## 6. Referring to the King's power

I can't be against the dam, but I disagree with dam construction. We are like the eggs, and government is like a big stone. The eggs break when they hit the stone. When the stone hits the eggs, the eggs are broken too".

Moh Yupin (old Karen women, Saw Myin Dong village, February 14, 2010)

Even though, the ordinary people think that they are the weak comparing with state authority, they are keeping their intention to find the ways accumulate more and more power of negotiation. One of the strategies that the border people use is referring to the King's strategy. In Thai society, the King's theory of sufficiency economy is very powerful. Most of the people respect to him and his idea. However, it was not only used by politician, but also ordinary people. On the one hand, the border people legitimize their livelihood which is good quality and acceptable. On the other hand, the EGAT was discredited by ordinary people. In this regard, the spokesperson, P'Somjit, was clearly speaking in front of the subcommittee and referring to the King's theory of sufficiency economy.

PSJ: The King said that the villager should have the way of life on sufficiency economy or agriculture production. I would like to ask the Karn Fai Fah why you are Mai Roo Jak Por (not enough)? Now we have sufficiency life. We have fish, we have gardening, we have enough rice, we have everything. Even though, we have not

many money, we can feed our life. Why you come to destroy us? If you move us, we will lose all. So we do not have any sufficiency job.

Nevertheless, the King's theory of sufficiency economy also was used by the EGAT to persuade local people to join their program of sufficiency agriculture, for example, organic fertilizer, biological fermented liquid, and wash solution.

Another case of referring to the King's power that was created by the border people is that the village where they lived is the land of the king. The villagers of Muang Mean village tried to claim their place is the village and identify themselves as villager rather than the migrant or alien person of the nation. They referred to the early period of the village, mentioning the King came to visit this area over 30 years ago.

The King went to visit many places nearby the border when he was young, including Muang Mean village. During visiting the marginal villages, he usually wore the soldier uniform. For the trip to visit Muang Mean village, he gave a piece of land to the community for growing rice. Until now, they still keep this land as the land for the common. In addition, The King's image was put at the public health center in the village, showing the part of history that very important for them.

They represented their community as village within Thai territory. This argument makes sense for Thai people to understand. Practically, this is the way to confirm that all those visited places are Thai territory. People who stay in those places also are the people of the King. In this regard, the border people, at the moment, pretend themselves as part of Thai community so that Thai state should recognize and look after them.

## **7. Conclusion**

Normally, nation-state was seen as powerful institution that has autonomy to control its people within state territory. But the case of the proposed mainstream Salween dam projects, which was developed by conspiracy of supra-state organization and transnational corporation, demonstrates that the power is not clearly handed by the nation-state as such. The power is intangible that hides and flows into somewhere which is difficult to see and capture. It seemed that the power is moving, back and forth, in-between state, supra-state, and transnational corporate institutions.

For the border people who propose against the Salween dam projects, how do they fight back the intangible power at local scale? They, even, did not clearly know who they are going to struggle with. In doing so, they deal with various agencies who came down to local ground. To overcome their difficulties, they sometimes collaborated with NGOs, but they worked with local authority in many times.

In terms of space, the state authorities conceived these areas as border areas, trying to freeze the border people and bound them into the border areas, regardless their livelihood and security. The border people, otherwise, perceived the geographic areas and look at their life as the important combination of border. In this regard, they can create their own space that they are able to find the place to stand on. As in the environmental movement, they articulated their own position with natural resource management. That is the way they mobilize their identity while the environmental movement is growing up.

The border people make sense of their own place. The border people have accumulated knowledge and learnt, more and more, to know their place. Throughout the times, knowledges about their place were recovered and created. They internalized those knowledges and shaped the way of looking at the place. By knowing their place, it became instrument of local people using to deal with outsiders. Moreover, they re-imagined themselves through the process of place-making that makes sense for Thai society. Particularly, they re-defined their place as village within boundary of Thai state in the way of referring to the King's power. Therefore, these border areas become the creating sites for struggle.

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