1. The Pak Mun Dam

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

The Pak Mun Dam is a multipurpose project during the same year.

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 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%.

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.

Northeastern Siames 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 Viêtnam 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 resentment even now.

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

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 for the impending isolation of theretofore bountiful migratory fish-ways 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, 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 community feedback to reach the 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 EIA's or other mechanisms to enable community feedback to reach the decision-making table. In such a climate of fear, ignorance and 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.

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 for the impending isolation of theretofore bountiful migratory fish-ways 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, 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 community feedback to reach the 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 EIA's or other mechanisms to enable community feedback to reach the decision-making table. In such a climate of fear, ignorance and 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.

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.
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...

“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 whisked away on a current of warm air to the enormous furnaces which were hidden somewhere in the recesses of the building.”

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!

source: [http://laopdnews.wordpress.com](http://laopdnews.wordpress.com)