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Strategies of Successful Anti-Dam Movements: Evidence from Myanmar and Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Scholars are rarely able to examine anti-dam movements that result in project suspensions or cancellations since these cases are rare empirically. Yet, they are central to understanding how anti-dam movements can succeed. This paper analyzes the movements against Myanmar's Myitsone Dam and Thailand's Kaeng Suea Ten Dam. Likely the most successful anti-dam movements in Southeast Asia in recent years, they achieved suspension over 6 and 37 years, respectively. The research is based on 60 semistructured interviews carried out over a period of 8 months. Leveraging thinking from both the constructionist and structural schools within the field of social movement studies, it is found that the framing of the Myitsone Dam as a project threatening the national cultural heritage of Myanmar (in combination with political change in the country in 2010/2011) largely explains the movement's success. Meanwhile, the set of sophisticated tactics (including *inter alia* demonstrations, *Thai Baan* research, 24/7 monitoring of the dam site, and spiritual activities) was decisive for the efficacy of the movement against Thailand's Kaeng Suea Ten Dam.

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Introduction

A surge in dam construction since the early 2000s is projected to continue for the foreseeable future (Zarfl et al. 2015, 161). Although dams have been built for nearly 5,000 years, challenges in mitigating their vast environmental and social impacts continue, which can be seen as a part of the technical requirements of dam construction (Scudder 2012; Haas and Skinner 2015; Urban et al. 2015). Hence, it can be questioned if dams are an appropriate technology to use (WCD 2000; Ansar et al. 2014). The failure to mitigate their negative impacts has led to many anti-dam campaigns, with perhaps the most famous being the one initiated against India's Narmada dam projects in the late 1980s (Khagram 2004, 65). Examples of current large dam projects contested are those in India's state of Sikkim (Huber and Joshi 2015) and those to be built on the Mekong River in Laos and Cambodia (Molle, Foran, and Floch 2009).

Despite the current boom in dam construction and the prevalence of anti-dam protests, Rodríguez-Labajos and Martínez-Alier (2015, 538) find that "water conflicts and water-based activism [have] not been given much [scholarly] attention." Anti-dam movements in the developing world resulting in project suspensions or cancellations have been largely

neglected by the scientific community (these are defined as “successful anti-dam movements” throughout this paper). The likely reason is that these cases are extremely rare empirically (further outlined in the next section). Yet, they can illuminate how anti-dam movements can be successful (albeit those non-successful movements can contribute relevant insights as well). This paper aims to exemplify how anti-dam movements can succeed through a comparative study of the campaigns against Myanmar’s Myitsone Dam and Thailand’s Kaeng Suea Ten Dam. Two of the most successful such movements in Southeast Asia in recent years, they achieved suspension over 6 and 37 years, respectively.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. “Methods” outlines the methodology adopted, while “Theoretical Framing” frames the analyses within the field of social movement (SM) studies. “Environmental Activism in Myanmar and Thailand” outlines environmental activism in Myanmar and Thailand. “Evidence on Successful Anti-Dam Movements from Myanmar and Thailand” narrates the struggles against Myanmar’s Myitsone Dam and Thailand’s Kaeng Suea Ten Dam. “Discussion” discusses these cases, and “Conclusion” summarizes the argument.

Methods

A comparative case study method was chosen as a research design to analyze anti-dam movements, as such small-N research is believed to be valuable in developing nuanced theoretical insights (Lijphart 1971). Indeed, my review of the relevant literature suggests that more theory development and nuancing may be needed regarding successful anti-dam movements. In this review, more than 30 scholarly articles on the strategies of anti-dam movements were identified (see Appendix for methods used to generate this list of articles), of which only five analyzed a canceled or suspended project. As per Hou (2000), Jain (2000), and Moore (1998), three of them are projects in the developed world, with the respective movements possibly not being identical with those in the developing world due to the entirely different contexts in which activists operate (McAdam et al. 2010, 403). Chandra’s (2013) and Sneddon and Fox’s (2008) are the only scholarly case studies identified that analyze successful anti-dam movements in the developing world—a minuscule body of literature, considering that such movements are likely of most interest to environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as well as international donors and dam developers. I hypothesize that few cases of successful anti-dam movements have been studied because they are quite rare empirically. Indeed, an activist interviewed acknowledged that most movements are unable to stop a dam project (TNI15; see next paragraph for details on this code). Why anti-dam movements are mostly unsuccessful is not the focus of this paper, however.

To develop a narrative regarding both movements presented in this paper, semistructured interviews were conducted in Myanmar and Thailand over a period of 8 months in 2015 and 2016. Interviews were carried out through telephone/Skype as well as face-to-face (see table of interviewees in the Appendix). Information regarding interviewee recruitment and sample termination can be found by Kirchherr, Charles, and Walton (2017). As detailed there, all interviews were coded. The first letter indicates the mode of interview (T for telephone/Skype, F for face-to-face, O for online survey/e-mail) and the second the type (AA for adversely affected people, G for government, I for international

donor, NI for international NGO, NL for local NGO, P for private sector). The number designates the overall interview number within a type.

Theoretical Framing

An anti-dam movement is a SM, defined as “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society” (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1217–18). In this paper, the term refers to the belief that one or more dams must not be constructed due to various environmental and/or social impacts. A movement’s preferences are implemented through its strategy, defined as “how we turn what we have into what we need” (Ganz 2000, 1010). The strategy, in turn, can be implemented by one or more SM organizations (SMOs). Comprising formal organizations such as the environmental NGO international rivers, these identify with the preferences of a SM (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1212).

The role of SMOs in a movement’s success is contested among scholars. Within contemporary SM studies, the constructionist and the structural schools are rivals, with the structuralists allegedly being dominant (Goodwin and Jasper 2004, 12; Smith and Fetner 2010, 44). Adopted as analytical lenses throughout this paper, both approaches cover “an enormous terrain” (Smith and Fetner 2010, 15). Hence, the summaries of them in this section can only present what I view as cornerstones of particular relevance for this paper.

I begin by outlining the likely common denominator of both schools: the concept of political opportunity structures (POS), defined as “dimensions of the political environment which either encourage or discourage people from using collective action” (Tarrow 1994, 19). These dimensions are commonly operationalized by democracy indicators such as those of the Polity IV project (McAdam et al. 2010, 415). Originally introduced by the structural school (Goodwin, Jasper, and Khattra 1999, 27), the POS concept is said by critics (e.g., Gamson and Meyer 1996) to “suffocate social movement research” (Koopmans 1999, 93). However, both the constructionist and structural schools currently acknowledge POS as the context that significantly influences a movement’s emergence and eventual success, with relatively open POS generally viewed as conducive for SMs (Smith and Fetner 2010, 6; Porta and Diani 2015).

Within this context, scholars adhering to the constructionist approach emphasize the importance of culture to gain popular support for a movement, while downplaying the role of particular SMOs (Buechler 2000, 11; Smith and Fetner 2010). Culture “consists of [...] shared mental worlds and their perceived embodiments” (Jasper 2010, 60), exemplified by practices such as mass prayer ceremonies. These shared mental worlds are created through “framing” of the movement’s issue(s). Goffman popularized this term, defining it as a “schemata of interpretation” (Goffman 1974, 21). Framing is particularly successful in creating shared mental worlds if it evokes emotions, a concept entirely “repressed [...] under structural models” (Jasper 2010, 80). Many constructionists believe an emotional framing of an issue that appeals to a broad popular base to be decisive for a movement’s success (Goodwin and Jasper 2004; Porta and Diani 2015).

Its very name suggests that scholars adhering to the structural approach pay particular attention to SMOs and additional formal organizations in their analysis of an SM and its struggles (Smith and Fetner 2010, 13). In this school, “the most widely appreciated kinds of [SMO] resources” (Edwards and McCarthy 2003, 1) are movement leadership,

constituents, and organization (including external networks), along with internal and external financial resources for self-administration, and outreach (see also McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1216; Opp 2009, 128). Due to the emphasis on resources, selected scholars sometimes also call the structural approach the “resource mobilization approach,” although “structural approach” seems to be more common (Opp 2009, 127). Many adherents to the structural school believe capable movement leadership, constituents, and organization paired with ample financial resources as most decisive in a movement’s success (Smith and Fetner 2010; Porta and Diani 2015).

The remainder of this paper reflects the theoretical framing presented in this section. “Environmental Activism in Myanmar and Thailand” mostly discusses POS in Myanmar and Thailand, with the environmental activism in both countries providing a context for the subsequent analyses. These analyses build on the attempts to bridge the constructionist and structural schools within SM studies (see Porta 2014). “Evidence on Successful Anti-Dam Movements from Myanmar and Thailand” introduces the two narratives with a discussion of the framing of the movement’s cause (reflecting thinking from the constructionist school), followed by an analysis of the movement leadership, constituents, and organization as well as its financial backing (reflecting thinking from the structural school).

Environmental Activism in Myanmar and Thailand

Environmental activists in Myanmar and Thailand have operated under different POSs in the past decades, which have impacted environmental activism in these countries. Myanmar was under the rule of an oppressive military junta from 1962 to 2011, and any civil society/pro-democracy protests, such as the 1988 protests facilitated by the 88 Generation Students Group, were brutally suppressed (FNL23; Simpson 2013, 74). Thailand, on the other hand, has switched repeatedly between democracy and the rule of an oppressive military junta. The latest military coup d’état took place in 2014, with the Royal Armed Forces still in power in early 2017 (TNL17; Forsyth 2010, 462). In Thailand, phases of democratic rule proved vital for the development of country’s civil society. In contrast to Myanmar, however (Forsyth and Walker 2014, 412), lively environmental activism existed even when the junta was in power, since “the strictures faced by Thai activists were generally much less severe than those in Myanmar, although [some] repression was not uncommon [in Thailand either]” (Simpson 2014, 90).

Environmental activism in both countries is interlinked because the repression of environmental activists in Myanmar resulted in the fleeing of activists to (*inter alia*) Thailand; activists began returning to Myanmar after its opening up from 2011 onward (Simpson 2014, 55). It could be argued that many returnees now campaigning against dam projects in Myanmar were influenced by environmental activism in Thailand. Thai activism intensified in the late 1980s (Middleton 2012, 293), with sweeping resistance against such projects preventing policymakers from completing any large dams after the controversial Pak Mun Dam in 1994 (Sneddon and Fox 2008, 632; Hirsch 2010, 315).

Thai policymakers then began to search abroad to satisfy the country’s growing energy demand and power its economy, negotiating (*inter alia*) the construction of projects such as Laos’ operational 1,070 MW Nam Theun 2 (NT2) Dam¹ and several others on Myanmar’s Salween River, such as the controversial Mong Ton Dam (Simpson 2007, 549; Middleton 2012, 293). Deregulation and resulting profit motives of companies in

the Thai energy sector further drove this search (Matthews 2012, 396; Baird and Quastel 2015, 1224).² In addition, the search was facilitated by financiers such as the World Bank, which can pursue dam projects (such as the Kaeng Suea Tean Dam) to use surplus capital and hence meet annual spending targets (most simply accomplished through large and thus costly projects; Park 2010; Ahlers, Zwartveen, and Bakker 2017, 562). According to Molle, Foran, and Floch (2009, 11), communities are “exploited by [such] private companies [and] financiers.”

Yet, these communities frequently spurn projects that threaten the environment on which they depend, a resistance dubbed “environmentalism by the poor” by Martinez-Alier (2002, 10). Indeed, environmental activism in Thailand has frequently been carried out by villagers protesting against various infrastructure projects that threaten their livelihoods (Forsyth and Walker 2014, 412). Yet, the middle class as well as international NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund also play a large role (Forsyth 2007), the latter thanks to Thailand’s comparatively open POS. Meanwhile, Myanmar’s restrictive POS limited the involvement of international NGOs before its opening, and communities adversely affected by dam construction and local NGOs continue to stir much of the activism there (FI8; Simpson 2013, 113; further discussed in “The Struggle Against Myanmar’s Myitsone Dam”).

Evidence on Successful Anti-Dam Movements from Myanmar and Thailand

This section narrates the struggles against Myanmar’s Myitsone Dam and Thailand’s Kaeng Suea Ten Dam. Key information on both projects is provided in Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2. Additional information regarding the Kaeng Suea Ten Dam’s impacts can be found by Kirchherr, Pomun, and Walton (2016).

Struggle Against Myanmar’s Myitsone Dam

Issue Framing

FNL3, FNL6, and TNL13 framed the river the Myitsone Dam is supposed to be built on emotionally, as an embodiment of the national cultural heritage of Myanmar. (“This dam impacts our holy river [the Irrawaddy], the heart of this country”; FNL3.)

Table 1. Key facts regarding the Myitsone Dam and the Kaeng Suea Ten Dam.

	Myitsone Dam	Kaeng Suea Ten Dam
Key milestones	2009: Start of preconstruction works 2011: Suspension of project	1980: Decision by Thai government to build dam
Main purpose	Electricity exports to China (90% of dam’s electricity to be exported in exchange for U.S.\$500 million annually)	Flood control (dam supposed to hold 1,200 m ³ water to prevent flooding particularly in Sukhotai Province)
Capacity (MW)	6,000 (15th largest hydropower plan in the world if completed)	49
Construction costs (USD million)	3,600	100
Resettlement	12,000 people	2,960 people
Project sponsor	China power investment cooperation (CPI) in cooperation with Asia World, Burmese developer	No sponsor (World Bank pulled out as a sponsor in the 1990s)

Sources: Bunte et al. (2012, p. 145 ff.), U.S. Embassy (2011), KDNG (2007), FAA20, FAA41, FNL21.

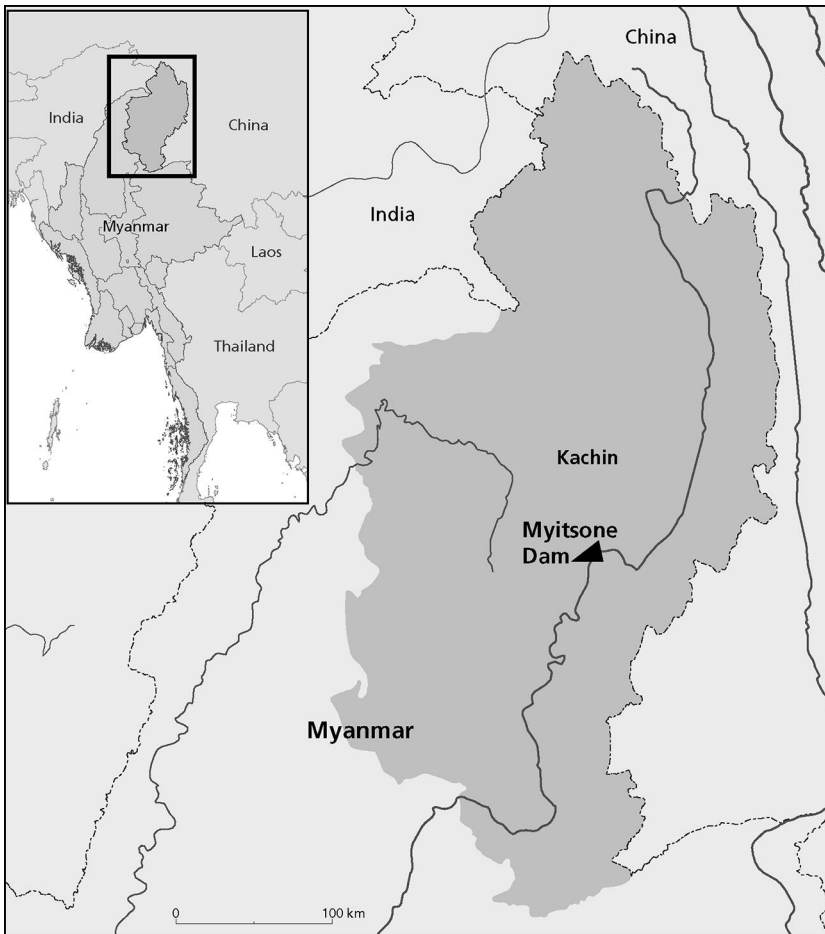


Figure 1. Myanmar.

These interviewees also pointed to this framing as the main reason why the Myitsone Dam is widely opposed—by up to 85% of people in Myanmar, according to one survey (FNL3). Yet, this specific framing and the resulting opposition apparently developed over time.

A pastor displaced because of the dam claimed to have first heard about it by coincidence, in 2003 (FAA1; further discussed by Kiik 2016, 380). The pastor then reached out to various civil society organizations and policymakers in Kachin State for protest support. Hence, the movement started as “environmentalism of the poor,” as the initial resistance emerged in the communities whose livelihoods the project threatened. The pastor framed the dam construction as a “threat to the culture of the whole Kachin tribe” (FAA1), but decision makers in Kachin State did not initially believe that such a dam would be built (FG7, FAA1).

This situation changed only upon the national government’s announcement of the project in a newspaper in 2007 (FG7, TNL17). Reported to be the leading environmental NGO advocating against the dam (FNL21), Kachin Development Networking Group (KDNG) released a major report against the project the same year (KDNG 2007), notably under the rule of the military junta. Most arguments in it focus on displacement and

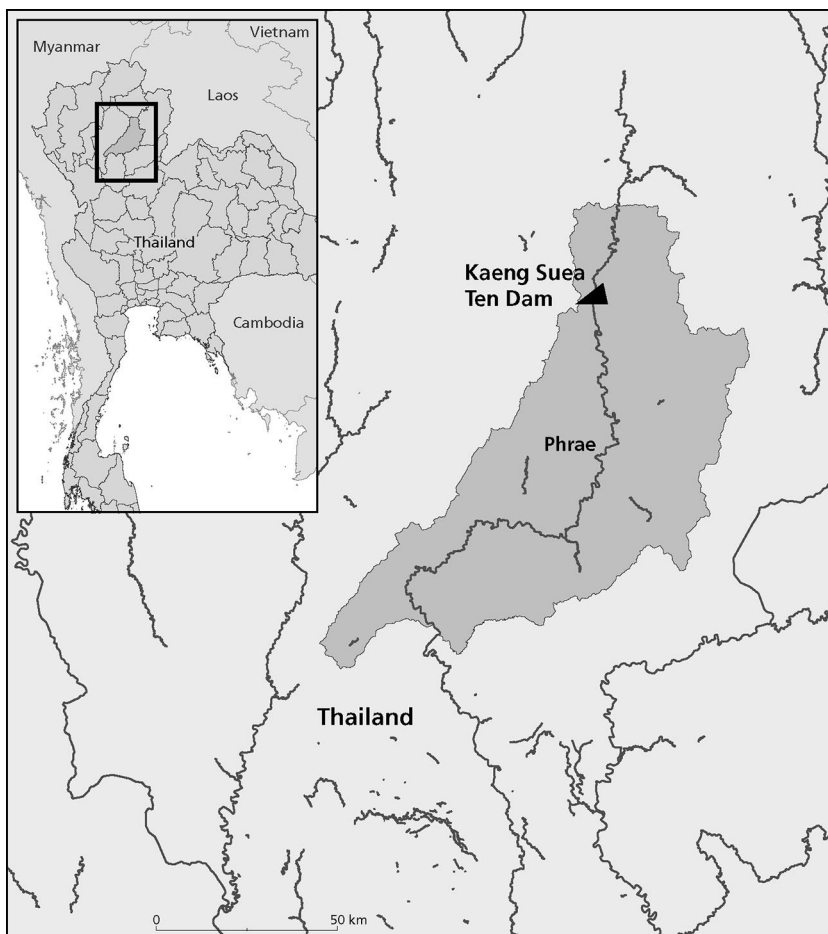


Figure 2. Thailand.

environmental impacts (KDNG 2007, 23). Kiik (2016, 376) hypothesizes that Kachin activists chose this framing (instead of the pastor's) for audiences outside of their ethnic group, while truly seeing the project “as part of an alarming set of existential threats to Kachin [cultural] survival.” Yet, despite this framing, the project gathered significant attention only once the November 2010 elections had taken place (FNL21, FNL23), as it was viewed as suitable by many to test the novel, allegedly now civilian government. “This was one of the few not-so-political issues out there. Protesting against [it] was certainly less dangerous than protesting for the release of political prisoners” (FI8).

The framing of the project focused on the dam's national cultural impacts only when the movement reached Yangon.³ According to activists interviewed, this emphasis was a conscious choice. Some of them had been abroad during the rule of the military junta, gaining valuable campaign experience, such as work in environmental NGOs in Thailand (stated *inter alia* by FNL3, FNL20, and FNL21). “We [thus] understood that we needed a sticky message to appeal to a wider audience” (FNL20). Not resonating as much with the notion of “environmentalism of the poor,” these activists eventually chose the project's national cultural impacts as the movement's key message over human rights violations. Due to

the project's malpractice resettlement (FAA2, FAA3, FAA5), the latter framing would also have been a possibility, but they deemed human rights to be "a too well-known message already" (FNL20).

To implement this wider framing, various tactics were chosen. Prominent performers released songs on the cultural significance of the Irrawaddy River (FNL6), and a 3-days art exhibition on the beauty of the Irrawaddy River featuring work by environmental photographer Myint Zaw was launched in a Yangon art gallery in mid-September 2011 (the Myitsone Dam project was suspended only 6 days after the end of the exhibition; F18, FNL6). Notably, many activists did not explicitly mention the Myitsone Dam in their campaign framing until project suspension, referring only to the Irrawaddy River as a national cultural heritage to be saved. Indicating how risky activists generally considered any protest activity, early demonstrations against the Myitsone Dam in Kachin State were also masked as mass prayer ceremonies for the Irrawaddy River (FNL3; KDNG 2007). No open discourse regarding the dam took place between the government and activists, as also found by Kiik (2016, 376).

Movement Leadership, Constituents, and Organization

These descriptions can be read as if the campaign against the Myitsone Dam was shaped by particular movement leaders. Indeed, Myint Zaw was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for his "underground 'Save the Irrawaddy' campaign" (FNL21). However, this honor was criticized by activists interviewed in Kachin State, who pointed out that Myint Zaw only joined the campaign once it had reached Yangon (FNL21, FNL23). Interviewees such as FNL12, TNL17, or FNL23 also conveyed that no single activist or organization was instrumental in the campaign. While none of the interviewees stated this explicitly, the impression based on the interviews is that the campaign against the Myitsone Dam overall was rather disjointed, but became less so once it had reached Yangon and attracted additional constituents. Yet it seems that no overall organizational structure was maintained within the movement at any point in time.

Financial Resources

The movement not only became more focused, but funding also likely increased once it reached Yangon. Because many organizations participated, a concrete estimate of the movement's overall budget could not be created. KDNG's annual budget varies between U.S.\$30,000 and 50,000, and all of the funds were spent on outreach, thanks to volunteers who handled the administration (TNL17). As a comparison, China Power Investment (CPI) has already spent up to 800 million on the project (Lwin 2015). When the campaign reached Yangon, local elites (such as several famous Burmese writers) also contributed to the movement's outreach budget (FNL6). Funding from outside sources included the U.S. embassy in Myanmar (FNL3; U.S. Embassy 2011). International NGOs funded the movement and its direct protest activities only upon project suspension, with the most notable example likely being International Rivers (2013). Initially, local NGOs hesitated to build relations with international ones because simply contacting them could result in 3-years prison sentences during the military junta rule (Simpson 2013, 113). Organizations such as International Rivers continue to play a marginal role in the campaign against the Myitsone Dam in the belief that "the local movement [is] very strong [so there is] no clear need or role for ... involvement" (FNI14).

While none of my interviewees mentioned funding as crucial for the movement, it undoubtedly contributed to its success by helping to spread the movement's message. The culmination of the movement's protests in the suspension of the project still surprised interviewees such as FNL3, TI7, and FP19. This decision was not solely attributed to the campaign. First, interviewees also suggested that the national government wanted to display its strength against China. Many in Myanmar perceived the country to be a "client state of China" (FP19), an image portraying the national government as weak (which it was thus keen to rebut; Simpson 2014, 20; 121 ff.; FP19). Second, the new government also viewed the suspension as a symbolic gesture, as evidence "that they are now listening to the people" (FNL12; largely echoed *inter alia* by TI7, FI8, and TP24). Due to this unique context of political change, an activist hypothesized that this movement may be difficult to replicate (TNL13).

Struggle Against Thailand's Kaeng Suea Ten Dam

Issue Framing

Most interviewees opposed the project primarily because it required them to resettle (e.g., FAA8, FAA14, or FAA28). "We love it here. This is our home" (FAA28). Yet environmental framing was also mentioned, although apparently it was introduced only after collaboration with NGOs (FAA7, FAA10, FAA29). From 1989 onward, the first NGO collaborating with the villagers was Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT), which was particularly active at that time (Forsyth 2007, 2118). It helped the villagers understand the dams' socioeconomic impacts, through actions such as organizing visits to communities resettled because of the Sirikit and Bhumibol Dams (FAA24, FAA27, TNL10, TNL26). Yet, WFT's primary concern was not the project's socioeconomic impacts (the framing of the villagers) but its environmental ones (TNL26): the project would flood teak forests that WFT wanted to protect (TNL26). When WFT arrived, villagers were cutting down teak trees to sell (TNL26). The conservation framing was eventually adopted by the villagers (in addition to the still dominant socioeconomic framing), with WFT claiming that no support could be gathered for villagers exploiting their forests (TLN26). "Convincing them took 2 years," WFT staff said (TNL26).

Yet, the dam project continues to be framed not only by the villagers and WFT, but also by the government and people downstream of the potential site. They view it as a prime solution to their flooding and drought issues and are thus seen as key antagonists by the villagers (acknowledged by FAA31, FAA39, and FAA45).

Movement Leadership, Constituents, and Organization

The movement is largely organized by the villages' anti-dam committees (140 members; FAA40), and it thus resonates particularly with the notion of "environmentalism of the poor." It is amplified by networks to various NGOs (FAA41, TG5, FNL18). The committee is led by an elected chair (FAA31) and a secretary who administers its funding (see the end of this section; FAA42). Each of the affected villages also has a specific movement chair who reports to the overall chair. At times, these specific chairpersons appoint subleaders (FAA42, FA44), who exemplifies the movement's sophisticated organizational structure. The committee monitors governmental efforts toward dam construction and adjusts its level of activity accordingly. Few protests have occurred since 2014, when the current

military government indicated that the project would not be a priority (FAA44). The committee also takes majority decisions regarding which tactics to implement (“and everyone accepts these”; FAA44), which are then passed down to the villagers through the described structure.

The tactics developed by the committee and implemented by the villagers (with 22 of 23 villagers asked reporting having taken part in them) evolved over time, partly as a response to the framing of the project by downstream communities and the government (“In the beginning, we had no system”; FAA24). Because the government did not take the resistance seriously (FAA24), a different campaign approach was needed. In particular, the NGO Living River Siam Association was credited with teaching the villagers how to campaign. It introduced *Thai Baan* research,⁴ which includes the development of alternatives to the construction of the dam (FNL18). *Thai Baan* research helped the villagers carry out factual conversations with those proposing the project, and these arguments (particularly the alternatives suggested) are apparently sought by journalists writing about the project (TG5, FAA31). Assembly of the Poor (AoP; Missingham 2002) was also credited, particularly for inviting the villagers to various mass demonstrations in Bangkok and Chiang Mai (these were carried out by villagers from all over Thailand who feared dam-induced displacement and were possibly due to the country’s relatively open POS; FAA40). The demonstrations ensure that the protests against the project remain visible to key decision makers.

The current protest system comprises not only demonstrations and *Thai Baan* research but also 24/7 monitoring of the potential site, spiritual activities such as puppet burning, and collaborations with villages downstream. The monitoring ensures that project proponents cannot take the villagers by surprise, with all of them gathering at the dam site to defend it if dam proponents approach (FAA10). The puppet burning usually targets specific officials within Thailand’s Royal Irrigation Department (“one official whose puppet we burnt even came to our villages and asked us to remove the curse” said FAA40). At last, an NGO-funded project in the late 1990s (with a follow-up in the mid-2000s) brought together the people from the 11 provinces on the Yom River to exchange views (FAA31, FAA40), and villagers such as FAA30 argued that the support of downstream people for the dam lessened as a result of these exchanges.

Constituting a “system of protest” (FAA61), their activities are seen by various interviewees (e.g., FAA11, FAA16) as the key reason why the dam has not yet been constructed. My reading of the case also suggests that this system of protest is the most decisive for this movement’s success.

Financial Resources

Outreach activities such as travel to protests in Bangkok are mostly financed through a dam opposition fund (FAA41). A fund of ~U.S.\$4,000 was set up and is maintained by volunteer movement leaders (FAA40). Approximately U.S.\$2,000 was gathered through a “mandatory payment” (FAA40, FAA41), with households asked to contribute U.S.\$3 each whenever funding runs low (FAA38, FAA41). The remainder is collected through donations from villagers, with amounts averaging U.S.\$3 per interviewee per year (FAA32, FAA33). The average annual household income in the villages was reported to be U.S.\$718 (FAA40). If this estimate is correct, the entire fund would only amount to the combined income of six village households (although government data indicate that the annual income may be higher).

It is acknowledged that the NGOs involved also require funding to support the movement (e.g., AoP for organizing protests of multiple villages in Bangkok), and their staff members are usually paid with the overall movement, thus facing some self-administration costs. Relevant funding data of the various NGOs involved could not be obtained. It is assumed that the bulk of relevant movement funding is covered by the dam opposition fund, although villagers' travel costs to a protest are likely to be much higher than organizing one, for instance. Hence, the sophisticated system of protest described can likely be implemented without much funding.

Discussion

The previous section presented two case studies of successful anti-dam campaigns that highlight the importance of framing when analyzing such campaigns. Echoing the constructionist school within social movement studies, I contend that the framing of a dam project is the key starting point for understanding an anti-dam movement. The instrumental role of framing for an anti-dam movement has already been highlighted by Moore (1998, 299), Hou (2000, 2), and Sneddon and Fox (2008, 637). The emotional framing of the Myitsone Dam case as a project threatening Myanmar's national cultural heritage was identified as the main reason for the movement's success, with most of the interviewees pointing out that this framing helped unite an ethnically divided country against the project. While an alternative explanation of a sophisticated protest system was suggested in the case of the Kaeng Suea Ten Dam, I argue that the contestation over framing this project prepared the ground for the movement's eventual success.

Indeed, tactics implemented by the movement against this dam project (with its sophisticated system of protest leading to its suspension for 37 years) may be seen as a result of competing framings. Yong and Grundy-Warr (2012, 1045) also imply this proposition in their analysis of the Lower Mekong mainstream dam debates, finding that activists engaged in scientific research on dams' impacts as a response to a narrative from pro-hydropower advocates. Similarly, I found that activists adopted more sophisticated strategies, such as conducting *Thai Baan* research and suggesting dam project alternatives as a response to their promotion by government and downstream communities as a solution to flood and drought issues. No comparable activities were observed in the case of Myanmar's Myitsone Dam because activists did not have to compete with a domestic pro-dam narrative. The military junta refused to explain its stance or respond to protests until project suspension, while 90% of the project's electricity would have been exported to China, which many view as Myanmar's main antagonist (FNL3; Kiik 2016, 375).

These case studies further suggest that a movement's framing broadens over time and that this expansion is vital for its success. Tarrow (1998, 105) states that movements "must frame their demands in ways that will attract [many] followers," a view shared by many constructionists (as shown in "Theoretical Framing"). Authors on social movements such as Kilgore (1999, 194) or Kim (2011, 320) assume the framing appealing to a popular base to be static. However, the framing of Myanmar's Myitsone Dam developed from a narrative of displacement and threat to the Kachin people and their culture to one that addressed the entire country through a focus on the Irrawaddy River's cultural significance for Myanmar. Due to this framing beyond the local scale, many more citizens were led to perceive a stake in the project. In Thailand, the movement's framing of the Kaeng Suea Ten Dam evolved

from a narrative on displacement to one that also stressed the project's environmental implications (echoing findings on environmental activism in Thailand by Forsyth 2007).

The case studies further suggest that changes in the movement's constituents induced changes in framing and in its primary tactics, thus being a key for the movement's success (echoing the structural school within social movement studies). Ganz (2004, 178–79) noted that the failure to focus on movement leadership and constituents is a “serious shortcoming of social movement theory,” a claim largely echoed by Morris (2004, 209). This alleged shortcoming has been addressed by scholars on anti-dam movements in recent years such as Young (2008, 183). These case studies replicate these findings, stressing that the national cultural framing of the Myitsone Dam campaign was consciously adopted as the most “sticky message” (FNL20), with emotional appeal for a wide audience. Some of the activists joining the movement in Yangon had returned to Myanmar from exile only upon its opening up, leveraging their campaign experience gathered when abroad (including in Thailand). They understood that significant solidarity for the issue of those to be displaced could only be gathered if the movement's framing was broadened (as stated by FNL3, FNL20, and FNL21). Similarly, the environmental framing of the Kaeng Suea Ten Dam campaign was introduced only when it developed beyond “environmentalism of the poor,” with WFT joining in and linking their knowledge (claims) regarding framing to the movement. Due to its relatively open POS at that time, WFT was active in Thailand, and the movement thus benefitted from these relatively open POSs. Furthermore, NGOs introduced novel tactics to villagers subject to displacement by Thailand's Kaeng Suea Ten Dam. These ranged from demonstrations to *Thai Baan* research, which proved decisive for the movement's success (FAA40, FNL18). This finding echoes those of Islam and Islam (2016, 12), who also describe how constituents introduced novel tactics, such as a petition to the United Nations in the international movement against India's Tipaimukh Dam.

The framing regarding both dam projects is grounded in their environmental, social, and cultural impacts. Yet, the case studies suggest that massive impacts do not seem to be a necessary condition for a campaign that results in project suspension. After all, the impacts of the Kaeng Suae Ten Dam are rather limited compared to those of the much larger Myitsone Dam (as shown in Table 1). Nevertheless, a successful campaign still emerged against this project, which is rooted in the initial resistance of those to be displaced by it—a resistance that allowed additional constituents to join in and broaden the movement's framing. This finding may be of particular interest to those in Southeast Asia wondering if successful campaigns can be staged not only against the various extremely large dams planned on the Mekong but also against the smaller ones planned on its tributaries.

Finally, I found (echoing Chandra 2013, 55) that the amount of campaign funding seems to be largely irrelevant for the success of anti-dam movements in developing countries, which can control much of their costs (including self-administration costs) through volunteers. Yet, Moore (1998, 310) argued that the struggle of the Sierra Club against the United States' New Los Padres Dam was successful since it “spent the most of any oppositional group.” This research suggests that thanks to many volunteers, even the sophisticated protest system developed by the villagers fearing displacement because of the Kaeng Suea Ten Dam was implementable with limited financial backing (with the entire dam opposition fund amounting to the combined income of six of the 1,206 households in the relevant villages). While the overall budget of the movement against Myanmar's Myitsone Dam could not be estimated, data suggest that it was minuscule, particularly when compared to the budgets of project

advocates. (The leading environmental NGO against the dam reported an annual budget of up to U.S.\$50,000 for outreach activities, compared to 800 million spent by the developer; TNL17; Lwin 2015). This finding may be particularly encouraging for environmental NGOs that frequently struggle to secure significant funding for their work.

Conclusion

Anti-dam campaigns are omnipresent, and they can significantly impact project conduct, such as the implementation of consultation or resettlement schemes (Hall 1994, 1805). Yet, those resulting in project suspensions or cancellations remain rare empirically (TNI15). Hence, scholars have had limited opportunities to study the strategies of such successes. Indeed, only two scholarly case studies were identified that discussed anti-dam movements in the developing world that led to project suspensions or cancellations: Chandra (2013) and Sneddon and Fox (2008).

This paper's objective was to explore how anti-dam movements can succeed. For this purpose, I have analyzed two pertinent movements in Southeast Asia. Likely the most successful ones in recent years, they achieved project suspensions for 6 and 37 years, respectively. It was found that the movement against the Myitsone Dam in Myanmar was successful largely due to the framing eventually adopted, which described the project emotionally as a threat to the country's national cultural heritage. It thus appealed to a wide popular base, with the political change in the country in 2010/2011 creating conducive conditions for the movement. Meanwhile, the movement against the Kaeng Suea Ten Dam in Thailand ensured its success through a sophisticated campaign strategy that developed at least partly as a response to the competing framings regarding the project (with those opposing it framing it as a threat to villagers' livelihoods and the environment and those advocating it framing it as a solution to flood and drought issues).

The case studies overall highlight the importance of framing as well as movement constituents when studying anti-dam campaigns. Emotional framing that appeals beyond the local scale can explain an anti-dam movement's success, and competing framings can result in sophisticated tactics that eventually also lead to project suspension (even for projects which are not extremely large and thus feature comparatively moderate impacts). Framing was found to be evolving in both cases studied, with its gradual broadening being driven by the respective movements' changing constituents. They linked their knowledge and experience with the respective movements, which originated as "environmentalism of the poor" but benefitted greatly from developing beyond this notion.

The case studies suggest that thinking from both the constructionist and structural schools within social movement studies can be helpful analytical lenses to help explain an anti-dam movement's success. Yet, both studies are embedded in specific contexts (e.g., the Myitsone Dam case study may be an anomaly due to the sudden political change in Myanmar in 2011). Thus, caution is warranted regarding the external validity of any findings presented. The context is different for any dam project and resulting movement, and this paper does not aim to imply that anti-dam movements not resulting in project suspension (such as those against projects on the Mekong River) lack suitable framing. Rather, these campaigns may be impeded by the much more restrictive POS in countries such as Laos and Cambodia. Yet, further case study research will be needed to test this hypothesis.

Notes

1. 93% of the electricity of the NT2 Dam is exported to Thailand, with this dam thus “sending more hydropower across national borders than any other project in the history of Southeast Asia” (Baird and Quastel 2015, 1224).
2. It is noted, though, that the Thai energy sector is not yet fully privatized (Baird and Quastel 2015).
3. Those supporting the movement in Yangon also framed the project as benefitting the elites only (Kirchherr, Charles, and Walton 2016, 44). This was not the dominant framing, though, according to my field research. Thus, I am not discussing it in this paper.
4. *Thai Baan* research is research conducted by villagers. This approach was developed in 2000 in the aftermath of the Pak Mun Dam project to enable villagers “to ‘write their own story’ [of impacts]” (Käkönen and Hirsch 2009, 346) and it is now used not only in Thailand, but also (*inter alia*) in Cambodia and Vietnam (Käkönen and Hirsch 2009, 346).

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