

Rational Approach to International River Management in Different Jurisdictional Contexts of the Greater Mekong Sub-region: Water Development Vs Biodiversity Conservation

by

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ABSTRACT

Who hasn't heard of the Greater Mekong? The Southeast Asian River originated from Tibet which flows across southern province of China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam before discharging to the South China Sea. The Mekong is a peaceful river and due to its hydrological and sedimentological regime that formed a pristine aquatic ecology and splendid watershed environment, various habitats for existence and development of endemic fish species and other wildlife occurred.

The ecological characteristics of the Mekong River are diversified following the physical conditions of its natural structures and hydrological regime, of which 4 distinguished ecosystems are empirically defined: the valley waterway system (1), the plateau watershed system (2), the reverse water system (3) and the delta system (4). The hydrological resources contributed from the four ecosystems are crucial to the whole Greater Mekong environment in terms of biodiversity development. Living and non-living aquatic resources are differentiated from one to another ecosystem and have contributed various interests to riparian communities.

Fish, forested products, edible vegetation and lands are the first commodities of the natural resource to be utilized by local people, especially at downstream where the ecology is characterized by numerous waterway corridors and various inundated vegetation. These are home of large catfish species that prevailed the capture fisheries during the past time. Unfortunately, the straggle for food through intensive commercial and subsistent fisheries during the last century together with the surge of water development for agricultural irrigation and generating electricity in recent decades were crucial consequences of the present degradation of natural environment and fish decline.

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Dispute and conflict among resource users, especially between developers and environmental conservators, dam builders and fishers, commercial fishers and subsistent fishers, agriculturists and fishers, fish farmers and fishers etc. spread throughout the region, of which the transborder issues are of great concern of this paper.

Searching for rational solution in different jurisdictional context where interest of natural resource utilization of each riparian country is different one another, an evolutionary approach with logical argument will be applied in deliberately debate. This paper describes and analyses the existing management systems and its consequences and tries to propose new rational concepts that are topics for further discussion.

Key words: different jurisdictional contexts, water development, biodiversity conservation



Figure 1. Environmental transborder map of the Mekong River Basin