



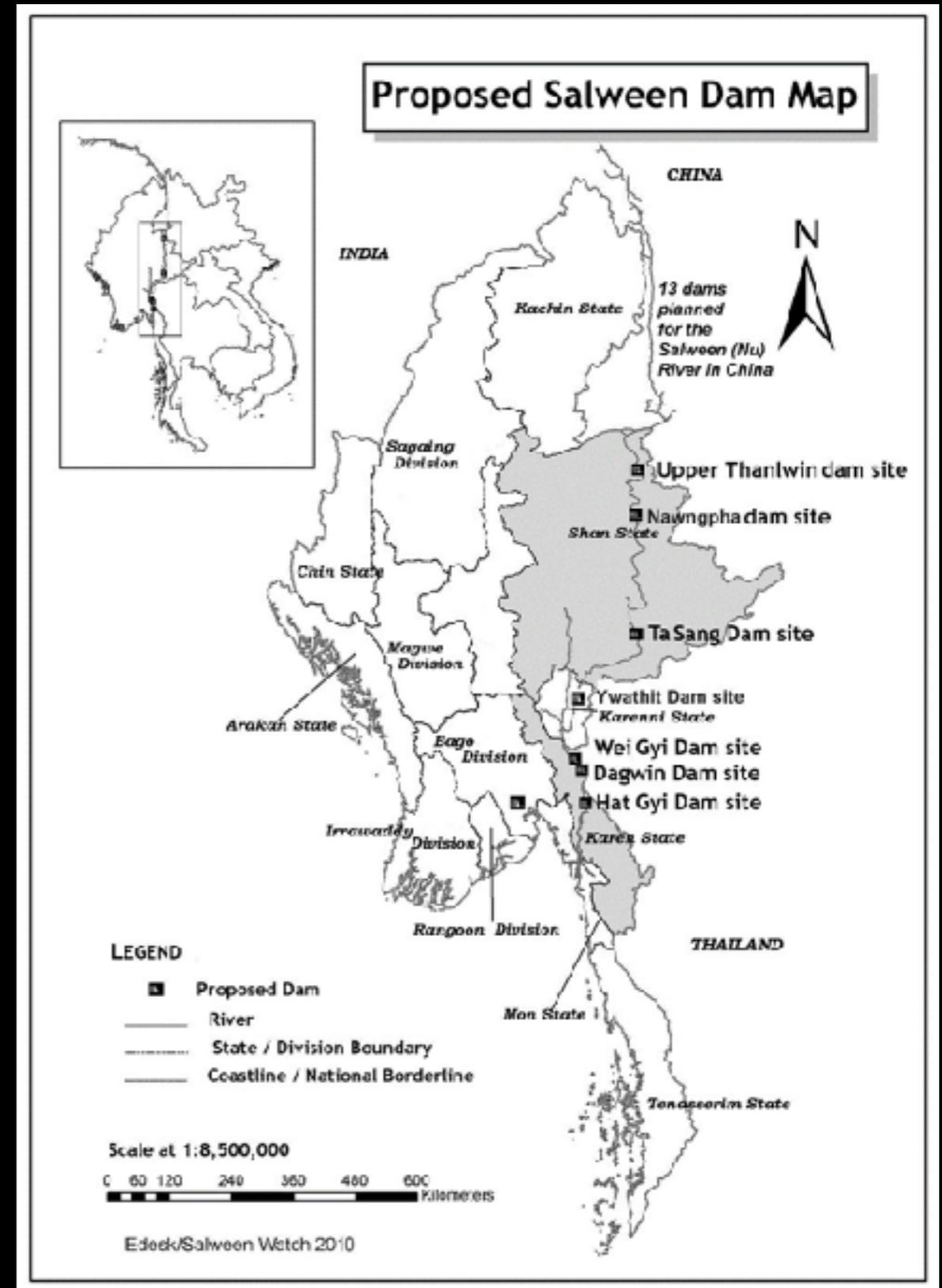
# Not only anti-dam: Rendering complex local communities in their negotiation for development in the Salween Borderlands

Paiboon Hengsuwan  
Department of Women's Studies,  
Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai University

# Introduction

Since 1980s, hydropower dam projects on lower part of Salween River Basin have been planned.

However, civil societies at different scales have mobilized against the proposed Salween dam projects.





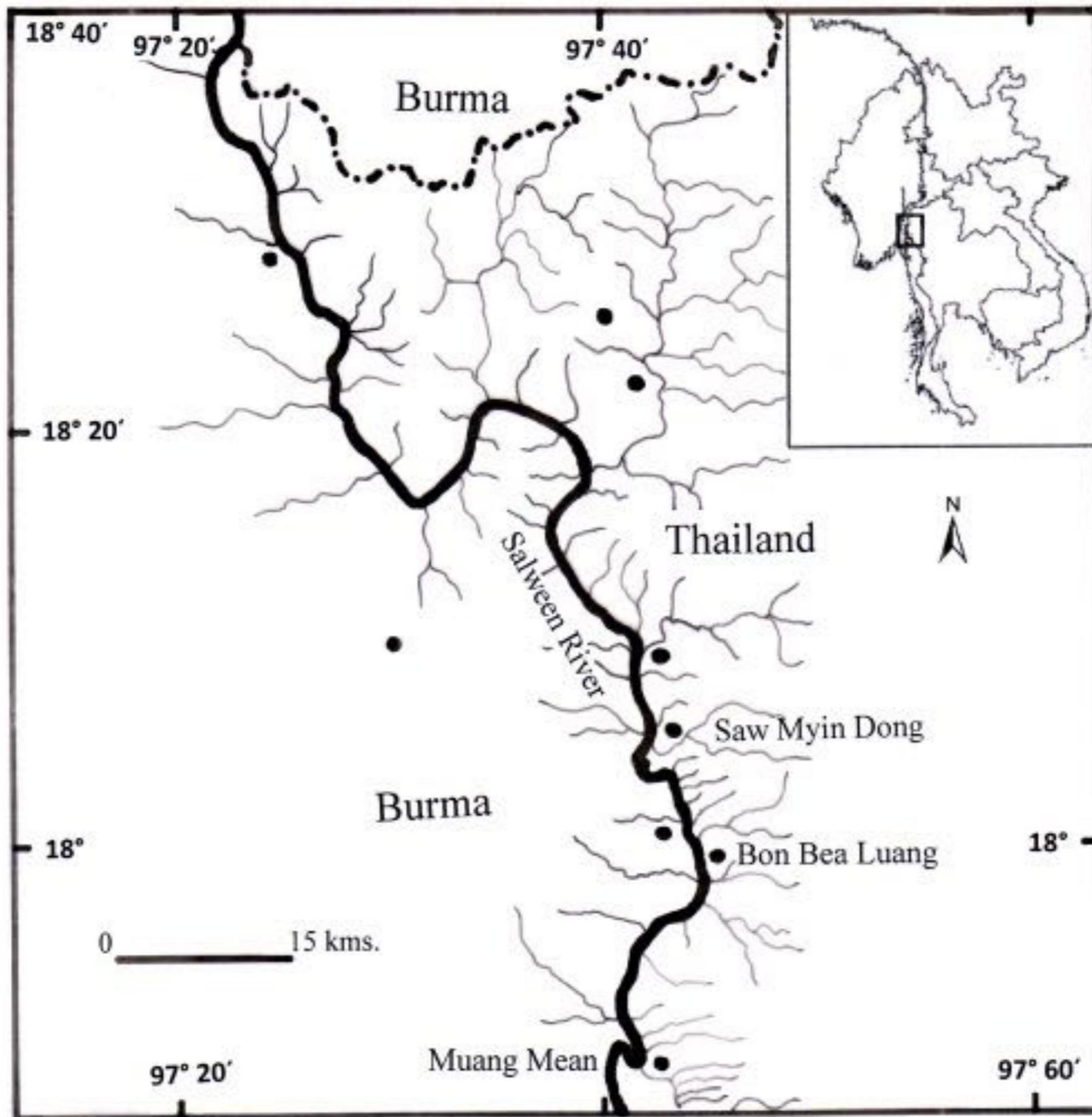
Villages at the Thai-Burmese border have been represented as **anti-dam** by the project's developers.



Meanwhile they are situated in poor conditions of development “**kanphattana.**”

- How have the Salween dams been framed through the state-project developer collaboration as hegemonic discourse of development?  
“Villagers are anti-development.”
- How have communities engaged in the state’s development by proposing local development?  
“Reframing the anti-dam movement, which is not singular by itself, but is a wider network of movements about local development.”





- The production of the meaning of nature is a **discursive practice**; actual practice to define the truth.
- It is a **regime of truth**; system of order procedures for production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements.
- “truth” and “knowledge” as **practice of power**.



# Communities' Production of Knowledge and Discourse

- 1980s: people's **movement**, Assembly of the Poor (peasant struggle over rights to resources) — use street and mediascape to open space for demands, role of urban NGOs and leaders having urban experiences.
- **Mobility** of rural villagers in respond to labor market (cosmopolitan villagers) — migrate to Bangkok and big cities.
- **Knowledge production** — *Thai Baan* research.



Villagers have their **own vision of development** rather than either passively accept or totally resist the government-defined meaning of development.



# Targeting the Salween Borderlands: Civilizing the Margins by the States

- The Salween borderlands have been modernized by Thai and Burmese governments.
- 1988: a “**battlefield into a marketplace**” Thai economic policy.
- 2003: four mega-projects — Tasang Dam, coal mine, port project, road project.

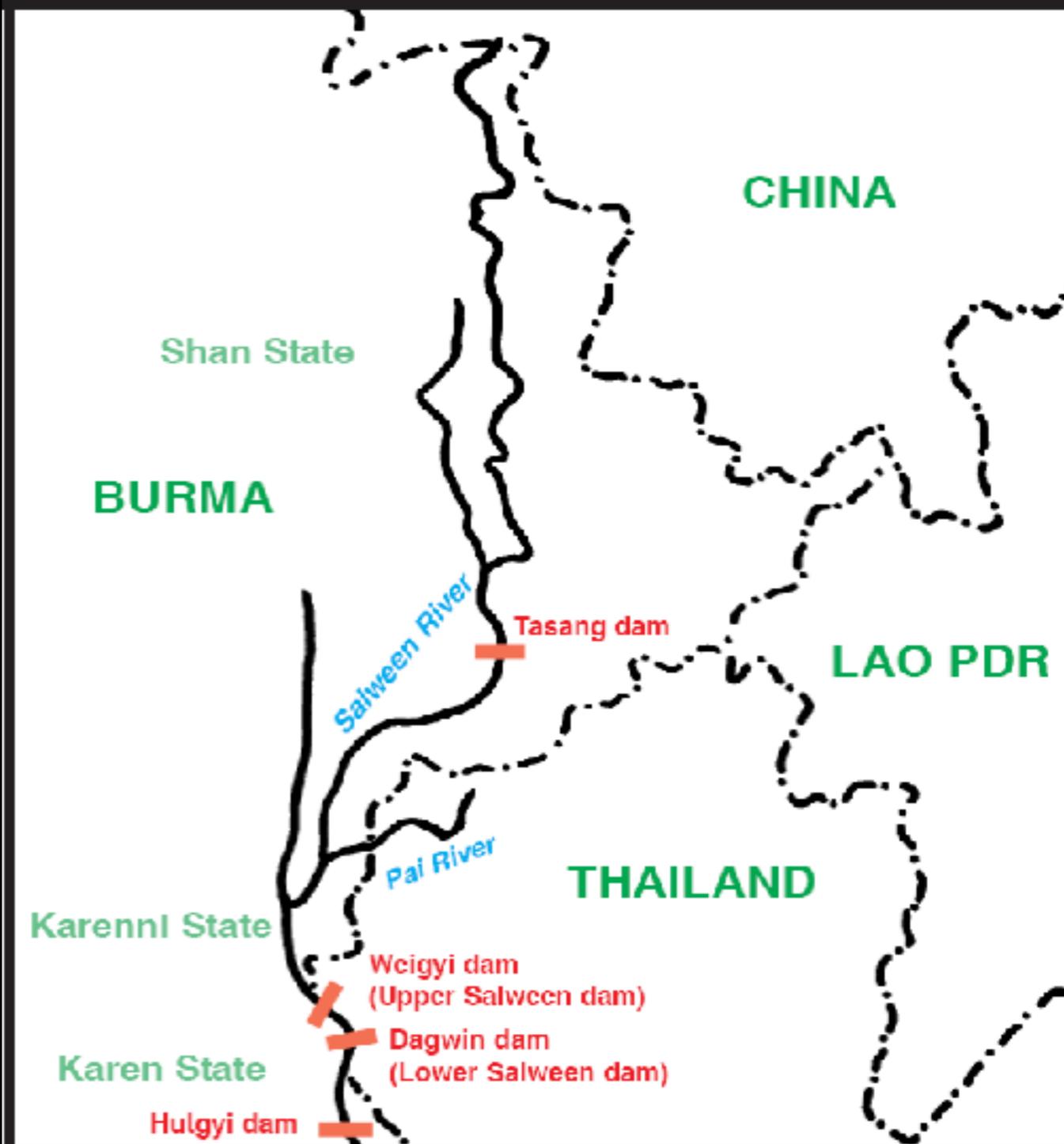


Map of the upper NU/Salween and sites of proposed dams



China's proposed 13-dam cascade on the middle and the lower reaches of the upper Salween with a combined capacity of 23,320 megawatts.

Map of the lower NU/Salween and sites of proposed dams



Thailand and Burma have agreed to form a joint venture to study and construct at least four dams on lower Salween with a combined capacity of 15,000 megawatts.

Local people at the Thai-Burmese border have chosen to **incorporate** into community development projects, but they **resist** the Salween dam projects.



# Life and Development Situation in the Communities





# Civil Society and Communities Resisting the Hat Gyi Dam Project

- Communities engaged the Thai National Human Rights Commission
- Villagers Undertook *Thai Baan Research*
- The Villagers and *Khwamcharoen*
  - local infrastructure and basic services
  - citizenship
  - village **histories** and relationship with the **King**
  - disaster response





The Information Disclosure Subcommittee on Hat Gyi Hydropower Project collected information at the village.

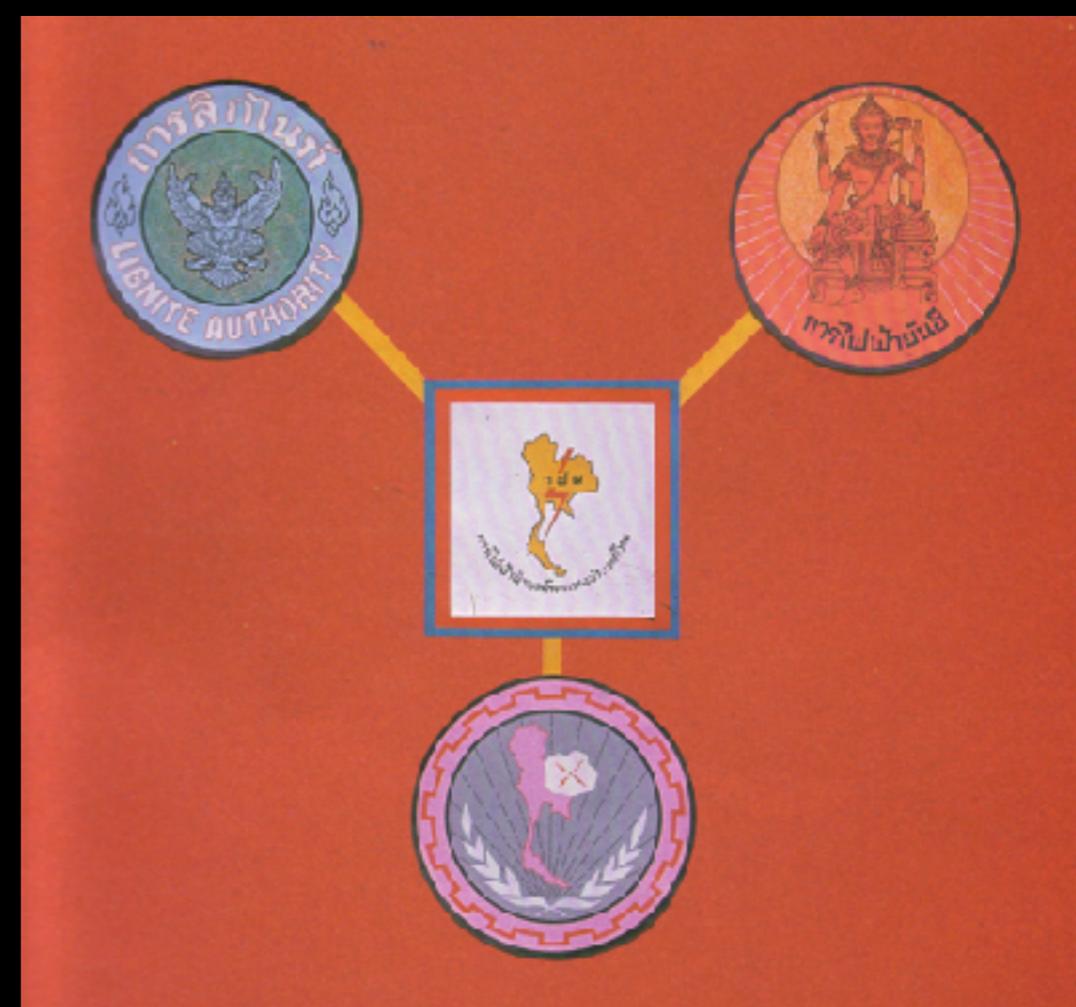
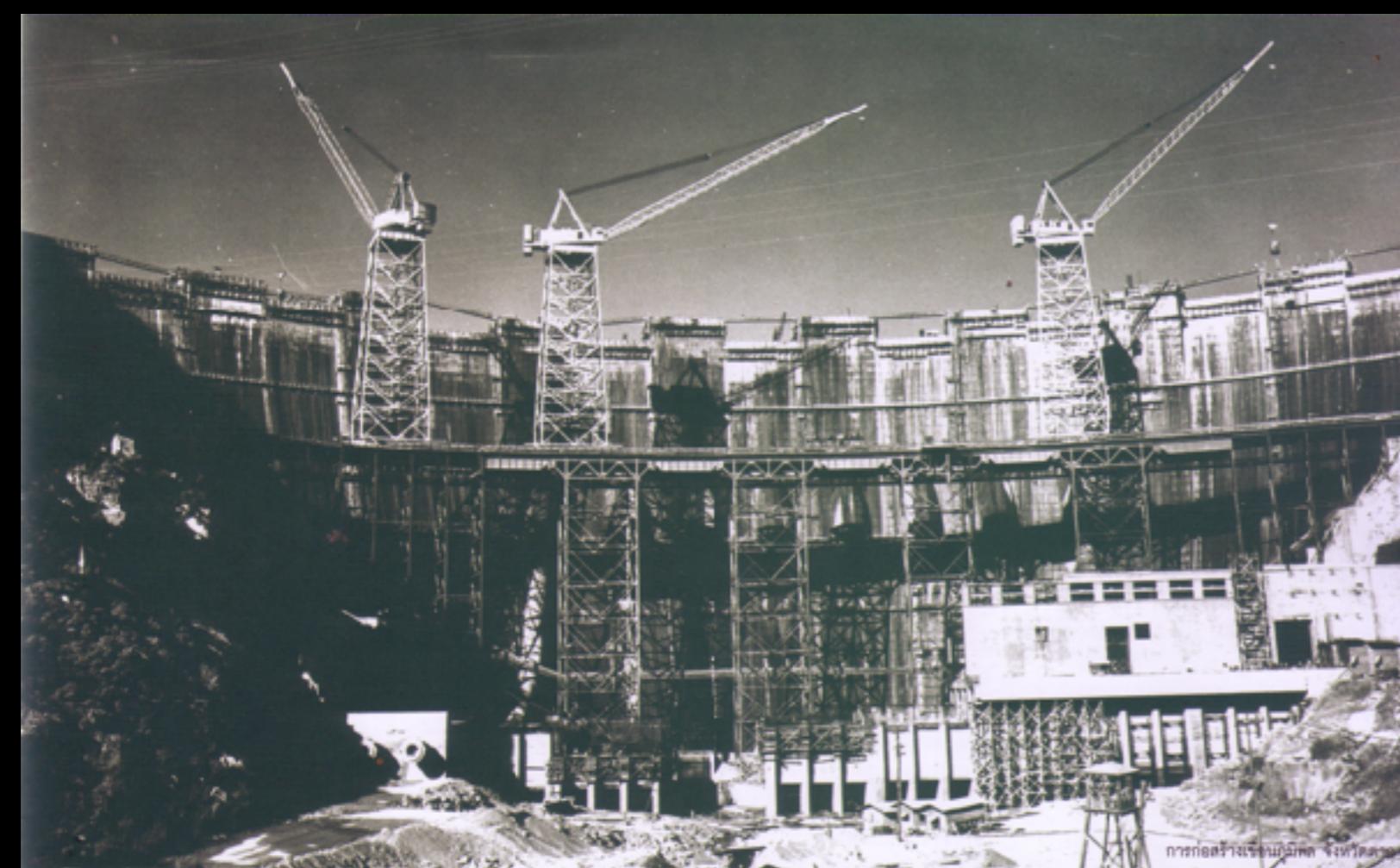






# Negotiating of Khwamcharoen: EGAT and the State

- Modern-ness as discourse of development is used by state and dam developers.
- Community is anti-dam, but **not** anti-development.



“EGAT has designated **120 million baht** (US\$3.6 million) to assist in public health, education and employment for local villagers in the Salween dam area”

Mr. Pornchai Rujiprapha, secretary-general of the Ministry of Energy and governor of EGAT

“Why are you against *khwamcharoen*? I argued ‘what does *khwamcharoen* mean? It means **money**, right?’”

*Ai Chamnan*

“There is a lot of *khwamcharoen* that has come into the village. It is good when *khwamcharoen* came into the village. But the problem is that it came into the village **too fast**... So, development should **slow down**” *Lung Kaew*

# Conclusions

- EGAT frames the communities as anti-dam, which dam is signified development, therefore anti-development.
- The villages having connection with NGOs are simplistically framed as the anti-dam community that villagers are anti-development.
- The anti-dam movement is one of the number arena avenues through which communities are seeking local development, engaging with land rights and network, and citizenship entitlement.

