Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Two streams of contention

The Mun river begins quietly enough in its headwaters in the Dong Phaya Yen mountains at the southwestern corner of the Korat Plateau, not far from Khao Yai National Park. Although in these upper tributaries the river is already regulated, not until the Mun reaches Srisaket and Ubon Ratchathani some six hundred kilometres downstream do we find large-scale social conflict (Figure 1.1). There a cluster of controversial large irrigation and hydroelectricity projects sit on or very close to the mainstream. In the 1990s, as fitfully democratizing Thailand learnt to tolerate non-violent protest, the Rasi Salai, Hua Na, Sirindhorn, and Pak Mun dams all became highly contentious.

Pak Mun – literally, Mouth of the Mun – is the most controversial of these projects. Ever since its approval in 1989, the 300-metre long dam – located just upstream of the confluence of the Mun and the Mekong – has sparked controversy, linked to villagers’ networks that have sought to defend, mitigate and restore fisheries-dependent livelihoods.

Flowing as quietly – in its early years – as the headwaters of the Mun river has been another stream. Although this one is not on any hydrographical map of Thailand, it is equally real. I refer to the social “stream” of electricity planning which emanates from the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), and has certified power station siting in Thailand since the 1960s. Since the mid-1980s this stream has broadened into a river of contention in its own right. First, other state agencies such as the National Energy Policy Office (NEPO) attempted to regulate EGAT’s planning, and later civil society advocates began to challenge its particular logic of supply expansion impelled by economic growth and the need for reliability. The inter-coiled
Figure 1.1 Thailand and the Mun River

Source: adapted from Sehar (2004).
struggles over Pak Mun and electricity planning have been carried along in a far larger stream of contention, that of Thai state–society relations since the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932. Thailand in the 2000s still carries the legacy of authoritarianism which we can trace to the banning of political parties in 1933 and the subsequent ascendency of military leaders in the executive branch, a pattern not ruptured until the downfall of the Thanom-Praphat regime in 1973. The legacy includes government agencies with little capacity or inclination to meet civil society’s rising demands for authentic participation.

This thesis investigates, describes and explains the politics of policy making in both these contentious “rivers,” with a particular interest in assessing the impact of civil society advocacy on political outcomes. I ask: Given distinctive institutional constraints of the Thai state, how have the actions (especially narratives and claims) of civil society advocates influenced practices of electricity generation planning and hydropower project implementation? My research agenda asks questions about political processes, powerful actors, and dominant institutions in Thailand. Do they change when social movement actors emerge and agitate for reform and, if so, by what processes? To pursue this agenda I ask several related questions (see Table 1).

**Table 1.1 Research Sub-Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Theme</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Interactions (Contexts, Patterns and Outcomes of Contention)</td>
<td>In what dynamic contexts of structure and meaning did contending parties interact?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What were direct and indirect outcomes of state-civil society interaction in each case?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Knowledge</td>
<td>What role do lay and expert knowledge discourses play in structuring conflicts and influencing outcomes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Organizational and institutional change</td>
<td>To what extent have relevant Thai state agencies displayed capacity to participate in, adapt, or learn from deliberative exchanges?</td>
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<td>What relevant political institutions changed as a result of the conflicts?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Causality</td>
<td>What plausible causal mechanisms* link interactions to particular outcomes of interest?</td>
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*aMechanisms are social processes. Chapter 3 provides an extended discussion.*
I pursue these questions through three case studies. These narratives step down in historical, spatial and conceptual hierarchy from macro to micro levels of analysis:

(1) Electricity generation planning, 1960s–2004: an overview and critique of the social construction of peak power demand and supply options in Thailand, focusing on the rise of a utility energy conservation advocacy (focussed on demand side management, DSM) in the early 1990s, and the rise of more confrontational sustainable energy activism in the late 1990s;

(2) Pak Mun Dam, 1989–2003: an examination of patterns of contention between EGAT, anti-dam villagers, and other state and civil society actors;

(3) Pak Mun Dam, 2000–2004: an analysis of the role knowledge discourses play in shaping the debate over local livelihoods in the lower Mun river basin.

I position these cases against a much larger backdrop of Thai state–society relations, 1927–early 2000s: from the Khana Ratsadorn (People’s Party) and its founders’ increasingly authoritarian struggles to shape the state; through to the rise of civil society in the Indochina-war era; to the most recent Thai Rak Thai “money politics” party that emerged in the late 1990s.

1.2 Genesis of this thesis

I first visited Mae Mun Man Yuen, the protest village erected next to Pak Mun dam, in July 2000, on the invitation of some labour-rights activists who made an overnight visit to give moral support to villagers opposing the Dam. At the time, I knew nothing of their long and controversial struggle. At the time, I was contemplating a Ph.D. study on the politics of the indoor environment – over contention about occupational health and safety in Thai industrial factories (Foran 2001; Foran and Sonnenfeld, forthcoming). At Pak Mun, the protestors were into the second month of their sit-in occupation of the dam’s powerhouse, where they were demanding the decommissioning of the dam.

Although I attended Thai primary schools during 1973–79, during some of the most turbulent years of modern Thai history, my own development path led me to favour the USA, an imaginary homeland I re-constructed from early childhood memories, where I attended university and entered the mainstream workforce in high-
technology Boston in 1989.

By the time I found my way back to Thailand a decade later, I was astonished by what I saw. Ramkhamhaeng Road, which I remembered as a long highway that led to my parents’ home on the outskirts of Bangkok, was now a continuous strip of commerce, housing, and clogged traffic. At Pak Mun, there were speeches, banners, barbed wire barriers between the protestors and the powerhouse guards, and nearby, about a hundred thatched huts of the protest village itself, a space of creative resistance. I was intrigued by what I saw and heard, and decided I would try to understand the conflict over Pak Mun Dam.

1.3 Outline

To situate the inquiry intellectually, Chapter 2 presents a conceptual framework that bridges post-structuralist and classical approaches to the study of contentious politics and policy making. I am not the first to use a stream metaphor to refer to the politics of policy making (cf. Kingdon 2003). The metaphor makes sense in light of the dynamism and turbulence of policy-making processes in the modern state. However, I chose not to apply evolutionary models of policy dynamics such as Kingdon (2003) or Baumgartner and Jones (1993) because they are not discourse-oriented enough to meet the needs of my research agenda. Second, they have been developed in the context of western democracies – especially the semi-pluralistic American system, which grants organized interest groups more autonomy and allows them more ready access to office holders than their counterparts in Thailand.

Many analysts of policy dynamics have been concerned with explicating the role knowledge discourses play, particularly in policy domains where active debate over what constitutes “the facts” forms an important locus of contention itself. As a master’s student in an interdisciplinary environmental science and policy program in the late 1990s, I shared these concerns. Using participant-observation techniques, I examined disputes over the setting of sustainable harvest rules in U.S. west-coast commercial trawl fisheries for long-lived and slow-to-mature rockfish (Foran 1998).

The importance of real-world epistemic disputes and debates in any intractable issue – especially “environmental” controversies – has led analysts to argue that the politics of discourse, particularly the politicization of expert knowledge discourses, constitutes a high-priority research agenda (P. Haas 1992; Hajer 1995; Keeley and
Scoones 1999; Hirsch 2003; Bush and Hirsch 2004). I take such concerns seriously. For me that has meant locating rare episodes where “rational” deliberation is glimpsed, where the best argument might win in larger currents of power (Risse 2000).

In Thailand and elsewhere, I argue that the politics of knowledge or rational policy debate needs to be embedded in an understanding of the politics of blame, threat, and other forms of contentious interaction (McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow 2001). To do so, I introduce a conceptual framework based on the concepts of institutions, interests, and discourse. This framework represents my approach to the general problem of structure and agency, of action that is enabled and constrained by larger contexts of meaning and structure (Giddens 1984; Hajer 1995; Whittier 2002). The framework allows and encourages both interest-based and discourse-oriented analysis. It takes interests, discourse, and institutions seriously, and defines each concept clearly so as to facilitate multifaceted analysis.

Chapter 3, on methodology, discusses basic questions about social scientific knowledge. Social systems are open and indeterminate, and conceptual objects (such as ideas) play a causal role. By what principles, therefore, do I propose to gain knowledge of institutional practices, or interests, or any other object of inquiry? I argue that a philosophy of science called critical realism provides the most productive grounding for my research agenda (Bhaskar 1975; Sayer 1992; 2000). Chapter 3 also discusses specific research techniques, such as critical discourse analysis and interview methods.

Chapter 4 addresses the question of how contention that emerged at the end of the 20th century over Pak Mun Dam and power supply planning is embedded in the larger historical context of state–society interactions. The Thai political system in the 2000s displays a notable mix of continuity and transformation. The interactions among an authoritarian polity, money politics, and the rise of civil society form the key external and internal contexts in which actors operate, both in activism around Pak Mun Dam and advocacy around sustainable energy.

The best way to begin representing modern Thai history is to look for path-dependent patterns of institutional rupture and continuity. The modern authoritarian state whose legacies Thai people experience to this day was critically re-shaped during
two “critical junctures.” The first critical juncture was the period approximately 1927–1951, whose contingent outcome was Thai authoritarianism. The second was the period approximately 1975–92, whose outcome was late twentieth century democratization. The distinctive legacies Thai society exhibits today owe much to what happened during those two critical periods of instability, when elites made choices about what political discourses, balance of powers, and limits on violence were acceptable.

Chapter 5 explores electricity generation planning and my research themes of knowledge, contention, and organizational change. I trace the self-regulation era of EGAT during the 1960s–1970s, through to inter-departmental regulation within government, to the current period of open challenge to planning practices by Thai civil society actors. Using expert interviews and textual analysis, I also explicate some of the technical practices in power system planning. Planning practices are not well understood by the public and by generalists. They rely on knowledge discourses difficult to access both in terms of standing and technical expertise. I show what stake civil society has in the matter, which goes to the heart of sustainable energy advocates’ calls for energy conservation, renewable energy, and governance reform.

Chapter 6 and 7 take us to Pak Mun, where I describe and explain patterns of contentious interaction in the period 1989–2003. Chapter 6 explores state decisions to build the dam, civil society opposition, and the state’s expanding recognition of people affected by the project. Chapter 7 analyses post-operational contention (1994–2003), a period rich in protest, concession, reversals, and plot shifts. I offer an explanation of decision-making in the period after the Thai financial crisis, focussing particularly on the Thaksin administration’s historic January 2003 decision to open the sluice gates of Pak Mun dam four months every year as a concession to wild-capture fisheries (April–July, as of this writing).

Chapter 8 examines the politicization of knowledge relevant to livelihoods in the lower Mun basin in the period 1999–2004, before and shortly after the January 2003 decision. The real complexity of livelihoods in the lower Mun River basin requires more nuanced policy narratives – as opposed to partisan storylines produced by lay people or experts – to do them justice. Yet better stories are not necessarily relevant to other stakeholders and elites in longstanding contexts of contention.

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1 A concept I take from Collier and Collier (1991) and Mahoney (2000).
resulting in a discursive dilemma for scholars and advocates of sustainable livelihoods. In the aftermath of a decade and a half of conflict, a key challenge is to create a variety of inclusive spaces for deliberation.

Chapter 9 provides a summation. I review key findings from my case studies, engage other analytical frameworks, and in light of this discussion, critique the conceptual framework developed and applied in this thesis. I conclude by discussing potential future research agendas of relevance to policy process reform.

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2 Chapter 8 will discuss the concept of sustainable livelihoods, an inherently ambiguous and normative concept that deals with household survival strategies in larger contexts (Chambers and Conway 1992; Scoones 1998; Fisher et al. 2005).
Chapter 2  A Framework for Contextualized Strategic Action

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2.1 Introduction

Given distinctive institutional constraints of the Thai state, how have the actions (especially narratives and claims) of civil society advocates influenced practices of electricity generation planning and hydropower project implementation? My purpose in this chapter is to review theoretical approaches that shed light on this question, the central research question of the thesis. I draw selectively and critically from the fields of contentious politics and policy making. I argue that understanding the dynamics of protracted state–civil society conflict requires both an actor-oriented and a discourse-oriented framework. This chapter introduces a framework which allows both interest-based and discourse-oriented analysis.

My case studies focus on practices and contention around Thai electricity supply planning (Chapter 5) and hydropower project implementation and resistance (Chapters 6–8). To give a sense of the analytical challenges involved, consider the following features from the last two decades of these cases:

1. Sustained collective action by civil society actors; organizational growth and maturity. A protest movement emerged over Pak Mun Dam and sustained its collective action over almost two decades, interacting contentiously with state agents over a series of demands: halting the dam project altogether (1989–1994), securing just financial compensation (1992–present), and restoration of natural flows to the lower Mun (1998–present). Anti-Dam resistance constituted one of the core local networks that helped form the Assembly of the Poor, a national social movement organisation in 1995. In addition to the anti-Dam movement, a pro-electricity conservation and efficiency movement emerged in the late 1980s, working in less apparent conflict with relevant Thai agencies. Social movement scholars might ask how to identify and assess the outcomes of these civil society actions (Giugni et al. 1999; Goodwin and Jasper 2003).

2. Variation in state response. In the Pak Mun case, decision-making processes of the Thai state varied considerably. Broadly speaking, state responses to the protest movement ranged from violence, repression of protest, and otherwise limited consultation, to extensive and elaborate consultation. The severe repressive responses tended to occur during the early 1990s, during construction of the dam, particularly under military rule (1991–92). Consultation by contrast occurred during
and after peak protest events (a five-month protest in 1994, a 99-day protest in 1997). Process- and mechanism-oriented analysts would ask what causal pathways produced the complex pattern of state response (see Chapter 3).

(3) An apparent increase in debate and deliberation. Third, in terms of the state’s handling of civil society demands, we seem to detect an increase in deliberation. For instance, in 1998 the second Chuan Leekpai government allowed the World Commission on Dams to launch a multidisciplinary inquiry on the impacts of Pak Mun Dam, with EGAT cooperation. Later (under Chuan and the succeeding government of Thaksin Shinawatra), the state commissioned inquiries explicitly aimed at problem-solving. Did this putative increase in deliberation contribute to the Thaksin administration’s authoritative decision making over Pak Mun in early 2003, and if so how? Institutional scholars might additionally ask to what degree bureaucracies such as EGAT and the Office of the Prime Minister changed or learned. To what extent have they become institutions capable of hosting deliberative practices – that is, inclusive responses compatible with real-world uncertainty and the loss of trust in expert knowledge (Hajer 2003)?

These three general features deserve elaboration and explanation. My goal is this chapter is to specify a framework that will address them, as well as the main research agenda. By “framework” I mean a coherent presentation of key intellectual concepts along with an argument as to how such concepts relate to one other (cf. Schlager 1999: 234). A framework does not suffice as an explanation but rather points the way to more specific theories, propositions and hypotheses.

In Section 2.2, I present ways to think about the questions of variation in the state’s response and apparent increase in deliberation, drawing on a range of scholarship from institutionalist and other policy studies. I argue that a productive way to proceed is to build on foundational concepts such as interests, ideas (discourses), and institutions. As well, we can make critical use of concepts such as organizational learning and adaptation, particularly as applied to actors like EGAT, a powerful bureaucracy.

Section 2.3 addresses the question of elite responses to social movement pressure, but from the perspective of protest movements’ need to sustain collective action. I present key insights from scholars of contentious politics and social movements. Section 2.4 argues that describing and explaining the outcomes of sustained contention between civil society and state actors requires a workable
framework to grapple with questions of structure and agency – or what I call the problem of “contextualized strategic action.” I review Maarten Hajer’s (1995) discourse-oriented approach to this problem. Section 2.5 synthesizes insights and findings into a framework adequate to study contextualized strategic action.

2.2 Approaches from public policy studies

Policy studies analysts wish to understand how and why policy changes. They detect continuity – long periods of gradual adjustment – ruptured by bursts of creativity and change. Explaining such patterns of continuity and change constitutes a common problematic in contemporary policy studies (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; John 1998, 2003; Howlett and Ramesh 1998). These inquiries have practical importance in so far as they take on questions such as what constitutes learning in policy-making; what facilitates learning; and the role of civil society actors in processes often dominated by elites (Fox and Brown 1998; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Hall 1993).

Policy-making is vastly more complex than heuristic conceptions of a stage by stage process that recurs in cycles (John 1998; see Figure 2.1). For instance, problem definition does not occur only at the beginning stages of policy-making, but throughout the process. Often, decisions take place without detailed “rational” analysis or subsequent program evaluation. Policy decisions at higher levels of government sometimes ratify de facto arrangements at lower levels. Policy implementation is contested and leads to unexpected outcomes (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993; John 1998). To make sense of this complexity, we will explore three fundamental concepts invoked by scholars of policy and politics. Each of the concepts – interests, ideas, and institutions – has formed the core of distinct explanatory frameworks. The subtle linkages between these concepts also need to be appreciated.
Figure 2.1 The policy life cycle


2.2.1 Interests, ideas, and institutions

An interest-based approach to policy and politics emphasizes competition between actors pursuing identifiable objectives and preferences (“interests”). The groups can be based in civil society or in government. In a pure interest-based approach, ideas do not have causal importance, because they are reflections or derivations of underlying preferences. Rational choice theory gives methodological priority to individual actors. The view is that “individuals are purposive entities rather than just vehicles for wider social and economic forces” (John 1998: 118). Although constrained by social structures, individuals also have the capacity to actively or passively work against the reproduction of those structures. The individual in this approach might be the head of a government agency. Their preferences might include maintaining or enhancing their agency’s budget or reputation, or furthering their career (including through material gain). The individual could be a villager who decides not to join an interest group pressing for compensation for impacts from dam construction. In this case, she believes that the government, were it to compensate, would treat protesters and non-protesters alike, as a matter of procedural justice. By
contrast, the individual in this rationalist approach could be a villager who joins a protest campaign, based on the rationale that the opportunity cost of her time is low and that joining brings immediate social benefits, in addition to the chance of winning claims. The latter two examples highlight how common collective action problems are for scholars who find rational choice models convincing. The challenge then becomes how to understand how people actually solve collective action problems, particularly in cases where individuals pursuing a narrow benefit-maximizing logic can deplete or damage a non-divisible good. Such goods include wild-capture fisheries, forests, rangelands, river systems, and the global atmosphere. Analysis involves understanding how social processes such building trust and learning lead self-interested actors to change their preferences, and applied work involves designing systems of rules and incentives for compliance (Ostrom 1990).

At this point we need to take the discussion forward in two complementary directions. First, concepts such as “rules,” “trust,” and – especially germane for my inquiry – “learning,” lead us to consider the role that institutions, as systems of rules and norms, play in structuring politics. Second, we need to understand how ideas might play a causal role independently from powerful actors who might seize upon them to further pre-determined interests.

**Institutions as systems of constraints**

Johnson defines institutions as “enduring set[s] of ideas about how to accomplish goals generally recognized as important in a society” (2000: 157). Hence the state, a collection of political institutions, provides a “blueprint for how governance should be conducted.” Johnson argues that “like most aspects of social life, institutions are experienced as external to the individuals that participate in them; but they are also shaped and changed by that participation” (2000: 157). Organizational scholars March and Olsen (1989) argue that contrary to the instrumental logic of rational choice theory, the behaviour of individuals in organizations is better characterized by a logic of appropriateness. Instead of asking “What are my alternatives? What are my values?” and choosing the alternative with the best consequences, they argue people more commonly reason according to a logic that proceeds as follows: “What kind of situation is this? Who am I? How appropriate are different actions for me in this situation? Do what is most appropriate” (1989: 23).
For March and Olsen, the logic of appropriateness is the “fundamental logic of political action” (ibid., 38).

Institutionalists contend that institutional rules and procedures shape outcomes. In the “institutional rational choice” sub-literature, it is institutions that determine the payoffs actors receive. Actors can strategize within the rules of a given game (such as the classic prisoner’s dilemma game), or they can choose to argue about the rules themselves, and hence design new institutions (John 1998: 126). In the sociological or historical institutional sub-literature, actors, as we saw above, ask “What kind of situation is this?” They do not necessarily have the ability to stand back and reflect upon the rules of the game they are playing. They tend not to ask “How can we transform this situation?” If they did, the practical costs of re-designing institutions might be prohibitive given the depth of normative and material commitment.

The key claim that all institution-oriented analyses make is that policy outcomes are not reducible to the balance of power between competing actors pursuing pre-defined interests, in an arena devoid of previous choices and commitments. There are no shortages of examples. Looking comparatively at the welfare state, European countries provide a greater welfare net than the U.S., at the cost of higher structural unemployment. Decades of authoritarian rule in Thailand have left distinctive institutional legacies including weak separation of powers between executive and legislative branches of government, and unstable political parties with indistinct programs and platforms (see Chapter 4).

If so much of human behaviour in institutions is norm-following, or determined by a logic of appropriateness, institution-oriented analyses would appear to have difficulty explaining how policy changes. This problem raises the familiar puzzle of how people exercise agency when embedded in institutional structures. March and Olsen (1989) deal with this problem by suggesting that constraints are never so rigid as to allow no room for discretion and interpretation.

Causal role of ideas

The notion that institutions are enduring sets of ideas raises questions about how ideas become salient, and how they interact with political interests. International relations scholars Goldstein and Keohane take on this agenda in *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, a volume of contributed essays (1993). They classify ideas into three
categories: broad world views, provided by religion as well as by modern rationality; principled beliefs (e.g., human rights); and causal beliefs (e.g., scientific and economic ideas). They suggest three causal pathways by which ideas can affect outcomes: (1) As paradigmatic “road maps,” certain ideas (e.g., Keynesianism; universal human rights,) offer rational actors a chance to re-examine strategies to achieve their goals. (2) Ideas serve as focal points in situations where multiple choices could be made. (3) Over time, ideas lead to unanticipated outcomes when embedded into institutions.

Methodologically, Goldstein and Keohane suggest the null hypothesis that “variation in policy across countries, or over time,” can be fully explained by recourse to factors other than ideas (1993: 6). Because this approach views interest-based accounts satisfactory in many cases, John (1998: 150) labels it “ideas-based empiricism” – ideas should be invoked only when rationalist explanations fail.

In Goldstein and Keohane’s approach, some ideas (principled beliefs) underpin preferences. Others merely provide guidance towards an actor’s preferred goal. They do not entertain the possibility that ideas can undermine preferences, because they grant preferences a priori status. They recognize that their project involves explaining how ideas, once constructed and chosen, may function (1993: 7).

Hall (1986; 1993) pursues a related approach. In a series of papers dealing with shifts in macroeconomic policy, Hall approaches the question of policy change from a “social learning” perspective. Policies and possibly institutions change when powerful actors learn. He defines learning as a “deliberate attempt to adjust goals or techniques of policy” in response to “past experience and policy-relevant knowledge” (1993: 278, 293). However, for Hall it is not just new information that matters. In response to extended policy crisis, new ways of approaching the problem also matter.

Hall – using Thomas Kuhn’s model of scientific change – distinguishes between change within a dominant policy paradigm, and change between paradigms. A policy paradigm is a “framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kinds of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing” (1993: 279). Examples of change within a paradigm include (1) incremental (“first-order”) changes to the settings of policy instruments, such as interest rates; (2) more consequential (“second-order”) changes to policy instruments. In my case, changing o the timing of

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3 Section 2.4 pursues the construction of ideas, in the context of a “discursive institutional” approach.
Pak Mun Dam’s annual seasonal opening is first-order. The 2003 decision to open the Dam seasonally was a second-order change.

Paradigmatic change – e.g., decommissioning a dam or more radical changes to political economy – occurs much less frequently. In Hall’s (1993) framework, modern state actors learn to switch paradigms under the following conditions: (1) They have access to relevant information as well as quite different interpretive frameworks or “paradigms.” Such policy-relevant knowledge can come from experts (P. Haas 1992), advocacy coalitions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999), or policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon 2003). (2) They are forced to deal with problems to which existing solutions are seen as no longer sufficient. (3) They can re-frame these solutions to further their prevailing interests (Hall 1993).

Hall (1993) uses this combination of serious problems, an alternative paradigm, and vote-seeking actors to explain the UK’s turn away from Keynesianism to tight monetary policy in the late 1970’s. His approach to understanding policy change has both admirers and critics. Parsons (1995) approves of how the approach insists on a detailed understanding of historical context, while still allowing room for “the role that (real live) people can have on decision-making” (1995: 335). Other analysts argue that a satisfying theory of policy change as “learning” needs to elaborate on the capacities and constraints of policy-makers to learn; and on exactly what is being learnt, e.g., new techniques, causal explanations, or norms of behaviour (John 1998: 152).

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith offer several such learning-related hypotheses (1999). Analysts have applied their “advocacy coalition framework” (ACF) approach to several dozen cases, albeit overwhelmingly in OECD contexts. It is worth reviewing for insights relevant to my case.

Like Hall and Goldstein and Keohane (1993), Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) believe ideas are an important driver of policy processes. Modern policy processes – with hundreds of actors and dozens of programs at different levels of government, are highly complex. In their advocacy coalition framework, policy-making in modern industrial states occurs mainly in “policy subsystems.” Subsystems are specialized state–civil society arenas in which coalitions of interest groups and other actors – bureaucrats from various agencies, academics, prominent journalists, and policy analysts – contend to influence governmental decisions (Figure 2.2). Coalitions are defined as alliances of actors who share beliefs about policy, and who
interact on a non-trivial basis to realize those beliefs. The general public and most of their elected representatives do not directly participate, although public opinion may affect problem definition and prioritization. Coalitions can be distinguished in terms of hierarchically organized belief systems:

1. A very difficult-to-change “deep core” of normative beliefs (including: socio-cultural identity; peoples’ relation to the natural world; criteria of whose welfare counts);
2. A difficult-to-change “policy core” which includes: more concrete precepts about the basic causes of a policy problem; society’s ability to solve the problem; desirability of public vs. expert participation; proper distribution of authority within government and between government and market;
3. A moderately easy-to-change set of “secondary aspects” which involve instrumental decisions and information needs required to implement (2).

(After Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999: 133)

As a consequence of defining coalitions with respect to fundamental belief systems, Sabatier states that empirically, few coalitions operate in a given subsystem (ibid., 120).

Decisions are selected by authorities from policy prescriptions thrust forward by the coalitions. Policy outcomes normally reflect the policy core advanced by the coalition with superior “resources” and fewer “constraints.” The ACF posits that since policy cores are difficult to change, subsystem change requires changes in the external environment (e.g., economic shocks, changes in public opinion, policies imposed from above).

The ACF does not offer a detailed model of decision-making: “belief systems, not characteristics of the situation, determine individual choices and actions” (Schlager 1999: 243). Methodologically, the focus is on empirical identification of belief systems and patterns of change in coalitions/belief systems, correlating those to changes in policy (e.g., through content analysis).

Debate exists as to whether the ACF is helpful in political systems outside its pluralistic and decentralized North American origins (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999: 151). In the Thai context, for example, the model’s assumption that an
individual’s formal organisational affiliation is less important than his/her policy beliefs is provocative. Neither does its notion that state–civil society coalitions, with non-trivial coordination, advance rival policies for submission to decision makers seem applicable to Thailand. In addition, while the ACF is more structurally specific than Hall’s model, it is much less dynamic. Indeed, the framework was offered as a tool to explain policy change over a decade or more.

The scholars reviewed above – March and Olsen; Hall; P. Haas; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith; and Goldstein and Keohane – deal with the broad question of how socially constructed interests reproduce themselves over time, including in relation to novel and uncertain situations such as financial crises, post-war institution building, and global ecosystem degradation. This approach is appropriate to my inquiry to the
extent that during the long conflict over Pak Mun Dam, certain events qualify as sufficiently novel to make actors re-examine their preferences using policy-relevant knowledge from various sources, including mass media, experts, and interest groups.

Nonetheless, studying the interaction between institutions, interests, and ideas by using the above approaches presents several difficulties. Peter John (1998) provides a sensitive critique. First, institutional analyses have difficulty explaining policy change, which occurs more rapidly than institutional change. Institutional processes are always reproduced by actors pursuing their interests – including power-wielding politicians and bureaucrats. This means that to explain policy change we need to pay attention to how institutional routines are often selectively applied, bypassed, and over time, discarded in favour of new institutions (John 1998: 50–65). Second, John notes the tendency of some scholars to define the concept “institution” so broadly – encompassing norms and beliefs – that it loses explanatory nuance (1998: 64). Although he does not offer a rival definition, John argues that:

[Broad definition of “institution”] makes the argument too circular. By including ideas, norms, and interests as institutions, the new institutionalism turns too much of politics into a set of formal processes. Such an expansion robs institutions of their explanatory power . . . institutional approaches tend to neglect the political and social context that affects how formal rules and norms operate . . . institutions fail [to explain policy change] because they are a process not fine-grained enough to explain . . . variation in the politics between sectors, over time, and in space. (ibid., 65).

Goldstein and Keohane (1993) remedy some of the above biases by taking interests seriously and as having a priori status. However, they do not pursue the important question of how ideas come to be chosen or rejected (1993: 7). In order to do address this question one could – working in an objectivist approach – specify a new theory for how ideas interact with interests, treating each as a separate, interacting variable. Empiricists like John favour this approach (1998: Ch. 8). Alternatively, one could pursue a stronger social constructionist approach, which attempts to sidestep the problem by arguing that ideas (as discourse) are constitutive of interests (Hajer 1995). This approach places both institutional and discursive limits on the pathways chosen by self-interested actors. Section 2.4 reviews the latter strategy in more detail.
2.2.2 Variation in state response: insights from studies of bureaucracy

Fox and Brown’s contributed volume *The Struggle for Accountability: the World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements* (1998) offers a helpful introduction to the question of the degree to which powerful bureaucracies such as the World Bank can significantly change, in response to civil society advocacy campaigns. Organizational “learning” entails “changes that endure in spite of individual turnover.” Learning is considerably more difficult and disruptive than “adaptation,” by which the authors refer to minor adjustments that leave core operating procedures unaltered (Fox and Brown 1998: 38–39).

Analysts who follow the World Bank have observed the following types of change: changes in discourse, for example Bank publications that argue in favour of significantly integrating environmental and social values into development projects; changes in sponsored research; and changes in lending programs, for example, anti-poverty programs instituted in the 1970s. Analysts have differed about the significance of these changes. Citing the anti-poverty programs, for example, Ernst Haas in an evaluation of international organizations based on secondary literature argued that the World Bank is “one of the few that has shown the capacity for ‘true learning’” (E. Haas 1990 in Fox and Brown 1998: 40). Fox and Brown, by contrast, drawing on the same sources as Haas, argues that the anti-poverty programs were of limited scope and “often captured by local elites” (1998: 40).

These divergent assessments might be advanced by more rigorous criteria that distinguish adaptation from learning (or, in Hall’s terminology – first- and second-order changes from paradigm changes). Fox and Brown suggest that adaptation results from “external political pressure and changing institutional incentives.” Learning, by contrast, involves “increased internal acceptance of new ideas, bolstered by their technical credibility, expertise, and intellectual acceptability” (1998: 10). The obvious question that follows is under what conditions – and via what mechanisms – do external political pressures lead to internal acceptance of new ideas attached to those pressures? Fox and Brown note the failure of organizational studies to offer a widely accepted theory of how organizations learn or change, but decline to venture a model of their own (1998: 10). However, they suggest that the following variables correlate
with significant responses by the World Bank to pressure for reform:

- The presence of insiders that share the views of reformists and advance their ideas within the organization (cf. Kingdon [2003] on “policy entrepreneurs”);
- The ability of reformists to argue that actual practices differ significantly from the Bank's own ethical guidelines;
- The discretion of Bank country representatives.

The Bank is a multilateral institution with decades of sophisticated normative and technical interaction with a broad cross-class coalition of reformists throughout the world. Yet Fox and Brown (1998) suggest that the World Bank’s response to demands for reform and power sharing with civil society actors has essentially consisted of tactical adaptations and – more rarely – strategic changes. If limited change is the verdict for the World Bank, we would expect that Thai state agencies display even less change in response to civil society pressure. First, Thai agencies have fewer and less-developed external accountability mechanisms than does the Bank, which has internal codes and receives periodic scrutiny from the U.S. Congress. Second, Thailand has distinctive authoritarian institutional legacies (see Chapter 4).

Heyman, an anthropologist who studies the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, offers some insights on how to approach the study of what he calls “power-wielding” bureaucracies (2004). Heyman wishes to understand how bureaucratic rationality reflects and furthers a specific exercise of power.

Heyman (2004) advocates an approach sensitive, firstly, to how features of an organisation’s “external” environment – its political and economic contexts – shape its de facto policies. Secondly, the approach should explore the consequences of bureaucratic action, “especially insofar as it deploys coercive, material, and ideological power” (2004: 489). The inspirations for this approach are Selznick’s study of the Tennessee Valley Authority (1949), and Perrow’s emphasis that power runs through bureaucracies in a way that is often “unregulated and unperceived” (1986: 5). This power-sensitive anthropological approach re-phrases the research agenda from “whether a given bureaucracy is rational or not” in terms of its practices (as means to ends given by political leaders) to “what is the rationale for this kind of

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4 Social scientists have used the concept “bureaucracy” to refer to a cluster of related concepts, ranging from a rational mode of organisation, to rule by non-elected officials (Heywood 1997).
bureaucratic . . . behaviour?” (Heyman 2004: 490). Examples of important bureaucratic effects are (1) the “simplifying and clarifying impulse” all state planning practices exhibit (Heyman 2004: 490, citing Scott [1998]) and (2) development discourse, which constructs a beneficiary population. Such constructions can be deeply misleading (Heyman 2004: 491, citing Ferguson [1994]).

Analysts can detect these power practices through ethnographic methods that seek to detect variation and political contests inside organizations. Heyman suggests studying the division of labour within an organization offers clues about the role that organization plays in wider power fields (2004: 492).

Like Fox and Brown, Heyman sees the potential for actors such as social movement groups and activist scholars to create more democratic forms of collective organization – to become “centers of alternative information, perspective, and policy conceptualization on issues usually controlled by dominant . . . policy actors.” He implies that social movements that can participate in such organized practices will increase their political strength, making bureaucracies more open and responsive (2004: 496). By the close of his essay, Heyman thus joins – but only briefly – a longstanding debate over whether marginalized groups should pursue power via institutional vs. non-institutional means (Piven and Cloward 1977).

At this point we should take the discussion forward in two directions: (1) We need an understanding of how civil society advocates create the conditions for, and join discursive struggles in a manner that power-wielding bureaucracies cannot ignore. That requires understanding how “argumentative discourse-oriented” approaches to policy analysis (e.g., Hajer 1995; Fischer 2003) offer a different purchase on the relationship between discourse, institutions, and interests. Such approaches may shed light on organizational learning in a way that the mainstream objectivist approaches reviewed above do not. (2) In order to pursue the above themes, we also need a basic appreciation of social movements and their dynamics, in order to understand how realistic it is for social movement organizations to play multiple roles in society, as Heyman recommends (2004).
2.3 Contentious politics and social movements

2.3.1 Definitions and contextualization

Section 2.2 argued that policy may change because elite interests or institutions change. This section offers a framework to think about “social movements” as agents of change, alongside and in the context of other actors and forces such as elites, the mass media, and public opinion.

Goodwin and Jasper (2003: 3) define a social movement as “a collective, organized, sustained, and non-institutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices.” Recently, however, analysts have challenged the institutional/non-institutional divide, arguing that in several noteworthy cases, rigid boundaries are less helpful. Cadena-Roa (2003) argued that in Mexico, social movement leaders also joined political parties which worked over several decades to democratize the state. In the U.S., when movements have created formal organisations to pursue their objectives, it becomes more difficult in practice to distinguish between them and less-marginalized interest groups (Burstein and Linton 2002).

It is therefore more helpful to consider any particular “social movement” as a complex interaction between state and civil society actors (Tilly 1999). We can distinguish organizational, historical, and discursive dimensions in these interactions:

(1) Social movements can contribute to advocacy networks. As Keck and Sikkink explain (1998: 8–9) advocacy networks are forms of organization that can include a range of state and non-state actors, pursuing policy change, often of a principled nature (i.e., not reducible to narrow economic interests). These network forms of organization make sense because of the need to generate and share information and other forms of “knowledge” in a more flexible and timely way than large (civilian) hierarchies. NGOs can play an important role, as they do in social movements (which Keck and Sikkink differ from advocacy networks as having more intense political identity processes).

(2) Particular movements are positioned in larger historical contexts. In our Thai context, one of the actors is an agrarian-based social movement, and the other is the modern Thai state. By the latter I refer to a collection of modern political institutions grounded in the ideology of nation/religion/King, as well as the ideology of mainstream development. As Chapter 4 discusses, these institutions were forged in a path-dependent trajectory of state-building.
(3) Social movements engage in both routine and contentious politics. “Contentious” politics refers to the public making of claims directed at the state (or other parties), where such claims are understood by parties involved as entailing redistribution of rights and/or resources, and where the state is a mediator (McAdam et al. 2001: 5). In this regard Tilly (1999; 2003) argues that social movements are distinguished by the symbolic and communicative work they do. Tilly sees a vital dimension of their action to consist of performances that occur contingently and episodically, performances which convey political demands. He argues that the most helpful definition of a social movement is:

*a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of repeated public displays of that population's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. At a minimum, social movements involve continuous interaction between challengers and power holders. The claim-making usually engages third parties such as other power holders, repressive forces, allies, competitors, and the citizenry as a whole. . . . It includes some interactions that overlap with industrial conflict, electoral campaigns, interest group politics, but by no means exhausts those domains; many an election, for example, proceeds without either sustained challenges to power holders or repeated public displays of worthiness . . . . (Tilly 1999: 257)*

In summary, an interactive approach to social movements draws our attention to how authorities treat challengers, and how challengers represent themselves to evade defeat. As well, we may need to consider how bystanders and third parties treat challengers.

**2.3.2 Emergence and sustaining contention**

The politics of challenges to authorities from below requires that we also pay attention to how movements sustain collective action. The concept of a movement trajectory may serve as an initial heuristic. For a social movement to emerge it must draw on an existing organisational base – whether a formal organisation (e.g., the southern Churches in the U.S. civil rights movement) or informal networks (e.g., village women’s weaving circles, in the case of the anti-Pak Mun Dam movement\(^5\)) – and “appropriate” it to disseminate new claims and mobilize (McAdam 1999; McAdam et al. 2001; see Figure 2.3). People who participate in a movement must

\(^5\) See Missingham (2003: 75).
possess both a minimal degree of income security as well as social/spatial proximity to movement activities. Movements must also motivate people to join.

Snow et al. (1986) use the concept of “framing” to describe the story-telling work that movement organizers strategically do in order to shift their cognitive constructions. Leaders must convince people that a social problem can be solved with joint action of a certain kind. Frames are most effective when they align with the worldviews, causal beliefs, and life experiences of potential members (Snow and Benford 1988 in Goodwin and Jasper 2003: 52). Goodwin and Jasper also argue that moral and emotional dimensions can play an important role in recruiting people to join a movement, ranging from outrage over a particular event conveyed via the mass media to the esteem recruits may have for existing members (2003: 54). In local settings people reluctant to join might nonetheless do so out of the fear of ostracism (McAdam 1999: xxxv).

What sustains collective action in the face of indifference or hostility from authorities? It may be benefits members of a challenger group get from everyday interaction with like-minded people, i.e., a sense of community (Meyer 2002). As well, it may be the creation of alternative social spaces or networks. Nancy Whittier refers to the importance of spaces such as feminist bookstores in sustaining a collective identity during periods in which political context was unfavourable for new advantages, such as during the Reagan years. Other scholars emphasize the work of political entrepreneurs, who continually promote their ideas as solutions to political events (Kingdon 2003).

The public emergence of collective action is characterized by uncertainty (see Figure 2.3). In McAdam’s view, sustained contention results from innovative collective action engaged in by both challengers and elites. What makes the situation “transgressive” is that both parties interpret the situation as one of dynamic threat or opportunity, and both parties view the political context as uncertain enough to warrant innovative action (McAdam 1999: xvii).

Figure 2.3 focuses on the emergence and escalation of contention. What of subsequent contention and outcomes? A striking theme in the literature is the ubiquity of repression. By repression I mean any deliberate action by authorities or bystanders that increases the difficulties of collective action. Such repression can range from severe violence (e.g., assassination campaigns aimed at movement leaders) to intimidation (state investigations of movement organisations) to “everyday” discursive
repression (attacks on movements’ credibility conveyed in mass media).

**Figure 2.3 Framework for analysing mobilization in contentious politics**

![Framework for analysing mobilization in contentious politics](image)

Source: McAdam et al. (2001: 45).

### 2.3.3 Repression

Movements whose actions are perceived as disruptive or threatening to elite interests commonly face repressive responses – a factor in the decline in the U.S. labour movement since the 1950s (Goodwin and Jasper 2003: 315) as well as in the decline in Thai and U.K. labour movements since the mid-1970s (Barker and Lavalette 2002; Phongpaichit and Baker 1995).

Under what conditions do state elites switch between severe and “everyday” repression? Della Porta (1999) approaches this question drawing on a constructionist perspective. She looks at how public discourse on policing and the right to protest changed in Italy and Germany from 1960–1980s. Based on textual analysis of parliamentary debates and newspaper coverage during the time period, she found two
broad coalitions engaged in struggle to control the interpretation of democracy: a “law and order” coalition defining democracy in narrow terms of parliamentary representation; and a “civil rights” coalition defining it in terms of participation, including the right to engage in direct protest actions. By the 1980s, the two coalitions converged around the right to non-violent protest, and German police had learned to selectively isolate violent protesters in a mass gathering (della Porta 1996). Before a major protest in the U.S. is mounted, protest leaders and the police may agree on how many people will be arrested (Meyer 2002).

In general, we would expect that as protest movements learn to restrain their demands or act within institutional parameters, state repression declines. Over time, many movement tactics lose their novelty: Thai authorities have learned to adapt, for example, to marathon sit-in demonstrations. Their incentives to do so are strong, because in so doing they regain control of the interpretive struggle. What they have not learned to repress are protest movements that use more sensationalistic tactics – such as hunger strikes or suicide attacks. These are more inherently disruptive because of the violence that is deployed and the sensationalistic appeal such events have for the media. We do not yet see a convergence between coalitions in society on how to interpret the violent insurgencies of the early 21st century, in Thailand and beyond.

Figure 2.3 suggests that contention may end when one party no longer perceives the political interaction as uncertain – for example, when it is confident it has read the balance of power accurately and can use its resources at hand to execute its winning strategy. In their recent work, McAdam and his colleagues argue that mobilization and innovative moments – that is, the processes in Figure 2.3 – mark entire episodes of contention (2001: 45). This raises the critical question of what interpretive work occurs in the state’s construction of its strategies and tactics. The foundational concepts – ideas, interests, and institutions – were introduced above. To pursue such interpretive questions, it remains for us to link them to a model of discourse analysis. By so doing, we can answer questions such as what are the risks/benefits of changing the level of civil society repression, from the perspective of state actors.

**2.3.4 Social movement outcomes**

This section discusses studies of social movements which focus primarily on
their policy outcomes. Gamson (1975) studied the state’s response to a representative sample of 53 challenger groups in the U.S., primarily using historical accounts. Looking only at the political status of the challenger group and the advantages it may have secured for its members, Gamson distinguished the following outcomes:

Table 2.1 Type of outcome, as function of level of acceptance of challenger, and level of advantages won by challenger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Advantages:</th>
<th>Acceptance of challenger group by authorities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Full response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Pre-emption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-optation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collapse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gamson (1975)

These groups were drawn as a near-random sample from a larger population of more than 600 groups. Gamson coded his source material to include, in addition to the variables in Table 1, whether the challenger group used violence, and whether its goals included the removal of particular office holders. He also analysed the role of variables such as the presence of sympathetic elites. Gamson thus used an extensive research design to answer questions such as what organizational characteristics and tactics correlate with what outcomes. He found high levels of new advantages or acceptance to correlate with willingness to use violence (e.g., unions resisting strikebreakers) and demands that did not require displacement of elites. Gamson’s classic study led to a subsequent debate among movement scholars over the relative efficacy of moderate vs. disruptive tactics. Giugni sums up this debate by arguing that contextual factors matter – vulnerable or receptive political regimes respond more favourably to disruption (1999: xviii).

Gamson (1975) defined advantages in terms of the demands issued by a specific challenger group – that is, in terms relatively easy to operate with. Amenta and his colleagues argue analysts should also attempt the more difficult task of assessing the magnitude of the “advantages” secured by a particular social movement organisation (Amenta et al. 2003; Amenta and Young 1999). They argue that the analyst who wishes to detect historically significant outcomes should focus less on acceptance, and more on advantages. They suggest distinguishing between outcomes
which are collective benefits – “groupwise goods from which it is difficult to exclude [beneficiaries, including free-riders]” – as well as collective bads (1999: 40). An example of the latter would be a worsening in state–civil society relations. They urge researchers to “think hard . . . about potential collective benefits for the group not contained in the challenger’s program. Their perspective tacitly recognizes that individual social movement organisations may collapse, while occasionally initiating significant political responses that occur after a time lag. Police tolerance of non-violent protest is an important indirect outcome (della Porta 1999). To analyse outcomes, therefore, it is important to propose collective goods or bads relevant to the case study and its political context.

Some analysts argue that in a context of democratic politics, social movement challengers are functionally equivalent to any interest group that struggles to determine policy outcomes (Burstein 1999). The question then becomes, under what conditions do elites accede to interest group demands? Analysts suggest that social movement organisations can advance their demands better under the following conditions:

1. They gain access to an advocacy coalition that contends over policy issues in a discrete policy subsystem, AND conditions facilitate policy-oriented learning (Section 2.2 above);
2. Public opinion about an issue is not clear, or the public does not feel strongly about certain issues (Burstein 2003; Burstein and Linton 2002: 382; Sabatier 1999);
3. Movement organisations shape public opinion and other organisations’ opinions through interpretive processes such as awareness raising, issue framing (Burstein and Linton 2002: 401);
4. The balance of power is close, as with closely-contested elections and/or unstable ruling coalitions (Amenta et al. 2003: 358);
5. They show they articulate the interests of a significant minority, as evinced by numbers of supporters (Tilly 1999);

Burstein and Linton (2002) systematically coded the impact of organisations on the final stages of policy-making, drawing on results from 53 articles published 1990–2000 in eight major journals. They found little evidence to support a core hypothesis that political organisations have a “substantial direct impact on policy
change” (2002: 395). On the other hand, they found that theorizing about the relative impact on policy of public opinion vs. political organisations is not matched by unambiguous empirical research (2002: 396). They conclude by calling for more accurately designed research, research outside the U.S. and Europe, and for research that measures the impacts of public opinion and interest organisations on less visible stages of the policy process, such as problem definition and agenda setting. (The articles they reviewed focussed by contrast on the more visible stages of policy-making, when laws are enacted and implemented.)

How might such research proceed in Thailand? One theme common to the above hypotheses is that they ignore specific historical institutional legacies. The institutional setting assumed is a policy subsystem (or “monopoly”) when issue salience is low, or legislative activism by elected officials when the public comes to feel strongly about an issue. Thailand has competitive elections. It has much less legislative activism than in the U.S., so the analyst needs explore the connections between social movement demands and the rationalities of top elected officials (the prime minister and cabinet). On the other hand, how state elites may shape public opinion through their preferential access to mass media also needs to be specified. Especially relevant in Thailand is the possibility of direct manipulation of media through ownership and threats to remove advertising (cf. Baker 2003), as well as bribing journalists for favourable coverage.

2.4 Explaining contextualized strategic action: a discourse-oriented framework

The preceding section introduced social movements as complex actors that need to sustain collective action in pursuit of contentious goals. Building on discourse-oriented approaches, this section presents a framework that will help describe and explain notable properties of the Pak Mun case (sustained collective action; variation in the state’s response; and a putative increase in deliberation).

To re-cap the terrain covered thus far: Section 2.2 introduced three important concepts – interests, institutions and ideas. Interests are objectives and preferences. Institutions are enduring ideas, formal and informal, about how to achieve desired social outcomes. Ideas include broad worldviews, as well as more specific normative or causal beliefs.

For many political analysts, these three concepts suffice as the main
components of explanatory frameworks for policy and organisational change. Thus for Goldstein and Keohane (1993), ideas play a strategic function, serving as road-maps for elite actors operating in uncertain (non-institutionalized) settings. Similarly (but for non-elites), Snow et al. (1986) argue that the rhetorical strategies pursued by social movement leaders are crucial in recruiting members and publicizing grievances. For Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999), normative beliefs are the “deep core” to which actors gravitate, forming rival advocacy coalitions. For Fox and Brown (1998), when embedded into institutions, ideas can serve as levers for accountability struggles. Finally, we saw the great weight given to public opinion – and therefore implicitly to ideas – in the work of Paul Burstein.

A suggestion emerges from my distillation of these approaches. The suggestion is that a crucial task of political analysis consists of understanding what – for ease of reference – I call “contextualized strategic action.” Such action occurs when creative agents linguistically and socially construct and contest problems and solutions, within the constraints of institutional contexts. Similarly, Giddens (1984; 2005) refers to the dialectical relationship between structure and agency as “structuration,” by which he refers to the “two-way process by which we shape our social world through our individual actions and are ourselves shaped by society” (2005: 700; see Section 2.4.2).

2.4.1 Post-structuralist approaches to social construction

Post-structuralist approaches to social construction contend that “ideas or cultural variables . . . should be assigned causal primacy because they . . . [constitute] . . . the most basic meaning systems that make individual or collective action possible” (Hall 1997: 184). Post-structuralist approaches view ideas not as adjuncts to interests, but as shaping interests themselves (Fischer 2003: 22). As Hajer puts it: “interests cannot be taken as given a priori but are constituted through discourse . . . the point here is that interests have to be constantly reproduced and will change over time, for instance through what Foucault described as the discontinuities between discourses” (1995: 51; emphasis added). Fischer puts the post-structuralist orientation in these terms:

[P]oliticians and policy decision-makers, like the public generally, are engaged in the manipulation of signs and symbols that shape the way these objects are seen and understood, much like the author of a play. Viewed this
the various actors, following the scripts of ideologically shaped discourses, emphasize different objectives . . . and outcomes in competing prescriptions . . . (2003: 23).

Since post-structuralism and discourse are invoked in so much contemporary social science, they are worth discussing explicitly. Johnson defines post-structuralism as: “a perspective based on the belief that words point not to some concrete external reality but merely to other words that we use to construct social reality” (2000: 315). He defines discourse as “written and spoken communication and the thinking that underlies it” (2000: 90). More extended definitions of discourse vary according to analysts’ interests:

A ‘communicative event,’ including conversational interaction, written text, as well as associated gestures, facework, typographical layout, images and any other ‘semiotic’ or multimedia dimension of signification. (van Dijk 2001: 98)

A shared way of apprehending the world, embedded in language . . . [resting] on assumptions, judgements, and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis. (Dryzek 1997 in Keeley and Scoones 1999: 36)

A specific series of representations, practices, and performances through which meanings are produced, connected into networks, and legitimized . . . discourses are heterogeneous . . . regulated . . . embedded . . . situated . . . [and] performative. (Johnston et al. 2000: 180)

The common theme in these definitions is a concern with exploring and exposing the powerful role language plays in structuring social thought and communication, over time. For Siegfried Jäger, a linguist and critical discourse analyst, the main point is that discourses “are not interesting as mere expressions of social practice, but because they serve certain ends, namely to exercise power with all its effects” (2001: 34). The model of power invoked by Jäger and much of the post-structuralist literature is that of Michel Foucault. As Keeley and Scoones put it: “discourses are the sum of numerous micro-practices: it is through these practices that power is exercised” (1999: 28). Particular frames and categorisations emerge historically and in part unintentionally from numerous societal practices. Their effects are inherently and deeply political.

The model of power that critical discourse analysts deploy is difficult because their analysis strives for ideological critique. Yet practitioners are aware that others can deconstruct these critical interpretations using the same techniques they deploy.
(Gergen 1999: 30). For all its difficulty, the point of all this theoretical work is not abstruse. Approaching ideas through the post-structuralist concepts of discourse and power is helpful to the extent that it shows us how ideas can have a force of their own, as Hall puts it, “at least partially independently of the power of their proponents” (1997: 185).

2.4.2 Politics of environmental discourse: Maarten Hajer

Constructionist scholar Maarten Hajer pursues the above sort of project in his work on the politics of acid-rain (Hajer 1993; 1995). The question to ask as we review his framework is to what extent can it describe and explain contextualized strategic action.

Hajer, like the scholars reviewed in Section 2.2, wishes to explain how policy changes. Like Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993; 1999), he sees coalitions of state–civil society actors organized around the pursuit of beliefs as important forces for change. His approach differs from Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith on a number of counts: first, particular institutions play important and discernible roles. They constrain the policy challenges reformists make. However reformists inevitably challenge institutions when they challenge received definitions of a social condition.

Second, Hajer attaches importance to how actors make sense of reality, and construct policy problems in terms amenable to particular institutions. Hajer’s neo-Marxist intellectual foundation alerts him to the political “biases” present in particular institutions (1993). Sabatier by contrast downplays both the importance of state institutions and the struggles over problem definition (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999; John 1998: Ch. 8; Parsons 1995: 202). For Hajer, Sabatier’s model of learning as a process best enhanced by reasoned debate misses important non-instrumental moments of exchange. Actors make contradictory statements, both deliberately and during argumentative struggle. Such speech acts, as Fischer notes “become part of the discursive space” for use by other actors (2003: Ch. 5). Actors can unwittingly further the work of more than their own coalition.6

Hajer uses the following framework to construct his interpretations of problem

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6 Hajer’s third break from Sabatier is to re-direct the goal of inquiry from (nomothetic) generalization about causes of policy change and learning to (idiographic) investigation of how, through interaction, discourse insinuates itself into particular settings – with intended and unintended effects.
definition and policy change, in the case of debates over acid precipitation in the U.K. and the Netherlands in the late 20th century. First, he takes as his foundation Anthony Gidden’s concept of structuration (1984). Since “structuration” is invoked by a number of analysts I draw on (Hajer 1995; Keeley and Scoones 1999) it is worth briefly reviewing what Giddens himself meant by this concept.

**Giddens’ concept of structuration**

Giddens’ larger project is to understand “recurrent social practices and their transformations” in modern societies (2001: 203). In *The Constitution of Society*, Giddens (1984: 23) distinguishes between structure(s) and social system(s):

- **Structures** – “rules and resources, or sets of transformational relations, organized as properties of social systems;”
- **System(s)** – “reproduced relations between actors and collectivities, organized as regular social practices”

Giddens states that: “One of the main propositions of structuration theory is that the rules and resources drawn on in the reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction (the duality of structure)” (1984: 19). However, by *rules* he does not refer primarily to explicit “discursive formulations” such as laws. Giddens is more interested in the rules of conversation and other social interaction that allow reflexive individuals to “go on” in everyday life, and regards the latter as prior to the former: “the discursive formulation of a rule is already an interpretation of it” (1984: 23). He argues that the rules that constitute meaning are prior to more elaborate institutionalized expressions.

Giddens states that: “the structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action but are chronically implicated in [action’s] production and reproduction” (ibid., 374). A tension exists between structure as rules, and agency as action that contingently reproduces those rules in real time and space. Giddens’ proposes a stratified model of action (see Figure 2.4):

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7 Giddens’ “system” is typically referred to as “structure” by other analysts.

8 This is consistent with his distinction between structure as “rules and resources,” on the one hand, as opposed to either “institutions” as “chronically reproduced rules and resources,” or “system” as “reproduced practices.”
In this model, action flows from unconscious motivation → practical consciousness (awareness of social rules; having reasons but not necessarily being able to articulate them) → discursive consciousness (rationalization) → reflexive monitoring. By the last term, Giddens means two rather different things. He appears to refer primarily to the monitoring of micro-interaction, as in conversation. At other times, he refers to a strategic capacity:

[In many contexts of social life there occur processes of selective ‘information filtering’ whereby strategically placed actors seek reflexively to regulate the overall conditions of system reproduction either to keep things as they are or to change them. (1984: 27–28)]

A key point is that action produces unintended outcomes, which in turn feed back, and may form part of "unacknowledged conditions" of action.

For Giddens, to have agency is simply to have the capacity to act: “what happened would not have happened if the individual had not intervened” (1984: 9). Following Foucault, he views power as a capacity, not a resource actors draw on. How much capacity an agent has in turn depends on that agent’s access to material and non-material “resources” (1984: 33).
Giddens’ abstractions have disappointed his critics (Craib 1992; Ritzer and Goodman 2004: 514). In response, he has stated that his theory of structuration is an ontological framework, as opposed a specific theory ‘of’ anything (2001: 204). He does emphasize the power of language, in a manner consistent with post-structuralist concepts of discourse. This brings us back to Hajer’s framework for analysing environmental politics.

**Hajer's analytical framework**

To deal with these tensions between agency and structure, Hajer offers a mid-range treatment of discourse. He analyses both the content of discourse as well as specific social interactions and practices. Of particular interest are “argumentative interactions” which are “key moment[s] in discourse formation that need to be studied” to understand “why a particular [construction] of the environmental problem at some point gains dominance . . . while other understandings are discredited” (1995: 54, 44).

Next, bringing in concepts from public administration and conflict management literature, he argues that policy-making involves separable tasks (1995: 22–23):

1. Problem definition (“discursive closure”)
2. Processes of actor inclusion/exclusion, and legitimation of those processes (“social accommodation”)
3. Problem closure

Tensions may exist between these tasks. For example, if politicians act on common-sense or lay understandings of an environmental problem, they may ignore important technical insights and aggravate the problem. On the other hand, following technical advice may be politically unpopular (1995: 23). Analysts should track these tasks to uncover possible tensions.  

Hajer then introduces the concepts of “story-lines” and “discourse coalitions.”

---

9. Critics such Margaret Archer have argued that it is more productive to maintain an analytical separation between agency and structure, rather than treat them as a duality (Ritzer and Goodman 2004). Ritzer and Goodman provide a useful review of Giddens and other agency-structure integrationists, including Margaret Archer and Pierre Bourdieu.

10. See Chapter 8 below for comparable examples of tension in rural livelihoods-oriented policy.
Story-lines are fecund narratives on social reality and perform important tasks. They simplify complex reality through representational and rhetorical devices such as metaphor, analogy, historical references, and appeals to fear or guilt. “Shallow and ambiguous” by character, story-lines allow diverse actors to “expand their own understanding and discursive competence.” They are “discursive cement that creates communicative networks between actors with different or at best overlapping perceptions” (1995: 62–63). The simplification of story-lines allows concrete policy action and problem closure. Story-lines form the basis of political coalitions.

Hajer uses the term “discourse coalition” to refer to “the ensemble of a set of storylines, the actors that utter those story lines, and the practices that conform to these storylines, all organized around a discourse”11 (1993: 47). Once actors commit to a story-line, that story-line channels their resultant strategic actions (1995: 264).

Applying this framework, Hajer found that the politics of acid precipitation played out very differently between the Netherlands and the U.K. Both countries achieved problem closure by adopting pragmatic and symbolic end-of-the-pipe solutions. The prevailing construction of air pollution as an urban and human health problem – as opposed to a rural or environmental problem – shaped the politics of the U.K. debate (1993: 57). Hajer identified a “pragmatist” discourse coalition. It included the British electricity generating board, and its central story-line on acid rain was one of scientific and economic prudence. Against this he found an “ecological modernization” coalition – including Friends of the Earth, and the House of Commons Select Committee for the Environment. Its central story-line was that of “sustainable development.” Key tenets included taking a precautionary approach to reducing emissions.

The powerful pragmatist coalition insisted that one scientific actor, the Royal Society of London, preside over a problem they defined as requiring, in light of the cost of pollution control investments, evidence based on adequate data and reductionist demonstrations of causality (Hajer 1993: 48–52). The British electricity board funded a cross-national study under the auspices of the Royal Society and its Swedish counterpart. Evidence from the study linked sulfur emissions to acidification in Norway. Other analyses showed that by making limited retrofits and phasing-in new power plants, the U.K. could meet its prior commitments to reducing SO$_2$

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11 Hajer’s concept of discourse coalition is thus much broader and more diffuse than Sabatier’s advocacy coalition, in which actors share a non-trivial degree of coordinated action in the pursuit of core beliefs.
emission. The Thatcher government acted on the basis of these framings.

Hajer’s findings of close connections between elite actors and science-based policy raise striking parallels with my electricity planning case study (see Chapter 5). Of immediate interest here is his analysis of contextualized strategic action. First, institutions “decisively influenced” the outcomes. The key practices of British pollution politics include: (1) the science-based policy approach as vested in the Royal Society, with its high evidentiary standards; (2) lack of monitoring data from rural areas (reflecting urban bias in pollution control); and (3) a practice whereby state experts determined the “best practicable means (BPM)” of pollutant control, in consultation with industry (1993: 60).

Second, within these constraints, Hajer found that strategic action matters. As he puts it: “the eco-modernists consciously opted for [a] reformist approach, respecting the parameters of normal policy practice, trading a radical stance for a more respectable one, hoping to gain influence” (1993: 64).

Analyzing key science/policy meetings in 1983–84, he shows how powerful actors – ranging from electricity board chairman Lord Marshall, to the Prime Minister – exercised discretion and choice, leading to a 1986 decision to invest in emission control retrofits and new plant design specification. Hajer takes pains to argue that this agency was structured, discursively, by the prevailing ritualized practices of “science-based policy analysis.” Government decision-makers shared a scientific background. Science was clearly used for managerial purposes, but it was not a fig-leaf for underlying interests.

**Discursive mechanisms**

Were Hajer’s analysis to conclude here, we would describe it as compatible with the institutionalist approaches reviewed in Section 2.2. However, Hajer argues that policy outcomes were not in the end determined by institutional routines, but – upon careful inspection – by a number of “discursive mechanisms” (1995: 267). A number of such mechanisms interfered with the changes sought by the eco-modernists (1995: 268), for instance:

1. **Recurrent speech acts.** The legitimacy of institutions was bolstered by “recurring figures of speech or tropes that dominated public understanding and rationalized . . . the existing social order.” Hajer does not analyse the media as an
independent actor, but we can imagine the impact of such media-genic phrases such as Britain’s “proud record” of air pollution control; its “prevailing westerly winds”; its “best scientists working on the problem” (1995: 268). An important effect of these story-line fragments is to “position” actors – to put reformists on the defensive by dismissing their expertise or suppressing their concerns (1995: 272). Yet not all such positioning is driven by dominant actors. Actors from both the traditional and reformist coalitions invoked story-lines from ecological modernization (1995: 273). They contributed, for different motives, to establishing a new discourse whose practical effects were not immediately discernable.

(2) Symbolic solutions. The installation of desulphurization scrubbers on point-source emitters was a concrete, symbolic solution. It undercut the broader and more profound critique of industrial society (with its multiple sources and types of emissions, including motor vehicle exhausts) entailed by eco-modernization.

(3) Persuasion through sensory experience. Hajer argues that policy change can turn on essential moments when actors engage in face-to-face contacts and visits. These personal interactions can build trust and credibility. Hajer views the trust and credibility vested in key individuals as factors that sustain discourse coalitions (Fischer 2003: 108).

Hajer’s approach exemplifies a constructionist approach to understanding what I have called contextualized strategic action. His emphasis on meaning-making, deliberation, trust, contradiction, indeterminacy and other dynamic features are welcome contributions to the framework I seek to craft. His work contributes to a post-empiricist literature on policy analysis (Fischer 2003; Fischer and Forrester 1993; Roe 1994; Stone 2002). It melds nicely with literature on more authentically participatory and deliberative processes (Dryzek 2002; Fung and Wright 2001; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Ryfe 2002; 2005).

Adding discursive analysis to institutional accounts allows the analyst to make subtle distinctions between discursive mechanisms – such as “structured ways of arguing” to which actors might defer – one the one hand, and more formal institutional routines (Hajer 1995: 267, 273). These distinctions help because they narrow the definitional scope of what we mean by “institution,” thus addressing John’s criticism that the latter approach subsumes too much under one concept (Section 2.2). The approach offers an important refinement to institutional accounts of policy-making.
2.4.3 Critique of Hajer and discourse-oriented approaches

Post-structuralist, discourse-oriented approaches present their own difficulties. I briefly touch on two of these. First, from an insider’s perspective, discursive analysts promote the following units of analysis: story-lines, narratives, arguments, and figures of speech (Fischer 2003). Reviewers such as Dryzek (2004) have asked for more specific discussion of how these concepts relate to each other. What difference, if any, does it make to invoke one rather than the others?

Secondly, at times Hajer appears to re-label institutional processes in discourse analytic jargon. He re-labels institutionalized barriers to reform (e.g., British science-based policy) as “disjunction markers.” The appointment of an institution to referee a conflict (e.g., the Royal Society) becomes the “discursive creation of a macro-actor” (1995: 269, 271). What purpose does this re-labelling serve? On this point Hajer is unclear. Perhaps he intends it to remind us that institutional and organizational structure and meaning are mutually constituted, and, as Whittier (2002) argues, need to be considered together. Such reminders however underscore the subtlety of the relationship between institutional structure and meaning. Hajer does not offer specific guidelines to distinguish “institutional routines” from “discursive mechanisms.” The overlapping vocabulary he uses may impede the development of a coherent framework for studying their interaction.

Next, consider criticisms from a perspective sceptical of interpretive accounts. First, how should one distinguish such analyses from alternative accounts? Hajer’s model treats interests as shaped by ideas and discourse. Accepting this point, however, still leaves use with explaining how actors act when they do, and how they negotiate and bargain, choosing some practices and meanings over others. Abandoning interest-based analysis weakens exploration of these questions.

Reflecting on post-positivist approaches, Peter John argues that:

once interest-based claims are relaxed, there is a broad spectrum of frameworks ranging from the Foucauldian to the modification of rational choice theory. Which ideas-based approach assists the quest to explain public policy? As with the other approaches [such as institutionalism] there is a tendency for one element in the explanation to dominate. As a result it is

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12 Whittier’s example is the U.S. military’s personnel policy on gay and lesbians, a practice which combines structure and meaning. It combines: “military procedures for questioning and expelling…servicemen (structure)” with conservative belief about “the relationship between claiming an identity…and engaging in same-sex sex (meaning)” (2002: 293).
impossible to know whether what is being claimed is correct or not. In post-
positivist and/or interpretivist public-policy everything is transformed into
discourse. If the empirical world is to be investigated, it cannot be seen as a
seamless connection of ideas. The policy analyst needs to cling on to the
claim that ideas affect the empirical world rather than the empirical world is
constituted by them. Although in a tautological sense the latter statement is
ture, the political process sorts ideas so that some are influential and others
fall out of favour. It is the process by which ideas become important in
emphasis added)

John goes on to say that post-positivist approaches such as Hajer's are “circular
and cannot explain” because their key concepts (ideas or discourse) subsume too
much. He reaches his tough-sounding conclusion because he holds to a distinction
between “description” and explanation. By “explain” he means offer a mechanistic
account of causality. Descriptions by contrast are what many policy studies produce,
because of the inherent complexity that confronts them (1998: 9). In a recent essay
(2003) John gives descriptions somewhat more intellectual credit, but still cleaves to
the distinction.

Scholars who favour a post-positivist approach rejoin that techniques such as
discourse analysis and phenomenology “offer a comprehensive approach to revelation
and explanation of the world . . . there is explanation a-plenty, but not explanation that
rests on causal generalizations” (Dryzek 2004). If these are “descriptions,” then so be
it – they are more helpful to policy makers, the rebuttal goes, than attempts to derive
covering laws (see Chapter 3).

Although John is sceptical of strong post-positivism, he takes ideas seriously.
He offers the following formulation of the relationship between ideas and interests:

Political decision-makers, as much as they are able to know what course of
action benefits them, do not follow ideas which are against their self-interest.
But to realize their self-interest they need ideas to give meaning in politics
and help shape their identity in the political world. It seems that at the same
time that ideas constitute interests, interests give reality to ideas. Though there
are politicians and bureaucrats who simply aim to maximize personal wealth,
fame or the size of their bureaus, most political actors are attached to political
ideas which help their careers and launch them into the political world. In the
soup of ideas there are always political agents which will attach (and detach)
themselves to some of them. It is this symbiosis between ideas and interests
which is at the heart of change and stability and public policy. (1998: 166)

Readers may sense an impasse between two approaches: strongly empiricist
vs. social constructionist (“post-positivist”). Occasional polemics in policy journals
heighten the sense of schism (e.g., Lynn Jr. 1999). But upon closer inspection, John's insights about the symbiotic relationship between ideas and interests actually complement and enhance Hajer's discourse-oriented institutionalism. Schmidt and her discursive institutionalist colleagues have arrived at a similar conclusion (Schmidt 2002; Radaelli and Schmidt 2004, van den Hoven 2004). As Frank Fischer puts it, reviewing this debate:

Discourse can and often does exert a causal influence on political change, although the influence tends to be that of an intervening rather than an independent variable. For this reason . . . discourse cannot be the cause, but it is often a cause of political change. (Fischer 2003: 30)

2.5 Research Question and Conceptual Framework

Given distinctive institutional constraints of the Thai state, how have the actions (especially narratives and claims) of civil society advocates influenced policy-making in the domain of electricity generation planning and power station siting?

Having stated the research question, the next broad choice is between epistemological frameworks. It is a choice between the mainstream (often nomothetic) frameworks reviewed in Section 2.2, and that of the social constructionist (and idiographic) analysts reviewed above. I choose the latter approach for the simple reason that it takes deliberation and argument much more seriously.

My goal is to craft a transparent framework for contextualized strategic action. I draw on discourse-oriented approaches, but add insights from empiricists such as Goldstein and Keohane (1993) and John (1998). The framework uses the following concepts, with synonyms or closely related concepts in parentheses:

- **Interests** – clearly-defined objectives and preferences, attributed to individuals, not organizations; they are the drivers of policy change;

- **Institutions and organisations** – sites of constraining discourses and routines. Their legitimacy and power is a function of the degree to which their discourses are coherent and uncontested (Hall 1993); actors can change institutions but at high cost (significant commitment of time, resources, and deliberation);

- **Micro-discourses** – representations used by actors in interaction (“ideas,” “frames,” “narratives,” “arguments”). They are means by which individual actors reproduce or change institutions, however their role in causality is contested. For
Hajer, these are not free-floating but tied to practices rather than actors (1995: 123), thus structuring interaction. For John, they are a power-resource for interests (suggesting they are tied to actors rather than practices);

- **Symbiosis between interests and micro-discourses** – to survive in political life, actors learn to adapt to new situations by discarding old discourses and adopting new ones (Hall 1993). The analogy is with the selection mechanism in evolutionary theory (John 1998: 184);

- **Narrative** – a ubiquitous form of interaction. Essential for complex organisations, whether social movement networks or bureaucracies, it serves instrumental as well as expressive functions. An explicit focus on story-telling allows the analyst to capture the symbolic aspects of political decisions;

- **Expert micro-discourses** – modern elites regard scientific and engineering discourses as authoritative. An interest-oriented theory would probe the extent these claims about science were used as barriers to participation or to delay decision-making. A discourse-oriented counterpart would ask to what extent they discursively structured conflict;

- **Problem definition** – occurs during all “stages” of a policy problem, allowing multiple opportunities to identify key episodes of interaction and key institutional practices.

The framework demands that we relate discursive interaction (micro-political action) to other fundamental drivers of politics, such as the pursuit of material interests. It demands that we show how both concepts (narratives and interests) are shaped by historical contexts and institutions (see Chapters 4 and 5).

### 2.6 Conclusion

Making use of two literatures, this chapter explored insights from scholars of contentious politics and policy studies. Section 2.2 introduced the foundational concepts of interests, institutions, and ideas. I then surveyed the problem of organisational change and learning, particularly relevant since actors in my case include power-wielding bureaucracies such as EGAT and the World Bank.

13 Their claim to “logical/analytic” epistemic status is received as more “objective” than that of narrative (Fischer 2003: 164).
Section 2.3 reviewed how social movement organisations must recruit and try to retain members, while acting instrumentally to accomplish their goals. They share these properties with interest groups. On the other hand, because of lack of reliable access to elites, they need to act in often highly unfavourable circumstances. Accordingly, I introduced two complementary perspectives for us to use in thinking about how civil society actors shape politics: a rationalist perspective based in theories of democratic responsiveness, and a constructionist perspective stressing the need to understand how discursive construction of issues makes a difference. Scholars using the former perspective have produced useful hypotheses to link theories to outcomes. However, as Burstein and Linton’s (2002) review showed, the extensive (nomothetic) research designs so often chosen do not, ironically, test these hypotheses conclusively.

Section 2.4 returned to questions of policy change and decision-making, from an intensively designed, discourse-oriented approach. I defended the utility of constructionist approaches to policy analysis. Drawing on the work of Fischer, Goldstein and Keohane, Hajer, Hall, and John, I sketched a framework that links interests, discourse, institutions, and contentious politics. The framework allows and encourages both interest-based and discourse-oriented analysis. It takes interests, discourse, and institutions seriously, defining each concept in a circumscribed manner. Few scholars have explicitly sought to bridge the social movement and policy-making literatures (Meyer 2002: 19). Of these, none, to my knowledge, has offered a framework of the sort championed here (cf. McAdam et al. 1997; Amenta and Young 1999; Burstein and Linton 2002; Joachim 2003). The following chapter refines the emergent framework, links it to specific research sub-questions, and designs research methods based on appropriate methodology.
Chapter 3  Methodology: A Critical Realist Approach

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3.1 Introduction

Methodology consists of philosophical interrogation of purpose, concepts, and method. That is to say, we talk methodology when we explicitly justify how we link our initial questions, our conceptual framework, and the specific techniques we use in a given research study (Sayer 1992; Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 23–30). Methodology as such involves reasoning about how the world is and how we gain knowledge of it (ontology and epistemology), and the relevance of these considerations for all phases of the research process. This chapter reviews a number of methodological issues relevant to this study. I introduce the process-oriented, critical realist approach to explanation used in this thesis.

Methodology is important for at least three reasons. First, it allows us to apply, test, and refine the theory and conceptual frameworks we use. Testing or applying a
theory requires that the analyst unambiguously translate its abstractions into operations such as collecting relevant data, and analysing that data in a reliable manner. Second, vital monographs I drew on to craft my conceptual framework in Chapter 2 do not discuss methods at all (e.g., Hajer 1995; Throgmorton 1996). On the other hand, otherwise useful methods texts discuss crucial issues such as causation all too briefly (e.g., Bernard 1994; Creswell 1998; Seale 1998; Silverman 2005). To avoid an unbalanced exposition, this chapter makes explicit connections between theory and method.

Finally, debate goes on in social sciences and in wider society about what kind of knowledge social science inquiry creates. To what degree are we justified in considering that knowledge “scientific”? The pursuit of methodology is important because it allows us an explicit stance in such debates.

The chapter proceeds as follows. Section 3.1 re-states my research agenda and offers specific research questions phrased in terms of the conceptual framework introduced in the preceding chapter. Section 3.2 discusses key challenges and issues related to quality of explanation. Section 3.3 describes study design and techniques of data collection and analysis. This chapter argues that my basic methodological challenge is to construct causal explanation. Neither empirical realism nor relativism offer adequate foundations to meet this challenge. Instead a critical realist philosophy of science (Sayer 1992; 2000) is most appropriate for my inquiry.

3.1.1 Purpose and objects of Inquiry

My thesis pursues the following general research question or agenda:

Q1. Given distinctive institutional constraints of the Thai state, how have the actions (especially narratives and claims) of civil society advocates influenced practices of electricity generation planning and hydropower project implementation?

Any research question necessarily invokes certain objects of inquiry, or concepts. The above question invokes objects such as “institutional constraints” and “policy-making”. However, by doing so it does not confine the analyst to a particular framework or theoretical treatment of these objects. Chapter 2 therefore introduced the particular conceptual framework I wish to apply and develop, which I labelled a
“contextualized strategic action” (CSA) framework. The framework represents my approach to studying the general problem of agency-structure interaction (see Section 2.4.2). It is compatible with other constructionist models of political debate and conflict, such as Throgmorton’s notion of planning as “persuasive storytelling in a web of relations” (1996).

To begin exploring methodological concerns explicitly, the following question casts Q1 in language that emphasizes issues of causation:

Q2. Under what conditions and via what causal mechanisms did civil society actions (especially narratives and claims) cause state actors to change policies or practices?

Q2 re-states Q1 in language compatible with the process- and mechanism-oriented approach pursued in the thesis. To answer Q2 we need to distinguish types of change. Fox and Brown (1998) assessed the impact of a number of advocacy campaigns on World Bank projects and policies, and identified several types of policy change. Joining two of their logically equivalent categories, I see three types of change relevant to my case studies:

(1) Cancellation or suspension of a project (e.g., NGOs campaigned to halt construction of Pak Mun Dam, unsuccessfully);
(2) Mitigation of social impacts of ongoing projects (e.g., the 2003 decision to open gates of Pak Mun Dam seasonally);
(3) New policies and programs (e.g., energy conservation in the early 1990s, new irrigation works in 2004).

The purpose of my thesis then is to answer Q2 using the CSA framework, and then re-construct that framework as new findings challenge it. But first, how do I justify the conceptual move to Q2? Answering that question requires us to reflect on how critical realism treats its objects of inquiry, on criteria for good explanations, and other basic challenges.

3.2 Key methodological challenges

The key methodological challenges for this inquiry include, first and most
broadly, the question of social science. By what principles do I propose to gain knowledge of institutional practices, or interests, or any other object of inquiry? Should we attempt to know these social phenomena by applying the same methods applied to natural phenomena? Is this knowledge scientific and if so how?

A second and closely related challenge is that of constructing explanation. When analysts “explain” social events or practices they engage in two distinct tasks: they interpret meanings, and they argue about causality. What underlying principles guide interpretation on the one hand and causal argument on the other?

Third, how we treat contexts poses a challenge. Do we abstract away from specific geo-historical contexts in search of regularities, as most natural scientists and positivist social scientists do? Or do we argue instead that particular contexts are indispensable for understanding our objects of inquiry? Fourth, there is the challenge of bounding and sampling. By what logic do we select (sample) particular cases or events for detailed scrutiny? Finally, and implicated in all of the above, are questions of rhetoric and narrative.

My guide through this methodological thicket is a philosophy of science called critical (or causal) realism (Bhaskar 1975; Sayer 1992; 2000). Sayer describes critical realism as “a philosophy of and for the social sciences. It is mainly concerned with ontology, with being, and has a relatively open or permissive stance towards . . . the theory of knowledge” (2000: 32). Table 3.1 summarizes critical realism’s distinctive approach to the structure of reality.

To see how critical realism differs from empiricism and interpretivism, compare it to their paradigms of explanation (see Table 3.1). Empiricist social science typically treats objects of inquiry as “variables.” Positivist inquiry abstracts them away from their context or environment in order to establish patterns of correlation. The goal of explanation is a general statement that takes the form \( y = f(x_i) \) where \( y \) is the dependent variable and \( x_i \) the set of independent variables. This version of strong empiricism is what school students are often taught as canonical scientific method. Having established de-contextualized patterns of correlation, the next step in empiricist explanation is to venture statements of causality. The model of causality is a “covering law” that can predict how \( y \) will behave, given precise knowledge of initial or scope conditions (Lazar 1998). The covering-law model of causality traces its

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14 An exception is empirically oriented anthropology, which is methodologically holistic and emphasizes context.
In covering law accounts, explanation consists of subjecting robust empirical generalizations to higher- and higher-level generalizations, the most general of all standing as laws. In such accounts, models are invariant – they work the same under all conditions. . . . In principle, either [a process such as] democratization occurs in similar ways everywhere under specifiable necessary and sufficient conditions or the elements of democratization . . . conform to general laws. The covering law analyst’s job is to establish empirical uniformities, then subsume them under such generalizations. (2001: 23)

Like mainstream empiricism, critical realism treats the world as independent of the analyst’s knowledge of it. However it differs sharply from empirical social science on a number of counts. First, it rejects the mainstream empiricist (Humean) model of causation as regular succession of events. As Sayer puts it:

The conventional impulse to prove causation by gathering data on regularities, repeated occurrences, is . . . misguided; at best these might suggest where to look for candidates for causal mechanisms. What causes something to happen has nothing to do with the number of times we have observed it happening. *Explanation depends instead on identifying causal mechanisms and how they work, and discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions.* (2000: 14; emphasis added)

Second, critical realism insists on studying how social objects relate to each other. It rejects the positivist social science attempt to study individuals abstracted from social structure (ibid, 13). In sharp contrast to covering-law explanations of causality, both critical realism and interpretivism argue social systems are “open” and indeterminate (Sayer 1992). Social systems are composed of intrinsically meaningful objects. Since meanings change, social phenomena and systems do not reproduce themselves with law-like regularity.

For interpretivists, the goal of explanation is not a thin description but rather a rich, nuanced account of how embedded actors construct meanings and the effects of
<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Empiricism</th>
<th>Critical realism</th>
<th>Interpretivism</th>
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<td>Empirical realism</td>
<td>Historicism</td>
<td>Idealism, Skepticism, Relativism, Poststructuralism</td>
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<td><strong>Ontology:</strong> The world exists independently of our thoughts of it</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can only know what it is like from within a discourse</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (with pessimistic implications for knowledge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of reality</td>
<td>Reality is what we actually observe (or infer and disprove on the basis of observation)</td>
<td>Reality is stratified into the real, the actual, and the empirical</td>
<td>Multiples realities exist: situated knowledges define and construct multiple social and “natural” realities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The natural and social world exists independently of our knowledge of it (“the real”)</td>
<td>The real = domain of powers that can be activated or remain dormant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Activated powers (= “the actual”) may or may not be observable</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology:</strong> Principles of Explanation</td>
<td>Law building: Generalization and prediction based on hypothetical-deductive method</td>
<td>Explanation based on necessary and contingent conditions</td>
<td>Interpretation of meaning (Hermeneutics)</td>
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<td>All knowledge is mediated by concepts</td>
<td>Yes (except positivism)</td>
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Table 3.1 continued

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</tbody>
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Source: Compiled from Sayer (2000, 1992); Blaauw and Pritchard (2005). Empiricism is the view that knowledge of the world must derive from “experience,” a concept “notoriously difficult” to define (Blaauw and Pritchard 2005: 52). The closely-related concept of “perception” can be defined along a continuum that posits reality can be perceived: (a) directly without mediation; (b) mediated by mental sense-data; (c) mediated by more complex mental representations, i.e., ideas (2005: 114). Belief in (c) is a form of idealism (2005: 15).

those meanings in terms of emergent properties of social life (Geertz 1973). The analyst must understand the meanings embedded actors attach to events and practices, and how meanings “underwrite” particular forms of practice such as political life (Fay 1996: 118). In practice, however, interpretation focuses most of its energy on analysing what a discourse means (including how it displays certain rhetorical powers). However, if this is done by treating discourse as a text for close semiotic analysis, the analyst may neglect tracing actual social causes and effects of a discourse.

Critical realism by contrast regards “thick description” as necessary but insufficient. It emphasizes seeking causal explanations, even for unique events (Sayer 2000: 131). The next section reviews how.

3.2.1 Components of critical realist explanation

A critical realist approach to causal explanation might proceed in four steps (Sayer 1992: Ch. 3). The first three steps/tasks involve selecting the event/outcome to be explained (the explanandum). The fourth step – the crux of explanation – involves constructing plausible causal pathways (mechanisms) that link initial events and outcomes.
Steps (1)–(3): Specify objects of explanation and conceptual framework

(1) Specify the concepts/objects of inquiry. The key concepts or objects I use are: events (key discursive exchanges and outcomes), civil society actors (as individuals, as advocacy networks, and as social movement organizations), Thai executive branch actors, actors’ interests, actors’ discourses, actors’ non-verbal communications, and key institutional/discursive practices. The objects which I seek to explain are: selected episodes of policy argumentation and non-discursive conflict over Pak Mun Dam and electricity planning. Since variation exists in these episodes, we can compare cases where the state’s response was largely what the civil society actors demanded, largely not, and distinctly different from original positions.

(2) Describe these objects: (a) how do they relate to each other, that is, how are they positioned in a conceptual/linguistic structure in relation to other objects? (b) What “causal powers and liabilities” (or causal “mechanisms”) do they possess? We define conceptual objects based on their relation to other objects. How concepts exist in semantic and structural relationship with other objects is of course an important element of interpretive social science. I devoted the bulk of Chapter 2 to this task.

All objects, including meaningful objects such as discourses and intentions, have causal powers and liabilities; and critical realist explanation in part consists of establishing these powers and tracking their combinations in actual events. By causal “power,” Sayer refers to an object’s inherent capacity to generate a given effect. Likewise, a “liability” refers to an object’s inherent susceptibility to be affected by other objects.

Table 3.2, building on discussion in Chapter 2, shows what I take to be the capacities and liabilities of some key concepts/objects I use to construct explanation. In the second and third columns, I conjecture about their inherent properties. In order to avoid circular reasoning or tautology, the analyst needs to specify what it is about the object that results in the power or liability. Critical realist explanation distinguishes real (inherent) causal powers from actual manifestations. Whether a power is manifested depends on its contingent interaction with other causal powers.

Steps (1) and (2) involve conceptualization and abstraction, and the result is a conceptual framework. The next two steps apply the framework to particular events of interest.
(3) Select a series of events of interest. What patterns of change do they exhibit? A critical realist approach “samples” reality by selecting outcomes the analyst seeks to explore and to ultimately explain. The goal of explanation is a plausible causal pathway\textsuperscript{15} that produced the outcome of interest (the explanandum), not a statement of correlation, co-variation, or other regularity. Hence the sampling issues associated with an empiricist paradigm – selecting a high-\textit{N} “representative” sample so as to allow reliable statistical analyses of co-variation – do not apply. In this thesis I am particularly interested in longitudinal series of state–civil society interactions involving varying degrees of change in electricity generation policy (at the system level), and site-specific conflict management processes. I selected three primary cases: (1) politics of electricity planning and conservation, 1960s–2004; (2) contention over Pak Mun Dam, 1989–2004; (3) politics of knowledge relevant to livelihoods, lower Mun river basin, 1999–2004.

I review these below in Section 3.3. The distinctive challenge of Step (3) is to compare episodes of contentious interaction within cases, in regard to important features such as:

- Repression (non-violent and violent): triggers, levels and outcomes
- Claim-making and negotiation: triggers, micro-structure, duration, outcome

The goal of this step is a more detailed description of how episodes of contention differ within a case study. Having tentatively established distinctive patterns of similarity/difference within (and between) cases, the next step attempts to account for them, in terms of critical realist causality.

**Step (4): Specify plausible causal pathways and mechanisms**

This step involves establishing plausible causal pathways, understood as sequences of causal interactions that produce intermediate outcomes, and ultimately the final outcome of interest. By pathways I mean sequences of necessary and contingent social mechanisms.

\textsuperscript{15} I thank R.J. Fisher for help formulating this phrase.
### Table 3.2 Capacities and liabilities of key concepts/objects in my framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Objects / Description</th>
<th>Possess the following capacities (powers):</th>
<th>Possess the following susceptibilities to change:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **State institutions and organisations** – sites of constraining discourses and practices | Can produce and reproduce legitimating discourses and practices  
Can delay or shape implementation of policy | Can be disrupted when: legitimacy/rationality challenged by outside actors; superior authority imposes change |
| **Interests** – attributed to individuals, not organizations; objectives and preferences; drivers of policy change  
Examples: job security, popularity, political allegiance | To engage in collective action and alliances  
To articulate preferences through political discourse | Preferences can shift on the basis of: threat, persuasive discourse; shifts in distribution of material interests; changes in organizational division of labour |
| **Discourses** – representations, ideas, narratives | Frame policy problems and solutions by means of narrative and figuration  
To shape individual preferences (especially in routine settings)  
To construct an interpretive community, with implications for participation | Are regularly challenged by opponents ability to offering an alternative policy frame or narrative  
Narratives can be attacked for failing to resonate with an audience’s experience, its cultural beliefs, and empirical “facts”  
Meaning changes when different actors contribute to a discourse (e.g., “sustainable development”) |

The concept of causal mechanism, well worth reviewing, goes back to seventeenth-century realist philosophy and natural science (Mayntz 2004). Robert Merton imported the term into twentieth-century sociology, and used it to generate “middle range” theories about social structure, deviance, and bureaucracy (Merton 1968; Johnson 2000). Explanation in terms of social mechanisms attracts a diverse and lively contemporary literature (see e.g., *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 2004, Vol. 34, Nos. 2–3).

In contemporary realist social science, the concept of mechanisms does not
refer to microscopic processes operating in rigid systems (e.g., Newtonian mechanics), so the term “mechanism” is somewhat misleading. Rather, statements about mechanisms are causal hypotheses or propositions (Mayntz 2004). Definitions of mechanisms vary and are contested (Mahoney 2001a; Mayntz 2004). One useful approach to thinking about mechanisms is to regard them essentially as action verbs that describe changes that occur to social objects used in a conceptual framework (cf. Tilly, 2001: 25). Mechanisms are social processes. They are not laws (understood as “general statements of co-variation;” Mayntz 2004). However, robust mechanisms – those inferred to occur in a variety of geo-historical contexts – have law-like properties. Notwithstanding this nuance, proponents maintain that mechanism-oriented explanation differs significantly from the covering law approach.

A distinctive feature of such explanation is that mechanisms produce different outcomes depending on initial conditions (including social structure they are activated in) and on the contingent presence of other mechanisms. Mechanisms can be formulated at different levels of specificity, and can serve as components of higher-order social processes (such as democratization) (Tilly 2001; Mayntz 2004).

At an operational level step (4) involves describing outcomes as combinations of certain necessary and conditional actions (Figure 3.1). “Necessary” means the action is inferable given the causal powers and liabilities of objects in the conceptual framework. “Contingent” means not deducible from the conceptual framework chosen (Mahoney, 2000; Blaauw and Pritchard, 2005). If indistinguishably similar action occurs robustly across cases, and within a longitudinal case, we can, in process-oriented, critical realist explanation, infer that action constitutes, hypothetically, a “mechanism” (Tilly 2004).

For example, in my case studies of contentious politics, I observed a number of recurrent actions and interactions. From them I hypothesized that a number of cognitive/discursive mechanisms are involved:

- rhetorical framing/counter-framing
- mobilization
- elite intervention
- deliberation
- rationalizing/strategizing
- socialization
- shaming
My analysis also suggested structural/relational mechanisms and higher-order processes were important in producing change, such as:

- political destabilization
- spatial transformation of contention
- mobilization – repression – acceptance cycles

My case studies and conclusion elaborate on the above mechanisms. The methodological point to emphasize here is that these “mechanisms” are hypothesized from the interaction between theory and observation, between conceptual framework and case studies.

**Figure 3.1 Structures of causal explanation**

![Figure 3.1 Structures of causal explanation](image)

Source: Adapted from Sayer (1992). Mechanisms, shown as arrows above, involve interaction of the powers and liabilities of objects X and c.
As Mayntz puts it:

Processes identified in the causal reconstruction of a particular case . . . can be formulated as statements of mechanisms if their basic structure . . . can also be found in other (classes of) cases. The mobilization process observed in a fund-raising campaign . . . can, for instance, be generalized to cover other outcomes such as collective protest or a patriotic movement inducing young men massively to enlist in a war. (2004: 254)

Relevant discussion of such interactions occurs at the conclusion of each case study narrative (Chapters 4–8), and especially in Chapter 9, where I reflect further on the utility of “mechanistic” explanation.

**Contextualizing social action**

A coherent research question focusses on certain concepts/objects, and necessarily places other concepts in the background. In other words, concepts of interest are placed “in context.” Contextualization is important because causal mechanisms play out in a social structure (Mayntz 2004; Pickel 2004). The social structure constitutes the set of initial conditions crucial to specify when reconstructing a causal pathway. The largest-scale contexts I describe are the historic processes that have made current Thai politics a combination of money politics, civil society activism, and authoritarianism (Chapter 4). Intermediate in scale between micro-political contention and historical context, I describe institutions such as electricity planning and conflict management (Chapters 5 and 6).

The key methodological challenge in answering my question is how to assess, given a particular response by a state actor, the relative weight to assign to civil society actors in shaping that response (Tilly, 1999). Advocates’ claims were obviously a necessary cause in generating responses – for example, NGOs and villagers originated and vigorously mobilized the campaign for wild-capture fisheries compensation (Case 2). They originated and pursued the subsequent campaign for restoration of natural flows (Case 3). Yet these “push factors” may have only placed these claims on the government’s decision agenda, or kept them raised. Processes by which movement claims rose or fell on the agenda also demand scrutiny.

**3.2.2 Quality of explanation**
How do we determine the quality of an explanation? A reviewer might first look for indicators of problematic explanation, and then reflect on the philosophy of knowledge that underpins the explanation. This section addresses the first level of evaluation. The following problems are not paradigm-specific:

**Over-determined explanation** occurs when more than one set of processes, each of which singly could produce an event, are offered as an explanation for that event. Example: statements such as “thus, a number of factors [a, b, c, d, e] during the period, led to x.” Consider for example the outcome *declining military control of state institutions* in Thailand, during the late 20th century. We could point to the following sets of processes:

1) Civil society:
   (a) student political activism
   (b) occasional support for student demonstrations by other factions of the middle class
   (c) rural insurgency led by the Communist Party of Thailand

2) Change in elite alignments and preferences:
   (d) new attitudes towards insurgency by regional commanders such as Prem Tinsulalonda
   (e) King Bhumipol’s (Rama IX) emergence as an independent political actor
   (f) economic changes, beginning with a boom in export-cropping during the 1950s
   (g) parliament grows both in number of seats and influence during the 1980s
   (h) civilian technocracy under Prime Minister Prem Tinsulalonda (1980–88)

All those processes were indeed present, but which are of primary causal importance? Answering this question requires moving from invoking multiple putative causes, to more closely exploring chains of necessary and contingent events (in turn composed of mechanisms) (Chapter 4).

**Reductionist error** occurs when important intervening mechanisms are left out. Sometimes this is a result of constructing objects/concepts that are overly broad, for example, defining “institutions” as systems of rules, norms and beliefs (see Chapter 2). Reductionism involves errors of identification and abstraction (Sayer 2000: 142).

**Functionalist error** occurs when we explain the origins of a certain structure, practice, or object solely “in terms of its functional role in an ongoing system” (Fay 1996: 120). Hence the analyst does not question how a social system produces the structures necessary for its functioning.

**Lack of refutation:** This error occurs when an analyst does not evaluate evidence that might refute her findings, leading to the complaint that she has
constructed a plausible story, but has not evaluated other plausible stories.

*Other instances of faulty reasoning:* We can trace how an explanation reasons about its mechanisms. Which are necessary, which contingent, and why? We watch for epistemic or logical fallacies. Vague language may cover gaps in analysis, as can substituting the narration of a chronological sequence of events for a causal explanation.

### 3.2.3 Narrative and rhetoric in social science

All social science consists of narrative – linear texts that tell a story from opening to closing argument. Any embedded analyses (e.g., modelling, statistical inferences, figures, structured lists) are also narrated. Narrators use a variety of rhetorical strategies in order to persuade their readers of the validity or authenticity of their findings and claims. They make smart analogies and deploy powerful metaphors. Are rhetoric and narrative nothing more than figurative language and formal structure that we can isolate from more “substantive” content? Or do some world views require stories to adequately and fully convey their knowledge (Nussbaum 1990 in Throgmorton 1996: 47)?

Questions about the relationship between rhetoric, narrative, and knowing appear to be instances of the more general tension between relativism – with its acceptance of multiple ways of knowing – and realism. Regardless of their underlying philosophy of knowledge, writers of scientific narrative face the following specific tension. Because the thesis is a series of narratives, a reader expects well-organized and coherent stories. At the same time, because the thesis makes scientific claims, the reader expects, *inter alia*, a real distinction between conceptual framework and methodology, on the one hand, and findings, on the other.

In this thesis, which presents a series of complex longitudinal case studies, a tension exists between narrative action, with its seductive emphasis on character, drama, and the flow of action, and the need to suspend story telling for the purpose of conducting analysis.

As Kiser (1996) explains, the desire to produce a complete, richly textured narrative can lead to several problems. First, temporal antecedents can be confused for causal ones (1996: 256). Second, the desire to capture complex social interaction can lead to attempting “total explanation” of historical outcomes (Kiser 1996):
When total explanation of particular historical outcomes is the goal, one
theory will never be sufficient. Therefore, there is a tendency among
narrativists to use theory as a large "toolbox" of ideas to be drawn on as
needed in particular explanations—instead of using one theory to provide a
general structure (plot) for the entire narrative, different theories are used to
account for particular links in the narrative sequence. . . . If the only constraint
on the explanation is accounting for the particular case (in other words, if
there are no theoretical constraints), than virtually any analyst will be able to
calculate an explanation that "fits" the facts of that case if their toolbox of
theoretical ideas is large enough. As a result, we can have little faith in this
form of explanation. . . . this approach . . . yields no anomalies, since some
theory is used to explain each aspect of the case. Since anomalies are an
important source of scientific progress, the narrativist move toward total
explanations is problematic. (1996: 258)

Human action is complicated, and literature is rewarded for sophisticated rendering of
such complexity. Kiser argues however that when analysts describe actors acting in
different ways for different reasons they risk “total” explanation (ibid., 259). To
avoid this fallacy, the social scientist must distinguish between empirical descriptions,
and theoretically grounded explanation.

The theoretical options are: (1) specify conditions under which different
motivations for action [e.g., instrumental vs. value- and identity-based] will dominate
or (2) use simpler micro-foundations, such as rational choice theory. The first option,
Kiser argues, is extremely difficult. The second option involves reduction to produce
falsifiable accounts, and inevitably results in partial explanation of less rhetorical
elegance (ibid., 259, 264).

I use several basic devices to order the text, to limit undesirable rhetorical
influence of narrative, and to avoid total explanation. First, I maintain a tension
between conceptual framework and methodology, on the one hand, and case study
material on the other. For instance, as case study findings emerged, I did not make
significant revisions to the original conceptual framework (Chapter 2). Instead, I do
that work in the final chapter (Chapter 9), so that it provides a vital space for critique.
Second, the expository style I use first selects key episodes of contention for review,
summarizes those episodes succinctly, and then expands upon the summary narrative
with explicit analysis (marked by sub-heading “Analysis”).

Second, the conceptual framework advanced in Chapter 2, although broad, is

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16 For instance an account might explain some action in rational and atomistic terms, and other action in non-rational,
expressive terms (e.g., based on concepts such as collective identity).
not a heterogeneous toolbox of theory. Explanations of social action in this thesis are mechanisms: they include instrumental, norm-following, and argumentative/deliberative mechanisms. The connections between these are stated in Table 3.2. I agree with Kiser (1996) that specifying the conditions under which each mechanism operates is difficult. This thesis is a partial explanation.

### 3.2.5 Social science knowledge

What is “knowledge”? In interpretivist social science, knowledge is not categorically different from belief (Johnson 2000: 27, 166). This is consistent with relativism, which maintains that multiple realities exist along with multiple truths. In empirical realism, by contrast, knowledge gets defined not as belief, nor justified belief, but justified true belief (Audi 2003).

Relativists regard “truth” as a convention established by particular communities. “Truth,” in this view, refers to nothing more than practically useful beliefs (Sayer 2000: 42 citing Richard Rorty [1979]). Critical realists agree that these conventions are inescapable; they mediate our knowledge of the world. This means, arguing against empiricism, that no Archimedean standpoint exists on which we can stand outside discourse to gain absolute truth. On the other hand, against strong versions of relativism, critical realists argue that our concepts and conventions mediate, but do not pre-determine everything that we observe or learn about the world (Sayer 2000: 47).

Critical realists also challenge the relativist notion that the “truth” of a discourse is nothing more than its practical value in a given context. A mechanistic explanation may not initially be received as having any use-value. A critical realist may respect the instrumental utility of indigenous knowledge, while pursuing her own project of explanation. For critical realists, knowledge is belief justified by claims to explain causation.

**Belief justification**

We justify our beliefs in four basic ways: direct perception, memory, the
testimony of others, and reasoning (Audi, 2003). For instance, I justify my belief that villagers protesting against Pak Mun Dam in recent years were not hired to mount their multi-month protest actions in the following manner:

(1) I have seen protest organizers receive donations, but I understand these to be for food and supplies, not wages. I thus distinguish payments in kind from hiring;
(2) Villager leaders and protestors have frequently been asked by media and bystanders whether they were hired, and in all cases I know of no one who has confirmed it;
(3) I have heard villager leaders tell me how campaigns draw on villagers on a rotating basis, so as to spread the burden of participating;
(4) I have visited villager leaders at home and assessed their living conditions. Villager leaders appear to have incurred financial hardship for their efforts;
(5) From reading and observation I know that the movement has made claims for financial compensation, as well as for decommissioning Pak Mun Dam. Hence people could participate based on the prospect of material gain and restoration of their dignity. I have read social movement scholars discuss the expressive and solidarity benefits of protest. I have observed movement participants interact expressively at meetings. Hence it is not necessary to get paid to demonstrate. Participants’ reasoning – the potential material payoff from a financial settlement, and the symbolic payoff from the potential opening the Dam – in combination with the benefits of taking direct action, suffice as explanations of motive.

Based on reason, testimony, and observation, I feel my belief is justified. Whether my justification is credible to you depends on the conventions of a scientific community. In turn that depends in part on whether we agree on conceptual distinctions, such as between receiving donations and being hired to protest. But that is not all it depends on. A critical realist would insist semantics does not exhaust our understanding of whether villagers were substantively paid to protest or not. My justification about protest is backed by several reasons. However, when I finally supply you with a set of cognitive and relational mechanisms in (5), I claim to offer a causal account of mobilization as a dynamic and multi-faceted social process. It is an account more interesting than that which relies on a single mechanism such as utility-seeking.

Now we can return to the problem of “truth,” and what it means for
knowledge. A critical realist argues, against relativism, that knowledge is neither equivalent nor reducible to a use-value definition of truth. Rather, for a critical realist, knowledge is belief justified by claims to describe underlying causal mechanisms.

The most interesting disputes over knowledge of course involve far more complexity than the above example. Are wild-capture fisheries in long-term decline? Is opening Pak Mun Dam four months per year sufficient to restore wild-capture fisheries, or are other measures needed, such as fisheries law enforcement or habitat restoration? These questions are complex because they involve real objects (fishery migration patterns and population trends) known only via concept-dependent intervention, as well as intrinsically meaningful social objects (fisheries management).

Our discussion thus far has given us a basis to settle one question posed at the beginning of this chapter: should we attempt to know social phenomena by applying the empirical methods we apply to natural phenomena? To this I would answer that our knowledge of the social world must differ from that of natural science because social objects (e.g., institutions and discourses) have meaning for actors, which change as a result of ongoing interaction (Sayer 2000: Ch. 2). We cannot be indifferent to these meanings, because they determine the object.¹⁷

3.3 Research sub-questions, case studies, and data analysis

Under what conditions and via what causal mechanisms did civil society actions (especially narratives and claims) cause state actors to change policies or practices? The following table follows up this analytical question by parsing it into a number of logically and empirically linked sub-questions:

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¹⁷ Hence, having settled the question of whether protesters were actually hired, we could also ask why some actors persist in believing protestors are hired, how they warrant their beliefs, and what effects that belief has on their policy narratives.
Table 3.3 Research sub-questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Theme</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interactions</td>
<td>In what dynamic contexts of structure and meaning did contending parties interact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Contexts, Patterns and Outcomes of Contention)</td>
<td>What were direct and indirect outcomes of state-civil society interaction in each case?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Knowledge</td>
<td>What role do lay and expert knowledge discourses play in structuring conflicts and influencing outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organizational and institutional change</td>
<td>To what extent have relevant Thai state agencies displayed capacity to participate in, adapt, or learn from deliberative exchanges?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What relevant political institutions changed as a result of the conflicts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Causality</td>
<td>What plausible causal connections (i.e., causal mechanisms) link interaction to particular outcomes of interest?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.1 Case study synopses

I have selected three cases from which to pursue answers to these questions. Each case contains episodes in which civil society actors made claims to change established discourses and practices. By combinations of causal mechanisms we do not yet know, these claims triggered unprecedented changes.

Case 1: Politics of electricity supply planning and conservation, 1960s–2004 (Chapter 5). I describe conventional electricity generation planning, practices, with emphasis on the emergence of energy conservation and demand-side management (DSM) in late 1980s. My study found that in the early 1990s, the staff of a “technical” international NGO based in Bangkok considerably influenced the design of Thailand’s first energy conservation program by EGAT. Despite notable successes, DSM programs were marginalized by the dominant discourse of supply expansion planning which framed energy conservation as peripheral to EGAT’s main purpose. Although “cost-plus” utilities\(^\text{18}\) inherently have strong incentives to pursue supply

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\(^{18}\) Utilities guaranteed their revenue requirements. Revenue requirements are defined to cover the total cost of supplying power and energy, plus a return on investment deemed acceptable to capital markets (Swisher et al. 1997).
expansion, Thailand’s outcome was not pre-determined: it was contingent on EGAT’s autonomy from rigorous oversight. In turn this was a function of the absence of a participatory regulatory body that could insist on alternate planning practices, such as integrated resource planning. However, since the late 1990s Thai NGOs have launched more ambitious critiques of power supply planning. Yet they are still disadvantaged by the absence of an independent regulator.

**Case 2: Mobilization against Pak Mun Dam, 1989–2004** (Chapters 6–7). Villagers associated with Mun River Villagers’ Committee (and after 1995, the Assembly of the Poor) mounted a series of campaigns to halt the dam, and subsequently to receive compensation for loss of inundated assets and wild-capture fisheries income. The first fisheries campaign, seeking three years’ lost income during the period of construction of Pak Mun Dam (1991–93), resulted in a significant and unprecedented concessions by the first Chuan Leekpai administration (1992–95).

A second campaign for compensation for fisheries livelihoods lost in perpetuity, was acceded to in principle under PM Chavalit Yongchaiyudh (1996–97), but subsequently denied by the second Chuan administration (1997–2001). After a period of abeyance in the wake of this rejection, villagers mounted a new campaign in 1999 to decommission the Dam and restore natural flows. During 2000–02, Pak Mun Dam was assessed by various parties, including the World Commission on Dams (WCD), Ubon Ratchathani University (UBU), and oppositional villagers and NGOs themselves. Sustained contention eventually resulted in an unprecedented four-month seasonal opening decision in 2003 under PM Thaksin Shinawatra.

This case study does not constitute an ethnography of protest campaigns or movement dynamics (cf. Missingham 2003). I focus instead on elucidating and accounting for patterns of interaction between state and dam opponents.

**Case 3. Politics of knowledge relevant to livelihoods on the lower Mun, 1999–2004** (Chapter 8). This case examines how four “expert” studies – a local knowledge research project, an opinion poll, and the WCD and UBU studies – construct and contextualize the relationship between aquatic resources and local livelihoods. I review two types of strategies elites use to counter oppositional policy narratives: power-wielding rhetoric and substantive investment in new projects aimed at increasing fisheries and agricultural production.
I found that although the WCD and subsequent studies in 2001–03 led to increases in knowledge, mere accumulation of knowledge did not resolve controversies about appropriate development strategies for the lower Mun river basin. The “failure” of knowledge discourses to resolve controversy results from the genuine complexity of rural livelihoods, divergent interests, and dynamics involving the production, reproduction, and reception of knowledge discourses. I point to the current lack of processes favourable to the kinds of multi-stakeholder deliberation demanded by the real complexity of livelihoods in the lower Mun River basin. As did the power system planning case study, this case also contributes to addressing the thesis question: What role do lay and expert knowledge discourses play in structuring conflicts?

Verbal vs. non-verbal action

Each case is a contextualized episode of contention between state and civil society actors. I treat episodes as chronological series of actions-responses-counter actions, resulting in a particular outcome of interest. My focus is on verbal actions: claims, arguments, and moments of face-to-face deliberation, in both spoken form and text. However these actions often (but not always) intertwined with “direct” actions. Protestors blockaded facilities and camped in Bangkok for months on end. State agents organized police actions and counter-demonstrations. Direct actions have verbal and non-verbal components. One way to describe the emergent totality is by using a dramaturgical model or metaphor (Hunt and Bedford 1997). Thus Baker interprets Assembly of the Poor processions around Government House in Bangkok as performances of non-violent siege and occupation (Baker 2000).

However, since I am interested in policy argumentation, I focus more on the dynamics of making claims and counter claims. Put slightly differently, if I interpret dramatic performances I do so to aid my interpretation of policy persuasion. I want to know what each major contestant argues and how, in terms of argumentation strategy and other rhetorical devices. Do power-holders adapt to pressure, do they resist it, and for what reasons?
3.3.2 Analytic procedures

The study poses a number of recurring operational questions. First, to determine *institutional practices*, an analyst might:

- Conduct written discourse analysis: key primary texts include handouts presented at meetings, plans, position papers, commissioned research studies;
- Use secondary sources;
- Infer practices from patterns of concrete effects (e.g., a series of dams constructed);
- Use interviews to resolve ambiguity (i.e., differences between texts and practice).

To infer actors’ key *interests* and preferences, it is possible to:

- Conjecture that individual interests align with organizational routines and norms (i.e., dissident insiders are an exception). However certain managers have more discretion or autonomy to interpret routine;
- Use interviews to qualify or refute conjectures.

How do I re-construct policy narratives as well as infer causality? By this iterative sequence: chronological tracing of actions and pivotal debates, discourse analysis, interviews.

3.3.4 Specific techniques

In each case study, I rely primarily on written discourse analysis and interviews. In addition, I was able to observe a number of relevant interactions. This section briefly reviews discourse analysis and interviews. What are their limitations and potentials?

**Written discourse analysis**
Written discourse analysis refers to a suite of approaches, not a unified
discipline (Hoey 2001; Wodak and Meyer 2001). I use written discourse analysis to
accomplish several key tasks: first, to comprehend competing policy narratives and
arguments, and to track how actors change their position over time. Second, I use it to
assess rhetorical strategies in these narratives. This allows me to interpret how a text
constructs the Pak Mun problem and its various protagonists. My own response to key
texts also gives me an initial basis to discuss policy positions with key informants. It
helps me construct interview questions with informants who may be able to describe
decision-making processes.

(1) I track inter-discursive and inter-textual connections in so far as they help
explain the flow of influence in a given case. For example, I will trace how the text of
a political decision (say a Cabinet Resolution) shares features in common with other
texts that preceded it, such as shared topics, argumentation, or other linguistic devices.
This inter-textual relationship is *prima facie* evidence of political alignment, leading
me to probe further about episodes of persuasion or influence.

(2) To comprehend argument, I will use methods of informal logic to uncover
the reasons \(R_1, R_2, R_3, \ldots\) an author advances to reach her conclusion \(C\) (Fisher
1988). The basic question in this kind of analysis is “what would someone have to
believe in order to correctly conclude \(C\)?”

For example, prior to the 2003 seasonal opening decision, a Thai senator
relayed to me and several others the following rhetoric he heard from some of his
colleagues, to justify continued operations of Pak Mun: “but the Dam has already been
built, why shouldn’t we use it [some of the time]?” The argument is as follows:

\begin{align*}
R_1. & \text{Pak Mun Dam has already been built.} \\
R_2. & \text{It has sunk costs which need to be recouped.} \\
R_3. & \text{It generates revenues.} \\
R_4. & \text{(Implicit.) Opening it does not generate comparable net benefits.} \\
C. & \text{The dam should be operated to generate revenues to recoup those sunk costs.}
\end{align*}

A speaker who believed in the truth of \(R_2, R_3, \text{and } R_4\) would reach conclusion
\(C\) by valid argument. \(R_4\), a non-trivial premise, is obviously the crux (see Chapter 8).

(3) To detect other rhetorical strategies, I ask: How are people named? What
traits and characteristics does a narrator attribute to them? What rhetorical strategies
does a narrator use to intensify or mitigate the force of statements? What
argumentative devices do narrators use to justify claims? Such questions are fundamental in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989; Wodak and Meyer 2001; Reisigl and Wodak 2001).

**Interviews**

Written discourse can take the analyst quite far, but eventually reaches the limit of its usefulness. Written texts are produced in specific settings to persuade specific audiences. Actual practices may differ from those specified in texts. And much persuasive communication is spoken, not written. For these reasons, it makes sense to gain an ethnographic understanding of what key texts mean to relevant actors. This leads me to interviews.

I interviewed a total of 67 people, on topics ranging in scope from relatively broad (e.g., an individual’s experience with, and assessment of, anti-dam campaigns) to narrow (experience with fish culture, irrigation canal usage). Villager leaders and NGO activists in the anti-dam movement were identified to me by word of mouth, by preliminary fieldwork in 2000. Other topical experts were identified through similar techniques. I supplemented interviews with observation of street demonstrations, and all policy-relevant meetings which I was permitted to attend.

As an indication of Pak Mun’s divisiveness, both AOP advisors and EGAT officials asked me “if I was a real student.” Previous students of the Pak Mun conflict have tended to align themselves with the Assembly of the Poor’s position, some to the extent of actively facilitating AOP activities. I certainly empathized with villagers against the state’s procedural injustice and ineptitude, but attempted to position myself as non-partisan during all phases of fieldwork. Based on their prior experience, EGAT and the AOP expected anti-dam partisanship from Thai and foreign students of the conflict. My requests to attend/observe villagers’ and AOP advisors’ meetings were occasionally declined.

Interviews are hardly straightforward windows into the black box of decision making. A more accurate take on the interview is to recognize it as a multi-layered social interaction (Silverman 2001). Along with one version of her reality, the respondent conveys her identity and her moral standing (Seale 1998). The interview is a rhetorical performance that produces many levels of meaning.

Some key decision-makers’ thought processes may never be articulated, or
articulated only obliquely to confidants. Decision-makers in time-distant events may no longer be able to remember their thought processes. An interest in narratives however allows us to treat actors’ reconstructions or rationalizations of historical events as useful data, because they express a certain policy narrative relevant to current practice. Realist methodology helps avoid the relativist pessimism that all representations are equally credible.

**Archival data sources: newspaper reports and movement media**

To reconstruct chronologies, noteworthy events, and episodes of debate/contention in my case studies, I relied on newspaper reports. Newspaper reports are a commonly used and important source of data for protest-event analysis (Earl et al. 2004). Newspapers of course do not report all possible events of political significance (Koopmans 2004). Pre-existing public discourse influences how the media select and represent political events as news stories, leading, respectively, to issues of “selection” and “description” bias. Media channels, as “gatekeepers of the public discourse” (Koopmans 2004: 372), are actors in their own right. Notwithstanding these limitations, Earl et al. found that: “The ‘hard news’ of the event, if it is reported, tends to be relatively accurate. However, a newspaper's decision to cover an event at all is influenced by the type of event, the news agency, and the issue involved” (2004: 65).

For hard news about early events in the Pak Mun case, I relied on newspapers such as *Nation*, *Bangkok Post*, and *Matichon*. I supplemented this with a chronology of protest-related events published by the Assembly of the Poor (AOP 2002). This chronology provided an accessible, finer-grained examination of the anti-dam campaign, albeit one that was movement-centric. Neither movement-produced media nor mass media are useful sources of data on early patterns of intra-organizational dynamics. I relied instead on Buchita (1997) and Missingham (1999; 2003).

**3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter emphasized key methodological challenges and issues related to quality of explanation. I also described key data analysis and fieldwork techniques. I
provided a succinct introduction to more profound issues in rhetoric, narrative, and epistemology. Most importantly, I argued that a critical realist philosophy of science is appropriate for this thesis, since my basic methodological challenge is one of causality. Causal narrative in critical realism attempts to account for the presence of all actions, necessary and contingent, that combine to produce an outcome of interest.¹⁹

Like mainstream empiricist science, the goal of critical realist explanation is the reconstruction of theory (Burawoy 1998). However since social phenomena are concept-dependent they are much less durable than natural phenomena traditionally approached by the covering-law model of explanation. As the modern world changes, salient political concepts change, and we need to re-conceptualize this open-system interaction. The late 20th century discourse-dependent emergence of Islamist insurgency might be reducible to some covering law about social conflict between subordinate groups and state elites. However process- and mechanism-oriented critical realists would deny that any such law could offer significant insight (McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow 2001). Rather, they re-cast explanation in terms of social mechanisms of limited scope but robust occurrence. In doing so they avoid scepticism, the view, as Tilly puts it, that political processes are so “complex, contingent, impenetrable or particular” they “defy explanation” (2001: 22).

The crux of this process-oriented approach is how to specify and distinguish necessary and contingent phenomena. That process is iterative. Having initially specified key aspects of my conceptual framework and methodology (see Table 3.2), the following chapters test both framework and methodology in a series of case studies, beginning in Chapter 4 with an analysis of large-scale contexts of contention.

¹⁹ In the natural sciences, developmental and evolutionary biology and ecology pursue analogous modes of explanation.
# Chapter 4 Contexts of Contention: State–Society Relations and the Assembly of the Poor

## 4.1 Introduction

## 4.2 Large-Scale Contexts of Contention

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## 4.4 Emergence of Civil Society and Social Movement Actors

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## 4.5 Conclusion

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4.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the question of how contention over Pak Mun Dam and electricity generation policy is embedded in larger structures of state–society relations. My discussion draws critically on scholarly narratives of Thai politics and history, as well as my experiences as a primary school student in Thailand, 1973–79, and conducting field research in 2000 and 2001–04.

In a helpful formulation Nancy Whittier states that “meaning and structure are mutually constituted and cannot be understood separately” (2003: 292). As Whittier puts it:

Both state and movement structures are constructed around ideological and symbolic imperatives, as well as those of power, resources, and efficiency; conversely, states and movements produce meanings – identities, discourses, representations – within structural contexts. (2003: 292)

The largest temporal-scale contexts in which civil society advocates contended with state actors to shape policy-making are that of state-building, capitalist transformation, and the construction of a hegemonic political culture. Second, neither Thailand’s long decades of authoritarianism nor its recent turn towards democracy was inevitable. Modern Thai history is considerably more complex and contingent, and its dynamics elude capture by any broad-brush theory of social change.

Third, the best way to begin representing this complex history is to look for path-dependent patterns of institutional rupture and continuity. Thus, Thai authoritarianism was the contingent outcome of a critical period that lasted approximately 1927–51, while late twentieth-century Thai democratization was the contingent outcome of a critical period approximately 1975–92.20 The distinctive set of historical legacies Thai society exhibits today owes much to what happened during those two critical periods of instability (see Table 4.5, p. 91).

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20 Following Collier and Collier (1991) I refer to these periods as “critical junctures.” Section 4.3 elaborates.
Table 4.1  Structure and meaning as contextual elements of social movements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of Structure</th>
<th>Elements of Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist transformation</td>
<td>Dominant culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and other institutions</td>
<td>Oppositional discourse and collective identities from other movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other movements; &quot;Political opportunity structure&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal and formal networks and organizations</td>
<td>Movement culture, collective identity, discourse; individual identities and consciousness; emotion (collective and individual)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Whittier (2002). Notes: (1) “Structure” refers to patterned or enduring social processes. (2) The concept of “political opportunity” is contested. In Tarrow’s words, it refers to “consistent – but necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics” (1998:19-20).

My discussion proceeds as follows. Section 4.2 explores how the civil society actors that emerged in Thailand in the late 20th century can be seen in relation to “external” structures and meanings, such as the rise of an authoritarian state, and the construction of a dominant Thai identity. Linking the politics of sustainable energy and Pak Mun to larger historical and social structures raises the question of how we approach explanation. The method advanced in Chapter 3 was to identify causal pathways as combinations of necessary and contingent events/mechanisms that unfold over time. Accordingly, Section 4.3 seeks to establish plausible pathways between early and mid–20th century state-building and the late–20th century emergence of civil society. Specifically, I ask whether modern sequences of Thai state–society relations display any form of path-dependency – that is, deterministic patterns set into motion by periods of highly contingent events (Mahoney 2000; 2001a; Collier and Collier 1991). Finally, Section 4.4 describes late–20th century episodes of collective action by Thai farmers, and the role “internal” social structures and discourses played.

4.2 Large-scale contexts of contention

For most of the six decades following the end of the absolute monarchy (1932–
92), the military has ruled, sometimes directly, sometimes through civilians. During that time, Thai people received 14 opportunities to elect members to the lower house of Parliament. Six of those Parliaments lasted less than two years before they were sacked by dictators. Elections were habitually manipulated by vote-buying and other forms of repression. Thai businessmen fared slightly better, with opportunities to influence economic policymaking, but open and formal channels of communication between business and state did not develop until the 1970s. These facts, combined with long periods of repression of independent civil society groups, exposed farmers, merchants, and emerging urban white-collar classes to the mercy of state elites for all types of policymaking. A Communist insurgency which attracted thousands of farmers and dissident intellectuals turned into a stalemate by the end of the 1970s, when China withdrew its support for the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), and when the state granted amnesty to insurgents. The political arena opened more suddenly after a crisis in 1991–92, when a faction of the military attempted to cling onto state power and overplayed its hand, resulting in weeks of mass protests and military violence. By the close of the 1990s, Thailand had a new constitution that protected a much higher level of civil liberties. However, during the 2000s, a coalition led by the new Thai Rak Thai party monopolized power won through populist rural policies, while undermining recent democratic consolidations.

A conservative explanation of these events would credit state actors with providing contexts of order and stability that allowed modernization of the economy. Economic development eventually reduced inequality and generated a solid middle-class, which grew in size and capacity to collectively lead society towards higher levels of democracy, albeit in its own self-interest. A basic Marxist narrative of the same events would recognize the role of capitalist development, but would also credit the impact on the polity of communist insurgency led by intellectuals and peasants. A Marxist might further argue that the political arena was opened by elites as a concession to healing social divisions that were threatening capitalist expansion. In the first narrative, economic development opens channels for political liberalization, with the middle-class as the main actor. In the second, two social actors – insurgents and elites – struggle to control the state, with the latter offering a compromise in interests of returning the nation to stability.

Rather than ask which of these (deliberately oversimplified) models is more valid, my point is that the overarching contexts in which contending parties in the Pak
Mun case operated are those of state building and, intimately associated, capitalist transformation. Both are ongoing projects which deeply affect civil society.

### 4.2.1 Phongpaichit and Baker on state building and capitalist transformation

Through a critical review of Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker’s (1995) political economy approach towards modern Thai history, this section takes a closer look at state building and capitalist transformation. Phongpaichit and Baker (1995) do not attempt to explicitly theorize social change. Their often-cited text provides a wonderfully detailed history of social relations, emphasizing material (economic) transformations, but also detailing political contention between different classes and factions in what became modern Thailand.

We can infer modes of explanation in Phongpaichit and Baker (1995) through basic narrative analysis. Which actors does the narrative accord privilege? What do they do? How do they change? We can also ask how the narrative deals with stability and change. What enduring social processes (i.e., structures) do actors inherit and transform? Uncovering these patterns allows us to relate their narrative to key concepts in my framework such as institutions, interests, and ideas/discourses (Chapter 2). Table 4.2 presents important actors, relations, and trajectories in Phongpaichit and Baker’s narrative.

### 4.2.2 Continuity and change in Phongpaichit and Baker

Phongpaichit and Baker’s narrative attributes continuity to four interlocking phenomena. The first is an “open economy,” where both traders and aristocrats are able to accumulate wealth from domestic and international trade. The second is a more powerful monarchy, able to coerce and co-opt state power away from an old regime where regional nobles controlled peasant surplus labour. The third factor is a peasantry able to flee the worst instances of exploitation (head taxes levied by the new state) for the frontier, beginning in the late 19th century. Under these three conditions, the monarchy captured peasant wealth and controlled state power. On the other hand, the presence of the frontier constrained levels of exploitation somewhat and produced a nation with a remarkably high proportion of smallholders (as opposed to landless peasants or tenants).
### Table 4.2 Actors, relations, and trajectories in Phongpaichit and Baker, 1860s–early 1990s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Ending position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolute monarchs</td>
<td>Rama V (1868–1910): weakens old nobility; bans forced labour; creates independent peasantry</td>
<td>Displaced by the military, post-1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rama V and VI (1910–1925): create modern bureaucracy (civil service, police, military); fail to administer rigorous property rights</td>
<td>Restored post-1947 as pillar of legitimation for the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military elite; civilian bureaucrats</td>
<td>Build “absolutist state;” dominate control of state (until 1990s); extend territorial reach of state through development and land use controls (after 1960s); appropriate rents from capitalists and from state budgets</td>
<td>Civil servants Technocrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Supplies land as frontier</td>
<td>Loses forest cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Protected as reserve forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasants</td>
<td>Supply surplus value to traders, state (through rice export tax), and capitalists</td>
<td>“Post-peasants:” peasant farmers embedded in capitalist agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resist severe exploitation by fleeing to frontier</td>
<td>Urban workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traders</td>
<td>Accumulate wealth; some reinvest into capitalist agrarian enterprise</td>
<td>Capitalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalists</td>
<td>Invest in commercializing agriculture and export-oriented manufacturing (after 1970s)</td>
<td>Provincial businessmen Bangkong-based capitalists Transnational elite investors After 1990s: capitalists dominate state power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 4.2 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Ending position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban workers (especially after WWII)</td>
<td>Supply surplus value to industrial firms;</td>
<td>Urban workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal urban sector supplies services to other urban strata;</td>
<td>Micro-enterprise operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>engages in episodes of contentious politics (from 1940’s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offspring of upwardly mobile bureaucratic classes and other strata</td>
<td>Serve diversified capitalist economy; engages in contentious politics (after late 1960s)</td>
<td>Urban salaried and professional class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A fourth explanation for continuity derives from culture. Like other scholars, Phongpaichit and Baker attach great importance to the royal project of producing a culture of national identity:

Along with one language, one syllabus, and one Buddhism, the reformers developed the idea of one nation under one king . . . [t]hese concepts deeply glossed over the ethnic muddle of Lao, Khmer, Mon, Vietnamese, Malay, and Chinese in Siam's cosmopolitan society, and elegantly submerged the Sino-Mon origins of the dynasty. (1995: 233)

Even after the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the triad of nation/religion/king established under Rama V continued to legitimate an “absolutist state” ruled by military bureaucrats:

The state was absolutist in the sense that the ideology of nation religion and king made the king the fount of all authority as the embodiment of the nation. It denied the legitimacy of political authority derived from other sources, including popular representation, local standing, and historical right. (1995: 400)

Notwithstanding the power of nation/religion/king to set the context for what it meant – and continues to mean – to be a Thai citizen, Phongpaichit and Baker attribute importance to peasant culture as a countervailing force. In their narrative, culture functions as a resource, providing idioms of resistance, and an ongoing source of identity.

**Change I: powerful actors tip balance of power**
Regarding drivers of social change, the narrators use two explanatory devices. The first device is competition between powerful actors. In every period of this narrative, history happens when powerful actors struggle to attain their interests. Most powerful actors in modern Thai history have been authorities. For example, at the onset, rivalry between imperialist powers and the Chakri family – a struggle for leverage and control over agriculture and other trade goods from the interior – prompts the Chakri rulers to re-build their army and weaken the *chao muang*, the hereditary nobility that ruled loosely over people outside of Bangkok and the lower Chao Phraya valley:

During the 19th century the society of Siam was fundamentally transformed. The expansion of agricultural production for the export market created new classes which stood outside the old social model—a new class of free, frontier peasants . . . and, a new urban society of merchants and workers staffed by immigrants from the south China coast. *The old ruling systems were poorly equipped to manage these new elements. . . . In the last quarter of the century, the royal family . . . [r]ecognized that the new social forces represented not only a threat to the kingdom and the dynasty, but also an opportunity to strengthen the state and to strengthen the role of the monarchy within it.* The shift of the economic base weakened the monarchy, but at the same time had reduced the capacity of the hereditary nobility to resist a project of royalist aggrandizing and centralization. (1995: 240; emphasis added)

This explanation assigns paramount importance to material interests as shaping preferences. It further assumes, despite recognizing the presence of cultural idioms, that actors can access their preferences, in other words, that they are not significantly misled by culture, "false consciousness", or uncertainty. The explanation also assumes that actors can pursue their interests through strategic action. In a similar manner, Phongpaichit and Baker explain a political shift a century later towards organized business interests:

As capital became stronger and more mature, it saw less value in allying with the generals. Businessmen came to resent sharing their profits to build military careers. With the growing external exposure of the economy, businessmen no longer saw strutting political generals as a comforting sign of political stability, but rather as a disincentive to the foreign investors . . . . From the late 1960s, the businessmen pressed for political representation in order to have better control over policymaking. This pressure was submerged by the backlash of 1976, but became insistent in the 1980s. Businessmen backed the writing of constitutions, formed political parties, set up lobby groups, entered Parliament, and sat in the cabinet. They re-wrote economic policy to favor exports, reoriented foreign policy to match their regional
ambitions, and revised labour policy to assist the more rapid recruitment of urban workers. (1995: 408)

Phongpaichit and Baker's model appears to work best when explaining political conflicts based on coherent material interests. However, during two important periods of political turbulence (late 1920s–1951 and late 1960s–1992), elite interests would have been much less coherent than Phongpaichit and Baker imply, stretching their interest-driven political economy model to its limits. The divergent response of the Thai middle-class to the 1991 Suchinda military coup against an elected Prime Minister is a case in point (Phongpaichit and Baker, Ch. 10).

Change II: dynamism and tension in political economy

Phongpaichit and Baker’s second and fundamental treatment of change is to attribute outcomes such as differentiation and resistance to imperatives and tensions in the political economy system itself. Sometimes the connection is explicitly made, other times taken for granted. They attribute a series of peasant uprisings in the North and Northeast at the turn of the 20th century as direct economic and political resistance – by peasants with the leadership of displaced leaders of the old regime – to new cash head taxes levied by agents of the new centralized Siamese state. Likewise, they link agricultural intensification to economic differentiation, such that the lowest stratum of farmers in the central plains became dependent on off-farm work as early as the 1930s. Similarly, but implicitly via capitalism’s need for docile labour, they link manufacturing growth to repressive labour regimes. The narrative then links the history of labour activism – the ability of organizing to evade outright bans on unions until the 1970s, and state and employer aggression during most of the period that followed – to capital’s functional need to repress labour. 21

Similarly, for peasants in recent decades, resource grabbing and authoritarian development schemes led to rural strains, and often to outright resistance:

Differential tariffs and the rice premium transferred the rural surplus into the urban economy for consumption and capital accumulation. Settlers on the uplands frontier were denied security of land tenure, branded as illegal

21 Low-status informal workers – a “floating class of rural migrants” – receive credit for some of the consequential night time resistance during the peak protests in May 1992 against military dictatorship (1995: 412).
squatters, and often controlled by the agents of agribusiness. In the rice paddy tracts, many smaller peasants lost out in the transition to new high-capital modes of farming and became dependent on wage labour. The income gap between city and country became wider. In the new factories, labour was defended neither by law or by organization. Employers relied on the growing reserve army of rural migrants to provide a constant supply of new labour recruits. Wages were low, labour rights almost nonexistent. In the early 1970s, the reaction came. Peasants protested. Workers went on strike. . . . Communist insurgency spread through the hills and forests. (1995: 290).

This kind of explanation assumes all actors – including the most exploited or oppressed – have an innate capacity and propensity to resist. While Phongpaichit and Baker discuss additional factors such as political openings and external resources (e.g., student allies in the 1970s labour movement) they do not probe this innate capacity at the core of their explanation. Actors have an inherent capacity to identify their interests and, given opportunities and resources, mobilize to pursue them. Culture provides vital resources oppressed people draw on to produce collective action. How this all works sociologically is not explored (e.g., Phongpaichit and Baker, Ch. 9).

In summary, when interests can accommodate or countervail each other, then stability ensues, as we saw in these authors’ treatment of peasant–state relations until the closure of the land frontier. The system at the time was not static, but at equilibrium between opposing forces. Conversely, power imbalances cause the system to change. The same mechanism – power – lies at the core of their explanation of stability and change (Table 4.3).
Table 4.3  Explanations of continuity and change in Phongpaichit and Baker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change flows from:</th>
<th>Stability derives from:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Long term] Inherent dynamism of system: shifts in balance of power between actors favours (contingent) emergence of new political actors</td>
<td>[Culture] stable collective identities caused by reproduction of cultural idioms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Short and long term] Actors (classes or powerful individuals) defend or pursue their interests rationally, drawing on diverse resources, including culture</td>
<td>[Power balance] Polity at equilibrium when all actors unable to alter balance of power any further towards their objectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Power in their model stems from three sources: authority, class position, and the ability to appropriate cultural idioms. Phongpaichit and Baker recognize the power of social movements, but do not explore how movements link new ideas and values with new activities (protests) at strategically opportune moments.

4.2.3 Probing state–society transformations: lingering puzzles

Phongpaichit and Baker's history raises at least two important questions for further inquiry, the first of which is to understand more fully the role cultural processes play in social change and political action. In their narrative, culture appears both as a broadly stabilizing influence, and as a resource to mobilize new political action. Is there a contradiction? An explicit discussion of hegemony helps clarify the relationship between culture as both inhibitor and catalyst of political change.

The concept of hegemony originated with the Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci. It refers to non-coercive processes of cultural domination, including the content of dominant representations, as well as ongoing practices elites use to maintain "dominant storylines that help to consolidate existing relations of power." Hegemony refers to cultural processes or effects that work by way of institutional arrangements and social practices experienced on an everyday basis by people in society (Johnston et al. 2000: 33). Johnston et al. observe that “at whatever site a dominant culture emerges, the naturalization and routinisation of its values and practices provide the ground for the unequal deployment of power” (2000: 33).
Examples of such sites in Thailand would include schools (where children are socialized to accept hierarchy, absorb Thai national identity, and learn official Thai history); religious and secular national holidays (were children and adults alike participate in practices of the dominant culture); state-dominated mass media; and importantly, what some pessimistic observers viewed as “the totalising presence of consumer culture . . . [leading] in Orwellian fashion, to the passivity and entrapment of citizens beneath the seductive spells of consumer gratification” (2000: 33).

The concept of hegemony includes two forms of cultural domination. The first is ideology: deliberate and strategic attempts at persuasion, attempts that aim for internal consistency. The other, more subtle form is what Gramsci called “common sense.” Moodie (2002: 51) argues that “common sense” offers a holistic grasp of “the relationship between the material, the political, and the ideological, without necessitating that any one dominate.”

Turton’s rich essay on hegemony and its limits in Thailand (1984) provides an interesting example of common sense. He argues (following Marxist agrarian studies literature) that small holders have an indeterminate class position: they might appear to “own” the means of production (e.g., land; rain) but are often in debt to (or have very poor bargaining power with) suppliers of “crucial” factors of production, such as new crop/animal husbandry strains. The ubiquity of contract-farming makes this insight quite salient. Few farmers however articulate their condition as “being hired for wages on your own land,” as did one sugar-cane grower Turton interviewed (1984: 34). Rather, poor farmers complain about “problems of the market” (panha talat) and being taken advantage of (ao priap) in market transactions. These constructions are not inaccurate, Turton argues, since “[modern] relations of exchange are in a fuller sense relations of production” (1984: 35). It is just that farmers’ common sense attributes exploitation to market structures.

Another example: it is not uncommon in Thailand today to hear the opinion – expressed in taxi-cabs or on radio talk-shows – that in regards to public policy, citizens should delegate responsibility to their elected leaders. After all, that is the job they voted the leaders in for, on the basis of their talent. After all, that is what the leader (in this case Prime Minister Thaksin) frequently asks for, when faced with criticism from intellectuals: autonomy to use his expertise in the national interest. This Thai common sense about the desirable limits of public participation in policy making reflects experiences living in a society where electronic media are not free, and policy
issues are explicated in only a few broadsheet newspapers.

What are the limits to hegemony? How is it challenged? In this regard Johnston et al. note that "the achievement of hegemony requires sacrifice and compromise, vigilance and hard work by elites" (Turton 1984: 33). In other words, its effects must be demonstrated and not assumed. Thai village culture prior to the 1960s was remarkably free of modern state influence. Belief in two spirits – ancestral spirits as guardians, and place-based spirits as benign but powerful agents to respect – provided a source of moral order (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 68, 87). In addition, villagers resisting state culture drew on storytelling (mor lam songs and modern luuk thung popular songs) as well as repertoires of combat, divination, and healing arts to frame and mobilize their opposition to state-building. The “millenarian” revolts in the North and Northeast at the start of the 20th century, and the Islamist insurgency in Southern Thailand in 2004 drew from this rich lexicon.

Beginning in the 1930s and increasingly after the 1960s, Marxist doctrine (including the Maoism adopted by the CPT) provided another counter-hegemonic discourse. More recently, the discourses of non-violent demonstration, and the narrative framing of poverty as caused by state-led development have been used with some success by the Assembly of the Poor in challenging the symbolic domination of the state. Regardless of whether social movements are successful in terms of their stated aims – and often many are not – we can see their cultural work first as reproducing and enriching the repertoire of oppositional discourse (Missingham 2003: 218–219). To sum up, a productive way to think of hegemony is as an ongoing struggle to dominate representations, in sites as diverse as mass media, school assemblies, and in policymaking.

4.3 Pathways to authoritarianism and democratization

A second important question raised by Phongpaichit and Baker’s political economy narrative is the need to explore and theorize closely the process by which new institutions and actors emerge. In their model, they emerge when structural change favours them: when the political economy creates tensions ripe for mobilization. Leaders draw on cultural and other resources to defend or pursue predetermined interests when political opportunities exist. However, Phongpaichit and Baker’s own narrative shows that state–society relations changed abruptly several
times during the 20th century (see Table 4.5 below). At a micro-sociological level, each of these periods of change would have been marked by considerable indeterminacy. In situations of ambiguity, ambivalence, and complexity, the model's reliance on coherent interests does not provide a sufficient explanation. What happens when complexity and uncertainty undermine the “common sense” of prevailing interests? This section takes on these challenges by exploring the interplay between periods of institutional change and continuity, drawing on path-dependent explanations of change.

I argue that by the late 20th century, through two critical periods of instability, Thai society had accumulated a distinctive set of historical legacies (see Table 4.5 below). Following Collier and Collier (1991) we can appreciate the significance of these legacies by pursuing a “critical juncture” mode of explanation. These authors define a critical juncture as “a period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies” (1991: 29). The distinct historical legacy constitutes the outcome to be explained. The critical juncture can be a quick transition, or a considerably more prolonged period (1991: 29–33; Figure 4.1).

In their model, a set of antecedent conditions results in social cleavages (deep divisions in society). This can then result in the period of significant change (the critical juncture or “turning point”), through mechanisms that the analyst needs to specify. The critical juncture is hypothesized to produce a new set of institutional and social conditions (the legacy; see figure).

Collier and Collier’s critical juncture framework is a form of “path-dependent” explanation. Path-dependency means that periods of highly contingent events set into motion deterministic patterns (Mahoney 2000). By definition, the sequence of action during the “critical juncture” is not predictable by existing social theory. For example, the immediate political consequences of events such as recessions, coups, military invasions, and new policy initiatives are usually not predictable. The consequences of a temporal sequence packed with such events are even less predictable.

By contrast, path dependency regards social processes activated subsequent to a critical juncture as not contingent. They are amenable to various forms of explanation (Table 4.4). Mahoney (2000) for instance describes two broad types of

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22 In Collier and Collier’s case studies the critical juncture ranged from nine to 23 years (1991: 32).
non-contingent historical trajectories: self-reinforcing sequences, and reactive sequences.

Interesting examples of path-dependent argument include the following:

(1) Reactive sequence: Goldstone’s (1999) argument that Newcomen’s 1712 steam engine was a particular and highly contingent solution to mining deep
Table 4.4  Two types of path dependent sequence that ensue after a critical juncture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-reinforcing Sequence</th>
<th>Reactive Sequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>Institution is reproduced without recurrence of original causes</td>
<td>Chains of temporally ordered and causally connected events that lead away from a critical juncture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Properties</strong></td>
<td>Relative benefits of institution increase over time</td>
<td>Cascades of logically linked events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Power) Institutions forcibly reproduced to benefit power-holders</td>
<td>(Power) subordinate groups resist elites, trigger chains of action/re-action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Legitimation) Institutions perceived as legitimate</td>
<td>(Legitimation/de-legitimation) cascades of collective action driven by rumour/panic/solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Rational choice) Mutual learning and coordination between rational actors</td>
<td>(Rational choice) Technological innovation → reduces costs and leads entrepreneurs to develop new markets/industries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


underwater coal seams in England which, once invented, ushered in a highly consequential reactive sequence whereby engine improvement → iron and steel price reductions → railways → industrial development (Mahoney 2000).

(2) Self-reinforcing sequence: Roy’s (1997) argument that the rise of private corporations in the U.S. “depended on the chance coming together of a series of historical events that discredited state-supported corporations,” any change in the timing of which would have favoured state-owned enterprises. The “discovery” of private corporations was subsequently locked in by elite interests (Mahoney 2000: 88)
522).

(3) Self-reinforcing sequence: The manner in which nine Latin American states recognized their labour movements as legitimate and attempted to control them proved consequential for shaping subsequent state–society relations. These periods of “incorporation” – which ranged from nine to 23 years – constitute “critical junctures” in the political development of these states (Collier and Collier 1991: 32).

In summary, the combination {highly contingent early events → deterministic sequences of late events} defines path-dependency. The alternative is a "constant cause" or nomothetic explanation, which does not assign causal importance to temporal conjunctures and sequences (Collier and Collier 1991; Mahoney 2000).

4.3.1 The first critical juncture (1927–51): military authoritarianism

The modern authoritarian state whose institutional legacies Thai people experience to this day was, I suggest, critically re-shaped first during a juncture that lasted just over two decades, beginning in approximately 1927, with the formation of the Khana Ratsadorn (People’s Party) in Paris. This is the period leading up to the “revolution” of 1932, which ended the absolute monarchy, and Field Marshal Phibun Songkram’s second (and longstanding) seizure of state power in 1947 (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995 Ch. 8; Suchit 1987).

Antecedents of the first critical juncture

By the time he was 39, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) had wrested a number of startling reforms in the administration of Thailand. Beginning in the 1870’s, he gradually freed Thai commoners from corvée labour obligations, abolished slavery, and made it easier for those in debt-bondage to free themselves. Chulalongkorn also created new courts and decreed centralized budgeting. His military reforms began the transition to an all-volunteer paid army, as opposed to an army composed of bonded people, many of whom were not Thai (Wyatt 1982).

Chulalongkorn’s reforms can be described as modernizing in the sense that functionally distinct ministerial offices, filing systems and book-keeping are all modern. Some of the most significant reforms entailed more state regulation of rural society, using Western techniques such as territorial administration.
### Table 4.5 Hypothesized antecedents, critical junctures, and consequences for Thai state building, post-1932

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent Conditions</th>
<th>Key Political and Social Divisions</th>
<th>Legacies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Juncture I (ca. 1927–1951):</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1860s–1930) Centralized state building, rise of military, elite nationalism, 1912 coup attempt Great Depression, unrest among urban workers</td>
<td>Within elite society: King and royalists vs. military vs. liberals; between elites and urban strata: bourgeoisie, labour organizers, media; between elites and rural peasantry</td>
<td>(1) Control of decision-making by executive branch; legislature and civil society organizations weak or banned outright (see Table 4.6 for more details)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heightened Contention (1960s–late 1970s):</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See (1), plus: Indochina war Continued economic growth</td>
<td>Within elite between monarch, military, and business; between military rulers Increasingly differentiated society including rise of middle-class</td>
<td>(2) Violent suppression of rights to association and free-speech; peak mobilization of communist insurgency; emergence of civil society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Juncture II (late 1970s–1992):</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See (2) Highly repressive authoritarian regimes</td>
<td>Within military: hardliners vs. moderates Within civil society: leftists vs. conservative nationalists</td>
<td>(3) Military control of state power ends; civil society organizations tolerated following amnesty/surrender of communist insurgents; localist development discourse; strengthening of political parties; money politics; hegemonic struggles between state and civil society actors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vandergeest and Peluso (1995: 398) describe these changes as “a massive program to territorialize and centralize local administration throughout the national territory.” Not only were Siam’s external boundaries mapped, in a contentious process, during the 19th century, its internal centres of power (muang; a town and surrounding tributary area) were transformed into provinces, and these were mapped into districts (ampur). Furthermore, the government classified sets of ten households into official “villages,” and approximately ten villages constituted a sub-district (tambon). These categories of local administration continue to this day to structure local relations.

Mainstream historians such as Wyatt credit these reforms with Thailand’s emergence as a modern state: open, structurally coherent, ruled by modern law, legitimate in a world dominated by imperial powers. Yet the Chakri reforms also generated new social tensions. Anderson (1976) notes that Kings Chulalongkorn and Vajiravudh (Rama VI) consumed a large fraction of the budget. He compares Thailand’s reforms unfavourably with those of Japan during the Meiji Restoration. The Japanese emperor, he argues, essentially ends serving as a symbolic head of state, whereas the Thai monarch wields real power. Nation building under Rama VI involved building a loyal martial citizenry and the strengthening of the military as an institution (Wyatt 1982).

By the early 20th century a new class division existed: between the greater and lesser nobility (offspring of the Chakri clan and of provincial rulers) and their subordinates – educated upwardly mobile commoners permitted to join the military and civil service (Phongpaichit and Baker, Ch. 8). The 1932 coup group drew its ranks from the latter.

Phongpaichit and Baker (1995) describe the social milieu from which these men emerged to take action. These include an increasingly free press, critical of King Prajadhipok’s (Rama VII) management of the economy, which included punitive civil service salary cuts after the Depression. Frustration at restrictions on their upward mobility was a recurrent grievance, particularly for young military officers. These tensions contributed to the emergence of a failed coup movement among young officers in 1912, and public pronouncements by King Prajadhipok about economic and political reform by 1932. More idealistic members of the coup group, such as Pridi Banomyong (1900–83), immersed in European education during the 1920s, also confronted contradictions between Siam’s absolute and arbitrary principles of governance (lak ratchakan), and Western ideals of rule by law (lak wicha) and
egalitarianism (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995; Baker and Phonpaichit 2000).

The Khana Ratsadorn monarchist and populist party was formed in Paris in 1927 by young military and civilian officers, including Pridi, Luang Siriratchamaitri, Siam’s assistant ambassador to France, and Lt. Plaek Kittasangka. (Plaek subsequently rose to the rank of Field Marshal and took the title Luang Phibunsongkram [“Phibun”]. He became one of Pridi’s great rivals.)

On the morning of 24 June 1932 the coup leaders mobilized roughly 100 men to seize power, and did so rapidly and without bloodshed (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 251). The leaders of the Khana Ratsadorn had several opportunities to begin building a liberal democracy. Yet almost immediately the Khana Ratsadorn displayed ambivalence about how to deal with the monarch they supposedly had just deposed.

On the one hand, their Announcement of the People’s Party No. 1, released the day of the coup, assailed the King and “his court relatives and toadies” for ruling above the law; denying people educational opportunities and “sucking blood” by levying punitive taxes and mass layoffs in the wake of the Depression. The coup leaders threatened a republican form of government if the King did not submit to constitutional rule (Banomyong 2000: 70–72). On the other hand, two days after the coup, the Khana Ratsadorn staged a ceremony of apology to the King. All copies of the Announcement were suppressed (Baker and Phongpaichit 2000: 65). The coup leaders furthermore selected as Prime Minister not one of their own but Phraya Manopkarn (Mano), a commoner but former senior minister. They also invited Prajadhipok to contribute to drafting a new constitution.

The intra-elite power play is also evident in the two constitutional charters produced in 1932. In the Khana Ratsadorn’s original constitution ratified by Prajadhipok on 27 July 1932, the monarch is clearly answerable to a national assembly. However, the constitution of 10 December 1932 granted the monarch more extensive powers and “baffled” the new National Assembly (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 252). The latter document was drafted by a committee of nine persons – only one of whom, Pridi, was a Khana Ratsadorn member (Banomyong 2000: 159–160). In just over six months, the Khana Ratsadorn had acquiesced in restoring much of Prajadhipok’s legitimacy and authority.

Chris Baker has remarked that in comparison with the preceding decade, the 1930s are poorly known to historians (personal communication 25/11/05). The leaders of the Khana Ratsadorn – by June 1932 a heterogeneous party of young civilian and
older military officers – faced the difficult challenge of how to legitimate their power. The contentious choice they arrived at was to preserve and reform existing institutions (monarchy and royalist military).23

In any case, manoeuvres for power in 1932–33 and during the rest of the tumultuous 1930s and 1940s proved highly consequential for Thai democracy. The political fortunes of Pridi and his civilian allies (about whom especially little is known) rose and fell during an almost two-decade period of revolution, reaction, coup, Japanese invasion, Allied victory, and regicide. The highly contingent patterns during this period justify regarding it as a critical juncture.

A year after the 1932 coup, a re-empowered Prajadhipok advised the Khana Ratsadorn to ban all political parties, including itself. One motive seems to have been to pre-empt the formation of a new political party called Khana Chat (National Party) comprised of senior military and royalists. The Khana Ratsadorn heeded this advice, but exempted itself.

The December 1932 constitution did create a National Assembly, but emasculated its potential by limiting its control of decision-making. Ordinary people could only elect only village headmen, who in turn would elect candidates. However the elected members comprised at best only half of the new Assembly, and their candidacy required the approval of the appointed members. Leaders in Bangkok devolved power to provincial elites, rather than allowing broad-based political parties to select their own leaders.

Notwithstanding our ignorance of the 1930s we detect an apparent anti-democratic realignment in the Khana Ratsadorn, a rapprochement between military and royalists, as early as 1933. The 1933 ban on parties meant that ordinary Thai people would have no opportunity to participate in, and shape, political parties. The lack of a broad-based party tradition meant that when elections were allowed, beginning in late 1933, candidates turned to Ministry of Interior staff (positioned down the line to reach into the villages) to organize voter support by vote-buying and other patronage (Ockey 2004: 178–179).

In 1933 Pridi released an ambitious economic plan to transform Thai farmers into collective workers on farm land the state would purchase. Though Baker and Phongpaichit (2000) argue this plan reflects less the influence of Soviet ideology and

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23 The traditional understanding of the military built up in the beginning of the reign of King Rama V and boosted by Rama VI, was defender of the triad of nation-religion-king (Keyes 1987).
more that of Friedrich List (an economist influential in Germany and Japan), Pridi was nonetheless attacked by Mano’s faction as a communist. Mano ordered loyal troops to prorogue the National Assembly, and Pridi and his allies were “pushed out” of the Cabinet – in Pridi’s case, out of Siam for almost six months. By this time, open rivalries had emerged in the Khana Ratsadorn between the fascist military faction led by Phibun Songkram, the socialist alliance led by Pridi Panomyong, and a royalist faction comprised of senior civil bureaucrats and nobility (some of whom commanded troop loyalty).

In 1944, as WWII turned against the Japanese, Pridi’s rival Phibunsongkram was forced out of the Prime Ministership. Phibun, who seized power in 1938, – had collaborated with the Japanese and declared war on the Allies.24 After the War, with Pridi briefly in ascendancy, the choice arose again, to strengthen the monarchy and conservative rule or to move towards a much more liberal, possibly socialist regime. As Prime Minister in early 1946, Pridi succeeding in passing a progressive constitution, with provisions for a fully elected parliament. But the coup of 1947 – backed by royalist military officers Phin Choonhavan, not part of the 1932 anti-royalist coup group – ushered out democracy decisively, and returned Phibun to power. It also marked the emergence of a new alliance between monarchy and royalist military, who subsequently agreed to restore crown assets nationalized after 1932 (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 281).

Pridi and allies in the Navy staged major coup attempts in 1949 and 1951 but never succeeded in ousting Phibun. For the next two and a half decades, until the “revolution” of 1973, a succession of military dictators ruled Thailand with varying degrees of authoritarianism (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: Ch. 8; Samutavanija 1987; Bunbongkarn 1987).

**Legacies of the first critical juncture**

The first critical juncture established a distinctly closed polity, and installed as its authoritarian overseers the military, legitimated in part by reference to a partially restored monarchy. The regimes of Field Marshals Sarit (1957–63) and Thanom (1963–73) also evolved rapid rural development as a technology of state-building in a

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24 However the Seri Thai (Free Thai) resistance coalition denied the legitimacy of this declaration. Seri Thai included Pridi as well as his royalist rivals (and later enemies) Seni and Kukrit Pramoj.
race against the spectre of a communist take-over.

I noted that the concept of critical juncture is defined with respect to specific legacies that the analyst wishes to explore. Table 4.6 describes institutional legacies of the first critical juncture that faced Thai social activism when it re-emerged in the 1980s, legacies which indeed remain readily detectable today in dealing with the state and contesting the political arena. Military and civilian elites reproduced the authoritarian state using a potent mixture of organized violence (in the name of national security and anti-communism), ultra-nationalism,\(^{25}\) and increasingly, developmentalism. The state installed infrastructure such as schools, clinics, roads, large dams, and electricity transmission lines in isolated regions. It financed these development projects from revenues secured from post-Korean War economic growth, and in part from US funding in the context of defeating communist insurgency in the region.\(^{26}\)

**4.3.2 The second critical juncture (1976–92): military decline, “money democracy,” and civil society mobilization**

The years 1969–92, from the declining legitimacy of Thanom’s dictatorship to the collapse of the 1992 military National Peace Keeping Council coup, constitute a highly dynamic period in modern Thai history. I argue that a subset of this period (1976–92) constitutes a second critical juncture, whose legacy includes increased freedom and equality in Thai society, in part through the agency of civil society organizations. However, the period of the second critical juncture also opened the polity to organized business interests, which increasingly dominated representative democracy.

**Antecedents of the second critical juncture (late 1960s–1976)**

If positive feedback between elite interests, development, and reproduction of authoritarian institutions produced stability during the 1950s and early 1960s, it was also brittle. The *antecedents* of what I classify as a second critical juncture (1976–92;...
see Table 4.4) include the most violent episodes in modern Thai history. The CPT had its first armed clash with the government in 1965, in Nakhon Phanom province. The communist insurgency peaked shortly after October 1976, when thousands of students and workers fled into the forests following the attack on student demonstrators at Thammasat University. Well before this time, however, the military junta led by Field Marshal Thanom Kitikachorn had lost the support of King Bhumipol. In public addresses in the late 1960s, the King expressed frustration at Thailand's ruling junta and its lack of a constitution during most of the 1960s (Bowie 1997). Since 1958, one committee had supposedly been working on a new draft of the constitution.²⁷ It released its new draft in 1968, and the junta allowed elections in early 1969. Field Marshal Thanom’s party comfortably won those elections, but the ensuing 32 month period of parliamentary politics created significant early openings for civil society (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 300).

By the early 1970s it was clear that the regime faced not only challenges from the communist insurgency but also considerable discontent among workers, peasants, and students. Military leaders bickered over how to suppress the rising communist insurgency (ibid., 300). Students emerged as political actors. They took on an ambitious range of issues, particularly after 1973: from corruption in their universities to support for urban strikers and to oppressive land tenure conditions in the North (see Section 4.4).

These antecedent events during the 1960s and early 1970s were clearly deeply consequential, yet I choose not to assign them to the second critical juncture itself (Table 4.5). I prefer to keep them separate as decades of increasing contention, during which time right-wing and left-wing groups transgressed the known boundaries of Thai politics, which deserve their own analysis. In so doing, I construct the 1976–92 “critical juncture” as the dénouement to these decades, when the students had fled the cities, and elites were left wondering how to heal the deep divisions in society.

The second critical juncture

The key dynamics during this juncture are the transfer of state power away from the military to parliamentary and civilian elites, the conviction that mobilizing

²⁷ In 1958 Sarit staged a second coup – this time against his own government – and annulled his constitution of 1957, which in any case was a throwback to the 1932 charter (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 273).
### Table 4.6 Institutional legacies of the first critical juncture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Features / Powers and Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Chief executive, legislator, and diplomat. Chairman of the cabinet. Paramount political authority, wide range of responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Coordinates agencies responsible for budgeting, economic and social planning, civil service administration, national security, public relations, and some state enterprises (including EGAT until 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>Apex of formal decision-making, coordinates policies of different ministries. Note: 1958–68 (under Sarit and Thanom), cabinet no longer nominally responsible to National Assembly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Assembly</td>
<td>Weakly institutionalized parliament. Three primary official functions: 1) to legitimize the regime; 2) to pass legislation; 3) to articulate voters’ concerns and other issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Senate and House of Representatives)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>Partially elected 1946–47; fully appointed 1958–68 (under Sarit and Thanom); first full elections under 1997 constitution: March 2000. Senators not allowed to join political parties.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


violence to rule the nation is illegitimate, and the acceptance of NGOs as actors in rural development. Securing this legacy required resolving two coup attempts (in 1981
and 1985 against General Prem Tinsulanonda and his cabinet) and one successful coup that backfired violently (in the bloody events of May 1992). It also required tolerance of increased NGO activity from the late 1970s onward (see Section 4.4).

General Prem, appointed Prime Minister in 1980, had risen to army chief through successful counter-insurgency operations in the Northeast. Prem combined violent offensives with road-building, forest clearing, and offers of village development and amnesty for insurgents who surrendered (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 313). Prem codified the amnesty offer as Executive Order 65/2523 [1980] within a month of becoming Prime Minister in March 1980. Order 65/2523 and its more detailed successor 66/2525 amounted to a reform manifesto that used the term prachathipatai (democracy) to mean political development led by the army, in the name of the people, justified by the threat of communism. It did not mean a fully-elected parliament (ibid., 329).

As Phongpaichit and Baker explain (1995: 348–349), the 1980s experienced significant tensions over this special political status the military had appropriated. In particular, the 1978 constitution contained temporary clauses granting the military the right to maintain a “guiding” or “supervisory” role in Parliament and the Executive, including the right to serve as Prime Minister. During the 1980s, military men repeatedly pressured Prime Minister Prem and the parliament to make these clauses permanent, without success. These were serious challenges, waged discursively. The military argued, for instance, that they were more democratic than corrupt elected businessmen (ibid., 349).

Without affiliating with any political party, Prem skilfully balanced competition between military officers and elected politicians for control of government ministries. Prem headed five elected coalition governments, 1980–88, and was well supported by the palace. Evidently a master of compromise and consensus building (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 346; Panu 1988), Prem also presided over a military budget that increased dramatically during the 1980s.

In February 1991 a military group led by General Suchinda Kraprayoon launched a coup against the elected government of Prem’s successor, Chatichai Choonhavan (leader of Chat Thai Party).28 The coup leaders, later called the National

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28 At elections in July 1988, Chart Thai party won the most votes and petitioned for the right to choose the Prime Minister. Prem stepped aside.
Peace Keeping Council (NPKC) justified their actions by the extraordinary level of corruption the mass media had disclosed in the Chatichai government.

While the corruption undoubtedly existed, the coup can also be interpreted as an attempt by the military to defend its long-standing prerogative – the military budget, which had been under increasing attack since the mid-1980s for its size and lack of transparency. The military also dominated a cross-border arms trade with the Khmer Rouge, and stood to lose from the regional detente the Chatichai government was promoting in the name of turning battlefields to marketplaces (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 350–354). The junta appointed former diplomat and current industrialist Anand Panyarachun as Prime Minister. The Anand government continued Chatichai’s agenda of trade liberalization and major infrastructure delivery for Bangkok (ibid., 356).

At elections in March 1992, the junta’s party Sammakhitham, which had induced many provincial politicians to defect from Chatichai’s party, emerged as the leading party at elections. When Narong Wongwan stepped aside from the Prime Ministership after allegations of involvement in drug-trafficking, General Suchinda stepped in, triggering renewed condemnation by pro-democracy NGOs and a series of rallies that began in April. Chamlong Srimuang, a former general and lay ascetic who headed the Palang Dham party, joined hunger strikers in protest. On Sunday 17 May 1992, attendance at the mop khap lai Suchinda (rally to oust Suchinda) grew to 200,000, characterized by the media as largely salaried and educated (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 358). The demonstrators were opposed to Suchinda’s attempt to install himself as Prime Minister, having promised a return to an elected Prime Ministership. After dark protestors moved their rally to the Democracy Monument, and troops with little training in crowd control fired into the crowd. After three days of night-time bloodshed, King Bhumipol brokered the conflict between Suchinda’s junta and the protestors, represented by Chamlong. Suchinda resigned on 24 May. Industrial leaders condemned the violence, which attracted international news coverage (ibid., 359–360).

**Legacies of the second critical juncture**

One important outgrowth of dynamics during the second critical juncture period is the development of parliament. Parliamentary rule in Thailand, however, has
led to a number of problems characterized under the heading “money politics” or “money democracy” (McVey 2000; Ockey 2004; Phongpaichit and Baker 1995). Basically, this refers to the ability of elected politicians to derive enhanced – and often illegal – benefits from public office. Such benefits were a notable feature of military dominance during the first critical juncture. This first period of institutionalized corruption (1950s–1980s) however benefited civilian and military bureaucrats, who nationalized some private firms, and pressured other private firms for lucrative directorships (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 278). Such benefits did not accrue to members of Parliament because Parliament was marginalized. During the late 1980s, however, as Thailand shifted towards an export-oriented economy, retired military officers increasingly ran for parliament and shared in the new “business of politics”.  

Benefits could take many forms, ranging from voting or lobbying for public contracts that would benefit industries or companies in which politicians had business interests, to kickbacks, bribe-taking, and embezzlement. Thailand’s rapid growth after the mid-1980s gave politicians opportunities to get their hands on a piece of the budget. Military spending for instance grew from $US1.5 billion to $US2.7 billion between 1982-1992, and “commissions” on arms sales (a phrase that included kickbacks to government officials and ministers) ranged from 2 to 10 percent (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 331).

The political and financial capital to be derived increased competition for public office, and gave contenders strong incentives to secure as many votes as possible, through conventional pork-barrel politics as well as vote buying (Ockey 2004). Another consequence of the gains to be had from material goods and infrastructure spending was the fact that national development became associated with these physically tangible forms of activity. (Although we have seen an increase in recent years in investment in institutional reform and human-capital-intensive forms of development, development as physical asset building and distribution continues, and remains very important.)

The other institutional legacy of this second critical juncture is the collapse of support from both elites and ordinary people for continued military control of state power, following the failed coups against Prem and the bloodshed of May 1992 (Macintosh 2000). Intertwined with that social repudiation of the military is another

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29 The phrase comes from Phongpaichit and Baker (2004).
legacy: the understanding that rulers could no longer secure order through ongoing violent suppression of civil society. In short, the legacies of this juncture consist of the rise of parliamentary democracy on the one hand and the re-emergence of “civil society” agendas and popular politics on the other. How prepared were the new parliamentarians for these resurgent agendas?

4.4 Emergence of civil society and social movement actors

This section reviews the emergence of new political actors, focusing on the rise of “civil society” and social movement actors from the 1960s onwards. I provide additional detail on state–society relations during the second critical juncture. By the mid-1980s, only a decade after the conservative and military backlash of October 1976, an observer of Thai society could count a "galaxy" of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), as Table 4.7 shows. By the mid-1990s, only a decade later, the number of NGOs and villagers’ organizations had greatly increased. Often working in coalitions with a multilevel structure, they influenced Thai politics by re-engaging in longstanding social problems as well as setting new public agendas.

Table 4.7 Some influential NGOs, 1960s–present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization / politically active period</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Student Council of Thailand (1965–present)</td>
<td>Student and national politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resource and Environmental Conservation Committee of 16 Universities (1973–76; 1978–present)</td>
<td>Environmental politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement (1967–1978)</td>
<td>Student exchanges; rural development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Volunteer Service (1980–present)</td>
<td>Rural poverty alleviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khon Kaen University Rural Development Institute (early 1980s–present)</td>
<td>Alternative development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (1985–present)</td>
<td>Grassroots organization/network building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute/Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) (1986–present)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project for Ecological Recovery (1986–present)</td>
<td>Ecologically sustainable development Policy analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.7 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization / politically active period</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siam Environmental Club (1978 – late–1980s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thammanat (1995)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santi Asoke (1973–present)</td>
<td>Buddhist intentional communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal sources: Phongpaichit and Baker (1995: Ch. 11); Missingham (2003); Panu (1988)

Conservatives viewed these developments with some unease. Somewhere in their work, these civil society organizations had crossed the line from doing routine development work into more contentious politics. Moreover, judging from the frequency of public demonstrations during the 1990s, contention was becoming routine. Conservatives could not easily peg these new, non-violent actors as “communist” revolutionaries and suppress them. By the late 1990s, NGO actors and their allies produced a vociferous new discourse calling for systematic reform of the state, appealing to high ideals such as authentic democracy and people-centred development. In reaction, conservatives branded this activity as sowing disruption and conflict and obstructing economic progress. On the other hand, liberal observers celebrated this re-emergence of non-state discourse and action as heralding the arrival of civil society politics (Hewison 1997; Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: Ch. 11; Missingham 2003).

How and why did these NGOs emerge? How did some of them engage in contentious politics? Narrators describing the early generation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) mention a number of recurrent themes: first, even during the highly repressive Sarit dictatorship, organizations could work on issues that did not directly confront state authority, such as heritage/environmental preservation (Ganjanapan 1999). Beginning in the late 1960s, acceptable community development work included providing education, health care, improved water and sanitation in

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30 The label “[backed by a] third hand” (mue thi sam) – meaning foreign-supported, replaced “communist.”
urban slums, poor villages, and refugee camps. The Thai government did not object to the ostensibly apolitical welfare orientation of these NGO projects. International aid organizations initially funded relief projects for refugee communities along Thailand's borders, but later expanded their mission to include development assistance for poor regions in Thailand (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: Ch. 11).

Second, social change activists had a counter-hegemonic, discursive base in the form of memories and collective identities. During the decades of heightened contention discussed above, Thai society in both rural and urban areas experienced unprecedented levels of popular mobilization in pursuit of conservative and reformist agendas. Although the Communist Party began to disintegrate in the late 1970s and the Peasants’ Federation of Thailand had also collapsed after violent repression and assassination of many key leaders, experiences and memories of collective action during this turbulent but exuberant period would still have been relatively fresh among activists in the subsequent decade. Fifteen percent of Assembly of the Poor leaders (pho khrua yai) had prior experience working with the 1970s farmers’ movement and/or Communist insurgents (Praphat 1998: 103). Intellectuals could draw on the Gramscian concept of “civil society” to re-inspire their continued activism, in the wake of the surrender of the Communist Party, the end of the Cold War, and the emergence of neo-liberalism (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995; Baker 2000; Chalermsripinyorat 2002). Indeed, a variety of alternative discourses of development were being spread around Thai society at this time. They ranged from socially engaged Buddhist teachers such as Buddhadhasa, Sulak Sivalak, Phra Photirak (the founder of Santi Asoke), as well as the Thai "community culture" school of thought, with its celebration of the purity of village-scale society and economy. These discourses could be combined into a logic justifying defending the “village” against the depredations of the “city” and the state (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: Ch. 11).

Organizational and discursive bases were necessary conditions for NGO emergence. A further and necessary set of conditions was the ability of villager and NGO activists to systematically identify (socially construct) sets of major grievances, attributing responsibility for them to the state.

In the 1970s and 1980s, villager and NGO activists contributed to mobilizations around two emergent issues. These were the concerns of land and capital-insecure peasant farmers; and, later, campaigns against state-sponsored resettlement schemes, some involving large dams, others related to forest
conservation. These contentious episodes played out in different ways, but each re-defined issues and understandings of contention during the 1990s.

### 4.4.1 1970s contention over land tenure insecurity

For most of their history, Thai people had the benefit of a land frontier they could move to if their prevailing condition proved unbearable. Beginning in the late 1960s, this frontier began to close as population grew, roads and agricultural credit expanded, and importantly, as the state began to assert control over remaining portions of land. In the Northeast, forest cover dropped from 53% in 1961 to 28% in 1988, just over a quarter century later. Farmers grew cassava, maize, and kenaf fibre on land they cleared; but they were exposed to drought, high interest rates from moneylenders, European import quotas, and U.S. market prices (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: Ch. 2; Bello et al. 1998: 186–187).

Prime Minister Thanom’s decision to allow parliamentary politics (for a period of almost three years, beginning in March 1969) emboldened Northern region farmer leaders such as Chai Wangtaku and Intha Sribunruang to raise issues such as high rents and distress levels of indebtedness with authorities in Bangkok. Student activists helped frame grievances as injustices perpetrated by moneylenders and landlords acting in breach of the law, with indifferent or collusive local officials (Morell and Chai-Anan 1981: 214).

After October 1973, farmers participated in large-scale protests. Some farmers attempted to re-possess land they had lost to moneylenders. The government of Sanya Thammasak set up a committee in 1974 to receive and investigate cases of land dispossession nationwide. In three months, more than fifty thousand petitions poured in (ibid., 216). By December 1974, after pressure from farmers demonstrating alongside leftist student groups, labour activists, urban people, and activist monks, the parliament had passed several laws to benefit farmers. These included the Land Rent Control Act, which fixed maximum allowable farm rents; and a Land Reform Act, with a provision allowing the state to take landholdings beyond 50 rai for redistribution (Bello et al. 1998: 149). But the advantages gained never materialized.

In December 1974, farmers and their allies formed the Peasants’ Federation of Thailand (PFT), to educate farmers about their new rights and monitor state compliance. The government of Kukrit Pramoj (March 1975–April 1976) soon backed...
down when it realized that its program would threaten the interests of dominant social classes. As Bello et al. (1998: 149) put it: “This legislation ran up against the realities of Thailand’s power structure . . . land reform served as the cement for the counter-revolutionary unification of powerful factions of the elite, which had been temporarily in disarray during the reformist period.” By this time, military and police leaders, with the backing of landed elites and the monarchy, had formed paramilitary groups such as the Red Gaurs, Nawaphon, and the Village Scouts (Bello et al. 1998: 150; Bowie 1997). These groups are suspected to be behind the campaign of assassinations against PFT leaders and members: 21 were assassinated in an eighteen month period ending August 1975, just over a year before right-wing groups joined state agents in the decisive attack on Thammasat University students in October 1976. The fledgling PFT had been quashed (Morell and Chai-Anan 1981: 227).

On the other hand, this does not mean the farmers’ movement of the early 1970s had no effect on the state, especially in the context of the perceived communist threat. After a post-1976 hiatus, a number of agencies, chiefly the ALRO, continued land reform in the 1980s, under a slightly more liberal Prem government. They steered away from re-distributing private land, and instead attempted to set up a graduated land titling program. By the late 1990s, ALRO re-distributed 7.57 million rai, of which 95% was public land. In one setting it re-distributed marginal cleared forest land, making settlers more reliant on access to capital for mechanized ploughing (Hirsch 1990). Elites could often use ALRO programs as a method to acquire land from recipients unable to farm (Bello et al. 1998: 154). In the 1990s, conditions of ALRO titling programs were relaxed so as to increase eligibility. More land was distributed to needy people. On the other hand, elites used the relaxed program to gain access to highly desirable land (ibid., 156).

In sum, the state proceeded with various types of “land reform.” In retrospect, their transparency and accountability would have been strengthened had farmers’ groups been able to organize and intervene. Instead, sixteen agencies had jurisdiction over sixteen types of land tenure (ibid., 152). Political scandals multiplied and toppled the Chuan government in 1995. Systemic problems of land tenure insecurity and land reform continue as of this writing.31

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31 The Thaksin government has periodically made declarations about moving aggressively to confiscate private land not put to productive use. However, it faces the same resistance from elites that daunted governments in 1973–76.
4.4.2 1980s contention over Nam Choan Dam

The state and right-wing mobilization forcibly repressed social activism after 1976. When it re-emerged in the early 1980s, it took on new issues, issues activists considered more fruitful than land reform as captured by the state. The 1982–88 campaign against Nam Choan, a large hydropower dam proposed for western Thailand, is one case in point.

EGAT proposed Nam Choan in the early 1980s. It would have flooded 223 km² of a wildlife Sanctuary in Kanchanaburi province northwest of Bangkok. By 1982, a coalition of Bangkok environmentalists, students, local middle-class people, rural NGOs, and some of the up to 2,000 Karen villagers who would be displaced joined forces to protest against the project. The Prem government, facing a number of other significant political challenges (see 4.3.2 above) postponed the project in 1982 (Panu 1988: 51).

EGAT reintroduced Nam Choan in 1986. The same year, a new environmentalist organization called the Project for Ecological Recovery (PER) was formed to oppose the hydropower dam and other instances of what it regarded as heavy-handed destruction of forest and resource-dependent livelihoods. This was likely the first time in Thai history that civil society organizations mounted sustained arguments against a large dam project. Opponents argued that the dam imposed unacceptable social costs, and furthermore would deplete forest coverage directly and indirectly through illegal logging, harming wildlife in the process.

Nam Choan politics displayed several notable dynamics (Panu 1988; Hirsch 1993). First, conflict among and within state organizations was apparent. In Parliament, the Joint House-Senate Committee on Science, Technology and Energy endorsed the project in June 1983 and urged the government to proceed with it. The House Committee on Public Health and Environment by contrast met several times between June and December 1986, and outlined the project’s potential economic benefits as well as costs to forest resources and wildlife (Panu: 1988: 132–133). RFD Director Phong Sono supported the project, while his Deputy Phairot Suwanakan (Chief of the Wildlife Protection Division) opposed it, as did Phairot’s subordinates at Thung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary. A local RFD station threatened legal action against EGAT in 1982 for unauthorized road construction (ibid., 47). Panu (1988) argues that such divisions within the state prompted state and non-state project opponents to ally
with civil society opponents.

Strong local opposition constituted a second and vital dimension to the politics of Nam Choan. In 1982 and 1986–88, EGAT faced concerted opposition from within Kanchanaburi. In late 1986, lawyers, local chamber of commerce and provincial assembly (*sapha changwat*) members, together with sugar cane growers, formed the Kanchanaburi Nature and Environment Association for the Future specifically to oppose Nam Choan. It was a vigorous organization, with some 300 members (Panu, 77). Hirsch (1993: 140) argued that previous dams within the province, in combination with agricultural intensification and resource-grabbing, had “begun to pinch the provincial population to the point where it was prepared . . . to organize to make a stand.” Local people blamed existing dams for deforestation and deterioration of soil, water, and fisheries; and viewed Nam Choan as an additional source of risk for earthquake and catastrophic failure (ibid., 140).

The third notable dynamic in Nam Choan politics consisted of efforts to legitimize decision-making by establishing special task forces to review and settle environmental uncertainties. The project, promoted as multi-purpose, provoked debate on a broad range of lay and expert topics, ranging from electricity supply alternatives, irrigation benefits, forest ecosystem quality in the inundated area, forced resettlement, and induced earthquake risk (Hirsch 1993: 140). In light of this discursive complexity, the Prem government decided in 1982 and 1987 (after civil society opposition flared again) to delegate rational decision-making to special task forces. Prem’s 1987–88 process is one of Thailand’s few experiences with formalized multi-stakeholder processes (MSP). The committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Tienchai Sirisamphan comprised forty expert members (including a contingent from EGAT) and five specialized sub-committees. For example, the Energy, Economics and Finance sub-committee compared the cost of power generation between hydropower and other technologies, under different scenarios of demand growth. It found that Nam Choan was the least-cost power plant. However, this sub-committee also considered a range of other cost and benefits. It found that the “crux” of the cost/benefit calculus was “two non-quantifiable items: the degradation of the intrinsic value of Thailand’s largest natural forest (including its rare flora and fauna) and the induced risk [from] earthquake” (Phantumvanit and Nandhabiwat 1989).

Opponents at the time considered General Tienchai inappropriately biased in favour of EGAT, and denounced his MSP (Hildyard 1987). Only five out of the forty
committee members were critics; only one of these had voting rights (Hirsch 1993). Dr. Niyom Visaithip, chairman of the Energy, Economics and Finance sub-committee, remembers quite polarized proceedings. For 70–80 days, participants “would speak, but not listen. They denounced each other nearly to death” (interview, 21/10/04). In spite of its utterly politicized nature, in March 1988 the Tienchai MSP recommended against proceeding with Nam Choan, in consideration of continued ignorance about all of the dam’s effects (Hirsch 1993). Prem’s cabinet shelved the project that same month.

Prem was criticized during his 1981–88 tenure as indecisive. In the context of having to balance unstable coalition governments, he was reluctant to court controversy (Panu 1988). However, Prem’s selection of a deliberative conflict management process allowed anti-dam advocates to articulate a policy narrative which the parliamentary opposition eventually fell behind. Significant parliamentary opposition and Prem’s leadership style redounded in favour of democracy.

Increasing protest

From the early 1980s until the mid-1990s, the number of public protests increased dramatically, from 42 in 1978 to 754 in 1995 and 1,200 in 1997 (Praphat 1998: 121). Analysis of these data show that the five issues people demonstrated about most frequently changed as well. People were protesting with unprecedented frequency over long-standing grievances such as crop price supports, corruption, and labour abuses. But they mobilized even more frequently in support of such new issues as large dams, and most dramatically, the right to make a living in forest reserves (Table 4.8).

Praphat (1998) attributes the increased protest activity to political openings offered by the Kriangsak and later Prem regimes: the lifting of martial law, the 1981 amnesty offered to CPT insurgents, and the state’s toleration of pro-democracy organizations. He views the 1990s protests over access to land, forest and water as involving different categories of claimants from the land tenure and crop support mobilization of the 1970s. Praphat sees the former as involving people at the margins of society: forest dwellers, people in watersheds, minority groups (1998: 35).

However, some of the forest access protests of the 1980s and 90s may have included poor migrants from lower elevation and/or from other regions (Bello et al.
In the period 1955–70, large numbers of people moved to the edges of the central plains and up hillsides from the northern floodplain valleys. They also moved from the Northeast to the lower North (Frank et al. 2004). Some resettlement was also encouraged by the military as part of anti-insurgency campaigns, e.g., in Sakon Nakhon’s Phu Phan mountains and in Buriram’s Dong Yai forest.

Praphat’s argument that the 1990s protests involve new claimants raises the question of what happened to the grievances of the 1970s farmers. Did they mobilize in vain, or did the state eventually extend its control over land rents and stem the most egregious forms of exploitation? Did socio-economic differentiation increase, forcing many farmers to derive more and more income from off-farm labour? In answer to the first question, I hypothesize that land rents were brought under state control. Chronic debt and usurious money lending however both remain a problem in the early 21st century. (Debt rose again on the public agenda when the new Thai Rak Thai party responded to new farmers organizations’ calls in the mid-1990s for a moratorium on farm debt. The Thaksin administration has grappled with how to reduce the burden of publicly held farm debt, as well as the equally difficult issue of how to persecute illegal private money-lenders in a context where debtors are reluctant to testify for fear of retaliation.)

Regarding differentiation driving the need to earn more income off-farm, migration data show dramatic increases in movement to Bangkok and the Central regions from Northern and Northeastern migrants during the period 1975–1990 (Frank et al. 2004). In 1990, the proportion of “agricultural households” had fallen to less than 65% in all but one of the provinces in the Northern and Central regions (Schar 2004).

Finally, Praphat mentions a number of rural and semi-urban protests around rivers, over issues such as industrial pollution, sand mining, new storages and diversions, and downstream flows (1998: 42–51). These kinds of protests occur in all regions but are particularly evident in areas where people need access to water for agriculture, including intensified farming.

In summary, as population expanded, the frontier closed, and the agrarian economy intensified, people’s grievances changed. What land tenure issues in the core extended Chao Phraya basin were to protestors in the 1970s, once-“peripheral” forest and water issues are today. Furthermore, some of the seemingly new social
### Table 4.8 Public demonstrations, 1982–95

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Year / Issue</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Labour rights</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Corrupt officials</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Crop price supports</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Environmental issues (land/water/forest/pollution)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Land use rights in forest reserves</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rallies to support politicians</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Labour rights</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Crop price supports and farmers' debt relief</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Large infrastructural projects</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Education and religion</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Water resources</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Land use rights in forest reserves</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Corrupt officials</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Misc. interest groups</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Pollution</td>
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<td>Rallies to support politicians</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Water resources</td>
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<td>Large infrastructural projects</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>754</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

constituency of protestors in the 1990s may have kinship linkages to rural households and communities mobilized during the 1970s. A significant number also trace their grievances to the pro-preservationist swing in state forest policy, as the next section reviews.

4.4.3 1980s–1990s contention over “forest” access and livelihood destruction

By the early 1980s, the state had begun classifying recently cleared land as state-owned “forest,” taxing farmers but often refusing to grant them titles (Mehl 1985 in Bello et al. 1998: 146). By the early 1990s, about 10 million people were occupying 30 million rai of public land without secure tenure (Bello et al. 1998: 153).

In the late 1980s, the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) revised its policies towards commercial logging. Prior to this time, the state had tolerated logging followed by settlement, justifying it as counter-insurgency and development. However problems with Thai forest practices began to rise on the public agenda after the late 1970s. The media publicized issues relating to illegal logging. Khru ban nok, a popular novel and feature film at the time, presented the young rural teacher as hero in a tragic conflict with illegal loggers. Popular discourse – in the cities and among state agencies at least – was apparently shifting to preserving what was left of Thailand’s forests.

For state agencies, that meant continued efforts to control rotational agricultural practiced by highlanders. It also meant increasing territorial control of often long-settled “forest” areas for preservation as national parks and sanctuaries and commercial use.

During the 1980s, we can detect certain patterns of competition and cooperation between state agencies. First, both the RFD and the Army staked discursive claims on forest resources. RFD for example released satellite maps and forest surveys documenting destruction in the early 1980s. The military followed suit a decade later, releasing intelligence reports of illegal logging conducted by businessmen in collusion with local politicians, police officers, and national level politicians (Bello et al. 1998: 192). Each agency built a case of natural resource mis-management as well as a case for its own intervention. The RFD also complained about its inability to control illegal logging because of its lack of staff and firepower.
RFD and the military were occasionally at odds: logging companies, allegedly backed by military officials, petitioned the courts to allow renewed access to old logging concessions located in protected areas newly designated by RFD (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 81).

In 1989, after many protests and a landslide in the South that killed several hundred people, the new civilian government led by General Chatichai announced a total commercial logging ban. The disaster was attributed to lack of erosion control in forest cleared for rubber plantations. By this time villagers who drew on forest lands for grazing and gleaning rights, working with NGOs and activist monks, had conducted sporadic protests and oppositional campaigns for almost a decade. They protested illegal logging, beginning in the North. They also protested the Prem cabinet's 1985 decision to allow private investors to help reforest, with eucalyptus plantations, the majority of land RFD classified as "degraded" (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 82).

After the ban, the Army and other parties also defended their interests in commercial logging through two other means: they secured logging deals in neighbouring countries, and illegal logging continued after the ban (Bello et al. 1998: 192). By the 1990s, however, the Army and RFD agreed on a massive new development project that would accommodate their varied interests. They agreed to conduct a large-scale involuntary resettlement scheme in the name of poverty alleviation. It was called Kho Cho Ko, Thai acronym for Project to Provide Land to Poor People in Degraded Forest Reserves.

Almost six million villagers from 9,700 villages were to be moved out of more than 1,250 “degraded” forests to newly designated areas, where they would receive community and infrastructural development and community forest reserves. The army began to remove people in April 1991, two months after the NPKC coup ousted Prime Minister Chatichai. Many villages found themselves coercively resettled on land they found less suitable, or in areas already occupied (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 83; Missingham 2003: 34–35). The program appears to have been universally

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32 This resource shortage however has not constrained it in persecuting ordinary people using the forests.

33 National development plans since the 1960s have declared proportions of the country's total area that should remain under forest cover. A target of 40% was enshrined in NESDB five-year national plans since at least the mid-1980s. The 1985 decision allowed 25% of the country's total area to be reforested commercially (Bello et al. 1998: 191; Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 82).

34 Krong kan chat thi tham kin hai kap ratsadorn phu yak rai nai phoen thi pa sa-nguan suemsom; my translation.
unpopular.

During 1991–92, villagers and NGOs organized an escalating protest campaign against Kor Cho Ko. Critics argued that the scheme involved replanting with species suitable for commercial pulp and rayon production, not ecological restoration (Hirsch 1993: 22). The campaigns began with local-level awareness-raising, gained momentum in early 1992 with demonstrations outside provincial halls, and peaked with marches that drew 4,500 protestors a month after Suchinda’s May 1992 resignation (Missingham 2003: 35). Baker describes the protest as a symbolic non-violent attack march on Bangkok, down the Mitraphap Highway corridor linking Bangkok with the Northeast. This route down the escarpment from Pak Chong to Saraburi on the plains was commonly used to attack Bangkok – most recently in 1981 when Prime Minister Prem ordered troops from a base in Korat to put down a coup attempt against him in Bangkok (Baker 2000: 19).

These protest events drew on villager groups linked by NGOs into regional networks. Such organizational building had been going on since the mid-1980s, propelled by ideas from both the Thai “community culture” school of thought, and global community development discourse. In addition, however, the very process of responding to threatening state-led initiatives such as Kor Cho Ko spurred new organizations to form. Assembly of Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast (ASFN) formed in March 1992, just under a year after the forced resettlements of Kor Cho Ko.

The ASFN had a broad agenda. It took on grievances ranging from chronic farm debt to justice for those impacted by large state projects (forest reserves, dams), and drew in a large paying membership within three years of its establishment in 1992. Members paid a 100-baht annual fee and made additional contributions during protest rallies. ASFN made frequent use of demonstration marches – it repeated 1992’s “long march” on Bangkok in 1994, 1995, and 1996, reflecting enthusiasm for the tactic that helped defeat Kor Cho Ko (Baker 2000).

**Resistance against Pak Mun Dam**

Resistance against EGAT’s Pak Mun Dam began in 1989–1990 with informal networking among villagers who opposed the dam and the state’s process, which worked through local authorities such as district officers and village headmen who tried to elicit public support at meetings they summoned (see Chapter 6 for details).
The paternalistic process and fears of repression failed to intimidate a few articulate and confident middle-aged women. They helped form a larger network and sought advice from the Union of Civil Liberties in Ubon Ratchathani (Missingham 2000: 73–76). Opposition spread to town people: first to vendors in Phibun Mangsahan district, who were worried about flooding of adjacent Kaeng Saphue, a large rapids and tourist attraction. Later it spread to a segment of the middle class in Ubon.

In the earliest stages people seemed to be responding to lack of information and fear of widespread impacts. When it became understood that EGAT’s run-of-the-river design would lead to a much smaller area inundated, and when EGAT undertook not to flood Kaeng Saphue, most of the opposition in Phibun and Ubon dissipated. The protest campaign narrowed to a core of villagers and alternative development NGOs. In a setting where ecologically significant forests were not understood to exist, conservation NGOs such as PER did not agree on how to rank the Mun villagers’ struggle against other priorities. Local people were apparently the first to raise the concern that the dam would destroy wild fisheries harvests, as they witnessed blasting of the river bed in 1991. By 1994, a villagers’ organization representing some 2,500 families from more than 50 villagers had formed to press for fair compensation as a result of the just-completed dam (see Chapter 6).

**Emergence of the Assembly of the Poor**

*Sammatca Kon Chon (Assembly of the Poor; AOP)* emerged in late 1995 as one of several groups that split away from ASFN after a conflict over strategy arose within the leadership. Was it best to work in partnership with mainstream politicians whenever possible, or was the only truly effective option, given the tenaciously closed nature of the Thai state, one of disrupting routine politics? This was the classic dilemma facing new political actors – to gain access at the risk of being co-opted by stronger allies, or to stay “outside” at the risk of being ignored or otherwise repressed? (By "repression" I refer to political activity that increases the barriers to collective action by challengers.)

ASFN chose the former strategy; Bamrung Kayotha and other NGO leaders put their bets on an organization to pursue the latter. Assembly of the Poor is a national-level alliance of issue-based and regional groups or networks. It operates with a

---

35 Also referred to as Forum of the Poor.
remarkably decentralized, non-hierarchical structure. A council of villager leaders (known as *pho khrua yai*) meets once every three months (more often during peak protest events) to deliberate strategy in a consensus-based manner (Missingham 2003: Ch. 7; Baker 2000: 16). By the late 1990s the Assembly of the Poor had emerged as a distinctive new political actor, and the Mun river villagers have always been a key constituency.

One of the most distinctive features of the AOP was that it challenged what it meant to be “poor” in Thai culture. The dominant cultural understanding of poverty is that poverty is an attribute of individuals or households, a result of ill-fortune, lack of motivation, or resourcefulness. The AOP redefined “the poor” as worthy people made income-poor (deprived of a secure livelihood) by inappropriate state-sponsored economic development, as well as made poor by exclusion from planning processes (AOP 1995 in Missingham 2003).

“Originally we were not poor people,” begins a policy brief published by the AOP:

> For so very long, we had a way of living with nature, rivers, forests, and mountains that nurtured us and our ancestors. Now we are poor people, without occupations, without hope . . . we never knew the torment of poverty until we became poor people . . . The government has taught us not to be selfish, for us to sacrifice for the country’s development. Why has this sacrifice involved destruction of our lives and communities to such an extent . . . we were never poor until the day that you [responsible parties] appeared in the name of “development.”
> (AOP 2000a)

The AOP forcefully asserted a new political identity, as an organization that made claims for compensation and structural reform on behalf of such “poor” people. The AOP however had to contend with both the evolution of money politics and the disruption of the Thai financial crisis. I take up that story in Chapters 6 and 7.

### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has pursued the question *In what contexts of structure and meaning did contending parties emerge and operate?* Section 4.2 began with an exegesis of Phongpaichit and Baker’s (1995) economic and social history of modern Thailand. I argued that this important text weaves a level of cultural analysis into a dominantly materialist mode of explanation. Despite recognizing the occasional power
of new discourses to change the political economy (notably during the insurgency decades of the 1960s–1980s), the authors treat culture and discourse as primarily a resource for interests. As the economy changes, interests change, leading to the embrace of new discourses to support those interests. Their narrative does not provide in-depth exploration of situations where new understandings and actors emerge in contention. To know how political-economic structures and structures of meaning are mutually constituted (Whittier 2002) requires that we emphasize the role of interpretive processes.

To focus such analysis where it matters most, I championed the merits of path-dependent explanation. Like Phongpaichit and Baker (1995), the most important causal mechanism I relied on to explain trajectories of state–society relations was intra-elite competition to dominate the state. Drawing on their fine-grained empirical analysis, I constructed critical junctures as periods of indeterminacy where struggles over meaning mattered. Both critical junctures I outlined (1927–51 and 1976–92) were periods where – given accumulated social divisions and constituted actors – elites made choices about what political discourses, balance of powers, and limits on violence were acceptable.

During the first critical juncture, civilian proponents of democracy and socialism (Pridi’s faction) contended for power with conservative royalists. The army faction in the Khana Ratsadorn, originally allied against the royalists, joined them after Pridi and his faction were repeatedly framed as communists (after the release of his socialist economic plan in 1933). More than a decade later, royalists such as Kukrit Pramoj and his followers blamed the 1946 assassination of young King Ananda Mahidol on Pridi, then serving as Prime Minister and Regent (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 268).36 During this fascinating period, both Pridi and Field Marshal Phibun served as Prime Ministers. However the 1947 army coup against Pridi and his failure, despite Navy assistance, to win power back in two counter-coups (1949 and 1951) signalled that the balance of power had tilted decisively towards royalist authoritarianism by this time. The aftermath of the first critical juncture however was a brittle police state soon combating rural insurgency and student demonstrations.

Processes of elite power contention also defined the second critical juncture, late 1970s–1992. Unlike the first juncture, the role of the monarchy was never in

36 Pridi successfully defended himself against these charges. The assassination remains unresolved.
question among elites. Military men found themselves competing for legitimacy with two new classes of actors: businessmen/parliamentarians, and progressive civil society. The army divided between conservatives in the tradition of Sarit (e.g., Suchinda and his allies) and slightly more moderate reformists (such as Chavalit Yongchaïyudh and his Democratic Soldiers). Prime Minister Prem’s pragmatic mediation between business and military interests allowed significant democratization during this period.

Section 4.4 explored in detail the emergence of different civil society and social movement actors. Progressive civil society was an important social force in the second critical juncture (1976–92). First, these progressive factions helped trigger it by mobilizing, after the late 1960s, against the authoritarianism institutions of the first juncture. Second, they contributed to it, seizing on openings offered by elites in the late 1970s to continue work on rural development. They benefited significantly from its most important outcome, civilian control of the military.

What changed during the 1980s, a mainstay of the second critical juncture? I suggested that one important change was the state’s habitual repression of debate and participation in development projects, combined with its new facilitation of rural development work by NGOs in the mid-1980s. These conditions favoured new farmers’ movements. Political openings were partly engineered from above – the 1980 amnesty offer given to insurgents, increasing toleration of farmers’ non-violent protests, economic liberalization, development of parliamentary politics. Openings were partly secured through the action of business interests, who discovered money politics. As well, political openings were sensed and secured through civil society agency. Thai NGOs secured donor support to actualize discourses of village-centered development and strengthen community organizations.

Discourses of environmentalism interacted complexly – against Nam Choan dam, they helped democratize Thailand by increasing public debate and deliberation (Panu 1988). However in struggles over smallholders’ access rights to forest, “deep-green” preservationism contributed to involuntary resettlement plans (Ganjanapan 1997). The second critical juncture thus did not resolve deeper divisions between a capitalist state and civil society (and within the latter) over development writ large.

If there is a paradox between the freedoms people enjoy on the one hand and their limited ability to participate in decision making on the other, I have argued it is the result of two critical junctures in modern history. The first established
authoritarian institutions and hegemonic practices, whose legacies – despite the important leftist and reformist reactive sequence that began in the late 1960s – are experienced to this day in the form of pronounced nationalism and a conservative, hierarchical political culture. The second juncture was a period of recurrent choice in which elites allowed civil society to re-consolidate, and by the 1990s, to openly challenge those authoritarian legacies. Like any model, the critical juncture or path-dependent framework simplifies complex reality, but allows us to explore history as more than the incessant unfolding of social action and reaction. It particular it allows us to see the long shadows cast over contemporary Thailand by highly contingent struggles for power and legitimacy in the 1930s and 40s. The critical juncture approach refines – rather than replaces – the search for causal mechanisms and processes.

Interactions between an authoritarian polity, money politics, and emergent progressive civil society form the key external and internal contexts in which actors operated during the Pak Mun Dam conflict and into the early 21st century. The historical approach I used allows us to see Thai state formation as animated by – but by no mean reducible to – dynamics in the political economy. Rather, state building becomes intelligible as the path-dependent transformation of state–society relations through distinct, contingent episodes constituted in part through struggles over meaning.
Chapter 5  Thailand’s Politics of Power System Planning and Reform

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5.1 Introduction

Long before the first charge of dynamite was set on the bed of the Mun river, long before the dam closed its gates and the Assembly of the Poor rose to prominence, Pak Mun hydropower dam existed as an abstraction, as a series of numbers, drawings, and equations that coalesced to establish it as the least-cost option to expanding peak-demand electricity supply in Thailand.

My purpose in this chapter is to chart and explain changes in the politics of electricity supply planning, from the self-regulation era of the 1960s–1970s, to the period of increasing inter-agency scrutiny that began in the late 1980s, through to the current period of open challenge to planning practices by Thai civil society actors.

I ask: What patterns exist in Thai electricity supply planning and politics? What roles do knowledge and knowledge-brokers play in conflicts over policy formation? By what mechanisms has a civil society “sustainable energy” network attempted to influence planning practices and policy, with what outcomes, and what emergent consequences?

Electric power system planning is a social practice that produces an expert knowledge discourse. Planning practices are not well understood by generalists. They rely on discourses difficult to access in terms of both standing and specialization. Their premises are often not questioned by experts. On the other hand, planning practices also include simple assumptions and beliefs that prove to be vital in buttressing political positions. Understanding how this combination of lay and expert discourses has been deployed and challenged addresses the question of what role knowledge plays in policy making, one of my thesis objectives.

Since the early 1980s, states worldwide have undertaken various forms of energy sector privatization. In the 1990s in Thailand, there have been countervailing pressures from civil society for social and environmentally friendly reform, particularly after the financial crisis which erupted in 1997. Both pressures continue as of this writing, in the context of the Thaksin administration’s attempt to privatize EGAT, and resistance from the EGAT union and civil society.37 Pressure to maintain the status quo from EGAT’s union has produced a fascinating political dynamic where competing agendas have been voiced, including a “sustainable energy” reform agenda.

However, Thailand’s electricity planning, and its overall industry structure,

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37 In other countries, e.g., India, civil society mobilization occurred earlier (Dubash 2002).
impede sustainable energy futures. By sustainable energy I refer broadly to a suite of renewable energy sources, energy conservation, and deliberative and participatory processes. Along with the historically closed planning processes, a small sustainability agenda can be detected among Thai state agencies, including initiatives to increase renewable energy and energy efficiency (C. E. Greacen 2005a).

Third, regarding knowledge and policy, civil society and state experts wielded distinct and competing knowledge discourses. The political dynamic in the most recent period has not been (solely) one of state vs. civil society, but rather polarized struggle combined with less visible but equally important cooperation. Hajer’s (1995) concept of “storyline” is a useful heuristic device for mapping the narrative content of these differences (see Chapter 2). However, to gain a finer-grain understanding of actual knowledge/policy dynamics it needs to be supplemented with Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) concept of advocacy networks.

My fourth and most important argument is that the structure of planning matters as much as the structure of the industry as a whole. In Thailand, the political agenda has been dominated by concern and conflict over the future structure of the electricity supply industry: what mix of private ownership, what degree of vertical integration (e.g., Amranand 2003). This “privatization debate” distracts from what I see as an equally important concern of who gets to plan and strategize, and how.

Although planning practices are embedded in and shaped by the prevailing industry structure, nonetheless, reform advocates can isolate the planning problems, both analytically and pragmatically. One can have privatization without planning reform, and vice versa. Civil society advocates know this. Yet for reasons partly beyond their control (having to do with the power of discourse coalitions) privatization has monopolized public discussion, resulting in a truncated and inadequate planning reform debate.

5.1.1 Chapter overview

Following an overview of the structure of Thailand's electricity supply industry, I survey contemporary power system planning, providing the reader with a sense of the expert knowledge discourse that has come to be contested by civil society actors. I trace the trajectory of the dominant electricity supply-expansion agenda, and compare it to the broader agenda of integrated resource planning (IRP; Swisher et al.
1997) that asks how to manage rising demand by overall least-economic cost planning, including investments in energy efficiency.\footnote{The IRP framework is comprehensive enough to include quantifiable social and environmental costs.}

EGAT’s Power Development Plan (PDP) emerges from a closed planning process that begins with a national load forecasting sub-committee and ends with approval by the Cabinet. The process has extremely limited civil society participation, no oversight by parliament, and limited participation by other stakeholders of. Of all the agencies involved, EGAT plays a major role in shaping the details of what appears in the PDP, particularly plant size, fuel source, and location. These conditions prevailed in the 1980s, at the time Pak Mun was identified as a potential addition to the Thai power system. They prevail today. The continuity surrounding the PDP process is remarkable considering the dynamism surrounding EGAT. The paradox is partly explained by the fact that most of the attention put on EGAT and the energy sector during the past decade has been couched in terms of the social costs and benefits of particular plants, and in terms of privatization.

To their credit, EGAT and other agencies have given increasing attention to the concern of how to supply energy services in a manner that is cost-effective and environmentally sensitive. However the incentive structure still discourages more significant investment in energy conservation. I conclude by describing recent attempts by civil society advocates to reform EGAT and the power system planning process.

### 5.2 Energy sector and industry structure

Figure 5.1 shows Thailand’s total primary energy consumption. About twenty percent of total primary energy use is for electricity generation. Thailand consumes one million barrels of oil equivalent per day (0.75% of world consumption) (Lertsuridej 2004). Figure 5.2 shows the composition of energy sources used in electricity generation. Thailand first began to generate electricity in 1897, for limited public consumption in Bangkok. During the 20th century, the dominant source of
energy shifted from wood, to imported fuel oil, to lignite coal. High-polluting lignite remained dominant (e.g., from Mae Moh, the nation’s largest coal plant, in Lampang) until the discovery of natural gas in Thailand in the early 1980s led to new gas-fired
plants.

The overwhelming share of natural gas in the fuel composition has led to policy debates, initiated by NEPO, the National Energy Policy Office, in the 1990s. Figure 5.3 shows the projection of peak power consumption over a 15-year planning horizon (EGAT 2003). Planners project the annual peak will occur in April, the last month before the southwest monsoon arrives, and a month of school holidays. The need to supply enough power for instantaneous peak demand periods drives new capacity planning. In Thailand “peak demand” is defined as the top 15th percentile, that is, the year's top 1,314 hours of demand. In 2003, the difference between the maximum power demanded, and average demand during the rest of the year, was approximately 26.5 percent (EGAT 2004a). Figure 5.3 also shows how reliability (in the form of a socially-constructed margin between supply and demand) is built into forward planning.

Figure 5.4 depicts the structure of the electricity supply industry and shows how Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, a wholly-owned state enterprise, is involved in production, transmission, and real-time system operation. EGAT was formed in 1968, joining Thailand’s existing large power stations. In the past, EGAT had a monopoly on production. During the 1990s, as demand rose rapidly, the pro-market NEPO pushed EGAT to share production with private sector “independent power producers” (IPPs). EGAT’s share of total generation capacity now stands at about 60%.

In 2005, renewable energy sources (rice husks, sugar cane residues, pig manure, wind, solar, and micro-hydroelectric power) from mostly private producers provided about 600 MW, or less than three percent of total peak power demand (C. E. Greacen 2005b). Private producers operating non-renewable, but high-efficiency natural gas co-generation plants provided another approximately 1,700 MW (Suvit, interview 22/9/04).

During the past decade, interest in selling energy by small and very small power producers (SPPs and VSPPs) has grown, however their ability to negotiate access to the grid and entry to the market is dwarfed by the power EGAT wields as essentially the nation’s single electricity wholesaler. EGAT is a “cost-plus” (or “rate-

39 SPPs are less than or equal to 90 MW in capacity; VSPPs are less than or equal to 5 MW. Direct sales to large industrial customers and some government agencies comprise only a small proportion of total sales, so EGAT is essentially a single buyer.
Figure 5.3 Trajectory of power demand and supply

Source: adapted from EGAT (199). Lines (1–3) are forecasts of supply, in order of increasing engineering reliability: (1) rated capacity; (2) dependable capacity (% of rated capacity, based on historical performance of different power plant types; 85%–98% for fossil fuel plants); (3) firm capacity (total dependable capacity minus dependable capacity of two largest units in system). Line (4) is demand forecast. Dashed line = demand forecast plus 25% reserve margin. In EGAT’s formulation, firm capacity should not fall below dashed line. Arrows (5–6) indicate hydropower imports from Lao PDR: (5) Huay Ho (126 MW, 1999); (6) “generic” project (1,600 MW, 2006).
Figure 5.4 Thailand’s electricity supply industry

base”) utility: it is guaranteed revenue to cover its costs plus a certain profit margin. While EGAT itself is currently 100% state-owned, it also has subsidiary corporations: EGCO, the Electricity Generating Company, and Ratchaburi Power Generation Company, which are owned in part by private shareholders. The overall image is of an agency invested with multiple duties and authorities (Table 5.1). One sees how multiple actors shape policy, and do so in the absence of an independent “regulator:” an institution that balances the needs of the electricity industry with an evolving public interest, for example, in reasonable tariffs and social and environmental safeguards (Throgmorton 1996; WRI 2004; see Section 5.3.1). Missing from the above structure, with few exceptions, is parliamentary review of major decisions. With this basic structure, Thailand resembles countries such as Indonesia, with the exception that
Table 5.1 Jurisdiction over electricity sector policy-making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duty</th>
<th>Agency:</th>
<th>NESDB</th>
<th>MOF</th>
<th>MOEN</th>
<th>EGAT</th>
<th>MEA &amp; PEA</th>
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<td>Permission to build</td>
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<td>Generation</td>
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<td>Transmission system control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribution / Retail</td>
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Source: Witoon (2004). Notes: ‘xx’ indicates main responsibility; MOF = Ministry of Finance; MOEN = Ministry of Energy; MEA = Metropolitan Electricity Authority; PEA = Provincial Electricity Authority.

Indonesia leads Thailand in moves to create an independent regulator (Seymour and Sari 2002).

5.3 Thai planning practices, 1960s–1980

This section begins a detailed examination of planning practices and governance. I focus on three concerns: Who plans? How do actors conceive and craft their planning practice, in terms of objectives, constraints, and methods? Third, how are Thai planning practices embedded in larger contexts of national and global economic change? I follow the history of planning practices, beginning when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat courted large-scale U.S. development planning assistance for Thailand shortly after seizing power in 1957.
5.3.1 System expansion and “self-regulation”

Modern power system planners address two interacting problems: estimating future demand (“load”) and figuring out how to meet that demand most economically. Critical issues include the options planners include as solutions to meeting demand. Do they look primarily at investing in new discrete power plants, or do they also look at investing in energy conservation through more efficient lighting, more efficient motors, and other programs? Table 5.2 below traces power system evolution in the U.S. and Thailand.

Immediately after WWII, less than ten percent of the Thai population had access to electricity, and lived mostly in urban centres. System expansion to meet a felt need for electricity was on the state's agenda. Energy conservation would not rise to prominence on any public agenda until the 1973–74 oil crisis (C. E. Greacen 2004).

When the World Bank completed its development mission to Thailand in 1959, it recommended, in line with its free market policy preferences, the closure and sale of most state enterprises and factories (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995). It exempted electricity supply and distribution – Bank planners in that era saw them as industries involving public goods and “natural” monopolies, hence best suited to a regulated utility model. Accordingly, EGAT was formed in 1968 to exercise unified control over Thailand’s main power stations (Bhumipol Dam and several lignite plants in the North and South), control previously decentralized to the regional/individual power plant level. By then, the Metropolitan and Provincial Energy Authorities had been distributing electricity to urban and rural customers for about a decade. As a regulated state-owned utility, EGAT would be required to serve the nation’s total demand for electricity. Customers, including the two retail electricity utilities, would pay EGAT for the cost of all these investments, including a modest return on investment. EGAT, the MEA, and PEA were structured as “cost-plus” utilities, the dominant organizational model at the time in the North (Greacen and Greacen 2004). It was a structure well-suited to a context of steady economic growth and expansion of access to electricity.

During the 1960s and 1970s, expanding population growth, a repressive labour regime, strong foreign investment, and tariff protections produced rapid economic growth in Thailand. Both manufacturing and agricultural exports grew by just under 10% per annum during the fifteen years spanned by Thailand’s first three five-year
national development plans (1961-1975).\textsuperscript{40} EGAT’s task was to prepare Power Development Plans (PDPs) that would support the economic growth envisaged in the national Plans. The PDP is a schedule of investments in new generating capacity – in other words, a schedule of additions to the system, driven by a particular electricity consumption forecast. As well, the schedule shows removals of power plants from the system for maintenance or decommissioning. The time scale involved is monthly, over a fifteen-year time horizon (Figure 5.3). The PDP includes cost data.

**Governance issues**

A society might have strong incentives not to pay more for electricity than is reasonable, and not to invest in more generation capacity than needed. The first concern – paying excessively for supply – derives from the fact that electric utilities have near-monopoly control of production and distribution. High energy costs impede economic growth. The second concern – over-investment – arises whenever the utility has a cost-plus incentive structure. Over-investment diverts capital away from other investment priorities, leads to higher electricity rates (tariffs), and degrades more natural resources (IIEC 1991).

As an organization able to pass on its costs to its customers, EGAT does not have a particularly strong incentive to minimize its costs of production. Yet its over-investment eventually feeds back, indirectly, as higher capital costs for alternative investments. A second disadvantage (particularly relevant in today’s context), is that overinvestment may lead to weakened competitive position vis-à-vis private sector suppliers. Such concerns have not been publicly articulated by state actors (cf. Amranand 2003).

During the 1960s–70s economic boom however, such governance issues were not on the agenda. If electricity rates were unacceptably high for rural households, then the solution was to subsidize rural consumers.\textsuperscript{41} Overall, the key to containing the basic contradiction between the public’s material interests (as captive consumers) and those of the cost-plus utility (as captive suppliers)\textsuperscript{42} lies in appropriate oversight or

\textsuperscript{40} U.S. planners advising the newly formed National Economic Development Board (NEDB, later NESDB) wrote the first three national plans (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995, Ch. 4).

\textsuperscript{41} This was done by charging everyone within a given customer class a uniform tariff.

\textsuperscript{42} The utility is captive in the sense that it is expected to supply no less than the total quantity demanded. In return, the utility is granted a monopoly on bulk power sales.
“regulation” (World Resources Institute 2004; Throgmorton 1996).

Table 5.2 Institutional change in power systems, United States and Thailand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Key projects / events</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Key projects / events</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>From Introduction of Electricity–WW II</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Explosion of interest in urban electrification for trolley lines, 1890s</td>
<td>Folsom Dam on American river supplies electricity 22 miles to Sacramento, 1895</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Deal era: large federal dams promoted for power and irrigation in West</td>
<td>Hoover Dam Grand Coulee Tennessee Valley</td>
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<td><strong>Post–WW II</strong></td>
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<td>1959 – Upper American River, (staircase of 11 major dams, 6 powerhouses, 24 miles of tunnels)</td>
<td>Late 1950s – urban and rural electrification grows</td>
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<td>1960s</td>
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<tr>
<td>7–8% electricity demand growth forecasted by big utilities → interest in nuclear power as cheaper than fossil fuel</td>
<td>1963 – First nuclear power plant, 1963 (ordered by New Jersey utility, built by General Electric)</td>
<td>1969 – EGAT established; rapid system expansion; self-regulation</td>
<td>1960 – Mae Moh lignite-fired thermal plant (13 MW) 1964 – Bhumiphol Dam (548 MW)</td>
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(Table 5.2 continued)

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<tr>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Key projects / events</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1970s</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>First and second oil crises: rapid economic growth in U.S. tapers. Parallel rise of post-War industrializing economies in Europe, and Japan, South Korea, Taiwan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electricity rates double in the USA</td>
<td>California’s regulator requires utilities to implement conservation programmes</td>
<td>Period of rapid system expansion, self-regulation</td>
<td>Major expansions to Mae Moh</td>
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<td>Consumer campaigns to open access to regulatory bodies</td>
<td>Several dozen new plants proposed</td>
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<td>1971 – Sirindhorn Dam (36 MW)</td>
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<td>Milestone environmental legislation passed:</td>
<td>Mechanisms for utilities to recover program costs developed</td>
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<td>1972 – Chulaborn Dam (40 MW)</td>
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<td>1980 – Srinakharind Dam (720 MW)</td>
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<td>1984 – Vachira-longkorn Dam (300 MW)</td>
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<td><strong>1980s</strong></td>
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<td>1984 – utility energy conservation peaks in CA, then sharply declines due to insufficient incentives</td>
<td>Self-regulation with increased scrutiny after creation of NEPO</td>
<td>4/1989 – EGAT submits Pak Mun Dam project for review by Thai cabinet</td>
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<td>1989 – Sacramento voters vote to shut down Rancho Seco</td>
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<td>1990s</td>
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<td>1989–95 – Second wave of CPUC energy conservation reform in CA: utilities’ profits tied to energy conservation performance targets</td>
<td>Utilities such as PG&amp;E provide consumer rebates for energy efficient appliances</td>
<td>8.5% electricity demand growth forecasted 1990–2001; 9.8% growth rate forecast for large commercial buildings</td>
<td>4/1989 – Pak Mun Dam approved by Thai cabinet (136 MW)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000s – revival of interest in renewables and IRP</td>
<td>2004 – Privatization attempt by Thaksin government backfires</td>
<td>2005 – Lao PDR’s Nam Theun 2 project (1,070 MW) approved by World Bank</td>
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What today’s analysts call “good governance” meant, in that era, predicting and providing electricity to underwrite economic growth (C. E. Greacen 2004, Sukkumoed, n.d.). The first agency that attempted to regulate EGAT was the National Energy Authority (NEA). The NEA had been formed 15 years earlier than EGAT, with a broad mandate to plan and regulate power generation. It once operated hydropower stations and regulated small-scale electricity suppliers throughout Thailand, but its portfolio declined when the government transferred power plant operations to EGAT and allowed PEA, a rival utility, to craft the country’s rural electrification policy. In practice NEA found itself unable to exercise significant oversight over utility planning:

By the 1970s . . . key decisions about where to build generators and wires [transmission lines] and how to operate the system were made by utilities themselves. The utilities refused to share key information with the NEA which would have allowed the NEA to effectively serve as a regulatory body. As it became clear that the NEA lacked data, analytical capability, and enforcement authority, the NEA became simply an energy data-collection agency . . . the three utilities (EGAT, MEA and PEA) were essentially allowed to self-regulate – with the exception of basic financial requirements set by the Ministry of Finance. (C. E. Greacen 2004)

These financial requirements followed World Bank guidelines to ensure the utility did not run out of cash and was able to service its debt. The first requirement was that EGAT finance 25% of any new capital investment, by increasing rates. The second requirement was that EGAT’s income before interest and taxes exceed its current debt obligations by 50%.

The agency most able to constrain EGAT’s “self-regulation” was NESDB. After approval by its Board of Directors, EGAT sent the PDP to NESDB for review, but the PDPs during that era did not receive any particular interest from the government. What mattered more was the budget for each discrete power plant proposed, which NESDB also reviewed prior to submission to the Cabinet. Although NESDB was meant to serve as a regulator, it felt to a newcomer that some staff people acted more like mouth pieces for EGAT, advocating for the utility’s designs (interview, Dr. Wanchai, former planner 20/10/04).

Although EGAT’s planning was indeed reviewed by a separate agency, in a

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43 These took the form of private, municipal, and cooperative utilities, typically powered by diesel generators. The structure was not unlike Cambodia’s current supply structure (C. Greacen, pers. communication).
context of rapid economic growth, the prevailing mentality was one of inter-agency cooperation to meet national development goals. Lacking power engineering analytical staff, NESDB’s main contribution as a regulator would have been to certify the validity of the nation’s electricity demand forecast (“load forecast”). During this period, EGAT took its forecasts from a “load forecast working group,” a group composed of relatively low-level representatives from the three power utilities and NESDB, without specialist advice. The working group fitted statistical regressions with time (year) as the independent variable, and demand as the dependent variable, extrapolating future demand from the past data. Although planners now look upon at this method as “quite archaic,” it sufficed in a context of a stable economic structure with agriculture at the base of the economy, in a context of predictable energy prices (interview, Dr. Prasit, former planner, 27/9/04; Dr. Wanchai, 20/10/04).

To sum up this era: the two and a half decades following the rise of national development planning (1960s–mid-1980s) were the “boom” period of electricity supply expansion. Lightly-regulated utility planners submitted system and project plans for approval, which readily ensued. The World Bank, through “concessionary lending,” played a key role in securing the involvement of a variety of foreign lenders, which included Canadian, Japanese, German, and OPEC sources (Greacen and Greacen 2004). By protecting domestic manufacturing from foreign competition, national policy favoured industrialization, and utility sales benefited.

5.4 Thai planning practices, 1980s–2004

The next two and a half decades (1980s–2004) constitute a qualitatively different period of system and planning evolution. This busy and contested period begins with the second OPEC energy crisis. Following the Thai financial crisis it continues with institutional upheaval, more open debates on the future of EGAT, backlash, and vociferous demands from segments of civil society for expanded participation in shaping the electricity industry. In this section I review the effects of introducing energy conservation into utility planning. I also note the influence more incremental – almost mundane – refinements to planning practices have had on the politics of planning today. Choosing such a long period, however, requires that we first discuss the impact of “external” economic shocks on planning.

In 1981, the majority of lending for energy projects was by commercial banks, as opposed to low-cost loans from World Bank and counterparts. Half of foreign credit
to Thailand went to the energy sector (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995, Greacen and Greacen 2004). By this time, tensions had emerged. After the second energy crisis (1979–80)\(^\text{44}\) newly tapped natural gas from the Gulf of Thailand began to flow. Thailand’s fuel import bill nonetheless tripled, rising to 30% of all imports by 1982 (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995, Greacen and Greacen 2004). (Electricity generation would later switch to natural gas as its main fuel source, but Thailand continued to rely on fuel oil in the short term.)

By the 1980s agriculture, the mainstay of the economy, had suffered a decade-long decline in terms of trade. The low value of national exports, combined with high public debt (in large part to service the energy sector) threatened the government with a financial crisis, and the administration – rather like the Latin American nations experiencing similar conditions – responded by approaching the World Bank and IMF for credit. The Bank and IMF supplied the credit, but under the condition that Thailand conduct “structural adjustments” aimed at boosting exports and trade, reducing welfare-oriented subsidies, and allowing the private sector greater role in what hitherto had been state-owned enterprises. Electricity prices jumped two and a half times, but otherwise, what Phongpaichit and Baker describe as the Bank’s “enormous pressure” for economic policy change otherwise resulted in minor reforms (1995: 148).

Labour unions and allied academics resisted this early attempt to privatize EGAT, but few would have been able to sense the sea change involved in the Bank’s turn towards neo-liberal model of global economic development. The context in which such models emerged was that of rising oil prices, slowing growth in OECD countries, and popular and elite disaffection with big government in the U.S. and UK (Brenner 1998; Kingdon 2003). Weakened OECD growth triggered international banks to lend to large developing countries (such as Brazil and Mexico). However, when these debtors, faced with OECD protectionism and declining agriculture commodity prices, incurred debt and balance of payment crises, the stage was set for neoliberal structural adjustment policies, one component of which was cutting government expenditures and privatization (Hewitt 2000).

What consequences did rising energy prices and World Bank scrutiny have for Thai power system planning practices? Certainly, private investors did not take control

\(^{44}\) The period after production from revolutionary Iran fell and OPEC cut back on production, before its members broke ranks to sell more oil to the world.
of EGAT. However, other agencies, including the World Bank energy sector staff in Thailand, attempted to induce EGAT to approach its planning practices with more economic and accounting rigor: first, as a result of increased economic volatility and lower growth in the mid-1980s, NESDB appears to have increased its scrutiny of PDPs, and initiated requests for revisions.

During the period 1985–88, the NESDB sent six Power Development Plans – previously approved by the EGAT Board of Directors – back to EGAT for revisions. Two were eventually approved by Cabinet. The budgets associated with these PDPs differed by as much as 54.1 billion baht ($US 2.16 billion). Each revision was triggered by the national Board’s preference for an alternative demand forecast. The Board helped select a new chairman for the load forecast working group. It also judged that the second forecast used techniques that were “not good enough” (EGAT 1992). This more assertive oversight was triggered in part by the entry of an energetic and talented economist. During this period, Dr. Piyasvasti Amranand began assisting NESDB reviewing PDPs. By 1986, the Oxford-trained economist headed a new regulatory agency, the National Energy Policy Office (NEPO) (Greacen and Greacen 2004). As a result of NEPO’s oversight and veto authority, both the load forecasts and EGAT’s PDPs became more detailed (Dr. Wanchai, interview 20/10/04).

Secondly, EGAT and other utility planners began to introduce a number of technical refinements to their practices. Table 5.3 summarizes these changes of practice, their potential implications, and the actual socio-political changes to date. Some of these changes – the advent of least-cost planning criteria, and of more detailed load forecasting – would have been initially welcomed by the World Bank and NEPO, but regarded disinterestedly by non-technical actors. Some refinements, while lying politically dormant for years, have the potential to catalyse further debate.

For instance, EGAT currently stipulates that its system should have 15% more dependable capacity than the expected annual peak power demand. This *reserve margin* – required of all generating systems – allows for planned and emergency power plant shutdowns. The size of the reserve margin varies by country and is a socially-constructed function of the maximum expected *unplanned* power outage (hours per year) deemed acceptable. EGAT’s however uses a rule-of-thumb-based reserve margin (currently 15%). The utility has never explicated its connection to Thailand's maximum expected unplanned outage level of 24 hours per year. However, a more transparent *loss of load probability* (LOLP) analysis could replace rule of
thumb selection of the system minimum reserve margin (Wang and McDonald 1994). Of course, the larger the reserve margin, the more generation capacity is required.

5.4.1 The context of technical refinements

What political and economic contexts enveloped these refinements? By the late 1980’s the Thai economy was growing more strongly, thanks in part to an influx of foreign direct investment from Japan (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995). Demand for electricity rose even faster than GDP growth (EGAT 1993). Power shortages and rotating blackouts were common (Greacen and Greacen 2004). The World Bank anticipated that energy sales and power demanded would more than double by 2000 (World Bank 1990).

Faced with these prospects, EGAT in 1991 was planning to triple its generating capacity to 23,000 MW in 2006 (Busch 1991). The organization would need to spend approximately $US 30 billion during the 1990s to finance this expansion. At the same time, EGAT’s debt rose to uncomfortably high levels: 57% of its $US2.04 billion budget went to servicing foreign debt (Greacen and Greacen 2004). During this period, with post-Cold War political détente in Thailand, and with bilateral aid, a current of support for sustainable development and environmental conservation emerged. The politics of new power plant construction became openly contentious. A small, yet ambitious segment of conservation-oriented NGOs clamoured to participate in policy discussions around specific controversial power plants, including the proposed Nam Choan and Pak Mun hydropower dams.

Yet EGAT’s system planning discourse was becoming less accessible to concerned activists. By this time EGAT would claim that each new power plant was the “least-cost” alternative to rising demand. The data they showed NEPO and the World Bank would support this claim. The discussion would then turn to financial technicalities of putting a deal together. The case rested on these terms: that the need
Table 5.3 Important planning practice refinements, 1980s–present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Prior Method</th>
<th>Refinement / [Source of Refinement]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Load forecasting</td>
<td><em>Macro econometric regressions</em></td>
<td>Survey-based end-use modelling – household appliances, commercial floor space [supported by Canadian Institute for Development Assistance in 1991]</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Expert choice between “high,” “low,” “medium” GDP growth scenarios</em></td>
<td>GDP projections by industrial sub-sector</td>
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<td>Probabilistic scenarios [World Bank Nam Theun 2 analysis, see Segal (2004)]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Determining reserve capacity</td>
<td>Arbitrary methods:</td>
<td>Probabilistic standard: total power outages in system not to exceed a pre-determined national standard of 24 hr in one year. Requires <em>loss of load probability</em> (LOLP) calculations (= probability of demand exceeding supply during any one hour of the year).</td>
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<tr>
<td>(total system dependable capacity minus system peak load)</td>
<td><em>(1) System (minus two largest units) must meet annual peak</em></td>
<td>Reserve margin can be derived from LOLP analysis and no longer needs to be set arbitrarily. LOLP requires detailed analysis of plant operating histories.</td>
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<td>*(2) Rule of thumb&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25% (pre–1988)</td>
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<td>15% (1988–98)</td>
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<td>25% (1999)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15% (early 2000s)</td>
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</table>

Sources: EGAT (1993b; 1999); IIEC (1991); interviews. Notes: <sup>1</sup> Based on: [(total dependable capacity divided by annual peak) – (1), expressed as percentage]. Prior methods still used today in conjunction with refinements shown in italics.

was undeniable, given steady rising demand, and that the solution was the cheapest, given the available alternatives. The debate would remain constructed in narrow terms for outsider critics of Thai power planning, until a striking new policy initiative emerged.

5.4.2 EGAT’s economic analysis and the rise of an electricity conservation agenda

In 1991, the International Institute for Energy Conservation (IIEC), a technically-oriented NGO based in Washington D.C., with a three-year-old regional office in Bangkok, made a compelling case to EGAT and the government for a massive increase in funding for energy conservation. IIEC proposed that the three
utilities – EGAT, MEA, and PEA – spend 4.57 billion baht ($US 179 million) to reach out and offer a suite of conservation programs to all categories of customer. Programs ranged from subsidizing more efficient lights and motors, to consulting services for architects planning new buildings. IIEC argued that:

The average long-term cost of these energy savings to the utilities is 0.49 baht per kilowatt-hour. When these costs are compared with EGAT's current long-term cost of 1.08 baht per kilowatt-hour to produce new electricity supply, it is clear that the least-cost investment for the utilities is in energy efficiency. (IIEC 1991: 2)

IIEC also argued that the ten-year potential for energy efficiency investments would obviate the need to build 2,000 MW of power plants, saving the Thai government 59 billion baht (US$ 2.36 billion).

In order for IIEC to make these kinds of provocative arguments, the authors needed to know EGAT’s long-run marginal cost. EGAT was willing to supply that figure, indicating good rapport, and an early display of enthusiasm for the concept of energy conservation. Equally important, EGAT was able to derive that figure – indicating the capacity for complex iterative computation.

Swisher and co-workers’ Tools and Methods for Integrated Resource Planning (hence after, "IRP Manual") explains the importance of the long-run marginal cost for utility planning:

"Acceptable" returns refer to interest rates and other financial conditions negotiated between utilities and investors such as commercial banks. Traditionally, banks have been willing to lend to state-owned utilities at lower interest rates, because these loans are underwritten by governments. According to conventions in energy economics, the "revenue requirements" include both sunk costs that have not been fully depreciated (for example, Pak Mun Dam), as well as a suite of fixed and variable costs. The least-cost plan is a schedule of future investments:

These future investments should be discounted to their present worth [present value] to reflect the time value of money . . . and they should be compared
according to their long-run marginal costs . . . . the long-run marginal cost governs the planning of new resources . . . . In traditional power planning the least-cost plan should also have the lowest tariffs. (Swisher et al. 1997: 129–130)

To re-cast the discussion slightly: as utilities plan to expand supply, they can choose, in theory, from a number of different types of power plants. Note that expanding power supply cannot be done by running existing plants longer hours. To run existing power plant for longer would generate more energy. It would not solve the problem of consumers, system-wide, simultaneously turning on electrical devices. This occurs during specific periods of the day and year and is referred to as "peak demand." For all practical purposes, energy cannot be stored. Utilities need to supply the peak amount of energy demanded at any given moment.

Traditionally, expanding supply has meant building new power plants, as opposed to solving customers' demands for specific end-services (such as a 27°C Celsius office temperature, or given level of illumination for a department store display). The utilities classify their power plants according to function: some plants run all year on low-cost fuel to meet what is called "baseload" demand, other plants can be fired up much more rapidly, and are used only to meet peak demand because their fuel costs are much higher, even if their capital costs are lower. Utilities planning to expand their supply must invest therefore in a portfolio of different technologies which have different costs. They must know in some fine-scale resolution how power demand fluctuates: typically they gather data on total system peak power demand for each one of the 8760 hours in a year. This enables them to graphically visualize demand, by constructing ranked plots of power demand throughout the year, from yearly maximum to minimum. Such plots are called "load duration curves."

In order for EGAT to argue that its long run marginal cost was the lowest (and therefore the least-cost system expansion plan) it had to construct alternative investments scenarios, with each scenario consisting of a suite of power plants together capable of meeting the system's load duration curve. EGAT would then have had to compare the costs of these alternative scenarios or plans. Although the fundamental principles of least-cost planning had been well-established by the mid-1980s, external actors such as NEPO and the World Bank appear to have increased pressure to comply and to refine that compliance.
5.4.3 Thailand's Demand Side Management Plan

By 1991 IIEC was arguing that the least-cost way to meet rising demand for energy services was for the government to invest in energy conservation. By the end of its five-year program, peak power demand would be 225 MW lower than it would if EGAT proceeded under the status quo, with no energy conservation. (The rated peak output of Pak Mun Dam is 136 MW, by contrast.) Annual energy consumption would fall by 1078 GWh (compared to an expected 286 GWh from Pak Mun). Critics of hydropower projects seized upon these findings. It is well worth tracing the effects of IIEC’s initiative on the politics of electricity planning in Thailand.

In late 1989, following up on a well-received conference on energy efficiency strategies for Thailand it organized the prior year, staff from IIEC persuaded ten Thai utility and other energy policy staff to take an intensive study tour of U.S. energy conservation programs (Cherniack 1989). Six months prior to this, EGAT had submitted to the Thai cabinet a summary report outlining the features and benefits of the Pak Mun Dam multipurpose project. By the time of the tour, the U.S. utilities hosting the Thai visitors already had more than a decade of experience implementing energy conservation programs, most of which they termed "demand-side management" (DSM) programs – which we can define as an intervention into end-user behaviour, by the electricity supplier, in order to raise the level of energy services45 supplied per unit of electricity produced.

On both the West and East Coasts, the Thai visitors found electricity utilities reaching out to the end-user with an array of energy-efficient technology: lighting, air-conditioning, refrigeration. Utilities were also offering subsidies for construction of highly efficient commercial buildings (buildings that significantly exceeded the building code standards). Significantly, the visitors also heard repeatedly about “integrated demand/supply least-cost planning.”

For example, the California Public Utilities Commission stated that it was the first regulator in the U.S. to “recognize energy conservation as a resource for future power planning that could be treated on an equal basis with increasing energy supply.”

Mark Cherniack, the IIEC study tour leader, wrote that “the growing trend of these [regulatory] commissions is to require some type of integration of demand-side energy efficiency programs into the overall power programs of the utilities they regulate;

45 Examples of energy services include illumination, or regulated temperature.
about half of the commissions... presently have such a requirement” (Cherniack 1989). Three months after the study tour, the Thai agencies had initiated new projects, including new energy-efficient buildings planned for the utilities themselves, and the reduction of import taxes on efficient lighting.

When IIEC submitted its *Demand Side Management for Thailand's Electric Power System: Five-year Master Plan* a year later, it was more than a technical document. Certainly, the Master Plan contained technical detail. For instance, it contained five budgeted programs, including efficient air-conditioners for new homes, (for which consumers would get a rebate); financial incentives to appliance manufacturers to improve efficiency; and assistance designing new buildings.

The Plan also recognized the need for organizational change. In order to deliver programs to diverse end-users, it called for setting up a new organization, the Demand Side Management Office, comprised of 110 staff drawn largely from within the three utilities. The Plan also argued for increasing the priority of energy conservation on the national agenda. It issued the following kinds of explicit advice to the National Energy Policy Committee46 for action at different levels, for example:

(1) Strongly promote the message within the government, and to the public and private sector, that the DSM program is a national development priority which will improve the environment and create a more efficient and competitive economy. . . .

(2) Advise the Ministry of Interior that complete cooperation is needed from MEA and PEA [the two distribution utilities] to meet the DSM objectives. . . .

(6) Advise agencies that all new government buildings should meet or exceed the energy efficiency levels in the proposed building energy standard. (IIEC 1991: 56)

The Master Plan appeared to catalyse broader institutional involvement. In November, 1991, the same month IIEC submitted the final draft to the three utilities, the Thai cabinet approved its US$ 179 million budget. The following year, EGAT, the agency nominated in the IIEC Master Plan to host the DSM office, had written its own five-year plan to be implemented beginning in 1993. EGAT’s plan boosted the IIEC Plan’s budget by $US10 million47 and its target for peak capacity reduction by about 6%. EGAT raised its targets for electricity energy savings by 32% (EGAT 1993b).

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46 The NEPC was formed shortly before the creation of NEPO in the mid-1980s.

47 In addition to this amount, the Global Environment Facility provided a US $9.5 million grant. The Japanese and Australian governments also provided US $25 and US $6 million respectively (Singh and Mulholland 2000).
The prominence of energy conservation on the national agenda appeared to have risen, with international actors both reacting to and abetting this process. What was implemented?

By 1997, year five of the DSM program, EGAT’s DSM office had surpassed its own targets. Investments in energy efficiency resulted in 305 MW of peak power capacity avoided. Annual energy savings were 1,705 GWh. The utilities failed to meet some particular goals, but surpassed others. IIEC had anticipated that “the modest savings goals of 225 MW for the initial five-year program could be surpassed by dedicated utility effort.” In any case, the international energy conservation community considered the program an exemplary case study (Swisher et al. 1997: 115). Careful technical analysis had laid the groundwork for significant conservation achievements.

5.4.4 The promise of integrated resource planning

Notwithstanding these achievements, the promise of energy conservation to revolutionize energy planning has not been systematically explored by Thai utility planners. The promise held out by IIEC was that the power utilities could reach out, to hundreds of thousands of consumers nationwide – both households and commercial customers – and motivate them with consumer rebates and free consulting services to invest in energy-efficient technology. It was a decentralized alternative to traditional highly centralized electricity supply planning.

More importantly, the IIEC plan was very explicit about the economic potential of energy efficiency investments. It laid down a clear decision rule: "the plan recommends that the utilities pay for DSM measures with a cost of saved energy below 1.56 baht per kilowatt-hour.” To elaborate, the Plan clearly demonstrated what investing “in the least-cost energy resource” meant. It computed the cost of energy conservation both in terms of the “cost of avoided peak power” (in baht per kilowatt) and the “cost of saved energy” (baht per kilowatt-hour).

The first cost is the cost of reducing peak power demand through energy conservation. IIEC calculated this to be 20,300 baht/kilowatt (the ratio of its total 5-year program cost divided by the peak power saved). By contrast, it stated that EGAT’s cost of building a new lignite-fired plant (without emission controls) was 37,800 baht/kilowatt.

Similarly, to buttress its argument, IIEC cited how much it cost EGAT to
produce wholesale electricity (in terms of long-run marginal energy cost). That figure was 1.08 baht/kilowatt-hour. IIEC further argued that this cost needed to be adjusted upwards, because of transmission and distribution losses. For each unit of power consumed by the end-user, EGAT needed to generate 1.14 units to cover transmission and distribution losses. Since IIEC’s programs reduced demand and hence did not require a reserve margin, IIEC argued that EGAT’s marginal cost therefore needed to be adjusted upwards by 15% for a true comparison. Summing these two adjustments, IIEC noted that for 100 MW of delivered power, EGAT had to install 129 MW of capacity. Finally, IIEC argued that conservation programs did not generate pollutants. By contrast, the societal cost of these harmful emissions – although not recognized by Thai law at the time – should be added to EGAT’s cost. It cited 15% as the mid-range of cost “credits” used by North American utilities (IIEC 1991: 2–3) when comparing DSM with conventional supply. Making all these adjustments, the societal cost of producing a unit (kilowatt-hour) of electricity was actually 1.56 baht. This was more than triple IIEC’s budgeted cost of saved energy, at 0.49 baht per kilowatt-hour, with no difference in level of energy service.

In short, IIEC’s proposal was an argument for “integrated resource planning” (IRP). This rather vague-sounding term refers to the systematic comparison of a suite of alternatives that meet demand for energy services. IRP emerged in the early 1970s following the first energy crisis. The heart of IRP involves generating technically viable alternatives that are compared, ranked according to cost, and combined. In the case of energy conservation programs, which involve persuading customers to change behaviour, some assessment would need to be made as to the likely “market” response.

5.4.5 Analysis: politics of Thai electricity conservation

In Thailand, energy conservation analysis and proposals were crafted with enthusiasm beginning in the late 1980s, and competently implemented during the 1990s. And yet, by the beginning of the current decade, there is a distinct sense that energy conservation has not been systematically pursued to the limits of its potential. I can cite the following examples. An EGAT Power Development Plan from the early 1990s contains a clear introduction to IRP. The authors knew exactly what was

48 Some energy efficiency programs, like ceiling insulation, reduce peak power demand more than others, such as installing more efficient air conditioners (IIEC 1991: 17).
entailed:

To integrate a DSM program as a candidate plant in the generation planning, the potential savings of energy and capacity as well as the hourly load pattern of electricity savings must be estimated together with the cost of the DSM program. This requires research into customer behaviour and response to utility initiatives such as program marketing and financial incentives. (EGAT 1993b: 37)

The following paragraph shows a palpable reluctance to consider DSM as a "candidate plant":

*There is greater risk to invest in the DSM programs than to invest in new power plants. Therefore unless the potential and costs of DSM program are confident [sic], effective IRP will not be achieved. . . . if the total savings of 238 MW and 1427 GWh hour per year by the proposed DSM programs in the Master Plan . . . are fully achieved, the quantity of the savings represents about 1.7 percent of the total peak generation requirements only and should be treated as extra power reserve margin [the margin between installed capacity and anticipated peak power demand] to the electric system.* (EGAT 1993b: 37; emphasis added)

Representing power or energy savings as quantities that should be assigned to a reserve margin (set by EGAT and NEPO at 25% or 15%; see Table 5.3) is not illogical. However, it undermines the purpose of IRP. Energy conservation specialists view efficiency programs as potentially able to *erase* portions of the reserve margin entirely, not fill them in. What is the difference between these two constructions?

The key difference is that the efficiency proponents, unlike EGAT, are willing to accept that energy efficiency can increase reliability, not reduce it. For example, in 1991, John Busch at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory ran a “production-cost” simulation model to study the effect of alternative load scenarios (including energy conservation) on the operation of the Thai power system. He used engineering models, comparable to those used at EGAT, and found that the probability of forced outages among power generation plants in the system actually *decreased* when energy efficiency scenarios were pursued, such as standards for new buildings (Busch 1991). This interpretation flatly contradicts EGAT’s interpretation that DSM programs are inherently “greater risk” than new power plant construction. Although Busch worked with EGAT during his Ph.D. data collection in 1988, and presumably would have disseminated his 1991 analysis, his findings appear to have been ignored by the planners.

By 1999, EGAT still had not move decisively to implement IRP. The Power
Development Plan for that year states that:

An analytical framework and a procedure for integration of DSM into the system planning process are expected to be established in the near future. Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) [U.S.-based, funded by member utilities in North America] will be retained to develop a framework within which DSM will be integrated. The framework will specifically address the methods for the following items . . . Integration of process and market evaluation results . . . Sensitivity analysis . . . Financial analysis of DSM . . . (EGAT 1999: 29; emphasis added)

I attended two public seminars in August and September 2004 where senior engineers from a Thai utility made presentations. One engineer presented his organization as doing IRP, in his introduction, but gave no further details. He focused on the privatization debate currently engulfing the industry. The second engineer, a planning specialist, did not mention IRP at all. When queried, he reasoned that the utility had already taken large energy efficiency programs into account by revising its demand forecast downwards – the rationale we just visited in the PDP 92-01. This is not, strictly speaking, IRP as introduced above (systematic comparison of alternatives, followed by combination on base of cost). When pressed on that point, the presenter agreed. The Ministry of Energy’s strategic plans contain no mention of IRP.

**Fragmented authority and capacity limitations**

Three separate energy efficiency/energy conservation programs exist, with weak interaction. In 1992 – a decade prior to the establishment of the Ministry – the Department of Energy Development and Promotion (DEDP; now DEDE)\(^9\), was mandated by the energy conservation and promotion act to be the lead implementation agency. The Act also set up an energy conservation fund, but NEPO acquired control over that fund. Independent analysts have criticized NEPO’s decision to pay electricity industry privatization studies from that fund (Greacen and Greacen 2004).

Meanwhile, DEDE (pragmatically) passed responsibility for actual DSM program implementation over to EGAT, and started its own energy efficiency programs, currently relying on IIEC and Danish consultants for technical assistance.

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\(^9\)DEDP, a descendent of the National Energy Authority, is now the Department of Alternative Energy Development and Energy Efficiency (DEDE).
(Dr. Wisai, interview 10/9/04; Vongsoasup et al. 2004). DSM staff at EGAT say much of the detailed data on customers resides with the MEA and PEA, yet these utilities have even weaker incentives than EGAT to invest in energy efficiency (Chamnarn, interview 24/9/04).

At the level of Ministerial policy making and implementation, the new Ministry of Energy has issued highly aspirational renewable energy targets, not fully backed by convincing strategies (C. E. Geacen 2005b). In 2002, the Ministry of Energy announced, that by 2011, eight percent of its total primary energy target would be sourced from “new and renewable” sources (a category that excludes large hydropower). According to DEDE, the lead agency, Thailand would meet this target by promoting renewable sources, on the one hand, and promoting energy efficiency, on the other. Critics argue that today no plan exists capable of implementing this lofty target (C. E. Geacen 2005b).

On the other hand, independent analysts complain that EGAT’s role as monopoly buyer gives it de-facto power over the rate at which supply contracts are issued to all new entrants, including small (<90 MW) and very small (<1 MW) potential suppliers of renewable energy. An optimist might demur, arguing that the current scattering of programs will make a difference – in other words that another period of progressive reform is about to commence. However the supply expansion paradigm still dominates:

In August 2004, at a public meeting over the proposed Nam Theun 2 hydropower plant, Mark Segal, an independent economist, asked to evaluate whether supply from Nam Theun 2 was least-cost, argued in the affirmative, especially when the comparison was with natural gas turbines (Segal 2004). He did not ignore the potential of energy efficiency and DSM, but assigned it to its traditional role of reducing the final demand. In a meeting with Bank directors in early 2004, sustainable energy advocates argued that the Bank’s investment in a large-scale hydro project would shoulder small renewable options out of the Thai market.

A final issue is that of development of in-house capacity to conduct requisite analyses. In the early 1990s, that capacity did not exist: IIEC supplied it in the form of the DSM Master Plan. In 2004, much of the capacity to conduct multi-sectoral analysis still resides at IIEC or other non-state actors – not at EGAT, nor at DEDE,

50 I wrote a courteous letter to the Bank, arguing that Segal’s least-cost analysis, despite its sophisticated cost-risk approach, was not, by definition, an integrated least-cost analysis.
nor elsewhere in the Ministry of Energy. Danish energy consultants advise DEDE to the point of maintaining a second office at DEDE.

In sum, we see fragmented responsibility, with no strong actor conducting comprehensive policy analysis or performance evaluation at the scales demanded. In 2004–05 reform advocates have called for a new, independent, and strong regulatory agency to diagnose institutional problems and compel utilities to conduct IRP (C. E. Greacen 2005a; 2005c). While attractive in principle, it is unrealistic to expect any single agency could transform electricity planning and policy without concurrent and radical change to the governance structure of other electricity agencies.51

Towards explanation

I now turn to consider some possible explanations for the distinctive – yet distinctively limited – success of the energy conservation reform agenda to change Thai electricity planning practices. The most obvious starting point is the explanation that cost-plus utilities worldwide have very limited incentives to take energy efficiency investment seriously. Many cost-plus utilities find stronger incentives to sell more electricity rather than less. As the IRP Manual puts it:

Institutional and legal barriers impede rates that allow utilities to recover the cost of DSM programs. . . . Profits also need to be decoupled from increased sales; utilities should not be penalized for lower revenues from successful DSM programs which increase the level of energy services provided to their customers. These barriers are very strong and impede the elaboration of an IRP that will be put into practice (Swisher et al. 1997: 74–75; emphasis added).

Thailand’s DSM program allowed EGAT to recover its expenses, such that the cost of DSM program expenses was revenue-neutral (du Pont 2002). EGAT however cannot earn a profit on DSM programs, as it does on building new supply. This is because EGAT’s energy conservation expenses are not classified as part of its rate base, the set of costs for which utilities are allowed an authorized rate of return (Swisher et al., 86). In short, EGAT’s profits remain tied to its energy sales. By contrast, in the early 1990s California’s regulator allowed its privately-owned utilities to keep a portion of the net economic benefits of the energy efficiency programs they invested in. This decoupled the link between a utility’s energy sales and profits (ibid.,

51 I thank Noel Rajesh for emphasizing this point.
A general lack of incentive goes a long way towards explaining Thailand’s limited adoption of DSM. However, we also need to understand how incentives are perceived and constructed. Table 5.4 presents the reflections of five practitioners, each with more than ten years experience working in Thailand.

Rather than only a deficiency of incentive, we see that in practice, the situation is more complicated. Planners and senior management believe aggressive implementation of DSM will lower total revenues – despite the program’s revenue-neutral design (du Pont 2002). Utility accounting procedures appear to hinder more transparent communication. Manager Phumrerk told me that DSM program expenses are accounted for in the same way as public relations expenses are accounted for, as a line item expense. Actual program details do not appear as sub-line-items. The sense we get is of an organizational culture that has evolved to tolerated levels of ambiguity that functionally benefit its underlying modus operandi.

Finally, striking a blow against DSM from another direction, respondents indicate that senior management and planners persist in believing that DSM programs are not as reliable as tangible power plants. The qualitative difference in terms of reliability between a new power plant and new DSM programs strikes me as a worthy component of explanation, especially when considered with other data about the
<table>
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<th>Issue / Summary</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sales:</strong></td>
<td>The budget for DSM programs comes from the central budget . . . the cost items are not clearly specified . . . people looking at the accounts perceive that if they don't conduct DSM programs there will be more money left over . . . besides, total sales will fall . . . at any rate we can't demonstrate how DSM is good for the organization . . . the organization still views that all the energy it produces gets consumed, the more sales the better . . . It's a problem all over the world. (Phumrerker, 24/9/04; emphasis added)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSM lowers sales, which is bad for the organization</td>
<td>The fact that the DSM office hasn't been closed is because the Ministry sees its value, they see that the organization is good at doing programs. But senior management don't particularly support it, they think that selling electricity is better than working on DSM. (Chamnarn, 24/9/04)</td>
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<td><strong>Profits and accounting:</strong></td>
<td>People in the organization have been socialized according to business principles . . . they emphasize making profits, they don't consider the larger [societal] context . . . even though the cost of programs can be passed on [to the customer] lower sales will lead to lower profits . . . DSM for this organization is really about building a positive public image. (Phumrerker, 24/9/04)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSM lowers profits (in the context of ambiguous accounting)</td>
<td>(Interviewer) Has anyone actually calculated the impact upon profits?</td>
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<td>Nobody has analysed the impact upon net profits . . . there are many complications involved in analysing profits and losses . . . does the organization want to maximize its profits, or does it want to pursue the highest benefits for the country? IRP has still not happened because they look at maximizing profits . . . Actually, DSM should be the first priority . . . especially in the context of increasing energy prices . . . . It certainly is a common benefit, but is not clear that it is a benefit to the utility as an organization. (Phumrerker, 24/9/04)</td>
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<td>Financial matters haven't been that important to the utility. For two reasons. First, they are a monopoly, second, because the tariffs guarantee that they'll have money to pay back their loans . . . it's clearly written in the structure of the base electricity rate . . . . However when the load didn't grow as they thought it would, they found themselves losing money, for example when they predicted eight percent, but it grew at six . . . [In any case] they view that if they have financial problems, the government will support them . . . . That was true especially in the past when the government guaranteed their loans so that their loans were public debt, now however government must increase equity in order to reduce public debt . . . . There is still plenty of protection for them. (Dr. Prasit, 27/9/04)</td>
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Table 5.4 continued

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<th>Issue / Summary</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability:</strong></td>
<td>The planning division and most senior managers are not particularly confident that DSM programs will reduce demand . . . [DSM programs] cannot answer concerns about reliability . . . “blackouts are not acceptable” remains the mantra. New power plants are tangible, unlike DSM. (Chamnarn, 24/9/04).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSM is not as reliable as new power plants</td>
<td>[The organization] sees the role of DSM programs as increasing the reserve margin. (Phumrerk, 24/9/04)</td>
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<td><strong>Senior management support:</strong></td>
<td>The DSM program’s real start was in 1995 [under Sithiporn Rathanopas] . . . he was aggressive . . . Dr. Piyasvasti [head of NEPO] was also aggressive . . . in 1999 or 2000 Sithiporn left the utility to join a private power producer . . . since then there’s been a caretaker director . . . there’s not much creativity or energy . . . the program is going on autopilot . . . the staff are capable but management isn’t strong, there’s no strong commitment. (Dr. Wisai, 10/9/04)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current management do not give DSM strong priority</td>
<td>[After he was promoted] Sithiporn proved to be a good executive with hands-on background in experience in DSM. (Woranuch, 24/9/04)</td>
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<td>Decisive management could have addressed the above issues of DSM – its reliability, how to measure it, how to look at its costs. (Dr. Wisai, 20/11/05)</td>
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Source: interviews with utility managers and industry analysts.

organization's incentives. In 2004, union members were adamant they will oppose any structural reform initiatives that do not give EGAT the right to build less than half of new capacity. We see how reliability functions to prop up the growth ideology.

It is worth noting that when it introduced the DSM Master Plan in 1991, IIEC was very clear and prescient about the discursive shifts required in Thai planning practices:

For DSM to succeed in Thailand . . . the utilities must believe in energy efficiency as a resource for the Power system. The utilities must think of investments in DSM as being just as important as investments in new power plants. Understandably, the utilities may find it difficult to accept that they should be the driving force for DSM. Some utilities in North America initially resisted the move toward DSM. Some considered DSM as a separate activity
that was unimportant, or perhaps harmful, to the utility’s main purpose, or something that should be taken care of by a government agency. . . . Why did some utilities accept the idea of DSM more easily? These utilities made an important realization: they could lower their total costs by investing in the least-cost energy resource. . . .

Marketing is the key to the success of the entire DSM effort. Without a clear and attractive marketing campaign, people will not participate in DSM programs, and there will be no savings. The key to actual DSM savings is **marketing, marketing and more marketing.** (IIEC 1991: 26, 28)

The respondents I interviewed, by contrast, were equally aware that theirs was not a “marketing culture.” [Senior managers] have a “practitioner mentality,” said one utility manager. The mentality to which he refers resembles the one discovered by von Meier (1999), who calls it “operator culture.” Von Meier studied technology adoption in the U.S. electric power industry. She found two cultural groups: “operators” and “engineers:”

Operators of technical systems, be they power plants, airplanes or air traffic control, must keep the system working in real-time . . . Unlike engineering, where the object is to optimize performance, the goal in operations is to maintain the system the state of equilibrium . . . steering clear of calamities. An operating success is to operate without incident . . . In contrast to the engineering representation, which was described as abstract, analytical, formal, and deterministic the operator representation of the technical systems can be typified as **physical, holistic, empirical, and fuzzy.** (von Meier 1999: 7–8)

To the extent that planners or senior management at EGAT indeed work in an organization with a dominant operator culture or practitioner mentality, their construction of the interests of the organization as a whole would be weighed by the goal of operating without incident. In that case, alternative scenario reliability analysis of the kind conducted by Busch (1991), an outsider based in California, might not seem very compelling.

In summary: while energy conservation opened up new possibilities for power system planners, it entailed new organizational challenges, including building both technical and marketing capacity. The most fundamental impediment appears to be the continued link between electricity sales and profits, in the context of dependence on capital markets. EGAT has proved competent at implementing DSM programs, yet has not changed its fundamental purpose.
5.5 The rise of a sustainable energy advocacy network

A small sustainable energy advocacy network exists today in Thailand. Despite resource and capacity limitations, it has been able to help local communities affected by existing and proposed power projects as well as publish policy narratives critical of Thai power planning governance. Table 5.5 compares its policy positions on planning with status those of status-quo practice.

The rise of the sustainable energy advocacy network has several origins. One key dynamic is local opposition to non-participatory power projects, supported by alternative development NGOs. Such projects included Nam Choan and Pak Mun in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as other large irrigation and hydropower dams proposed and built during the 1990s–2000s (see Chapter 6).

Another related influence should be traced back to the establishment and increased authority of NEPO since the late 1980s, as a rival to EGAT in terms of policy analysis and solutions. By the mid-1990s, as civil society advocates increased their interaction with project-affected people, as NEPO analysts became increasingly critical of EGAT for systemic reasons, and as domestic and foreign NGOs began pressuring EGAT and the World Bank for greater accountability, an advocacy network emerged.

In the mid-1990s, NEPO advocated EGAT’s privatization, sparking a backlash by EGAT’s union in 1997, and forcing the Chavalit government to defer the issue (Watershed 1997). Efforts by NEPO to expedite private coal-fired power plants, along with EGAT’s signing of power purchase agreements before holding hearings or environment assessment, contributed to strong local opposition to two coal-fired plants planned for Prachuab Kiri Khan province. Developers’ public relations contributed to dividing local communities between a faction that viewed impacts in positive terms (construction jobs, land appreciation), and those who voiced concerns about impacts of pollution on orchards, coastal fisheries, marine mammals, and
<table>
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<th>Variable / Issue</th>
<th>Thai agencies</th>
<th>Sustainable energy NGOs</th>
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| **Planning governance** | Six-step de-facto process with negligible public participation (TLFS → EGAT Planning Division → EGAT Board → NEPO → National Energy Council → Cabinet) | Want significantly more access and power in planning process
Constrained by expert knowledge and lack of access to certain technical data |
| **Demand estimation** | Thai Load Forecasting Subcommittee (TLFS) | Want more civil society role in TLFS; want updated, disaggregated forecasting methods and lower macroeconomic growth estimates based on maturation of economy |
| **Energy conservation** | 3 programs:
EGAT – energy savings (demand-side management; DSM) programs for large buildings, also consumer appliance labelling
EPPO – public awareness / rebates for saving
DEDE – large buildings | See more potential for energy savings than do responsible agencies through rigorous use of Integrated Resource Planning (IRP) techniques |
| **Scale of new supply** | Favour increments of 700 MW combined cycle gas turbine (CCGT)
Favour large hydro for peaking power / but constrained by public
See limited technical potential in retrofits because of capacity mis-match | Favour small scale renewables
Favour 150 MW of combined-cycle natural gas turbine for non-renewable energy
Favour retrofit of existing old capacity wherever possible |
and tourism. NGO networks in Bangkok supported the latter faction. Intimidation of protest leaders was not uncommon (Surasom 2004).

After the financial crisis, NEPO continued to promote the Prachuab coal-fired plants. Sustainable energy advocates argued excess power generation capacity made these plants unnecessary (Anonymous-1 2002). The civil society advocates were assisted by some NEPO staff who disagreed with their agency’s position. Foreign NGOs such as Probe International also joined the struggle by pointing to the conflict of interest between the government’s investment in private projects, and its regulation of those projects’ rates of return (Ryder 1997).

One of the current active nodes in the sustainable energy advocacy network is the Health System Research Institute (HSRI) in the Ministry of Public Health. HSRI’s director Decharut Sukkamnoed is an economist with a wide-ranging interest in social and economic implications of conventional energy development, and was an important contributor to the Pak Mun research study conducted by Ubon Ratchathani University on behalf of the Thaksin government (see Chapter 8). HSRI has organized public panel sessions focussed on energy and community health (broadly defined).

The sustainable energy coalition gathered momentum with the formation in 2002 of Palang Thai, a vigorous NGO working on energy policy. This small organization of articulate engineers was founded by Chuenchom Sangnarasri Greacen, a former NEPO analyst, and her husband Christopher, both of whom graduated from the Energy and Resources Group at University of California, Berkeley. Palang Thai has contributed significant analytical capacity to other NGOs working mainly with

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<th>Location</th>
<th>Favour distributed generation (large regional nodes)</th>
<th>Favour distributed generation (small nodes)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Use existing poles and lines Community support</td>
<td>Authentic community acceptance critical</td>
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| Fuel source            | Favour traditional local & regional fuels (natural gas, lignite, hydro) Reduce reliance on natural gas (NEPO/EPPO) | Favour more aggressive support for renewable energy (biomass, wind) |

(Table 5.5 continued)
local communities on discrete power project problems since the early 1990s, such as Alternative Energy Project for Sustainability (AEPS). Palang Thai regularly supplies technical advice to EPPO as well as other organizations. One of its early and notable contributions was to design policies and write legislation to allow small and very small power producers to sell excess electricity they generated to the grid.

Another active node in the sustainable energy network is the Confederation of Consumer Organizations (CCO). When electricity tariffs increased in 2001 by a noticeable 25 satang per unit, this small NGO organized a series of public seminars criticising the tariff structure. Critics drew attention to the “Ft” charge, a line-item on the electricity bill that supposedly captured the volatile cost of fuel used for generation. Since 1998, civil society advocates had attacked the Ft for concealing mechanisms to maintain minimum returns for EGAT and private producers even in the face of lower-than-expected demand (Sangarasri 1998; Sukkumoed n.d.). They campaigned to abolish it. In response to the 2001 campaign, the Thaksin administration set up a multi-stakeholder process in which the CCO, HSRI, and other organizations, such as the Federation of Thai Industries (FTI), participated. In 2004, in the wake of EGAT union protests against the administration’s move to incorporate EGAT and sell 49% of its shares publicly, the CCO played a key role helping the Senate Committee on Public Participation design two participatory hearings to scrutinize and debate the future of EGAT (Saithan, interview 11/9/04).

Impetus for these hearings came from civil society advocates opposed to the government’s plans to push through the privatization of EGAT. The Thaksin administration had previously conducted a series of regional public hearings. Sustainable energy advocates denounced their narrow agenda and persuaded the Senate Committee on Public Participation to organize two broader and more deliberative hearings (interviews with Saithan, 11/9/04; Khamkrit, 13/9/04). At those June 2004 hearings, activists presented an alternative power development plan (Witoon 2004).

5.5.1 An alternative power development plan

The “alternative PDP” was presented by Witoon Permpongsacharoen, representing the National Economic and Social Advisory Council (NESAC). NESAC,
a 99-member policy advisory council, is an independent agency mandated under the 1997 constitution, and Witoon heads a well-known environmental organization.\textsuperscript{52}

The alternative PDP criticizes Thailand’s electricity supply industry structure, its governance problems, as well specific system planning practices, such as demand forecasting, and the exogenous role of DSM (Witoon 2004; Sukkumnoed et al. n.d.). It also makes specific (normative) recommendations to EGAT’s 2004 PDP which includes increasing the supply of electricity sourced from clean renewable energy, while cancelling plans that source energy from large hydro plants (Nam Theun 2) and large new plants in general.

The Alternative PDP met with a distinctly cool reaction from EGAT’s powerful union, and no public reaction from EGAT’s pro-union management (Vidhaya, interview 28/9/04; Prachseri, interview 27/9/05). Prior to releasing their plan, energy advocates had established a short-lived rapport with EGAT’s union. The advocates opposed any privatization plan that did not make extensive governance reforms. The union opposed plans to downsize EGAT into separate transmission and generation companies, the latter of which would be forced to compete against private power producers. By late 2004, the Ministry of Energy made it clear there would be no radical unbundling of EGAT, thereby appeasing the EGAT union. In 2005, as the second Thaksin administration attempted to sell 25% of a largely-unchanged EGAT,\textsuperscript{53} the sustainable energy network publicized in the print media its call for a strong independent regulator, with power to approve supply expansion plans, and for participation in long-term planning (C. S. Greacen 2005; C. E. Greacen 2005c; Janchitfah 2005).

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined the actions and influence of civil society advocates in electricity conservation (early 1990s), and alternative system planning (late 1990s–2000s), in the context of dominant planning practices that I traced back to the 1960s. I asked questions about patterns in planning politics, about the role of knowledge and

\textsuperscript{52} Project for Ecological Recovery (PER), active in the Nam Choan and Pak Mun cases (see Chapters 4 and 6).

\textsuperscript{53} Revised downward, in the face of union opposition, from its original proposal to sell 49% of EGAT. The new public offering proposal placated EGAT employees by awarding them significant stock options.
knowledge brokers, and about mechanisms by which reform advocates attempted to influence dominant practices.

Regarding patterns, a remarkable continuity in planning practices spans 1960s to 2005. This continuity exists notwithstanding the rise of NEPO in the 1980s, energy conservation in the late 1980s, and a sustainable energy advocacy network in the late 1990s. Planning practices contributed to a pattern in which high investment in supply expansion produces recurrent perceptions of capital shortages, which in turn inspired neoliberal arguments for electricity privatization, which we can trace back to the early 1980s in Thailand.

I credit the strength of institutional incentives for this continuity, but explicitly did not argue that incentive structures alone explain policy continuity. Incentives are discursively constructed by real individuals, who mix reflexive strategizing with taken-for-granted adherence to more basic norms (such as reliability or inevitability of economic growth). Nor are incentive structures (institutions) sufficient to explain the timing or content of the policy changes we reviewed. Policy scholars who regard institutional explanations as impoverished already know this (John 1998). Thai civil society advocates, who believe they must first change institutions in order to change planning practices, might by contrast find it liberating.

To understand the timing and content of policy changes, I use an approach to explanation which makes use of necessary and contingent social mechanisms (Chapter 3). Consider first mechanisms involving knowledge.

Knowledge dynamics

More refined knowledge did not lead in a straightforward manner to more “rational” planning. Nor did it necessarily open up more public space to raise an issue. More detailed economic and engineering modelling did not have the simple effect of opening up planning practices to outside actors such as IIEC. As the cost-of-supply modelling became much more sophisticated in the late 1980s, it shielded EGAT from independent, potentially critical analysis. Similarly, EGAT staff produced a co-authored textbook on feasibility studies for hydropower design, legitimating their practices (Chulit 1992). As a state agency, EGAT’s knowledge systems were embedded in the institutional arrangements of electricity supply, contributing new knowledge that buttressed those arrangements. Lebel et al. (2004) refer to this as a
“state knows best” structure, where scientific knowledge, generated by state organs, animates command and control practices.

By the early 1990s, reflecting the rise of the environmental conservation movement, the politics of planning and new power plant construction became openly contentious. However those most motivated to question new power plants found EGAT’s planning discourse becoming more sophisticated. As more projects drew censure during this period, EGAT’s most prominent critics – such as Project for Ecological Recovery – would have found the organization unwilling to share information. Critics were forced to rely on intermediaries such as postgraduate students with common values, overseas analysts, and insider critics willing to share insight and data – even the World Bank itself, to the extent it allowed access to analyses conducted for its own due diligence. Given the paucity and transitory nature of these connections, it was easier for conservationists to fault with new proposals based on what they knew best: environmental and social (distributional) grounds.

The knowledge dynamics summarized above, and discussed elsewhere in this chapter, contributed to changes in the policy domain of electricity generation. In order to see more precisely how, the next section reviews mechanisms of civil society influence and state reaction.

Social mechanisms of influence and control

Civil society advocates attempted to influence dominant practices by several pathways: (1) Rationalist/technocratic pathway. Civil society actors with technical expertise helped state energy policy counterparts rationally define new agendas. These included demand side management in the late 1980s to early 1990s, grid access agreements in the early 2000s, and more recent technical policy analysis conducted by Palang Thai (C. E. Greacen 2005a). This pathway of influence also constituted an “epistemic community” (P. Haas 1992) within the larger policy domain – a community limited to technically proficient analysts with the social capital to access state-dominated spaces.

(2) Public agenda setting pathway. Some analysts published information and analyses that, when disseminated by other organizations, allowed activists to frame issues in a more accessible manner (e.g., Anonymous 2002; Palettu 2003; du Pont 2005). Some of these actors contributed analyses and debating points to prepare activists for key exchanges with elites from opposing policy coalitions.
Such debates, however, gained status and attention to the extent they were sponsored by authoritative public institutions such as NESAC, and the Senate. Since both organizations are large, advocates first needed to create conducive micro-political settings (e.g., by lobbying the chairman of NESAC, and lobbying the Senate Committee on Public Participation to review earlier Ministry of Energy hearings).

Civil society advocates met with counter-mechanisms of control or domination. One general mechanism that limited the influence of activists is what I refer to as “institutional reframing.” Organizations adopted new policy initiatives if they did not significantly threaten key interests and taken-for-granted structures. For example, EGAT’s new DSM program was innocuously reframed during the 1990s as good for EGAT’s organizational image (as opposed to being good for society, a component of least-cost planning, or helping EGAT reduce capital investment). In the context of record petroleum prices in 2004, recent national renewable energy targets improve the Ministry of Energy’s image, despite significant design and implementation problems (C. E. Greacen 2005b; Prachseri, interview 27/9/05).

Conversely, after sustainable energy advocates sharpened their criticism of status quo governance – offering a sweeping set of reforms at the Senate Committee on Public Participation hearings in June 2004 – they were rebuffed or “counter-framed” in negative terms by EGAT staff (e.g., at a public meeting organized by the World Bank on Nam Theun 2, 31/8/04).

In summary, technical expertise possessed by some members of the advocacy network allowed both incremental reforms favourable to sustainable energy, as well as, by the late 1990s, the launching of a far more contentious agenda involving broad-scale changes to EGAT’s governance. The diversity of the issues involved (from governance to modelling to grid access standards) suited an advocacy network (Keck and Sikkink 1998). That structure, with its diverse membership and opportunities for key individuals to exercise multiple forms of agency, to a certain degree dissipated intra-network conflict.

The progressive reforms achieved by the advocacy network occurred however in a larger context of unsustainable energy use. This leads us to consider the larger discursive divisions that exist around electricity supply. Chapter 2 introduced the concept of discourse coalitions. Discourse coalitions use simplified and

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54 By counter-framing I refer to rhetorical action deployed to repress or subvert activist framings (Chapter 9).
institutionalized “storylines” (Hajer 1995). These provide a template for actors to assimilate new experience, including data and technical knowledge discourses. One consequence is that new experience is usually dwarfed by the basic storylines coalitions operate with. EGAT’s storyline is that of the cost-plus utility, guaranteed an adequate return on investment. In this storyline, system expansion is both beneficial and an inevitable result of economic growth.

In this context, new data produced by more transparent accounting might make DSM more visible to EGAT senior management. However as long as energy conservation means profit losses for the utility, such data make little difference. Calls for increased transparency instead further a market liberal reform agenda.

**Macro-scale consequences**

Market liberals now want EGAT to increase the proportion of capital it sources from equity markets. There is not a little historical irony in this, and it escapes all but the most critical observers. The irony is that the fundamental driver of financial unsustainability comes from continued investment in expansion plans that arguably are not least-cost. In so doing, the utilities siphon capital away from the very markets they are embedded in, inspiring calls for privatization, and setting them in contention with project-affected people.

With their obsession on solving short-term capital problems, market liberals fail to see that no amount of financial restructuring can rescue an intellectually defective organizational strategy. The supreme irony, I argue, lies in this failure of construction. Organizations like EGAT and the Ministry of Energy treat energy conservation and renewable energy as an after-thought, an accessory to their main business of planning and financing conventional engines of capacity. EGAT’s strategy obstructs transition to futures that are equitable, desirable, and technically and ecologically sustainable. Instead, such transitions require vigorous and sustained debate on the sector’s current construction of profits and reliability.
Chapter 6: Conflict over Pak Mun Dam, 1989–1994

6.1 Introduction

This chapter and Chapter 7 contribute to my thesis objectives of identifying outcomes of contentious interaction, and offering plausible explanation for how certain key policy decisions over Pak Mun Dam were made. I begin to apply the study’s framework and methodology to a protracted site-specific conflict.

This chapter reviews pivotal events and key decisions over Pak Mun Dam during the pre-operation period 1989–94. \textit{What contribution did civil society actions make to the following state decisions: to build the dam in the face of opposition (1989–91), and to recognize a broader range of people affected by the project than originally intended (1993–94)?}

Campaigns against Pak Mun Dam produced potent discourses of transparency and accountability. Occasionally, sympathetic and open-minded policymakers exercised agency, but were constrained by institutions and associated discursive practices. Institutions thus limited the influence of civil society networks opposed to the dam. While opponents did not change powerful practices and institutions in the
short term, they strengthened and sustained their collective action and won important concessions. They succeeded in broadening problem definitions and solutions, a necessary step for them to win concessions. However, concessions also appear to have been triggered by an elite desire to minimize contention in the wake of unanticipated episodes of violence. Outcomes were also contingent on decision-makers' reactions to the emergent process of sustained collective action.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the political context of large dam development in the late 1980s. Section 6.2 then presents a detailed narrative of the pre-operational conflict over Pak Mun. Section 6.3 analyses patterns of state and protest movement interactions, and presents the direct and indirect outcomes of five years of contention. Section 6.4 discusses a rival explanation for these outcomes.

6.1.1 Large dam projects in the 1980s

In the 1980s, during the Prem regime, the Thai state planned to build six large hydropower or irrigation dams (Usher 1991a). It was forced to retreat from all but two: Rachaprapha Dam (in southern Thailand, 1987) and Pak Mun (1994), both developed by EGAT. One of the most powerful framings that civil society opponents mounted against the four other large projects (Nam Choan, Haew Narok, Kaeng Krung, Kaeng Sua Ten) was the spectre of protected area forest destruction.

An interview with former Senator Ekachai Ngamruangrit, an advisor to the government of Prime Minister Chatichai, reveals how Pak Mun was framed by EGAT and by dam opponents. The interview also reveals the constraints Ekachai perceived himself under as a decision-maker. Senator Ekachai, a prominent and outspoken liberal, chaired the Foreign Relations Committee in the first fully-elected Senate under the 1997 constitution (elected 2000). A previous Khon Kaen University academic, he had worked with NGOs, and was aware of people's opposition to development projects. As an adviser to Prime Minister Chatichai’s government (1988–91), he provided input on almost all proposals dealing with environmental and social issues, and interacted with civil society stakeholders (interview, 7/9/04). It was a time when the economy was booming after the Cold War, and there was excitement among investors. Although contemporary observers listed the Senator as a public supporter of Pak Mun Dam (Ladawan et al. 1993), he told me, in fact, that at that time he opposed all five dams.

Ekachai recalled his involvement in the struggle against Nam Choan Dam.
Opposition centred around preserving Thung Yai and Huai Kha Kaeng Wildlife Sanctuaries (Thailand’s most restricted category of protected area). The sanctuaries were the largest block of protected area in Southeast Asia (Stewart Cox 1987). To middle-class interests, deliberate hydropower development in a wildlife sanctuary was manifest illegality. Ekachai visited the area himself, and was able to get information that differed from the official information released by agencies such as the Royal Forest Department and EGAT. The Prem government postponed Nam Choan Dam for a second time in 1988 (see Chapter 4).

The Nam Choan campaign arguably deepened Thai democracy, showing dam opponents viable models of collective action and legitimising oppositional framings (Hirsch 1993). Importantly, collective action against Nam Choan was not harshly repressed under Prime Minister Prem’s semi-democratic regime. Nam Choan gave Pak Mun dam opponents more confidence in the legitimacy of protest. In early April 1989, Pak Mun opponents distributed leaflets saying “Kan[chanaburi] people don’t want Nam Choan, Ubon people don’t want Pak Mun,” identifying their northeastern Thai struggle with civil society’s victorious campaign against Nam Choan, shelved in March 1988 (Assembly of the Poor 2002). 55

As the remaining four dams came forward for approval by the Chatichai Cabinet, Ekachai said, the idea was put forward that because the Prime Minister and his Cabinet were elected politicians, they ought to consider the impacts of the dam projects. Ekachai was by that time sceptical of the discourse he heard from proponents of hydropower, who were saying it was a very clean form of energy. He was aware of the impacts of Bhumibol Dam, Sirikit Dam, and Sirindhorn Dam. He felt these projects resulted in significant impacts upon forests, while the amount of electricity generated was quite limited. Pak Mun Dam was the only one of four dams that “got away from us” because it was not in a protected area, and was promoted as a “low wall” (i.e., low impact) dam. Ekachai recalls the Chatichai government however passing a cabinet resolution requiring the NESDB to monitor and assess the impacts of the project (NESDB 1990).

Ekachai’s remarks indicate that despite being seen (and remembered by others) as a public proponent of Pak Mun Dam during the Chatichai government, he considers himself unambiguously opposed to Pak Mun at that time. If there is a contradiction

55 Assembly of the Poor (2002), henceforth “AOP Chronology,” is based on Thai newspaper reports and NGO press releases, 1967–2001. It is a useful, albeit movement-centred compilation of events.
here, it is between his interests in people-centred development paths, and his official role as an adviser to his father’s government, which operated within the discursive space of mainstream development as industrialization. If he had spoken out to oppose all five dams, Ekachai would have lost credibility in the eyes of the government. As we shall see, this reflexive concern with maintaining credibility was not a singular occurrence, but a rationale that recurs among decision-makers (see Section 6.2.3 below).

The campaigns that halted Nam Choan, Kaeng Krung, Haew Narok, and temporarily shelved Kaeng Sua Ten did not transform Thailand’s parliament. Discursive spaces gained through collective action were not institutionalized. In the Kaeng Krung case, MPs were divided, but opposition appears to have had more to do with who would be awarded the right to log the inundated area (the state Forest Industries Organization or local interests), and less to do with breaches of democratic practice. With few exceptions, powerful provincial MPs (including some with ministerial portfolios) supported Pak Mun and Kaeng Sua Ten dams in the name of conventionally understood development (Siriyuvasak 1994; Ladawan et al. 1993).

What effect did Nam Choan and other campaigns have on EGAT? Despite all the pressure and scrutiny put upon EGAT, I argue that the direct effects were rather limited. EGAT and the Royal Irrigation Department continued with their model of dam building. There were several hydropower projects in EGAT’s Power Development Plan at any time, consisting of new schemes and capacity expansion at existing dams (see e.g., EGAT 1993b). EGAT built all it could get approval for.

One possible indirect effect of the previous anti-dam campaigns on EGAT was its decision to relocate the axis of Pak Mun Dam from Kaeng Tana rapids upstream 1.5 kilometres to its present location at Ban Hua Haew (Figure 6.1). EGAT had known, from its Team Consulting Engineers study dated January 1982, that a dam at Kaeng Tana would require 4,000 households to resettle (Team Consulting Engineers 1982). Amorn-sakchai et al. (2000a) date the relocation decision to 1983, the same year Kaeng Tana site was gazetted for a National Park, and a year after the Prem government’s first postponement of Nam Choan (see Table 6.1). By contrast, EGAT’s choice of a run-of-the-river design for Pak Mun appears to have been determined by hydro-engineering considerations alone: the relatively low gradient of the river allows

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56 As well, Ekachai’s reflections suggest that forest conservation/destruction discourses were more salient to mainstream decision makers and environmentalists than discourses of social displacement, and livelihood destruction.
Mekong flood waters to back upstream into the Mun during the main (southwest) monsoon.

6.2 Campaigning for transparency and participation, 1989–91

This section reviews events from the Chatichai Cabinet’s first project endorsement in 1989 to the World Bank’s December 1991 approval of a $54 million loan package, part of which was for Pak Mun. In January 1989, EGAT informed provincial notables in Ubon Ratchathani\textsuperscript{57} about a new dam project. The governor, deputy governor, the mayor of Phibun Mangsahan township, and the vice president of the Chamber of Commerce were taken to see two of EGAT’s existing dams, and a model of Pak Mun at Asian Institute of Technology. Three months later, Cabinet first endorsed the project.\textsuperscript{58}

The Cabinet understood that the 136 MW Dam would double the installed generation capacity in the Northeast region, a region dependent on power imports, with peak demand growing at double digit rates. The project was part of a least-cost system expansion plan, had an expected internal rate of return of more than 18%, and would also produce irrigation and fisheries benefits (EGAT 1988; NESDB 1990).

Within two weeks of the Cabinet announcement, several civil society actions occurred. Activists wrote to Prime Minister Chatichai requesting more information on impacts of the dam. They distributed leaflets and made speeches in Phibun district township (April 13), and organized a rally of 600 people, many from Phibun, at Ubon Ratchathani Teacher’s College (April 22). The gathering of 600 people turned out to hear EGAT supply more information, however EGAT cancelled the meeting, claiming that more people than agreed upon had shown up (AOP Chronology, 22 April 1989).

\textsuperscript{57} Also referred to as “Ub\textsuperscript{on}” in this thesis.

\textsuperscript{58} At this 8 April 1989 meeting, the government also approved the further study and development of a massive irrigation and water diversion project, the Khong-Chi-Mun (Karnkongsak and Law 2001).
Table 6.1 Chronology of Pak Mun Dam case, 1982–94

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Actions (major civil society actions in italics)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Events under Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda (March 1980–April 1988):</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1982 | Environmental and ecological impact assessment for dam located at Kaeng Tana rapids with 112 m crest indicates 4,000 households need resettlement.  
      | *[Nam Choan Dam: First civil society opposition campaign begins.]* |
| 1983 | Kaeng Tana National Park declared; EGAT decides to conduct new feasibility study for dam located upstream at Ban Hua Haew. |
| 1985 | EGAT lowers water retention level from 112 m to 108 m elevation and situates dam at Ban Hua Haew. |
| 1986 | [Nam Choan – Cabinet gives preliminary approval for Nam Choan; second civil society mobilization. Project for Ecological Recovery (PER) formed; coordinates Bangkok campaign.]
| 1987 | Pak Mun Dam appears in the Power Development Plan. [Nam Choan: September – Prem government forms a multi-stakeholder process to evaluate Nam Choan.]
| 1988 | March – EGAT completes report quantifying benefits of power, irrigation, and fisheries. Used as basis for review by NESDB and Cabinet. [Nam Choan – Prem government shelves project.]
|      | **Events under Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan (April 1988–February 1991):** |
| 1989 | April – Pak Mun Dam project first approved by Cabinet; first protest of people from Phibun Mangsahan and Khong Chiam at provincial hall, led by local MP and alliance of groups dependent on tourism; Mun river villagers begin talking in their own groups. |
| 1990 | EGAT applies for World Bank loan to develop power system, including Pak Mun;  
      | *February – Campaigns begin to increase transparency about number of affected households: 3 day rally against Dam/confrontation with supporters’ rally.*  
      | May – Cabinet approves Pak Mun budget of 3.88 billion baht. Number understood affected equals 262 households; sets up Committee for the Compensation of Land Rights and Properties and Committee for Resettlement.  
      | May – Northeast NGOs support anti-dam villagers.  
      | June – World Bank produces Executive Project Summary, indicating bank's interest. Site preparation work commences.  
      | August – NESDB releases environmental mitigation plan.  
<pre><code>  | October – World Bank completes pre-investment Staff Appraisal Report. |
</code></pre>
<p>| 1991 | January – Completion of preliminary site works. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Actions (major actions by civil society in italics; other events in brackets)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1991 | February – EGAT sticks to its May 1990 estimate of affected households; proceeds with construction.  
March – 12,000 petition World Bank against making loan.  
May – Two week sit-in rally ends with agreement to establish participatory impact assessment committee.  
May – Thai NGOs and villagers protest Kho Cho Ko forest resettlement.  
June – Minister Niyom’s multi-stakeholder committee begins meeting;  
October – World Bank directors meet with Pak Mun opponents.  
November – International Institute for Energy Conservation completes demand side management plan.  
December – World Bank Board approves loan, with two objections (US, Australia) and one abstention (Canada). |
| 1992 | March – EGAT, RFD, National Parks, and Fine Arts Department defend rapids blasting in National Park as legal and not harmful;  
April – 200 villagers protest against blasting of Kan Haew rapids, claiming damage to fisheries migration;  
April – Bangkok demonstrations against General Suchinda assuming Prime Ministership.  
May – Suchinda resigns (24 May) after large-scale demonstrations turn violent. |
| 1993 | February – Anti-Dam network begins campaign for just compensation. |
| 1994 | June – Dam commissioned, impoundment begins, fish ladder completed;  
April–June – Episodic anti-dam rallies in Bangkok;  
October – Beginning of “157-day” rally: 2000 villagers launch protest over fair fishing livelihood compensation at Ubon Provincial Hall; after two weeks march to dam site.  
December – 300 villagers affected by Sirindhorn dam march to join Pak Mun rally, demanding compensation for the earlier project. |

Sources: Amornsakchai et al. (2000a); AOP (2002); Missingham (2003); newspaper reports.
Figure 6.1 Mun River from Ubon Ratchathani to junction with Mekong

Source: adapted from World Bank (1998). Dashed line shows approximate area in which rural anti-dam activism was concentrated.
Contention was breaking out over the state’s conduct of public information sessions, as well as over the dam’s inundation “footprint,” particularly the number of households that would need to move out of the flood zone. Section 6.2.3 discusses mobilization over flooding impacts, and analyses the politics of a review committee chaired by Minister Niyom Visaithip. First, however, I review the practices by which the state reviewed and approved Pak Mun.

**6.2.1 The state’s approval and review process**

EGAT presented the project to Cabinet a total of four times. Two of the four were for pro-forma approvals, while the other two involved substantive budget authorizations.

**Pro-Forma**  
April 1989, for approval “in principle”  
February 1991, approval of construction

**Substantive**  
May 1990, approval of budget  
September 1991, approval of increased budget

National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) approval was required before approval by the Budget Office. The development board submitted an 18-page, highly favourable memorandum in support of the project to Prime Minister Chatichai prior to the May 1990 approval (Pisith 1990). Basic data were taken from EGAT. No sensitivity analyses are included in the report. The basis of the board’s approval appears to have been EGAT’s 1988 Summary Report, which presented a high positive internal rate of return, as well as NESDB’s decision to authorize an environmental mitigation plan (NESDB 1990; EGAT 1988).

A decade later, the World Commission on Dams (WCD), a multi-stakeholder process with participation from organizations opposed to Pak Mun, would ask whether the project complied with “criteria and guidelines of the day” (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: xii; see Chapter 7). The WCD report faulted EGAT for relying heavily on studies conducted in 1982 and 1984 by Team Consulting Engineers. WCD noted that instead of relying solely on a private firm for environmental impact assessment, EGAT could have adopted more rigorous and participatory EIA guidelines from the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning, the Pollution Control Department, and
the World Bank (ibid., 84–85; 95–96).59

The National Environmental Board is another agency that might have played a more active role in Pak Mun Dam’s approval. Under environmental law at the time, the NEB received, and presumably reviewed, EGAT’s EIAs. Interestingly, it commented in the case of Kaeng Krung, but not in the case of Pak Mun Dam (Siriyuvasak 1994). One possible reason is that Kaeng Krung attracted more intense opposition than Pak Mun at that time (Chaidet, interview 14/2/06).

The National Energy Policy Office (NEPO) was another potential reviewer of proposed power stations. NEPO was formed in 1986, prior to Pak Mun Dam’s approval. It would soon establish a reputation for itself as a more critical energy policy agency than NESDB (see Chapter 5). However Dr. Wanchai, a former NEPO analyst, told me that NEPO was not involved in reviewing options to Pak Mun (interview, 20/10/04). NEPO proposed differential tariffs based on time-of-day usage in 1989. Prime Minister Chatichai resisted strongly, thinking that they were meant for the residential sector, and would be unpopular (ibid.).60 In 1990, NEPO encouraged analysis of hourly power demand disaggregated into various end-use sectors. According to Dr. Wanchai, had such demand side alternatives been implemented more vigorously, Pak Mun Dam might not have been approved, because of its high cost. Dr. Wanchai mentioned other proposed hydro-dams such as Mae Lama Luang that were in EGAT’s PDPs (cf. EGAT 1993b), but never built because energy conservation analysis suggested cheaper alternatives. Pak Mun was approved and construction began well before International Institute for Energy Conservation released its energy conservation plan for Thailand in November 1991 (Chapter 5).

Other branches of the state played a more limited role in the early review of Pak Mun. Individual MPs in Ubon played a role in oppositional and support networks, but did so in their traditional capacity as individual patrons, as opposed to representatives of political parties with explicit policy positions regarding the dam. Among northeastern MPs, Pak Mun was almost universally popular. The proposed Kaeng Krung dam, by contrast, divided politicians over allegations southern MPs would gain from logging the inundated area (Siriyuvasak 1994: 34). In neither case

59 World Bank Operational Directive 4.00 calls for the borrower to “take the views of . . . affected groups and local non-governmental organisations fully into account in project design . . . implementation and . . . preparation of EIAs” (Amornsakchais et al. 2000a: 85). In any case the WCD report drew strident criticism from EGAT (see Chapter 7).
60 Time-of-day tariffs were implemented in 1990 for large customers, but IIEC (1991: 37) described their impact as limited.
did the legislature set up a hearing process to deliberate the projects prior to executive branch approval.

The immediate political context in which the Chatichai regime emerged helps explain the general orientation of the executive branch towards infrastructure projects such as Pak Mun. Since the mid-1980s, the Thai economy had grown, following its shift from import-substitution to an export-oriented strategy. The strategy involved partially lowered trade barriers, welcoming foreign direct investment, and repressing labour (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995; Bello et al. 1998). 61

6.2.2 Mobilization to reduce uncertainty

On a par with the issue of fisheries impacts (see Chapter 8), the most notorious aspect of Pak Mun Dam has been the state’s handling of public participation – that is, its response to grievances that were inducing villagers to take unprecedented levels of action.

Early “participation” in Pak Mun was framed by the state in terms of notification and project promotion. Initially, the state manifestly failed to assuage fears of negative impacts or convince many villagers that they stood to gain. When Chalerm Yubamrung, the Minister responsible for EGAT, went to Ubon in June 1989 to lead a series of information sessions, his conduct proved as incendiary as the proposed dam itself. Chalerm visited two months after Cabinet’s first approval of the project, and a month after a civil society alliance 62 had started leafleting and rallying in the Phibun Mangsahan district seat, the small town that hosted the popular Kaeng Saphue rapids.

At two of these June public sessions, in Ubon Ratchathani and in Khong Chiam district, neither Chalerm nor the EGAT staff with him could answer the audience’s questions to its satisfaction. Nikon Wiisapen, a lawyer with the Union for Civil Liberties and member of the anti-dam Committee Opposing Construction, argued that the project ought to be deferred or cancelled in light of the unresolved problems. Chalerm answered that “the dam must be built, that’s a hundred percent sure, people who don’t agree can just go on opposing it” (Kanha 1989: 48; AOP Chronology, 11 June 1989). The level of dissatisfaction was such that Committee

61 These elements were adopted elsewhere, e.g., in South Korea and Taiwan. Thailand by comparison had later industrial development, a lower-capacity civil service, and a larger agrarian electorate (cf. Evans 1995).

62 Khana kammakan khat khan kan ko sang khuean pak mun [Committee Opposing Construction of Pak Mun Dam]; henceforth, “Committee Opposing Construction”.
Opposing Construction factions in the audience booed and walked out (AOP Chronology, 16 and 21 June 1989; Kanha 1989). In September, Chalerm shut down a public session with 3,000 in the audience after it degenerated into threats by one of his aides to silence outspoken critics by gunshot (AOP Chronology, 5 September 1989).

But overall it was the construction of a climate of sheer uncertainty which fuelled mobilization. The earliest estimate of affected households, from EIA studies in 1982–83, was less than three hundred (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 111). This estimate was for: (1) households directly in the construction area; (2) households below 108 metres elevation (the dam’s normal water retention level); and (3) households between 108–108.5 metres elevation (see Table 6.2 below). EGAT cited 262 affected households in its May 1990 Cabinet presentation (Usher 1991b).

By contrast, civil society opponents claimed the dam’s footprint was an order of magnitude higher. In 1989, a precursor to the Committee Opposing Construction claimed that 35,000 rai would be flooded, and 2,000 families would need to move out of the flooded area (Buchita 1997: 53). In 1991, the Committee Opposing Construction argued that 3,400 families (20,000 people) lived inside the inundation zone (Usher 1991b).

How do we make sense of these numbers? The civil society estimates are much higher, as we would expect from opponents of a project. Some estimates included fisheries impacts; others referred only to land and houses. It is important to note however that the government released no maps at budget approval in May 1990. In March 1991, nine months after site work had begun, detailed contour maps were still not available (Usher 1991b).

As construction proceeded under a military-backed government, one of the key activists’ demands was to halt the project pending credible information about all the impacts of the dam. All opponents believed EGAT was withholding relevant information. In light of the state’s lack of information, the figures cited by opponents do not seem recklessly inflated. By 1994, after a series of protests for the state to recognize and compensate additional categories of people, the figure rose to at least 1,649 households:
Table 6.2 Categories of households recognized for compensation of structures and fixed assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set (1) Recognized in Team Consulting Engineers’ 1982–83 studies</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Affected by construction, Ban Hua Haew village</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Living below 108 m above mean sea level (a.m.s.l.)</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Living 108–108.5 m a.m.s.l.</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>sub-total</strong></td>
<td><strong>243</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set (2) Recognized in 1994 by civil society campaigns, 1990–94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Affected by blasting of rapids</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Agriculture land inundated</td>
<td>706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Living above 108.5 m a.m.s.l., chose to relocate</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>sub-total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,406</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,649</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Early contention was fuelled by different actors referring – often confusingly – to different categories of affected people. Whether the state would recognize Set (2), and when it would finally compensate for all of Set (1), added to the uncertainty.

I review below how the positive and adverse impacts of the dam were framed. First, however, it will help to get a clearer sense of the oppositional networks that were emerging over Pak Mun Dam.

**Civil society opponents**

The AOP Chronology is replete with names of civil society groups or identities active in 1989. Those concerned or critical came from a number of backgrounds: vendors at Kaeng Saphue rapids and Ku Duea Beach upstream in Ubon, teachers, the Union for Civil Liberties (an NGO formed in the 1980s), and Isara Somchai, a former Ratsadorn Party MP bidding for re-election. In May 1989, these groups formed the above-mentioned Committee Opposing Construction of Pak Mun Dam, with Ubon lawyer Phaitun Chopsiang as its chairman (AOP Chronology, 19 May 1989).

According to Missingham (2003), key early opposition to Pak Mun Dam actually emerged from local villager women who could not, despite the repressive atmosphere at state-sponsored informational meetings, bring themselves to support the project. Missingham provides an evocative commentary from Mae Bun, one of the
first local villagers to voice her opposition to the dam project. Mae Bun tells how the headman assembled the villagers of Ban Hua Haew, to inform them about the dam to be built in their village, and asked them to clap their hands in favour. Not only did she refuse to do so, she reminded the villagers about the hardship of forced resettlement onto infertile land imposed by the construction of nearby Sirindhorn Dam in 1965 (ibid., 74).

In Ubon, collective action in opposition to Pak Mun Dam was most diverse during 1989–90, the initial years of the conflict. According to Missingham, Mae Bun, after consulting a nephew who had studied law, contacted the Union of Civil Liberties and Isara Somchai, the former MP. Isara and the NGO were persuaded to act, and reached out to urban groups in Ubon. At the same time, villagers closer to the dam site also received support from field workers sent by Project for Ecological Recovery (PER) (Hubbel 1992; Buchita 1997). One of these workers, Maliwan,63 would eventually leave PER and become a key organizer among the villagers and subsequently, the Assembly of the Poor.

Mae Bun’s speech is revealing because it reminds us that local opposition existed around Sirindhorn Dam, and though that opposition never registered nationally, its memories lived on among many local people. It is revealing that a Ban Hua Haew headman, speaking in 1989, warned that EGAT would not tolerate a repeat of Sirindhorn-era opposition (Missingham, 74). Within months, as outlined above, ordinary people were already walking out on Chalerm at public information meetings. Within a year of 1989 there would be mass rallies outside Ubon provincial hall; within two years, roving demonstrations that began in Ubon and descended upon Bangkok – notwithstanding the coup of February 1991 and the prolongation of martial law in Ubon. Within six years villagers with suppressed grievances from Sirindhorn Dam would in turn join the newly declared “Assembly of the Poor.” That a rural headman drastically misread how Thai society was changing in the late 1980s is perhaps understandable. But as we shall see, EGAT fell into that interpretive trap as well, and explaining its blindness is less straightforward (see Section 6.3).

EGAT at least knew it had a public relations task ahead. It invited provincial MPs and Chamber of Commerce members to learn more about the project, and to support it. Chaisiri Ruangkananchanaset, a provincial notable and Minister in the Chatichai cabinet, used his network to recruit 3,000 people to rally in support of the

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63 Maliwan’s background included time spent with the CPT in the forests after 1976, as well as urban manual labour.
dam, confronting an anti-dam rally (AOP Chronology, 27–30 March 1990). EGAT’s repeated assurances that Kaeng Saphue and Ku Deaua would not be flooded appears to have mollified most tourist operators, urban teachers and lawyers. It still faced determined opposition from villagers who faced the likelihood of property and livelihood damage.

6.2.3 Transformation of contention: shifting extended rallies and Anand’s response

In 1990, after a year of sporadic demonstrations, the long rallies that would become emblematic of Pak Mun emerged. These multi-day and multi-week gatherings mark the intensification of protest. They reveal the development of collective action using tactics much more disruptive than an afternoon or a day protest. Initially, the transgressive nature of their tactics triggered strong defensive moves by dam supporters. When opponents staged a three-day sit-in outside provincial hall, they were met by supporters of Minister Chaisiri. Protest increased as construction got under way, notwithstanding police repression and harassment by project supporters. Opponents continued to press for a halt to construction pending a more transparent process of inquiry and deliberation.

A two-week rally that began in May 1991 near the construction site and ended up in Bangkok is worth reviewing on several counts. First, the interaction between villagers, bystanders (both opponents and supporters of the dam), and state agents took a form of a drama (unfolding in both time and space) that would repeat itself literally dozens of times over the next decade. Second, the rally is notable for leading to the first concessions the emergent movement won from the state. In this section, I describe the rally, a decision maker’s conflict management, and the outcomes.

The rally began on 21 May 1991, three months after the NPKC coup ousted Prime Minister Chatichai, and three weeks after villagers formed Klum hak mae nam mun (Love the Mun River Group) with representatives from 20 villages in Khong Chiam and Phibun Mangsahan districts (Hubbel 1992: 67).

Villagers gathered to protest the demolition of a wooden spirit house they had erected at the construction site a year earlier. Such spirit houses are revered in Thai culture as guardians of place. Erecting the spirit house, wittingly or not, was an

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64 A transgressive situation is one interpreted by contending parties as one of dynamic threat/opportunity, where parties view the political context as uncertain enough to demand innovative action/reaction (McAdam et al. 2001). See Section 2.3.2.
effective frame for collective action. It invoked spiritual guardianship of the river. When a foreign construction worker bulldozed the shrine to make way for construction, it signalled a violation against which villagers could rally to defend and re-assert themselves.

Some 800 villagers reinstated the shrine, and continued to demonstrate nearby for EGAT to release accurate information about areas that would be flooded. They demanded the government set up a four-part committee to review the information and other impacts (Nation 1991a). Four days later, police and army troops set up a roadblock to prevent additional supplies and people from reaching the demonstrators. Students who were rallying with them held a press conference in support of the villagers, and appealed to the Prime Minister to halt the construction pending an independent inquiry. Almost two weeks later, after being harassed at night by ten men throwing manure and stones, and firing shots, the demonstrators attempted to march towards the dam site, but were prevented from doing so by police (AOP Chronology, 3 June 1991). They dispatched a delegation of 150 villagers to protest outside Government House in Bangkok, and six representatives were finally received by Dr. Niyom Visaithip, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office responsible for EGAT, on 4 June 1991.

1991 Multi-stakeholder process (Niyom Committee)

Dr. Niyom65 assented to demands to appoint a committee composed of four parties: government, villagers, academics, and EGAT. Disagreement immediately sparked over the mandate of the committee. Its official mandate was to oversee compensation and resettlement, to verify the number of families to be resettled, and to verify the accuracy of EGAT’s flood zone surveying. Villagers however wanted the committee to do much more: to examine the entire social and environmental impacts of the dam and recommend that Cabinet revoke approval if impacts exceeded a certain threshold.

But what was that threshold? That was the crucial question facing Niyom as the nominal decision maker. We saw above the almost ten-fold difference between the less than 300 households EGAT claimed would be affected, and the 3,400 households

65 A U.S.-trained economist, former university Dean; former deputy Minister of Finance under Prem, and chairman of a sub-committee on economics and finance commissioned by Prem to review Nam Choan Dam in late 1987 (see Chapter 4).
cited by opponents. Niyom declared that if the number of (verified) affected households exceeded 1000, the government would review Pak Mun (Bangkok Post 1991a; AOP Chronology, 4 June 1991). The cabinet gave Niyom’s committee less than two months to verify affected numbers (Usher 1991c).

When I interviewed Dr. Niyom in late 2004, we did not discuss the 1,000 family threshold. (I was not yet aware of it and did not question him about it.) I did ask him about his relations with the World Bank, but he stated he did not remember their role. By contrast, dam opponents recall the Bank’s review as an important opportunity to leverage their advocacy against the project (Nick Mitchell, interview 7/9/04; see below).66

What Dr. Niyom remembers are the constraints he perceived himself under. The project had already been approved; it had already gone out for tender; the contractor had already begun construction. Opponents were already marching against it. They wanted him to guarantee that he would cancel the project if the work of his committee led to that conclusion. He allowed six villagers to serve on one of the two committees he set up. They wanted more.

The problem was that the various advocates, almost all of them, did not understand the complexity of the objective function. What they understood was what they wanted, which was one objective. They did not understand the set of constraints, or else set these constraints to zero. They could not compromise. Advocates opposing the dam had only one solution, which was that the dam must stop. EGAT had only one solution, that the dam must be built. The prior constraints were that the government had already signed off on the construction contract. Now, the government is an institution, not a group of individuals. When governments change, and new people enter office, the opponents think that they can exercise significant agency [to change policy]. We asked, first, whether it was possible legally to cancel the project? The answer was yes, if there was evidence of corruption. We thought there was, but did not have evidence. Second, politically, was it evident that it would create very severe losses? But [the project] was complex, it wasn't clearly obvious that it would be a disaster for the country . . . . If you ask whether the project should have been built, the answer is, "it's not worth it" (Niyom, 21/10/04).

Dr. Niyom indicated that privately, that was how he felt at the time, but again referred to the "constraints" he felt he and the Anand government were under. “In the end, rationally, it was not possible to do anything,” he said.

There are several points worth making about Dr. Niyom’s decision-making. First, his model of public decision-making, cast in the precise language of

66 Chapter 3 discusses the relationship between interview testimony and real events.
mathematics, is the solving of a complex objective function based on a set of constraints. While the decision maker attempts to optimize, in practice in situations such as Pak Mun it is only possible to satisfice,\(^\text{67}\) because "the data are not sufficient and our knowledge is not sufficient."

Next, when Dr. Niyom said that “rationally, it was not possible to do anything” he meant that it was not possible, given the model of positivist, rational, decision-making that he operated with, to make the kind of non-incremental changes the opponents of the dam were hoping for. By implication, the best one could do was “muddle through,” the term Charles Lindblom famously used to describe and defend limited, as opposed to comprehensive, rational analysis (Lindblom 1959; Parsons 1995: 284–285).

Third, Dr. Niyom’s account of his predicament displays a familiar justification, one based on economic burdens borne by the state: a contract was already signed, and construction had already begun. These were sunk costs with clear financial commitments, against which no clear evidence existed that the dam would bring a disaster upon the country. By implication, the costs of switching course on a project with such presence and momentum would be felt by the state in one symbolically huge impact if it cancelled. On the other hand, the cost of providing additional compensation for disaffected villagers appeared to be less in magnitude and symbolically slighter. Wodak (2001: 76) describes the stock argumentative device in Niyom’s justification as follows: “if a person, an institution or a country is burdened by specific problems, one should act in order to diminish [those] burdens,” which in this case were financial and symbolic.

Dr. Niyom’s committee overran its original time frame and appears to have ended in dispute over due process (Traisawasdichai 1991). By mid-October 1991, while World Bank directors and representatives visited Ubon, Dr. Niyom was speaking out in public as a full-fledged advocate of the project, as was the Thai Finance Minister (Tangwisuttijit 1991; Nation 1991b). Meanwhile, some of his committee members were still going about their work.\(^\text{68}\) Did the efforts of the villagers then amount to little, or even backfire?

\(^\text{67}\) Refers to simplifying a multi-variate policy problem by prior assignment of a “satisfactory” value/s to some key variable/s (Stokey and Zeckhauser 1978: 124). In the case of the 1991 Niyom Committee process, the key variable was that the number of affected households not exceed 1,000.

\(^\text{68}\) In December 1991, a member of Niyom’s environmental impact assessment sub-committee complained it had still not completed its work (Traisawasdichai 1991).
That is certainly one reading of events. However his multi-stakeholder process produced at least one unanticipated result. The committee found that the total number of affected households was 903. This number included 655 newly-recognized households whose land would be flooded.

The fact that different categories of affected households existed was a cause for significant confusion. At times, it seemed as if EGAT chose, in its press releases, to discuss only the limited category of households with flooded structures (Table 6.2, Set 1) leaving other parties to disclose the larger set of affected households. Dr. Niyom censured EGAT for not disclosing all its information from the onset of the project (AOP Chronology, 13 October 1991).

To be sure, such an outcome was miniscule compared to the momentum of the project. Yet they are significant for our purposes because they are examples of policy-relevant concessions made by the state in response to discursive civil society actions. Had there been no independent review of the number of affected households, EGAT would not have unilaterally compensated any more than the number it originally identified.

Next, although substantive outcomes of Niyom’s four-party process did not amount to much, consider its indirect impacts. First, the committee gave substance to the notion of independent review. This was exactly what the dam opponents were calling for, when lobbying the World Bank to reflect more critically on its role as a potential funder of the project. Second, villagers and other opponents developed the “extended shifting rally” as a form of contention they were able to use in many of their subsequent protests. Multi-stakeholder processes continued to be demanded by opponents, despite a tendency to be coopted by the state.

**Emergence of a Bangkok-based, transnational anti-Pak Mun Dam movement**

In 1991, the spatial and organizational dynamics of opposition began to shift. Prior to that, it had been based predominantly in Ubon Ratchathani. But the work of Dr. Niyom’s committee, and the entry of the World Bank into the drama as a potential funder of the project, meant that Bangkok and places beyond were becoming important as sites of contention. The Association of Sixteen Thai University Student Environmental Clubs was based in Bangkok, as were Project for Ecological Recovery,

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69 AOP Chronology (14 August 1991) citing an EGAT press release.
Wildlife Fund Thailand, and of course Chulalongkorn University. There, activist academics organized teach-ins and seminars (Apaporn, interview 24/8/02). The new form of contention the villagers had developed reflected Bangkok's political importance.

This section briefly reviews the advocacy campaign targeted on the World Bank. The World Bank’s very involvement as a multinational actor opened up opportunity for opponents to mount a transnational campaign. The Bank has played an important role in Thailand's post-war development (see Chapters 4 and 5). In this particular context the Thai government approached the Bank for a loan of $US 54 million to fund the Third Power System Development Project. The bank staff completed an Executive Project Summary in June 1990.

Nick Mitchell, a former field worker with PER, shared with me his memories about various strands of mobilization that year (interview, 7 September 2004). To the activists, World Bank funding was symbolically important. Mitchell remembers a Thai government official saying "we'll have to review this project if the World Bank doesn't fund it.” The Anand government had a fair reputation, and so PER and other organizations placed their hopes upon activism targeted at the World Bank.

In March 1991, dam opponents had gathered a 12,000 signature petition and presented it to the World Bank. By the middle of the year, EGAT was beginning to blast rapids. Mitchell recalls that people in Ban Hua Haew could feel the ground shaking, and blasting debris occasionally punctured their roofs. Reports of the blasting galvanized NGOs such as Wildlife Fund Thailand, which had not been previously involved. The commencement of blasting work in 1991 raised concerns among local people about the impacts of the project on fisheries migration (Missingham 2003: 77), a theme that the Bangkok environmental NGOs took up.

Mitchell recalls that despite the construction work, the activists’ mood was optimistic that the Bank would not vote in favour of the project. He was aware that the Bank had voted back in 1990 to formally appraise the project, and understood that the Bank had never backed away from a project that it had decided to appraise. On the other hand, villagers’ protests and petitions had prompted the US Congress to commission USAID to conduct an independent inquiry on their behalf. It was Mitchell who supplied Mark Rentschler, the USAID analyst, with information and guided him to Pak Mun Dam. They visited in August 1991 when the contractors were blasting the river bed. Local people in Ban Hua Haew commented on worsening fish catches, and
Rentschler was to write in his report that EGAT did not study Pak Mun Dam's potential to destroy the means of livelihood of millions of families of fisherfolk in northeast Thailand and Laos (Rentschler 1991).

In addition to the critical discourse of the USAID report (see Table 6.3 below), Mitchell's optimism was also based on two additional factors: the risk of schistosomiasis, and the anti-dam villagers’ willingness to undertake collective action.

In addition to their optimistic portrayal of improved fishing catches in a Pak Mun Dam reservoir, Mitchell mentioned the EIAs had been criticized by biologists and public health experts for underestimating the potential of schistosomiasis. Indeed, an advisory committee report commissioned by the World Bank warned of schistosomiasis infections because impoundment would create conditions favorable to the *Neotricula aperta* snail, the main vector of the disease (Woodruff et al. 1991).

The villagers' own high level of mobilization, with several hundred of them at a time coming down to Bangkok to press their case, also gave PER and other Bangkok allies grounds for optimism.

It seems likely that all three factors – disruptive collective action, concerns about schistosomiasis (articulated in spaces provided by Bangkok university academics) and multi-faceted critiques of Pak Mun (articulated in the Rentschler report, based on field guidance from Mitchell) contributed directly to the Bank’s unusual decision to postpone voting on Pak Mun. While Philippe Annez, the chief of the Bank mission in Bangkok, and a firm proponent of the project, was predicting a favourable vote on 10 September 1991, Usher reported that “tough questions” were being asked in Washington the prior week. The Rentschler report supplied Bank sceptics in Washington with framings to question the project (Usher 1991d).

By the time Directors finally voted on 10 December 1991 to fund the project, the vote had been postponed at least twice. The first time was on 10 September; Directors decided to postpone their vote until the October meeting of the Bank and the IMF in Bangkok. In October the Directors, faced with demonstrators outside their meeting, decided not to vote until after they heard from anti-Dam villagers at a public meeting in Bangkok. Directors also decided to meet with pro- and anti-Dam villagers in Ubon on 18 October, on the suggestion of the U.S. Director (*Bangkok Post* 1991c; Buchita 1997: 58–59).

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70 Mitchell recalls “four to five” postponements in World Bank decision-making (interview, 7 September 2004).
In addition to demonstrations outside the World Bank/IMF meeting, dam opponents also helped organize "Development as if the People Mattered," a concurrent forum with alternative development activists from Thailand and some 50 other countries. International Institute for Energy Conservation’s Mark Cherniack argued that the Thai DSM plan being formulated by IIEC would result in a total 2,000 MW of avoided peak power over 10 years (see Chapter 5). He stated that “2000 MW amounts to the total power that could be generated by 15 to-be-built Pak Mun Dams” (Inbaraj 1991). “The whole world would be watching Thailand if the plan is implemented because it would be the largest energy conservation project today,” said Cherniack (Inbaraj 1991).

Vidhaya Niwetsak, director of PER, chaired the Bangkok meeting between World Bank Directors and opposing villagers. He remembers that Directors repeatedly asked the villagers: “how much would it take to compensate you?” Their reply was that they did not want any compensation, but rather wanted to preserve their original livelihood (interview, 21/5/04).

Much to the disappointment of the anti-Dam movement, World Bank Directors eventually voted in favour of the project. Mitchell notes that Pak Mun Dam was the first non-unanimous vote among its Directors: the United States and Australia voted against the project, while Canada abstained. The Japanese director, Mitchell recalls, voted for Pak Mun, although he thought it was a questionable project. The director’s reason was that he did not want to give NGOs “momentum to prevent much-needed dam projects in the Mekong Basin” (Traisawasdichai 1992).

6.2.4 Framings

This section looks at the various framings put forward by opponents and supporters of the dam at the time the World Bank Directors made their historic non-unanimous vote. Table 6.3 presents the opposing discourses that had accumulated by December 1991.

By 1991, all features of civil society discourse in opposition to Pak Mun had been voiced. In subsequent years of conflict, most of the debates became more refined.

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71 The public session with Dam opponents appears to have been planned back in September, in Washington (Bangkok Post 1991b). I assume that the Bank would not have planned to vote prior to staging the public meeting in Bangkok.

72 By 2003, after a decade of demand side management by EGAT, a total of 858 MW of peak power had been avoided (EGAT 2004). While less than Cherniack’s original 2,000 MW estimate, analysts regard the result as a significant accomplishment (see Chapter 5).
as a result of new knowledge discourses, and some issues dropped out of public debate, most notably, schistosomiasis. With the exception of a policy proposal made in 2000 to open Pak Mun seasonally (Chapter 7), no new themes were added.

6.3 Campaigning for accountability and compensation, 1992–94

By the time the World Bank Directors voted in December 1991, the project was approximately 10% complete. Opponents publicly declared they would continue to campaign against it. During the next three years their discourse also took a pragmatic turn, toward the theme of holding EGAT and the state accountable for specific impacts of the project, including, for the first time, impacts on fisheries.

This section describes the focussed campaign for accountability that was mounted in 1993. The prior year, 1992, appears to have been a relatively quiet one for mobilization against the dam. The 1991 drama involving the World Bank had ended unfavourably, leaving PER staff, the oppositional villagers network, and their allies considering how next to mobilize. They seized on blasting of the river bed. This was not a new grievance, but one which could be framed to attract media attention, especially when EGAT began to blast Kan Haew rapids inside Kaeng Tana National Park (Traisawasdichai 1992). A National Park official disclosed that EGAT had not asked for permission. Several hundred villagers and students began a two-day rally and hunger strike aimed at getting Minister Niyom to sponsor a Cabinet resolution to halt the blasting. Kaewsan Adiphoti, a law professor at Thammasat, declared that the blasting was illegal and urged villagers to take legal action against EGAT and the National Park service (AOP Chronology, 5–7 March 1992). At the same time, opponents disclosed that a carved stone tablet at least 1,200 years old had been found in the vicinity of the construction site. Dr. Srisak Valibhotama, a prominent archaeologist at Silapakorn University, repeated his concern that the lower Mun River had been little studied archaeologically, and that the project could destroy some of Southeast Asia’s important historical sites (Sluiter 1992: 105). When opponents discovered that EGAT had revised its cost estimates for the project up from 3.2 billion

73 The network included representatives from at least 20 villages by early 1992. That year it changed its name from Klum Hak Mae Nam Mun (Love the Mun River Group) to Khanakamakan chao-ban phuea fuenfu chiwit lae chunchon lam nam mun (Mun River Villagers Committee for Rehabilitation of Life and Community) (Missingham 2003: 77). The name change reflects PER’s discourse of ecological renewal.
baht to 6.6 billion baht, they also asked Minister Niyom to look into this matter.

EGAT countered by building alliances with the other agencies implicated in these new allegations. It argued that the blasting was part of the original engineering design, intended to “improve” the river bed by deepening the channel (hence increasing discharge), and that they had secured approval from the Department of National Parks service back in 1990. The Parks Director pronounced that EGAT’s work was a legally permissible “improvement of the site.” The Director of the Archaeological Bureau countered that the project would impact only one recently-discovered site. Finally, EGAT argued that NESDB had approved the 70% budget increase to compensate for recent devaluations in the baht.

While 1992 was a year in which other civil society campaigns – notably against the forced forest resettlement scheme Kho Cho Ko – were successful, it was also year of political turmoil, which erupted in April when General Suchinda appointed himself Prime Minister (a year after the February 1991 coup which he had participated in). Suchinda resigned in late May after the army fired on street demonstrations against his regime (see 4.3.2). A good deal of NGO energy at the national level was spent opposing Suchinda.

With no support for their claims from senior civil servants, with a conservative approach to conflict management from Minister Niyom and from Prime Minister Anand's second government, the campaigns of 1992 did not break the momentum of the project, and construction proceeded. This was the immediate political context in which anti-dam activists began their campaign for assurance of state responsibility for subsequent impacts.

The new campaign for accountability began on 27 February 1993 when a hundred villagers activists travelled to various villages along the left bank of the Mun, urging villagers to join their campaign for the government to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which would commit it to take responsibility for important impacts from the dam. By March 2, activists had prepared a list of demands they wanted Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai’s government to consider in the MOU.
Table 6.3 Discursive features of debates over Pak Mun Dam, 1988–91

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporters</th>
<th>Critics and Opponents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electricity and irrigation benefits</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power: 75 MW dependable capacity</td>
<td>Investing in energy conservation through DSM alternatives would be 4x cheaper than investing in new supply, but not considered by planners (Rentschler 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy: 280.2 GWh per year output</td>
<td>Irrigation benefits depend on creation of irrigators’ groups and farmers’ willingness to pay cost of pumping (Sanan 1990 in NESDB 1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation: 45,000 rai pumped irrigation pilot scheme in Kanthararom District, Srisaket Province, producing 105.5 million baht net benefits (EGAT 1988)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Affected households | |
| Narrowly defined as households with structures and significant parcels of land under 108 m | More broadly defined, as well as fisheries-dependent households (see Table 1 and discussion above) |

<p>| Ecosystem and fisheries | |
| Flood risk will be controlled by real-time monitoring (Usher 1991e) | Dam will increase flooding, because structure will impede water even with gates fully opened (Usher 1991e) |
| Dry season inundation of Kaeng Saphue rapids avoided by EGAT’s 1990 concession to maintain water level below 105.5 m (Usher 1991e) | Ecosystem inadequately studied by EGAT (Permpongsacharoen 1991) |
| Fisheries yield 100 – 200 kg/ha/yr (without and with stocking respectively; Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 39) | Loss of rapids will harm fish populations; fish ladder will not work for many species; diversity will decline (Usher 1991g; Permpongsacharoen 1991) |
| Fish ladder will assist wild species migration problem (Usher 1991g) | |
| Low risk of schistosomiasis because of flow regime (Usher 1991h); risk to be controlled by public health surveillance (NESDB 1990) | Schistosomiasis and other parasitic diseases potentially serious problem (Permpongsacharoen 1991) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporters</th>
<th>Critics and Opponents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision-making, policy process and principles</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval legitimate because of expert diagnoses of need for electricity and selection of Pak Mun as least-cost solution</td>
<td>Approval illegitimate because no participation (Permpongsacharoen 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental destruction inevitable; must be traded off against development gains (electricity, industry, growth) and compensating local development</td>
<td>“Development” does not primarily refer to industrialization; need to safeguard natural resource base as well as archeological heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse of local sacrifice to national needs</td>
<td>Reflexiveness about Pak Mun conflict as synecdoche for conflict over future ecological outcomes and developmental benefits (Tangwisuttijit and Traisawasdichai 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Must defend local communities because offer superior livelihood options to modern mainstream development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rhetoric used to describe other faction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A minority (Bangkok Post, 1991d)</td>
<td>Project’s experts unreliable because not independent of the state (Permpongsacharoen 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t mean well to the nation (AOP Chronology, 30/1/90)</td>
<td>EGAT withholds information about impacts (AOP Chronology, May 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstruct prosperity (khwam charoen) (AOP Chronology, 30/1/90)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulated by third parties (AOP Chronology, 30/1/90)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists &amp; foreigners (Working Group to Monitor Impacts of Pak Mun Dam 1993: 97; Mitchell, interview, 7/9/04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition based on principle [as opposed to rational analysis] (Bangkok Post 1991b)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The activists’ demands covered the known and likely impacts of the project, as framed by opponents:

(1) Mapping and Surveying; Timely Notification. For EGAT to release maps and declare the precise location of the 108 meter AMSL elevation to the public and to affected people within 30 days;

(2) Compensation. For EGAT to pay compensation for loss of fixed assets including land, structures, trees which have been flooded, as determined under (1), as well as the cost of resettlement;

(3) Compensation. For affected households that need to resettle: for EGAT to build housing, and provide land including household plots and rice paddy or other cropland in appropriate areas with water supply, close to the original location; if this is not possible EGAT is to pay compensation at fair value for land loss to flooding (but not to exceed 10 rai);

(4) Fisheries. To establish a committee composed of villager representatives, the Department of Fisheries, academics nominated by villagers, and EGAT representatives, to study and survey impacts on fishing occupations during a period of project construction in the project area (from Kaeng Tana to Kaeng Saphue), to determine principles and methods of providing assistance and compensating affected individuals;

(5) Schistosomiasis. In the event schistosomiasis infections occur after construction of the dam, for EGAT to pay for medical expenses as well as expenses in solving public health problems;

(6) Dispute mediation. In event that parties to the memorandum are not satisfied with the value established for various losses under items (2) to (5), for the party disputing the value to refer the matter to a mediator and for the results of that mediation to be binding.


The anti-Dam villagers’ call for unambiguous mapping and timely notification indicates that they were still not satisfied, almost three years after construction began, with their knowledge of the scope of direct flooding impacts, to say nothing of ecological impacts.

By 2 March 1993, 500 villagers had succeeded in occupying the construction site, despite the presence of a hundred police and soldiers (WG-PMD 1993: 3). More villagers joined them, despite a barricade imposed by the police designed to stop the
demonstration from growing and to stop food supplies for reaching the protestors. However on 5 March, demonstrators successfully appealed to Suthat Nguen-meun, an Ubon MP and Assistant Minister of Interior to mediate the conflict. Suthat visited them, joined by the EGAT governor, the provincial governor and the Ubon police chief. The protesters appealed for Suthat, whom they knew from 1989 as at least not a vocal supporter of the dam, to convey their demands to Sawit Phowihok. Sawit was the new Minister in the Chuan government responsible for EGAT.

Notwithstanding assurances by Suthat that violence would not be used against them, after 9 p.m. the following night a hundred-strong counter-demonstration attacked the protestors. Sawaeng Mankhong, a former kamnan and relative of Sak Mankhong, one of the protest leaders, organized the counter-rally. Sawaeng's group had gathered nearby since 6 p.m., but were separated from the protesters by 200–300 police. At 10:30 p.m. representatives from both villager gatherings met, with Sawaeng’s group demanding that the protesters leave the site before 6 a.m. the following morning. Anti-Dam protesters apparently accepted this request, in return for Sawaeng joining their appeals to the government (ibid., 74). Apparently Sawaeng's followers rejected this agreement. Shortly afterwards, they commenced throwing stones and firing on the protesters with slingshots. Police communicated to the protesters that they were no longer able to contain Sawaeng's group. Allegations were made not only that Sawaeng's group were paid 500–1,000 baht each, but that police moved in after the attack started, to take down protestors’ tents, to smash their food supplies, and to beat up their camp guards (Buchita 1997: 62; AOP Chronology, 6 March 1993). After protesters were forced to retreat from the site, they sent a delegation of a hundred people down to Bangkok where they joined students outside Government House. There they protested the Chuan administration’s use of violence.

6.3.1 1993 Campaign for memorandum of understanding (Akhom process)

Negotiations over the draft memorandum of understanding finally began in Bangkok on 11 March 1993. This was after several days of pressure, including an emergency meeting of student organizations nationwide, teach-ins, and a three-day vigil on the streets outside Government House, maintained by a core group of 20 activist students. EGAT would not commit to opponents’ proposed language. It objected to a clause for disputes to be resolved by an independent mediator. Meetings
and negotiations took place on three of the five following days. Then on 18 March, in a meeting last almost ten hours, government representatives adopted all clauses of the opponents’ proposal, with the exception of the clause on mediation. Protesters argued that this was the most important clause, since it was the mechanism by which they could hold EGAT and the government accountable. The state however refused to budge, claiming that EGAT's legal charter did not recognize mediation (WG-PMD 1993).

The senior-most official signing the memorandum was MP Akhom Engchuan, Deputy Permanent Secretary for Political Affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister. It was also signed by Apichart Triisawatchai, Secretary to Sawit, the Minister responsible for EGAT. The 18 March 1993 agreement added language setting up a new four-party committee with various specific powers, including to advise agencies on the implementation of the agreement; to receive and assess peoples’ grievances; and to refer grievances to relevant agencies for action within a time frame specified by the committee (ibid., 70).

Despite the missing clause on mediation, the agreement was a tangible step forward toward holding the state accountable for the project. However, by the end of the second implementation meeting in late March, it was clear that EGAT and the villagers could not agree over the selection of an outside, permanent chairperson. The oppositional network criticized EGAT's nominees as having close ties to the utility. They also complained that EGAT’s rejection of their own nominees was unjustified.

By the second meeting on March 30, Akhom had apparently secured the EGAT Governor’s agreement to the committee chair (AOP Chronology, 30 March 1993). Dam proponents raised other issues. Sawaeng’s group had recently petitioned the committee, asking that they be permitted to join it. Minister Sawit advised Akhom that he favored nine kamnan (sub-district officers) to represent all villagers. Committee members from EGAT questioned the legitimacy of protestors’ representatives.

Akhom, the temporary chairperson, declared at the end of the second meeting that he had reached the limit of his mandate, and referred the matter to Minister Sawit. Within a week, 1,000 protestors gathered in a traditional community spirit ceremony (bai si su khwan) to support their representatives (ibid., 6 April 1993). However within a month of the 18 March 1993 agreement, Minister Sawit dealt the dam opponents a

74 A retired Supreme Court justice, and the Secretary-General of the Medical Council of Thailand.
stunning reversal of fortune when he flatly declined to continue the work of the committee, saying he had not “signed any agreement with anyone” (Buchita 1997: 62).

Notable parallels exist between this campaign and the 1991 campaign reviewed above. In both cases a concerted demonstration that began in Ubon was forcefully repressed, ended up in Bangkok outside Government House, and eventually led to substantive negotiations. In both cases a four-party problem-solving committee was agreed upon, and in both cases direct and tangible outcomes of the committees’ work appeared slight. Missingham (2003: 85) argues that the March 1993 agreement “came to nothing” because Sawit refused to honour it.

If we look more closely at the events that followed, however, we find that by six months later, Sawit announced the formation of a committee headed by the Ubon Governor Maitree Naiyakul. Maitree’s committee set up sixteen sub-committees to handle various grievances. If the bad news for dam opponents was that there was no villager participation, the good news was that the government had finally devolved a good deal of responsibility for handling resettlement and compensation down to an appropriate level of government. Among the sub-committees formed were those tasked to assess impacts on households (by registering complaints), to calculate compensation, and to pay it. There was also, importantly, a sub-committee to survey and study impacts on fishers.

Missingham describes village headmen asking for kickbacks to register and process compensation claims (2003: 76). On the other hand, Chanchai Sekpalangtham, at the time a village headman, recalls bowing to villagers’ persistent demands that he help them obtain household registration papers for cheap temporary structures they deliberately erected in the flooded zone to qualify for compensation (interview, 2 June 2002). Both types of interactions would have contributed to increasing tensions within local communities.

In any case, by December 1993, the state had accepted demands for a process devolved down to a set of village-level committees, with villager participation, to process residents’ grievances. This was a vast improvement over a process marred by several years of widespread mistrust over EGAT’s information base.

While a devolved process helped deliver just compensation, it was not sufficient as long as project opponents were unable to hold the state accountable for specific categories of impact. The state and protestors were particularly in dispute over
land above 108 metres elevation. EGAT initially claimed that it would pay only for earthworks to raise affected structures. Opponents objected that their homes would be surrounded by water, and after more demonstrations, prevailed in getting the state to pay the costs of moving and re-erecting those houses.

It took another very risky series of direct actions to force the government to accede to this claim: in late 1993, villagers sporadically disrupted detonation work on the river bed. EGAT’s contractor responded by continuing the work, albeit covering up some of the blasting with netting. It told protestors if anyone was killed, EGAT was prepared to pay out compensation, which would not exceed 30,000 baht per person. The state finally acceded in February 1994 (Buchita, 65-67; see Table 1 above).

To summarize the campaigns of 1993: by April, the state was initially successful in thwarting villagers’ goal of direct high-level participation in problem-solving (MP Akhom’s short-lived process). Protestors nonetheless campaigned to broaden the limited concessions offered. They achieved recognition of the need to take concrete steps to address agendas they consistently advanced. In this respect their collective action and their discursive framings had indeed influenced the state’s response, as measured by the Maitree process and its tacit acceptance of protestors’ frames for problem resolution.

In order to improve their legitimacy and reach their target constituency of elites, opponents generated intense movement media. They wrote letters and press releases. They published rebuttals (e.g., WG-PMD 1993) and organized seminars (Apaporn, interview 24/8/02). They courted media coverage. This was sympathetic in the case of the English-language press Nation and Bangkok Post, but pro-dam in Ubon’s provincial media and large circulation Thai-language papers, such as Thai Rath. Decision makers such as Minister Sawit and the EGAT Governor had their own network of information sources: they were kept informed of the ebb and flow of local protest dynamics by EGAT field staff, as well as Ministry of Interior line staff, including village headmen and police (Achakulwisut 1991).

6.4 Analysis

Using key aspects of the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2, I reflect on direct and indirect outcomes of five years of contention, 1989–93. First, what effects did state practices and actions have on civil society?
6.4.1 Dam opponents’ response to state actions

The public sphere so vital to voicing opposition had distinctly increased during the 1980s. Yet the state’s predominant response to calls from civil society for a more deliberative process was notable for its aloofness. This combination of increased tolerance for speaking out, on the one hand, and institutional aloofness on the other, meant that Thai people had both cause and opportunity to articulate their grievances publicly (cf. Kitschelt 1986). As we saw in Chapter 4, they did so more and more readily during the 1980s and especially the 1990s. NGOs sensed that EGAT’s application for World Bank financing of Pak Mun generated opportunities to amplify their concerns internationally, and to mobilize transnational opposition (Hubbel 1992; cf. Keck and Sikkink 1998).75

As in many other cases, Thai NGOs stepped in to help villagers publicize their grievances. NGO narrative work cast the problem in terms they had developed from work begun in the late 1960s (see Chapter 4). We can identify two basic components: first, a “community culture” frame portrayed the village economy as inherently superior to dependent capitalist development (Phongpaichit and Baker 1995: 387) and by extension, defended the need to protect the common natural resource base of local people against the resource-grabbing state. The community culture school blended Marxist dependency theory with a non-Marxist celebration of a traditional Thai village economy and culture. In the case of the Mun river, the key resources this framing defended were the most fertile farmland, wild-capture fisheries, and natural tourist attractions (Ladawan et al. 1993: appendix 1, 4–6).

Second, NGOs presented an injustice narrative. The state trampled over what activists saw as basic rights such as transparent information provision and participation in project planning. Opponents complained vocally about the state’s closed practices, its lack of reliable information, and at times, its arrogant handling of public meetings. They decried plans to resettle inundated farmers on land with less secure titles (ibid., 4).

Missingham asks how villagers’ opposition emerged and sustained itself (2003: 65–96). He gives much weight to the strength and efficacy of a democratic network-structure in which NGOs played a key leadership function. However, internal

75 In addition to its longstanding role articulating Thai post-WWII development policy (see Chapter 4), the Bank has been a significant lender to Thai energy projects, though not always the majority financier (Chapter 5). In the eyes of commercial banks, the Bank’s various project review processes reduce political risk. Associated with Bank project
social movement structures were not the only cause of sustained mobilization. The events 1989–94 suggest that one important reason people kept on challenging the state’s handling of Pak Mun was that the state persistently responded with a *mixture of concession and repression*. Concessions made during Anand’s government needed to fought for again during the subsequent Chuan administration. Chuan’s government first granted these concessions in the form of the MOU that established Akhom’s committee, but later revoked them when senior decision-makers like Sawit perceived they were too threatening. This tantalizing and, no doubt, frustrating dance of concession and denial – in no way planned or perceived by the state – had the consequence of spurring opponents to keep struggling.

6.4.2 Response of state to dam opponents

What important effects did activists’ action have on the state? The collective action that emerged was perceived as very threatening to established notions of political order. Many of the state's immediate responses were repressive. First, consider how the state framed the identity of dam opponents. People who distributed leaflets, wrote letters, and attended demonstrations were occasionally branded communists by the police. Mitchell, the PER worker, had his picture taken by an EGAT public relations officer while sitting in a village shop, and subsequently appear in a newspaper identified as a “foreign communist” (interview, 7/9/04).

Apilas Osathanond, Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister claimed opponents were in the five percent minority and “paid” (*Bangkok Post, 1991d*). Even a moderate conservative like Niyom classified the protestors into three groups:

(1) Authentic local people with concerns about inundation. Almost all in this group however lived above 108 m [the limit of flooding declared by EGAT];
(2) Students and the media, whose perspective was that the project would provide benefits if peoples’ problems could be resolved;
(3) Other opponents, whose one purpose was to halt the dam, just as they did with Nam Choan and attempted with Rachaprapha. (Niyom, interview 21/10/04)

The former Minister’s rhetoric suppresses, first, any sense that the project had
critical flaws, and second, that the concerns of the “other opponents” – which included the NGOs – were rational or legitimate. In a similar vein, World Bank country director Philip Annez complained in a press release that "NGOs in general represented a movement to stop in principle the construction of dams" (Bangkok Post 1991b).

Rationality for Annez and Niyom consisted of opposing projects on a case-by-case basis, not in principle. In other words, to be principled in this context meant to be irrational. Ironically, Niyom complained about the limits of rationality when I interviewed him. The discourse of rationality regulates both ordinary subjects and elites.\(^\text{76}\)

A second dimension of repression was state-owned radio and television coverage that failed to report on anti-dam activism, and consistently reported favourably on public meetings in Ubon. Provincial media gave the project favourable coverage (Arthit, interview 2/7/02).\(^\text{77}\) A third dimension of repression was the mobilization of local support for the dam. EGAT and the state instructed local leaders to speak out in favour of the dam, and to strongly discourage villagers from voicing dissent (Missingham 2003: 73–76). Opponents alleged that EGAT gave incentives to certain local leaders, such as former kamnan Sawaeng, to organize villagers in pro-dam rallies and confrontations with anti-dam protestors, which occasionally turned violent (WG-PMD 1993: 84).

**Impacts and consequences of protest**

The impact of the civil society opposition campaign during this period was limited. The Chatichai government pressed ahead in 1989–91; the Anand/NPKC government did not halt construction in 1991–92 when the dam was less than ten percent complete. Some World Bank directors did vote against the project in late 1991, but not a majority. In 1993, Chuan’s Minister Sawit reversed hard-won gains when he withdrew support for the Akhom committee. Akhom’s MSP was unfolding in a manner that proved more empowering to dam opponents than Sawit was willing to tolerate (see Section 6.3.1).

A second assessment is that early discursive concessions underpinned subsequent campaigns. Despite encountering various types of repression, opponents

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\(^{76}\) To the extent that a discourse equates principled action with irrationality, it is antagonistic to the “precautionary principle” and many other norms.

\(^{77}\) Chapter 7 provides more analysis of media coverage.
opened up a variety of spaces for debate, and notable concessions were made. The Anand I and Chuan governments, under pressure, set up review committees. Minister Niyom’s 1991 committee did two things. It validated protestors’ claims that EGAT was not handling Pak Mun as transparently as they and the Anand government desired. As well, Niyom’s process helped legitimate the notion of problem-solving committees with ordinary villagers participation.\textsuperscript{78}

The cancellation of Akhom’s 1993 committee under Chuan is evidence of the fragility of the spaces opened up. However, opponents eventually generated real gains out of these ostensible failures. The 1993 campaigns to expand recognition of affected households built directly on the micro-discursive concessions won in Niyom’s Committee in 1991. In 1994, moreover, land and household compensation was under way, with representation at the village level.

We can recognize the concessions won without overstating the point. Dam opponents did not unseat dominant discourses of mainstream development, nor did they succeed in defeating pragmatic arguments, such as the project had already been approved, construction had started, so therefore the dam must proceed. Of the three governments during this period, the Anand I government came closest to halting the project, as revealed in my interview with former Minister Niyom. As an analyst, he indeed took a fresh look at the case (Section 6.2.3). However, as an individual within a pro-development government, any private doubts he had were soon quelled by proponents’ arguments that the project was necessary, that its impacts could be successfully mitigated,\textsuperscript{79} as well as by his own discourse of rational decision making.

In light of this discursive and institutional context, the fact that activists successfully forced the state to recognize broader categories of people was a very important outcome. It delivered collective benefits to those otherwise invisible to the state (cf. Amenta and Young 1999; Scott 1998).

**Indirect impacts**

Protest against Pak Mun also produced indirect impacts and unanticipated consequences. The mobilization of pro-dam villagers frequently led to violent

\textsuperscript{78} The World Bank also recommended, a week after their meetings in Bangkok and Ubon, that the Anand government establish an independent panel to monitor and assess the impacts of the project (Natio 1991c). The recommendation was not taken up.

\textsuperscript{79} In September, Bank head of mission Annez defended Pak Mun as “innocuous” to the environment (Bangkok Post, 20 September 1991).
encounters. Displacing protesters from a given site could trigger sympathetic media coverage. The protesters’ non-violent forms of contention, when met with violence, tended to generate social movement and media frames of innocent and displaced victims, which governments subsequently had trouble dismissing. This pattern should not be read as meaning that anti-dam activists consciously acted to provoke violent confrontations that would play in their favour. When villagers protested river bed detonation, however, they were probing the boundary between drama and real danger.

A second unanticipated outcome was that fisheries issues expanded. Fisheries impacts had been on the agenda since 1991, but were only beginning to be processed by one of Governor Maitree’s subcommittees in late 1993. At this time, Maliwan and Pho Siang, two protest leaders, emerged from jail to demand that the state pay fisheries compensation of 35,000 baht per household, for each year of the three-year construction (Buchita 1997: 65; see Chapter 7).

A third indirect outcome of Pak Mun’s implementation was to divide local communities. As Chanchai, a former village headman tells it, generous compensation divided local people, between people whose land or structures would be inundated, and those not. Chanchai is now the kamnan in a locale close to Pak Mun Dam, and a longstanding opponent of the anti-dam movement. He describes himself as someone appointed to every local committee set up by the state to examine contention over Pak Mun (interview, 12/11/05). Here is how Chanchai remembers the pre-operation phase of the Pak Mun conflict:

Land [around here] was cheap before the compensation process, because it wasn’t great paddy land. It was worth only about 500 baht per rai, it would flood almost every year. The state announced it would compensate at 35,000 baht per rai (up to 10 rai) and would provide another 10 rai of land. It would compensate trees on flooded land, and structures. This led to envy. People were divided into two factions: those getting impacts, and those not. Everyone wanted to receive flooding impacts. The protestors joined [the anti-dam rallies] out of envy. “Nam ko tong thuam khoi bang (the water has to flood me as well).” People tend to be jealous of each other. Siblings (phi nong) were quarrelling. There was conflict in practically every village. They came in to see their kamnan and village headmen [and] Maliwan came in to intervene against the dam. (Interviews 12/11/05; 2/6/02; Chanchai, n.d.)

In subsequent years these divisions and pressures for a wider distribution of compensation benefits proved to be a great challenge to local authorities. How

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80 Maliwan and Siang were charged with offenses related to the early 1993 construction-site occupation and released on bail.
Chanchai met that challenge is taken up in Chapter 7.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter described and analysed patterns of contention between state actors and civil society opponents over Pak Mun Dam, during the pre-operational period. The state's responses to the strategic actions of its opponents ranged from repression, to negotiation leading to concessions. Some significant concessions appear to have been triggered by a desire to reduce contention, following unanticipated episodes of violence. Tangible outcomes included recognition of a broader range of affected people (Table 6.2). Important, but less obvious outcomes included episodic acceptance of villager participation, and a negotiated text setting a standard of downward accountability (the Akhom agreement). By late 1993, a discourse to hold the state explicitly accountable for impacts on fisheries also emerged, along with a new round of collective action.

More broadly speaking, the indirect outcome of contention during this period was sustained collective action. It was fuelled on the one hand by the state’s practice of mixing ongoing repression with sporadic concession, and, on the other hand, by expectations for participation and responsible governance raised by concessions. Activist’s attempts to change discourses did not change institutions of project planning and governance. Would they do so in the years after 1994? Before turning to that question in Chapter 7, I want to briefly discuss a rival explanation for why the state’s response to civil society movements shifts.

Some analysts of Thai politics argue that a regime’s “strength” is the most important determinant of the state’s response to civil society campaigns (Lertchoosakul 2003; Chalermsripinyorat, 2002). A proponent of this type of explanation would argue that the elected Chatichai (1988–91) and Chuan I (1992–95) governments made fewer concessions than the Anand/NPKC junta governments (1991–92) because the former, as elected governments, perceived themselves to have more legitimacy.

This explanation views government authority, as opposed to political institutions, or discourse, as the source of policy change. While it may be plausible in a broad sense, and attractive because of its simplicity, it has a number of difficulties. First, it is static and ignores the emergent nature of the conflict. The emergent nature of Pak Mun began with the gathering momentum of the construction, defensive
collective action, and important shifts in problem-definition and agendas that resulted from contentious interaction.

Second, a regime strength account does not explicitly explain important findings presented here:

- Volatile preferences of decision makers (Minister Niyom in 1991; dissenting World Bank Executive Directors in 1991; Minister Sawit in 1993)
- The perceived importance of upholding institutions (Niyom; advisor Ekachai in 1989–90)
- The role of discourse as the medium in which advocacy and repression were processed (Table 6.3)

In order to better understanding the causal powers and liabilities of interests, institutions, and discourses – the conceptual framework I introduced in Chapters 2 and 3 – the next chapter continues our exploration of the Pak Mun conflict. As we learn more about state–civil society interaction over the fifteen-year trajectory, we will test the more complete findings against my framework and alternate explanations.

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81 A causal liability is a susceptibility to be acted on by other causal objects. See Chapter 3.
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7.1 Introduction

This chapter charts the continuing course of the Pak Mun Dam conflict from 1994 to 2003. As in Chapter 6, I identify episodes and outcomes of contentious interaction, and isolate certain key decisions for further analysis. The period is rich in contention, concessions, reversals, and plot shifts (Table 7.1). I provide a detailed narrative. Building on that, using the conceptual framework advanced in this thesis, I offer an explanation of decision-making in the period after Thailand’s financial crisis. I focus on events leading up to a four-month seasonal Dam opening decision, made in late 2002 by the Thaksin administration.

In Chapter 6, we saw that by sustaining collective action, civil society actors engaged in contentious interaction with the state, and won important concessions. I identified two plausible mechanisms involved in those outcomes: (1) deliberative processes that changed problem definitions and solutions, and (2) conciliatory openings offered by elites, after peak protest events or unexpected episodes of violence. In addition, I argued that institutions and institutionalized discourses constrained decision-making.

This chapter argues that as collective action continued after the economic crisis that erupted in 1997 and intensified in risky direct actions three years later, EGAT engaged in more diverse struggles over problem definition. Policymakers acted to uphold and change institutions. The four-month-opening decision made by the Thaksin government is an example of institutional change, one partly created by deliberative mechanisms that allowed elites to revise their preferences. Creative and well-placed individuals voiced new discourses and pushed against the boundaries of important institutions. To understand how, we need an approach sensitive to argumentative and dialogic interaction.
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Actions (civil society actions in italics)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Events under Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai (September 1992–July 1995):</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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| 1994 | June – Dam commissioned, impoundment begins, fish pass completed.  
April–June – **Rallies in Bangkok;**  
October – Beginning of “157-day” rally: 2,000 villagers launch protest over fair fishing livelihood compensation at Ubon Provincial Hall; after two weeks march to dam site.  
December – 300 villagers affected by Sirindhorn dam march to join Pak Mun rally, demanding compensation for the earlier project. |
| 1995 | January – New consensus-based participatory fisheries compensation committee (CAODFF), chaired by DOF Director Plodprasop Suraswadi;  
**March – Govt. agrees to pay for 3 years’ lost fishing income; 157-day rally ends (23/3/95).**  
May–November – CAODFF examines 4,530 applications for compensation and approves 2,932;  
June – Cabinet makes first round of payment made to 571 households; Pak Mun Villagers’ Agricultural Cooperative formed to hold 2/3 of compensation money.  
May – Chuan dissolves parliament amidst corruption scandal.  
July – Banharn’s Chart Thai wins elections. |
|      | **Events under Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa (July 1995–November 1996):** |
| 1995 | December – Assembly of the Poor announces Mun River Declaration; 600 rally to present sustainable development manifesto to ASEAN summit leaders in Bangkok. |
| 1996 | **March – AOP stages multi-issue farmers’ rally with up to 12,000 people;**  
April – Government agrees to all demands. Participatory committee set up with PM Banharn as chair.  
May – DOF begins fish stocking at Pak Mun (World Bank funded program).  
[Sirindhorn Dam villagers’ movement for retroactive compensation grows to 2500 households.]  
September – Banharn’s coalition government collapses.  
November – Chavalit’s New Aspiration Party wins elections. |
(Table 7.1 continued)

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Actions (civil society actions in italics)</th>
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<td><strong>Events under Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh</strong> (November 1997–November 1996):</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td><strong>January</strong> – AOP begins “99–day” multi-issue rally;</td>
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<td><strong>April</strong> – Government agrees to pay perpetual fisheries compensation for 3,080 Pak Mun fishermen (29/4/97)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>July – Financial crisis erupts; Chavalit devalues baht.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>September – First fish stocking program ends at Pak Mun.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>November</strong> – Chavalit resigns; Chuan assumes Prime Ministership</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Events under Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai</strong> (November 1996–February 2001):</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td><strong>April</strong> – Chuan’s second government refuses to honor Chavalit’s resolution of 29/4/97</td>
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<td></td>
<td>July – Thaksin Shinawatra launches Thai Rak Thai party</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td><strong>March</strong> – Movement changes demands: “bring nature back”; builds protest village in park adjacent to Pak Mun Dam</td>
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<td>Late 1999 – WCD multi-stakeholder process begins</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>March – World Commission on Dams draft report criticizes dam’s performance;</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>May</strong> – AOP villagers occupy Pak Mun and Rasi Salai dams;</td>
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<td>June – Government establishes “Neutral” problem solving committee (Bantorn Committee);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>July – Neutral Committee proposes four-month trial opening with local university to study social, economic, and ecological impacts; Chuan declines;</td>
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<td><strong>July</strong> – AOP villagers scale walls of Government House resulting in mass arrests.</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>January – Thai Rak Thai wins national elections.</td>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Actions (civil society actions in italics)</th>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Events under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (first term: February 2001–February 2005):</strong></td>
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</table>
| 2001 | April – Thaksin government accepts trial opening; commissions Ubon Ratchathani University (UBU) study;  
June – UBU begins study.  
[December 2001 – State agrees to televised debate with Bo Nok/Hin Krud power plant opponents.] |
| 2002 | June – EGAT governor Chalermchai Ratanarak offers to open Dam gates four months a year;  
September – Pongpol committee votes for four month seasonal opening;  
October – Cabinet resolution ratifies Pongpol decision.  
Late 2002 – UBU Pak Mun study submits interim and final conclusions; Tai Baan research project completed.  
[Late 2002 – Tensions between protestors encamped in Songkhla to protest Thai – Malay natural gas pipeline.]  
December – PM Thaksin chairs roundtable with academics and anti-Dam villagers. |
| 2003 | January – Thaksin govt. re-confirms final decision: four month seasonal opening (14/1/03); Bangkok governor evicts 500 demonstrators (29/1/03).  
March – Ministry of Agriculture announces fish-stocking and irrigation investments. |

Principal sources: Amornsakchai et al. (2000); AOP (2002); Missingham (2003).

7.2 Post-operational contention

7.2.1 The 157-day rally: campaign for interim fisheries compensation, 1994–1995

In February 1994, anti-Dam villagers, after staging more sit-in protests aimed at obstructing construction, were able to negotiate agreements regarding remaining resettlement and land-based asset compensations cases to their satisfaction (Buchita 1997; Amornsakchai et al. 2000: 74). As the dry season of 1993–94 ended, EGAT wrapped up construction, and installed the first generator. As villagers observed the
dam receive its final touches and knew that impoundment would begin in June 1994, the issue of compensation for impacts to fisheries-dependent livelihoods remained ambiguous (Buchita, 67). In April 1994, there had not been a concrete offer regarding compensation from Governor Maitree’s fisheries sub-committee.

Activist villagers staged another two-week long dry-season demonstration in Bangkok, calling for Minister Sawit to assume responsibility. Prime Minister Chuan declared that Bangkok-based officials had no authority to deal with their claims – Governor Maitree was handling them. Chuan did promise to request that Maitree’s committee meet again soon. However, at its next meeting on 6 May, Maitree’s committee expressed the view that acceding to the villagers would invite a never-ending series of compensation claims (Buchita 1997: 69).

In addition to demanding that police drop charges against Maliwan and Siang, two protest leaders, the villagers demonstrating in Bangkok again demanded that the state pay fisheries compensation for the three-year construction project (Buchita, 65). A few days after this, the protestors staged a mock funeral of six Democrat Party MPs (presumably undutiful patrons) and scattered their ashes on the Chao Phraya River in frustration. Dr. Sawit, the Minister, declared that having established a committee with full authority to resolve villagers’ problems, he had discharged his duties. He would repeat this refrain five months later, when a much larger sit-in rally gathered outside Ubon’s Provincial Hall. Governor Maitree stated by contrast that “the committee has given assistance to its maximum extent, as Chair I am not able to do more, as Sawit was the person establishing . . . the [composition of the] committee” (ibid., 70).

Contemporary observers interpreted Sawit’s acts as a deliberate case of avoiding responsibility – what in Thai is called “tossing the drum” (yon klong) and of course in English, “passing the buck” (ibid., 67). In this case, tossing the drum was a double dispatch: first from Sawit’s own office, and second to subordinates with known restricted powers. There the problem supposedly would rest. The dispatch worked because civil servants from various government departments shared a view of the protestors as dangerous, as pushing a wedge of demands that would undermine political order.

By June 1994, Maitree’s committee proposed to pay fisheries compensation on a graduated basis. Fishermen living nearest the dam would get up to 90,000 baht,
while those living in the most distant zone, around Kaeng Saphue upstream, would get only 15 baht. In October 1994, at the beginning of the post-monsoon dry season, these events and tensions were the immediate context in which the Mun River Villagers’ Committee (MRVC), the organization at the centre of the oppositional network, launched a fresh campaign. Calling on the state to compensate for three years’ lost fisheries income was the centrepiece of this campaign.

On 18 October 1994, about 2,000 villagers gathered at Ubon provincial hall to press their claims for the 105,000 baht compensation (100 baht per day for three years the dam was constructed). This they argued was a conservative estimate of the average daily value of a fishing household’s catch (Tongcharoen 1994; Missingham 2003: 87). In addition they demanded:

- Ten rai [1.6 hectares] of land per household for landless fishermen [a minority of the demonstrators];
- Changes to the “unjust” eligibility criteria for compensation;
- Termination of the existing fisheries sub-committee in favour of a new committee half-comprised of their representatives, with a clear and decisive problem-solving mandate. (AOP Chronology, 14 October 1994)

On the tenth day of their rally in the grounds of the Ubon provincial hall, villagers led by Pho Siang joined negotiations resulting in a lump-sum offer of 10,000 baht. The 500 protesters still demonstrating considered this amount unacceptably low, and announced a march to the dam almost 80 kilometres away. A plan had been formed by that time to demonstrate as close to the dam wall as possible. When the protesters finally reached the vicinity of the dam, they issued an ultimatum to the government to address their demands or otherwise face "decisive action." After waiting three days without any response, they walked a final eight kilometres into the dam site, cut through a barbed wire fence, and staged their demonstration right beside a final barricade EGAT had set up. The protesters settled in for a long demonstration, set up meeting spaces and a classroom for children, and began to work on marketable handicrafts in their spare time (AOP Chronology, 12 December 1994; Missingham 2003: 90). Several weeks later, a contingent of about 300 villagers seeking compensation over impacts from nearby Sirindhorn Dam (completed 1971) joined

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83 See Section 6.3, footnote 16
In late January 1995, the government announced the formation of a new Committee, in which villagers and academic representatives would also participate, to be managed by consensus. Dr. Plodprasop Surasawadi, Director of the Department of Fisheries (DOF), chaired the committee. By this time, Korn Tapparangsri, leader of Chart Pattana, one of Chuan’s coalition partners, had become Minister responsible for EGAT. Almost eight weeks later, the new committee and the new Minister reached an agreement with villagers to pay 90,000 baht, almost all of the compensation originally demanded; and the rally dispersed.

**Analysis**

The October 1994–March 1995 demonstration was large, prompted allies to intervene in Bangkok, and eventually induced concessions from the government. Disagreements over conflict management also created noticeable divisions within and between branches of government. Importantly, it spurred local leaders (kamnan and village headmen) to form a new group to oppose the anti-Dam movement. This section expands these points.

**Scale and minimization of violence**

In terms of its duration and number of participants, the 157-day\(^{84}\) rally was by far the largest protest action against Pak Mun Dam taken to date. The scale of the event was a function of the material stakes and of the state’s tolerance of the demonstration. Remarkably, there appears to have been only one significant incident of violence during the long demonstration. This occurred on 3 December 1994 when police with batons charged a procession of two hundred villagers from Sirindhorn district attempting to join the main demonstration, arresting 14 demonstrators and injuring many others (Buchita 1997: 75).\(^{85}\) In addition, there were a number of repressive acts, including arrest warrants issued for 13 protest leaders on charges of trespassing and property damage, and a very large pro-dam rally organized with help from kamnan and village headmen (Matichon 1994).

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\(^{84}\) Remembered by activists as the “five-month, nine day” demonstration.

\(^{85}\) Mobilization over Sirindhorn Dam (completed 1966) was assisted by Pak Mun activists. Villagers with longstanding but repressed grievances began to protest inadequate resettlement and compensation provisions.
Overall, however, the state allowed the protesters to demonstrate for more than four months next to the dam. One possible interpretation of this important concession is that the state had learnt, after the clash with Sirindhorn villagers, that any violence against Pak Mun demonstrators would lead to a media backlash. According to Praphat (1998), Prime Minister Chuan regarded civil disobedience as fundamentally illegitimate. Elected representatives should handle all political problems. Chuan expected local state agents to keep politically assertive villagers in their place; and this they did directly, by breaking up demonstrations, or indirectly through organizing mop chon mop, hostile counter-demonstrations (1998: 123–124). On the other hand, by this time, the unacceptability of police and military action against innocent people was an entrenched frame in the Thai mass media. Although many state agents and bystanders thought the Pak Mun villagers were anything but political innocents, the latter portrayed their struggle as non-violent, minimally disruptive to bystanders in the public, dignified and deliberate, in short, a legitimate struggle for justice from the state. This helped avoid the worst of the repression.86

Third-party intervention

A variety of third parties sympathetic to anti-Dam villagers attempted to intervene in the conflict. For instance, nine days after the rally began, a delegation from the Students Federation of Thailand met with the Prime Minister. They criticized Sawit, the EGAT Minister, for going overseas on holidays and not taking responsibility. They appealed for Prime Minister Chuan to take courage in resolving the problem. Chuan responded by summoning EGAT senior management to meet with him. He referred again to the Governor's problem-solving committee and chided unspecified “senior people” (phu yai) in EGAT for “not paying as much attention to the matter as they should” (AOP Chronology, 22 October 1994).

Two weeks after the rally began, the House of Representatives Committee on Justice and Human Rights also intervened, responding to protesters’ appeals on the fairness of the “nine baht a day” compensation payment. Chairman Nipon Visithyuthasat noted the Committee’s prior site visit (in 1993) and recommendations submitted to the government. Nipon said he “did not understand what the government

86 Pak Mun demonstrators made frequent use of ceremony and ritual (Missingham 2003: 81, 95). Praphat (1998: 125) argues that Chuan’s second government (November 1997–February 2001) was no different from his first
was doing in letting the problem drag on until today” (ibid., 28 October 1994). A few days later, the Committee criticized the state's compensation proposal, and undertook to submit its proposals directly to Chuan, bypassing Sawit, whom it noted had declined several invitations to appear before it (ibid., 3 November 1994).

Academics also intervened. On 1 December, during a well-attended seminar at Chulalongkorn University, a number of academics criticized the state's social and environmental impact assessments. While this was nothing new, the fact that some 2,000 protesters were gathered at the dam site served to increase the credibility of their cause and, perhaps for EGAT and Sawit, the urgency of the situation. This time, the Minister did make an appearance, and announced a "long-term compensation fund” (ibid., 1 December 1994). Academics also met privately with Sawit to urge the formation of a new committee process with villager participation, helping legitimize that particular demand (Buchita 1997: 76).

Media coverage

During the 157-day demonstration, seventeen Thai language news periodicals published a total of 168 stories, according to Matichon’s news clipping service. I reviewed their headlines and analysed the 28 stories published during the final month of the rally. Overall, the more serious broadsheets such as Phuchatkan Rai Wan, Krungthep Thurakit, and Matichon provided detailed and sympathetic media coverage, whereas high-circulation papers such as Thai Rath (a predominantly conservative daily) published only four articles during the entire event. Some Thai Rath coverage was hostile enough for the protesters to issue a press release condemning its reporter (AOP Chronology, 14 November 1994).

Conflict management practices

PM Chuan appears to have genuinely intended to delegate authority to Minister Sawit, to EGAT, and to the Provincial problem-solving Committee. Sawit for his part repeatedly cited the authority of the Provincial Committee. While this design had some of the trappings of good governance, it was more accurately a rationalization

(September 1992–July 1995) in its conflict management. However, the Assembly’s largely non-violent occupations at Pak Mun, Rasi Salai, and elsewhere in 2000 contradicts this bleak reading. See Section 7.2.5.

87 http://www.matichon.net/. I examined a hard copy version at Ubon Ratchathani University.
for the media.

Faced with a determined and concerted protest campaign, actors in the executive branch divided over how to handle the claims. Sutat Ngoen-muen, the Ubon Member of Parliament and former Cabinet member, stated on 26 October that PM Chuan was worried about EGAT's lack of response to the demonstrators. Minister Sawit was repeatedly criticized by students and others for avoiding responsibility. He denied these allegations, saying he was not "fleeing the problem," but did not agree that a minister must personally resolve local problems:

"Such travel] is not a minister's duties . . . after completing the construction it isn’t as if [we] will abandon the villagers . . . [I] have already ordered EGAT and the committee to take care [of the problem]. (AOP Chronology, 26 October 1994)

As we noted above however, the committee chaired by the provincial governor had limited power. In fact, Nithisak Rachaphit, who succeeded Maitree as Ubon Governor in early 1994, disclosed during a radio interview that “the power that Minister Sawit delegated did not include specific power in budgetary matters, therefore the true power should be with the EGAT Governor or Minister Sawit, I’m like a postal carrier only” (ibid., 18 October 1994). I interpret this disclosure as a sign of the Governor's frustration at the Minister's “drum tossing” tactic. If tossing the drum had some initial advantages for superiors wishing to avoid making difficult choices, by this time it was beginning to backfire as the subordinate agents began to break ranks. Divisions among elites in the executive branch indirectly helped the protesters’ cause during this campaign, in part because different state actors had come to fault each other, instead of only the villagers.

The state attempted to diffuse conflict by making concessions. Early during the 157-day rally, the government announced that it would begin distributing the interim fisheries compensation (by its rates), and for villagers to obtain their disbursements within 30 days at district offices. Some 400 out of 2,100 protesters opted for these payments. In addition, in December, after almost three weeks of rallying at the dam site, the demonstrators were offered fish ponds by Plodprasop Suraswadi, director of the Royal Fisheries Department. The EGAT Governor also offered a longer-term mitigation fund.

Another concession was a 92-metre-long fish pass installed after construction began. DOF first proposed a fish pass as mitigation for Pak Mun in the mid-1980s,
during the preparation of revised feasibility studies (Usher 1991g). However EGAT instead believed that higher fisheries yields could be obtained by reservoir stocking (EGAT 1988). The fish pass was again suggested as mitigation for the dam’s impacts by the World Bank (by 1991). After dam opponents had begun campaigning for fisheries compensation, EGAT began promoting the fish pass in 1994.

The fish pass was controversial even before construction. Dr. Tyson Roberts, an outspoken fisheries biologist who began fieldwork in Thailand in the early 1970s, criticised it as a means of mitigation in 1991 (Usher 1991g). He argued that significant ecological change would result from altered flow regimes. Such change rendered the notion of mitigating Pak Mun Dam’s impact by using a fish pass unlikely (Roberts 1993). 88 In December 1994, protesters welcomed EGAT and DOF’s fisheries and livelihood concessions. They also clearly rejected them as substitutes for the 105,000 baht compensation they sought (AOP Chronology, 1–13 December 1994).

Conflict resolution

On their side the protesters had sympathetic allies, tolerance of their non-violent protest, divided elites, and early concessions made by their opponents. They also had large numbers and media interest, particularly at the beginning of rallies, counter-rallies, and other dramatic points in the 157-day protest, such as their occupation of the left side of the dam (Thai Rath, 1994). As well, the protesters also had in their favour a large concurrent farmers’ rally staged by the Assembly of Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast (ASFN). As reviewed in Chapter 4, ASFN had a broad agenda. It took on grievances ranging from chronic farm debt to justice for those impacted by large state projects, such as forest reserves and dams (including by this time Pak Mun and Sirindhorn). ASFN made regular use of demonstration marches. 89

The above factors weighed in their favour, sustaining mobilization, but were not sufficient to win a final compensation settlement of 90,000 baht. What appears to have tipped the scales in their balance was firstly PM Chuan’s replacement of Sawit (a fellow Democrat) by Korn (head of Chat Phatthana, a junior coalition member). 90

88 Roberts subsequently concluded that the fish pass had failed as a mitigation device (Roberts 2001).
89 It staged rallies at Lamthakong plain, near the entrance to the final pass down to the Chao Phraya plain, in the dry season at the beginning of 1994, 1995, and 1996.
90 Chat Phatthana (founded by Chatichai Choonhavan), drew most of its electoral support from the Northeast, unlike the Democrats (Phongpaichit and Baker 2004: 89).
the new Minister responsible for EGAT, Korn moved decisively in January to re-open secret negotiations with the Mun river demonstrators, bypassing Governor Nithisak’s committee altogether (Phuchatkan Rai Wan 1995). The press interpreted Korn’s more participatory style as an implicit challenge to the Democrats’ model of devolved conflict management (Krungthep Thurakit 1995).

The second factor was Korn’s acceptance of activists’ demands for a new consensus-based, multi-stakeholder committee. The new committee featured academics such as Somkiat Pongphaiboon and Dr. Bantorn Orndam, both seasoned social activists and articulate allies of villagers’ movements.

A third factor securing a favourable fisheries settlement was action taken by Dr. Plodprasop Suraswadi. Plodprasop chaired the new negotiating committee91 approved by Minister Korn. As head of DOF (1989–97) he found himself in conflict with EGAT in 1992, after a large industrial spill occurred upstream in the Chi river, resulting in large fish kills. DOF wanted EGAT to halt construction of Pak Mun Dam, so that fish from the Mekong could re-populate the Chi unimpeded (Roberts 1993: 122). While EGAT was building Pak Mun, Plodprasop spoke out “unequivocally” against the Dam and its fisheries impacts (ibid., 106).

Plodprasop had made a brilliant career, obtaining a Ph.D. in Ecology at the University of Manitoba on a Thai government scholarship, subsequently returning to DOF and rising to head the agency at age 44. It is plausible that, as an ambitious civil servant, he wanted to deliver results for the Pak Mun villagers in order to further his own career.92 Plodprasop’s committee, the CAODFF, resolved after its first meeting to recommend a 90,000 baht compensation payment for eligible fishers. Plodprasop declared to waiting villagers, “I give you a gentleman’s promise that I will convey the results of this meeting to responsible parties, for them to have as much compassion to villagers as they’re able to.” He viewed this mission as requiring him to personally convey his committee’s resolutions to Korn, Chuan, and the EGAT Board (Wichian 1995b). In a television show several years later, referring to his role in negotiating the agreement that ended the 157-day protest, Plodprasop claimed that “Pak Mun got its generators running because of me” (EGAT 2001a: 8).

91 Committee on Assistance and Occupational Development for Fisher-Farmers (CAODFF).
92 Plodprasop subsequently headed the RFD (1999–2002), during which time he helped the second Chuan government (1997–2001) implement aggressive policies against small farmers occupying forest reserves (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000: 147).
Emergence of conservative political action

The events described above formed the proximate context for the emergence in the latter half of 1994 of a new pro-Dam political group formed by kamnan Chanchai, the local leader introduced in Section 6.3.2. Chanchai told me that he formed the Klum Kamnan Phu Yai Ban Sam Amphoe (Three Districts Kamnan and Village Headmen’s Group; henceforth, “KVHG”) out of a sense of frustration with the political current in local communities.

At the time, there was a rush among villagers mobilized by the Mun River Villagers’ Committee to register for interim fisheries compensation. The eligibility test was easy to pass: villagers were asked to show they knew how to use one type of fishing gear, and to recite the names of common fish species. Although these applications for compensation also required villagers to obtain signatures from village headmen, no local leader eventually dared refuse. “They did it to survive, they went with the flow” said Chanchai. “Some headmen were voted out by a majority vote.”

Chanchai however felt loyal to the “eighty percent” of villagers who still respected their leaders, villagers who found the protestors’ behaviour outrageous. Chanchai remembers the protestors as aggressive, wilful, rude, and lacking morality. “If they felt like blocking a road to demonstrate, or a district office, they just did it.” After canvassing the opinions of his peers in three districts, he called a meeting, which was quite well attended. His peers felt the same way. They were increasingly viewed as having lost their touch (mot nam ya) by villagers, and were none too happy about their fallen status.

Chanchai was voted chairman of this group. “We already had a local leaders’ association (samakom), already had a club (chomrom). We wanted to join together as a group (klum).” The district officers and the governor were supportive, as were senior EGAT management. “They gave me a green light,” said Chanchai (interview, 12/11/05).

Thus the KVHG emerged. Originated by grassroots local officials, with tacit state support, and lacking a broad change agenda, it was more a political network than a conservative social movement. Its primary objective was to dissuade villagers from joining anti-Dam action. The KVHG did this by making claims on behalf of villagers
who stayed out of protests. For instance, it organized the interim fisheries compensation of more than 2,000 villagers, without their having to join any of the anti-Dam campaigns. The rationale was that whatever claims the anti-Dam protestors established would be extended to other fishing households on equity principles.

Table 7.2 Interim fisheries compensation awards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Decision Date</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Amount (Baht)</th>
<th>Amount/head</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Chuan I</td>
<td>19/06/1995</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>51,390,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Chuan I</td>
<td>16/11/1995</td>
<td>2,361</td>
<td>212,490,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Banharn</td>
<td>1/04/1996</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>22,230,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Chavalit</td>
<td>26/09/1997</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>62,550,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chuan II</td>
<td>27/04/1998</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>8,280,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Chuan II</td>
<td>25/01/2000</td>
<td>2,210</td>
<td>132,600,000</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>6,176</td>
<td>489,540,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As far as Pak Mun villagers were concerned, the remainder of 1995 passed peacefully. By year-end, the new fisheries assistance committee had determined that 2,932 households were eligible for compensation. By January 2000, the state had compensated a total 6,202 households (Amornsakchai et al. 2000: 78).


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93 Some local leaders in the KVHG also organized direct action (counter-demonstrations) against the anti-Dam villagers.

94 The KVHG’s less contentious approach however resulted in villagers it organized being paid after the MRVC/AOP. In its January 2000 compensation decision, the second Chuan government determined that it would pay only 60,000 baht to 2,210 people organized by the KVHG.
The timing of the October 1994 marathon demonstration favoured the villagers. Had they launched their campaign later, they would have had to contend even more for the attention of elites in Bangkok and deal with a regime change, all with the likely effect of prolonging their marathon.

### 7.2.2 Emergence of the Assembly of the Poor

The success of the 157-day rally increased the prestige of the Mun River Villagers’ Committee. Other villager organizations in Ubon sought its advice on mounting campaigns for their grievances to be addressed (Missingham 2003: 91). Other developments in rural politics produced favourable conditions for the emergence the new alliance which became known as the Assembly of the Poor (AOP) in late 1995. By this time general Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, a Northeasterner, had formed the New Aspiration Party. The NAP was a mixture of old-style Thai patronage politics, and a new populist platform oriented towards small farmers. The party drew its support especially from the Northeast. When Chavalit’s party reached out to it, a factional split arose in the Assembly of Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast (Baker 2000). Leaders who feared co-optation left to help form the AOP (see Chapter 4). They conceived the AOP as a national-level alliance of issue-based and regional groups or networks, operating with a decentralized, non-hierarchical structure. The Mun river villagers were a key constituency in the new organization.

The AOP was born at a large conference of villagers’ delegates and NGO workers held at Thammasat University in Bangkok on 10 December 1995. Its policy manifesto – the Mun River Declaration – was unveiled several days later at a meeting in Khong Jiam district, where Pak Mun and Sirindhorn Dam activists hosted them (Missingham 2003: 38–39). The Declaration was a critique of industrial development as a threat to small-scale farmers, their natural resource bases, and the rights of urban labour. It called by contrast for solutions that would promote human rights, democracy, popular participation, self-determination, and "community rights" (ibid., 39).

 Barely several months later, after the delegates to the founding conference submitted the Declaration and a petition of some 50 specific grievances (ranging from proposed and completed infrastructure projects to problems of access to land and forest) to the Banharn government, the Assembly organized what one of the larger
mobilizations Thailand had seen since the 1970s. Twelve thousand demonstrators rallied outside Government House beginning on 31 of March 1996. Enough of these stayed on until late April for the cabinet of Prime Minister Banharn to announce it would take action on all of the grievances in the petition (ibid., 129). A participatory committee chaired by the Prime Minister was formed. The committee made little headway, as the Banharn coalition government was highly unstable and collapsed several months later in September 1996 (Lertchoosakul 2003).

Banharn's government had lasted just over a year. The Chaat Thai party that led the coalition appeared to be an unstable amalgam of provincial bosses (chao pho) with little by way of an ideological platform to distinguish itself from other parties. As Chavalit's New Aspiration Party gathered attention, Chaat Thai suffered a loss of 25 MPs who defected to the NAP (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000: 138).

In accounts of the Assembly, its first mobilization is largely overshadowed by the famous "99-day rally" that followed in the dry season at the beginning of 1997. Yet it is important to record the fact that Prime Minister Banharn had granted the Assembly an unprecedented concession, namely the establishment of a high-level committee with himself as chair. Banharn's concession to the Assembly may have been mostly placatory, reflecting a fragile leader's need to boost popular support. But activists villagers would have read it equally as proof that villagers grievances could be processed in a different way than the aloof “drum tossing” under Chuan.

7.2.3 The 99-day rally and campaign for permanent fisheries compensation, 1997

The immediate political context in which this rally took place included the unresolved agenda of the Assembly, as recognized by the Banharn government, internal organizational building that had taken place during 1995–96, and the status of Chavalit’s new coalition government. That government was popular with rural voters, but distrusted by urban elites, and still in the process of consolidating its power when the rally started.95

Missingham (2003) provides an excellent ethnographic account of many aspects of the 99-day rally. Bearing in mind our focus on mechanisms of political

95 Business sector discomfort with the Banharn administration’s choice of poorly qualified candidates to lead the Ministry of Finance and the central bank intensified after a May 1996 bank collapse, and appears to have carried over to the Chavalit administration (November 1996–November 1997) (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000: 112–115).
influence, I want to make the following points: first, protesters worked very hard to create the best possible political context or balance of power in their favour. They consistently portrayed themselves as serious, dignified, loyal and, crucially, committed to settling in for a long time to demonstrate for their causes (cf. Tilly 1999). They also portrayed themselves as interesting to the public, both theatrically and intellectually. The protest encampment and street processions made use of paintings and sculpture; the protesters also staged performances that served to entertain both immediate and media audiences as well as to lampoon the government. Demonstrators displayed their intellectual interests when they opened a “school of politics,” inviting university lecturers and other public intellectuals to speak to them, as well as themselves preparing a contribution to the concurrent process to draft a new constitution (ibid, Ch 6).

The Chavalit government for its part took pains to appear responsive. The Bangkok Metropolitan administration provided significant resources by way of potable water and toilet facilities; the central government also authorized buses to transport representatives and interested parties to negotiation sessions. It also established seven different negotiating committees to respond to diverse grievances presented by the Assembly. The first negotiations commenced two days after the demonstrators descended on Bangkok. Finally, the Dams negotiations group was able to secure as its committee chair Adisorn Piangket, a northeastern MP whom activists regarded as sympathetic to their cause (Missingham 2003: 164).

On the other hand, a number of important factors weighed against any easy success at the negotiating table. First, demonstrators were frequently frustrated by the slow pace of the negotiations. This is not surprising, considering the large number of accumulated grievances they came to Bangkok with. Even assuming agreement on problem definitions and solutions, negotiations in each case were hampered by the sheer mass of facts, numbers, names, and other details.

Next, even though Prime Minister Chavalit provided high-level support, the AOP still faced significant institutional resistance to negotiation. For example, resistance from one irrigation official drafted to serve on the bilateral Dams committee involved questioning the very standing of villagers (and by extension the whole committee process) sitting across from him (Missingham 2003: 167). Finally, there were serious differences about what constituted the “real” status of fishing incomes following the construction of the Dam, and the Dam’s role relative to other variables.
in a putative income decline (Missingham, 165–67; Buchita, 75; see Chapter 8).

Of 122 grievances/issues, Cabinet had taken action on 29 by the sixth week of the rally. Although some of these resolutions were not to the satisfaction of the AOP, the pace indicates a relatively high level of responsiveness compared to the previous Chuan administration. By 2 May 1997, when Assembly leaders declared the rally would disperse, they had negotiated the following commitments (Missingham, 169):

- 15 rai of land (or monetary equivalent, at 35,000 baht/rai) for 3,080 Pak Mun fisher households (for occupation change after permanent fisheries loss)  
- Compensation for impacts from Sirindhorn Dam
- Compensation for five other constructed dams
- Cancellation of proposed Sayaburi Dam; review of four other proposed dams (including Kaeng Sua Ten)
- Agreements for occupational illness compensation
- Agreement for urban dwellers compensation
- Cabinet resolution to form joint committee to continue addressing all remaining grievances

The total amount of compensation approved for these items was an unprecedented 4.66 billion baht (Praphart, 207). A good deal of participatory committee work subsequent to the 99-day rally also appears to have led to problem closure (Missingham, 169). Chavalit’s administration was by far the most responsive of any government in modern Thai politics (Praphart 1998; Missingham 2003). Chalermsripinyorat attributes Chavalit’s responsiveness to one basic factor: his government’s relatively low approval rating among urban, middle-class Bangkokians (2002: 54). As it turned out, however, Chavalit’s regime did not stay in power long enough to reap the benefits of its generous settlements. Nor did it manage to disburse any of the money.

7.2.4 Economic crisis and policy reversals, 1997–98

Thailand’s economic crisis erupted full-blown after Chavalit’s devaluation of the baht in July 1997. It was the largest shock the Thai economy experienced in the
In November 1997, Chavalit resigned after parliament passed a no-confidence motion. Chuan Leekpai replaced him without calling fresh elections. The crisis was arguably caused by a combination of weaknesses in governance, in both the real estate sector and Central Bank, as well as risk-seeking investment behaviour (Bello et al. 1998; Phongpaichit and Baker 2000).

Estimates of urban job losses were one to three million, spanning construction work to manufacturing to the financial sector (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000: Ch. 4; Bello et al. 1998: 3). Urban workers returned temporarily to family farms. Rice farmers enjoyed high international prices in 1997 and benefited from surging baht prices and a good harvest. A year later however, many other farmers began to demonstrate for price supports and debt relief after their input prices rose (Phongpaichit and Baker 145). Print media publications went bankrupt, and environmental news coverage declined (Chalermsripinyorat 2004).

The International Monetary Fund’s conditions for its 1998 $US17.2 billion rescue package included a 20% budget cut to achieve a surplus, foreign ownership of land and financial assets, and orders to sell off banks and bankrupt companies to new investors (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000: 38). Chuan’s implementation of these measures made it unpopular among Thai businessmen, and was seized upon by Chavalit’s NAP and other opposition political parties as a cudgel against the Democrats. The counter-discourse from business, from the opposition, and from a range of other civil society actors was one of economic nationalism: protecting Thai interests, large and small (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000; 2004).

This was the immediate political context in which Thaksin Shinawatra launched Thai Rak Thai (“Thais Love Thailand”), his new party, in 1998. From the beginning, Thaksin promoted Thai Rak Thai as standing for policies that would benefit small and medium enterprise owners, and nurture and unleash the entrepreneurial potential of the wider workforce (Phongpaichit and Baker 2004: 98). This optimistic narrative helped sweep him to power in a landslide in early 2001, less than thirty months later, opening up Pak Mun Dam and much of Thailand to many

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96 525,000 baht monetary equivalent per eligible household. Number of households is similar to the total of 3,179 households which by May 1996 had received compensation for 3 years’ lost fishing income during construction (Amornsakchai et al., 76).

97 The Chuan administration actually refused to implement the most severe of the IMF prescriptions, and reversed them by early 1999, following Japan’s advice. It borrowed money from the Japanese government to re-stimulate the economy (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000: 60). Nonetheless, it was the most obvious scapegoat for public discontent.
decisive changes.

In 1998 however, the Pak Mun protestors still faced a hostile Chuan administration, bearing the brunt of widespread displeasure with its crisis management. On 21 April 1998, after several weeks of another large dry-season rally, Chuan’s Cabinet resolved to not pay any compensation for past development projects, on the grounds that this would open a Pandora’s box of claims, and that the government was broke. Essentially, it refused to honor any of the commitments to the AOP made by the Chavalit government. Chuan’s dramatic reversals meant harsh setbacks for Thai highlanders who had won some rights to live in protected areas, for opponents of Kaeng Sua Ten and Pong Khun Phet dams, as well as for villagers claiming compensation for Sirindhorn and Pak Mun Dam (Missingham, 201).

As well, Chuan’s staff resurrected anti-NGO discourse. Such discourse existed since the beginning of the PMD conflict, when activists were labelled communists, meaning subversive elements controlled by foreigners. Now the referent “NGO” replaced “communist” – the new label did not signify intentions to violently overthrow the state, but retained the core concept of anti-Thai subversiveness. As part of this discourse, Chuan government agents raided offices of PER, looking for evidence of foreign sponsorship (Missingham, 202). We can read this latest rhetoric of prejudice as part of the government’s attempt to consolidate power during a period of high uncertainty, while scapegoating other parties in Thai society in an attempt to diffuse media attention away from an overwhelming focus on its handling of the crisis.

According to Missingham (2003: 203), the Assembly's leaders (pho khrua yai) and advisors felt that the best strategy, given the hostile administration, sympathetic media coverage, and flagging morale among many of their villager constituencies, was to return activism to the localities. This dao krachai (scattered protests) strategy kept issues alive, albeit well off any decision-maker’s agenda. An AOP media campaigner interviewed by Chalermsripinyorat believed that in the post-financial crisis period, news editors were reluctant to cover protest events, worrying about the impact on Thailand’s international image and investor confidence. Suffering in addition from advertising revenue cuts, and production-material cost increases, newspapers reduced their total space, laid off reporters, and re-concentrated their coverage on the capital (Chalermsripinyorat 2004: 545, 564).
7.2.5 WCD process and a reinvigorated campaign, 1999–2000

In March 1999, the AOP launched a new campaign. It established a protest village called Mae Mun Man Yuen, occupying several hectares of a public park and river bank immediately adjacent to the Pak Mun Dam site. The Assembly announced it was abandoning its previous claim for permanent loss of fisheries income. Since the government was not willing to provide the 15 rai of land (or monetary equivalent), the Assembly made another bold demand: that the government decommission the Dam in order to restore natural flows and fisheries to the river.

In 1999, another process got under way that was to prove very influential on the trajectory of the case. The World Commission on Dams – a multi-stakeholder process (MSP) funded by a range of development and private-sector donors – was a sophisticated attempt to conduct a series of participatory studies about the performance of large dams worldwide. The WCD asked the governments of ten countries, including Thailand, for permission to study the economic, environmental, and social impacts; the benefits, costs, distribution of these impacts; and the decision-making processes for these dams. For these multi- and inter-disciplinary studies, the WCD developed a methodology based on trial studies in South Africa. In Thailand it decided to commission a set of expert consultants (mostly Thais) to do disciplinary studies. Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), a government think-tank with economic credentials, was to write the synthesis report (Prof. J. Lee, interview 1 April 2004).

In part, WCD chose to study Pak Mun because its proponents considered it an exemplary project. In June 1998, the World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department released a report saying the Pak Mun Dam's resettlement program was “overly generous” and denied the dam caused any decline in the fish population in the Mun (World Bank 1998: 7). On the other hand, WCD’s NGO members, such as International Rivers Network, were well aware of and had occasionally helped the Assembly’s campaign against the Dam.

Thailand has had very limited experience with formalized knowledge-building MSPs. In fact, the only major MSP during the 1990s was the Constitutional Drafting Assembly of 1996–97 (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000). The WCD was ambitious in

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98 Another MSP, chaired by General Tienchai Sirisamphan, was commissioned by the Prem government in late 1987 to review Nam Choan dam (see Chapter 4).
terms of scope, goals, and inter-disciplinary methods, considering the immediate political context at Pak Mun. Thailand appears to have been the only WCD case study that proceeded while dam opponents staged protests, and these tensions required it to hold separate meetings with EGAT and with civil society.

EGAT initially requested that the WCD defer its study until the conflict was resolved. A WCD commissioner and staff appealed for its cooperation, citing its overall timeframe limitations. It promised that the study would not be “judgemental” and that the knowledge generated would help guide governmental decision-making. After frankly expressing its desire that the study not further the demonstrators’ cause, EGAT agreed to proceed (WCD Secretariat 1999). The AOP also had concerns about the conduct of the study and initially wanted foreign experts to do all the study (Steiner 1999). Each side expressed concerns about consultants and specific research methods used but, with dedicated facilitation by WCD staff and consultants, did not abandon the process (Lee, interview 1/4/04). WCD gave stakeholders several opportunities to help shape the report: in 1999, to comment on a paper outlining the scope of the study, and several times in 2000, as successive versions of the draft final report were issued.

In March 2000, the WCD released a draft summary of its Pak Mun case study. The evaluation was critical. While the final report (November 2000) was considerably more nuanced, it conveyed the same basic evaluation: of its intended hydropower benefits, the Dam delivered only 21 MW actual dependable capacity vs. 75 MW planned. Its economic cost-benefit ratio, calculated from the larger power generation figure, had been overestimated. Furthermore, despite the installation of a fish pass, it had reduced the diversity and overall supply of fish to income-poor, labour-exporting rural households (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: Ch. 4). The report included dissenting reviews from the World Bank and EGAT, and responses to those reviews. It was a dense, multi-vocal compilation of knowledge.

Unfortunately, despite its well-designed and well-intentioned deliberative process, the WCD Pak Mun study ended in acrimony. The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued statements through its missions worldwide rejecting the findings of the WCD case study. In order to understand why the process ended this way, consider that in its response to the WCD report, EGAT steadfastly argued that:
• The dam produced hydropower benefits in line with the original feasibility studies justifying the project (Amornsakchai et al. 2000: 102–103);
• The study over-exaggerated decline in the number of fish species found in the Mun after construction of the dam, and, in any case, any such decline resulted from multiple causes and should not be attributed to Pak Mun Dam alone (ibid., 105–111);
• Socially constructed grievances were driven by villagers’ material incentives for compensation, and organized by Thai and foreign environmental NGOs (ibid., 111; WCD Secretariat 1999).

In its narrative, EGAT congratulated itself for producing power benefits, while limiting its responsibility for fisheries declines. Its arguments repeatedly took the form of categorical assertions that certain methods and studies were credible, and other studies and methods were invalid.99 WCD’s counter-narrative was challenging for EGAT to deal with, and was exacerbated by two factors: first, WCD gave EGAT less than 14 days to respond to its 28 May draft final report (Parasuraman 2000). Second, adverse media publicity surrounded successive drafts of the WCD report (e.g., Chang Noi 2000). These were leaked on several occasions to the press by dam opponents in the WCD, who ignored the WCD Secretariat’s strong appeal to desist. Draft reports also appeared on WCD’s website as early as March 2000, six months prior to the November 2000 final report. Finally, conflict over Pak Mun intensified in May 2000, when protestors blockaded the powerhouse.

Both the WCD report and the media coverage caused project proponents EGAT and, to a lesser degree, the World Bank, to lose face. All these factors provided EGAT motive and ammunition to attack the conduct and integrity of the process.100

A reinvigorated campaign

For the protesters at Mae Mun Man Yuen village, the emerging WCD findings provided a significant morale boost (AOP 2000b). In May 2000, after more than a year of government inattention to their campaign, the Assembly dramatically escalated its campaign. On 15 May 2000 it launched a sit-in demonstration, disrupting access to the Pak Mun Dam powerhouse, as well as a simultaneous blockade of Rasi Salai, an

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99 See EGAT’s response to the June 2000 draft report, which appears as Chapter 9 in Amornsakchai et al. (2000a).
100 Internal disagreement among case study analysts also arose (see Chapter 8).

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upstream irrigation dam in Srisaket province. At Pak Mun, the protesters denied
EGAT staff access to the powerhouse for a number of days. They later agreed to move
aside a few meters so that access could continue.

This dam seizure appears to have done what many months of sit-in
demonstrations outside Government House since 1994 could not: it conveyed to
EGAT senior management that they needed to take much more active measures to
resolve the conflict (Surapong, interview 20/8/04). In June 2000, Chuan's Cabinet
established a bilateral Neutral Committee to Solve Problems of the AOP. It was
chaired by Dr. Bantorn Ondam, the former academic and respected social activist who
had served on Plodprasop’s committee in 1995. Dr. Bantorn’s committee voted to
recommend a four-month experimental opening of Pak Mun Dam to restore fisheries
migration. As Missingham put it, the committee's findings were “overwhelmingly in
support” of the Assembly's positions on all 16 sets of issues raised (Missingham, 207;
Neutral Committee 2000).

Chuan initially regarded the Bantorn Committee’s findings as non-binding
advice. However, he and his advisors appear to have changed their minds a month
later, when a contingent of Assembly demonstrators again rallied outside Government
House. They staged a night scaling of the perimeter walls of the compound walls on
16 July, an event that ended in bloodied heads, several hundred arrests, and a splash in
the print media of condemnation for the police violence (Nation, 18 July 2000,
Chalermsripinyorat 2002: 83).101

During the remainder of 2000, a small contingent of protesters stayed on
outside Government House to pressure Chuan to open more negotiations, without
success. By this time the economic crisis had truly set in and Chuan faced regular calls
from critics to dissolve parliament and call fresh elections.

7.2.6 Contention under Thaksin, 2001–03

The Pak Mun case during Thaksin’s administration falls into two periods. The
first, set into motion in early 2001 shortly after Thaksin assumed office, consists of an
experimental dam opening and evaluation studies. The second and much shorter

101 On 25 July, a week after the wall-scaling incident, Chuan ordered EGAT to open the gates of Pak Mun Dam.
Interestingly, this decision was not received by the Assembly or discussed in the media as a concession to the
protesters’ demands but rather as an action EGAT initiated to manage unusual flooding that year. EGAT closed the
gates of Pak Mun Dam in late October, after flooding subsided.
period – the end-game – consists of interactions between the AOP and the government after the AOP refused to accept the 1 October 2002 cabinet resolution for a 4-month seasonal opening of the dam gates.

As we shall see, during the closing weeks of the second period, the Prime Minister chose to intervene in the case, opening up what appeared to be novel channels for deliberation, raising hopes for an outcome the Assembly had fervently sought and campaigned for. These latter events have a special significance for me, because I experienced them first-hand and remember them as a period of high suspense. Trying to understand how harried decision makers settled a complex controversy during this “end-game” period became one of the challenges I set myself.

**Experimental opening and rival studies**

On 6 January 2001, Thaksin toppled Chuan in a landslide in national elections. In March, acting on campaign promises, Thaksin visited AOP protesters encamped outside Government House. The organization had maintained villagers outside Government House since January 2000. Thaksin made his symbolic visit two days after finally cleared of electoral fraud by the Constitutional Court. Less than two weeks later, his government established a *Committee to Resolve Problems of the Assembly of the Poor* led by Deputy Prime Minister Pongpol Adireksan. However, the Committee included no representatives or observers from the Assembly of the Poor.

On 14 April 2001, three days after the final contingent of protesters had returned home, Cabinet accepted the recommendations originally made by the Bantorn committee: it ordered EGAT to open all eight sluice gates of Pak Mun Dam for four months, May–August inclusive, and for Ubon Ratchathani University to conduct a multi-disciplinary study. More than eight weeks later, EGAT indicated it was ready to open the dam gates, and Thaksin attended the 25 June 2001 ceremony.

Pongpol’s committee set up a *Subcommittee to Resolve Problems of the Assembly of the Poor Related to EGAT Dams*. Its chair was Dr. Chaiwat Satha-anand, a respected Thammasat University political scientist and peace activist. In its one meeting, Chaiwat’s sub-committee set up four task forces (see Figure 7.1). Ubon Ratchathani University was to submit its study to the *Pak Mun Dam Trial Opening Task Force*, chaired by its president Dr. Phaithun Ingkhasuwan. This working group included representatives from the University, EGAT, and the AOP. It was supposed to
report directly back to Pongpol’s committee.

In addition to the UBU study, EGAT also commissioned its own study, led by the Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research (TISTR 2003a). A notable component of this study consisted of questionnaires administered face-to-face by a team of 51 surveyors to 94% of the 6,176 households that had received fisheries compensation (TISTR 2003b). As well, villagers themselves – coordinated by Southeast Asia Rivers Network (a Thai NGO that campaigns against large dams) and Assembly of the Poor – initiated a participatory research project (Tai Baan Research) to document all fish species caught by villagers, along with other evidence of ecological change in river condition (Srettachau 2002a, 200b).

The new studies were attempts to generate different knowledge discourses from which to argue different preferred choices: Should Pak Mun Dam open indefinitely, as the social movement organization demanded? Should it stay closed to generate hydropower, as EGAT would prefer? Should it, as a compromise, open seasonally, and if so, during what months, and based on what evidence? (see Chapter 8).

By the end of the first four-month trial opening period, the AOP felt it had strong evidence that the opening had allowed fish migrations to occur. It announced that it would embark on a 2,000-kilometre march to publicize the good news about the favourable impacts. The four-month experimental opening became a one-year experiment after the trial dam opening working group accepted the argument from its Assembly of the Poor member that the study needed a full year to observe effects through all the seasons. The Cabinet voted in favour of this recommendation on 12 December 2001. In May 2002, Pongpol’s committee issued a one-year progress report, announcing problem-solving progress on a number of fronts, but deferring any decision about livelihood restoration in the lower Mun river basin until Ubon Ratchathani University finished its study. On 10 June 2002, a few days before the one-year opening of the dam was to expire, EGAT offered to open Pak Mun Dam seasonally. Its offer – four months July through October – entailed ceding approximately 52% of the river’s average annual flow.102

Pak Mun however remained open after June. It did not close its gates until 1

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102 Critics argued that less than 100% of total annual flow was available for power generation to begin with. Some rainy season peak flow events force EGAT to spill flood water (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a) so the 52% figure is an overestimate. EGAT has ceded the option to generate electricity during those months.
November 2002. The trial opening therefore expanded from four to 16½ months.

**Figure 7.1 Structure of Ad-Hoc Committees related to Pak Mun Case, 2001–03**

- **Committee to Resolve Problems of the Assembly of the Poor (Deputy PM Pongpol Adireksan, Chair)**
  - *March 2001*
- **Sub-committee to Resolve Problems of the Assembly of the Poor in Cases of Dams Owned by EGAT (Dr. Chaiwat Satha-anand, Chair)**
- **Task Force to Resolve Problems of Lam Takhong Pumped-Storage Dam (Mr. Pricha Ouitrakun, Chair)**
- **Task Force to Restore Lives and Communities Receiving Impacts from Pak Mun Dam (Dr. Suthee Prasartsert, Chair)**
- **Pak Mun Dam Trial Opening Task Force (Dr. Phaitun Ingkhasuwan, Chair)**
- **Committee to Track and Guide Problem-solving for the Assembly of the Poor (Deputy PM Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Chair) (May 2002)**
- **Sub-Committee to Review Research Findings Related to the Pak Mun Dam Case (Dr. Suphawit Piemphongsan, Chair) (June 2002)**
- **Task Force to Find Land to Restore Quality of Life of Villagers Receiving Impacts from Sirindhorn Dam (Mr. Nathi Khibthon, Asst. Minister for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives, Chair)**
While this may seem to indicate surprising latitude on behalf of the Prime Minister's office, it likely also reflects the fact that the Thaksin government was at this time facing the need to make decisions on other controversial infrastructure projects: two coal-fired power plants (see Section 5.5) and a natural gas pipeline. Closing Pak Mun Dam before Ubon University had delivered its study would provoke an outcry from the Assembly.

The Kamnan and Village Headmen’s Group, the local authorities’ network with close ties to EGAT, announced its support for the four-month opening in July 2002. The KVHG argued that the seasonal release would suffice to allow the majority of important fishes to migrate upstream, spawn, and remain in the reservoir to be caught. It saw important benefits to impounding water the remainder of the year, such as hydropower revenues and water storage during the dry season. It asked for expansion to the very sparse network of irrigation canals that currently existed in the lower Mun basin (testimony at public meeting, 28 June 2002).

The University concluded its study in late 2002. On 6 September, it held its first public meeting to discuss its main research findings. This meeting was open to the public but attended almost entirely by government agency staff from EGAT and other provincial agencies. The University had released copies of its Executive Summary to EGAT prior to the public meeting, and they came well prepared to knock holes in it. (The University did not release its complete report until November.)

At that meeting, EGAT engineers rejected the findings of the University report's regional power flow modelling. The report indicated that removing PMD from the grid would not cause any regional blackouts, although it might lead to appliance-damaging brownouts from voltage drops at three high-voltage substations:

In the lower Northeast region, the shortfall between demand and power supplied locally (by Pak Mun and Sirindhorn Dams) is met by power supplied from Khon Kaen via Roi Et substation, and by power supplied from Huai Hau Dam via Ubon 2 substation. System stability (that is, maintaining voltage fluctuations at plus or minus five percent) can be maintained without Pak Mun Dam. The lower Northeast region is part of a national system with links to power plants in Lao PDR. At the same time, however, consideration needs to be paid to the cost of power purchases from Laos. If in the future the link to Huai Hau Dam in Laos was removed, controlling voltage drop in this region would be a considerable technical problem. The substations likely to experience problems are Kantralak, Poan Tong, and Srisaket (UBU 2002: Khor-3–Khor-4).
A similar conclusion applied if the link to Roi Et substation was disrupted (ibid., p. 2-44). The study results are sensitive to the region’s peak demand growth. The study authors used a figure of 5.3% growth in demand, which was the average of 1996–2001, a period where demand growth ranged from almost ten percent in 1996 to just over two percent in 1998, during the economic crisis. EGAT’s scenarios assumed higher demand growth and hence predicted more severe brownouts (EGAT 2002). At the meeting, other EGAT staff objected to the University report's conclusion about the positive impact of the Dam opening on fisheries income, claiming that the estimates were unrealistically high (see Chapter 8).

The University’s executive summary contained four options – maintaining the status quo; a five-month seasonal opening; an eight-month opening; and a year-round opening for five years. The structure of this text – a linear examination of the strengths and problems of the first three options, before concluding with the last – suggest that the authors preferred the five-year complete opening option. The text argues that for the next five years, the dam’s chief benefit – improving electric power reliability in the lower Northeast – could be derived by increasing imports of electricity along existing transmission lines. A technical substitute existed for the dam, whereas no technical solution existed for improving the security of community-based livelihoods (UBU 2002).

Different actors immediately interpreted this document in different ways, to argue their respective positions. Opponents of the dam – activists and a handful of media columnists – initially wary of the University, echoed this argument. Other print and radio journalists accused some of the researchers – in particular the authors of the Executive Summary – of conspiring with the AOP.

Back in May 2002, worried about its lack of participation in the Pongpol committee, the Assembly had successfully lobbied Deputy PM Chavalit to form a new committee, the Committee to Guide and Track Problem-solving for the Assembly of the Poor, with representatives from the Assembly of the Poor, himself as Chairperson, and a more open process (Figure 7.1). On 16 June, Chavalit’s committee established a Sub-Committee to Review Research Findings Related to the Pak Mun Dam Case with representation from academics, EGAT, and the National Economic and Social
Watching these events and tensions, I assumed that Pongpol and Chavalit’s committees would coordinate their work, in order to legitimate the eventual decision over Pak Mun. However, on 23 September 2002, Pongpol’s committee voted to recommend a four-month seasonal opening policy. (This was less than three weeks after UBU issued its executive summary.) Cabinet endorsed this decision at its meeting on 1 October 2002. Pongpol’s committee thus reached an important policy decision – involving a conflict that had run on since 1989 – before receiving an authoritative report from the University, and allowing only one public meeting to take place beforehand.

Arguing that Pongpol’s committee rarely met, and had never allowed the AOP to observe its deliberations anyway, a vanguard of some fifty villagers descended to camp outside Government House in protest. They further denounced the fact that Pongpol’s decision had pre-empted Ubon University’s dissemination of its findings, the final version of which had not even been released. The next section takes a closer look at the end-game of decision-making over Pak Mun Dam in its first decade of operations.

**End-game and four-month-opening decision**

On 18 September 2002, five days before Pongpol’s consequential committee meeting, villagers in the Assembly of the Poor gathered in the grounds of Ubon Ratchathani provincial hall for a show of strength, prior to attending the public meeting that the University had scheduled for them. The meeting never happened. The provincial governor ordered the gathering dispersed, on the grounds that villagers were interfering with entry and exit to the provincial hall. Instead, UBU research team leaders ended up briefing Assembly advisers that day in the local office of the Law Society of Thailand. At that meeting, which I attended, Assembly advisors indicated they had learnt Pak Mun would soon be on Cabinet’s agenda, and the mood was tense.

On 19 September, research coordinator Dr. Sumitra Phanprasert, accompanied by project advisor Dr. Seri Sakhmani, and led by Dr. Mongkhon Visetsuk, the new President of UBU, met with a handful of the Prime Minister’s advisors. These included

103 Chavalit’s committee appears to have folded quietly after Pongpol made its decision. It met several times and commissioned one of its members, Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaputhi, to write its analysis, but as of 2004, had not reached agreement on a final draft.
Prime Minister’s Office Minister Pongthep Thepkanchana (a legal bureaucrat who two weeks later led the new Ministry of Energy), Dr. Prommin Lertsuridej (a close associate who was shortly after promoted to one of six Deputy Prime Minister positions), and Thawee Luesakul. Prommin and Thawee were former student activists who fled to the forests after 1976, but ever since then had worked in mainstream occupations (the former worked for one of Thaksin’s Shinawatra companies; Phongpaichit and Baker 2004: 68).

Dr. Mongkhon told the meeting that the University formally recommended a four-month seasonal opening. It was the same option he had proposed twenty-seven months earlier in Bantorn’s committee. His recommendation contradicted an earlier briefing Drs. Seri and Sumitra made two weeks earlier to Thawee and middle-level advisors.

At that earlier briefing, which I attended, Dr. Seri clearly indicated that technical solutions for the dam existed, while achieving its irrigation potential required new investments. Seri had worked before with Thawee in 1992, to campaign for the restoration of democracy. Thawee participated actively in the conversation and appeared sympathetic to the policy narrative put forward. Sumitra and Seri’s message was that a year-round opening was in the interest of project-affected communities on the lower Mun (meeting notes, 4/9/2002).

On 22 September 2002, AOP supporters and a small contingent of villagers moved down to Bangkok. The following day, Pongpol’s committee voted in favour of the four-month seasonal opening. On 1 October 2002, Cabinet endorsed the Pongpol committee’s recommendation, and three days later Pak Mun was ordered to close.

As Pak Mun protestors settled in for what proved to be their final rally in Bangkok, I sensed that their power in numbers had greatly waned from the mass gatherings that I remembered from my first encounters with them in 2000. For most of its 17-week duration, I estimate that the rally had no more than 200–300 people.

Later in October 2002, to protest Cabinet’s four-month opening resolution, villagers and AOP advisors lobbied erstwhile allies, such as Deputy PM Chavalit (who chaired the Committee to Track Problem-Solving; Fig. 7.1). They also sought 1970s-era student activists such as Prime Minister’s Office Minister Chaturon Chaisaeng, and Minister for Natural Resources and Environment Prapat Panyachartrak. In each case the AOP sought support to revise Cabinet’s 1 October 2002 resolution. As we will see, Cabinet did do so but in a way no one anticipated.
To revive their grievances, villagers staged a number of media-worthy actions. They marched on the Prime Minister’s residence to deliver a petition. Police blocked them, generating successful newspaper coverage of a stand-off with flag-bearing villagers (Khao Sod 2002a). On 4 November, villagers drowned an effigy of UBU President Dr. Mongkhon, to protest what they claimed was a distortion of the university’s research study recommendations (Matichon 2002b). Three weeks later, to protest inattention, using wooden bows, they fired arrows bearing appeals over Pak Mun and the proposed Thai-Malay gas pipeline over the wall of Government House (Matichon 2002c). The next day, a hundred villagers crossed police barricades to gather right outside the gates of the Prime Minister’s Secretariat building, where they made speeches attacking Minister Pongthep for his role in the 1 October 2002 Cabinet resolution. When Pongthep granted them permission to meet him, villagers attempted to bring in jars of fermented fish, a symbol of river-dependent livelihoods used in earlier rallies. After police refused entry, they shattered the jars and moved across town to lobby Thai Rak Thai party boss Sanoh Tientong (Thai Post 2002).

Energy Minister Pongthep did not refuse all interaction with protestors. On 1 November 2002, he agreed to chair a rare deliberative session. It was attended by villagers, AOP leaders, and the EGAT Deputy Governor responsible for hydropower (Chalermchai Rathanarak). Pongthep defended the legitimacy of Pongpol’s committee decision, because it had been ratified by Cabinet.

Although the situation resembled a stand-off with the state very much in control, during this time a number of elites intervened in the media on behalf of the Pak Mun protestors. Former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun and Dr. Prawase Wasi both spoke out in favour of governance reform. Anand cited recent events at Pak Mun as an example of poor accountability. The government promised a decision based on a university study, and then ignored that study (Khao Sod 2002b). Prawase urged thinking beyond opening or closing Pak Mun, towards small-scale alternative energy and distributed power generation (Phuchatkan Rai Wan 2002).

On 18 November 2002, on petition by the AOP and its allies, the Senate Committee on Public Participation held a hearing. EGAT Governor Sitthiporn Rathanopas admitted that EGAT could reliably supply the lower Northeast region’s growing needs by expanding transmission lines, and hence that PMD was not indispensable to power reliability. Based on this admission, Dr. Mongkhon was to modify his position on Pak Mun (see below). The National Economic and Social
Advisory Council held a similar hearing several days later. During this time, the administration appears to have taken no further action.

**Thaksin's intervention**

On 5 December 2002, early on the morning of the King’s Birthday (a highly patriotic national holiday), unknown men ransacked the AOP’s camp, harassing but not harming the demonstrators. The event made news. Next day the prime minister expressed his regrets, but said he would not reconsider the Cabinet decision. On the following day, a Sunday, Thaksin changed tactic. After playing golf in the morning, he visited the protestors, treated them to ice cream and other food, and promised to revisit the case.

On 20 December, as promised, the Prime Minister held a three-hour problem-solving meeting with 30 AOP representatives. NGO allies were not allowed to participate. Dr. Mongkhon now endorsed the same option favoured by the University’s research team leaders: a year-round, trial opening for five years. UBU’s Dr. Sumitra and AOP villager representatives both testified that the year-round opening had produced tangible and significant social and economic benefits (see Chapter 8 for more details). Before Sumitra presented the UBU findings, Dr. Mongkhon summarized the University's position:

Dr. Mongkhon: There are a lot of people that cannot change their occupations because of limitations. Their only fault is that they are poor and have no opportunities. This I think is the problem . . it's a problem that they cannot help themselves. The fact that the dam has had an impact . . regardless of whatever measures are put in place to help, [their] livelihoods [pose] limitations to changing their occupations. This is the social problem that will occur. Therefore if you listen to the options: the second option is to open the dam five months, the third option is to open eight months; the last, open the dam throughout. The people get increasingly more . . therefore if you take the people [as the basis], the approach is to open the dam gates all year-round. If you take the people who loses? In this case there's only electricity production that is impacted. On the 18th [of November 2002] I had an opportunity to present at the Senate Committee [on Public Participation] . . the EGAT Governor also presented. I was very pleased to hear from him that if they stop producing electricity at Pak Mun Dam, it will benefit the people. While EGAT will receive impacts, EGAT can overcome those impacts. The government can help EGAT resolve problems regarding electricity in the Northeast without any problem at all until 2005, because there's enough power generation capacity, and at this time the EGAT has plans to build a transmission line from Ta Tako, Pitsanulok to Chaiyaphum, by approximately 2008. If power demand problems in the Northeast can be resolved in this
matter . . as someone who has worked in water resource development, rural development, community capacity building, and currently has assumed responsibility for Ubon Ratchathani University, which is a local University . . and I've always said that local Universities must help local communities . . therefore I would like, in sum, to say that the options that the University has presented . . the four options . . if you want to solve the problems for once and for all [bet set det khat] and to have only gainers, no losers, only winners, only those who give and those who receive . . yes, and only winners . . it should be the approach that helps the people to get rid of the problems for once and for all. If you follow this approach then EGAT is a winner, because it’s the one helping the government solve the problem for the people—

Prime Minister Thaksin: —Meaning you have . . meaning you conclude that—

Dr. Mongkhon: —In concluding I think that, the University thinks that, the government should decide to help the people as much as possible to end the problem—

Prime Minister Thaksin: —By which method? By opening the dam?

Dr. Mongkhon: —Year-round, since EGAT can solve electricity problems in the Northeast.

Prime Minister Thaksin: So . . did you study . . because it's like this. There are two groups [suan]. The group that hasn't adjusted its living yet, and the group that has. So will that group complain? The group that raises caged fish and so on – will this group complain?

Dr. Mongkhon: Well, there will be impacts if the dam is opened year-round, there are probably some that benefit from storing the water, like the fish cage culture group. That's likely, but the number isn't large, so there should be measures to help solve this problem without difficulty. Another point, about water for irrigation, actually, there haven't yet been irrigation canals constructed for people really. Therefore that benefit doesn't exist yet. The key impact is more on electricity production. And if electricity production, EGAT itself can fix, I think that for the common benefit, with only winners, [we] should find a way of completely resolving the problems, which is giving people an ability to return to their original way of life. What people are asking for, I think that if [we] decide to open the dam year-round, the people gain, but really, they gain only what they've lost not more than that. I'd like to conclude with just these remarks. (Department of Public Relations 2002)  

UBU however was not the only study team Thaksin invited to present that day. As part of World Bank funding conditions, Khon Kaen University had conducted post-project social and environmental impact reviews on EGAT’s behalf. It followed 241 households originally compensated for non-fisheries impacts (Table 6.1) in 1994, 1996, and 1997–99 (Supachai et al. 2000). Dr. Suchat Sailamai from Thailand Institute

104 Untimed short pauses denoted by two ellipsis dots [ . . ].
of Scientific and Technological Research also presented results from its survey of 5,792 households compensated by EGAT. Both researchers presented shortly after Mongkhon and Sumitra.

With tense villagers from the Assembly in the audience interjecting about how much time they intended to take, these other speakers did not attempt to deny the importance of fishing. Dr. Suphachai Suetrong from Khon Kaen University however argued that it was a secondary occupation (achip rong) and emphasized the importance of off-farm income and out-migration to household income. Dr. Suchat Sailamai from TISTR, given only five minutes to speak, argued that fishing did still take place in the reservoir, thanks to fish and prawn stocking. Fishers needed to adapt their techniques however. He was concerned with the low level of crop and livestock productivity, and suggested that the solution was to invest in new pumped irrigation capacity, the energy costs of which EGAT might subsidize, if the dam closed year-round.

**Seeking fresh opinions**

Almost immediately after the roundtable, the Prime Minister ordered a special task force set up, reporting to Energy Minister Pongthep (*Thai Rath* 2003). The group included staff from the Ubon contingent of the armed forces, the National Statistics Office (NSO), and the Interior Ministry. Thaksin ordered the National Statistics Office to survey rural residents’ attitudes in the three districts of the lower Mun river. The agency completed its work in only three days (24–26 December 2002), sampling 3,750 adult household representatives from 150 villages. The least disruptive and most favoured option was the four-month, seasonal opening. This was the same option the local authorities and EGAT had been promoting since June 2002.

In addition to this late study, the Prime Minister asked officers in the Second Army and the Border Patrol Police, units with bases in Ubon, to report on local opinion regarding how Pak Mun Dam should be operated. Thaksin described the units

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105 UBU team member Decharut Sukkumnoed countered by saying that in 1990, before the Dam was built, his study found that real average household incomes, as well as fishing incomes, surpassed 2000 and 2001 incomes. His 1990 results however were based on respondents’ estimates obtained in 2001–02. Results obtained from 899 households sampled in 22 villages (UBU, 2002: Ch. 6; see Section 8.4.1).

106 Question 2.9 of this survey asked respondents an open-ended question about their preferred management option. The top three responses were: “four months” (24% of total); “as the government sees fit” (19%); and “explicitly scheduled opening/closing” (14%). Only 6.6% said they wanted the gates opened year-round. 12.4% did not offer an opinion.
as “very neutral, with no politics” (*Matichon* 2003). The Committee to Solve Problems of the Assembly of the Poor, now chaired by Phumtham (the Thai Rak Thai party secretary and former NGO official) reviewed these results on 13 January, inviting representatives from the Office of the National Human Rights Commission to attend. It reiterated its support for the 1 October 2002 Cabinet resolution.

Pak Mun was on the agenda of Cabinet’s meeting the following day, 14 January 2003. At a press conference that morning, the Prime Minister gave a little more insight on how the decision had been processed thus far. He said he had asked three Deputy PMs – Chavalit, Prommin, and Visanu Kruea-ngam\(^{107}\), to consult together one final time with assistance from working group staff before recommending a decision (ibid., 16). According to Thaksin, the results of the statistical poll and the two military reports were “all very consistent . . . 75–80% said to open the sluice gates for four months, close them for eight months” (*Matichon* 2003).\(^{108}\) After Minister Pongthep briefed Cabinet about the results of the opinion poll and the new studies, Thaksin declared to his Cabinet that:

> Now that there’s been a clear study and survey, the decision must follow its findings. In a democracy the government must act according to the benefits [prayot] of the majority, but we need to solve the problems of the minority that’s been impacted. (*Thai Rath* 2003: 16)

The same day, Cabinet issued a one-page resolution about Pak Mun. It did not yet make a formal resolution about opening the gates, but stated in its preamble that:

> In considering the Pak Mun Dam problem the Cabinet has deliberated based on the principle of common benefit to all people in the country [as well as] considering impacts to those who have received impacts from the project . . . It has considered the purposes of the dam which is a multipurpose dam with benefits to agriculture, energy, fisheries and other aspects. With respect to agriculture [the Cabinet] has viewed the benefits of the dam as storing water for farmers to use . . . especially in the dry season . . . with respect to energy the Pak Mun Dam project has been an approximately 6,000 million baht investment . . . when completed it has been able to generate electricity at very low cost because there are no fuel expenses unlike other power plants which have high fuel costs, whether natural gas, coal or oil. If Pak Mun Dam is able to generate electricity it will lower the use of fuel, which in some cases is imported, or lower electricity purchases from other countries. As well, the dam also helps power reliability in the lower Northeast. In regards to impacts

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\(^{107}\) A respected career civil servant, before his promotion to the Cabinet.

\(^{108}\) However, the results of the NSO poll alone (Question 2.9) do not support this particular interpretation. The military reports have not been made public.
to people from the dam [the Cabinet] has noted public opinion in areas receiving impacts from the dam.

The results of the opinion poll conducted by the National Statistics Office, which agrees with the . . . surveys of other agencies ordered by the Prime Minister, reached common conclusions, that the people want the sluice gates to open four months and close eight months . . . the Cabinet has further considered methods of reducing the impacts as well as increasing incomes to this population. The Cabinet therefore resolves that:

1. The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (Royal Irrigation Department) shall expedite action to provide irrigation canals for the people to use in pursuing occupations and making a living, as necessary and appropriate;

2. The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (Royal Department of Fisheries) shall expedite action to assist fishermen to continue pursuing their occupation including possible support in improving and changing equipment for suitability to fish in deep water, as well as advice and knowledge for developing fishing occupations;

3. The Ministry of Energy (Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand) shall consider support and assistance in various costs incurred in pursuit of item (2) by the Department of Fisheries, including reproduction and release of various fish species in the Mun River in order to increase the number and diversity of aquatic animals, and including reforestation, occupational support, and other measures as necessary. (Office of the Prime Minister 2003)

Later that day, after the Cabinet meeting, Pongthep spoke to the press, saying he had given Thaksin his final summary documents, and that he would announce the Prime Minister’s decision the following day. Not surprisingly, the decision Thaksin reached was a seasonal opening.

Two weeks later – after their numbers swelled in a last ditch mobilization to protest the 14 January decision – the governor of Bangkok peacefully evicted some five hundred demonstrators, and I followed them to the Bangkok train station (29/1/2003). I got the sense – as would anyone more than passingly familiar with the Pak Mun saga – that a decisive chapter in the history of this case had just ended. For unless the protestors, mostly older men and women, are ever able to gather in the thousands again to claim more of their river back, this “compromise” decision, made by a Prime Minister resoundingly confident in his electoral majority, will stand.

7.3 Analysing post-operational contention

In this section and section 7.4, I compare two different plausible explanations for variation in the state's response to social movement pressure. The first explanation
is based on the concept of political opportunity. One element of the “political opportunity structure” concept is regime strength: governments make policy concessions to interest groups in order to secure their allegiance, and maintain their popularity. (At some point more and more concessions may generate more instability, so the relationship no longer holds.) To some analysts, a regime strength explanation is attractive because it appears to lend itself to hypothesis testing.

The second explanation, by contrast, draws on the conceptual framework and methodology introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. In that framework, actors strategically use certain rhetorical forms (argumentation schemes and modes of attribution) as power resources. At the same time, the semantic field their rhetoric draws from necessarily shapes their cognition. Specific institutional routines also constrain action. This type of explanation gears itself towards elucidating causal processes, rather than testing hypotheses of regular associations.

I begin by summarizing the interaction of the main contending parties during the five administrations in power in the post-operational period 1994–2003. What were important effects of state actions on dam opponents? What effects did opponents and critics of the dam have on the state?

7.3.1 Response of oppositional civil society to state actions

We can characterize the anti-Pak Mun villagers, and later the AOP’s response, as innovative, flexible, pragmatic, and to a lesser extent, increasingly radical. First, they displayed innovativeness in seeking justice from the state. In order to gain the three years’ worth of fisheries compensation, they argued that they had lost out on opportunities to catch fish, and hence deserved compensation for this lost opportunity. It was an unprecedented extension of a frame from the world of the modern welfare state.

Their actions displayed innovation after winning significant victories, as when establishing the AOP as a new political actor in late 1995, and pragmatism after suffering large defeats. Their 1998 return to protest in local areas after defeats dealt by

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109 In Tarrow’s words, the structure of political opportunity refers to “consistent – but necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics” (1998: 19–20). See Chapter 4, Table 2 for other components of meaning and structure in social movements’ external and internal environment.

110 I understand that the lost opportunity argument was first supplied by Chulalongkorn University academics (Apaporn, interview 24 August 2004).
the second Chuan government is an example. Periods of abeyance generated innovations, as in the simultaneous dam blockades of 2000, launched after a year of local protest encampments. These strategic and tactical choices were not pre-ordained, but rather were contingent on the outcome of earlier campaigns.

Negative outcomes under Chuan II led to a radicalization of demands – the Assembly’s call for decommissioning a new dam. At the time, this was a controversial decision among AOP villagers, because it apparently meant abandoning claims for permanent fisheries compensation. One of the reasons for this shift in demand was to revive support and interest in their case among environmentalists and the public, to show that the protestors were campaigning for public goods and not personal interests (Manchit, interview 21/11/02).

Unlike protest movements elsewhere at the end of a long period of contention, the AOP did not take up violence against Chuan II to press its case. It remained non-violent, which is somewhat unusual (cf. Tarrow 1989, 1998; McAdam 1999; McAdam et al. 1996). If there was any divergence between AOP’s leadership and its base over dropping claims for compensation, it was subtle.

After Thaksin assumed office and agreed to the four-month trial, the AOP found a way to re-introduce claims for monetary compensation. It requested, in its submission to an April 2001 cabinet meeting, “restoration of life and community.” Specifically, it called for eight years’ lost opportunity to catch fish during the impoundment period of 1994–2001 (576,000 baht per eligible household). It called for compensation for lost opportunity to grow crops along the riverbanks (432,000 baht per eligible household). These new demands assumed the government would eventually decommission the dam. With the trial barely underway, such a case would have struck many in the Thaksin government as presumptuous. The matter was quietly set aside pending the findings of the UBU study.

Decommissioning captured the imagination of other groups in Thailand and abroad, such as International Rivers Network and the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation (see, e.g., White 2002). It rallied flagging support among environmental groups after 1998. At that time, it formed the radical flank for original demands of 15 rai land compensation (or cash equivalent). In 2001, it appears to be the core around which the AOP presented ambitious claims to a supposedly receptive administration. The decommissioning claim, with its ambiguous nature, was an example of strategic innovation.
7.3.2 Diversified media struggles by EGAT

The Assembly’s direct action on the powerhouse at Pak Mun in 2000 spurred a new type of discursive response from EGAT. During the pre-operation period, most of EGAT’s pro-dam publicity was delivered in Ubon, in the form of leaflets, announcements delivered to villagers by local authorities, radio programs, and occasional television commercials\(^{111}\) (e.g., AOP Chronology, 13 October 1991).

After 2000 the agency began more combative public discourse. While continuing to invest in print and TV advertisements promoting the benefits of Pak Mun and the fishpass (e.g., on Channel 11, run by the Thai Department of Public Relations), it began attacking dam opponents. Its published *The Truth at Pak Mun Dam*, a 79-page compilation of facts about the project, rebuttals to the WCD, interviews, and newspaper articles and columns articles compiled from *Daily News, Naew Na, Thai Rath*, and *Thai Post*, with a negative analysis of Thailand’s radical NGOs (EGAT 2000; see also EGAT 2001b). EGAT’s public relations department published the transcript of a television panel discussion on NGOs, which included Dr. Plodprasop, who had since become Director of the RFD. Plodprasop shared his thoughts on mediating the marathon fisheries compensation rally at Pak Mun in 1995, on current conflicts at the Dam, and conflicts with NGOs over RFD’s policy of forced resettlement from protected forests (EGAT 2001a). An anonymous mimeo appeared titled *WCD – A Non-transparent Process* that contained copies of correspondence between senior EGAT management and the Secretariat (Anonymous-2 n.d.).

After EGAT created a reservoir-stocking program in September 2001, it sponsored a daily current affairs radio program in Ubon under the name of the Mun River Fishery Production Improvement Program, run by a college professor and *Thai Rath* stringer known for his attacks on the AOP (Arthit, interview 2/7/02). Local journalists tended to be close to EGAT and state sources anyway (Chalermsripinyorat 2002: 98). Pro-NGO journalists alleged that provincial groups sometimes offered generous payments (framed as contributions to travel expenses) in return for positive coverage or non-coverage of a story (Arthit, 2/7/02).

EGAT’s Pak Mun media investments were modest compared to other PR

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\(^{111}\)Commercials ran mostly on Channel 11, operated by the Department of Public Relations.
investments during the 1990s. However, since some print media outlets, (e.g., Nation and Bangkok Post) had been publishing detailed criticisms of the Dam since at least 1990, the agency’s more vigorous media/public discourse was perhaps overdue. EGAT’s media defence of Pak Mun correlates with events in 2000, and this timing provides indirect support for EGAT manager Surapong’s assessment that his organization was thoroughly shaken out of its institutional complacency by the WCD process and by the powerhouse blockade (interview, 20/8/04).

7.3.3 Explaining governments’ responses: political opportunity arguments

The most obvious finding about the effects of civil society campaigns on successive governments is that they varied widely. Some observers claim the political opportunities a regime may give its challengers explains this variation (Lertchoosakul 2003; Chalermsripinyorat 2002). Lertchoosakul compares the second Chuan administration with its predecessors Banharn and Chavalit:

The [Chuan] government not only had a strong elite support in acting as the countermovement, but it also perceived NGOs as a threat to the regime. It could gain considerable support from middle class and business sectors, and had strong relations with the bureaucracy including EGAT. Furthermore, it could hold . . . political support from voters in its constituency in the Southern part of Thailand. As a result of that, this government did not put the demands of the [anti-Dam] movement which [was] based in the North-eastern region, as the priority in its agendas. As for the relationships with NGOs, this government perceived that the protest was mobilised mainly by NGOs not the affected people, and was financially supported by opposition parties. Thus, even though we saw the picture of well-organised and persistent protest of the Pak Mun movement during this government, the demands of the movement were not achieved.

On the contrary, NGOs found more political space during the Banharn and Chavalit government and could seize opportunities which benefited the movement. These two governments were rather weak in term of popular support, division within the elite, and capacity in dealing with economic and political crisis. They found difficulties in gaining support from middle class and international agencies owing to their rural based parties’ background and the combination of MPs with low-profiled and corrupted reputation. Furthermore, conflicts and divisions among coalition parties, made the governments vulnerable. Consequently, the government needed to ensure their previous electoral base, at the same time requiring support from new political actors (2002: Ch. 4).

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112 Between 1994–98 EGAT managed a 1.8 billion baht public-private reforestation program for 300,000 rai in the catchment areas of its hydro dams, in honor of the King’s 50th coronation anniversary (Netdao 2000: 94).
Lertchoosakul draws on the concept of “political opportunity structure” which she takes from Tarrow (1994) and McAdam et al. (1996). Chalermsripinyorat, in a similar manner to Lertchoosakul, implicitly uses a similar concept to explain Chavalit’s approach towards the AOP:

The unpopularity of the Chavalit government amongst the urban middle class and the national press gave AOP a great advantage. In covering the Assembly's political campaigns, the Thai press criticized the government's inability to solve the problems of the rural poor and in leading the country as a whole. The moral authority of the Chavalit government was seriously undermined by widespread criticism in the media. Lacking support from the urban middle classes and encountering strong public denunciation, the Chavalit government became conscious of the need to address the plight of the poor but the hope of expanding its basic support and seeking political legitimacy (2002: 54).

Comparing the Chuan I (1992–95), Banharn (1995–96) and Chavalit (1996–97) regimes, we find that Chuan I indeed resisted making concessions. It required both a marathon rally and the intervention of new mediators like Korn and Plodprasop to favour the AOP. By contrast, Banharn’s highly unstable regime granted concessions after only a month of street demonstrations. These concessions, while symbolic, helped mobilize a multiple-sector mass rally the following year against Chavalit. Chavalit’s regime made many tangible concessions.

Thaksin’s regime began with a very friendly stance towards the AOP and popular movements. His Thai Rak Thai party, eager to differentiate itself from the others, participated in seminars the AOP organized to deliberate policy solutions to problems of Thailand’s poor. Less than two years later, however after he had consolidated power, Thaksin had distanced himself from his erstwhile base of support in the AOP and the development NGO sector. Intractable conflicts over major projects such as two coal-fired power stations proposed for Prachuab Province, the Thai-Malay natural gas pipeline project, and Pak Mun may have meant such a distancing was inevitable.

Apaporn Sriduangden, a Chulalongkorn University social scientist, spoke to Thaksin’s Minister Dr. Prommin in 2003. Prommin spoke of the Pak Mun villagers as manipulated by the Assembly’s NGO advisors. He differentiated the Pak Mun protestors from opponents of the two proposed Prachuab coal-fired power plants, as
well as the Thai-Malay natural gas pipeline. Dr. Prommin believed that the anti-Pak Mun movement was fabricating reasons (ha ruang) to overthrow the government, and the Pak Mun conflict would not end with opening the dam gates year-round. Prommin distrusted the AOP and believed it could catalyse turmoil (Apaporn, interview 24 August 2004).

Evaluating political opportunity-based arguments

Regime strength is a key component in the concept of political opportunity structure (McAdam et al. 1996). The concept, which can include leaders’ perception of their power, goes some way towards explaining the general outcomes of contention. However, it does not suffice as explanation, because it says nothing about state actors’ preferences, other than assuming that they prefer to reward existing and likely future voters, and prefer not to make concessions to radical groups.

Chuan’s second government assumed office during a period of high instability, and therefore – if regime strength alone mattered – we would expect it to make at least token concessions. However, as we saw, the Chuan II government reversed almost all of Chavalit’s commitments to the AOP. An alternative explanation for this exception is discursive: Chuan II operated according to “emergency management” policy narratives in which solving the nation’s financial and economic crisis was the top priority, a discourse which lent itself to practices such as ignoring AOP demands wherever possible, or pleading insolvency when forced by demonstrations to confront AOP’s issues.

Chuan’s second government also went further than finding arguments to kill off the AOPs’ demands. In 1999 the state aggressively filed fraud charges against more than 700 Rasi Salai Dam demonstrators in the AOP, including MP Adisorn Piangket (Missingham 2003: 201). Many observers would regard these events as anti-democratic and deplorable. But they were also innovative responses: Chuan II deliberately sought to undermine the gains made by the Assembly during the 1990s (including under Chuan I) (Baker 2000). It did so, perhaps, because it wished to counteract the larger changes they implied for Thai society. The Democrats had always adopted a master narrative of mainstream development as industrialization, which they shared with the NESDB. Chuan explicitly said that one of the goals of his

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113 These activists were not formally part of the AOP.
government was to reduce the number of people engaged in primary agricultural production, a framing congruent to that of the NESDB (Laird 1998). The entire project of the AOP and the alternative development NGOs appeared to obstruct the progress of this grand narrative. We see the intertwining of powerful discourses and interests orchestrating Chuan’s responses to the AOP, not merely an explanation such as regime strength.

Likewise, explaining Thaksin’s approach as a simple function of the strength of his regime at various points in time is hardly satisfying. Thaksin’s response to the political rise of the “poor” was innovative. It mixed real concessions to some poor people with real attacks on poor peoples’ political organizations. Thai Rak Thai defined a new rationality, that of competing with Thailand’s NGO sector to design anti-poverty policies, while at the same time pursuing modernization. The new image he projected of Thai Rak Thai as the national engine of policy and program innovation contributed greatly to his popularity and political strength.

In the Pak Mun case, as we saw, Thaksin commissioned a political opinion poll, and justified much of his decision on its results. Not surprisingly, public figures sympathetic to the AOP – e.g, Ubon Senator Dr. Niran Pitakvachara,114 attacked his decision-making as superficial – especially in contrast with the analysis offered by UBU. Did Thaksin use the poll and the military reports solely in a cynical manner, to justify a foregone conclusion based on other reasons – such as protecting EGAT’s interests and his own, by asserting his government’s right to govern in the face of a vociferous minority?

That would result in a simple interest-based explanation. While some interests are indeed simple, the conceptual framework I use (Chapter 2) emphasizes the role that institutions and discourses play in shaping preferences. If we recall that Thaksin entered politics from a long career in business, it would be reasonable for him to regard the opinion poll as an important means of generating valid and valuable knowledge on how to serve large numbers of people whose business he wanted. The poll was equivalent to market survey research. Thaksin, no democratic theorist, did not have qualms about defending action according to majoritarian preferences.

Early on 14 January, the day he later was to reach a decision on Pak Mun,

114 Dr. Niran stated the decision was dishonourable and lacked an understanding of the structural causes of the conflict (Matichon 2003). Niran is a practicing physician and prominent Ubon social activist, ally to the AOP, and former Chair of Senate Committee on Public Health.
Thaksin spoke at a press conference:

We had to take a poll because we wanted to know the opinions of the majority. The government did not follow its own wishes, or act under pressure, or act to generate any particular benefits . . . we need to think of the greater benefit, especially the benefit of people in the area, because it affects the livelihoods [withi chiwit] of local people, and everything must go according to rules. As we are a democracy we need to accept democracy. Not accepting democracy is not democracy, it’s anarchy. (*Matichon* 2003)

When asked what the government would do if the protestors did not accept its resolution, Thaksin said “the protestors might understand the reasoning, there could be a local referendum, whatever the majority says will need to be accepted” (ibid., p. 16).

The Prime Minister's narrative disavows any interest in how the local “majority” formed its opinions. My suggestion is that pro-dam discourses propagated by local authorities (the KVHG) and the mass media played a role (Phongpaichit and Baker 2004: Ch. 5). Chapter 8 discusses a number of specific factors that may have shaped local opinion (see sections 8.2.3 and 8.6).

### 7.3.4 Rhetoric and narrative as power resources

The analysis above rejects changes in political opportunity structure as a sufficient explanation of government responses to the Assembly and its allies. I argued that one process used by state agents to limit their susceptibility to the campaigns of civil society actors was the strategic deployment of particular rhetorics by different governments. I noted the argument of economic crisis used by Chuan II and the rhetoric of opinion polling and accommodating the majority by Thaksin. I suggested that state actors’ perceptions of regime strength and stability mediated the use of these rhetorical and narrative devices.\(^\text{115}\) Similarly, the weak governments of Banharn and Chavalit limited their losses (in terms of standing with urban voters) by at least implicitly invoking a rhetoric of populist concession.

In the case of Chuan II and Thaksin, I suggested that their particular rhetorical devices and narratives were not arbitrary but invoked larger normative models. In Chuan’s case, the model was of industrial development along neo-liberal terms. In Thaksin’s case, the model was a more complex one combining liberalized trade with a much more active role for the state in financing domestic growth, incubating small and

\(^{115}\) Here I apply an explicitly social constructionist interpretation to the concept of political opportunity structure.
medium enterprises, and supplying minimal social safety net provisions (see Phongpaichit and Baker 2004: Ch. 4).

Similarly, social-movement actors deployed a rhetoric of legitimacy in numbers, a welfarist argument of lost opportunity, a rhetoric of environmental restoration; and finally, when attacked by Thaksin’s administration as a minority, they resorted to a basic rhetoric of justice. Considering Thailand’s political and economic volatility and the changing series of antagonists they dealt with, these diverse rhetorics are hardly surprising. The strategically evolving rhetoric of social-movement actors nonetheless appealed to a common discursive frame. In contrast with the dominant model of state-led modernizing transformation, the AOP’s frame anchored to social justice, popular participation, and defence of natural resources as common property.

7.4 Unexpected events and institutionalized practices

The attention above to actors’ strategic use of rhetoric may give the impression that an entire case such as Pak Mun can be dissected into a series of moves and counter-moves made by contending parties with stable preferences. However, two factors complicate this kind of rationalist reading: first, the impact of unforeseen events, such as episodes of violence and shifting preferences, and second, the power of institutionalized practices.

7.4.1 Unexpected events

The Assembly initiated risky and dramatic direct actions, such as the May 2000 dam seizures at Pak Mun and Rasi Salai. The Pak Mun seizure caught EGAT by surprise and increased the salience of the problem among senior management (Surapong, interview 20/8/04). Likewise, violence by, or attributed to, state agents generated media coverage sympathetic to demonstrators (e.g., police beatings and mass arrests after the compound scaling incident in 2000), and unleashed more pressure on the government from student and academic allies.

Such events initially re-aligned the micro-political context in the Assembly’s favour. To limit their vulnerability to pressure, both Chuan in 2000 and Thaksin in 2002 authorized re-examinations of villagers’ grievances, admitting new actors and practices. In 2000, with thousands of villagers mobilized around a number of grievances, the Bantorn committee produced favourable recommendations. In late
2002, however, with many fewer people mobilized around Pak Mun, and a four-month offer already on the table, the new actors and practices included the local military and a poll by the National Statistics Office.

Try as they might to establish a climate of non-violence, rational decision makers in the government could not predict when dramatic and possibly violent direct actions might occur, since they could not control the actions of either the Assembly or its many conservative antagonists. Moreover, we see no evidence of preventive measures by EGAT in 2000 against the possibility of a blockade at Pak Mun. Such evidence would make a highly rationalist explanation of contention more plausible. A rational choice model might conclude by stating that actors’ capacity for rational action was limited. By contrast, the conceptual framework I seek to develop challenges us to identify processes that might produce interesting outcomes such as the finding, despite more than a decade of contention, of constrained strategic thinking. The most promising place to look for a process able to constrain rationality on the part of both factions is in the realm of discursive practices.116

**Changing discourses and interests of elites**

Another force that could turn the Pak Mun conflict unexpectedly was rapidly changing discourses or policy narratives of elites and experts on either side of the debate. One of the most clear-cut examples was Dr. Mongkhon Visetsuk’s changing policy narratives.

Project for Ecological Recovery once counted Dr. Mongkhon, a civil engineer and former director of the Water Resource and Environment Institute at Khon Kaen University, among its early ranks of Pak Mun critics (Permponsacharoen 1991). Mongkhon subsequently defended small-scale, locally-managed irrigation projects Watershed 2001). In 2000, he served on the Neutral Committee chaired by Dr. Bantorn, and there he floated the idea of a four-month trial opening of Pak Mun Dam.

Monkhon did not directly participate in the subsequent Thaksin-era Pak Mun study conducted by Ubon Ratchathani University. However, in September 2002 he became president of the University. This was after the University’ study team released its executive summary, and Dr. Sumitra and Dr. Seri began to promote a five-year trial

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116 The rhetoric of legitimate protest for social justice used constantly by the AOP may have caused it to underestimate the danger of harassment in Bangkok and the potential of Thaksin’s administration to innovate new tactics to legitimate its preferred policies.
opening as the study team’s preferred option. Mongkhon instead endorsed a four-month seasonal opening. He communicated that position as the University's official recommendation to Deputy Prime Minister Pongpol’s committee.

Several weeks later, after the Pongpol committee had made its decision, Dr. Sumitra contravened Dr. Mongkhon's position at seminars in Bangkok (Matichon 2002d). Mongkhon defended his position – in a memo circulated around the University – by arguing that the four-month opening was “a middle path” and that the dam provided clean renewable energy far more cheaply than solar energy. By December, after EGAT admitted that PMD was not indispensable to power reliability, and after he had been drowned in effigy during the rallies outside Government House, Dr. Mongkhon did what some University colleagues described as “a 180-degree turn” (klap lam). At the Prime Minister's special roundtable with the villagers, as we saw, he eloquently defended the year-round opening as an option that would produce “only winners.”

What prompted these changes? One interpretation is that until November 2002, Mongkhon attempted to save face for EGAT and the government by getting behind what many elites regarded then and now as a middle path to conflict resolution. When the EGAT governor signalled a willingness to sacrifice Pak Mun, at the 18 November Senate Committee on Public Participation meeting chaired by Chirmsak Pinthong,117 Mongkhon may have realized his burden was unnecessary. He had antagonized university colleagues, progressive NGOs, and local villager organizations. Emboldened by EGAT’s discursive concession, Mongkhon re-aligned himself with his study team colleagues. Pho Manchit, a villager leader who attended that meeting, recalls Senator Chirmsak excoriating Mongkhon for the manner in which he had handled the University’s research findings (interview 15/2/03). “Your remarks are destroying (thamlai) your institution,” Chirmsak allegedly said to Mongkhon. “They’re destroying other institutions as well.”

Mongkhon soon chose explicitly to uphold the University, as opposed to EGAT, as an institution. In doing so, to a certain degree, he revived his 1991 position against constructing the dam. It is plausible that the deliberative space opened up on 18 November at the Senate Committee by the questioning of its Chairman, Senator Chirmsak Pinthong, forced EGAT to admit a position it was not yet ready to

117 A Bangkok-based academic and television presenter.
announce. Other actors such as Mongkhon then received a chance to re-examine their preferences, even as other actors attempted to shame them that day.

What about Thaksin's advisers, men such as Dr. Prommin, Phumtham, and Thawee, former activists from 1973–76? Did their preferences change? What about Thaksin himself? In 2000, the relationship between TRT and the Assembly of the Poor grew rather cosy. Thaksin and his aides invited NGO and Assembly participation in the new party’s activities. The relationship was mutually beneficial. The Assembly benefited from Thaksin's electoral victory, and TRT distinguished itself from the Democrats as an active problem-solver for poor farmers. When crunch time came in 2002 for decisions on major energy projects however, it was clear that intractable conflict existed between the small-scale, communitarian development path championed by the Assembly, and the modernist-entrepreneurial narrative of TRT (Nantipha, interview 27/11/02). Community rights were unacceptable if that meant giving communities veto power over national development projects (Thawee, interview 4/12/02).\(^{118}\)

Whereas Dr. Mongkhon shifted his public preferences dramatically, I read the defiant rhetoric directed at NGOs by TRT leaders as a push-came-to-shove re-affirmation of their preferences.

We can re-construct how rationalities shifted for particular leaders, without necessarily claiming that we entirely know what caused them. But as soon as we do so, we have to abandon any notion the entire conflict can be modelled as a fixed game played by rational actors with stable preferences.

### 7.4.2 Power of institutions and discourses

Thus far we have reviewed the strategic use of rhetoric to justify an actor’s preferences, both in cases where we infer that those preferences dovetail with underlying normative models (Section 7.3.4), and in cases where preferences are challenged during the course of struggle. The findings – the constraining power of discourses, as well as their vulnerability to change in the aftermath of unexpected shocks and argumentative struggle – challenge us to identify the causal mechanisms by which preferences change. From the discussion above, mechanisms that cause preferences to change include deliberation or reasoned argumentation (the 18

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\(^{118}\) The 1997 constitution provides traditional communities rights to participate in management of local natural resources (Sections 46, 56).
November 2002 Senate hearing) and—a new finding in this chapter—social censure or shaming.

The discussion of normative models used by Thaksin and Chuan above, however, also pointed to the importance of mechanisms that limit preference change. Other institutions and institutionalized discourses constrained the strategic actions and policy narratives of social movement and, especially, state actors.

Electricity generation planning practices

First, although computational techniques and some methodologies have changed, EGAT approaches planning with the same principles that it did in the 1980s, when Pak Mun Dam was planned. Because of transmission line capacity constraints, planners continue to see the Northeast and South regions as the most vulnerable to power reliability problems. The preferred solution, then and now, is to build new sources of peaking power and locate them within or near each of these regions so as to minimize transmission losses. Second, EGAT still views hydro as attractive, despite its high capital costs, because of its renewable nature (low “fuel” cost). However it appears to have decided not to build new hydro dams in Thailand, in no small part because of the immense conflict over Pak Mun Dam.

This combination of planning principles was used to promote Pak Mun Dam in the lower Northeast, Kaeng Krung Dam in the South in the late 1980s, as well as the current Nam Theun 2 (Laos) and Khanom (southern Thailand) natural gas projects. If various proposed Salween river hydropower projects get underway, they will be justified by similar considerations: a combination of basic power supply engineering considerations, along with investors’ push. With these practices in mind, we can appreciate why Sithiporn Rathanopas, the EGAT governor who offered the four-month option for Pak Mun in 2002, also promoted new projects on the Salween before his retirement (Matichon 2002e). As we saw in Chapter 5, demand-side management and other energy conservation programs have been implemented since 1991, but they are still considered ancillary to EGAT’s main business of supply expansion. The only practices capable of radically challenging the status quo are integrated resource

119 Nam Theun 2 will supply Thailand up to 995 MW which, when combined with existing local power sources, is more than peak demand in the NE. Power from Nam Theun 2 that cannot be consumed in the NE will be exported to other regions; hence critics have pointed out significant transmission losses. If this contradicts the planning principles I have just mentioned, it also reflects the real-world complexity of project promotion. One of the strongest project proponents is the Laos government.
planning (IRP) and distributed small-scale generation systems.

**Mitigation and engineered progress**

In this chapter, we saw in the exchange between Mongkhon and Thaksin the notion that the Pak Mun protestors are a minority who have failed to adapt to the currents of rural social change. Thai state agencies’ planning practices accept that environmental impacts are inevitable, but assume they can mitigate, compensate, and even overcome them, by targeted delivery of development projects. Here we see none other than the grand narrative of development as technically engineered progress, a story repeated countless times across the planet in the 20th century, and often in the case of water development, on a grand scale (Worster 1985; Reisner 1993; McCully 1996). Strikingly in the Mun case, reservoir stocking has been offered as a means to enhance fishing yields (see Chapter 8) even in the context of a four-month wet season opening, notwithstanding the risk of downstream fish emigration from the system.

Discourses of mitigation and compensation are discourses of calculation and conversion. They draw from the same instrumental rationality that enables an analyst to establish majorities and minorities. They translate otherwise incommensurable demands minorities make into packages of benefits a modern industrial polity can deliver. At least in Thailand however, such translations are routinely contested.

**Conflict management processes**

Thailand has evolved ad hoc problem-solving committees for conflict management. Problem-solving committees are usually appointed by and report to the Prime Minister or the cabinet, as opposed to parliament. The main committee may establish more than one level of subcommittee, which increases the chances that project opponents, academics, and other stakeholders may directly participate and observe. However, it is typical for the main committee (with decision-making power) to include only civil servants and elected politicians.

This kind of institutional arrangement has several weaknesses: first, it turns decision-making about large projects into a series of "one-off" encounters. The need for a problem-solving committee depends on whether the executive branch acknowledges a problem exists, which often depends in turn upon the ability of civil society stakeholders to argue and protest that it does.
Second, by its very nature, the "one-off" settlement appeals little to rules of law. Weak stakeholders must rely upon their own and their allies' skills and resources. In certain political situations, problem-solving committees indeed deliver benefits to vulnerable stakeholders. Benefits however are highly contingent on political circumstances: stakeholders must be able to stage long-running demonstrations to press their case, which is most favourably heard when governments need to maintain flagging popularity. Receiving benefits, however, also requires convergence on shared definitions of the problem and solution. To a certain degree, the four-month opening represents such convergence. Although the AOP officially continues to reject it, most of its membership has chosen to live with it. The complexity of issues that needed to be addressed for convergence on problem definition and solutions meant that it took a string of ad hoc committees (dating back to Bantorn’s Committee in 2000) to converge on the four-month opening. This is inefficient particularly with respect to future contingencies.

Neither the Bantorn committee nor any of Pongpol’s committees specified the formal steps, procedures, and criteria by which key decisions would be made before the dam was to open or before the UBU study was to commence. Statements about decision-making were uniformly vague. I heard and read the following description of process in the media, from Ubon Ratchathani University and from AOP affiliates: “Ubon Ratchathani University will generate research and deliver results to the government, and the government will decide” (Chalermsripinyorat, 2002b). Indeed, when Thai people say “government” (rathabaan) they mean the executive branch, not all three branches. These statements assume that the executive branch has the technical capacity and authority to decide.

In the Pak Mun case in 2002, the lack of a detailed decision-making timetable meant there was no institutional buffer for decision makers to resist pressure from all parties. Lack of a clear, stakeholder-accepted decision-making process led to tense lobbying for new “problem solving” committees.

Why did dam critics acquiesce in letting the Thaksin process – which left decision-making so firmly in the hands of the executive branch – proceed? After all, this coalition includes some of Thailand’s most politically sophisticated civil society analysts, such as the Campaign for Popular Democracy, and of course the AOP advisors themselves. I asked Naruemon Thabchumpon, a research scholar and activist with close ties to the AOP, to reflect on this question. Thabchumpon (personal
communication, 17/1/06) cited three possible reasons:

1) Power – lack of bargaining power with respect to Thaksin, who presided over the choice of committee design (notwithstanding personal ties between AOP advisors and Thaksin advisors Chaturon, Prommin, and Phumtham);

2) Institutions – entrenched administrative norms regarding the (peak) committee as an “impartial highest body” for decision making, as opposed to a multi-stakeholder forum;

3) Strategic expectations – activists believed that in any case, further mass demonstrations would be highly likely.

This explanation displays a pragmatic rationality. However, it is one shaped by contrasting storylines: (2) reflects the obstacles civil society reformists confronted as they faced taken-for-granted institutions (bureaucratic committee as impartial final arbiter). By contrast, the storyline in (3) reflects low expectations from those committees, and ongoing need for street politics. Both frames are “institutionalized” in modern Thai political culture.

7.5 Conclusion

During the fourteen-year course of this conflict, arguments changed, actors changed, and some political institutions changed. This chapter described those changes during 1994–2003. I conclude by reviewing and explaining key findings.

7.5.1 Patterns of contention

As in the pre-operation period, the state's responses to dam opponents ranged from repression (see Section 6.4.2) to negotiated concessions. Likewise, violence against the protestors – e.g., police crackdowns on direct actions – provoked a temporarily empowering media backlash.

Despite these similarities, the post-operation period is qualitatively different. The Mun River Villagers’ Committee and later the AOP began to stage larger demonstrations, in part because their demands for fisheries compensation appealed to a larger set of beneficiaries, in part because of proven successes in earlier campaigns and the entry of new aggrieved groups into the Assembly. Faced with the challenge of sustained mobilization, the state, beginning with Chuan I, deliberately stalled and
otherwise refused to budge on protestors’ demands. The state learnt to withhold its force. This was not a foregone conclusion.\textsuperscript{120}

Rather than reacting by harshly repressing protest, the state discovered it could let protestors languish, and especially post-1997, espoused their right to protest. Such a response helped produce the marathon demonstrations in 1994, 1997 and the protest village at Mae Mun (1999–2002). A rational counter-response by the protestors was to transgress against the state in ways calculated to maximize the odds of favourable media coverage. Scaling the walls and blockading the gates of Government House, along with blockading operating dams, signalled intense commitment to their cause.

After the 1997 economic crisis, however, media and public opinion soured against the Chuan administration. In the wake of the major wall-scaling incident at government house, \textit{Nation}, a sympathetic media channel, reported that public opinion – as expressed on the political message board Pantip.com – was “bitterly divided” (2000b). Supporters defended the wall-scaling as a last resort “because the government had ignored [the protestors’] concerns for too long.” Pro-government messages condemned NGOs “for sending women, children, and old people to face commando police, and . . . accused [them] of provoking the crackdown” (ibid.).

Immediately after the wall-scaling incidents, senior officials from Ministry of Interior, police Special Branch, and National Security Council conceded that state-owned media channels were “presenting more news about the protestors than about the government’s side” of the story. The officials resolved to “boost their public relations effort” and “tell only the truth” (\textit{Bangkok Post} 2000). Within a week, Assumption University released a poll which found that among 1,394 Bangkok residents, 93.3% and 85.9% objected to protest tactics that, respectively, blocked traffic and trespassed on Government House (\textit{Nation} 2000c).

Media coverage of the entire Pak Mun conflict has not been systematically studied. However, throughout the controversy, the overwhelming impression is first that coverage in the two main English-language broadsheets, \textit{Bangkok Post} and \textit{Nation}, has been sympathetic to activists. Second, large circulation Thai-language papers such as \textit{Thai Rath} and \textit{Daily News} have given much less coverage than broadsheets such as \textit{Matichon, Khrungtep Thurakit, Phuchakan Rai Wan}. For

\textsuperscript{120} For instance, some two weeks into the 157-day rally, there was speculation that Ubon’s governor had backed a large conservative counter-demonstration in the hope that it would force the eviction of the anti-Dam protestors (\textit{Phuchakan Rai Wan} 1994).
instance, in 1994, the Matichon index listed 20 stories on the Pak Mun conflict from *Thai Rath* and *Daily News*, out of a total of 265. In 2002, another eventful year, the service listed only 8 stories from *Thai Rath* and *Daily News*, out of a total of 241 (see Section 7.2.1 above).

*Thai Rath* coverage is often negative (Chalermsripinyorat 2004). Occasionally the anti-Dam movement has even found it defamatory. In June 2002, the Pak Mun protestors burnt a *Thai Rath* journalist (and host of the EGAT-sponsored provincial radio program mentioned above) in effigy to denounce a series of his recent articles with predominantly negative coverage (*Matichon* 2002a). At *Thai Rath*, senior editors interviewed by Chalermsripinyorat in 2000 displayed attitudes that ranged from scepticism to hostility against the AOP (Chalermsripinyorat, 2002: Ch. 5).

In summary, the evidence we have suggests that social divisions in print media coverage before and after Pak Mun’s 1994 commissioning did not change. However, as the struggle featured “expert” knowledge games, particularly after 2000, the more serious broadsheet journals such as *Matichon, Bangkok Post,* and *Nation* re-produced that discourse, while with few exceptions the popular papers avoided it.

The net result, to use a musical metaphor, was a multi-vocal, multi-register discourse. The state contributed to the “base” notes in that discourse by continued repressive struggle. During Chuan I, two civil servants (the Khong Jiam district officer and the director of a local inland fisheries culture station) were transferred to other posts, allegedly for criticizing EGAT’s handling of the project (Wichian 1995a). During the second Chuan government, his personal secretary called the Assembly “parasites” and “opportunists” when they arrived to demonstrate in early 1998 (Phongpaichit and Baker 2000: 144). EGAT published attacks on NGOs and the Assembly (EGAT 2000b; 2001a; 2001b). The WCD process quickly became a discursive struggle *par excellence*.

The 1997 economic crisis had mixed effects on the Assembly’s demands. In the short term, the crisis ushered in the unfriendly second Chuan administration, but it also hastened the passing of the new Constitution. The crisis increased calls for reform of economic governance from farmers and business people alike. These events were conducive to the rise of Thai Rak Thai, the first political party with coherent policies to benefit both constituencies.

Thabchumpon (forthcoming) argues that the 1997 Constitution, with its reforms to strengthen the executive branch, and its electoral rules, has benefited Thai
Rak Thai far more than it has public participation. On the other hand, I note that the Constitution also established Thailand’s new Senate. I have mentioned Senators Chirmsak and Niran, but other men and women in the Senate also shaped the recent Pak Mun conflict by creating space for, and leading, deliberations (Chalermsripinyorat 2002: 71).

7.5.2 Explaining the path towards the four-month opening

We cannot explain the Assembly’s influence solely by the receptivity of weak regimes to pressure from below. The regime-strength explanation, which draws on the concept of “political opportunity structure” popular in mid-1990s social movement theory (McAdam et al. 1996) no longer suffices. By contrast, I argue that the manner in which claims were processed depended on framing contests between dam opponents and the state. These unfolded over time and were contingent on micro- and macro-political contexts. Some of these contexts were durable, such as electricity planning, and – surprisingly – norms of conflict management and participation. Some were novel, such as the widespread groundswell for reform after the 1997 crisis, and Thai Rak Thai’s discourse of poverty reduction through entrepreneurship. It is neither necessary nor desirable to force all these contextual dynamics into one over-taxed concept called political opportunity structure (McAdam et al. 2001; Meyer 2004).

Pak Mun’s four-month opening, meant to be honoured every year, is a new institution. The elite path to the four-month opening began with Dr. Mongkhon’s idea in 2000. EGAT adopted it in June 2002. In September 2002, shortly before Pongpol’s committee took its vote, Dr. Mongkhon again recommended it, as the middle path [tang sai klang]. Although Mongkhon later advocated a year-round opening, the Thaksin administration regarded this as too regressive and institution-bending. By conceding only a four-month opening, Thaksin and his men defended their party’s vision of development, and their authority to rule. In so doing, they upheld dominant institutions.

Institutions get defended and invented through discourses and practices, by real people with salient – yet dynamic – interests. Discourses and practices set broad parameters on likely outcomes, but in the case of Pak Mun we found considerable latitude for revision.

In the framework advanced here, actors strategically use certain tropes
(argumentation schemes and modes of attribution; Chapter 3) as power resources. At the same time, the wider discursive field shapes and limits their ability to act. Specific institutional routines also constrain or enable action. Of particular interest to me are important and contingent moments of micro-political change, in which elites allow reasoned public argument (i.e., deliberation) to occur, and participate in it. This chapter has emphasized detecting and understanding causal pathways that produce and result from such key moments, when powerful, publicly articulated interests shifted.
Chapter 8  Livelihoods in Dispute, 1999–2003

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8.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses my research agenda question about knowledge: What role do lay and expert knowledge discourses play in structuring conflicts and influencing outcomes? My attention shifts from trajectories of conflict and Thaksin’s decision making, the focus of Chapter 7, to the politicization of knowledge relevant to livelihoods in the period 1999–2003.

All institutions require knowledge discourses for legitimation. Thailand’s democratizing institutions increasingly legitimate themselves by appeal to expert knowledge discourses. In addition to this large-scale function, at the micro-scale knowledge discourses are resources that actors use in the course of political contention, including decision making. In Chapter 7, we saw how policy-making processes during the Thaksin administration allowed multiple knowledge discourses to circulate (multi-disciplinary studies, military intelligence, an opinion poll). I also noted the paucity of deliberation, or reasoned public debate.

This chapter more closely examines knowledge discourses around livelihoods and their politicization in the Pak Mun case. I pay particular attention to how four studies – the Tai Baan research project, the National Statistics Office (NSO) opinion poll, and the World Commission on Dams (WCD) and Ubon Ratchathani University (UBU) studies – construct and contextualize the relationship between aquatic resources and local livelihoods.

Although the WCD and subsequent studies associated with the trial dam opening of 2001–02 led to increases in knowledge, the mere accumulation of knowledge has been insufficient to resolve controversies about appropriate development strategies for the lower Mun river basin. The failure of knowledge discourses to resolve controversy results from:

- The genuine complexity of rural livelihoods;
- Divergent interests;
- Political dynamics involving the production, reproduction, and reception of knowledge discourses.

Long-standing contention has destabilized the status of knowledge brokers and of policy-relevant knowledge. Such destabilization has also been produced by a lack
of multi-stakeholder deliberation. The complexity of Mun River livelihoods however demands such precisely such processes.

Section 8.2 re-examines rival discourse coalitions and their policy narratives. Section 8.3 introduces a conceptual framework from the literature on sustainable livelihoods, as a guide to exploring a 2000 debate within the important World Commission on Dams Pak Mun Dam study. Section 8.4 continues the exploration, examining a dispute over livelihoods analysis between the Thailand Development Research Institute (one of the players in the WCD debate) and Ubon Ratchathani University. Section 8.5 discusses rhetorical strategies elites use to receive knowledge discourses that challenge orthodox policy narratives. Section 8.6 looks at another type of response by the state to oppositional narratives of livelihood – investment in new projects aimed at increasing fisheries and agricultural production.

8.2 Rival discourse coalitions and policy narratives

8.2.1 Discourse coalitions

The Pak Mun case’s polarized structure emerged very early in the conflict, and hardened in the decade between the Dam’s commissioning in 1994 and the four-month-opening decision in 2003. For each rival discourse coalition, one can find the composite policy narrative that it defends and promotes (Table 8.1). We have seen aspects of these narratives in Chapter 6 and 7, but they are worth reviewing here. A striking feature of both discourse coalitions is how they portray the livelihoods of project-affected people. The citations in Table 8.1 all derive from “expert” knowledge discourses or expert testimony whereby both discourse coalitions invoke “scientific” claims. However the epistemic grounding of these knowledge discourses ranges from mainstream empiricism to social constructionism. The citations vary in intensity of evidence presented, from highly data-intensive studies (e.g., Amornsakchai et al. 2000a) to commentaries (e.g., Roberts 1993). Finally, they vary in quality and salience. The rest of this chapter examines selected epistemic and policy-relevant debates in more detail.
Table 8.1 Discursive features of livelihood and fisheries-related debates over Pak Mun Dam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thai state line agencies and their commissioned studies / Mainstream coalition</th>
<th>Civil society, multi-stakeholder processes and independent studies / Critical coalition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Livelihoods: Relationship between local people and living aquatic resources</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing plays a marginal role in livelihoods (Supachai et al. 2000)</td>
<td>Central role in livelihoods, as measured by almost 95% of households that engage in fishing activity (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 51; Settrachau 2002a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing is a marginal “occupation” (achip)</td>
<td>Deeper, more profound relationship with cultural resonance (Settrachau 2002a; UBU 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mitigation and resource management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fish pass</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish pass will assist wild species migration problem (EGAT 2000b)</td>
<td>Pass does not work for many important food species (Roberts 2001; Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fisheries management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable fisheries requires enforcing unpopular bans on illegal fishing gear (Starr 2004; Jutagate et al. 2003)</td>
<td>Acknowledges overfishing but discusses extenuating circumstances (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fisheries yield and role of stocking</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisheries yield 100–200 kg/ha/yr (without and with stocking respectively; Team Consulting Engineers 1982 in Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 39)</td>
<td>More realistic yield from a run-of-the-river dam head pond = 10 kg/ha/yr (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a:109)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Natural ecosystem

#### Habitat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thai state line agencies and their commissioned studies / Mainstream coalition</th>
<th>Civil society, multi-stakeholder processes and independent studies / Critical coalition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No proof rapids are important habitat (Pan-Aram 2000)</td>
<td>Loss of rapids has harmed fish populations (Roberts 1993; 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of wetlands a concern (Roberts 1993; 2001; Poulsen et al. 2002; Asanee, interview 12/10/04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fish movements (ecology of feeding and spawning)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thai state line agencies and their commissioned studies / Mainstream coalition</th>
<th>Civil society, multi-stakeholder processes and independent studies / Critical coalition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited recognition</td>
<td>Many important wild-capture Mekong fish species need to move to complete life cycle, as well as for feeding (Roberts 2001; Poulsen et al. 2002)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Biodiversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thai state line agencies and their commissioned studies / Mainstream coalition</th>
<th>Civil society, multi-stakeholder processes and independent studies / Critical coalition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity is a salient issue for outsiders, not local people (Surapong [EGAT], interview 28/8/04)</td>
<td>Diversity has declined (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 40)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.2.2 Critical discourse coalition

Dam critics and opponents produced narratives whose common themes were injustice, anti-development or development as dystopia, and most recently, renewal or restoration by nature. Regarding *injustice*, Chapter 6 noted how an injustice frame was deployed against the project beginning in 1989. More than a decade later, in a report he wrote for WCD on social aspects of the Pak Mun Dam case, Chayan...
Vaddhanaphuti\textsuperscript{121} inverted a memorable phrase in a World Bank evaluation report\textsuperscript{122} as to what the “history” of the project was really about:

The history of the Pak Mun project is not the history of struggle over fair compensation for the resettlement and loss of income from fishing, but the history of struggle of the affected villagers over their rights to livelihood, environment, and participation in decisions affecting their lives.

(Vaddhanaphuti 2000a: 27)

The WCD case study used Chayan’s framing in its final report:

Several promises have been made by EGAT, but they have been broken. Often the government used force to end demonstrations. The history of the Pak Mun project is the history of the struggle between the affected people and EGAT over the right to livelihood and the right to the environment upon which the affected people depend . . . and not over fair compensation.

(Amorphsakchhai et al. 2000a: 13)

Countering the mainstream frame of generosity, Chayan stated that: “The so-called 'generous' compensation was the result of years of negotiations, protests, demonstrations and confrontation” (Vaddhanaphuti 2000a: 27).

Regarding anti-development, Tyson Roberts, an independent fisheries biologist and one of the most vocal critics of large dams in the Mekong basin, wrote in 1993:

Officials of the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the Mekong Secretariat should realize that the received truths concerning development . . . are true no longer, or at least not so true as once seemed. . . . We must not continue on the path of unrelenting environmental degradation . . . . Mankind's greatest material heritage is an ecologically healthy planet Earth.

(Roberts 1993: 131–132)

Nidhi Aeusrivongse, historian and public intellectual, caustically noted in his introduction to the Tai Baan villager research project:

The income of fishers changes according to the lifecycle of fish. When large fish move up the river they can average 400 baht per person per day. In seasons when the size of fish declines, the price falls . . . and villagers turn to make fermented fish to sell or to exchange for rice for an average income of approximately 200–300 baht per day. Workers in Bangkok for the most part cannot match this, therefore it is astounding that the NESDB decided to build a hydropower dam to generate electricity to feed industrial factories, forcing people in the Pak Mun area to become factory workers at rates of less than

\textsuperscript{121} Chiang Mai University’s Dr. Chayan is a scholar-activist on the board of Southeast Asia Rivers Network (SEARIN).

\textsuperscript{122} World Bank (1998: 13). See Section 8.2.3 below.
half of what they used to receive, and even referred to this as development. (Aeusrivongse 2002 in Srettachau 2002b: III–IV)

Renewal / restoration. The dam openings in 2000 under Chuan and 2001–2 under Thaksin gave dam opponents an opportunity to present a corrective storyline that showed the way to restore the imbalances of development. The most striking and lavishly illustrated narrative of renewal comes from the Tai Baan research project.

Tai Baan’s restoration narrative

The Tai Baan action research project was coordinated by Southeast Asia Rivers Network and the AOP, with funding support from Rockefellers Brothers Foundation. It ran for approximately 14 months, timed to coincide with the trial dam opening in June 2001. It involved 200 adults and children from 65 villages, and used participant observation, interviews, and thematic expert focus groups (Srettachau 2002a). A key feature of the study’s participatory design consisted of anti-dam villagers nominating experts among their peers to serve in the focus groups, which included topics such as economic botany and fish biology.

Tai Baan’s purpose was to answer the broad question of what changes in livelihoods and the lower Mun ecosystem occurred as a result of opening the dam. Tai Baan’s products included two monographs and a visually sophisticated eight-minute video shown during PM Thaksin’s December 2002 roundtable meeting with villagers (Srettachau 2002a; 2002b; SEARIN 2002). The video’s images include flowing water, uncovered rapids, fish traders, laughing fishermen pulling up catches, children playing, and happy young families.

The Tai Baan research project presented some numerical claims as the basis for those visual images. In the 45 riverside villages studied, comprising 7,286 households, 95% of households returned to fishing during the first four months after the sluice gates were opened in 2001. The Tai Baan research project's classification of their livelihoods emphasized fishing (Figure 8.1):
Figure 8.1 Tai Baan’s classification of livelihoods

Source: data from Srettachau (2002b: 16)

One of the Tai Baan texts falls into the genre of natural history field guide. It features maps and colour photographs of the riverine ecosystem, notably rapids and detailed images of more than 156 species of fish, of which the study claimed 123 were species that moved between the Mekong and the Mun (Srettachau 2002a). The Tai Baan narrative portrays the river and its ecosystem as boundlessly potent natural forces, whose restoration unleashes a cascade of rejuvenation and other positive transformations in the lives of all *tai baan* (local people).

The narrative concludes that its research findings, together with other considerations, all support a continued opening of the dam:

Regardless of whether the impacts of opening the dam are considered with respect to ecological, social, cultural, or conflict issues, the Tai Baan research project found that opening the gates of Pak Mun Dam has more positive than negative consequences. These positive consequences occur widely both at the level of local communities and society. If these findings are considered together with the fact that Pak Mun Dam does not generate electricity according to its established targets, while the country has surplus power of more than 40%, together with a social and political situation in which the people's Constitution of 1997 guarantees community rights and people’s participation in resource management, the Tai Baan research project has only one recommendation, namely the continued opening of Pak Mun Dam's gates in order to return rights to livelihoods to Pak Mun people, and to return
wholeness to Isan [Northeastern Thai] people once again after it was stolen following the construction of the dam. (Srettachau 2002a: 22)

The recurrent metaphor deployed in the Tai Baan texts is that restoration of fish and flow to Mae Mun (Mother Mun) is the return of life to fishers. In its universal and mythopoetic tropes the text reaches far beyond the Mun river and its people.

**Ubon Ratchathani University’s restoration narrative**

The Ubon Ratchathani University (UBU) study constructed a more complex restoration narrative. It explicitly begins by acknowledging the current contribution of the Dam to regional power reliability, especially if imports from Lao were interrupted (UBU 2002: *Khor*-4). Likewise, the narrative recognizes the potential for expanding irrigated agriculture – not multi-cropped rice (as in the Chao Phraya basin) but rather row and fruit-tree crops such as watermelon, guava, lemon, papaya, and cultured fish (ibid., *Khor*-5). The narrative invokes a model of mixed-cropping smallholder agriculture promoted in recent years by King Bhumibol:

> [T]he development of irrigation supply to these areas needs to be matched with use of fertilizer, cover crops, and selection of appropriate crops for cultivation. As well, thought needs to be given to market conditions, and genuine soil and water conservation measures.

In addition, use of irrigation to increase rice field area does not fit in with rice farming methods used by farmers in this area. Farmers do not ask for water to grow a second (dry season) crop of rice. Instead, they ask for water for rice seedling production, and rely on rainfall for cultivation of the transplanted rice crop. Therefore, it could be said that irrigation charges, lack of soil fertility in the study area, and methods used by farmers are obstacles to developing agriculture in the area using irrigation. However, these obstacles could be overcome by government investment in development of irrigated, water-conserving mixed agriculture following concepts proposed by his Majesty the King. (ibid., *Khor* 5-6; English-language original)

Having acknowledged and qualified the benefits of power and irrigation, the narrative then discusses the merits of progressively opening the Dam's sluice gates from year-round closure to five, eight, and twelve months of the year. In each alternative, as the following excerpts clearly show, the narrative repeatedly invokes the concept of “community economics” and “community livelihoods:”

[Alternative 1, status quo]: This Alternative, although meaningful for electricity generation, is ungenerous to community economics, which needs to rely on fishery resources. Solutions based on other agricultural livelihoods are limited, even if there were to be improvement of irrigation. Seeking
employment outside of the farm sector is not a method of solving the problem, because it must be exchanged with hardship to normal patterns of life. Household members must migrate temporarily or indefinitely to sell their labour, which is not a desirable outcome in community-based development.

[Alternative 2, five-month July-November opening]: It will be possible to generate seven months of electricity. In any case upon consideration of community economics, during this period, returns from fishing are limited, both in terms of amount of income and number of households that derive income from fishing. Limited returns stem from problems catching fish during the flood season, especially for the majority of villagers who fish using small-scale mobile fishing gear (for example, hand-cast nets, fish traps set on the bottom, and gill-nets) and have boats without engines . . . In this alternative, although electricity may be generated, restoration of community livelihoods in the Mun River basin will not occur to its full potential.

[Alternative 3, eight-month April-November opening]: Opening the sluice gates during this additional three month period will cause natural rapids to appear, benefiting fisheries and forest ecology. This Alternative also provides livelihood benefits and traditional cultural benefits during the Songkran period, as well as benefits to community economics.

[Alternative 4, year-round opening for five years]: This Alternative follows from the consideration that many technical solutions to the Dam's problems in electricity generation can be found . . . However the problems of community economics do not quite have solutions, and are not solvable by technical means. The Dam has affected poverty and natural ecosystem in fertility in a manner not possible to deny. . . . This period, during which electricity generation by the Dam halts, will provide benefits of restoring ecological conditions, economics, and community livelihood. Villagers will be able to access fishery resources throughout the seasonal round. They will be able to use a variety of fishing gear . . . to catch fish following the seasonal natural cycle of the Mun River. . . . Restoration of nature will occur, as well as restoration of community livelihoods founded in their original locations. (UBU 2002: Khor 14-18; English-language original)

We see that UBU’s executive summary explicitly promotes and extols the concept of “community livelihoods founded in their original locations.” The narrative acknowledges the occurrence of out-migration and the importance of off-farm income. However it does not explicitly state that off-farm income in 2001 was more than 3.5 times fishing income (see Figure 8.6 below). The rhetorical effect is to construct a dualism between “community economics” – with implicit and explicit references to restoration of culture and social harmony – and an unnamed Other. That Other is by implication mobile, unable to follow seasonal rhythms of fishing, and displaced from community. The narrative casts a shadow over this way of living. Overall, the critical discourse coalition celebrates the return of fishes to the lower Mun following the dam opening, because it regards fishing as a key component of sustainable rural

123The Thai-Lao lunar new year in early April.
livelihoods. This coalition constructs livelihoods in terms of synergies between different rural activities such as farming, fishing, and vegetable gardening.

8.2.3 *Mainstream discourse coalition*

State line agencies and their commissioned studies, as well as studies by the World Bank, produced narratives whose common story lines included development, generosity, and responsive governance. Regarding *development*: EGAT repeated performance claims about the dam even after they had been challenged by the WCD study. It made use of frequent speech acts such as insisting that the dam would generate 136 MW and irrigate 45,000 rai with potential to expand to 160,000 rai (EGAT 2000; public meeting November 21 2002\(^{124}\); Surasom 2004: 93) and the nil fuel cost of hydropower (Cabinet Resolution 14 January 2003; Veera, interview 5/10/2004).

Regarding *generosity*: EGAT repeatedly pointed out, in presentation handouts, press kits, and other public relations literature, the scale of its payments, for example:

- 499,932,111.80 baht for landed assets compensation and local public infrastructure works
- 489,540,000 baht for fisheries compensation, to six sets of recipients totalling 6,176 households from 1995–2000, totalling 989,472,111.80 baht

(EGAT 2000: 13–14)

EGAT (2000: 15) cited World Bank reports commending its involuntary resettlement program for improving household income, assets, health, education, and public goods. The Bank framed the Pak Mun conflict as follows:

The history of the Pak Mun project is largely a history of the struggle over fair compensation, as resettlement had very minor impacts on incomes, except from fishing. EGAT actually committed to exceed the World Bank resettlement policy, to improve the living standards of affected households, to provide a range of options, and to implement resettlement with the participation of the affected people.

(World Bank 1998: 9)

\(^{124}\) Meeting at National Economic and Social Advisory Council, 21 November 2002.
As we saw above, the critical coalition consciously inverts this version of “the history” of the project.

Regarding responsive governance: EGAT and the Thaksin government framed the four-month opening as a win-win solution, following the wishes of the majority (Chapter 7). Thaksin’s cabinet also announced expanded pumped-water irrigation projects on the Mun River, and other investments (see Section 8.6).

Regarding livelihoods and project-affected people, we find the repeated assertion that fishing is, at best, a supplementary occupation. For instance, Khon Kaen University, based on its 1994–99 census of project-affected household members’ occupations, presented figures in which fishing is dwarfed by other occupations (Supachai et al. 2000: 23; see Figure 8.2). It is not until later in the same report (ibid., 98) that we find acknowledgement that fishing takes place in 60% of these households. Likewise, one of the first things we are told about the 3,750 households surveyed by the National Statistics Office is that only 3.6% reported fishing as their main occupation. The concept of livelihoods that underpins both narratives is modern, in that it equates livelihood with occupation. This type of policy narrative differentiates between fishing as a primary or secondary occupation (achip), and fishing as an activity (mi kan chap pla). The implication is that only “occupations” are salient in policy making.

State production of local knowledge: National Statistics Office poll

Opinion polls and local ecological knowledge, at first glance, do not appear to be well-matched competitors in an epistemic dispute. In the Pak Mun case, however, to a certain extent we can regard the NSO poll, conducted 24–26 December 2002 among 3,750 households in 150 villages, as a deliberate construction by a state agency of “local knowledge” to contest Tai Baan’s prior publication of local ecological knowledge (NSO 2003a).

The NSO described its survey design as “stratified three-stage sampling” (2003a: 1). The first stratum was district: it consisted of the three districts Phibun Mangsahan, Khong Chiam, Sirinthorn which contain the lower Mun River below Kaeng Saphue rapids. (These three districts also contain the majority of the 66 villages

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125 The Khon Kaen University study is a longitudinal socio-economic impact census of 241 households receiving compensation for inundated structures and land (n = 211 in 1999; response rate 87.5%).
in which people received compensation for income during construction of the dam.)

From a total of 317 villages/municipalities in this stratum, the NSO study team randomly selected 150 villages/municipalities from which to sample households. It divided the 150 villages into two sub-strata: 33 villages adjacent to the Mun, and 115 not adjacent to the Mun (see Figure 8.3). This activity comprised stage one of the design. In each village selected, the NSO team randomly chose 25 households (stage two), and administered the survey to people over age 18 (stage three).

The NSO survey consisted of a total of 16 questions, the first four of which asked the sex, age bracket, education level, and the respondent's relationship to the head of household. The remaining substantive questions are as follows:

- Questions 2.1–2.5 asked structured questions about: main occupation, land holdings, secondary occupation (if any), number of household members, and whether the respondent had watched the Prime Minister's televised roundtable meeting with villagers on 20 December 2002.
- Question 2.6 asked how the respondent's household rated the following sorts of impacts from the dam (as “positive,” “no change,” or “worse”): impacts on living conditions; environmental impacts; occupational impacts; flooding impacts; tourism-related impacts; and transport-related impacts.
- Question 2.7 asked whether the respondent knew which months fish spawn, and if so, to specify.
- Question 2.8 asked whether overall the respondent and household members were “satisfied” or “not satisfied” with the PMD project.
Figure 8.2  Primary and secondary occupations reported by Khon Kaen University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No occupation</td>
<td>8.44</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>71.52</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>6.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of labour (independent)</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>30.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and private sector</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>8.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: data from Supachai et al. (2000).

- Question 2.9, an open-ended question, asked the respondents to state how the gates of PMD should be opened and closed in order “for common benefit and for the benefit of the majority of the people as much as possible.”
- Question 2.10 asked, for each of five management scenarios, “If there were to be an opening-closing of the Pak Mun Dam sluice gates in the following cases, would your household be troubled (dueat ron) or not?” Respondents were to answer “no” or “yes,” and if “yes,” to supply reasons. The five scenarios were: opening the gates all year round; opening four months (July–October); opening five months
(July–November); opening eight months (April–November); and year-round closure.

- Question 2.11 asked “the PMD problem has persisted for more than 10 years without successful problem resolution. What is the main reason in your opinion?”
- Question 2.12 asked for further thoughts and recommendations to help guide problem resolution. (NSO 2003b: 2–4)

Conducted in three days, and using ambiguous terms such as main occupation and secondary occupation, the NSO poll was a relatively superficial intervention in the livelihoods debate. However, it became highly relevant when the Thaksin administration claimed it represented the preferences of the majority in the 3-district area (see Chapter 7). Figure 8.4 below shows preferred management strategies elicited in response to Question 2.9.

Analysis

A striking contribution of the NSO poll was to demonstrate how limited the AOP’s decommissioning campaign had become to people in the three districts of the lower Mun. The results of the poll indicated that the majority of respondents – even self-identified fishers and those living next to the Mun – did not clearly align themselves with the policy preferences put forward by the AOP and the Tai Baan research project, in which fishing was a ubiquitous and transformative component of livelihood strategies.

Having acknowledged this finding, a number of criticisms and comments follow. Survey research draws on the methodology of positive science (what I refer to in Chapter 3 as empirical realism). As Michael Burawoy (1998) discusses, to study the “real” world, social survey research specifically attempts to be non-reactive, reliable, replicable, and representative. Table 8.2 below summarizes each of these standards of validity (the “4Rs”).

The NSO report – and its officers’ remarks at an ad hoc public meeting organized with unhappy AOP villagers in Bangkok on 20 January 2003, a week after the government announced its final decision – provide no indication that important context effects were recognized, let alone controlled for. In order to defend the validity of this poll, a number of important interview, respondent, and field effects need to be addressed.
First, the poll's use of the phrase “occupation” was a lightning rod for AOP villagers. The NSO poll asked respondents to state their primary and secondary occupations \((achip)\). At the public meeting, Mae Lamduan stood up and asked: “Why didn't you gather information using wording such as ‘Pho Yai (grandfather), do you have children or grandchildren that fish?’” – implying that the response to this question would have been different than to questions based on “achip.”

Second, the poll took place several months after the government had announced its support for the four-month opening, and about six months after EGAT and the Kamnan and Village Headman’s Group had begun promoting the four-month opening. The three-day survey began on the day of Thaksin’s highly publicized visit and helicopter tour of the lower Mun. Interviews were conducted by 46 NSO officials, more than half of whom were from Bangkok. Each surveyor collected approximately 30 samples per day. Encounters were brief, constrained by the large sample size \((N=3750)\) and the government's request for results before year-end (Mr. Sue Lo-uthai, Secretary-General, National Statistics Office, public meeting 20/1/03). In such a context, interviewees may have given responses calculated to be conciliatory (Burawoy 1998). Respondents could also have interpreted the poll as an implicit request from the Thaksin administration for a show of support for its handling of the case.

To ask people how they would be affected by various management scenarios, the NSO poll used the ambiguous phrase \(dueat ron\) (troubled). Compare that with UBU’s approach towards dam management impacts on respondents. As part of its economic impact study, \(^{126}\) UBU asked a series of questions about food security, including “How has the construction and trial opening of Pak Mun Dam affected the convenience of obtaining food for your household? The choices were: no change; improved \((di khuen)\); much improved \((di kheun mak)\); worsened \((yae long)\); much worsened \((yae long mak)\) (UBU 2002: 6-47).

By contrast, NSO asked for a yes/no response to the following: “If there were to be an opening-closing of the Pak Mun Dam sluice gates in the following cases, would your household be troubled or not?” If respondents answered yes, they were asked to state their reasons (NSO 2003b). The UBU question, though complexly

\(^{126}\) See Section 8.4.1 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard of validity in positive science (“4Rs”)</th>
<th>Research design principles (“4Ss”)</th>
<th>Context effects (challenges to validity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-reactivity</strong>: research does not alter the phenomena under study</td>
<td><strong>Stimulus</strong> – Survey instrument is a neutral stimulus</td>
<td><strong>Interview effects</strong> – phrasing of interview questions and/or subject position of interviewer (e.g., socio-economic status and ethnicity) $\rightarrow$ reactivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong>: operational questions actually capture the phenomena they purport to measure</td>
<td><strong>Standardization</strong> – ask all respondents identical questions in identical ways</td>
<td><strong>Respondent effects</strong> – Irreducible ambiguity in questions leads to variance in how they are interpreted; cannot be eliminated by standardized administration of survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Replicability</strong>: any other analyst would obtain the same results</td>
<td><strong>Stabilize</strong> “external” conditions or argue that they do not affect responses</td>
<td><strong>Field effects</strong> – political, social, and economic context in which the research conducted affects results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representativeness</strong>: the sample selected is typical of the population</td>
<td><strong>Sampling</strong> – principles need to be carefully described and justified with respect to research question</td>
<td><strong>Situation effects</strong> – the argument is that “meanings, attitudes, and . . . knowledge do not reside in individuals but are constituted in social situations” $\rightarrow$ problem of how to sample “situations,” as opposed to individuals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Burawoy (1998)
Figure 8.3  Contrasting spatial distribution of villages studied by NSO (2003) and UBU (2002)

Source: Village names from NSO (2003c); UBU (2002: Ch. 6). NSO polled 150 villages; Figure 8.3 shows all I could accurately determine using publicly available GIS data.
structured, permitted a range of responses. It occurs in the context of a much more extended questionnaire about incomes, assets, and livelihood strategies. The presence of multiple thematically related questions could reduce interview effects and might serve to limit respondent effects. By contrast, the NSO’s question structure (no/yes/and if yes, elaborate) asks a sensitive question in a clinical and blunt manner, placing the burden of elaboration upon the respondent. In the context of a one-off encounter between surveyor and respondent, motivation to elaborate might have been absent.

**Figure 8.4 Preferred management options of households surveyed by NSO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Fishermen (n=150)</th>
<th>Adjacent river (n=875)</th>
<th>Not adjacent river (n=2875)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close year round</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open year round</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open 4 months</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open 5 months</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open 8 months</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the government sees fit</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a scheduled manner</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During spawning season</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSO (2003a).
Even if the NSO survey had managed to eliminate all context effects, its results raise further questions. For instance, the poll does not display any margin of sampling error. It reports that the proportions of people who would be troubled by four-month, five-month and eight-month openings of Pak Mun Dam are respectively 2.3%, 2.4%, and 3.0%. At the public meeting, I stood up and asked the presenter whether the NSO would claim these differences were statistically significant, but did not receive an affirmative response. UBU fishery scientists have argued in favour of an eight-month opening, to allow fishes to complete more upstream and downstream movements (Jutagate et al. 2003). If the number of people who would be negatively affected by an eight-month opening is not significantly larger, then such a policy option might warrant further consideration, in light of its greater potential to sustain fishing-dependent livelihoods.

To summarize, the results of the Thaksin administration’s poll are uncertain and ambiguous upon closer examination. However, in the manner in which they were reported and received, they subverted the monopoly of policy narratives – from Tai Baan and UBU – that claimed to represent *tai baan* (local people). The poll gave voice to what the administration constructed as the hitherto silent majority, and allowed it to beat the AOP at its own game of representing local people. The poll legitimated state decision making by appealing to, and constructing, a local knowledge discourse.

### 8.3 Livelihoods in dispute

As we have just seen, the two main discourse coalitions construct livelihoods in sharply divergent ways. The contested construction of livelihoods lies at the heart of the Pak Mun case. Relationships between living aquatic resources and livelihoods remains contested in the Mekong basin more generally (Bush 2005). In this section and Section 8.4, I take a close look at how different contributors to the WCD and UBU multi-stakeholder processes constructed these relationships. Before doing so, however, it will help to relate the polarized narratives we saw above to a conceptual framework from the literature on sustainable livelihoods.

#### 8.3.1 Sustainable livelihoods framework

Put most simply, livelihoods are sets of activities that people piece together in order to survive, subsist, and ideally to procure some measure of well-being which
they get to define (Scoones 1998; Sen 1999). In so doing they draw on other assets at hand and, especially in rural areas, on natural resources. The whole process of accessing and converting livelihood “assets” to well-being is shaped by larger processes such as markets and state institutions (see Figure 8.5).

The sustainable livelihoods concept emerged in the work of development scholars and practitioners in the late 1980s, and has since been elaborated in a series of research projects, many commissioned by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, the U.K. Department for International Development and international non- and inter-governmental organizations such as Oxfam and IUCN (Chambers and Conway 1992; Scoones 1998; Carney et al. 1999; Fisher et al. 2005).

A more formal, commonly used definition is that:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the long and short term. (Chambers and Conway 1992: 7–8)

The sustainable livelihoods framework encompasses a number of variables and processes. People make a series of decisions, based on their “livelihood resources.” These resources, also referred to as different types of “capital,” include natural resource endowments and social access to those endowments. Peoples’ decisions are also influenced by local and non-local institutional constraints. In Northeast Thailand, rice growing, fishing, livestock raising, off-farm labour, and craft production constitute common ingredients in livelihood portfolios.

In a helpful review, Ian Scoones states that intensification, extensification, and diversification comprise three general features of livelihoods:

Either you gain more of your livelihood from agriculture (including livestock rearing, aquaculture . . . ), through processes of intensification (more output per-unit area through capital investment or increases in labor inputs) or extensification (more land under cultivation), or you diversify to a range of off-farm income earning activities, where you move away and seek a livelihood, either temporarily or permanently, elsewhere. Or, more commonly, you pursue a combination of strategies . . . (1998: 9)

The overarching question Scoones urges analysts to ask is:
Given a particular context (of policy setting, politics, history, agro-ecology and socio-economic conditions), what combination of livelihood resources (different types of "capital") result in the ability to follow what combination of livelihood strategies (agricultural intensification/extensification . . . diversification and migration) with what outcomes? Of particular interest in this framework are the institutional processes . . . which mediate the ability to carry out such strategies and achieve (or not) such outcomes. (1998: 3)

Cast in these terms, the debate over livelihoods in the lower Mun River basin involves divergent framings of the most appropriate livelihood strategies, reflecting multiple framings of context and appropriate outcomes. However, strategies invoked by most actors in the lower Mun emphasized capital-led and labor-led intensification (e.g., pumped water irrigation, increased investment in boats, organic farming and year-round fishing) and de-emphasized migration. The mainstream discourse coalition emphasized material outcomes. Its critical counterpart framed them more broadly in such terms as happiness, cultural restoration, and the inherent right of localities to define outcomes.

In assessing sustainable livelihoods, Scoones reminds us that:

The concept of sustainable livelihoods is a composite of many ideas and interests, the coming together of a number of different strands in the development debate. The important thing to recognize about the term is that it is always subject to negotiation . . . different people will inevitably have different views as to the priority [outcome] indicators, and, where conflicts are highlighted, choices then have to be made. (Scoones 1998: 7)

Returning to Pak Mun as a case of livelihoods in dispute: ever since the Mun River Villagers’ Committee launched its first campaign for fisheries compensation in 1993 (see Chapter 6), oppositional villagers have deployed the collective identity of being fishers (chao pramong) to advance their claims (Missingham 2003). After the 157-day rally that ended in March 1995, this claim was recognized by the first Chuan government. In early 1997, the AOP campaign at Pak Mun continued to assert its collective identity as fishers to launch the more ambitious demand for 15 rai of land (or 525,000 baht) as permanent compensation for lost fishing income given what the AOP claimed was a significant declines in Mun river fish catches post-impoundment. Chavalit’s government accepted this claim as part of the settlement that ended the 99-

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127 By January 25, 2000, a total of 6,176 villagers had received compensation for 3 years’ lost fishing income.
day rally (Chapter 7). However, after the financial crisis in 1997, the incoming second Chuan government rejected this claim, and the AOP subsequently announced a new

**Figure 8.5 One framework for analysing sustainable livelihoods**

campaign for dam decommissioning in early 1999 (see Chapter 7). When the WCD Pak Mun case study got under way in mid-1999, it ushered in a new round of contention over the importance of fishing in local livelihoods. Obviously, the more that fishing was agreed to have declined since impoundment, and the more people the government accepted as fishers or fisheries-dependent, the stronger became the AOP’s case for decommissioning.

When the WCD asked its case study teams worldwide to answer questions such as “What was the distribution of costs and benefits: who gained and who lost?” its Pak Mun study team, as a multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary process, was forced to confront the challenge of how to represent an uncertain, polarized, and overall difficult set of issues.

8.3.2 Contesting livelihood within the WCD study

In 1999, at the request of EGAT, the WCD Secretariat commissioned Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) to lead the Pak Mun case study (see Chapter 7). Established 1984 as a non-government foundation, TDRI was Thailand’s first policy research institute. Initially funded by foreign donors, its research projects are now mainly funded by Thai state agencies (Chalongphob 2004). TDRI is known as a leading source of mainstream development economics studies.

TDRI’s March 2000, 13,000-word synthesis report made a significant contribution to the text of the WCD final report (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a). TDRI (2000) stands out against the backdrop of the two hardened discourse coalitions, because it does not neatly align with either. It criticizes – at times quite severely – both of the rival policy narratives. Reviewing the project’s economic justifications, TDRI (2000) criticized EGAT in these terms:

14. EGAT did no service nor justice to the method of benefit-cost analysis in exaggerating the value of net gains in power production. The calculated benefits were based on the avoided costs of an alternative investment in a turbine power plant. But an assumed capacity exceeding the claimed dependable capacity of the dam was used in . . . calculations of the project’s power benefits. . . .

15. The end result is that the Pak Mun project has an economic return lower than what is considered acceptable. Although the Var\(^{128}\) support benefit of the dam [its benefit in maintaining power reliability] and the greenhouse gas reduction benefit of the dam were not included in the economic

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\(^{128}\) A measure of reactive power, a necessary component of AC circuits (Sreekumar and Sant 2004).
evaluation, their inclusion would not have made the project economically justifiable... 

16. The National Economic and Social Development Board, responsible for vetting infrastructure investments, failed to challenge the critical assumptions underlying the project’s economic feasibility when its financial costs were adjusted upwards by as much as 70%. (TDRI, 2000: 4–5)

While critical of EGAT’s and NESDB’s pre-project feasibility analyses, TDRI (2000) did not accept the narrative of fisheries decline presented by Dr. Sansane Choowaew. 129 A disagreement arose between TDRI’s lead author Dr. Songkram Grachangnetara and Dr. Sansane over how to interpret changes in household level well-being in the study area (interview with Prof. Chaisuek, 8/9/04). Dr. Sansane based her Social Aspects of Fisheries report to WCD on literature review, stakeholder interviews with oppositional villagers, officials, and NGOs, and a structured interview/questionnaire administered to 63 household members sampled from 12 villagers ranging from below the dam to upstream of Kaeng Saphue. Sansane found that fishing was customarily a ubiquitous part of local livelihoods. Following Dam construction, the number of fishers and fishing incomes declined. Some of her key findings are as follows:

- Fishing households: Number of households involved in fisheries or having at least one fishing member decreased by almost one-fourth (from 96.8% to 73.0%)
- Number of full-time fishermen: decreased; 15–30% changed occupation; upstream households experienced the highest change
- Average income from fisheries: as high as four-fifths of total household income before-dam, decreased to only one-fifth of total household income in 1999
- Most fishing in 1999 was no longer a daily income-generating activity, [and] almost inadequate for subsistence.
- Average annual food expense per household: increased by 1.7–3.3 times.
- Fishing effort: Increased: still occurred all year round after-dam, no matter whether or not or how many fish they would get from each fishing effort.

(After Choowaew 2000a: 23–24)

Sansanee’s story of fishing catch declines was not the only decline narrative produced by WCD case study authors. Amornsakchai et al. (2000b) also presented a

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129 A Mahidol University social scientist sympathetic to the activists’ cause. NGO stakeholders nominated her to the case study team (Lee, interview 1/4/04).
narrative of ecosystem decline. Based on interviews and discussions using a photo chart as an aid to identification, Amornsakchai et al. (2000b) stated that current catches consisted of 149 fish species. Before 1994, by contrast, a total of 265 species had been identified. Furthermore:

Of the total of 149 fish species recognized as occurring in the present catch at least 51 . . . have been caught significantly less upstream of the dam since the construction of Pak Mun Dam. The decline of catch of these 51 species can be caused by the cumulative impacts of ongoing developments in the Mun/Chi watershed. . . . Most of rapid habitats upstream of the dam in downstream areas of the Mun River have been inundated by Pak Mun headpond. Fish species . . . depending on rapid habitats as spawning grounds are mainly [12 species] all belonging to the family Pangasiidae, [3 species] belonging to the family Sisoridae, and [2 species] belonging to the family Cyprinidae. These 17 fish species are particularly impacted by the Pak Mun Dam, because their migration route is blocked off in the beginning of the rainy season, the fish pass is not performing and their respective spawning grounds are inundated by the headpond. (Amornsakchai et al. 2000b: Ch. V)

These authors argued the dam had eliminated a fishery targeting two among these 17 rapid-dependent fishes: *P. macronema* and *P. pleurotaenia*, small catfish caught using large conical traps. They valued the fishery at 5.3 million baht.130

Choowaew gives a concise sense of how fishing and rice farming complement each other as components of lower Mun peoples' typical livelihood strategy:

[T]here is a very close relationship between the so-called “major or main”, “minor,” and “supplementary” occupations. Most households naturally consider themselves “rice farmers” – either they have rice fields of their own or rent from their neighbours. Generally they have to dedicate most of their [time to] rice-farming . . . so that their family will . . . [have] rice all year round. They may not earn a single baht from rice-farming because they do not produce rice for sale but for subsistence, still they consider rice-farming as major occupation. Only those who do not have farmland . . . will not indicate themselves as “farmers.” . . . Fishing may be indicated as supplementary occupation, but at least one family member, and normally more than one, fish daily . . . if they have plenty of fish catch, they preserve fish for home consumption for all year round. The rest of the fish will then be sold for cash. (Choowaew 2000a: 7–8)

**Dissenting village census data**

Meanwhile, TDRI faced data purporting to tell an antithetical story. The

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130 Based on an estimated daily catch of 35 kg per day per each of 24 traps operating 5 months near Kaeng Saphue rapids, totalling 294 metric tons (Amornsakchai et al. 2000b: VI-9).
National Rural Development Committee (NRDC) village census\textsuperscript{131} reported that in the 11-village core project area, many indicators of well-being rose dramatically during the period from 1990 (before construction) to 1996 (two years after impoundment).\textsuperscript{132} For instance:

- Wages: 55\% increase (cf. 66\% increase in Ubon Ratchathani province)
- Number of freshwater fisherman households: 203\% increase (cf. 0.49\% increase in province)
- Modal freshwater fishing income per household: 605\% increase (cf. 62\% increase in province)
- Number of households with tiled roofs: 290\% increase (cf. 274\% increase in province)

(After Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: Annex 3)

TDRI as synthesis writer was then faced with the challenge of how to reconcile its data with divergent accounts from its WCD colleagues. It needed to answer WCD’s question “What was the distribution of costs and benefits: who gained and who lost?” TDRI provided the following three-paragraph conclusion:

80. Whether or not the socio-economic dynamics of the 11 villages which make up the Pak Mun project area can be linked to the construction of the dam in 1992 and its subsequent operation, it is clear from the biannual NRDC village census data that \textit{remarkable changes did take place over the period, which positively affected people’s livelihoods}. . . . [Since 1992] there have been dramatic and general improvements in the quality of life . . . in absolute as well as in relative terms compared to the rest of the province. Labour productivity rose, as indicated by the level of the prevailing daily wage . . . . There was relatively less out-migration of labour from the project area and at least up to 1996 fishery provided an alternative and very lucrative livelihood since Pak Mun dam was built.

81. But the NRDC village census data do not distinguish between affected and unaffected households in the project area. The [TDRI] conclusion differs from the results of surveys which are based on affected villagers’ perception of their own livelihoods before and after the project. The decline in fish catch and fish income from such surveys which are attributed to the dam are clearly not conclusive in quantitative terms . . . . Surveys focusing on affected population in a given area ignore the general trends or

\textsuperscript{131} The NRDC village census is compiled by the Department of Community Development, Ministry of Interior, based on a biannual assets and income questionnaire administered to households, typically by village headmen or kamnan. It is controversial (see below).

\textsuperscript{132} The dam’s peak construction period was 1991—1994. TDRI defined the core project area as the 11 villages upstream from the dam axis which EGAT originally identified as directly affected by the reservoir water level (Amornsakchai et al. 2000c: 32). See also Table 6.1.
changes in the wider context which may be taking place in the region, in the province, or even nation-wide, independently of factors pertinent to the project and to the existence of the dam.

82. The latest survey after dam construction recorded only 96 species upstream of the dam. There has been an apparent loss of 169 fish species. The composition of species is changing. Only one species disappeared from the interviewees’ catch since the construction of Pak Mun. Still more than 100 fish species are not accounted for upstream of the dam since its construction, compared to previous fish surveys. But with rapidly changing aquatic environment in the Mekong basin where fisheries research has been limited, stakeholders generally accept that there may be over-exploitation of fishing resources. Anecdotes point to the general deterioration of water quality of the Mun, particularly in the lower stretches. Hard evidence and baseline data are however lacking. Such evidence could be obtained by additional fisheries surveys . . . . (TDRI 2000: 22–23; emphasis added)

This excerpt shows how TDRI’s synthesis produced a complex reflexive narrative. In paragraph 80, we read a narrative of progress: “remarkable changes did take place over the period, which positively affected people’s livelihoods.” However, paragraph 81 qualifies this narrative by stating that it is based on “village census data” which, the text adds, “do not distinguish between affected and unaffected households in the project area.” Having cautioned against over-confidence in the NRDC-driven story of progress, the text then distinctly rejects “the results of surveys which are based on affected villagers’ perception of their own livelihoods before and after the project” – that is, work such as Choowaew (2000a) and Vaddhanaphuti (2000a) – because they are clearly “not conclusive in quantitative terms.”

In paragraph 82, we encounter a distinct tone of loss in the phrases “more than 100 species have not been accounted for,” “over-exploitation,” and “general deterioration of water quality.” These phrases are taken almost directly from the fisheries report supplied by Amornsakchai et al. (2000b: 36–37). However, in a parallelism that mimics paragraph 80, the loss is immediately qualified by the caveats – based again on the same fisheries report – that “Only one species disappeared from the interviewees’ catch” and “hard evidence and baseline data” are lacking (ibid., 38, 36).

Overall, paragraphs 80–82 present a sceptical scientific discussion, which implicitly re-affirms the NRDC data as the most reliable among several imperfect data sets. The storyline in the above passage is that the only conclusive evidence indicates positive changes in livelihoods and that no hard evidence of fisheries decline exists.

TDRI’s commitment to using NRDC data pre-dates its involvement with WCD. The commentary it supplied to WCD is predominantly enthusiastic:
The continuity of the available census data every other year makes the NRDC database a unique instrument for measuring changes and trends in Thailand’s rural socio-economic infrastructure over the last decade. (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: Annex 3, 27–28)

Notwithstanding these endorsements, the WCD Secretariat relegated all NRDC-derived conclusions to its Annex 3. The Secretariat had been swayed by arguments other non-state WCD participants made about weaknesses in the NRDC survey:

Use of NRDC 2C data as the ONLY information to draw the conclusion may not [be] appropriate. . . . Most of the time the questionnaires are filled by the development officers and the stakeholders are asked to check and sign. However, in some areas, the persons who sign never check . . . . Further complications arise from other biases. If we take into consideration that, during the construction (and protesting) period, officers and village headmen sided with EGAT, it is clear that NRDC 2C data is an unreliable source of information . . . . (Tonkla Group 2000 in Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 152).

In summary, within the WCD multi-stakeholder study, an important and highly policy-relevant debate over livelihoods arose. On the one hand, the key terms of debate consist of TDRI’s and other mainstream actors’ construct of livelihoods in the project area as incorporated in and transformed by the dynamism of the larger national economy. On the other hand, other WCD authors constructed livelihoods in the same area as highly vulnerable to changes in the Mun ecosystem. Alternative narratives were made in the face of uncertain knowledge about the underlying fisheries resource, and invoke inescapably normative models, making the debate intensely political. The next section explores how the ongoing livelihoods debate was conducted during the Thaksin administration.

8.4 Contesting knowledge about livelihoods in the Thaksin era

The WCD process took place prior to any trial opening of the Pak Mun spillways. What happened to the dynamics of knowledge relevant to livelihoods during and after the Thaksin-era trial opening? The remainder of this chapter pursues further answers to this question. Section 8.4.1 reviews an important Ubon Ratchathani University economic impact study and then analyses a 2003 TDRI paper which

133 The World Bank noted that the NRDC-derived narrative of progress had been relegated to the annexes of the final report. In its comments, it again backed this narrative (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 146-150).
8.4.1 Ubon Ratchathani University economic impact study

Central to UBU’s narrative is the claim that average household fishing incomes increased significantly after Pak Mun Dam opened its sluice gates in June 2001 (UBU 2002: Ch. 6). UBU obtained these data from surveys conducted in 22 villages along the lower Mun and its tributaries. A team of research assistants led by Decharut Sukkumnoed – the same analyst who challenged TDRI’s use of NRDC data in the WCD – administered a questionnaire to 899 households, one-third of the total number of households in the 22-village population. These 22 villages were chosen as the sampling frame because they “directly [received] impacts from Pak Mun Dam [and] were located adjacent to the Mun river and some of its tributaries” (ibid., 6-2). Their locations range from below the dam to above Phibun Mansahan (see Figure 8.3 above).

The study team tested the questionnaire in October–November 2001 on an initial sample of 225 households, and administered the main survey in April–May 2002. The team asked respondents to supply estimates of income in cash and in kind from fishing, from other farm work, and from off-farm income. They also asked for estimates of household expenses, assets, and indebtedness; and collected these estimates for three periods: 1990 (before construction of the dam), 2000 (6 years after impoundment), and 2001 (the year in which the trial dam opening began in June). The team also conducted 35 in-depth studies of individuals chosen across a range of fishing intensity (ibid., 6-3).

The team classified the surveyed households in different ways, including by size of land holdings, by location, by consumption vs. sale of fisheries catch, and by level of fisheries assets (ranging from small-scale gear used without boats, to gear requiring customary access rights and/or boats with engines). I summarize their most important results below.

Between 1990 and 2000 (from pre-project to six years post-impoundment), the study found:

- A change in the structure of household income, from one in which fishing exceeded all other sources of income, to one in which off-farm income dominated all other sources (ibid., 6-7; see Figure 8.6);
Poverty and indebtedness increased strikingly. The incidence of poverty (measured against an official poverty line) increased from 33% to 63% of households. Landless households \((n = 241)\) were most likely to be poor, with expenses exceeding income (average net income was -5,933 baht in 2000). For the entire sample \((N = 899)\), average net incomes fell from 49,032 to 9,971 baht (ibid., Tables 11, 12 and 4).

Between 2000 (a year the dam was open for only two peak flow months) and 2001 (the year it was opened for the trial, beginning in June), the study found:

- Fishing incomes take a striking upswing both in cash and in kind. However in absolute terms they are far below 1990 levels (see Figure 8.5);
- Fishing households that sold a portion of their catch in 2001 \((n = 423)\) enjoyed an increase in net household income. Conversely, net household income did not increase for households that did not sell fish;
- Among households that sold their catch, the incidence of poverty declined from 62% to 52%. The largest reduction in the incidence of poverty – from 55% to 34% – was gained by households with motorized boats;
- Household expenses and debt increased, notwithstanding the trial dam opening;
- The proportion of households who earned cash from fishing declined between 2000 and 2001. Of 700 households that sold fish in 2000, only 423 sold fish in 2001.\(^{134}\)

In other words, 277 households ceased selling fish between 2000 and 2001. This result is counter-intuitive since we would expect that with more fish to be caught in 2001, households would not drop out of selling for market.

Summarizing their study, the authors discussed outcomes in terms of effects on different kinds of livelihood resources (“capital”):

Opening the sluice gates of Pak Mun Dam led to the recovery of communities' capital stocks as follows:

1) Natural capital very clearly increased, both in quantity and diversity of fish species, use of aquatic resources, forest resources, and use of the river . . .

2) Financial capital clearly increased especially investment in fishing operations and follow-on activities . . . In any case, the recovery of financial capital has not yet covered every household;

3) Human capital increased through the recovery of knowledge and skill in catching fish, with more opportunities to work. In addition,\(^{134}\)

\(^{134}\) Of the total sample of 899 households, 199 had not sold any of their catch since 1990.
households also enjoyed better mental health. . . in any case, we found that a number of households still lacked labour to engage in fishing;

4) Social capital increased through the restoration of culture and various forms of cooperation. Sharing of equipment and products took place, however conflict regarding closing and opening the sluice gates still persisted . . . (UBU 2002: 6-22–6-23).

Analysis

With findings of this sort, it was not surprising that the UBU study team leaders made a policy recommendation to open the dam for five years. Of all the studies reviewed in this chapter, it alone explicitly uses a livelihoods framework, and widens the discussion on livelihoods from market activity to subsistence. Explicitly pro-poor, the UBU study provides a basis from which to obtain a sharper picture of poverty in the lower Mun. Landless households unable to engage in fishing for the market are likely to be poor, and most reliant on off-farm for income. By inference, landless households unable to earn much off-farm income (through illness, high dependency ratios, or divorce) are among the poorest.

The study’s most obvious weakness is that it provides very few methodological details, beginning with how the households were actually chosen, and how context effects were controlled for (see Table 8.2). Most notably, the study does not describe how it asked respondents to estimate their fishing income – and does not indicate the uncertainty (e.g., variances) in the data presented. The study does report that fishing incomes varied by four orders of magnitude: Pre-dam (1990) cash fishing income ranged from zero to > 49,141 baht. Pre-dam in-kind fishing income ranged from 1,900 to > 13,807 baht (UBU 2002: Tables 6-1 and 6-3). A better measure of central tendency in this context would be median incomes, and it would be more appropriate to plot the distribution of all incomes.

It is difficult to interpret the significance of 1,528 baht in non-cash fishing income, in terms of how much food it actually provided. (This is the average non-cash income in 2001 among the 476 households that did not sell any of their catch that year). The study did ask people if they felt household food security changed at all following the trial Dam opening. However, the study did not report on other relatively easy-to-obtain indicators of food security, such as numbers of jars of fermented fish people made in a given year. The latter would be easier to recall to recall than kilograms of fish caught.

A conceptual limitation is that UBU’s discussion of livelihoods focuses on
Figure 8.6 Average household fishing incomes from five studies, 1990–2002

Notes: Sample size (N) and standard error shown if provided by source. TDRI = Grachangnetara and Bumrungtham (2003). Nominal baht except for UBU (1990 baht).
fishing, and on the near-term. It does not discuss sustainability of fisheries stocks, and
this silence could be read as implying that no policy issues exist regarding the status
and trends of those stocks. The connection UBU and Tai Baan made between more
fishing and increased well-being influenced the Thaksin government’s 2003 program
to supply additional fishing gear (see Section 8.6).

Finally, because of its focus on the local ecosystem, the study does not provide
any details on the structure of off-farm income, or report on post-project patterns of
migration. However, bearing in mind the interpenetration of rural and urban (Rigg
2003), the study might have provided a little more discussion, from its in-depth
interviews, of how people adapted to the changed context in which livelihoods were
pursued. In other words, we need more analysis of livelihood strategy "portfolios"
(Scoones 1998).

8.4.2 “Pak Mun Dam Revisited”

In a paper by that title, TDRI analysts Grachangnetara and Bumrunghtham
(2003) responded to the UBU economic impact study above. Their intervention takes
the form of an English-language applied economic analysis. Their main objective
appears to be undermining the validity of UBU’s economic impact narrative, based on
a methodological critique. Their paper also frames fishery-dependent livelihoods in a
particular way. Its methodological and conceptual arguments are consequential for the
structuring of the policy debate. The TDRI analysts argue once again that NRDC
village census data are the most reliable source of data on fishing incomes and that it
is appropriate to value fishing livelihoods based on the marketable values of the
catches. The study also attempts to make a definitive empirical argument about the
absolute and relative values of fishing in the project area.

To frame the overall policy problem, Grachangnetara and Bumrunghtham
(2003) began by re-capping TDRI’s (2000) earlier conclusions on the dam's
performance:

The balance of evidence against Pak Mun as an economically feasible
investment stands on the diminished benefits of its peak load output, without
weighing in the added costs on the environment . . . . on EGAT's own
terms . . . based on energy output alone, the project's costs already outweigh
the benefits. It does not necessarily follow however that in failing the test of
good investment, Pak Mun should now be closed down. In the post-
construction phase, resources that have been invested in the dam . . . become 'sunk costs'. No value is assigned in project analysis for sunk costs, which are in effect written off the project's balance sheet. Cost-benefit analysis can then be conducted under a timeframe put forward . . . .

(Grachangnetara and Bumrungtham 2003: 6; emphasis added)

This is an important statement. It contradicts lay understandings (that the dam should be operated because it has already been built) and associated policy narratives by Thaksin-era decision makers.\(^\text{135}\) Having re-framed the policy problem, Grachangnetara and Bumrungtham (2003) argue as follows. First, the authors argue that determining villagers' fisheries incomes from surveys conducted after compensation campaigns had been mounted is not a reliable, objective method of determining fishing incomes:

The circumstances of the reconstructions were . . . not ideal for the collection of uncorroborated income data spanning periods before and after an event over which the authorities were seen to be giving ground on the terms and scale of the compensations . . . there is a lack of verifiable information on the unit prices, quantities, and the kinds of indigenous fish caught and sold for the declared cash incomes. (Grachangnetara and Bumrungtham 2003: 6)

Second, they argue that NRDC village census data constitute “quantitative evidence” superior to “ad hoc” surveys conducted by UBU (2002) and Choowaew (2000):

Despite recognized shortcomings, the NRDC data series exhibit an evident degree of consistency in continuity and absolute as well as in relative terms, to which past ad hoc surveys of local incomes should at least have given a passing nod of acknowledgment or qualification . . . . (Grachangnetara and Bumrungtham 2003: 12)

Third, the authors argue that these data show median household fishing incomes in the Pak Mun area increasing from 1990 (before the dam) to 1999 (five years after impoundment) and again from 1999 to 2001 (the year in which the trial dam opening began; June 2001). Fourth, they argue that results from the UBU 899-household survey are not typical of the six-year NRDC data set. In particular, the average pre-dam (1990) fishing income reported by UBU is unusually high, while the post-dam (2000) income is unusually low. The implication is that UBU has misrepresented the pre- to post-dam trend in fisheries income:

With reference to . . . [UBU] income figures, a post-dam annual fishery income of 3,045 baht would place a household well below the observed

\(^{135}\) See Section 7.2.6.
median, at a point between the 18th and 19th percentiles, in the 2001 NRDC census, whereas a pre-dam income of 25,742 baht would put a household well above the highest observed typical income per household from fishery in all the villages in the project area as recorded in the 1990, 1992, and 1994 NRDC census data (ibid., 9).

The authors also presented NRDC data showing that median household incomes from fishing in the Pak Mun area exceed those in the Northeast and in other rural areas nationwide. Overall:

Pending definitive and quantitative evidence to the contrary, the NRDC village census data show not only that Pak Mun fishing householders are not worse off than before in the pre-dam years in absolute terms, but also that they yet remain relatively better off, more of them deriving more incomes from [the] fishery than elsewhere.

(Grachangnetara and Bumrungtham 2003: 12)

In short, these authors conclude that the Dam has had no evident impact on fishing incomes. This is an important conclusion because it directly implies that in terms of forward-looking cost-benefit analysis, streams of costs (to fishing) are zero and obviously do not exceed streams of benefits (to hydropower). Hence, based on known impacts on fishing, no economic justification exists to cease operating Pak Mun Dam for hydropower.

Analysis

The TDRI analysts’ 2003 paper makes important points about the invalidity of the sunk cost argument, and the potential bias in any method that uses informants' recollections to estimate household incomes. Its call for such survey data to be compared with other data sets is also welcome. Its plea for analysts to decompose their fisheries income estimates into more basic data on catch volumes, species, and prices would improve transparency.

However, the case by Grachangnetara and Bumruntham (2003) rests on conceptual and methodological foundations that we can challenge. As a narrative, it also employs certain rhetorical devices that warrant comment. First, the authors do not explicitly discuss the large variances (uncertainty) in the NRDC data set. The NRDC data are estimates – made by village head men and other authorities – of the modal (most common value) fishing income in a given village. The authors’ tabulation of these data show large variations in modal income (0 to approx. 10,000 baht in 1992) reported by head men.
If we plot average modal income\textsuperscript{136}, along with the standard error of this average, using data in Grachangnetara and Bumruntham (2003), we see that it is misleading to argue that the average modal income has increased from 1990 to 2001, because of the large variances. The variances do not show any sign of decreasing over time (Figure 8.6).

Second, the authors continue to claim that NRDC data are more objective than UBU and other survey data that rely on interviews with household members. They describe the former as “census data” and the latter as “\textit{ad hoc} surveys” (2003: 12). They suggest that the latter are subject to bias because informants have a material stake in reporting declining fishing incomes post-project. However, they provide no discussion of precisely how the NRDC data are collected. We know that village headmen typically complete the surveys and report modal data (Sumitra, interview 6/9/05). However, neither TDRI (2000) nor Grachangnetara and Bumruntham (2003) tell us how village headmen and others actually obtain the modal income figures – for example, whether they interview a range of villagers beforehand, and if so which villagers, and why we should expect headmen to not over-estimate incomes. Without this kind of discussion, it is difficult to substantiate the claim that NRDC data are categorically more valid than surveys based on direct enumeration of data supplied by respondents. TDRI’s continued vindication of NRDC data (despite being criticized for doing so during the WCD process; see above) shows that no progress has been made in resolving this debate.

Third, we can question the argument that the appropriate way to conceive of fishing livelihoods is solely in terms of the marketable value of the catch. Conceiving of livelihood in those terms marginalizes the contribution fishing makes to household food security. For instance, in 2001, a year in which the dam opened in June, 53% of the 899 households surveyed by UBU fished only for subsistence.

Finally, the TDRI 2003 study reacts to the data presented by UBU almost entirely in objectivist terms. As we saw above – based entirely on comparison with its preferred data set – it suggested that UBU misrepresented the pre- to post-dam trend in fisheries income. As long as the debate remains couched in objectivist terms however, we are left with arguing for the validity of one data set over another, or comparing both uncertain data sets to other uncertain sources of data (see Figure 8.6).

\textsuperscript{136} By “average modal income” I refer to the average of the modal values reported by village headmen to the NRDC.
Another way of approaching contradiction between sources of data is to take the UBU survey data as a policy narrative – as a resource for interpretation rather than as a window onto underlying reality. As I showed above, the UBU narrative tells us that all respondents report a striking decline in net household income (total cash and non-cash income minus total expenses) between 1990 and 2001. These respondents ranged from asset-poor to asset-secure households, from commercial fishing households with motorized boats and customary rights to fishing grounds, to households whose members fished with handheld gear and had no special access rights (UBU 2002: Tables 6-1–6-8). The net incomes they reported in 2001 ranged from –3,070 (landless households) to +39,524 baht (households with more than 50 rai). In all cases, these net incomes are significantly lower than the net incomes respondents reconstructed for 1990. Regardless of its empirical realism, the narrative is an indictment of a decade of rural development in the lower Mun basin. From the standpoint of sustainable livelihoods, TDRI’s dismissal of this narrative reads as an over-hasty silencing of a debate it does not recognize as inherently normative.

8.5 Reception of oppositional knowledge discourses

8.5.1 Rhetorics of response

To play any significant role in policy processes, knowledge discourses need audiences that receive and re-articulate them in ways that power holders cannot easily dismiss. When faced with the appearance of a novel policy narrative, elite actors in the Pak Mun case were quick to assign them to the existing discourse coalitions. One of the most potent rhetorical strategies is to mount methodological challenges. The discussion above reviewed such debates within the WCD, and subsequent challenges to UBU by the NSO poll and by TDRI. These explicit and implicit methodological exchanges function to police the boundaries of knowledge.

To oppose challenging knowledge discourses, elites also drew on several less intricate but nonetheless potent responses. In 2000–03, for instance, we find both quasi-scientific and lay rhetorical tropes deployed.

Quasi-scientific tropes

*Example (1).* Responding to the WCD draft presented at the second
stakeholder meeting in February 2000, Prapard Pan-Aram, a fisheries specialist at EGAT, argued that the pre-dam fishing yield calculated by WCD was “clearly unreasonable” (2000: 130). He argued that:

If the value of 90.9 million Baht is the fact, it means that [at] the average price of 20 Baht/kilogram, the annual catch of fishing from the affected area is 4,545 tons which is approximately four times . . . the annual fishing yield from Ubolratana reservoir, a reservoir [with] water surface . . . about ten time[s] [that of] the Mun River.

The fact on this topic is that before the dam construction, the fishing activities in the Mun River may be considered as non-commercial. There were only a few fishermen engaged in fishing as [their] full-time career. Most of people who fish in the river catch the fish for daily food (EGAT 1982). This statement can be confirmed by the fact that there were no fish-landing site or fish market in the lower Mun River. If [an] amount of more than ten ton[s] of fish [was] landed a day it [would] have some place developed to be the fish-landing site automatically as it is found in every water body of Thailand. (Pan-Aram 2000 in Amornsakchai et al. 2000c: Annexe 9, p. 130)

The narrator invites the reader to visualize fish being produced (by the ecosystem), caught by fishermen, landed and sold. So show me the markets, landing sites, professional fishermen, and habitat, he asks. If fact, the narrator tells us, nothing on the scale of 4,545 tons existed. EGAT repeated this line of criticism in its final round of comments (see Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 108–109). WCD responded to Prapard’s forceful skepticism by showing how it derived the 4,545 ton figure\textsuperscript{137}, and by reiterating that the natural river was highly productive – even more so than Ubol Ratana, a large shallow, stocked reservoir:

The basic conclusion of the WCD report is that the free-flowing river has higher annual fishing yield, which means higher revenue for fishing households and which is now clearly declining. The fish yield and revenue from free-flowing river was neither correctly understood or estimated by the 1982 EIA. (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a: 109)

Interestingly, the WCD report authors, in their defence, did not refer to known fish markets in Khong Chiam or Phibun Mangsahan, or to the consumption value of the catch, which makes landings difficult to monitor along a river (Roberts 1993; Coates 2002). However it did make clear its yield estimates came from “the entire

\textsuperscript{137} The figure derives from primary and secondary data reported in Choowaew (2000a): (1) estimates of average annual fish catch per household in 1982, before the dam, from Faculty of Fisheries, Kasetsart University; (2) similar estimates, from Khon Kaen University, 1997, and (3) Sansanee’s interviews. See Amornsakchai et al. (2000: 51); Choowaew (2000a).
river, upstream and downstream . . . not restricted to the head pond\textsuperscript{138} site” (Amornsakchai et al., 2000a: 109). It reiterated its confidence in Choowaew (2000a) and added that an ineffective fish pass, and submersion of fish habitat and fishing grounds by impoundment were likely causes of fish catch decline (ibid. 109).

In summary, Prapard’s challenge took the form of a highly sceptical positivist rhetoric, throwing the burden of proof upon the WCD team, which in turn responded with a range of paper studies, local knowledge, and categorical assertion (i.e., the quote above), all of which lacked the positivist force of the challenge.

\textit{Example (2).} In its comments to the June 2000 version of the WCD report, EGAT repeatedly objected, in strong language, to the fact that the WCD study team – including Vaddhanaphuti (2000a) and Choowaew (2000a) – obtained information from dam opponents. For example:

\textbf{Use of Incredible Data}

The commissioners and researchers do not declare the limitation of data collection in the study. They just state that . . . base line data to determine the required answers [are] not available but they do not try to solve the problems systematically. They decided to ask the necessary information from interviewing the local persons involved in the dam protesting. It should be clear that the outcome of such interviewing would be negative to the project but they prefer or relish in making the project look bad. This . . . is the major cause that makes the [WCD study] unconvincing. (EGAT 2000c: 101)

This trope equates a group’s \textit{contentious political action} (its resurgent campaign to decommission the dam after 1999) with its \textit{unreliability} as a source of policy-relevant knowledge.\textsuperscript{139} How did WCD meet this challenge?

Sansanee Choowaew responded by defending her research design (Section 8.3.2). She noted that only six of her 63 interviews were with protestors at the dam site (Choowaew 2000b: 144). Chayan took the challenge head-on, stating that one of his goals was to focus on the views of “projected-affected people” because of “deficiencies in the baseline data on affected people . . . and a lack of good-quality consultations with affected people” (Vaddhanaphuti 2000b: 151).

\textit{Example (3).} Dr. Prasarn, EGAT’s representative on the Sub-Committee to Review Research Findings Related to the Pak Mun Dam Case, complained in late

\textsuperscript{138} The term “head pond” refers to the maximum extent of water impoundment from a run-of-the-river dam. In the case of Pak Mun this is generally accepted by experts in both discourse coalitions as not extending further upstream than the vicinity of Kaeng Saphue rapids.

\textsuperscript{139} The trope can be used against any political position.
2002 that Tai Baan was not scientific, because it was about feelings. According to another committee member, he also categorized the Tai Baan narrative in overall terms as "romantic" (Monthip, interview 6/10/02).

Taken together, these quasi-scientific tropes attempt to persuade the receiver that policy-relevant knowledge needs to be based on positivist ecological and social science. At their best, these tropes are potent because, given dominant canons of science, challenges can be mounted to scientific claims that appear to be derived from uncertain, non-transparent, unpublished sources of knowledge, such as the memories, experiences, and ecological knowledge of ordinary people.

The fact that it is embedded in an advocacy frame, or that it displays a vision some react to as "romantic," does not automatically invalidate the Tai Baan study, in my reading. Rather, its qualitative descriptions of change, its photographs and testimonies, are constructed so as to voice the concerns of a marginalized constituency struggling for legitimacy. However, its transparently situated political engagement threatens those who believe knowledge must be justified on the basis of positive truths assessed from an Archimedean standpoint.¹⁴⁰

**Lay rhetorics**

Chapters 6 and 7 discussed a number of common tropes used by decision makers, notably the trope of describing fisheries-dependent people as a minority to be compensated, on terms dictated by the majority, and the trope of economic fatalism in arguments such as “the dam has already been built.” Here I discuss additional rhetorical strategies, ranging from naming and attributing traits to people, to more elaborate constructions which combine different tropes.

**Example (1).** “Mop,” the Thai vernacular word for demonstration, is negative. *Pai mop* (go join a protest) mainly signifies organized disruption of everyday life. Other meanings – such as to legitimately defend one’s livelihood, or participate in a social change movement – are contingent. Newspaper headline writers (even those sympathetic to protest movements, like *Khao Sod* and *Matichon*) favour the term *mop* because of its brevity. (Section 9.3.3 provides further discussion.)

**Example (2).** The protestors/advisors/NGO allies come from elsewhere (*ma*

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¹⁴⁰ Hirsch described the latter mode of discourse as “scientism . . . a particular culture of knowledge . . . that rejects that which has been produced other than under very specific circumstances,” distinguishing it from more inclusive epistemologies such as interpretivism (2003: 14). See Chapter 3.
chak thi uen). Occasionally, one hears that they are backed by foreign interests (see Chapter 7).

Example (3). Protestors are people who “never can get enough:” “given an inch, they’ll take a foot” (dai mai ru chak pho; dai khuep cha ao sok). AOP villagers in June 2004 invoked these phrases in contemplating how to frame a new round of claims for short-term assistance from EGAT.

Example 4. Unity for a larger cause: in an op-ed piece in the Bangkok Post World Bank Country Director J. Shivakumar called for all stakeholders to “attack poverty, not one another” (Shivakumar 2000; see Thesis Appendix A). He was writing after the May 2000 blockade at Pak Mun, the June 2000 WCD Pak Mun case study, and the wall-scaling incidents at Government House.

In the measured tone of a seasoned development specialist, the narrator explains that at Pak Mun, unresolved problems remain with “the fisheries issue,” whereas the narrator claims that “several credible studies” vouch for “adequate” handling of public health, resettlement, and compensation issues.

The narrative constructs the image of a larger enemy – poverty –which all people should unify to combat. The closing paragraphs offer specific recommendations for how poor people can and should fully participate in a “high-powered commission” to help design new strategies, frameworks, and institutions to alleviate poverty, defined more broadly as “lack of security, opportunity and community, in addition to lack of income.”

The core rhetorical strategy is to make an analogy between the world’s evolving approach to poverty alleviation, and the flawed, but improvable project governance at Pak Mun. The state-of-the-art in large dam project governance has improved, thanks in part to greater expectations now placed on such projects, and to initiatives such as the WCD (funded in part by the World Bank). The narrator sums up by arguing it is more productive to shift the focus of the debate from "removing dams and removing protesters to removing poverty," that is, from the specific conflict at Pak Mun, to the systemic cause of anti-poverty reform (see below).

Shivakumar’s piece produces ambiguous effects. On the one hand, conflict resolution requires, to a certain extent, some change among actors. His logical suggestion for new stakeholder processes echoes the Neutral Committee’s recommendations in July 2000 (see Chapter 7). On the other hand, it is curious that in a piece ostensibly about Pak Mun, Shivakumar’s September 2000 piece does not
comment on the Neutral Committee’s June 2000 recommendation for a four-month trial opening, followed by supporting studies. Instead, Shivakumar calls for “promoting technical improvements for managing and augmenting fishery resources in the entire river.” The essay is less specific in its process and substantive recommendations than the Neutral Committee’s brief (Neutral Committee 2000). Given its timing and context, it could be read as a co-optive intervention.

Example (5). Thaksin’s Deputy PM Dr. Phrommin Lertsuridej, one of few advisors tasked to vet options during the conflict in late 2002 (see Chapter 7), reputedly said, in an ironic response to UBU’s Pak Mun study, “just looking at the title – Restoration – you can tell what they will conclude” (Apaporn, interview 24/8/04). In this turn of speech, “restoration” conjures up an entire network of programs and actions that the speaker disparages. His use of innuendo re-casts “restoration” into a space of negative connotations, terrain the speaker does not need to specify to the listener (because of assumed shared understandings about the Assembly of the Poor). By implication, this terrain is destructive of the status quo and better left alone.

Examples (2) and (3), which construct protest/protestors as Other, were common tropes. I encountered them both in villages along the Mun and in air-conditioned offices in Bangkok (interviews Pho Laem, 8/10/04; Prof. Chaisuek 8/9/04). That the AOP used its protest village at Pak Mun dam as a base to campaign on a variety of issues meant that some protestors encountered by state agents or interviewed by media were indeed not from the lower Mun. However, in a manner parallel to Example (5), construing the diverse interests in the AOP simply as “Other” works to dismiss an entire social phenomenon.

In summary, the net effect of these rhetorical tactics is to help dismiss, reduce, or co-opt novel and heterodox knowledge claims. These lay and quasi-scientific figures of speech complement the methodological challenges reviewed above. Together these strategies help police the boundaries of policy-relevant knowledge.

8.6 Intensifying livelihoods: canals, fingerlings, and new fishing gear

Not all responses to new and oppositional knowledge discourses consisted of speech acts. An important type of response from the state to oppositional narratives of livelihood consisted of adaptive investment in new projects aimed at increasing
fisheries and agricultural production.

Launched in response to the 14 January 2003 cabinet resolution, the Ministry of Agriculture’s Study Project to Develop Fisheries in the Lower Mun Basin\footnote{Khrong kan sueksa lae wichai phuea kan phatthana pramong nai lum nam mun ton lang.} involved fish stocking, fisheries research, and distribution of new fishing gear to eligible fishermen. It was announced in conjunction with the Pak Mun Irrigation Program, a five-year fast-tracked investment in the construction and renovation of pumped-water irrigation canals in the area. The study project was guided by a new 35-member steering committee chaired by the Ubon governor, with 18 villager representatives, including several from the AOP.

### 8.6.1 New fisheries projects

#### Fisheries stocking

The first reservoir stocking program, by DOF with World Bank funding support, commenced in 1995. It is regarded as a limited success. The DOF budget was not sufficient, and a three-year funding gap affected its fishery station at Ban Hua Haew (interviews Sorasak, 20/8/2004; Surapong, 23/8/2004). Pan-Aram and Ekamol (2004) speculated that the size of fingerlings released was too small to withstand predation.

In 2003, as part of the four-month opening decision, the Thaksin administration authorized DOF to run a large-scale stocking program, co-funded by EGAT. DOF set a numerical target of productivity in terms of 5.72 kg/rai/year, a level of abundance equal to surveys by DOF before Pak Mun Dam was built (Dr. Suphot, interview 23/8/04). In its first year, this program released 10.5 million fish (8 million of which were not native to the Mun) and 40 million long-armed prawns \((\text{Macrobrachium rosenbergii})\).

In 2001, the year in which the trial opening began, EGAT initiated its own fisheries culture program, one which trained local households to grow out the juveniles. Eligible villagers (with fish ponds larger than 400 m\(^2\) and a minimum water depth of 80 cm) received extension support and juvenile fish free of charge. Once a year, villagers would grow them at their own expense for two months, then sell them back to EGAT at two to three baht each (depending on species) when they reached
three inches in length. EGAT suggested that this larger size decreased risk of predation upon release into the river (Pan-Aram and Ekamol 2004).

If the pond failed (fish died or disappeared), EGAT would pay a one-time sum of 5,000 baht, slightly more than the total cost of feed and labour per crop. Pan-Aram and Ekamol claimed that in 2003, the average annual income and profit – among those who did succeed in raising a crop – were 16,740 baht and 12,391 baht respectively (2004: 6).

In 2003, EGAT’s program released a total of almost two million juveniles (comprising six native fish species) to be raised by local households. The program’s favourable terms made it popular, and the number of participants rose in four years from 15 to 400 households in 15 villages. One percent of the juveniles were tagged and a 100-baht reward offered for the return of tags. The total cost to EGAT to produce fingerlings in this manner (including overhead costs) was comparable to or less than buying from private commercial sources (2004: 7).

**Interviews with households raising fish for EGAT**

In October 2004, to hear from farmers about their experiences raising fish for EGAT, as well as experiences with pumped-water irrigation (see 8.6.2), research assistant Apirat Krueawong and I interviewed 21 households in four villages in the upstream vicinity of the Dam. Nine of these households participated in EGAT’s fish grow-out scheme, and in October 2004 were waiting to sell their third annual crop to EGAT. Three of these households lost all or most of their fish crop in 2002 and in 2003. Even experienced culturists suffered fish mortality (interview, Pho Sai 14/10/04). The remaining six of the nine households reported satisfactory to excellent survival rates.

Pho Laem and his wife were raising 9,000 or so catfish for EGAT in 2004. Having lost his fish crop twice, Pho Laem now took special precautions. He used a double mesh barrier around the fingerlings the first month they were in his pond (interview, 8/10/04). Although he had received 90,000 baht interim fisheries compensation money, his family had never participated in any of the AOP rallies, and Pho Laem spoke of AOP followers disparagingly as “always asking for money” (*kho ngoen rueai*) and weak-minded (*hua on*). He thought of the AOP’s move in 2004 to petition EGAT for a 10,000 baht special restoration grant payable to fishing
households as “unseemly” (na kliat). Pho Laem and his wife farmed 12 rai of rice, four rai of which would be inundated if the dam were closed year round. The couple had two high-school aged children, and two adult children, one in the navy, while the other worked in Pattaya. In earlier days, Pho Laem said, he would go to Tung Lung rapids to fish three to four times per year. But he never used drift gill-nets (mobile gear popular with fishermen during the start of the rainy season): “I’m a rice farmer,” he said. These days, he caught fish from a nearby small tributary of the Mun, enough for the two of them to subsist on.

The couple wanted the dam closed as soon as possible after Songkran so they could pump water from the stream nearby to water their chilli and corn garden and to begin rice seedling production. (Last year they lost 2,000 baht on their garden when the water in the stream dropped too low to pump.) The couple had taken out a 50,000 baht loan from a local agricultural co-operative to buy three head of cattle (25,000 baht), a second-hand motorcycle, school expenses, and fertilizer (some of which they would re-sell). Borrowing from Thaksin’s million-baht-per-village fund they had previously invested in water buffalo, and earned twice their 30,000 investment in three years. The couple expressed a clear preference for this kind of livelihood intensification over EGAT’s fish culture scheme, because cattle were much more resilient assets than fingerlings.

Pho Laem and his family are an example of a household that has a clear preference for a limited seasonal opening of the Mun. Although his livelihood would place him in the Tai Baan’s category of those who “fish and grow rice” (Figure 8.1), it was clear that he supported local authorities and not the AOP, even if he had benefited from campaigns launched by the AOP. Pho Laem and his wife did not mobilize to defend their interests, in part because they constructed their interests very differently than members of the AOP. To a certain degree they had adapted to the changes EGAT had wrought on the lower Mun.

On balance, farmers thought EGAT’s scheme attractive despite risk of fish mortality and occasional administrative glitches (Pho Won, interview 7/10/04). To Pho Ruea, EGAT’s scheme was a much better deal than contract fish farming for agribusiness, because it involved about 12 times less capital outlay (4,500 baht vs. 53,000 baht respectively) while delivering almost half the profit of an agribusiness contract (about 30,000 baht). Only four out of 21 fish growers in his village contracted with agribusiness (interview, 10/10/04).
New fisheries studies and new gear

Fingerling survival rate in the reservoir constituted the major uncertainty in the stocking program. AOP leaders Pho Siang (a member of the new Study Project’s steering committee) and Pho Manchit (a landless fisher who works at the Mun-Mekong confluence) were sceptical. Manchit said on several occasions, “we have caught some long-armed prawns, but we’ve never seen any fish” (interview, 6/9/04).

Factors affecting fingerling survival include size at release, predation rates, adequacy of food, physical and chemical parameters, overfishing, and emigration from the lower Mun (Pan-Aram and Ekamol 2004; Dr. Suphot, interview 23/8/04). To inform these large-scale fish stocking programs, DOF launched a set of fisheries ecology studies:

- Monitoring: surveys of fish diversity and abundance (conducted by several different methods, including electro-shocking) at different sites;
- Water quality and abundance of plankton and bottom dwelling animals: to study adequacy of food and the physical ecosystem for released fish;
- Feeding biology and growth: to improve basic knowledge of feeding behaviour of three key species by area and season;
- Fisheries economics: to estimate volume and value of fishing catch based on sampling catches in 13 villages

(Department of Fisheries 2004).

In addition, EGAT on its own initiative invested in hydro-acoustic monitoring equipment. It purchased five SIMLAD echo-sounders, installing one on a boat and four below the Dam, at a total cost of more than 50 million baht. The DOF’s initial budget for its fingerling release and ecological studies, by contrast, was approximately 10 million baht (Thinakorn, interview 23/8/04; Sorasak, interview 23/8/04). As yet however, EGAT has chosen not to publicize its work with this technology.

Finally, the Ministry of Agriculture’s Fisheries Project also offered, to each of the approximately 6,200 people originally compensated for lost fishing income, new fishing gear valued at 5,000 baht. This offer of several types of fishing gear appears to have been a more broad-based intervention, one that moreover can be read as

142 DOF results were not available at time of writing. DOF methodology appears similar to the UBU fisheries study (UBU 2002: Ch. 4). UBU studied abundance by recruiting local fishermen from 29 villages to catch and sell fish to their survey. The latter design was meant to represent normal fishing activity (Jutagate et al. 2003).
reflecting the influence of the UBU restoration narratives. Both Tai Baan and UBU studies attributed the limited rates of participation in fishing for market after the trial dam opening to lack of fishing gear and labour power (UBU 2002: Ch. 6). However, I did not hear any favourable comments on this program from AOP villager leaders. The view among this group was that people preferred cash to new fishing gear, and many recipients immediately sold their gear back to the suppliers for cash rebates of 3,000 to 4,000 baht (Supara, interview 6/10/04). The gear distributed was small mobile gear, such as cast nets, drift nets, and conical traps, which many people had already, and the suppliers' declared prices were above market (Pho Thep, interview, 15/6/04). Many households lacked the capacity to fish anyway because their children and grandchildren were working out of the area (testimony at AOP villagers meeting, 12/6/04).

8.6.2 Irrigation Canals

In the last week of January 2003, several days before AOP villagers protesting the four-month opening were finally evicted from outside Government House, Newin Chidchob, Deputy Minister for Agriculture, made a visit to the lower Mun in the vicinity of the Dam. He met with residents and accepted their request to give special priority to residents in Khong Chiam and Sirindhorn districts in the implementation of the Cabinet resolution of 14 January 2003. The resolution directed the Ministry to expedite the provision of irrigation canals, as part of the four-month opening decision (Chapter 7).

In February 2003, RID released details of the Pak Mun Irrigation Project. It announced an 807 million baht, five-year pumped-water irrigation project to expand existing stations and build new works from villages slightly above Pak Mun Dam to Muang District, an approximately 80 km stretch of river. New projects in phase III were budgeted at 5,000 baht per rai (Table 8.3). However, the four new stations scheduled for rapid completion in the vicinity of the dam cost more, averaging 6,333 baht per rai.

Pumped-water irrigation supplies river water to fields by large electrically powered pumps mounted on floating platforms. Such pumps were installed by DEDP beginning in the 1980s, approximately 70 in Ubon on the Mun; with 16 in the three districts of Phibun, Khong Chiam, and Sirinthorn. The canal systems are concrete trapezoidal channels approximately two metres wide, which run inland from the river,
with occasional branches, for a total length of three to four kilometers. Water flows into fields through simple metal-gated openings in the canal that can be raised by hand. Requesting water usually requires collective agreement among three to four farmers along the canal, and the pump is operated by a resident employee of RID (Klahan, interview 10/10/04). Unlike gravity-fed irrigation water, which is currently supplied without user charges in Thailand, farmers using pumped water had to pay 70–80 baht per hour in 2002.

As part of the UBU Pak Mun study, a team from the Faculty of Agriculture collected data on farming practices in four districts in the lower Mun. They found that pumped water was used primarily to raise rice seedlings for the main rain-fed rice crop, and secondly to grow higher-value crops such as watermelon and chilli, as well as stock fish ponds in the dry season. In 2000–02, the average usage rate was only 14 percent of the total projected irrigable area (UBU 2002: Khor-6).

The main obstacle to expanded use of pumped water was the high user charge (70–80 baht/hour) relative to the value of rice. Other obstacles included the high capital costs of growing chilli and watermelon, which require large amounts of

Table 8.3 Summary of Pak Mun irrigation project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Area/Cost (million baht)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I (2004) |           | • Project planning  
• 4 fast-tracked new stations                                                                 | Khong Chiam and Sirinthorn districts | Planning: B 10.00  
12,000 rai / B 76.00 |
|       | 8 expansions |                                                                              | 5 districts, incl. Muang and below | 8,500 rai / B 39.70 |
| II (2005-06) |           | • 21 expansions                                                                  | 7 districts, incl. Muang and below | 77,140 rai / B 381.70 |
| III (2007+) |          | • 20 new stations                                                                | 7 districts, incl. Muang and below | 90,000 rai / B 450.00 |
| Total | 53 (29 expansions & 24 new) |                                                                              | 8 districts, incl. Muang and below | 157,640 rai / B 807.40 |

Source: RID 2003 and 2004
chemical inputs (ibid., 3-32). Many farmers with access to pumped water tended to rent out their fields to specialist watermelon growers, who chose new areas after soil fertility declined.

The UBU study team stated that many farmers in the study area expressed the desire to have access to affordable irrigation (ibid., 3-33). However sandy soils, steep terrain in the vicinity of the Dam, and the high cost of construction in a context where fields were small and separated by patches of uncleared land presented challenges (ibid., 3-33). The team called for further detailed study. Notwithstanding these constraints, when I conducted interviews among local farmers in October 2004, RID had nearly completed the first round of new canals.

**Farmer interviews**

I interviewed eight irrigators and two pumping station managers, in three villages on the right bank of the Mun. Suwanawari and Kanpueai villages had had canals since 1991, each with its own pumping station. Ladwari village was to get a 2,000 metre lateral canal extension from Suwanawari station. To obtain candidate households for interviews, I asked the station managers for names of villagers who were regular users of water, as well as people who were at the end of canals. I was particularly interested in diagnosing existing or potential problems with irrigation.

Resting between bringing in the main rice crop of that year, some villagers told me that they were delighted to be getting new irrigation canals. Pho Ruea, a prospective user, farmed rice for consumption only. He also owned fish ponds and cultured fish both for EGAT and private buyers (see above). “If we’re going to farm, we need water. Lots of water will help forests,” he added somewhat cryptically, since I knew of no significant forest plots in the vicinity.

On the other hand, Mae Phom and Pho Laen, a married couple both active in the AOP, declined to give up any of their paddy land for the new canal. In 2004, local rainfall was erratic. It was less than farmers hoped for both at transplanting time and particularly in September and October as their crop ripened. A shortage of labour in the family – given Mae Phom’s increasing demands at the Pak Mun Cooperative – led to less weeding than usual in the 30 rai they planted. The family expected their 30 rai of paddy would yield only 6,000 kg, 25 percent below the preceding year, a year in which rainfall was satisfactory. Notwithstanding the water shortage this year, Pho
Laen stated it wasn’t clear to him that even with a canal near his fields he could rely on getting irrigation water when he needed it. He worried about the cost effectiveness, particularly in the situation where he was the only user. Perhaps of equal importance, he viewed the fingerling culture and the irrigation projects as “their projects.” “It’s a water business . . . it’s not a true form of help for people here”, he said of the pumped-water project, comparing it unfavourably to a nearby no-charge gravity-fed project supplied by Sirinthorn Dam.

Mae Fon, who farmed 10 rai of paddy for consumption only, expected the same poor yield as Mae Phom’s family. She used a total of seven hours of water, six of which she ordered during transplanting. Able to control her transplanting date, she then went to Bangkok to make Chinese moon cakes for three months, earning the minimum wage, and returned for the harvest. (This is a popular form of off-farm work for women in this area.) She did not use irrigation water to grow any dry season crops, because the cost was prohibitive (interview 21/10/04).

Pho Phom farmed 10 rai of paddy nearby, with yields in 2004 comparable to the previous two households. However he was forced to pump almost twice the amount Mae Fon did, because of multiple leaks along the canal in his vicinity. He complained to the sub-district administration, but was told that the station master had to report to RID before the sub-district could intervene. He thought the canals weren’t built to last and thought the maintenance reporting procedures excessive (*lai khan ton mak*). Ten years ago, he tried growing a dry season rice crop on eight rai, but lost money badly on it and never attempted it again.

Pho Yai Tham owned 20 rai of paddy land that he now let two of his adult children farm. (Five of his other children lived outside the village.) He ordered irrigation water only once, but was unhappy with the cost effectiveness of the water he received. His fields are at the end of the Suwanawari canal, and the irrigation water did not reach the portion that was higher than the canal. “The canal is a bit too low,” he said. He never bothered again. The village headman asked him if he would allow the canal to be extended through his property, but he declined. “I’d have lost my paddy land to a project with no benefit, or very little,” he said (interview 16/10/04).

Neighbouring Ban Kan Pueai village had a 3,900 metre canal with several leaks along its length, according to its manager Vinai (interview 10/10/04). The first stage, a 1,000-metre pipe from the river to a holding pond, had a 30 degree slope, and needed repairs once or twice a year, with delays involved because RID had only two
repair teams to service 100 stations in the region. No water at all went past 2,700 metres, where the canal crossed a creek, with suspected rupture of its underground pipe. These problems had not yet been fixed. Vinai told us the farmers who used Kan Pueai water mainly had sandy fields. The project was designed to deliver water to 1,200 rai but peak actual usage was 500 rai. Some members wanted to try growing watermelon but lacked the capital and did not trust the pipe. Vinai told us he heard from RID staff that with so many problems, the canal could have been built simply to disburse all money in a budget. Interestingly, rather than fix the problems affecting the final 1,200 metres of the canal, the Pak Mun Irrigation Project was building a new 1,200 metre lateral canal to branch off from Kan Peaui.

8.6.3 Analysis

Arguments made by the Thaksin administration to justify the four-month opening referred to the original purpose of the project as a multi-purpose dam (Chapter 7), and the recent Pak Mun Irrigation Project also justified itself based on farmers’ requests for more reliable water supplies (DOF 2004).

These demands were articulated in several ways. The pro-Dam Kamnan and Village Headmen’s Group appears to have organized several meetings with villagers in 2001–02, in which they solicited villagers’ preferences about what they wanted by way of development. Research teams from TISTR and UBU also asked villagers their needs and preferences. The preference for water was real. However, what remains unclear is how that need was shaped by prevailing discourses. Certainly, the notion of recurrent drought is a common part of media and cultural representations of northeastern Thailand (Sawitri 2002).

By the completion of Phase III, the Ministry of Agriculture will be able to declare that the Pak Mun project serves a total of 157,640 rai. By no coincidence, this figure compares with the 160,000-rai irrigation area in upstream Srisaket which EGAT (1988: III) had declared as a benefit of Pak Mun. Although the Srisaket project never materialized, EGAT continued to refer to the 160,000-rai figure in its public relations literature (EGAT 2000: 7). The Thaksin administration has gone “back to the future” in order to justify Pak Mun’s irrigation benefits.

Beyond this numerical resonance, the irrigation works being built today bear little physical or economic resemblance to the large, centralized pumping scheme RID and EGAT envisioned in the mid-1980’s. That scheme imagined doubling the wet
season rice crop, and growing a dry season crop on 72 percent of wet season paddy fields, for a net economic benefit of 105 million baht (SOGREAH 1985). Almost two decades later, the main benefit of pumped-water irrigation to the farmers I spoke with is to safeguard the wet season rice crop from punitive yield losses because of poor rains (cf. UBU 2002: 3-32). A secondary benefit is the ability to control timing of seedling production and transplanting, allowing farmers to more reliably commit to off-farm work.

No cost-benefit analysis was required to justify the 2003 Pak Mun Irrigation Project, because Cabinet ordered it as part of a special conflict resolution (Somchai, interview 14/10/04). More conscious of distributional politics than RID and EGAT planners in the mid-1980s, Thaksin’s Ministry of Agriculture has deliberately apportioned irrigation projects to 53 Ubon villages, concentrated along the Mun from Muang district downstream to the vicinity of the dam (see Table 8.3).

Fingerling culture, concrete canals, and fishing gear all signified a commitment to intensify production from the lower Mun river and its adjoining arable land. These projects also re-inscribed local farmers’ interests in a managed river, in conflict with the AOP’s agenda. Intensification also reproduced well-institutionalized practices such as artificial fisheries breeding and stocking, and infrastructure-led development at DOF and RID respectively. We see a clear synergy between peoples’ needs as selectively received by elites and existing institutional capacities.143

EGAT’s increased role in fisheries programs can be read as a special case of organisational adaptation. When anti-Dam villagers launched their campaign for fisheries compensation in 1994, EGAT had been content to build a fish pass and let DOF design and operate a stocking program on the lower Mun. After the unexpected duration of contention over the dam – including its controversial fish pass and ineffective initial reservoir stocking – EGAT now takes on a more significant role in fisheries mitigation. In part this reflects frustration with the limited successes of DOF (Surapong, interview 20/8/04), but EGAT has also discovered that a fingerling grow-out scheme is very desirable to villagers with fish ponds. These actions have helped improve EGAT’s local image. The fact that it – and not DOF – owns the only hydro-acoustic sampling equipment in the region signals EGAT’s adaptive commitment to regulate knowledge relevant to its interests in commanding the lower Mun.

143 Later in 2003, the Thaksin administration announced plans for a B200 billion round of national investment in irrigation supply infrastructure (Bangkok Post, 3/9/03).
8.7 Conclusion: livelihoods in dispute

This chapter has examined the politics of knowledge related to fisheries livelihoods in the Pak Mun case, emphasizing the WCD and post-trial dam opening period. Sections 8.2–8.4 reviewed key features of policy narratives and lines of tension between them as manifested in actual debates during 2000–03. All prominent narratives were challenged. Indeed, close examination raises productive questions, logical and methodological, about all policy narratives.

During 2000–03, all policy narratives that used quantitative surveys were either silent about, or contained minimum discussion of, context effects. These narratives include studies led by villagers (Tai Baan Research), professional statisticians (the NSO poll), and social scientists (Khon Kaen University, TDRI, TISTR, UBU). We are left with the impression that investigators either did not appreciate the salience of interview effects, respondent effects, and field effects; or simply did not recognise them (Table 8.2).

None of these studies invited stakeholders from other organizations to join, participate in, or observe survey work. Particularly controversial survey constructions included the NSO's use of the term “occupation,” and UBU's reconstruction of fisheries income in 1990 based on residents’ memories.

At local and national levels, the politics of livelihoods is fiercely contested. It involves discursive struggle over livelihoods, evident in disputes over terms such as achip. The struggle also manifests itself in divergent constructs of the AOP (as a livelihood movement or a mop) and of the Mun river itself (as a productive, free-flowing river vs. a productive, impounded river). It involves novel practices underpinned by contested policy narratives. Such practices included the codification of local knowledge by both state and civil society actors, and new rounds of investment in natural and physical capital.

One contradictory finding in particular attests to this politicisation. Only a fifth of the 135 people who identified themselves to the NSO survey as fishers by occupation (achip lak pramong) actually said they preferred a year-round dam opening (NSO 2003a: 17). However of all the people the NSO polled, we would expect this group to be most sympathetic to a year-round opening. Such a preference would be consistent with what households who sold fish told the UBU team in 2002,
namely that they enjoyed improved food security and net income after the dam opening. That the first choice among fishers polled by NSO was a *four-month* opening indicates local opinion was deeply divided. It also indicates that by this time, the state and local authorities were winning the discursive struggle over the AOP.

By this time, other factors may have increased antagonism towards the AOP. These include the unequal interim fisheries compensation received by AOP and non-AOP groups (Table 7.1), and subsequent dissatisfaction among some AOP members over management of their compensation money by the Pak Mun Agricultural Cooperative (Chanchai, interview 12/11/05). Some respondents, including fishers, may have equated declaring support for the year-round opening with public declaration of support for the AOP. One farmer we interviewed said that, when people from Khong Chiam, Sirindhorn, and Phibun Mangsahan districts apply for work, such as seasonal work making cakes in Bangkok, the notoriety of the Pak Mun case gives employers an additional edge in negotiations (interview Pho Ruea, 10/10/04). In a context where off-farm labour is important, the desire to avoid such stereotyping might spur resentment towards the AOP. Finally, local antagonism towards the AOP may stem from the hegemonic effects of official discourse, which contributes to such stereotyping (Section 8.6). Conflict over Pak Mun reproduced itself at the local level through villagers’ diverse experiences of conflict resolution in the form of compensation, and complex and diverse livelihood interests, mediated by expert knowledge discourses.

Expert knowledge disputes continue to be polarized. First, current decision processes are informed by knowledge discourses that reproduce dominant institutions. For instance, in 2000 and 2003, TDRI researchers writing about Pak Mun repeatedly valorized quantitative data, particularly from NRDC, as *the* basis for knowledge claims. Their defence of NRDC data appears to be driven by the fact that as a profession, mainstream economists depend on large quantitative data sets, and the NRDC data are the only nationwide rural data set. If NRDC data became known as no more reliable, or indeed less reliable, than well-designed intensive livelihoods surveys, routine applied economics in Thailand might undergo reappraisal. Other examples of institutions and organizations reproducing themselves through new knowledge discourses include studies commissioned by stakeholders such as EGAT that have
narrowly-defined premises or non-reflexive terms of reference.\textsuperscript{144} By contrast, studies such as the WCD and UBU studies, which use (implicitly or otherwise) a sustainable livelihoods framework, \textit{offer more ambitious policy critiques and reforms; but they are also – in part because of their multi-stakeholder, deliberative nature – more contested.}\textsuperscript{2}

Second, practices of reception work to assimilate novel discourses into prior political positions. These practices included fast-tracked new investment, use of lay and scientific rhetoric in defence of dominant narratives, and methodological challenges. These actions reflect deeper conceptual tensions, such as whether policy debates over livelihoods should be:

- Settled by impartial experts producing scientific knowledge for decision makers – the rationalist model adopted by TDRI and other state agencies;
- Settled by decisive action based on public opinion – the populist model of the Thaksin administration;
- Clarified and resolved by inclusive, repeated deliberation of problem definitions and solutions – the model favoured by many independent analysts, civil society actors in Thailand, and, purportedly, the World Bank (Shivakumar 2000).

Cast in a livelihoods framework, the four-month opening finally appears to recognize local dependence on natural capital. However, the government’s intensification programs are ambiguous. Some fisheries experts at EGAT and DOF acknowledge that large-scale fingerling stocking is an experiment with unknown outcomes (Surapong, interview 28/8/04). Yet by the end of 2004, as new fishing gear was sold back to suppliers, more fingerlings were released, and more canals were built, promising water from the lower Mun, the case for a year-round opening became incrementally less evident. Intensification has helped re-embed Pak Mun Dam in the landscape.

From a critical standpoint, the four-month opening, the fish stocking, and the canals display only a limited understanding of the potential for low-external-input livelihoods on the lower Mun in the narratives put forward by Tai Baan and UBU. The rapidly planned irrigation project in particular displays the features of a highly

\textsuperscript{144} The Sub-Committee to Review Research Findings Related to the Pak Mun Dam Case (see Chapter 7) raised this criticism over the EGAT-funded TISTR study (SRR-PMD n.d.).
symbolic solution. The canals are concrete, monumental interventions in the landscape (reminiscent of the Pak Mun Dam fish pass). The front-end emphasis on physical capital has come at the expense of investments in operations and maintenance and appropriate extension to low-income farmers (Vinai, interview 10/10/04; Wanlop, 9/10/04). The state has bet on capital-led intensification. In so doing, it has reduced the resilience of the natural river ecosystem, while sidelinging issues of agricultural extension and support. However, if we take seriously Scoones’ (1998) reminder that sustainable livelihoods are inherently normative and hence contested, the Thaksin interventions are no more ambiguous than the sustainable livelihoods debate itself.

Livelihoods of many strata of small farmers in the lower Mun river basin are complex. They depend on living aquatic resources as well as on off-farm income earned seasonally by farmers or received as remittances from out-migrants. If we need more complex narratives – as opposed to simplistic storylines – to do justice to complex livelihoods, they are also least likely, because of their longer causal chains, to be heard by other stakeholders and elites in contexts of contention. Analysts of livelihood and ecosystem sustainability thus face a real dilemma.

Discussion of sustainable livelihoods requires that participants handle complexity and uncertainty. For example:

- Will viable populations of key migratory species (Roberts 2001; Jutagate et al. 2003) persist in the lower Mun if they cannot complete their downstream migration?
- Is fishing effort on key species unsustainable, as Jutagate and Krudpan (2003) suggest? If so, what are the most appropriate stock conservation measures, given their transboundary nature and possibly high levels of fishing effort throughout the river basin? Will DOF and EGAT artificial breeding and release programs make any difference?
- Is fingerling stocking an efficient and effective means of sustaining fisheries?
- Will new irrigation canals make any significant impact on intensification or reduce vulnerability among recipient farmers?
- What interventions – e.g., occupational health and safety interventions, wages and benefits packages – will most benefit the well-being of household members who work away from the lower Mun?
In order to begin addressing these topics in the near-term, debate over livelihoods need to be partly re-contextualized. Attention to the above issues may reframe the polarized and stalemated debate over the management of Pak Mun Dam. Basic concerns include understanding the coping strategies of most vulnerable households in the context of the four-month opening, and evaluating the state’s new intensification programs.

Reasoned public argumentation – notably the WCD and UBU multi-stakeholder knowledge-building studies – constitutes a social mechanism that contributed to changing the trajectory of conflict around Pak Mun. As noted in Chapters 6 and 7, and underscored here, moments of authentic deliberation in the Pak Mun case were rare. A key challenge is to create new inclusive venues for such deliberation after a decade and a half of conflict. A holistic framework such as that of sustainable livelihoods may help inform and moderate such a debate, for example by showing how different narratives and interventions privilege different local people. Considering that the livelihoods framework itself is complex and inescapably normative, that is no small order.
Chapter 9 Conclusion: Rivers of Contention

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9.1 Case study findings in comparative perspective

This thesis has examined two rivers of contention – electricity planning and the conflict over Pak Mun – and set both in the context of changing Thai state–society relations after 1932. In this chapter I discuss key findings from my case studies, reappraise my conceptual framework, and suggest a number of research and policy interventions. Section 9.1 reviews key findings from my three case studies. My goal is to generate a broader comparative discussion of the plausible mechanisms by which civil society actors influence policy making. Section 9.2 discusses causality in terms of discursive and structural/relational mechanisms identified by the study. In Section 9.3, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the conceptual framework used in the thesis. Section 9.4 offers suggestions for future research.

My research agenda has been to describe and explain the politics of policy making in three progressively contextualized cases: Pak Mun livelihoods, 1999–2004; Pak Mun Dam contention, 1989–2003; and electricity generation planning, 1960s–2004. My interest in assessing the impact of civil society advocacy on political outcomes led me to ask: Given distinctive institutional constraints of the Thai state, how have the actions (especially narratives and claims) of civil society advocates influenced practices of electricity generation planning and hydropower project implementation? I implemented this central research question by posing questions
linked to the conceptually related topics in Table 9.1 below.

9.1.1 Interactions: contexts

The electricity generation planning and Pak Mun cases played out in very different micro-political contexts. At the same time, both were embedded in a larger context: the contentious and uneven democratization of an authoritarian state. One striking feature of the Thai state is highly closed policy processes and lack of public deliberation.\textsuperscript{145} For example, the state held no public hearings prior to the final approval of either Pak Mun Dam or the DSM Master Plan, in the early 1990s. Almost a decade later, despite the passage of the new constitution, public hearings over proposed coal-fired plants in Prachuab Kiri Khan province were held after project developers had signed power purchase agreements with EGAT (Chapter 5). More than a decade later, hearings organized in late 2003 by the Thaksin administration over its proposed EGAT privatization were narrow in scope. To date, no public meeting has been held by EGAT or other agencies to discuss its annual Power Development Plan. Lack of authentic deliberative spaces – despite eight years since the passage of the 1997 Constitution – produces a state of affairs where tension between rival discourse coalitions is the norm. Both the sustainable energy advocacy network and the Assembly of the Poor rely on perceived openings of political opportunity, such as the EGAT union’s 2004 campaign against privatization. Sympathetic senators were able to initiate a broader set of hearings only after union protests emerged against Thaksin’s initiative (Saithan, interviews 7/7/04; 11/9/04).

9.1.2 Interactions: structure and dynamics of cases

Obvious and significant differences existed between the Pak Mun protest movement and sustainable energy advocacy campaigns, both of which emerged in the early 1990s. Despite close ties between NGO leaders and occasional contributions to

\textsuperscript{145} Section 9.2 below discusses deliberation as a causal mechanism.
### Table 9.1 Research sub-questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions (contexts, patterns and outcomes of contention)</td>
<td>In what dynamic contexts of structure and meaning did contending parties interact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What were direct and indirect outcomes of state-civil society interaction in each case?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>What role do lay and expert knowledge discourses play in structuring conflicts and influencing outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational and institutional change</td>
<td>To what extent have relevant Thai state agencies displayed capacity to participate in, adapt, or learn from deliberative exchanges?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What relevant political institutions changed as a result of the conflicts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causality</td>
<td>What plausible causal connections (i.e., causal mechanisms) link interaction to particular outcomes of interest?</td>
</tr>
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Each other’s campaigns\(^{146}\), overall the structure of the sustainable energy and AOP networks is that of discrete regional/issue-based advocacy networks. The core concerns of the AOP’s dams group focussed on compensation for existing dams and independent review and deliberation of proposed projects, mainly in the Northeast. The sustainable energy network, which lacked a significant mass base, divided its energy between critiques of planning policy and aiding villagers opposed to the proposed power plants at Bo Nok and Hin Krud in Prachuab province (Prachseri, interview 1/10/05).

The goals of the two advocacy networks occasionally overlapped, but were notably different: sustainable energy advocates wanted to implement energy conservation, and several years later, broad governance and planning practice reform, by means of rational design. Anti-Pak Mun Dam protestors initially wanted only to

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\(^{146}\) One notable example: in August 2004, at a World Bank sponsored public meeting in Bangkok, Pak Mun activists spoke out against the Lao Nam Theun 2 project. Pak Mun activists claimed their disappointing experience with World Bank project governance gave them standing to advocate against the Lao project.
halt the project by means of protest and issue re-framing. Dismissed by the Chatichai government, they found themselves engaged in an emergent stream of collective action with successive governments, which by early 1997 became a sustained livelihoods compensation movement on behalf of development-affected people nationwide.

Actors and resources were different: the sustainable energy advocates had resident technical experts. Sponsored by USAID, and later by state agencies themselves, they offered status-enhancing study tours of progressive energy projects overseas. This contributed to the legitimacy or symbolic capital of the advocates. By contrast, the core of the Pak Mun movement consisted of villagers and communitarian activists whom state agencies were used to patronizing on the one hand and framing as subversives on the other. Methods were very different: in the Pak Mun case, AOP relied on frequent and lengthy mass mobilizations. These protests exacted high transaction costs, including very high psycho-social costs on villager leaders in the movement, some of whom suffered divorce and impoverishment (Khwan, interview 16/6/04).

The shock of the 1997 financial and economic crisis affected the outcomes of the two cases differently. The energy advocates’ campaign against the coal independent power producers (IPPs) was initially boosted. The crisis allowed the activists to frame the new coal plants as unnecessary, after the economy faltered and the system reserve margin increased (Chapter 5). The anti-Pak Mun movement by contrast was dealt an immediate setback after the Chavalit government resigned. In the wake of Thaksin’s four-month-opening decision, it demobilized to re-examine its goals.

By the 2000s, however, other differences between the cases had become less pronounced. Pak Mun villagers produced expert knowledge in the form of Tai Baan Research. While Tai Baan was dismissed by EGAT as experiential and romantic, its participatory action research model has generated interest among other organizations, and may have a longer-term impact on environmental politics in Thailand.

Sustainable energy advocates, in addition to producing erudite technical analyses, attempted to build broader networks, reaching out from their core

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147 John Dore, IUCN (World Conservation Union); personal communication 21/4/06.
constituency of energy technocrats, to villagers interested in grass-roots energy projects. They briefed project-affected people about their proposals for systemic reform. Sustainable energy activists also found themselves engaged in defining more contentious issues after they chose to campaign against the coal IPPs, against Nam Theun 2, and explicitly against the orthodoxies of supply expansion planning.

Finally, there were important synergies between cases. Pak Mun’s position as an “early riser” provided obvious inspiration for other villagers, such as those opposing Bo Nok and Hin Krud. In turn, controversial energy projects supplied motives for advocates, in agencies and civil society organizations, to generate new alternative energy policies.

9.1.3 Dynamics of knowledge

**Issue characteristics – Electricity generation planning**

In the case of system and individual power station planning, expert knowledge was essential to making a difference to policy outcomes. Such expert knowledge was closely guarded and highly quantitative: performance statistics, cost data, and specific parameter sets used as input into expensive simulation software (interview, Dr. Veerasak, 27/8/2004). Without EGAT’s refinement of knowledge about its own system, IIEC would not have been able to argue that demand side management was the least-cost solution in 1991. Without inputs from EGAT, Phillipe Annez would not have been able to compare Pak Mun’s actual vs. planned power output on behalf of the WCD in 2000 (Chapter 7). Mark Segal, a power systems economist consulting for the World Bank in 2004, likewise relied on data sets from EGAT to prepare an elaborate cost analysis of the proposed Nam Theun 2 project. Segal argued that the costs of Nam Theun 2 — including social and environmental impact mitigation — was more economical than a combined-cycle gas turbine plant, even with delays in construction, and especially in scenarios of rising fossil fuel prices (Segal 2004). On the other hand, a commission from the World Bank allowed IIEC’s Peter du Pont to conduct detailed analysis arguing that Thailand could meet its energy and power demand by investing in a mix of DSM and renewable energy at a cost comparable to Nam Theun 2 (du Pont 2005).

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148 Interestingly, Annez served as the World Bank’s Country Director in 1991, when the Bank approved a controversial loan to finance Pak Mun dam; see Chapter 6.
In struggles over power system planning, the most relevant knowledge consisted of narratives that supplied answers about a project’s performance and costs. In terms of influencing decision makers, generating general criticism did not suffice. To avoid being dismissed by experts in disputes over power planning, one had to offer a detailed quantitative rebuttal.\textsuperscript{149} This made du Pont’s report all the more valuable to civil society advocates.

**Issue characteristics – Pak Mun**

By contrast with the predominately engineering and economic tropes in planning disputes and practices, the Pak Mun case had a wider topical agenda. Topics such as fish pass design and socio-economic assessment were outside of EGAT’s core expertise, leading EGAT to rely on commissioned studies, some of which opponents later criticized as methodologically narrow (Amornsakchai et al. 2000a; SRR-PMD n.d.). On the other hand, genuine uncertainties regarding livelihoods and fisheries made these vital topics of debate. EGAT and other elites participated, using scientistic and lay rhetorics (Chapter 8). EGAT also deployed its discourse of power reliability against the Pak Mun decommissioning campaign. This was an exceptionally powerful discourse because it was linked to threat of electricity blackouts (\textit{fai dap}), representing costly disruption to the economy\textsuperscript{150}.

For its part, the anti-dam coalition found that it could contest EGAT and World Bank livelihood impact narratives with local knowledge. Anti-dam advocates for the most part appealed to direct testimony. After 2000, they were also consulted by WCD and UBU fisheries research teams, and published their own Tai Baan research. Compared to the struggles planning activists engage in, knowledge contests over livelihoods have more accessible ambiguity (Chapter 8).

In summary, both electricity planning and Pak Mun involved complexity and uncertainty. In both cases, by the 2000s we find a proliferation of knowledge discourses. However, the status of expert knowledge and of knowledge brokers is routinely questioned on the grounds of situated organizational interests. Rhetorical strategies to relegate or dismiss heterodox knowledge claims are also common.

\textsuperscript{149} As Risse puts it, summarizing Foucault’s view of discourse, “the rules of the discourse prescribe which arguments can be legitimately used by the participants (2000: 17).”

\textsuperscript{150} Statements made by EGAT staff at UBU public meeting 6/9/02; Apisak, interview 30/8/04.
Deliberative venues are rare. Knowledge discourses do not contribute to an “epistemic community” (P. Haas 1992) but emanate from and gravitate to rival discourse coalitions. A need exists for new modes of deliberation – in short, for institutional change.

9.1.4 Organizational change and institutional continuity

Some of the most important and policy relevant findings of the thesis pertain to questions of organizational and institutional change. With closed institutional practices and polarized knowledge claims, we might initially expect little by way of change in the direction of more deliberative and accountable governance (Fox and Brown 1998). Yet by the 2000s it was possible to detect a number of notable albeit ambiguous changes.

Organizational adaptation by EGAT

The fishing gear, fingerling stocking and irrigation projects launched by the Ministry of Agriculture and EGAT (Chapter 8) are evidence that the AOP’s longstanding framing emphasis on fisheries-dependent livelihoods has affected state policy towards the lower Mun. To be sure, these policies do not represent outcomes preferred or endorsed by the AOP. However, even in Western democracies it is uncommon for movements representing oppositional framings or marginalized constituencies to succeed in getting all their demands met (Chapter 2). McAdam and Su (2002) found that anti-Vietnam war demonstrations affected how frequently the U.S. Congress voted on the issue, but not the outcome of the vote. As Meyer (2004: 138) puts it: “The movement successfully set the political agenda, but could not determine the resolution of that agenda.” Parsons (1995) draws similar conclusions in his review of the outcomes of women’s rights campaigns in the Netherlands and France.

In cases where EGAT has proposed new power and energy projects, there are indications that it now attempts to minimize local resistance by sending in specialists to discuss and promote new projects among villagers in a more relaxed manner (testimony of villagers from Wiang Haeng, site of proposed new lignite mine, meeting 16/8/04). EGAT planners now speaks of building power stations where local people are willing to host them (Patrapong, comments at public meeting 29/9/04).
Institutional continuities

Having recognized organizational adaptation and its significance for broader institutional change, we should take stock of important institutional continuities detected in this thesis. I discuss three: practices, parties, and power (as authority and capacity).

Planning practices. During the late 1990s, discourses changed, as reflected in the passage of the 1997 constitution. It is common to encounter official discourse supportive of multiple stakeholder participation. For example, in 2003, Thailand’s Council of State solicited public comment on a new draft public hearing law, pursuant to Section 59 of the Thai constitution, and later submitted a draft to the Cabinet for comment. The Department of Environmental Quality Promotion likewise contracted with Mahidol University to suggest new environmental legislation in line with Section 56 of the constitution. Section 56 grants rights to individuals to participate, inter alia, in “preservation and exploitation of natural resources and biological diversity.” In the case of large development projects, it allows a multi-stakeholder independent environmental organization the right to voice its prior opinion on impacts before development is permitted. Section 59 grants the right to “receive information, explanation and reason” in regards to development and the right to participate in a “public hearing procedure.” In both cases, a handful of seminars were held, but substantive progress requires high-level support from the administration, which has not yet occurred (Phanomsak, interview 17/9/04).

Dominant practices persist and eclipse progressive rhetoric. For instance, in the case of the Thai-Malaysian natural gas pipeline project currently under construction, the second Chuan administration signed an investment agreement in April 1998 and allowed the private project holder, Trans Thai-Malaysian Company, to conduct local public relations before holding any public hearing. In late 2000, after two failed attempts to conduct an orderly public hearing in the face of strong local opposition, the Thai Council of State ruled the pipeline was a “private” project and that no public hearing were necessary (Supara 2004: 179). Despite vociferous calls for drafting new laws and procedures for the conduct of public hearings and the review of EIAs, civil society has not been able to pressure the Thaksin administration to reform the institutional processes by which projects are approved (Phanomsak, interview 17/9/04). Risky and transgressive contention continues to be a common vehicle for
civil society input into project planning and siting.

**Political parties.** With the exception of the New Aspiration Party and Thai Rak Thai, political parties have generally not displayed any desire to represent the interests of AOP. The fragility of coalition governments during the 1990s and the threat posed to other parties by the rise of Thai Rak Thai in the 2000s suggest that it would be rational for vote-seeking politicians to develop platforms more specifically geared towards segments of civil society aggrieved by the Thaksin administration. To my knowledge this has not occurred around sustainable energy, project planning, or siting.

**Power.** Regarding power as authority, when Thai people refer to “government” (*ratthaban*) they mean the executive branch. In this respect Thailand resembles other parliamentary systems with centralized government and limited separation of powers, such as France and Great Britain (Weaver and Rockman 1993). However, Thailand’s judicial system and National Assembly are arguably less open to civil society advocacy than those Western counterparts. Independent organizations such as the Anti-Money Laundering Office and the National Counter Corruption Commission have had their integrity compromised in recent years. This leaves civil society advocates with the weak but active Office of National Human Rights Commission and a few Senate committees as sites of access to office holders outside the executive branch. Fortunately for activists, a few agencies within the executive branch have agendas compatible with environmental and health advocacy, such as the Health Systems Research Institute and to a lesser extent the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning. At the highest level of government, however, the Prime Minister wields more “presidential” authority, rather than being a “first among equals,” as in Britain (cf. Rangsan 2003). The rise of Thai Rak Thai and the “medieval” social vision of Thaksin Shinawatra (Phongpaichit and Baker 2004: 228) inspire little optimism for progressive reform from within.

Regarding power as human capacity, one of Thaksin’s advisors indicated to me that he was not satisfied with the number of staff available to help review alternatives put forward to the government in the Pak Mun case (Thawee, interview, 7/1/03). Adding more analysts may make little difference if agenda setting is hampered by ambiguity and limits on the amount of information that top decision makers can attend to at any one time (Zahariadis 1999).

In light of these institutional continuities, some observers have been critical of Thai NGO networks and movements, including the AOP, for failing to build a
broader, cross-class, and cross-locale, radical social movement (Lertchoosakul 2003). Rather than criticize civil society for its failures of agency, I have attempted to generate a clear understanding of the forces that contribute to enduring institutional and wider socio-cultural structures – the ongoing field of struggle over material and symbolic stakes (Ray 1999).

9.2 Causal analysis: mechanisms of contextualized strategic interaction

Causal stories need to be fought for, defended, and sustained. There is always someone to tell a competing story, and getting a causal story believed is not an easy task. (Deborah Stone 1989)

In this thesis, I have attempted to establish causality in two ways: first, and most obviously, through reasonably fine-grained narratives of routine and contentious politics. Second, I discussed how causal pathways involving key concepts in my analytical framework (Table 3.2) combined to produce notable outcomes. By pathways I mean sequences of necessary and contingent social mechanisms. An event or outcome is caused by combinations of necessary and contingent mechanisms. Mechanisms can be environmental, relational (structural), or discursive (McAdam et al. 2001; Chapter 3).

My interest in strategic interaction has led me to emphasize rhetorical mechanisms. However, my awareness that such interactions need to be contextualized led me to bring in a discussion of structural/relational mechanisms that provided the dynamic micro-contexts for such framing and agenda-setting contests.

The argument in this section proceeds as follows. First, I review some of the recurrent causal pathways (mechanisms) identified in this study (Table 9.2). Next, I show how discursive and relational mechanisms interacted to produce important outcomes of action for anti-Dam advocates in the late 1990s.

9.2.1 Tentative micro-scale mechanisms

The hypothesized mechanisms in Table 9.2 consist of both small-scale, discursive mechanisms as well as larger political processes such as mobilization-repression-acceptance cycles (McAdam et al. 2001). If we think of larger structures as produced and re-produced by micro-agency (in a manner consistent with Giddens’
structuration theory) it makes sense to proceed by reviewing robust micro-mechanisms.

**Framing and counter-framing**

Counter-framing refers to rhetorical action deployed to repress or subvert activist framings. Such discourse can range from policy narratives to terse speech acts (fragments of narratives). Counter-framing occurs throughout an episode of contention, where it justifies government stalling or inaction on social movement demands (Section 7.5.1). In closed venues of “final” decision making counter-framing disarms radical policy narratives. The social movement literature is replete with examples of the different types of framing efforts movement leaders make.\(^\text{151}\)

Examining counter-framing helps redress the imbalance.

A ubiquitous component of Thai counter-framing is to attribute negative traits to activists – as a mob, as “people who can never get enough,” as troublemaking NGOs. Other notable examples in this study include claims that:

- Dispute settlement powers have been devolved to appropriate authorities (Chapter 7)
- EGAT has already paid out more than 989 million baht in compensation related to Pak Mun (Chapter 8)
- “But the dam has already been built” (Chapters 3, 7)
- People want water, so an eight-month Dam closure is appropriate (Chapter 8)
- DSM is less reliable than conventional power plants (Chapter 5)

Hajer uses the concept of “storyline” and “subject positioning” to refer to the action and effects of what I call counter-framing. Analysing the construction and regulation of acid rain in the U.K. and the Netherlands during the 1970s and 1980s, he found that in both countries: “On the discursive level acid rain had to compete with a whole array of existing figures of speech . . . combined with existing institutional commitments. These story-lines had become recurring figures of speech or tropes (1995: 268).”

In my opinion, the term *counter-framing* is preferable to *storyline* because it clearly denotes action. Part of the reason that Hajer avoids an explicit action verb is that he follows Foucault in viewing structural power as residing in discourse itself,

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\(^{151}\) McAdam et al. (2001: Ch. 1) provide a critique.
Table 9.2 Causal pathways and mechanisms recurrent across cases and scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Situation / Antecedents</th>
<th>Events and Mechanisms in Causal Pathway</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State–Society Relations, 1932–1947</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite coup ending absolute monarchy</td>
<td>• Competition between civilian and military elites</td>
<td>Failure of bureaucratic control of military → authoritarian state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State–Society Relations, 1947–2005</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising demands for “democracy” in context of: Sarit and Thanom military regimes (1957–1973)</td>
<td>• Broad change processes: capitalist accumulation, differentiation, and crises; Indochina war; transnational discourses of development</td>
<td>(Partial) democratization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military coup, February 1991</td>
<td>• Polarization between state and progressive civil society, in cycle (2)</td>
<td>After end of cycle (2): expanded civilian control of military; re-construction and strengthening of civil society networks; money politics; emergence of protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electricity Planning, early 1990s</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGAT as highly autonomous monopoly with intent to expand</td>
<td>• Socialization (technical advocacy and new practices)</td>
<td>Planning practice reform to include DSM, more detailed load forecasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEPO as weak regulator</td>
<td>• Elite intervention (by USAID)</td>
<td>Institutional reform: creation of independent power producers (partial privatization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inter-agency competition (NEPO/EGAT)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
(Table 9.2 continued)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Situation / Antecedents</th>
<th>Events and Mechanisms in Causal Pathway</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electricity Planning, late 1990s–2005</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| EGAT as self-regulated monopoly with intent to increase debt and plant construction | • Socialization (technical advocacy and new practices)  
• Civil society framing → elite counter-framing (Alternative Power Development Plan)  
• 1997 financial crisis  
• Villager mobilization/counter-mobilization against coal IPPs  
• Mobilization of EGAT union to resist downsizing of EGAT  
• Elite intervention → deliberation | Planning practice reform to include explicit renewable energy targets  
Institutional reforms: new Ministry of Energy, weakened NEPO (renamed EPPO), weak new regulatory committee, explicit targets for renewable energy, improved entry for independent and small power producers  
Recognition of Palang Thai and other civil society advocates  
Agenda setting  
Compromise on EGAT privatization 2004 (partial privatization) |
| Inter-agency cleavage over institutional structure (NEPO vs. EGAT) | | |

| **Pak Mun Contention, 1989–June 1994 (Pre-Impoundment)** |
| Proposal to build Pak Mun Dam backed by EGAT, executive branch, and World Bank | • One mobilization-repression-acceptance cycle  
• Actor constitution  
• Framing/counter-framing | Recognition of Mun River Villagers’ Committee  
Agenda setting (household and landed assets compensation)  
Expanded compensation & mitigation |

constraining what can legitimately be said.\(^{152}\) Hajer also does not want to claim that institutional actors resist the challenge of ecological modernization by conscious attempts to “strangle” the latter discourse (1995: 267). He finds instead that their resistance is far more subtle. In part because of the ambiguity of ecological

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\(^{152}\) For Hajer, storylines “position” subjects, but this verb, signaling both constraint/enablement, is also ambiguous. I prefer to use the phrase “contextualized action” in lieu of subject positioning. See also 9.3.1 below.
(Table 9.2 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Situation / Antecedents</th>
<th>Events and Mechanisms in Causal Pathway</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pak Mun Contention, June 1994–January 2003 (Post-Impoundment)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Mobilization around livelihood grievances (fisheries) | ▪ Three major mobilization-repression-acceptance cycles:  
  (1) 157-day rally, October 1994–March 1995  
  (2) 99-day rally, January–April 1997  
  (3) Blockades at Pak Mun dam and trespass at Government House, May–July 2000  
  ▪ Framing/counter-framing  
  ▪ Actor constitution and local mobilization against AOP  
  ▪ 1997 financial crisis  
  ▪ Political destabilization of AOP (see 9.3.3)  
  ▪ Unexpected violence, December 2002  
  ▪ Elite intervention [Thaksin, December 2002] → deliberation | Agenda setting (interim fisheries compensation; permanent livelihood compensation; dam decommissioning)  
Emergence of AOP as national social movement organization  
Emergence of Kamnan and Village Headmen’s Association  
Regime change post-financial crisis  
Decision: four-month opening, and livelihood intensification investments, January 2003  
Demobilization of AOP  
Polarization between Thaksin administration and progressive civil society |

modernization, some state agencies adapt that discourse to mean end-of-pipe solutions for emissions, as opposed to more profound changes to industrial processes. By contrast, much contention over Pak Mun and electricity planning involved conscious political struggle. Nonetheless, even in these domains of conscious struggle one narrative was accepted by all actors: the narrative that grants to EGAT mastery over all issues of power supply reliability. Sustainable energy activists thus far have not been able to adapt or reframe issues of reliability to further their agenda.

**Elite action (intervention)**

The mobilization of elites (senior bureaucrats, politicians, technocrats) to intervene in a civil society advocacy campaign usually occurs after sustained
mobilization and media coverage contribute to escalating an issue. Visible examples of intervention include:

- Proposed coal-fired plants, late 2001, by Minister Chaturon Chaisaeng in the conflict between NEPO, sustainable energy advocates, and villagers leading to a televised debate between PER’s Witoon and NEPO’s Piyasawati (Greacen and Greacen 2004);
- Pak Mun, June 2002, by EGAT Governor Sithiporn Rathanopas to offer a four-month opening, three months before Pongpol’s Committee to Solve Problems of the AOP took its vote, and before UBU completed its study (Chapter 7);
- Pak Mun, November 2002, by the Senate Committee on Public Participation in the Pak Mun case;
- Pak Mun, December 2002, by Prime Minister Thaksin.

Elites intervene to advance and – more commonly – to defend their interests (McAdam 1999), with a range of unexpected consequences. Elite intervention, not surprisingly, is a common occurrence in contentious politics (Tarrow 1998). The combination of elite intervention and counter-framing has the power to coopt policy proposals from civil society. Such outcomes are likely without inclusive deliberation proximately timed before a final decision.

Some important elite interventions exploit organizational ambiguities. All institutions are ambiguous in the sense that they allow room for discretion and rule-interpretation (Chapter 2). At EGAT, the combination between closed electricity planning processes and ambitious elites allowed Sithiporn Rathanopas to expand the DSM program in the early 1990s when it was under his control and later as EGAT Governor in 2002–03, to propose building new dams on the Salween river.

Elite action may have an emergent logic. An MP or senior bureaucrat may be tasked to handle a particular conflict, and end up doing more than anyone expected in light of the circumstances. Plodprasop Suraswadi’s role as chair of the 1994–95 interim fisheries compensation committee is probably the most notable example (Chapter 7). Plodprasop identified himself as someone who extended himself to negotiate on behalf of dam protestors, and the agreements reached in his committee were cited by dam opponents more than five years later to justify their campaigns.\footnote{Another possible example is Adisorn Piangket, the New Aspiration Party MP who chaired tense negotiation sessions during 1997’s 99-day rally (Missingham 2003: 164–165).}
Socialization

Socialization in this context refers to processes of advocacy and discursive adaptation involving state actors. Finnemore and Sikkink’s suggest that such “teaching” and “learning” occurs in a number of contexts (2001: 401, 407). First, following a political crisis, actors may reject political norms supportive of authoritarianism in favour of democracy. Mechanisms involved include comparison with other countries’ experiences, self-criticism, debates, and interaction with international actors (ibid., 407). Second, international governmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as scientific/technical networks, may disseminate new norms of behaviour. Finnemore and Sikkink argue that:

[International organizations] are effective agents of social construction because the rational-legal authority they embody is widely viewed as legitimate and good. Further, the perceptions that these organizations are merely technical (and not political) and that the social models they push are chosen because they are efficient and effective add to the power of these norms. (2001: 401)

Examples from my cases include:

- USAID and IIEC teaching EGAT new practices of energy conservation planning in the early 1990s (Chapter 5)
- World Bank teaching EGAT and other actors, in a comparative review, that EGAT’s involuntary resettlement policies at Pak Mun, were generous, equitable and of limited negative impact (Chapter 8)
- The limited success to date of the WCD and its successor, UNDP’s Dams and Development Program, in “teaching” Thailand and other states (notably China and India) its normative framework for dam and energy infrastructure project governance (Dore et al. 2004)

Should we view EGAT’s ostensible shift from proposing new hydropower projects in Thailand as an example of organizational “learning”? Analytically, that would reduce an outcome to one overly-broad causal process. If EGAT has indeed “learnt” not to propose new dams in Thailand, such an outcome is the result of several rounds of mobilization, repression and discursive struggle, involving mechanisms other than just socialization. As always, questions remain about the relationship
between discursive vs. substantive changes to practice. The analysis in Chapter 5, 6 and 7 supports the notion that civil society advocates can consolidate on small gains won through rounds of routine and contentious interaction. Chapter 8 by contrast reminds us of the tenacity of developmental norms of livelihood intensification, through such practices as reservoir stocking and irrigation canals.

Public deliberation

By public deliberation I mean face-to-face debates and exchanges, in contexts understood by participants to be of heightened importance (cf. Ryfe 2005). Deliberations are performances: opportunities to make policy issues salient, to bring them to life before an audience, as in the debates mentioned above. Deliberation is important because it allows rival actors to engage in an open policy contest, which at the same time is received by a diverse audience including media, decision makers, and civil society. The outcome of any given debate is not necessarily a good indicator of how a “final” decision will be made. Private deliberation among elites probably matters more. Rather, such exchanges are important in the Thai institutional context because of the paucity of high-level public deliberation. It is one of few opportunities for dominant and oppositional framings to confront one another, for elites to experience first-hand the balance of contending interests, and for actors to modify their preferences (Chapter 7). The quality of facilitation makes a difference to the conduct of a deliberative performance, as does the venue in which it is staged (Chapter 7; Keck and Sikkink 1998: 18; Holzinger 2004).

Ryfe (2005) argues that significant historical, institutional, and cognitive obstacles impede setting-up and sustaining deliberative processes involving ordinary citizens in OECD countries. Participants in deliberative processes are expected to engage in sustained reflection, to question their “snap judgements” and taken-for-granted policy narratives. Ryfe notes that such expectations are often psychologically challenging. Humans normally rely on “cognitive heuristics,” and stepping beyond these familiar mental models raises levels of anxiety and frustration (2005: 54–56).

Unpacking mechanisms: initiating and sustaining processes

Tilly (2004) argues that we can analyse a social mechanism in terms of (1) processes/mechanisms that generate the mechanism of interest, and (2)
processes/mechanisms that “constitute” (sustain) it. Using deliberation as an example, processes that help initiate deliberation include a context of high stakes and pressures for accountability (Ryfe 2005: 57). Ryfe argues that high stakes and actors’ perceptions of accountability matter more than an ideal design (ibid., 63). Sustaining processes include diverse stakeholder participation, quality of leadership/facilitation, and procedural rules (e.g., civility, equality). Important as well to sustaining deliberation are the “stories” that participants are told and tell themselves to motivate their continued participation. Otherwise, participants may choose to exit talk-oriented deliberation in favour of direct political action (e.g., lobbying, legal action), or in favour of apathy (a particularly acute problem for public goods).

This brief attempt to “unpack” deliberation as a tentative robust mechanism of policy change reminds us of the importance of institutional and cultural contexts. In so doing, it highlights a tension between contextually-oriented, historicist explanation, and mechanism-oriented explanation. Sections 9.3.2–9.3.4 discuss further the connections and tensions between these modes of explanation.

### 9.2.2 Structural/relational mechanisms and their effects

Through the wider-angle lens of relational mechanisms, Pak Mun’s trajectory of contention can be viewed as a series of episodes consisting of mobilization → repression → struggle → concession mechanisms (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). As Table 9.2 indicates, we can construct the larger trajectory of Thai state–society relations post-1947 in terms of such episodes. Such a view shifts focus from the substance of political disputes to their form. It shifts from narrative description of action-response to analysis of emergent formal relational patterns. Why would we want to do so?

For McAdam et al. (2001), the best way to explain the late–20th century disintegration of the Soviet Union by contrast with the 19th century unification of Italy, the Spanish civil war by contrast with the U.S. civil war, or a number of other apparently incompatible cases, is to identify robust causal mechanisms, then see how they combine in different sequences to produce strikingly different historical trajectories.

Of immediate relevance to this thesis is McAdam and colleagues’ argument that discursive mechanisms alone do not suffice to explain patterns of contention.
Relational pathways – constituted through social construction – are ultimately more important:

We treat social interaction, social ties, communication, and conversation not merely as expressions of structure, rationality, consciousness, or culture but as active sites of creation and change. We have come to think of interpersonal networks, interpersonal communication, and various forms of continuous negotiation – including the negotiation of identities – as figuring centrally in the dynamics of contention. (2001: 22)

McAdam and colleagues identify at least 20 mechanisms, one of which is “brokerage”. The following passage on brokerage effectively conveys the flavour of their analytical project:

Brokerage is the linking of two or more currently unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with each other . . . . brokers vary significantly in social location and modus operandi, with important consequences for the contention in which they participate . . . . some brokers deliberately keep their clients segregated from each other, while others actively merge them . . . some undermine the capacity of certain sites for effective claim making by pairing them with ambitious rivals, by making unsavory deals with objects of claims . . . some don't know they are brokering, because they think of their activity as gossip, sociability, information gathering, favor-giving, or mutual aid. In all cases, nevertheless, brokerage . . . creates new boundaries and connections among political actors. (2001: 142)

Other analysts have expressed concerns about this comparative research agenda. Markoff (2003) points out that “mechanisms” like “brokerage” – and, I would add, political boundary mechanisms – are vaguely defined and may suffer a loss of explanatory nuance. The authors do not yet supply operational definitions. Barker (2003) objects to the emphasis on abstract relational mechanisms:

If mechanisms represent the (abstracted) ‘forms’ of interaction, they do not by themselves provide satisfying explanations of contentious episodes, as somehow distinct from a ‘content’ that includes the truly causal, namely the situated understandings, strategizing choices and actions of relevant participants. It is as if the authors’ own self-admitted roots in a form of structuralism prevents them from offering a clear way forward in the very fields of inquiry they address, for classic problems of agency and structure are somehow evaded. Given their focus on ‘episodes’ and their contingencies, it is surprising that they pay so little attention to the significance of events and turning points as ‘moments of decision.’ (2003: 607)

I share McAdam and colleagues’ views on methodology. Relational mechanisms are necessary. They appear in Chapters 6 and 7 without showcasing their
presence. For instance, McAdam and colleagues might refer to the spatial transformation of contention I describe in Chapter 6 as “scale shift,” a broadening of the locus of contention.

Similarly, we could refer to the radicalization of the AOP and the cleavage between it and the Kamnan and Village Headmen’s Association (KVHA) in the late 1990s, as “polarization”. To do so, according to this framework, is to hypothesize that the local episode involves processes of identity construction and political boundary-setting similar to the severe left-right polarization that afflicted Thai society during the mid-1970s. Likewise, pathways of mobilization $\rightarrow$ repression $\rightarrow$ struggle $\rightarrow$ political recognition/concession in the Pak Mun case also concatenate to produce larger scale processes of democratization (McAdam et al. 2001).

On the other hand, I agree with Barker (2003) that analysis of situated understandings and turning points matters as much as analysis of relations. It is clear that McAdam and colleagues’ program ultimately cannot dispense with interpretivist or ethnographic situated understandings. In the next section I demonstrate how some of their insights might be applied in a manner of interest to scholars and advocates alike.

### 9.2.3 Triangulating on activist destabilization in Thailand

This section reflects on one striking aspect of the Assembly of the Poor’s Pak Mun struggle, particularly during the post-financial crisis period: the elite convergence on the four-month opening (2000–03), and the weakening of the AOP after Thaksin’s rise to power and proactive conflict management at Pak Mun (Chapter 7). There we see both concession and actor destabilization. One question worth asking therefore is: *How do the process and outcome of struggle change the construction of actors, and vice-versa, in an emergent fashion over time?*

We saw in Chapters 6 and 7 that successive governments have alternated between repressing the anti-Dam protestors’ network and its successor social movement organization, the AOP. I argued that explanations based on political opportunity do not explain the form or content of discursive innovation by both the second Chuan, and especially the Thaksin administrations (see 7.3.3–7.3.4). To reach for a more satisfying explanation, I attempt a theoretical triangulation (Roe 1998) encompassing John Kingdon’s “multiple streams” model of agenda setting and
Kingdon’s agenda setting model

Drawing on neo-pluralist theories of democracy and some 250 interviews over four years of fieldwork, John Kingdon (2003) offers a “multiple streams” model of agenda setting at the federal level of American politics. Kingdon’s model is a non-rational model of organizational choice driven by ambiguity and the logic of temporal sorting (Zahariadis 1999). Ambiguity arises from government turnover, unclear preferences, and unclear decision-making processes. Temporal sorting is driven by demands on elites’ scarce time, with the consequence that “who pays attention to what and when is critical” (ibid., 75). Despite its North American origins, these general features of Kingdon’s model make it partially relevant to other national government contexts (ibid., 79).

Organizational choice (in this case whether and how to respond to civil society advocacy) is a function of three analytically separable socio-political processes or “streams.” Actors can and do participate in different “streams” of action:

1. Problems: The flow of reports, indicators, and media-genic events, when “recognized” as conditions that deserve to be addressed, even if no solution is currently available;
2. Policies: The stream of solutions thrust forward, especially by political entrepreneurs;

By “national mood” Kingdon means elites’ sense of public opinion, which they construct through various channels of communication such as trends in newspaper editorial coverage, voting trends, questions asked at public meetings in which they speak, and formal opinion polls. Kingdon argues that elites respond to social movements only to the extent they view the latter as aligned with the national mood (2003: 146–149).

Kingdon argues that political entrepreneurs – actors with high legitimacy – can shape outcomes through sheer persistence and investment of time, money, and effort.
Generic solutions, he argues, already exist in specialized policy communities (academic and practitioner networks). By vigilantly monitoring the changing “problem” and “political” streams, and always being ready to advocate their solutions, policy entrepreneurs can contribute to elevating a problem/solution to the decision agenda (the set of policy narratives up for active consideration).

Seen through the lens of Kingdon’s multiple streams model, the striking feature of the AOP as a social change network is that by the late 1990s it was participating vigorously in the “political” and “solution” streams (the latter, especially through its academic and NGO allies), while constituting part of the “problem” stream through its marathon protests. Because of its general lack of access to government elite, the AOP, as we have seen, needed to generate media-genic “events” to compete in the problem stream (Chapters 6–7; Chalermsripinyorat 2004). The AOP was both a problem for government elites and a potential bearer of policies, notably, in helping shape Thai Rak Thai’s agenda. This raises pressing questions about the politicization of its identity. Policy choices result in attributions of identity, and vice versa.

**McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly on actor re-constitution**

McAdam and colleagues’ discussion on actor constitution may help us see more clearly the dynamics involved. These authors crucially argue that political actors are not neatly bounded, self-propelled entities (2001: 12). Sustained transgressive conflict stimulates ongoing framing contests. Both challengers and members of the polity draw on the stock of identities present in political discourse, and re-fashion them (2001: Ch. 10). These identity-framing contests are not decided once and for all, but shape and are shaped by the changing fortunes of political entrepreneurs and collective actors themselves (McAdam 1999). I would add that in modern Thailand, contention over identities is constrained and transformed through interactions between elites and mass media institutions (Chalermsripinyorat 2004). Building on these insights, let us try to understand the recent destabilization of the AOP in the Pak Mun case.

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154 Kingdom's model recognizes pressure group campaigns, and assigns them to the “political stream.” He argues decision makers look at the balance of forces between different pressure groups in setting agendas. Although other pressure groups (such as the KVHG) were less vocal and visible than the AOP in the Pak Mun Dam Case, decision makers nonetheless heeded them as well, for example, in deciding to order the opinion poll that helped justify the four-month opening.
First, if protest actions are leveraged by media coverage, then identity politics are also shaped by media practices. Like other modern mass media, Thai news media focus on dramatic events on the one hand and routine elite politics on the other. Far more so than in Western democracies, however, Thai print media coverage privileges the government (as opposed to the parliamentary opposition). A news story typically consists of extended quotes of statements made by top political leaders (first and foremost), followed by quotes from opponents much further down the column. Local authorities and village reading stations (sala) tend to receive leading circulation newspapers like Thai Rath and Daily News.

Next, frames from the Indochina war have not disappeared from political discourse. While NGO has neutral or social democrat connotations in Western democracies, the Thai word (en chi o) is ambiguous. NGOs were identified as being the “third hand” (mue thi sam) behind the AOP’s protests in 1997 (Missingham 2003: 97; see also EGAT 2000b: 45–46, 63). Thaksin, like his predecessors, distinguished between the legitimate majority vs. the subversive minority of NGOs, without necessarily naming any. Such rhetorical action when covered by the media destabilizes the identities of NGOs, not just among village headmen in the lower Mun who have participated in counter-mobilization, but among the urban public in Ubon and Bangkok. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly refer to this as “decertification.”

The category mop, from the English “mob,” provides a possible example of discourse the news media themselves have diffused into society. The term appears to be of recent origin in Thailand (Praphat 1998). It is vernacular (the official designation is puu chumnum; demonstrators), and refers to the broad category of demonstrators, whether farmers or white collar workers (including the rallies against Suchinda in 1992 and Thaksin in early 2006). Despite its assimilation to cover all forms of demonstration, and despite the fact that Mun villagers may use it casually, as in pai mop (to join a protest), the term mop still carries negative connotations. AOP protest leaders never refer to their group as a mop when speaking publicly, nor did villagers I interviewed. It is hegemonic discourse par excellence.

Taken together, media practices, hegemonic frames, and inherently unstable political identities favour top elites in Thailand. The AOP’s periodic compensation

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155 Praphat (1998: 28) traces the first usage of mop in the media to a Matichon headline in July 1982, describing a rally organized to support an MP facing expulsion from parliament.
victories in the 1990s, its ambivalence about its future political trajectory (as
movement organization or political party), and its tactical decision to support the
emergent Thai Rak Thai party, meant that to the average Ubon farmer, the AOP
represented less “the poor” as a national identity than a mop representing, at best,
specific categories of poor.

Taken alone, the models from Kingdon (2003) and McAdam, Tarrow, and
Tilly (2001) provide partial explanations. By triangulating their insights, we see that
agenda-setting dynamics, a crucial component of policy change, can also be viewed as
emergent sequences of discursive and relational mechanisms, in which dominant
actors destabilize the identities of a weaker social change network, in part through
media practices.

9.2.4 Summary of causal processes and mechanisms

Table 9.3 compares processes and mechanisms identified by this study with
those offered by post-structuralist (Hajer 1995), structural/relationist (McAdam et al.
2001) and constructivist scholars (Risse 2000; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). Both
Hajer on the one hand and McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly on the other influenced my
approach to causality in this study. Whereas Hajer offers much in terms of discursive
analysis, in the end he touches sparingly on the dynamics of actual advocacy
campaigns (my research agenda). While McAdam and colleagues have much to say
about contentious dynamics, at times they tend to avoid confronting discursive
mechanisms. They argue that entire episodes are discursively constructed (2001: Ch.
1), which is a truism. Or they state that they “seek . . . to lodge interpretive processes
in the give-and-take of social interaction rather than treating them as autonomous
causal forces” (2001: 32). In so doing they dislodge substantive interpretation. Yet
Tilly himself has argued strongly in favour of discursive analysis, for example in
concluding an essay with the following statement:

The crucial processes of contentious politics are not instrumental in the sense
of proceeding directly from the self-centered competition of elites . . . they are
not primordial in the sense of expressing deeply grounded individual
phenomenology. They are conversational in the sense of proceeding through
historically situated, culturally constrained, negotiated, consequential
interchanges among multiple parties. Whatever else it requires, the
explanation of political contention demands that analysts take mere speech
acts seriously (Tilly 1998; emphasis added).
I have taken speech acts seriously. Drawing from related intellectual maps (Table 9.3), the thesis takes its own soundings in understanding contention, policy-making and democratization in Thailand.

It is time to sum up. Given distinctive institutional constraints of the Thai state, how have the actions (especially narratives and claims) of civil society advocates influenced practices of electricity generation planning and hydropower project implementation? My answer is that anti-Dam advocates and the AOP did so by forming social change networks, gaining contingent recognition as new political actors. Through innovative and disruptive action, through claims for transparency and justice, through mass performances of worthiness, unity, and commitment, and through the production of local knowledge, they helped set agendas. They triggered elite intervention, as well as reactive counter-mobilization and occasional violence. The escalation of uncertainty from unintended outcomes forced elites to reconsider unfavourable decisions, and to make concessions.

At the same time, a number of events made the Assembly of the Poor vulnerable to destabilizing rhetorical action at the local and national levels. Such action involved the following dynamics: formation of competitive organizations in the lower Mun basin; complex and intractable issues (such as multiple rounds of compensation); and inability to take credit for championing the interests of vulnerable small farmers. Destabilizing interactions occurred particularly in the restricted media space of the post-financial and economic crisis years. Populist platforms put forward by Thai Rak Thai and Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra pre-empted the AOP’s influence.

Sustainable energy advocates influenced practices of power-system planning by teaching new techniques and diffusing new norms of energy conservation. In the recent period, however, as they engaged in more contentious interaction, disrupting dominant rationalities, they found themselves confronting some of the same core practices of a power-wielding bureaucracy and an authoritarian state, namely rhetorical strategies that police the boundaries of policy-relevant knowledge.

9.3 Reappraisal of research design and conceptual framework

Concepts (theory) and findings relate to each other in a cyclical manner (Seale...
In light of the findings above, my goal in this section is to offer a dialogue between my findings, my research design as implemented, and my original conceptual framework. The goal is a candid and reflexive critique that will help re-tune concepts and design for future analyses. I begin with a critique of research design.

My research design was intensive, and cases were chosen for their inherent interest, in a bottom-up, incremental manner, reflecting an incremental logic of discovery (as opposed to being pre-determined, isomorphic units). In Chapter 5, I studied planning discourses and routines through close textual analysis, participant-observation in public meetings and seminars in which EGAT staff participated, and through interviews. I learned much about planning through listening attentively to people talk about it, and scrutinizing planning texts. However, the relationship between planners and their optimization practices remains an intricate and important component of policy making. It remains poorly understood, in part because it is closely guarded.

Studies that could explicate such practices require trust, rapport, and internal support by elites. With hindsight, my research agenda would have benefited from a systematic shift of focus from the AOP towards ethnographic study of EGAT. However, the contentiousness of the Pak Mun case from 2000–03 absorbed a lot of my intellectual and emotional energy and, frankly, gave me an initial bias of pessimism against my being able to gain access to EGAT as an ethnographer.

9.3.1 Reflection on contextualized strategic action (CSA) framework

I intended my CSA conceptual framework to be general, balanced, and accessible. Although it deals explicitly with issues of structure and agency, I designed it to help me use social theory, not provide a general re-statement of the social (cf. Giddens 1984). The framework has a clear actor-oriented core. I then acknowledged the importance of structures, ranging from macro-historical contexts and meso-scale institutions to micro-discourses. The balance between structure and agency in the thesis reflects the priority accorded to agency in the framework.
Table 9.3 Social mechanisms in Hajer (1995) and in present study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hajer (1995)</th>
<th>This Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[discursive mechanisms]</td>
<td>[discursive and structural/relational mechanisms and pathways]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-lines &amp; black boxing</td>
<td>Framing/Counter Framing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Positioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disjunction markers: “legitimate ways of denying” the deeper (structural and institutional) ramifications of an oppositional discourse</td>
<td>Institutional practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Discursive creation of macro-actors”</td>
<td>Actor constitution (McAdam et al. 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured ways of arguing (specific to policy domain)</td>
<td>Identity destabilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic politics</td>
<td>Teaching and learning (between civil society actors and agencies) (Finnemore and Keck 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for sensory experience → trust</td>
<td>Protest movement performances: worthiness/unity/numbers/commitment (Tilly 1999)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

{Mobilization → Repression → Struggle}  
→ (a) [agenda setting by civil society ] → negotiation  
→ (b) elite intervention → public deliberation → rhetorical action → pressures for accountability and credibility → communicative action? (Risse 2000)  

My framework encompasses the key concepts of rationality, culture and structure that recur in political analysis (Lichbach and Zuckerman 1997). Actors follow their interests; however these are discursively constructed and, I argued, subject to change in the course of deliberation (Hajer 1995; Migdal 1997; van den

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156 Following Habermas (1987), Risse (2000) distinguishes between “rhetorical action” and “communicative action.” The latter discursive process is defined as a situation in which parties are persuaded on the merits of the best argument. In real situations both occur together. The thesis does not engage in debate over the merits of Habermas’ concept.
Hoven 2004). Institutions matter, because actors’ interests are constrained by their norms and routines. To avoid confusion I defined institutions more narrowly, as specific institutionalized practices (e.g., electricity planning or modes of public consultation) as opposed to more diffuse norms and values. The latter concepts I assigned to the category of discourse. I then conceived of institutions as sites where discourses are deployed. Having applied the framework to my case studies, this section discusses a number of useful conceptual and methodological refinements.

**Knowledge**

All political conflict involves a struggle to control interpretation, so to a large extent a label such as “politics of knowledge” is redundant in policy studies (Ginsberg 1998). My CSA framework accordingly did not segregate knowledge discourses from other discourses. In my case study on the politics of livelihoods (Chapter 8), however, I distinguished scientific, quasi-scientific, and lay discourses, noting how all three were deployed in actual exchanges. However, I refused to grant scientific discourses privileged special ontological status. I showed how relatively simple techniques of narrative and rhetorical analysis also allow interrogation of “scientific” texts.

**Organizations**

An organizational concept that does not appear in my framework at all is that of organizational culture. Heyman argues that the concept is useful, although it “has often been badly applied” (2004: 493). My discursive orientation allowed me to study some important aspects of organizational culture, such as EGAT’s supply-expansion and reliability narratives in Chapter 5, and Department of Fisheries’ artificial breeding and culture frames in Chapter 8. However, I did not pay attention to other important aspects of organization culture, such as socialization of new workers (ibid., 494). Strong (hegemonic) organizational culture is important to the extent that it insulates workers at EGAT from the need for authentic dialogue with project-affected communities.

Heyman (2004) argues that the study of “power-wielding bureaucracies” deserves intensive, ethnographic analysis. An intra- and inter-organizational analysis centred on EGAT might uncover:
- Internal division of labour – how differences between system operators, system planning engineers, and energy conservation planners in terms of status and tasks produce particular organizational rivalries;
- Political alignments – through a study of funding patterns, both formal and informal;
- Relationship between internal alignments and wider political processes – by collecting narratives of cooperation/conflict, for example, between the privatization agenda of the Ministry of Energy and EGAT union resistance to corporatisation and marketization.

**Mass mediated politics**

Although my conceptual framework includes “institutions and organizations” as “sites of constraining discourses and routines,” I chose not to pursue the mass media as a subject of extensive inquiry. Having slighted the media in favour of institutions such as electricity planning, it makes sense now to acknowledge that omission.

Koopmans (2004) argues that the public sphere of the mass media is increasingly important as an independent process shaping contentious interactions among authorities, public opinion, and social movements. Like other media scholars, he conceives of the public media sphere as bounded by prevailing public discourse (e.g., on what constitutes a relevant topic) as well as institutionalized “news values,” which, among other things, give standing to prominent and prestigious public figures. These institutionalized discourses and practices produce a public sphere that is top-down.

Koopmans argues, first, that all activists rely on and compete for mass media “visibility” (extent of coverage), “resonance” (extent of reaction from other parties, including authorities), and “legitimation” (extent to which such reactions are supportive). Second, movements lacking full-time political analysts (and dense intramovement ties) especially rely on mass media discourse for political information, i.e., to learn about the resonance and legitimacy of their actions. For example, in the context of German media coverage of public debate on appropriate policy towards political asylum seekers, radical right groups switched from customary targets (e.g., leftists, homosexuals, tourists) towards attacking “foreigners.” Koopmans argues that such actions intensified media coverage of the debate, revealing significant elite
divisions, while diffusing the appeal of anti-foreigner attacks to radical-right cells nationwide which are not otherwise integrated with one another).

By contrast, this study argues that patterns of “direct” encounters between demonstrators, police, and authorities were important (Chapters 6–7), as epitomized by mass protests and occasional blockades and skirmishes at Pak Mun Dam and Government House. The skinheads Koopmans studied drew on media coverage to “legitimate” their violence, and they lacked high-level political reform agendas. The AOP by contrast engaged in extensive forward-planning and had seasoned political analysts. It was less reliant on mass media for empirical knowledge. The AOP certainly desired media legitimation, and desired it intensely, but did not let such concerns dictate their tactics (Chapter 7). In summary, my study tacitly recognized the media as an important site of framing/counter-framing, while focusing analysis on other unexplored sites of struggle, e.g., the expert “knowledge games” explored in Chapters 5 and 8.

**Agency and structure**

I use the terms “action,” “response” and “practice” liberally in the thesis. The former two terms refer to agency, while “practice” is intermediate between agency and structure (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2000). My usage of these terms tended to emphasize strategic actions and interactions, that is, meaningful behaviour which actors can reflexively describe and reconstruct. I prefer to speak of “contextualized action” rather than “subject positioning” (Hajer 1995) because, first, not all action/positioning is discursive – action is also positioned by webs of social relations which, as McAdam et al. (2001) argue, have an efficacy partly independent of discourse.

Second, at the micro-scale, my concept of agency is stronger than that suggested by Hajer, and by social theorists such as Giddens. Fairclough (1989), a linguist and critical discourse analyst, conceives of agency and practice in a way I find helpful. He also uses the term “subject (position)” but is clear that:

> [B]eing constrained is a precondition for being enabled. Social agents are active and creative. . . . discourse (and practice generally) draws upon discourse types rather than mechanically implementing them . . . discourses typically draw upon a combination of types. Discourse types are a resource for subjects, but the activity of combining them in ways that meet the ever-changing demands and contradictions of real social situations is a creative
one... Reproduction [of discourse and practice] may be basically conservative, sustaining continuity, or basically transformatory, effecting changes. (Fairclough 1989:39)

**Practical consciousness**

Giddens (1984) is particularly interested in large-scale structures and institutions, those that "[stretch] away, in time and space, beyond the control of any individual actors" (1984: 25). That leads him to emphasize action that takes place without the agent’s being able to articulate precisely how or why it occurs. He refers to this as “practical consciousness” (1984: 6). For Giddens, action also results from unacknowledged conditions, and produces unintended consequences (see Chapter 2).

A notable example of these dynamics from my case studies is that of overinvestment in power generation capacity by EGAT, leading to capital shortages and to pressures from the World Bank and the Thai government for privatization (Chapter 5). Another example is the post-1998 destabilization of the AOP’s identity discussed above. Protest leaders may be aware of this, yet pragmatically dismiss it as repression, without implicating themselves in its logic of emergence.

Nonetheless, my application of the CSA framework was somewhat biased towards strategic actions, and in retrospect slighted the role practical consciousness and unacknowledged conditions play in social action. What difference does it make to bring these concepts in, other than stretching the research agenda?

In situations of high ambiguity and uncertainty, we know that people act collectively before they necessarily can articulate a political identity, and we have also seen that political identities transform rapidly (McAdam et al. 2001). For example, my case study of conflict over Pak Mun Dam reveals a large number of different groups/identities in urban and rural Ubon during the initial two years of contention before the urbanites demobilized and Bangkok NGOs helped separate villager groups form the “Mun River Villagers’ Committee.” On the other hand, even in situations of routine institutional practice, such as electricity generation planning, practical consciousness is important.

A more intensive examination of causal processes involving either “routine” planning or collective actor formation would require explicit conceptualization of practice and practical consciousness, as well as suitable research methods, such as participant-observation in power system planning.
**Methodological progress**

This thesis has provided both contextually oriented historicist explanation and mechanism-oriented explanation, with the former providing empirical foundations for the latter. The main methodological challenge has been specifying necessary and contingent conditions which trigger and sustain social mechanisms. Another significant challenge is to describe putative mechanisms more thoroughly.

The inquiry is clearly far from complete. The causal pathways identified are hypotheses. For example, under conditions of protracted conflict between opposition movements and the executive branch of an authoritarian regime:

1. Anti-movement violence backfires when accurately covered by mass media;
2. Mass media discourse destabilizes movements’ political identities;
3. Intervention of sympathetic elites is necessary to initiate deliberative processes;
4. Deliberative processes are likely to produce concessions when they expose dominant actors’ preferences and subject them to public critique.

Such hypotheses can be tested, first, by enriching our knowledge of “sub-events” (potentially consequential happenings between events) and assessing what difference more detailed knowledge makes to each hypothesis. More data from those close to key decision-makers would be valuable. Second, we could explore other cases under similar scope conditions (Kiser 1996). More rigorous analysis of causality is also possible, using, for example, formal analytical techniques such as event structure analysis (Griffin 1993; Isaac et al. 1994; Brueggerman and Brown 2003).

**9.4 Recommendations for future research**

I close with brief suggestions on research programs relevant to analysts interested in Thailand, as well to scholars concerned about state–society relations in nominally democratic settings elsewhere.

**Comparative history and politics of Thailand**

My brief analysis of patterns of state–society relations in Thailand (Chapter 4) could be extended into a comparative study that situates Thailand in a category of
nominal democracies with authoritarian legacies and significant civil society movements. Much work could be done in this regard. For example, having hypothesized critical junctures and antecedent conditions (Chapter 4), we could more closely examine patterns and mechanisms of contention in those conditions and junctures.

**Agenda setting by national governments**

We still know little about the politics of problem definition, agenda setting, and decision-making outside Western democracies (Chapter 2). Such politics regularly involve interactions between public opinion, organized interest groups, and elite politics. How might such research proceed? We would need to specify historical, institutional, and discursive legacies, as I have attempted to do. We would need to determine the extent to which policy is made in specialist communities (subsystems or monopolies) and how in mass mediated discourse it shifts as issues expand to high salience.

**Oppositional politics and mass media**

Recent developments suggest that the Thai mass media as an “actor” in state–society relations merit continued study. The first development concerns the AOP’s capacity to conduct more marathon-style mass rallies. In the Pak Mun case, the four-month dam opening plus other concessions made by the current administration appeased a large portion of the AOP’s constituency (Chapters 7–8). In late 2005 scholars close to the AOP spoke in terms of its concentrating on lobbying, and losing a number of its core NGO support staff to other causes, including forming a new political party (Suwit, interview 8/11/05). These developments may make the AOP even more reliant on mass media for legitimacy, as well as for political feedback. Finally, there have been overt attempts by the Thaksin government to censor, as well as buy controlling stake in, electronic and mass media channels (Phongpaichit and Baker 2004). Also relevant in Thailand is the practice of bribing journalists for favourable coverage (Baker 2003).

Thaksin’s heavy-handed attempts to shackle and deflate the public media sphere finally backfired in late 2005, as evidenced by the public invective between Thaksin and his former colleague Sondhi Limtongkul, a newspaper owner and
television host (*Nation*, 29/11/05). The Sondhi-Thaksin conflict surfaced in late 2005 and catalyzed mass demonstrations against Thaksin in early 2006, pressuring Thaksin to dissolve parliament and call elections in April 2006. How have the targets of Thaksin’s repression reacted, in terms of compliance or possible defiance (including increasing their coverage of activism)? Will the 2005–06 campaign to oust Thaksin democratize Thai mass media and, if so, how? Thai cases may shed light on general questions of interactions among state elites, public opinion, and mass media.

**Organizational power and institutional change**

The study of power-wielding bureaucracies certainly deserves more attention. One of the consequences of globalization and neo-liberalism is that discourses of managerialism – that is, discourses of excellence, competition, and knowledge – have been promulgated in the public sector in Thailand, as elsewhere. These discourses could help secure access to organizations such as EGAT by researchers who offer independent evaluations of the organization's learning ability. Having secured prior access, ethnographers could observe how managers respond to alternative policy narratives generated by civil society advocates.

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157 Major opposition parties boycotted the 2 April 2006 elections. They accused Thaksin of avoiding a potentially damning no-confidence debate over his business dealings by dissolving parliament. The Supreme Court ruled on 8 May 2006 to invalidate the April elections after civil society activists filed lawsuits alleging multiple irregularities during and leading up to the elections (*Nation* 2006).
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Appendix A

Attack poverty, not one another [Bangkok Post, 1 September 2000]

The impact on fisheries was not considered when plans were drawn up for the Pak Moon dam, hence the heavy impact on people's lives, many of them sadly impoverished to begin with, and the protests and demands for restitution.

J. Shivakumar

The uproar over the Pak Moon dam has resulted in a lot of finger-pointing. Blame has flowed freely among all parties involved. It has generated a lot of heat and noise but has not shed sufficient light on the fact that the problems surrounding the dam are really problems stemming from poverty. The broadening of the protest to include a much larger group of people, discussing a much wider range of issues, reinforces the point that there is a deeper problem that goes well beyond a dam: poverty in the Northeast.

It is no surprise that most of the people gathered to protest are from the country's rural Northeast, where poverty is stubbornly rooted. Nine out of 10 poor people in Thailand live in rural areas. Seven out of 10 of those poor live in the Northeast, where 34% of the country's total population live. The Northeast bears twice the average national burden of poverty.

While the Pak Moon project has helped consumers of power and the nation as a whole through additional power production, it is apparently hurting a number of poor and vulnerable local people. This is a possible consequence of almost any dam, which is why measures to minimise the impact are part of any dam project. The state of the art on those measures is advancing rapidly. Because of this and the degree of poverty in the Northeast, it is not surprising that there is a lively debate surrounding the corrective measures embodied in the Pak Moon project.

Several credible studies have confirmed that the issues of compensation and resettlement for those directly affected have been handled adequately. Likewise, with the health impact. Not so, the fisheries issue. It has created problems that remain unresolved.

The project did not provide a set of baseline data on fisheries and fishermen to enable us to distinguish between the project's impact on fisheries and the impact of other non-project factors such as population pressures, urban pollution and widespread poverty; or determine how many fishermen would be affected and to what extent. In addition, the project did not provide enough opportunities for fishermen to have a voice in the management of fishery resources in the area.

While making provisions for the development of fisheries, the project was not expected to, and thus did not, draw a line between what it could do for the poor and vulnerable fisherman in the area and what was the legitimate broader responsibility of the state outside the project.
As a result of what one today would classify as project deficiencies, the project is now blamed for anything and everything affecting the fisheries. For example, there is data to show that urban pollution discharged into the river has caused damage to aquatic diversity, and fishing malpractices have caused fish catches to dwindle. Yet, it has not been easy to convince people of these points. The dam is more visible and a better target, so naturally it has become the focus of the debate. The environmental standards of a decade ago were applied to the impact of the project on fisheries. The state of the art has advanced since then, just as the world's view on poverty has evolved.

Poverty was once considered only on the basis of income. But that definition has evolved to include much harder to measure factors such as lack of security, opportunity and community, in addition to lack of income. Projects are expected to address those issues, not only their direct impact.

It is high time the parties involved stopped attacking each other and joined forces to attack poverty in the Northeast, in general, and rejuvenate the fisheries sector in that area, in particular. And the poor must participate fully in this effort.

There are trade-offs. If you grow trees on your land, you may be unwittingly putting your neighbour's vegetable garden in the shade. But having all parties at the table improves the chances of finding the best solution for everyone involved.

All of the stakeholders on Pak Moon should work together towards:

- Developing and implementing a poverty-alleviation strategy that would improve livelihoods for the entire region;
- Implementing an improved framework for environmental management of the river basin(s);
- Identifying and promoting technical improvements for managing and augmenting fishery resources in the entire river; and
- Designing institutional arrangements that give fishermen and local communities a voice in the management of fishery resources in Pak Moon area.

To foster this collaboration, government should establish a high-powered commission, assisted by a multi-disciplinary team of experts and chaired by a respected personality, to address these issues. This should not be just another commission. This group should be about action, able to bring in experts and funding to address problems. Important to this effort would be the involvement of the people themselves, systems to ensure transparency and regular progress reporting; and a clear programme of action.

When the Pak Moon project was being processed in the late '80s and early '90s, a number of issues were highlighted. How does one trade off the benefits of a dam against its negative effects? How can negative effects be mitigated? What criteria should we use to decide whether to go ahead with a dam project?

These are the difficult issues which still evoke strong feelings. The World Commission on Dams, established by the World Conservation Union IUCN and the World Bank, is now attempting to bring about a global consensus on these issues for the future. It is striving hard to deliver on its mandate.
All the stakeholders should not only fully participate in the high-level commission suggested to recommend strategies and programmes to address poverty in the Northeast but should also extend full support to the World Commission on Dams which is dealing with the broader issues of the future of dams.

These two initiatives will promise us a much better future. The focus must shift from removing dams and removing protestors to removing poverty. We should attack poverty, not one another.

(Shivakumar 2000)