

in Andean uses of graphic mediums and the ways they are embedded in social practice as well as structured by local-global dimensions of power, knowledge, and communication. Esben Leifsen

Santasombat, Yos: *The River of Life. Changing Ecosystems of the Mekong Region.* Chiang Mai: Mekong Press, 2011. 224 pp. ISBN 978-616-90053-2-2. Price: \$ 28.50

In 2005, the Mekong Press was initiated by Silk Worm Books with the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation, and in 2007 the Mekong Press Foundation was registered as a non-profit organization in Thailand to support local scholars from Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and other countries in the "Greater Mekong Subregion." Thus, it is appropriate that a well-known Thai anthropologist from Chiang Mai University, Yos Santasombat, has written a book for the Mekong Press about development and environment issues in the upper and middle Mekong Basin in northern Thailand, northern Laos, and the southern Chinese province of Yunnan.

The explicit aim of "The River of Life" is to develop "a better understanding of transnational megaprojects, especially the construction of hydropower dams on the Mekong, and their impact on changing ecosystems and the lives and livelihoods of marginal communities in the Lower Mekong Basin" (2). The book is also oriented towards better understanding "the impact of subregional growth and development on resource use, class differentiation, lifestyles, and cultures, and to identify serious health, economic, and environmental threats caused by unbalanced development within and across countries" (4). Crucially, the author argues "for a need to incorporate a new bottom-up planning process in the development of the Mekong Basin which must be adopted in future approaches to regional resource management. Stakeholder approaches to development, based on recognition of the value of local knowledge, provide an underlying framework for inclusiveness and participation, taking into consideration the unequal political, social, and economic power structures in and between countries involved" (13).

"The River of Life" is divided into seven chapters. The first frames the book, and provides background regarding the Mekong River Basin and some of the major emerging natural resource conflicts in the region. Focusing on Thailand and China, chapter two introduces more details regarding "transnational enclosure," a concept heavily influenced by Marxist ideas and particularly primitive accumulation, or what David Harvey has more recently called "accumulation by dispossession." The author adopts what he calls an "ethnoecological approach" to his research.

Chapter three provides ethnographic information about ethnic Lue people in one community near the Lancang (Mekong) River in Sipsong Panna, Yunnan Province, southern China. Chapter four then looks at natural resource management and livelihoods in three communities adjacent to the Mekong River in Luang Phrabang Province, northern Laos. Chapter five completes the ethnographic part of the book by examining northern Thai-

land, and particularly Chiang Khong, in Chiang Rai Province, and issues related to the fishery and conservation of the endangered giant catfish (*Pangasianodon gigas*).

Chapter six builds on the previous ethnographic chapters by explaining how large-scale development projects are negatively impacting on local cultures, lifestyles, and subsistence practices. The author also argues that "local riparian communities must find new ways and means to adapt their knowledge and cultural practices to cope with changing environmental and socioeconomic contexts" (16). Chapter seven, the conclusion, elaborates on the relationship between transboundary environmental problems and the increasing role of what Yos calls "transnational civil society", arguing that transnational civil society could "serve as a forum in which the voices of all stakeholders are heard and a negotiated space of good governance and participation in the true sense of co-management of natural resources between local, national, and international agencies is realized" (16). He uses "globalization from below" to frame his vision.

I am certainly sympathetic with Yos's research methodology, which involved reviewing a considerable amount of literature from the Mekong region, and on-the-ground ethnographic research. I also applaud his explicit call for government decision-makers to take the intimate ecology knowledge that rural villagers have in the Mekong region more seriously, and to provide rural resource-users with more opportunities to meaningfully participate in development processes. Certainly, many of the socio-environmental problems that are evident in the region have been due to transnational capital investments, coupled with efforts by nation-states to take control of natural resources historically under the local management. Yos is definitely correct in arguing that rural people should have much more of a say in defining the development trajectories that affect them. In particular, Yos is rightfully concerned about the development of large hydropower dams. He usefully provides village-level insights about how the Mekong River is changing, including due to Chinese dams upriver.

While many of the challenges and changes affecting the rural inhabitants of the people are acknowledged in the book, the author sometimes comes across as a bit overly positive about the abilities of communities to make decisions that are beneficial for both local livelihoods and the environment. Certainly, this is sometimes the case, but there are also times when villagers have decided themselves to replace forests with mono-culture plantations, and diverse wetlands with wet rice paddy fields, albeit for good reasons. Economic and power structures are part of the root causes, but there is more. Explicitly making it clear, that there are times when the best interests of villagers do not coincide with the maintenance of high biodiversity values which would have been appropriate. Rural villages are typically socially complex places, and their inhabitants have a wide variety of views regarding natural resource management challenges. For example, while Yos mentions those who protested against the Pak Mun Dam, he does not point out that some villagers have supported the project, albeit for specific reasons.

There are a number of small errors that could have been addressed by better editing oversight. For example, some information is not presented clearly, or consistently. For example, it is stated that there are 240 million people in the Mekong Basin (1), and at another point it is reported that there are over 55 million people in the six nations of the Mekong Basin (12). Similarly, the number of fish species in the Mekong Basin is variously reported (1,200 and 1,700 respectively), without providing adequate explanation. There are also certainly many more than 100 ethnic groups in the Mekong River Basin.

There are also occasional erroneous statements. For example, it is claimed that teak plantations are being developed in Cambodia, not rubber. Actually, rubber development has been quite heavy in Cambodia in recent years. I also disagree that the Khone Falls divides the “highlands” and “lowlands.” Really, both above and below the Khone Falls are in the lowlands. Also, some Lao places are provided using central Thai transliterated spellings, which should have been avoided. Some parts of the book also sound a bit overly romantic, partially because of the grammatical absolute tense they are presented in. Later, however, it becomes evident that the author recognizes that those initial statements do not represent present-day reality. The time frame of the book is initially presented as encompassing changes over “the last decade,” while it is expanded to cover “recent decades” later in the book. These types of problems could have been avoided.

Overall, I congratulate the author for challenging us to seriously take on many of the most serious development problems facing the people and the environment of Mekong River Basin, and for advocating for the masses of people who rely on Mekong natural resources for subsistence – such as small-scale fishers – to have a much greater say in how development occurs in the region. Readers can be the judges of whether Yos Santasombat’s vision is truly realizable, but in any case, I hope that his vision takes root; as if it did, the world would be a better place.

Ian G. Baird

Schindlbeck, Markus: Gefunden und verloren. Arthur Speyer, die dreißiger Jahre und die Verluste der Sammlung Südsee des Ethnologischen Museums Berlin. Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 2012. 272 pp. Fotos. ISBN 978-3-86206-131-0. (Veröffentlichungen des Ethnologischen Museums Berlin, Neue Folge, 79) Preis: € 44.90

Ist es in Zeiten gravierender Finanznöte und sich zuspitzender sozialer Probleme legitim für staatliche oder städtische Organe, Museumsobjekte zu veräußern, noch dazu, wenn die Ankaufs- und Ausstellungssetats der Museen gegen Null schrumpfen? Und wenn dies von höherer Stelle angeordnet würde: Nach welchen Kriterien sollten diese Exponate ausgewählt werden, und was würde dann aus ihnen? Diesen bestürzend aktuell klingenden Fragen standen die ethnologischen Museen zu Beginn des 20. Jhs., vor allem aber nach dem 1. Weltkrieg gegenüber: Auf Anordnung ihrer vorgesetzten Behörde, zuweilen auch der Museumsdirektion, aber auch aus ei-

genem Antrieb trennten sich Kuratoren von Stücken aus den ihnen anvertrauten Sammlungen, um dafür Geld, für das Museum als wichtig erachtete Dienstleistungen oder andere Objekte einzutauschen. Dem besonderen Fall der aus dieser Praxis resultierenden Verluste der Sammlung Südsee des Ethnologischen Museums Berlin hat nun Markus Schindlbeck, langjähriger Leiter des Fachreferates “Ozeanien und Australien” des Museums, ein Buch gewidmet.

Der Autor beginnt mit der Erläuterung des Konzepts der Dublette und ihrem “verborgenen finanzpolitischen Aspekt” (15), dass es “gleichartige und daher entbehrliche Stücke” (16) gebe. Zwar wurden “Dubletten” vereinzelt auch schon im 19. Jh. von der Kunstkommission bzw. später dem Berliner Museum abgegeben. Es war jedoch die vollkommene Sperre von Ankaufs- und Forschungsreisemitteln unter dem seit 1905 amtierenden Generaldirektor der Berliner Museen, Wilhelm von Bode, welche einen verhängnisvollen Ausverkauf in Gang setzte, der in den 1920er/1930er Jahren seinen Höhepunkt erreichte, sich jedoch bis in die 1960er Jahre hinziehen sollte. Bode, vom Studium her Kunsthistoriker und Archäologe, fehlte jegliches Verständnis für die Ethnologie. Adolf Bastian, der Gründer des Berliner Museums, hatte sich dem Studium menschlicher Universalien gewidmet und sah entsprechend “gleichartige” oder ähnliche Objekte als wichtige Dokumente der Forschung. Dies hatte allerdings zu einer allseits beklagten Platznot in den Räumen des Museums geführt. Bezeichnenderweise war es nach Bastians Tod im Jahre 1906, dass Bode der nach seiner Auffassung “sinnlosen Anhäufung von Gegenständen” (18) mit der Anordnung zur Aussonderung “entbehrlicher” Stücke und Dubletten zu begegnen trachtete. Im Laufe seiner Amtszeit förderte er – auch durch entsprechende Personalpolitik – den Ausbau von Sammlungen aus den sogenannten Hochkulturen und der Archäologie zu Lasten der ethnografischen Sammlungen von den sogenannten Naturvölkern. Dabei misstraute er offenbar den Berliner Museums-ethnologen und holte stattdessen externen Rat ein.

Die Rolle einer Sachverständigenkommission bei der Abstoßung ethnografischer Objekte, welche bei Ankäufen und Tauschaktionen des Museums zu Rate gezogen werden musste, ließ sich aus den Archivmaterialien nur noch teilweise rekonstruieren. Bestand sie bis zum 1. Weltkrieg noch aus durchaus kundigen Experten und Beratern, so gehörten ihr in den 1920ern auch Sammler, ab den 1930ern auch der nationalsozialistischen Ideologie nahestehende Personen an. Schindlbeck zeigt jedoch auf, dass die Kommission nicht immer sehr einflussreich war, teilweise umgangen wurde und generell die Abgabe der Stücke nicht verhindert hat.

Das 2. Kapitel des Buchs ist den 1920er Jahren gewidmet. Der 1. Weltkrieg und die Folgejahre mit ihren gravierenden wirtschaftlichen Problemen stellten einen schweren Einschnitt für die Arbeit des Völkerkundemuseums dar. Forschungs- und Sammelreisen wurden fast unmöglich; Personalmangel aus Gründen der Einsparung verhinderte auf Jahrzehnte hinaus die Bearbeitung und Publikation von Sammlungen sowie die systematische Dokumentation der Objekte, welche das Museum