

# Human rights components of an eBook portfolio

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*Abstract*— Selected out of those fifteen interactive eBooks from our work in South and Southeast Asia (1988-2018) now online, this paper annotates and excerpts from those in which “Human Rights in Cyberspace” figures in part, conceptually. Some 8 GB of content —about half of which we personally created— is accessible directly through these pages. They should ordinarily open and run consistent with our authoring styles, *provided that the configuration instructions for the operating system (Mac 10.6 or better and Windows 10); the web browser; and the requisite helper apps are followed for the end-users’ playback platforms.* High bandwidth and relatively large displays (no handheld devices running IOS or Android will work!) are obligatory.

*Keywords*— *human rights in cyberspace; pdf e-books; interactive online publication; digital samizdat*

## I. INTRODUCTION

What the conveners of PNC 2018 exactly meant by “Human Rights in Cyberspace” wasn’t much elaborated in their call for papers. However —and as maybe something of a leap— “biodiversity” and “sustainable development” were included under that rubric. While political murder and State-sponsored warfare were, at the least, peripherally encompassed within our research on the *externalities and dis-benefits of economic development* throughout South and Southeast Asia, the sometimes-massive involuntary displacement of households and communities and the degradation or even extirpation of ecological quality; of aesthetics values; and of cultural heritage were always central to our adopting and demonstrating the *emerging visualization toolbox*.

Excerpts plausibly consistent with this year’s overarching theme are drawn here below from our existing eBook topics, of which the interactive content is fully hot-linked and completely accessible online. Thus, this presentation is *not* a conventional stand-alone, 8 pps paper when properly opened and run in accordance with our authoring style...

[http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital\\_Media/Human\\_Rights\\_Components\\_of\\_an\\_eBook\\_Portfolio.pdf](http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital_Media/Human_Rights_Components_of_an_eBook_Portfolio.pdf)

Human rights (in “cyberspace”, or otherwise) are presumed by most liberal progressives to encompass protections against ethnic cleansing —and its evil offspring, genocide— with the concomitant “responsibility to protect” potential and actual such victims. And, necessarily, to permit their free cross-border transit and resettlement as refugees.

Moreover, transnational agencies now posit the basic “right” of nearly all migrants —fleeing refugees or not— to seek employment and economic betterment: **irrespective of existing national boundaries!** The package further contains Western-style civil liberties in expanded or contracted versions; with the latter today tending to discard USA-style absolute free speech. And those at the *social justice* or ideologically leftward poles assert boldly universal “rights” to primary, secondary, and maybe even tertiary education; and to housing, subsistence, and medical care: all provided by an expanding welfare state and necessarily requiring more robust and aggressive income redistribution than now.

There may be, however, other altogether illiberal models of irreducible human rights. E.g., the politico-moral rationales for the Third Reich and the East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, enabling the unfettered and deserved ascent of the Aryan and Nihon races to their natural global supremacy: as accepted by-and-large by all their right-thinking people. Indeed, there have been countless outrages—including multiple genocides— perpetrated in the holy name of Human Rights. The Bolshevik *realpolitik* aphorism, “who, whom?” identifies those on the correct side of robust revolutionary activism (the “who”), and those on receiving end (the “whom”) whose wickedness justifies the harshest punitive means.



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who,\\_whom%3F](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who,_whom%3F)

But putting aside such inflammatory bloody shirts, the long-accepted *utilitarian* measure of correct public policy was/is “the greatest good for the greatest number”: but, again, according to whose definitions?

As the footer text of the *IAAS Newsletter #78* cover story states, “*Kul (58) is a farmer and community activist: here she stands on logs that were once the forest where she*

*lived since her childhood. Kul was forcibly evicted from her land by the government, who sold it to foreign corporations to grow sugarcane and rubber, ultimately benefitting politicians and the military..”*



<https://ias.asia/the-newsletter/newsletter-78-autumn-2017>

This is exemplary left-leaning human rights rhetoric, and leaves unanswered —other than the main article having noted that the Khmer Rouge had *intentionally destroyed* all land titling documents— whether Kul or her family claimed to have ever held title to any of the sold and cut forest, or whether it had been inalienable public land; whether the government had offered her any compensation or resettlement; and moreover, whether the beneficiaries of capitalization and agricultural intensification by the private sector extended beyond “politicians and the military” to encompass broader economic uplift of the Cambodian people.

How then, can a libertarian or right-leaning researcher attuned to alleged human rights abuses constructively respond to such a one-dimensional proposition?

The reaction by the Cambodian Peoples Party and the country’s leadership (and its economic elites) to what they probably view as foreign propaganda attempting to reverse national development strategies which have been arguably successful —their country’s GDP at the end of the Khmer Rouge era was less than USD \$1B and has now surpassed \$21B— has been to make it nearly impossible for suspected foreign critics to undertake unimpeded firsthand observations of the *actual outcomes* —including social and environmental impacts— of ambitious recent projects such as Lower Sesan 2 hydropower, or Boeung Kak Lake’s reclamation and urbanization.

## I. BOEUNG KAK

[http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital\\_Media/boeung\\_kak/Boeung\\_Kak\\_poster\\_interactive.pdf](http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital_Media/boeung_kak/Boeung_Kak_poster_interactive.pdf)

When we last visited the Boeung Kak development in mid-2017, about 20% of overall site had approached its full build-out potential; with high-rise apartments still under construction in the SW quadrant and low-rise villas in the NE quadrant completed and fully occupied: perhaps a thousand residential units between them (when the high-rises in that initial bloc are finished). Another several blocs

north-centrally located comprise commercial/recreational facilities also already in use. Many/most of the billboards for the as-yet undeveloped fill pad sectors are in Khmer and Chinese: identifying, evidently, both the primary investors and the likely marketing targets. (No sign of the impressive deep blue lake or “water features” shown in the Shukaku Corporation blurbs, given the commitment to tertiary wastewater treatment required to keep them from going eutrophic or likely septic.) Two gateless major highways now transect the former lake bearing considerable motor traffic. Many more roadways are already partially completed but not quite opened yet to the periphery.



*Build-out of the Boeung Kak reclamation scheme, January 2018*

Nevertheless, when I stopped in the middle of all the action to shoot some new video and VR imagery to upgrade the eBook that I had first assembled in 2014, within ten minutes local police arrived to demand that I stop filming. This is a continuation of the harassment of foreigners — other than those obviously shopping for housing— that began a decade ago when “reclaiming” with pumped hydraulic dredge spoils the former Boeung Kak lake: along the former shorelines of which, incidentally, most of the original backpacker hostels were located after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge).

This became quite a *cause célèbre*, both for the loss of an urban ecological amenity which had been zealously conserved since the early French colonial period, and also a highly-mediatic Human Rights outrage over the involuntary displacement of the several thousand families who had long made a living out of harvesting the lake’s “living aquatic resources”.





The second *vihaan* (the main image hall of a Theravada Buddhist temple) was probably constructed in the 1920s along with much of the rebuilt seat of the new French Protectorate; but by 1997, when we settled in *Baan Oub Mong* (actually *Baan Nakham*), VOM was locally known as the preferred hangout for teenage glue sniffers. The plan was then already well-advanced by the VOM *sangha* (the monks and abbot of any particular temple, but also the monastic community in general) and the local influentials—some of whom were our friends and neighbors—to reverse their Vat’s declining fortunes by raising funds for building a vastly more imposing and prestigious new *vihaan* on the footprint of the still-standing older one, once its demolition moved forward.

VOM had been pretty much shut down during the period between the communist takeover in 1975, and the abandonment/reversal of the ruling Pathet Lao’s nominal suppression of Buddhism in 1985. Again, as with many other temples there, the grounds were partly taken over to build a government elementary school. A distinguishing aspect of the re-establishment of the *sangha* throughout the Lao PDR was that the two primary conditions set down by the regime were that the monks had to stay completely out of politics; and that the version of the Lao *dhamma* to be re-established was to be purged of “superstition”: mostly meaning pre-Buddhist animist practices. But purged also—maybe, as collateral damage—were many of those Brahmanic elements which had always figured so large in the neighboring Theravada Buddhist countries. All of which were powerfully influenced by Hindu Khmer civilization.

In the decades prior to the chaos of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina War, and even during then in areas spared wartime depredation (as Vientiane was generally so spared) there would have been troupes of itinerant singers, dancers, and storytellers coming for days at a time to the urban and rural *baans* to enact scenes out of the Hindu Ramayana tradition. But after 1985 as “anti-superstitionism” took hold, very few of the local people nor the younger generation of monks even knew what were the ancient tales and moral strictures that the VOM murals had specifically and elaborately illustrated. This was exacerbated in that the detailed captioning of each of the mural’s storylines was in the old Lao script; which which after 1975, was simplified to the degree that literate Thai people, who formerly could read written Lao no longer were able to. We surmise that the demolition plan was so little opposed because by then the captions were mostly impenetrable, except to the elderly.

Another reason (which we only discovered ex-postfacto) was that it was widely believed, locally, that there was a treasure buried beneath the 16<sup>th</sup> century original temple site that could be accessed only if the present *vihaan* was removed. *Oub Mong* actually means “cave” or “grotto”, which apparently gave rise to that unfortunate misconception. The national-level Ministry of Information

and Culture (MoIC) was quite aware of the artistic, literary and historic value of the old *vihaan* and would have been disinclined to allow the nominally-mandatory special permission required of their Archaeology Department for the demolition of a “listed” such site.

But several years previously, when the local *sangha* and lay community at much more isolated Khong Island in southern Champassak Province had requested such permission to destroy what appeared to be a most unusual old *vihaan*—built in a semblance of the Singhalese architectural tradition evident nowhere else in Lao, to our knowledge’ Similarly, the intent was an opportunity for merit-making and for uplifting the prestige of a down-at-the heels *baan* (foreign tourism hadn’t yet come to Siphandone; the “ten thousand islands”). However, the MoIC was instructed in the strongest terms by a very senior Lao Workers Party official originally from that region—whose name in fact was Mr. Siphandone—to back off. No reason, in his view (as I was told by MoIC insiders) to unnecessarily antagonize uneducated local people in the deprioritized abstract interest of “preserving cultural patrimony”. So the Ministry, chastened by the Khong Island rebuke, had nothing to say about the VOM demolition: of which they were unquestionably aware in advance.

#### IV. WARTIME CULTURAL COLLATERAL DAMAGE IN LAOS: VAT TALEO KAO

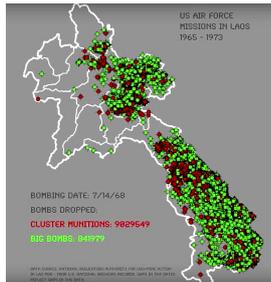
[http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital\\_Media/Vat\\_Taleo\\_Kao\\_eBook/taleo\\_kao\\_homepage\\_1.pdf](http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital_Media/Vat_Taleo_Kao_eBook/taleo_kao_homepage_1.pdf)

The Second Indochina War (ca. 1959-1975) was a tragic manifestation on the periphery of the Cold War between West, i.e., the US and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies (which then included the Peoples Republic of China). From the perspective of the West, the Human Rights record of the self-declared Marxist-Leninist regimes, generally, since the successful Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the Maoist takeover of China in 1948 was demonstrably appalling, and—apart from the phenomenal destruction of WW2—entailed the deaths, mostly of their own citizens: by execution, starvation, intentional agricultural mismanagement to accomplish ideological objectives, and through semi-natural causes within Solzhenitsyn’s “Gulag Archipelago” and through enforced punitive ethnic cleansing, and assumed to number at least in the tens of millions. This may have actually been an order of magnitude too low.

The victory of the communists in Viet Nam in the First Indochina War (ca. 1945-1954), and the establishment in the north under Ho Chi Minh of the “Democratic Republic of Viet Nam” (DRVN, changed after “national reunification” in 1976 to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam) resulted in the *de facto* ethnic cleansing of much or most of the predominantly pro-French Vietnamese Catholic population living inside the DRVN and their escape to the pro-western Republic of Viet Nam (RVN);

and of countless summary executions —or deaths under imprisonment— of bourgeois, reactionary and counter-revolutionary elements still remaining in the North.

The vast, and theretofore-unprecedented application of American firepower —particularly aerial bombardment, chemical defoliation, harassment and interdiction (“H&I”) artillery fire— led to the deaths of at least one or two million people within the war zones: probably no more than half of whom were combatants on both sides, with the remainder innocent civilians. Unlike in WW2, that firepower was mostly directed outside of the urbanized regions of the four countries, with some exceptions: especially during and immediately after the February, 1968 “Tet Offensive”.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UM2eYlBzXg>

The other two countries comprising the erstwhile *Indochine française* (Laos and Cambodia) and were led until 1975 by neutralist or pro-western regimes, while undergoing armed communist insurgencies of their own abetted by —if not absolutely subordinated to— the DRVN: which from the outset received vast material and political support from the Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China. The US-led defense of the RVN and of the Kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia were either cynical and horrific manifestations of imperialism and the last gasps of colonialism. Or were national sacrifices (c. 59,000 American military KIAs, plus four times that many ARVN soldiers<sup>1</sup>) of the highest order in defense of human rights.

In their war against the South Vietnamese, i.e., Republic of Viet Nam (RVN) “puppet regime” —given the impenetrability of the “de-militarized zone” (DMZ) below Lat. 17° N., guarded and secured by several divisions of US and ARVN soldiers and marines, plus aviation units and inshore/offshore naval forces— the Ho Chi Minh Trail (HCMT) was a network of footpaths and camouflaged vehicular roadways transiting the crest of *La Chaine Annamitique* (the “Truong San” range in Vietnamese) separating Laos from both North and South Viet Nam. Much of the American bombing throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina War was directed against the HCMT and intended to interdict and to terminally break the flow of men and material through the Kingdom of Laos, and their re-entry from Laos into the RVN well below the DMZ.

As the Vat Taleo Kao eBook elaborates, Savannakhet Province of Laos was particularly densely dissected by sub-sections of the HCMT, and accordingly, subjected to

particularly intense American aerial bombardment. In the fall of 1969, a minor rural monastery in what would have then mostly still been thinly-settled primary tropical forest was occupied by *Peoples Army of Viet Nam* (PAVN) regulars who had come through the HCMT. The local population —expecting intense American countermeasures soon— had generally abandoned the surrounding villages. These duly arrived in the form of several US Air Force F-105 aircraft probably based in **Takhli, Thailand**, dropping 1,000 lb unguided bombs.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLwrrvaCvCY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CLGFLV0hbk&t=737s>

A previous version of this eBook, which was linked to the homepages for the aggregated eBooks comprising our PNC 2017 presentation in Tainan, Taiwan, but otherwise barely mentioned there, has been recently much expanded. It now contraposes the considerable profile of F-105s in aviation museums and war memorials inside and outside the USA with our extensive and original archiving in 2015-16 of the notable architecture, decorative details, and Buddhist liturgical aspects of the single surviving —due to a fortuitous bomb fusing failure— structure of the “semi-destroyed” *Taleo Kao* monastery.



[http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital\\_Media/Vat\\_Taleo\\_Kao\\_eBook/Vat\\_Taleo\\_media/taleo\\_exterior\\_crater\\_debris\\_field.swf](http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital_Media/Vat_Taleo_Kao_eBook/Vat_Taleo_media/taleo_exterior_crater_debris_field.swf)

Our revised objective has been to model an integration of sorts between the cultural conservation and documentation efforts now slenderly underway on-site, and perhaps more robustly online; and the aviation museology of the attacking aircraft, also which encompasses oral histories of F-105 pilots —now all aged in their late seventies or eighties— who flew in the Indochina theatre of operations.



<http://video.flyingheritage.com/v/117085479/colonel-robert-krone.htm>

## VI. SAFEGUARD ISSUES IN THE WORLD BANK'S AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: (IDA CREDIT 3059-LA) LAO PDR

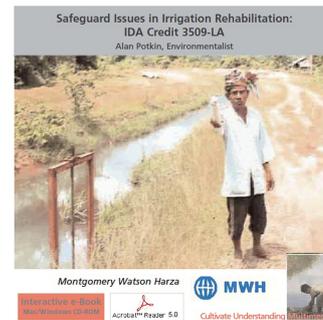
Beginning in 1998, the World Bank Group's (WBG) International Development Association (IDA) initiated a project in the Lao PDR to finance through concessionary loans the rehabilitation of 23 previously-implemented small irrigation projects in several provinces of southern Lao that were regarded as having "failed". In some cases, they had never worked due to incompetent engineering or topographical survey errors; or had incrementally collapsed—physically and/or institutionally—due to operations and maintenance (O&M) problems, or to unresolved political and cultural turf wars. All had previously been executed by Lao PDR government agencies with national or provincial funding only and had not entailed external borrowing.

The overall cost of repairs and reworks would be USD \$25M. The WBG had recently developed an internal package of robust project design and evaluation criteria and mechanisms called "Safeguard": intended to prevent both human rights violations (requiring full compensation for even trivial material losses by an IDA project's intended beneficiaries), and also avoidable environmental degradation. As design and planning of IDA-3059-LA moved towards implementation in 2002, we were engaged to review the effective application of Safeguard mechanisms on a project-by-project basis.

Ordinarily with WBG international consultancy products, all the deliverables would be in English only, and the accepted format for their hard-copy graphical content would emphasize tabular databases and checklist matrices: at the expense of high-quality annotated photos and aerial imagery/topo maps (the latter two often highly restricted— in pre-Google Earth days— due to security considerations).

The Lao PDR was then very limited in "capacity" for enviro and social impact assessment, and to produce or to translate the required such documentation into/from academic English. Indeed, there didn't even yet exist agreed Lao-language equivalents for essential terminology such as "biodiversity" or "ecological sustainability". Lao culture, however, was strongly inclined towards visual and auditory learning (including storytelling); and traditional Lao religious art, architecture, and iconography were, arguably, world-class.

While at nearly every level, most Government of Laos (GoL) agencies and its slender civil society infrastructure—independent National NGOs were then, as now, impermissible— had access to adequate computer and imaging hardware, but digital documentation as such was mostly non-existent, and there was no accepted technology for its local distribution. Internet bandwidth was extremely limited, and precious few GoL computers had online access; and while that generation of PCs usually incorporated optical media readers, CD-ROM burners were still notably scarce and expensive.



In the course of two years of consultancy, while our contractual Terms of Reference (ToR) was limited to monitoring application of WBG Safeguards and to point out possible deficiencies, our "off-the-ToR" professional agenda was to develop new and necessarily-unorthodox documentation and publication formats for use by National participants in the development assistance process. These would maximize visual learning, and enable Lao-language digital publication and distribution in both online (not widely then very practicable) and offline technologies.

In visiting and extensively imaging all 20+ rehab sites, we realized that some of the Safeguard mechanisms were counterproductive or un-implementable, and also that in most cases, the real causes of the previous project failures there were widely understood at the local level: inside and outside of government. Yet there was no politically acceptable mechanism for disseminating this low-level knowledge base throughout the GoL *apparatus*. (I viewed its informal publication and distribution using formats such as we were then devising as constructively-critical *samizdat!*)

The WBG was clueless about the many downsides of their Safeguard formulation: e.g., compelling the GoL's payment in full for every and any local claimant's statement of the most trivial material loss, which could only lead to administrative chaos and evasion of recompense for non-trivial impacts; the "gender equity" elements which effectively mandated all local women attending Safeguard presentation and data-collection events, even in ethnic minority villages where organized childcare provision was inconceivable...



...and the insistence that irrigation deliveries be limited to members of official water users groups (WUGs), when unauthorized "public cuts" had led frequently to enhanced crop production by non-WUG farmers outside the nominal command area at the heads of the distribution canals; thus

rendering hydraulically impossible (and institutionally-embarrassing) the foreclosed eventual deliveries to WUG members at the toes of the the official irrigation command.



Also, egged on by the globalized Greens, the WBG's pressured borrower governments to at least discourage. If not to criminalize the informal wildlife trade (and the requisite traps and firearms): irrespective of any data on sustainable yield. And to pointlessly require, but assuredly to not enforce, cessation of commercial logging — ordinarily Lao military-controlled and executed— which risked degrading offsite, hydrologically-critical upland watersheds. Also noted (and videoed) were theretofore unaddressed potential impacts to highly-valued—and villager initiated— micro-hydro and domestic water supply infrastructure which would be temporarily or permanently foreclosed by new canal construction under IDA-3059-LA.

We presented all these concerns, as well as a vastly shortened version the requisite conventional text with all the procedural boxes nevertheless ticked, in the unheard-of medium of visualized, highly-interactive PDF CD-ROMs. Included were video clips of Lao speaking critically of previous failed small irrigation projects and the unclear guarantees that the same errors would be repeated, while this time going into debt. The response of the WBG's Laos desk officer in Washington was unreceptive, and to our knowledge, the WBG chose not to address the enumerated downsides. There was never a robust performance review of whether the identified causes of failures of the first iteration “National” projects were rectified in the second iteration rehabs financed under the IDA-3059-LA loans.

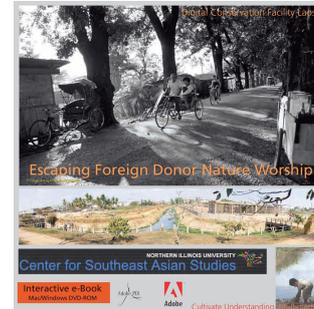
## VI. ESCAPING FOREIGN DONOR NATURE WORSHIP (EFDNW)

[http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital\\_Media/EFDNW\\_UNESCO\\_1.4.1/nongchanh\\_interactive/EFDNW\\_poster/nongchanh\\_poster\\_homepage.pdf](http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital_Media/EFDNW_UNESCO_1.4.1/nongchanh_interactive/EFDNW_poster/nongchanh_poster_homepage.pdf)

Nong Chanh was a semi-intact wetland landwards of the old Lane Xang capital's 17<sup>th</sup> century fortifications and city wall barely adjacent to what was the old city center in the 1980s.

“EFDNW” is an acronym (and later, *meme*) which grew out of producing an eBook on the failed Danish International Development Agency's (Danida) project to create an urban environmental amenity and educational site in Central Vientiane, as recommended by the IUCN's “Wetlands of Laos”. IUCN's conservation proposal laid out the marsh's conservation benefits: “As an open space with water and vegetation, Nong Chanh makes an aesthetic contri-

bution to the quality of life in Vientiane... As a multiple-use wetland within easy reach of research and resource management institutions in Vientiane, this wetland has high potential...It is already the subject...of building up a long-term dataset... Nong Chanh is close to the main cultural centres...and has high potential as an educational resource...”



[http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital\\_Media/EFDNW\\_UNESCO\\_1.4.1/nongchanh\\_interactive/EFDNW\\_poster/nongchanh\\_poster\\_homepage.pdf](http://cultivateunderstanding.com/Digital_Media/EFDNW_UNESCO_1.4.1/nongchanh_interactive/EFDNW_poster/nongchanh_poster_homepage.pdf)

While there had long been considerable encroachment, mostly by squatters fleeing the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail during the Second Indochina War, its ecological condition in the 1990s was still fairly good, and water quality there was indeed being regularly monitored (by a GoL agency which was summarily abolished when wetlands ecology was seen as longer in the picture).



Danida was known for high-concept bilateral initiatives in the Lao PDR frequently focused on biodiversity and fisheries conservation, and their design for the restoration/stabilization of Nong Chanh necessarily included relocating nearly all of the 600 squatter households there to a dry, and back then then totally rural, uplands plot c. 12 km to the west, beyond Wattay Airport. Involuntary relocation at this scale was generally a red flag or deal killer in most Western donor activities, but was considered acceptable within environmental conservation schemes such as for the Nong Chanh marsh. As the Danida project moved forward, the squatters were mostly able to disassemble their dwellings —which were not necessarily modest shacks— and provided transport, nails and tools to reconstruct them in the new town. (They were not given land title, but that may since have changed.)

The channel improvements, drainage elements, and vegetation restoration were all well underway when Denmark abruptly withdrew from all its bilateral assistance to the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic.

Meanwhile, under its *Vientiane Integrated Development Programme*, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) had rerouted all of Vientiane’s untreated sewage effluent into new drainage channels which were ordinarily septic during the dry season, directly entering the Nong Chanh restoration: having somehow been “unaware” of Danida’s plans. The stench was memorable.



*Danida’s ex-Nong Chanh Wetlands Restoration signage was speedily dismantled just as the new Waterslide Adventure Park was announced*

The ADB had by then also converted a landscaped scenic path—the former *Promenade du dimanche* built during the French colonial period atop the buried brick city wall alongside Nong Chanh’s southern periphery—into a major urban motor route (for which their EIA said that “the only impact would be temporary increases in dust and noise”).

Within months after Danida’s pullout and the Project’s institutional abandonment, the entire Nong Chanh site was conveyed over to a Sino-Malaysian company to build a water slide recreation facility and a larger “adventure park”, modeled on a similar development near Kuala Lumpur. It took only a few years, however, for the waterpark to fail economically; ostensibly because the prodigious volume of water that needed to be pumped, at extravagant energy costs, to make the slides safely operable: reflecting in unacceptably stiff admission prices. All the buildings and infrastructure were soon demolished and removed but meanwhile, considerable additional encroachment had proceeded apace, notably the expansion of the main downtown market, *Talath Sao*.

By 2010, the remaining water adventure site was conveyed in its entirety over to another Chinese investor consortium for an extremely ambitious business and commercial park, high-rise offices, boutique hotels and entertainment complex of which until now the construction has been only slowly proceeding, apparently facing funding problems.

For their part, the displaced Nong Chanh squatters were demonstrably unhappy with their outlying rehabilitation village, where drought was a major issue and where their traditional harvesting and marketing the Nong’s “living aquatic resources” was no longer possible. But they had been effectively and non-controversially —given the

uplifted environmental rationale for their expulsion— removed from a very attractive development site comprising some 72 ha, in what with the Lao capital’s accelerated urbanization, has since become modern Vientiane’s expansive downtown.



*Animated time-series based on Google Earth imagery of the landuse conversion of the Nongchan Wetlands Conservation project*

This ultimate scenario was likely foreseen from the outset by local influentials inside and outside of government; and those foreign observers who saw the whole process unfold over the past two decades now believe that the Danida wetlands preservation thing was effectively the first stalking horse and the Sino-Malaysian waterslide the second stalking horse for what would inevitably be a vastly “higher” and more lucrative use of the erstwhile Nong Chanh wetlands.

Such a trajectory may have been predictable from the respective (post-1995) “perceived corruption indices” of the national participants: with Denmark —of the 180 surveyed countries always ranking amongst the top four in honesty; with the Lao PDR typically ranking around 130<sup>th</sup>; and with Malaysia and China roughly midway between them. Regarding Danida’s role, the cynical American expression, “they saw you coming”, probably applies.

Noteworthy too is that the Danish Foreign Ministry’s inarguably soft-core post-facto review of its terminated bilateral development program with the Lao PDR shied away completely from stating the obvious.



*Commercial timber harvest by BPKP, the Lao military-run corporation, of the raintrees and mahoganies lining Khou Vieng: originally planted by the French paysagistes urbaines before the Great War (1914-1918).*