



***Adam Simpson, Energy, Governance and Security in Thailand and Myanmar (Burma): A Critical Approach to Environmental Politics in the South. Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2017.***

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Among all the books concerning energy and environmental security, environmental activism and the development of Southeast Asian countries, Adam Simpson's book is considered a must-read, and since its first edition in 2014, this book has been met with interest by many experts who have expressed their enthusiasm in their reviews.

The book is based on Simpson's direct experience in Thailand and Myanmar, covering a decade and a half of research. The origin of the book, as the author declares in the introduction, was a residential course on Buddhist economics at Schumacher College and led by Sulak Sivaraska, a Thai activist involved in the campaign against the

Yadana Gas Pipeline project. Through the analysis of the campaigns launched against four energy projects, involving Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia, Simpson has developed many concepts, introduced through dichotomies, that are crucial to fully understanding environmental activism and the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Southeast Asia.

The first dichotomy is that between *North* and *South* countries. The difference is not only about wealth, but also about the nature of environmental issues on which the campaigns of protest are based. If the northern activism is more focused on global environmental issues, such as wildlife conservation and climate change, the southern activism is directed towards the resolution of short-term environmental issues that generally interest only a specific part of the country and that are concerned “about immediate existential ‘environmental security’ priorities, such as access to food and water” (5).

Another dichotomy considered in this book is that between *transnational* and *local* activism, that is transversal to the distinction between northern and southern environmental groups. In Myanmar, all environmental activists were forced to leave the country due to the authoritarian military regime, giving origin to the activist diaspora towards many places in Thailand along the border with Myanmar. If the Burmese activist diaspora gave origin to a transnational form of activism (on which both North and South organization collaborated together), the Thai activism that arose to stop the Thai-Malaysian Gas Pipeline involved only local communities of the Songkhla province, in the South of Thailand, and for this reason it represented an example of *local* activism.

Using a classification developed by Doyle and Doherty in 2006, Simpson divided the activist organizations into three categories: Emancipatory Governance Groups (EGGs), Compromise Governance Groups (CGGs) and Environmental Governance State (EGS). The first group includes the majority of NGOs considered in this book, that, according to the definition given by Simpson, adhere in both their structure and objectives to the four pillars of green politics, introduced by German Greens in the early 1980s. Those pillars are participatory democracy, ecological sustainability, social justice and non-violence (38).

The CGGs present emancipatory aims and activities, but differently from EGGs; their structure is based on a hierarchical system, with few opportunities for all members to take part in the decision-making process. Finally, EGS have both conservative aims and structure, and for this reason they are considered as counterproductive to emancipatory objectives.

The four cases considered in this book present the different natures of activism and campaigns adopted. The first is that related to the Yadana and Yetagun Gas Pipeline projects, which aimed to bring gas from Myanmar to Thailand through the Kanchanaburi province. The project caused the relocation of many Kayin villagers and had a relevant environmental impact on the forest between the two countries. The project, which involved some foreign companies (Unocal from the US, Total from France, and EGAT and PPT from Thailand), was initially contested by two different groups of activists. The first, based in Myanmar and represented by the Kayin people, was engaged in a constant fight for surviving. The second group, based in Kanchanaburi, focused on the preservation of the local environment. Eventually, the two groups joined their forces, representing a good example of a transformation from local to transnational activism.

The Salween Dam projects, which include seven dams along the Salween river, and that interest the Shan, Kayah, Kayin and Mon States in the eastern part of the country, has caused the relocation of many local villagers, who suffered violence of many kinds. The military regime forced all activists to move to Thailand, and from there they started to conduct many activities that aimed to raise awareness of the implications of the dams.

The Shwe Gas Pipeline project that brings gas from the offshore gas deposit near the Ramree Island (Rakhine State, in Southwest Myanmar) to the Chinese province of Kunming, represents the best example of the influence of international politics on the development of energy projects. Indeed, the pipeline was initially planned to supply gas to India, but, after a UN Security Council resolution that would have addressed the human rights situation in Burma was vetoed by China and Russia in 2007, the gas was sold to China, despite their offer being lower than that proposed by the Indian government. In this project the type of activism was transnational, and involved both North and South organizations.

The Thai-Malaysian Gas Pipeline project involved only local activist groups, which relied firstly on the preservation of the local environment, and then on the necessity of stopping the marginalization process of the local Muslim communities, both in the national context (during the Thaksin government many local communities were involved in the War on Drugs, and in those years, the independence movement arose) and international context.

The concepts of energy security and environmental security, introduced as criteria to judge the effectiveness of an energy project, complete this interesting book, which finds that the type of regime (traditional or competitive authoritarian) influences

the level of participation of activist groups (transnational vs. local), the nature of the actors involved, and the type of campaign adopted. The great value of this book is that it gives a complete overview of the phenomenon of environmental activism, representing a fundamental work for the study of energy security that surely will be a fundamental reference for many researchers and all people interested in energy, environment and governance.

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