

Press release by Kunhing villagers

March 5, 2020

Hundreds of Kunhing villagers hold blessing ceremony for Salween river and historic Ho Leung stupa

Today hundreds of local villagers in Kunhing township, southern Shan State, are holding a blessing ceremony on the banks of the Salween River so that it may flow freely forever, and will make merit at the well-known Ho Leung stupa to pray for its longevity. This is to mark the International Day of Action for Rivers on March 14.

About 400 local villagers from Ho Pang village tract, Phang Lang village tract, Keng Lom village tract, Wan Tong village tract, Hsai Mong village tract, Weing Phui village tract, Wan Pang village tract, Wan Lao village tract, and Wan Phai village tract, including youth, farmers and monks, are gathering today at Ta Ho Kaw, north of the Ta Kaw bridge, with banners to protect the environment and rivers, and will float a raft bearing that message.

After that, the group will head by boat north to the ancient Ho Leung stupa, built over 700 years ago, and famous for the miraculous self-opening and closing of the stupa door on the Full Moon of the 4th Lunar month of the traditional Shan calendar, which falls in March. The group will make merit at the stupa and pray for its longevity, and will distribute leaflets to the thousands of pilgrims from all over the country who attend this event.

Large areas of Kunhing township will be submerged by the reservoir of the planned Mong Ton dam on the Salween river, including the numerous islands in the Pang river tributary, which give Kunhing (meaning “Thousand Islands” in Shan) its name. The historic Ho Leung stupa in Mong Paeng township will also go underwater.

“We are gathering to bless our beloved Salween river, so it may flow freely forever and continue to nourish our lands, livelihoods and cultural heritage,” said Nang Jeng Kham, one of the leading organizers.

The Mong Ton dam is a joint project between the Burmese government, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, and China’s Three Gorges Corporation. The giant dam is planned to produce 7,000 megawatts of power, mostly for export to neighbouring countries.

“The government must not sell off our precious river,” said one of the youth organizing the event. “In this time of climate crisis, we should be preserving our natural resources, not destroying them.”

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