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Research essay - final draft

### **Dam or Damn?**

The Mekong is a river in Southeast Asia that flows through six countries. It starts in China and then goes through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam before emptying into the South China Sea. China views the Mekong River as its hydropower source. Hydropower is a common renewable resource. When hydropower dams let the water flow, turbines within spin and regenerate electricity, which is called hydroelectricity. Many governments hope to use hydropower to replace energy from sources such as fossil fuels. Today, China is planning multiple dams on the Mekong River, which they say is for hydropower, and they have already built a number of these dams. In 1995, China built a single hydropower dam on the Mekong River. At the present, China has constructed more than 11 dams on the Mekong. Investing in renewable energy sources seems to be an environmentally-friendly thing to do. However, many countries oppose the Mekong dam projects. China shouldn't dam the Mekong because if the flow of the river is held back by dams, the environment of the Lower Mekong basin will be damaged and all those developing countries in the Mekong Basin will suffer.

Although hydropower is environmentally friendly, dams themselves are not. For example, fish that need to swim upstream or downstream are [blocked by the dams](#). When there are barriers on a fish's migration path, fishing volume will decline since many fish cannot travel to the right location at certain seasons. Also, many fish eggs hatch in the dry season when water is slow and will not wash them away. However, if the flow of the water is altered, [the fish's life cycle is interrupted](#) since the dams are likely to release water during the dry season for irrigation. Finally, the water that passes through the dam always has the [wrong temperature or concentration of dissolved oxygen](#). This will decrease the number of organisms in the river since most organisms cannot survive in changing temperatures and oxygen levels. The dams might provide China with more clean energy, but they will also injure the Mekong ecosystems.

When dams hurt the environment of Mekong, they will also hurt the economy. [The economy in the Lower Mekong is mostly dependent on the Mekong River](#). For instance, the Mekong Basin has the largest freshwater fishery in the world. As mentioned before, dams pose a huge threat to fish in the river. The fishing industry will decrease significantly as a direct result of more dams. Local GDPs will drop too because [the Mekong River contributes \\$17 billion of income every year](#). Furthermore, animals from the [Mekong River are 80 percent of the protein needed for the people in the basin](#). Everyone can expect the presence of hunger in the Lower Mekong basin if more dams are constructed in the Upper Mekong.

The Mekong River also brings sediment deposits, which [fertilize the land for farming](#). Agriculture along the Mekong River relies on these sediment deposits. [Rice](#) is the major crop in the Lower Mekong Basin, and it thus the main staple for people who live there. While China may get more hydropower, Mekong Basin kids will be in their homes crying for rice and protein.

The dams on the Mekong River not only offer hydropower but also give China the power to control the Lower Mekong Basin. One example that illustrates how China could wield its power is China's diplomatic friction with Vietnam, one of the countries in the Mekong Basin. Vietnam has long been in conflict with China about who the South China Sea belongs to. [The South China Sea is important because more maritime ships sailing in the region have to pass through the South China Sea. The sea also contains oil and natural gas.](#) If Chinese dams were to hold the Mekong's water during the dry season, they could easily demand that Vietnam give up its status in the South China Sea for water in the Mekong. Obviously, China's main purpose for damming the Mekong River is not for hydropower, it is to force the countries of the Mekong Basin into obedience.

One country should never try to control other countries by blocking their resources because it is an unfair and unjust way to negotiate. Holding water in dams is using the pain of citizens to force another government to obey. However, why should the innocent citizens in the Lower Mekong Basin be used as a bargaining chip for diplomatic issues? Other countries should stand against China's dam projects not only to protect innocent citizens from suffering but also to prevent weak countries from being threatened. Standing against China's damming projects also shows that the international community won't stand for injustice and unfair treatment of smaller countries by larger countries. As such, other countries might have to pose trade barriers on China to make them give up damming the Mekong River. Powerful countries can make China sign a treaty to stop building those dams if necessary. If powerful countries don't stand against unfair treatments, no one else will.

Today, 11 dams are already holding water in the Upper Mekong, as well as fish populations and critical sediment. The damage to fisheries and the decrease in new sediment leads to economic depression, hunger, and poverty. Once dams are built, it is impossible to stop China from controlling the fate of countries in the Lower Mekong. 11 dams are already causing enough suffering and concerns, so the world ought to make sure that China builds no more. Action must be taken before it is too late.