



The Nam Ou 1 dam, still under construction, has flooded Lat Tha Hae's riverside gardens
(Image: Ton Ka/China Dialogue)

“When they closed the dam gates on 21 November, many families brought fishing nets here with high hopes, but only a few caught anything. Today, we can only find small fish,” said Muansy quietly. “When the fish disappeared, the local ferry was abandoned and we began to experience the opposite of the prosperity we had been promised.”

I continued my walk to the newly relocated Pak Jaek village, where I met 46-year-old Omjan. She wore her hair in a bun and her mouth was red from chewing betel nut. Her eyes looked angry. “Pak Jaek temple has been abandoned, along with our old village on the other side of the river. The temple is in a bad state now, with no one to sweep and maintain it. The Buddha image has not been removed, and we still paddle across the river to pray whenever we miss it. The new temple that’s being built by the company is not like the old one. We don’t feel the sacredness of our religion in it.” She appeared on the verge of tears. “Development has made us abandon our religion. Our temple was a safe place for us, a place where our hearts were at rest. There’s no longer a place like that for us.”

I walked down to the water to ask about renting a boat. “Out of respect, we only use paddle boats to cross the river to the temple. No motorboats are allowed,” an elderly Lue woman named Grandma Phan told me. “This has been our custom since the old days.” She introduced me to Thongsy, who agreed to take me across.