Flexible sovereignty and the politics of hydro-development in the Mekong River Basin
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In a world characterized by wide-spread ecological degradation, the disjunction between political borders and ecological processes presents a significant barrier to international cooperation around environmental problems. While the dynamics of ecological systems require that they be understood and addressed at the ecosystem scale, politics remains overwhelming centered at the state scale. Nowhere is this more evident than in international river basins, where the tension between flowing water and sovereign, territorial states creates a particularly complex political-ecological situation. To avoid the conflicts that are inherent to this situation, states enter into agreements to cooperate around river basin development. Yet the nature of international cooperation is such that it often reproduces the norms and practices of sovereignty – along with the values and assumptions that underpin it – thereby never truly overcoming the barriers to an ecosystem approach.