

Asset Theft Resolution along the Laos-China Railway Corridor in the Lao PDR, A study of: Luang Prabang Province Issue, the Lao PDR

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS
The Laos–China Railway is a strategically important transport infrastructure project, supporting domestic connectivity, trade, tourism, regional integration. At the same time, the railway corridor has created new security, law-enforcement challenges, including assets theft of railway corridor. This article examines the principal causes of asset theft along the Laos–China Railway Corridor, case study is in Luang Prabang Province in the Lao PDR. The issue of assets theft along the Laos-China railway corridor is considered a criminal offense under Article 231 of the Lao PDR Criminal Code, it can be focused on that: Preventive legal mechanisms, it should prevent the theft of railway assets before a crime occurs and to pay more attention to security patrols along the railway corridor, there must be inspected of access to the railway corridor area, more CCTV must be installed, especially in dark areas, more lighting systems must be installed, the cables, screws, and other assets were stole, must be inspected by police, cooperation between railway security and local police must be implemented regularly. The strict regulatory and legal mechanisms for security officers stationed at each point along the railway corridor. In case of non-compliance, administrative and legal disciplinary measures must be taken to control the behavior, and avoid creating conditions and facilitating to steal the railway company's assets. Reporting and complaint mechanisms, such as: when receiving complaints from the public, the railway officers must report to the police immediately, and to inspect for finding the facts and collect evidence, after that, the laws must be enforced to arrest warrant the person immediately. KEYWORDS: The Laos–China Railway, Criminal Legislations, Legal Gaps and Development, Luang Prabang Province in the Lao PDR.	Published On: 03 September 2026 Available on: https://ijiissh.com/

1. INTRODUCTION

The Lao PDR stands for the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which is the official name for the country commonly known as Laos. It is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia with a population of over 7.5 million people, bordered by Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, China, and Myanmar. The Laos-China Railway is one of the most important infrastructure and connectivity projects in the Lao PDR and China, its operation has increased the strategic and economic importance of railway infrastructure to the Lao economy. However, the development of important railway infrastructure has also created new challenges for the Lao PDR in terms of law enforcement and sustainable infrastructure security protection. One of the problems that has arisen is the theft of railway assets, including power lines, screws, safety fences and other railway equipment along the railway corridor, especially in Luang Prabang province railway corridor. Based on report on the Laos-China Railway officer in Luang Prabang station, it is indicated that the police have arrested the people who stole railway assets from 2023 to 2025, with an increase of 28%.

This issue is particularly important because railway assets are not ordinary private asset. Some elements are directly related to the safe operation and security of railway services. The assets theft of railway corridor is considered a criminal offense and should be investigated in accordance with the criminal law to protect the assets of the Laos-China Railway Company and the Lao national assets, and the perpetrators must be held criminally liable in accordance with the criminal law. Therefore, the investigation agencies, the prosecution and law enforcement agencies must cooperate strictly and regularly to enforce the law against the perpetrators of the theft of assets along the Laos-China Railway Corridor. Therefore, this article is needed to study the underlying issues of the legal framework and law enforcement related to the Laos-China Railway corridor and the community areas, which are sufficient to

protect critical railway infrastructure. The Lao PDR has a Criminal Code as the main law for prosecuting asset theft cases. However, the continued occurrence of asset theft raises important legal questions: How clear, comprehensive, and effectively enforceable are the existing laws to prevent and respond to assets theft by law enforcement authorities?

Legal frameworks: Based on study, the Lao PDR has a specific legal framework for prosecuting perpetrators of the asset theft issues, including: Criminal Code, No. 26/NA, dated 17 May 2017, which sets out the criminal case principles, regulations and measures, article 1 (2) states that "Any acts that is harmful to society or to individuals is considered a criminal offense and will be subject to criminal punishment and fines", and article 231 also states that "A person who unlawfully takes another person's asset shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of three months to three years, or by modification without imprisonment and shall be fined from one million to five million kip. In cases of asset theft by breaking and entering, breaking down fences, gates, etc., the person shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of six months to five years and shall be fined from three million to ten million kip." Through an analysis of the penalties and fines set out in Article 231, it is considered that they are not yet consistent with the asset theft along the Laos-China railway corridor because those assets are of high value and have the highest safety value for trains and passengers. Therefore, the penalties in this article are too low and it is proposed to improve the penalties and fines to a higher level. In addition, Law on Criminal Procedure, No. 37/NA dated 14 November 2017 plays an important law in defining rights, duties, and delegating the legal power to the legal officials and provides the institutional and procedural framework for criminal investigation, prosecution, and adjudication. Nevertheless, based on actual implementation find that, it has limited investigative resources, inadequate technical equipment, insufficient budgets, uneven professional capacity, weak coordination, evidentiary problems, and the flight of alleged offenders.

The Law on Railway, No. 62/NA, 17 Dec 2018, also sets out principles, regulations and measures for the effective and safe management and inspection of various tasks for domestic and international transportation. It also sets out the rights and duties of Laos-China Railway officials to carry out their work efficiently. However, this law does not set out strict measures against officials who are not responsible for their work and does not have any measures and conditions to monitor and inspect the Laos-China railway corridor. It is proposed to add a specific provision to be enforced exclusively for Laos-China Railway officials to ensure the quality of the work.

In fact, the safety by Laos-China Railway is considered important because passengers, especially domestic and foreign tourists to Luang Prabang by railway because they come to visit according to the saying that "the Luang Prabang is considered a charming tourist destination", it was registered as a world cultural heritage by UNESCO on December 9, 1995 and attract tourists from all over the world to visit continuously. In this case, and to ensure the safety of traveling by Laos-China railway along the corridor of Luang Prabang province area, it is necessary to pay attention to the inspection and patrolling of every minute by security officers and railway police of Luang Prabang province to prevent and combat asset theft along the Laos-China railway corridor. In case of an incident, it must be resolved immediately by the law enforcement strictly with relevant authorities.

Against this background, the study addresses three questions: (1) What are the principal causes of asset theft along the Laos-China Railway Corridor? (2) What difficulties are encountered by responsible criminal justice institutions in resolving these cases? and (3) What preventive and enforcement measures should be adopted to reduce railway asset theft?

The study aims to identify the principal contributing factors, assess institutional and procedural difficulties, and propose practical measures for improving prevention and case resolution. The research is significant because the protection of railway infrastructure requires not only substantive criminal law but also effective investigation, prosecution, adjudication, inter-agency coordination, and preventive security measures.

Objectives: This study identified the following issues:

1. To assess the enforcement of criminal laws by relevant agencies of the Lao PDR, especially the investigation and security units within the Laos-China Railway Corridor in the Luang Prabang Province area; the promptness and timeliness of prosecutors' work in prosecuting asset thieves; and whether court officials have properly imposed penalties in accordance with the Criminal Code and relevant laws.
2. To explore mechanisms and ways to address legal gaps, weak enforcement, and the slow performance of state functions.
3. To determine whether the management and cooperation mechanisms between state agencies and the Laos-China Railway Company are implemented in accordance with the obligations of the Agreement between the Lao PDR and the China Railway Company on 24-hour security measures for the Laos-China Railway infrastructure, especially valuable assets and high-security for passengers during the operations.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining legal research, documentary analysis, quantitative questionnaire data, and qualitative interviews. The research focused on Luang Prabang Province issue, and on institutions performance that involved to the prevention and resolution on the asset theft along the Laos-China Railway Corridor. In addition, this study approaches enabled the

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simultaneous examination of several predictor variables in relation to multiple risk-taking thieves' behaviors dimensions for assets theft along the Laos-China railway Corridor, which is consistent with the multi-factorial nature of the research problem.

Study of the legal principles in comparison with actual acts, analyzing case studies and official documents from relevant departments in Luang Prabang province, conducting face-to-face interviews with legal experts and criminal investigations officials, sending questionnaires to people or groups of people concerned to answer, and compiling data that is truthful and reliable up to 65%.

The legal research instruments, to analyze from some articles of the Constitution of the Lao PDR because it states the protection of the interests and assets of the state, the community and the individual, which no person can violate. If anyone violates it, it is considered a criminal act; analyzes the provisions of the Criminal Code No. 13/2017, especially Article 231 "Theft of Assets". If any person violates this article, he/she must be criminally liable and punished according to the law; analyzes the Law on Railways; Law on Criminal Procedure, and the Regulations on Railway Safety, which stipulate the measures of safety responsibility and preventive measures and other relevant documents.

Study Population and Sampling Procedure

The study was conducted in Luang Prabang Province and involved respondents associated with the Provincial Police, the Provincial People's Procuracy, and the Provincial People's Court. A total of 92 respondents participated in the questionnaire survey. The qualitative component consisted of interviews with four senior informants: one head of the railway police department, one head of criminal investigation department, one head of the provincial prosecutor's office, and the president of the Provincial People's Court.

Data Analysis

Primary data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Documentary materials included relevant Lao legislation, police and prosecutorial records, court-related records, railway security information, government reports, and other documents identified by the researcher. The source material states that the study also used observation and informal interviews to understand the local social environment.

Quantitative questionnaire data were summarized using frequencies and percentages. Qualitative interview information was organized thematically around causes of theft, institutional difficulties, preventive measures, and proposed solutions. Legal and documentary materials were analyzed to assess the relationship between the legal framework and practical enforcement. Because some official case information remained incomplete or pending at the time of research, the findings should be interpreted as a case-study assessment rather than complete statistical census of all railway asset theft in the Lao PDR.

Qualitative findings

From reliable and useful sources for this study, it was reported that thefts by groups of unemployed people, drug addicts and gambling gangs continue to occur in many places, especially along the Lao-Chinese highway in Luang Prabang province, and are a great concern and fear for the people in Luang Prabang. The sources described the thefts in various ways, including breaking into houses to steal property; entering the railway corridor to steal railway-related property, including steel, railway components, electrical wires and other equipment, and selling them at copper and scrap metal shops.

Based on interviews with Luang Prabang provincial investigators, some incidents related to the thefts were carefully planned from start to finish, especially the preparation of equipment to facilitate the theft and theft of property. The informants also mentioned the main reasons for the high incidence of property theft in Lao society, especially in Luang Prabang province, due to the unemployment of young people, the poverty of parents who are unable to support them to continue their education after primary or secondary school, drug abuse and gambling. In addition, the weak security and management system of the railway corridor creates important factors that facilitate and provide good opportunities for property theft crimes along the Lao-China railway corridor in the Luang Prabang province area.

In addition, the interviewees mentioned the insufficient budget support from the government and the Lao-China Railway Company to modernize the security system, limited professional skills, insufficient modern equipment, and the escape of criminals who cannot be caught due to the lack of a modern database system for managing and collecting citizen information. The last problem is that law enforcement is not yet strict and the authorities do not pay attention to bringing the perpetrators to justice and the resolution of cases is not very effective.

Through the questionnaire, they suggested that there should be 24-hour patrols, especially at night and during heavy rains, which are good opportunities for theft, that more and more regular inspections of the railway corridors be carried out, that strict measures be taken to enter and exit the railway corridors, that more CCTV cameras be installed, that lights be installed in dark areas, and that electronic signs be installed to warn when someone enters the corridor without permission, and that security personnel be educated to perform their duties diligently and follow security rules.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Characteristics of respondents

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	62	67.39%
Female	30	32.61%
Total	92	100%

Most respondents were male (67.39%), while female respondents represented 32.61% of the sample.

Age	Number	Percentage
Under 30 years	32	34.78%
30–39 years	36	39.13%
40–49 years	16	17.39%
50 years and above	8	8.70%
Total	92	100%

Respondents aged 30–39 years formed the largest age group (39.13%), followed by respondents under 30 years (34.78%).

Educational level	Number	Percentage
Doctorate	0	0%
Master's degree	9	9.78%
Bachelor's degree	48	52.17%
Diploma	28	30.43%
Other	7	7.61%
Total	92	100%

More than half of respondents held a bachelor's degree (52.17%), while 30.43% held a diploma and 9.78% held a master's degree.

Workplace	Number	Percentage
Provincial Police Headquarters	60	65.22%
People's Court	18	19.57%
Prosecutor's Office	14	15.22%
Total	92	100%

Police personnel represented 65.22% of the respondents, followed by People's Court personnel (19.57%) and Prosecutor's Office personnel (15.22%).

Perceived causes of asset theft

Reported factor	Number	Percentage
Unemployment	33	35.87%
Poverty or deprivation	25	27.17%
Drug-related problems	17	18.48%
Alcohol-related problems*	11	11.96%
Gambling	6	6.52%
Total	92	100%

The largest proportion of respondents identified unemployment as a contributing factor (35.87%), followed by poverty or deprivation (27.17%), drug-related problems (18.48%), and gambling (6.52%). The original source labels the 11-response category inconsistently; it appears in the table as an 'eat and drink freely' problem and in the discussion as a drug-related/addiction category. This category should be verified against the original questionnaire before submission.

Difficulties in resolving asset theft cases

Reported difficulty	Number	Percentage
Insufficient budget	14	15.22%
Limited knowledge and skills	8	8.70%
Insufficient modern equipment and facilities	48	52.17%

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Alleged perpetrators fleeing prosecution	22	23.91%
Total	92	100%

The most frequently reported institutional difficulty was insufficient modern equipment and facilities (52.17%). This was followed by alleged perpetrators fleeing prosecution (23.91%), insufficient budget (15.22%), and limited knowledge and skills (8.70%).

Preventive measures

Preventive measure	Number	Percentage
Increase inspection/patrol officers along the railway corridor	50	54.35%
Improve railway corridor security/patrol coverage	18	19.57%
Install additional CCTV cameras	16	17.39%
Increase lighting and electronic security systems	8	8.70%
Total	92	100%

Increasing the number of inspection or patrol officers was the most strongly supported preventive measure (54.35%). Respondents also supported improved patrol coverage, additional CCTV cameras, and better lighting and electronic security systems.

Measures addressing underlying social factors

Proposed social measure	Number	Percentage
Address poverty and deprivation	44	47.83%
Address unemployment	26	28.26%
Address drug-related problems	15	16.30%
Address gambling	5	5.43%
Others gambling-related category reported in source	2	2.17%
Total	92	100%

The respondents most strongly supported measures addressing poverty and deprivation (47.83%) and unemployment (28.26%). Drug-related problems were ranked third (16.30%). The two gambling categories in the source data should be consolidated or clarified before final submission because the labels appear duplicative.

Measures addressing institutional difficulties

Proposed institutional measure	Number	Percentage
Add modern equipment and facilities	48	52.17%
Prevent perpetrators from escaping prosecution	32	34.78%
Increase budget	9	9.78%
Improve professional knowledge and skills	3	3.26%
Total	92	100%

The strongest institutional recommendation was investment in modern equipment and facilities (52.17%), followed by measures to prevent alleged perpetrators from escaping prosecution (34.78%).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that asset theft on the Laos-China railway corridor should not be understood as a simple crime. In fact, it is a big problem of the security system along the Laos-China railway corridor and a legal issue that imposes penalties and fines on perpetrators of asset theft, causing damage to other individuals and to the state, but is prosecuted as a criminal case and is not punished appropriately. At the same time, it also shows that government agencies, and the Laos-China Railway Company lack mechanisms related to protecting assets, and lack creating safety for passengers. These problems are caused by the lack of strict and slow enforcement of criminal laws.

Based on the current findings, it is seen that the main problem is the effectiveness of implementation and law enforcement by legal agencies is not strong and does not follow the law because the officers responsible for the asset theft cases do not have in-depth legal knowledge. In other words, there seems to be a gap between the legal framework and its implementation. Through analysis, it is found that the system of investigation, prosecution, asset recovery, security control along the railway corridor and institutional cooperation are still weak and slow to implement. Therefore, it is proposed that the establishment of a legal framework should be evaluated in two dimensions:

First, the protection of assets along the Laos-China railway corridor in the area of Luang Prabang province, it must be protected by the law and strictly enforced.

Second, the protection of infrastructure and security along the railway corridor must establish a modern control system and develop the knowledge and skills of security performance to be strong.

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The study suggests that, the legal framework development should be improved in accordance with the Government's Strategic Plan on Development of the Domestic Legal System to 2030" to flourish under the slogan: **"The Rule of Law"**; Develop a modern security system along the railway corridor and create strategic importance in improving the patrol system of security officials and ensuring potential impacts on railway safety and national security and that of the Laos-China Railway Corridor.

This is a roadmap showing what the consequences of asset theft along the railway corridor within the borders of Luang Prabang province will be as follows: ***"Asset Theft → Risk to railway safety → Economic and social consequences → There will be asset theft on railways again"*** if it is not solved by enforcing the law and imposing penalties and high fines on criminals who commit asset theft.

4. CONCLUSION

The asset theft along the Laos-China railway corridor, especially in Luang Prabang province area is not only a criminal case but it is also a problem that needs to be addressed in terms of strengthening law enforcement and the investigation system for officers involved in theft cases in Luang Prabang province. The security of the railway infrastructure under the responsibility of the Luang Prabang Railway Police requires a strategic plan to improve the regular patrolling. In addition, if there is asset theft along the railway corridor, the Criminal Procedure Law, the Criminal Code, the Railway Law and other relevant laws must be strictly and promptly enforced, which will have a positive effect on the protection of assets along the railway.

The study concluded that effective solutions require a mechanism and strategy for law enforcement and development, and related regulatory implementation that aims to protect assets, apprehend perpetrators of asset theft along the railway corridor, conduct prompt investigations, expedite prosecutions, judicial redress, asset recovery, compensation and prevention of recidivism. Therefore, strong cooperation between railway officials, railway police, prosecutors, courts, local authorities in Luang Prabang province and people living along the railway corridor is necessary to cooperate and provide reliable information on asset theft along the Laos-China railway corridor to lead to the tracking, investigation and arrest of perpetrators for prosecution.

This study recommends that relevant agencies of government strengthen legal protection of assets, especially along the Laos-China railway corridor, improve the security system to prevent theft of assets along the railway corridor to be effective and modern, create legal knowledge for investigators, enhance coordination between local agencies in Luang Prabang province and central agencies, especially the Department of Railway, the Ministry of Public Works and Transport on implementing measures to prevent and suppress assets theft along the railway corridor, and open up avenues for community participation to regularly report information on the status of railway corridor in their areas.

This study also promotes protecting railway assets along the Laos-China Railway Corridor from the Vientiane to Boten, especially in the Luang Prabang province area, effectively is the duty of all of us. But if we want to reduce the number of asset theft cases, relevant agencies must strictly enforce the law. If any article of the laws is found to be inconsistent, proposals for amendments must be made. The authority has power must create a more rapid investigation system and create mechanisms to protect the safety, security, sustainability and reliable operation of the Laos-China Railway, and support the rule of law and the economic development of the Lao PDR.

Finally, the strengthen railway security by increasing patrol and inspection personnel in identified high-risk locations and establishing systematic patrol schedules; Expand CCTV coverage, lighting, perimeter fencing, access-control systems, and electronic intrusion detection along vulnerable section of the railway corridor; Increase operational budgets and provide modern investigative and evidence-collection equipment to responsible criminal justice institutions; Strengthen professional training for investigators, prosecutors, judges, and railway security personnel, particularly in evidence collection, digital evidence, crime-scene management, and railway-related offences; Establish a clear inter-agency coordination mechanism among railway authorities, police, prosecutors, courts, local administrations, and community representatives for rapid reporting, evidence preservation, information sharing, and case referral; Develop targeted prevention programs addressing unemployment, poverty, drug-related problems, and gambling in communities located near high-risk railway sections; Improve railway asset inventory and risk assessment so that high-value and safety-critical assets receive enhanced protection and monitoring; Verify and standardize official case statistics before publication and maintain a consistent reporting period for investigation, prosecution, and court data; and Ensure that all enforcement measures remain consistent with the Criminal Code, Law on Criminal Procedure, and applicable principles of due process, presumption of innocence, fair trial, and judicial independence.

The study has several limitations. First, access to official case information was limited because some cases remained under investigation or had not yet reached final adjudication. Second, some participants were reluctant to provide information or respond to research questions. Third, the case-resolution statistics in the source material contain inconsistencies in dates and percentages that require verification against primary institutional records. Fourth, the study focuses on Luang Prabang Province area and therefore should not be generalized automatically to all railway provinces in the Lao PDR.

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