Colonial Margins and Global Hotspots:
The past and present of Forest Management in Thailand

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Abstract

Forest resource management in Thailand bears the mark of its' historical position on the margins of colonial power and its' present position in a biodiversity hotspot. During the colonial era, British forestry in Burma and India had a fundamental influence on the knowledge and techniques used in Thai forest management. More recently, international conservation agendas and organizations have influenced the ways in which the Thai government regulates the forest within its boundaries. The treatment of forests as a national and international resource, defined in interaction with colonial neighbors and global partners, has resulted in legal constructs, spatially simplistic conservation mechanisms and a conception of nature ill-suited to managing forests as a local resource. This paper uses a case study from a region where the government is establishing a national park to investigate the manifestation of Thailand's historical legacy in local park-people conflicts. It finds that the continued use of laws, tools and concepts derived in relation to colonial and global influences undermines the forestry department's ability to address the contemporary challenge of managing forests as a local, as well as a national/global commons.

Introduction

Conflict over forest management and conservation in the highlands of Northern Thailand is intensifying as the Royal Forestry Department (RFD)[1] classifies remaining forests as protected areas, regardless of their standing as home for highland farmers. The RFD has long managed forests as a national and international resource but a new constitution, a more active civil society and fiscal restraint is pulling management practice towards decentralization and a greater recognition of local needs. Grassroots NGOs have helped highland residents recognize their precarious legal position and encouraged them to resist the establishment of protected areas in absence of greater livelihood security. Consequently, the forestry department is encountering situations they have not previously had to confront and is finding the establishment of protected areas to be fraught with difficulties. The challenge facing the RFD is to manage forests as both global commons and local commons, yet for the moment, their tools rooted in a colonial history and global present are exclusively meant to manage for national and global concerns.

[1] The majority of RFD staff and functions are now located in the new Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment. During my fieldwork (2001-2002) the RFD was still intact and thus I continue to use the term here.

As a number of scholars have demonstrated, notably Vandergeest (1996; 2003) and Peluso (2001) , current forest management practice and conflict in Northern Thailand needs to be understood within the context of its historical position on the colonial margins. Through mid 19th century negotiations with the British, the King of Siam asserted control over the northern teak forests at the same time that he negotiated boundaries for a modern nation state (Winachakul 1996). Forest management and conservation in Thailand continues to be territorial, where the state attempts to delineate and control not only its forested peripheries but also the ethnic minority communities living within them (Luangaramsri 1999; Peluso and Vandergeest 2001; Vandergeest 1996; Wittayapak 1996). The delineation of simple, bounded territories for centralized management obscures the complexity of local use and neglects the needs of local communities (Ganjanapan 1998; Vandergeest 1996). The primacy of managing forests as a national resource combined with the lack of citizenship of many ethnic minorities has enabled the depiction of highland people not only as forest destroyers but also as nation destroyers (Lohman 1999; Luangaramsri 1999). This paper does not contest these well-argued assertions, its' contribution is to understand how these historical processes of nation-building, territorialization, identity-making, space-making and forest-making are manifested at the village level. In doing so, the paper treats these processes as being developed throughout the modern era of centralized forest management and global partnerships which placed Thailand in a 'global biodiversity hotspot'[2]. Management tools and practices have been shaped through interactions with colonial neighbors and global partners and have not yet been adequately altered, with some exceptions, to local circumstance.

This paper builds upon an emerging understanding of how historical processes effect current politics in Thailand by examining an area in Northern Thailand where the RFD is in the process of establishing a national park. It isolates two significant ways that these historical processes are manifested locally in conflicts between conservation areas and the villagers living in them. First, the local understanding of RFD history as territorial leads to distrust and obstructs recent efforts for a more cooperative approach to park establishment. Second, the continued use of the tools and laws produced in conjunction with colonial and global influences is the source of much conflict. In particular, the simple spatial expression of territorial management and the legal

[2] The term 'biodiversity hotspot' refers to the work of Norman Meyers (2000) and the State of the Hotspot initiative of Conservation International.

separation of people from forest are being challenged by local farmers wanting to obtain their constitutional rights to participate in the management of local natural resources.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section briefly summarizes the history of early forest management as intertwined with nation-making and territory-making. The second section looks at the policies of Field Marshall Sarit in his efforts to build a modern Thai State, emphasizing developments in Northern Thailand. The third section argues that territorial processes were re-enforced and developed through a recent era of international influence that has given rise to a particular spatial form conducive to central state management and a particular conception of nature as human-free. Finally, I show how these historical processes manifest themselves locally and how they currently threaten hopes of moving towards more decentralized, participatory forest management and conservation.

The colonial margin: an era of nation-building and forest-making

The early development of Thai forest management was intertwined with the demarcation of Siam from the territories of neighboring colonial powers (Winachakul, 1996). Teak played a central role in early colonial relations with the British, who threatened to annex the northern territories of rich teak forests if Bangkok could not subdue the region and provide safe access to the teak trade (Luangaramsri 2001). Consequently, throughout the 1890s Siam used its Ministry of the Interior to assert more control over the northern Lanna tributary. The establishment of the Royal Forestry Department within the Ministry in 1896 allowed Bangkok to obtain revenue through teak concessions while asserting its territorial sovereignty in the north. (Luangaramsri 2001; Peluso and Vandergeest 2001; Vandergeest 1996). In 1899 the King declared all land not cultivated or claimed by a person to be forest belonging to the Kingdom and managed henceforth by the RFD, thus solidifying Siam's territorial control over the strategic region (Lohman 1993; Luangaramsri 2001).

Early forest management under the initial directorship of H.A. Slade, a British forester with experience in British India, was focused on the scientific management and organization of forests to facilitate the harvest of taxable forest products (Luangaramsri 2001). In 1897 Slade passed the Forest Preservation Act and Teak Trees Preservation Act, which detailed the rules for timber harvest such as the minimum allowable girth. In 1913, the Forest Conservation Law was passed, enabling the conservation of tree species with economic value and any deemed rare and important (Peluso and Vandergeest 2001). While the RFD had a large territory, species

management was the basis for forest control and local use that did not interfere with such goals was overlooked.

In a move to promote modern scientific management of the national forest, the post-monarchy government established in 1932 passed the Forest Protection and Reservation Act of 1938, enabling the RFD to map and declare specific territories as either protected or reserve forest (Peluso and Vandergeest 2001). The overall structure of the act was based on the Indian and Burmese forest acts. Notably, however, the Siamese law had no provision for the kind of village forests allowed by its colonial neighbors but did allow local livelihood use throughout reserve forests (Vandergeest 1996). The demarcation process was slow, which can be attributed to legislation that required extensive local consultation, and to an RFD that lacked the political means to assert strong territorial control against a more powerful Ministry of the Interior (Peluso and Vandergeest 2001). The RFD thus focused on species control but continued to pressure parliament to allow more rapid demarcation of forest reserve, a wish that was not granted until 1958 when Field Marshal Sarit established a military government. (Peluso and Vandergeest 2001; Vandergeest 1996).

The nation building project embarked upon by Siamese leaders in the face of more powerful colonial neighbors consisted of adopting forest management techniques that ensured tax income for the national good and expanding territorial control over previously peripheral regions. This early era of forest management saw the emergence of a forest as national capital, to be managed as a separate resource for the good of the nation.

Modern State Making: The expansion of state control into the northern highlands

The military government of Field Marshall (F.M.) Sarit is noted for its nationalistic efforts to modernize Thailand. His policies had particular significance for highland Thailand and the numerous non-Tai[3] ethnic minorities who reside there.

F.M Sarit extended the notion that forests are a national resource and made tremendous changes to how forests were seen and regulated. He embraced modern American methods and used ecological rhetoric that defined forest destruction as an act against the nation (Cooper 1995; Luangaramsri 2001; Vandergeest 1996). “Forests are significant natural resources for the lives of Thai people... Those who destroy the forests are the enemy who destroy the nation's security"

[3] Tai is used to denote the Tai ethnicity, whereas Thai is used to denote a citizen of Thailand.

(Sarit quoted in Luangaramsri 2001:75). During his rule he established the forest police and protection units, passed the 1960 Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act and he passed the 1961 National Park Act (Vandergeest 1996). Soon after his death, but when his successors were still in power the National Forest Reserve Act of 1964 was enacted to revise the 1938 Act. The 1964 revisions reduced the level of local involvement in forest demarcation and opened up the forests to further commercial exploitation (Lohman 1993). Demarcation proceeded rapidly and by 1974, with the help of 1:50000 US military topographic maps, 32% of national territory was designated forest reserve (Vandergeest 1996; Vandergeest 2003). The RFD during Sarit's government thus made a transition in practice from species management to territorial management of forestland, enforcing the control of the state in previously peripheral forest regions. This transition meant that the RFD was interested in any activity within forest territory and unsurprisingly, local use was secondary to the use of forests for the national good.

The governance of F.M Sarit is marked by the rapid demarcation and definition of forests as national resources, but also by opium reduction policies and concern over national sovereignty at a time of communist insurgency in Indochina. This agenda had very specific implications for the ethnic minority residents of Northern Thailand. Numerous highland groups reside within Thai territory, some having migrated in over the past 100 years (e.g. Hmong, Lisu, Lahu and Akha) and others being long term residents of the mountainous region between Burma and Thailand (e.g. Karen, Lua and Htin). The highland groups are characterized as practicing long and short swidden cultivation with those residing at higher elevations also growing opium poppy (Grandstaff 1980; Kunstadter 1978; Kunstadter *et al.* 1978; Renard 2001).

Sarit saw highlanders as a possible threat to national security due to their shifting cultivation, their opium cultivation, and their different culture, language and customs leading to a lack of clear allegiance to the Thai State. Sarit thus ended a history of benign neglect towards the highland groups and instead promoted highland development aimed at integrating and assimilating highland people into lowland Thai politics and culture (McCaskill and Kampe 1997; Renard 2001).

Sarit's government drafted the first highland development plan to be implemented from 1964 to1969. The plan included the establishment of the Tribal Research Institute and called for development in the highlands including road building, crop replacement and the provision of education. (Renard 2001). The Tribal Research Center had three goals that are of interest to us

here. The first was to stop shifting cultivation and introduce fixed field agriculture. This goal emerged in line with an international perception of shifting cultivation as a waste of timber resources, a misuse of national economic resources and a "threat to the water and soil resources of the lowlands upon which the nation's future welfare depends" (Ruhle 1964:10). The second goal was to eradicate opium, which was considered antiquated and uncivilized, through opium substitution programs (Renard 2001: Bhruksari, 1989 #95). The third goal of interest was to instill a feeling of loyalty to Thailand among the hilltribes (Suwanbubpa 1976:26-27). Thailand received military and economic aid from the United Stated for the defense of its borders and the fight against communist insurgents, most of who were found in the hills (Wyatt 1984). These goals manifested themselves in research and development that sought to integrate the eradication of opium and shifting cultivation while promoting Thai nationalism and economic development.

Development activities in the highlands have not particularly succeeded in assimilating highland people into a Thai identity, due in part because they were based on a characterization of ethnic minorities as forest destroyers, as possible and actual nation destroyers and as not-Tai. All highland people of ethnic backgrounds other than Tai, were demarcated as 'hilltribes' and subject to development efforts aimed at changing their livelihood strategies. Even those groups who were once accepted by the Thai monarchy and government, such as the Karen, were alienated from it through their association with higher elevations, shifting cultivation and possible involvement in communist insurgency (Jonsson 1998; Sato 2002; Vandergeest 2003). Development of and research on highland groups re-enforced an opposition between 'hilltribe' people and Thai people in terms of custom, language and method of cultivation. These prejudices against highland peoples continues to drive policies vis-à-vis shifting cultivation, development and citizenship, and play a strong role in defining rights to forests in the North (Johnson and Forsyth 2002).

The territorial process that demarcated an emerging Thai nation state from its neighbors was intertwined with the territorial goals of the RFD as it sought control over teak and later land. Modern centralized forest management produced a forest to be managed for the good of a nation to the neglect of local needs and uses. The local use of Thai forests has been at times tolerated but never accepted as legitimate. In fact, the creation of a modern Thai forest occurred in opposition to the local practices of minority populations residing in the highland forests and in

conjunction with counter insurgency efforts to better define Thailand's territorial sovereignty. Territorial forest management successfully took legal control (if not actual) of the forests away from local communities and placed in the hands of the RFD who has proceeded to manage for national economic and conservation goals.

Global Hotspot

Neighboring colonial powers were pivotal in the early development of Thai forest management institutions. After the Second World War international influence in Thai forest management shifted to the American government and multilateral institutions including the FAO, IUCN and the World Bank, which continued to provide western methods and expertise during the modern era of forest management. Globally, this era witnessed the exportation of the US National Park model, which insists on a nature free of human habitation, as the conservation ideal. Between 1950 and 1990 almost 3000 protected areas were established worldwide, almost five times the number established in the previous four decades. This rapid growth was facilitated by the rising international concern with deforestation and loss of biodiversity, the availability of foreign funding for conservation and the promise of foreign currency earnings through tourism (Ghimire 1994). With increasing global concern over tropical forests Thailand found itself in the middle of the Southeast Asian hotspot, identified for its rich biodiversity and rapid rate of deforestation. Thailand was not immune to these changes in global forest governance and took full advantage of international expertise to manage its forests initially for timber production and eventually for conservation.

This section traces these global influences and demonstrates that throughout the development of modern forest conservation, identity making and nation making activity continued to be very much a part of forest management in Thailand. I argue that the continued process of territorialization, the centralization of forest management and the incorporation of the National Park model converged to support the simple spatial form that conservation now takes in Thailand. In addition, a conception of nature as free of human-habitation was engrained in the laws and eventually embraced by the popular middle class culture of a developing Thailand. These policies and conceptions, produced through interaction with global partners, emerge as important factors in current forest conflict.

The development of dominant conservation mechanisms: national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and watershed classification

The period between the Second World War and the Indochina War saw considerable western involvement in Thai forest management. In 1948 a group of forest experts from FAO led by Danhof from the Netherlands came to Thailand to assess the forest management and provide advice. They recommended the use of aerial photography for management and suggested conserving 40% of land area as forest – a number still used today as the official goal for percent of territory under forest cover. Their main concerns were a lack of knowledge, technology, and financial support as well as shifting cultivation in the highlands (Luangaramsri 2001). Another FAO team in 1957 conducted an aerial survey of forest resources and concluded that over 50% of Thailand's forests were degraded (Department of Welfare 1964).

The development of National Parks in Thailand has its' roots in mid twentieth century cooperation with the American government. In 1955 American development assistance invited Thai forest scholars and bureaucrats to visit the USA and examine Yellowstone National Park. National parks in the US were initiated at the turn of the century when the US itself was defining its nationhood in opposition to the nationhood of European states (Nash 1982). Likewise, "western guidance coincided with the desire of a newly modern state during the reign of [F. M.] Sarit Thanarat. National parks, a landmark of modern civilization, came to represent one of the key elements of the modern Thai nation-state" (Luangaramsri 2001:74). At the request of Thailand, the IUCN sent Rhule from the US National Park Service to provide guidance on site selection of and laws for protected areas. He had a significant role in shaping the 1960 Wildlife Conservation Act and the 1961 National Park Act. In 1962 Khao Yai was declared the first National Park in Thailand and in 1965 the first Wildlife Sanctuary was declared at Salak Phra.

US influence over forest management does not stop at National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries; the US forest service also had substantial influence in the development of the watershed classification scheme. In 1985 the RFD, at the request of the government, created a watershed classification scheme based on the US model (Pratong and Thomas 1990). They used a one km^2 grid and a mathematical formula taking into account soil, slope and forest cover that turned each km^2 area of land into watershed zones 1A, 1B, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Classification 1A is the strictest and does not allow human habitation of any kind. A one km^2 grid may be adequate in flat lands but in the mountainous north, it results in large areas being zoned uninhabitable even in places where irrigated rice has been cultivated for centuries (Thomas 2001).

From cutting to conservation: the expansion of protected areas

The RFD's primary purpose has long been to manage for timber extraction. By 1990, however, after recording some of the highest deforestation rates in the world and after murderous flooding in the South, thought to be connected to deforestation, the government imposed a ban on commercial logging. The RFD has thus had to remake itself as a conservation organization. In doing so, the RFD has enlisted the aid of international expertise concerned about biodiversity loss in their efforts to maintain control over significant territory (Wittayapak 1996). In 1992 Thailand signed the convention of biodiversity (CBD). Also in 1992, the RFD revised the 1985 forest policy which had allocated 25% of territory for production forest and 15% for conservation, to reverse the numbers making 25% of Thai territory the target for protected areas. Much of this expansion is occurring in the North, where 55% of Thai National forest remains (Poffenberger 1999; Wittayapak 1996). By 2000 18% of Thai territory was contained in protected areas and another 5% was in the process of establishment, representing a doubling since 1985 when protected areas consisted of 9% of Thai territory (IUCN 2002; Vandergeest 1996). In 1997 the parliament passed the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 1998-2002 that was formulated in part to recognize article 6 of the CBD. The action plan contains a number of projects aimed at the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and at the promotion of biodiversity conservation. The projects have been jointly funded from the national government and agencies such as UNEP, DANCED, JICA, CIDA and UNDP (IUCN 2002).

With this new role as protector of biodiversity and champion of forest cover, the RFD has forcibly relocated villages and promoted the reforestation of fallow agricultural fields. The expansion of protected areas effectively intensifies the RFD's territorial control over forest land for the express purpose of conservation in line with national and international goals and to the express denial of highland people's place in forest use and management.

Territorialization and abstract space

The relationship of the Siamese government and later the Thai government to forest management and conservation is evidently tied closely to the process of territorialization for the purposes of Nation building. Indeed Vandergeest and Peluso (Peluso and Vandergeest 2001; Vandergeest 1996; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995) have written extensively on how territorialization has shaped forestry policy in Southeast Asia. Vandergeest (1996:159) defines territorialization in agreement with Sack's (1986) definition as: "the process by which states

attempt to control people and their actions by drawing boundaries around geographic space, excluding some categories of individuals from this space, and proscribing or prescribing specific activities within these boundaries". Vandergeest (1996) outlines three stages of territorialization in which the Thai State has gained increasing control over land. The first stage is "Territorial Sovereignty and Product Controls" where unoccupied forest was declared national forest in an effort to control Teak in the North. The second stage is "Forest Demarcation" where land was classified as either protected or reserved in order to halt the cultivation of forest land by peasants. And the third stage is "Functional Territorialization" where land was remapped according to scientific criteria upon which permissible activities were determined. This last stage was characterized by the reclassification of forest reserve to the stricter National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary or Watershed 1A classifications, leading to greater control over territory. In his conclusion he makes it clear that the use of territorial maps to communicate resource management strategies has obscured, rendered invisible and made illegitimate complex local resource management strategies. Vandergeest (1996:171) points to the simple abstract spatial form of territorialization as hindering the ability of managers to implement "participatory approaches which would recognize and allow for complex on the ground arrangements among users." In my current task of exploring the local manifestation of historical processes, such as territorialization, it is important to carefully define the spatial form that conservation takes and how it is linked to the process of territorialization.

Territorialization uses and produces an abstract notion of space; a homogenous area, firmly bounded and existing independent of the objects it contains. This is the space of planners, architects and cartographers; it is also the space produced through the control of territory from a distance (Lefebvre 1991; Smith and Katz 1993). Sack (1986) agrees on the connection between territoriality and abstract space.

> "Territoriality in fact helps create the idea of a socially emptiable place... Territoriality conceptually separates place from things and then recombines them as an assignment of things to places and places to things... This tendency can be combined with others to form an extremely important component of modernity - that of emptiable space." (Sack 1986:33).

Drawing boundaries on a map, an act delineating abstract space, is not territorialization unto itself without the enforcement of those boundaries. Territorialization can thus occur in degrees (Sack 1986). If a piece of land is re-categorized from forest reserve to National Park its' boundaries are given new meaning since the rules and regulations attached to them change as

does the intensity at which they are enforced. What makes the spatial form of conservation materially relevant is the act of territorialization that accompanies it. Territorialization and abstract space are thus interrelated in that the boundary demarcation and external control of territory is conducive to the creation of a strictly bounded and homogeneously defined space.

Abstract space is a key component to modern land management as it provides order to a landscape, which, from afar, may appear chaotic. Top-down control over an area of land requires the collapsing of complex relations to isolate those items and relations of most interest to the state (Scott 1998). Dominant forms of state-led conservation management, such as land use classifications and protected areas, attach sets of rules to simple spatial units to facilitate the transfer of control to a manager with no first hand knowledge of the landscape in question. Protected areas are rigidly bounded, homogeneously defined and managed as static spaces. Their establishment is part of a process through which the Cartesian grid gains primacy in the organizing and managing of distant places.

The implication of the spread of abstract management space with the expansion of state control over a territory is that local circumstances are rendered irrelevant in the eyes of the modern manager. The production of conservation spaces that are firmly bounded, homogenous, static and controlled from the outside allow external managers to close their eyes to alternative spatial arrangements pre-existing their management constructs. The expansion of Royal Forestry Department control over marginal forest areas made use of abstract space to define their management units and have attempted to impose an order on a complex landscape.

The National Park Ideal and the Ideal of Nature as Human-Free

The National Park Ideal is an example of a territorial conservation mechanism with a simplistic spatial form. It has strict boundaries, with an interior managed from afar as a static and homogenous landscape subject to uniform regulations. It can theoretically be placed anywhere and whatever objects, people and landscape it encloses would be subject to National Park laws and any territory on the other side of the boundary is managed as not-park. It is thus consistent with the territorial form of abstract space and is a key spatial mechanism for modern management. The National Park model has had an undeniable influence in Thailand, serving as the primary conservation unit.

The National Park Ideal carries with it an underlying conception of a pristine nature. “A view of human society as inherently antagonistic to and incompatible with wilderness

underpinned the creation of… Yellowstone" and most parks since (Kothari *et al.* 1995:191). This idea of a national park as a 'special place' cordoned off, free from human interference and available for the recreation and benefit of all (or those coded as worthy) has become the dominant model for environmental conservation in Thailand and elsewhere. And so with the technical advice of western scientists came a shift in conception about nature.

Luangaramsri (2001:63) argues that the closest the Thai language has to the word 'nature' is '*thamachat'*. The word originates in Buddhist teachings meaning "things that occur according to forces of the universe such as human beings, animals, trees etc.". '*Thamachat'* thus includes a conception of nature that includes humans; nature as a force of which humans are a part (Jonsson 1998; Lohman 1993). Luangaramsri (2001) argues that modern western thinking about wilderness has influenced traditional Thai conceptions and policy. "The expansion of protected areas throughout the country has carried with it the idea of untouched wilderness where "nature" is to be set free again, returning to an original state under the absolute protection of the RFD" (Luangaramsri 2001:65). Regardless of origin, the conception of nature as separate from humans is certainly the dominant conception amongst urban Thai and amongst policy makers. (Samabuddhi 2002). Consequently, popular support for the definition has colluded with internationally influenced law legislating conservation forest as being absent of human habitation.

The conception of nature as human free has not gone uncontested – it is the source of major debate in the decade long struggle for a community forestry bill (CFB). The idea for a community forestry bill was first proposed after the 1989 logging ban and the first official draft was released in 1990 (Brenner *et al.* 1999; Johnson and Forsyth 2002). Its goal was to protect biodiversity and forest cover while guaranteeing continued access to forests for villagers who had used them for centuries. Since then, the bill has gone through numerous drafts with debate over whether people and forests can co-exist central in the conflict amongst academics, community-oriented[4] NGOs, RFD officials and nationally-oriented NGOs (Makarabhirom 2000). One side argues that communities can be effective managers of forest even within protected

[4] I follow Makarabhirom (2000) who uses the terms nationally-oriented and community-oriented to distinguish between different sectors of civil society. Nationally oriented NGOs are those who see forests as national resources to be used solely for biodiversity and watershed conservation while Community-oriented NGOs are those who see forests as community resources for sustainable subsistence use. Deep green and light green have been alternatively used.

areas whereas the other side argues that protected areas should be free from all humans including their community forests. The second group frequently argues that the highland peoples cause deforestation and their commercial agriculture leads to water shortages for lowland farmers (Vandergeest 2003). On April 22 1997 the Chavalit government passed a resolution claiming that people and forests can co-exist only to have it revoked on June 30th 1998 by the second Chuan government. Plodprasob Suraswadi then became the new Director General of the RFD, and proceeded to manage under the tenant that people cannot co-exist with forest. (Brenner *et al.* 1999; Sato 2002). In 1997 the new Thai constitution passed which, among other things, gave rights to Thai citizens to participate in the management and conservation of natural resources and to present 'people's bills' on issues of concern. Consequently in 1999 community-minded civil society presented a revised CFB along with 50 000 supporting signatures (Noikorn 2000). The 'people's draft' would allow communities in protected areas to establish community forests but only subject to the approval of management plans (Vandergeest 2003). In July 2000 this draft, a RFD draft and four others passed first reading in parliament (Johnson and Forsyth 2002). The people's version passed the house but in 2002 the senate only approved the bill after adding a crucial clause banning community forests from protected areas (Samabuddhi 2002). Evidently there are differing views amongst academics, farmers, and even the RFD as to whether people and forests can co-exist. As I write, the senate's version has yet to pass through the house and debate continues.

The distant and proximate history of Thai forest management demonstrates the importance of territorial control for the creation of a nation state and the related creation of national forests. The demarcation of forests as a national and international resource, re-enforced by the involvement of colonial powers and international organizations has resulted in a the use of management tools, including law and conservation mechanisms, which are not well suited to local involvement. The use of spatially simple conservation constructs that enforce the separation of people from forests results in a RFD that is not well equipped to deal with the challenges it now faces. Specifically, they are encountering an increased demand for local participation in forest management and conservation. The next section takes a close look at an area where the RFD is establishing a national park in order to demonstrate how the history reviewed above manifests itself in present forest conflicts.

Mae Tho National Park

The history of forest management in Thailand, influenced through colonial and international involvement but clearly present in Thai law and culture, shapes the current local conflicts regarding forest conservation. This section will examine Mae Tho, an area in Northern Thailand where the forestry department has been trying to establish a protected area since 1991 but due to increasing local resistance they have begun a more participatory process of park establishment. NGO involvement in the local struggle has given prominence to law and legal rights in the conflict between park staff and local villagers while mutual mistrust and disagreement over the role of local people in forest management is what has, perhaps permanently, stalled the establishment of a National Park. The villagers and forestry staff alike are struggling within the constraints of a historical legacy that leaves them with legal constructs, spatially simplistic conservation mechanisms and a conception of nature ill-suited to the more participatory task at hand.

The first part of the paper identified the characterization of highland peoples in opposition to lowland Thai as playing a central role in the formation of Thai forest management. While I believe this to be true, as I have seen evidence of it elsewhere, the residents of both villages I worked in were Thai citizens and so the discourse of nationalism didn't play as strong a role[5]. Instead, this section focuses specifically on how the conflict between local people and the RFD reflects the historical legacy of forest management in Thailand. Specifically, the section focuses on how management tools, such as law and simple spatial territories, and the conception of nature as free of human habitation, shapes village-RFD conflict. After a brief introduction to the study site, this section characterizes the mistrust between villagers and the RFD and explains how it is an outgrowth of the historical processes discussed in previous sections.

Mae Tho National Park is proposed to cover an area of 990 km^2, twice the size of Doi Inthanon National Park, Northern Thailand's first park. The presence of 50 or more villages

5 There existed, however, a sense of 'otherness' for many of the farmers I spoke with. Language differences are a key means of alienation, as one woman expressed "I can't talk with the RFD because I don't speak Thai". Furthermore, many RFD officials speak only central Thai that is only understood by the few villagers with a formal education. There is also a feeling of alienation from the government in this current conflict. Many farmers stated that "the government doesn't help [them]. They will help the park and the RFD first." Furthermore, residents are aware of their status as 'other' within Thailand. "We wonder why people from outside want to develop us. People from Bangkok come and say - you need electricity, your children are dirty - this is not good…. They do not understand our way of life."

within the proposed boundaries has led to considerable difficulty in establishing the park. Consequently, in 1997, the RFD chose Mae Tho as a pilot project in which park officials negotiate with local villagers regarding the boundaries of the park (Limchoowong 2000). In conjunction with park establishment, the RFD is promoting a model of sustainable land use designed to decrease the amount of land claimed by the villagers and increase the amount of forest land under control of the RFD. The land use model engages fixed, homogenous, bounded land use categories meant to regulate village use. My primary research sites are two villages of the Karen ethnic minority located inside the park boundaries. One, Ban Insom[6], has more experience with development efforts and has thus far cooperated with the RFD. They have reclassified their land use, reduced their shifting cultivation and increased fixed field cultivation. The second village, Ban Pracha is thus far resisting the measures recommended by the RFD and its NGO partners. They have retained a six-year cultivation cycle and have lower market involvement. Over a 12-month period I conducted interviews with senior park officials, forest guards, NGO staff and participated in a few forest patrols. In the villages I conducted household surveys, focus groups, forest transect walks and the participant observation entailed in living for stretches of time with village families.

Throughout my research in Mae Tho foresters told me that the largest impediment to their establishment of the park was the 'meddling' of NGOs that caused villagers not to trust them. "The problem is that some NGOs have influenced the villagers and now we can't just announce the National Park but have to negotiate."[7] Many of the senior foresters that I spoke with believed that the NGO in question (hereafter referred to as ABC) had told lies to the villagers. "They tell the villagers that we (the RFD) will arrest them if they take a single stone from the park. But this is not true. They lie to make the villagers scared of the park." The senior officials explained how some NGOs tell the villagers only bad stories about the nearby Doi Inthanon National Park but in reality the RFD is more flexible than the law suggests. On a number of occasions officials expressed frustration with ABC, claiming to not understand why they are convincing the

[6] In accordance with my confidentiality agreements, I have renamed the villages.

[7] Though RFD officials were careful to use the plural most of the time, it was clear that their frustrations centered on a particular NGO – referred to here as ABC.

villagers to resist the establishment of the park. “Some NGOs are trying to block the survey team. Is this because they need to extend their funding? What is their motivation?”

These stories were confirmed through discussions with villagers and ABC employees. The organization in question explains to the villagers that national park law does not allow people to reside in the forest and that if the park is established the villagers will not be secure in their livelihood. My survey revealed that an overwhelming percentage of the villagers did not trust the RFD and believed that if the park were established they would be prevented from cultivating crops or using the forest. Many people in Ban Pracha expressed sentiments similar to the following woman “We collect bamboo and firewood throughout our life, if the RFD comes, we'll definitely starve because going to get anything from the forest will not be easy. For example, in Doi Inthanon they can't take anything out of the forest.” One man explained that "If the park comes, they will want to take our land. I have heard from other people. We won't be able to get food or live." However, ABC did not believe what they are spreading are lies. They see their role as informed middlemen advising villagers of their precarious position as illegal residents inside the forest so that the villagers may better negotiate with the RFD.

Law and legislation obviously play an important role in the imaginations of both the villagers and the RFD staff. It is a central explanation used by the RFD as leverage in their negotiations. One senior park official explained to me “You have to understand that all this land is in watershed 1a and 1b where it is illegal for people to live. They are all living here illegally.” The National Park designation in Thailand also does not allow human habitation. When questioned about the idea of establishing community forests the same official said that community forests would be illegal because they would be established in Watershed 1a and 1b. Regardless of whether the watershed classification system is suitable for the region, this important official, see the villagers as residing illegally and thus he argues that any effort to give the villagers some land is a big sacrifice on his part. Furthermore, park officials continually assert that in practice, they enforce the law in a flexible manner, making allowances for subsistence use. Meanwhile it is a central explanation used by villagers to explain why they cannot accept a National Park and are working to have legal standing in the forest. They claim that without legal standing, they are at the mercy of whatever forest official happens to see them collecting firewood or vegetables, or clearing land for cultivation. A village leader and member

of ABC in Ban Pracha told a village meeting that the law doesn't yet accept the farming of land by villagers, he explained that they don't have land rights.

The supremacy of law in forest conflicts is particularly troublesome given that most forest law in Thailand was developed, not for local circumstance, but in accordance with international norms of the time. One particularly progressive park official told me "that the law hasn't changed. The forestry laws are directly from Burma in the 1940s. Thailand hasn't decided in the present situation exactly what it needs from its laws." The community forest bill would be the most recent form of legislation and its difficulty in passing demonstrates just how many opinions there are in regards to what Thailand needs from its laws.

The general history of the RFD, complete with its scandals, is a source of distrust and a base from which villagers challenge the legitimacy of the RFD. Villagers and the ABC spoke frequently of how they managed the forest well before the RFD, that they did not require the RFD's help. Village spokespeople at district meetings state that the RFD is only 100 years old and that the villagers were present long before the RFD. Furthermore a number of my key informants recounted stories of corruption and misdeeds within the RFD. One story was how the head of a watershed unit diverted the village water source for his own needs, leaving the villagers with no water to irrigate their rice. Despite a number of appeals by the villagers RFD officials did little to correct the problem. Another was about the well-publicized Salween logging scandal where RFD officials were complicit in a poaching ring consisting of politically powerful people who arranged to illegally log in the national park, float the logs to Burma and re-import them to Thailand. The purpose of repeating these stories was to discredit the ability of the RFD to manage and to question their authority. Within this context, a village key informant often spoke of how the rich and powerful people can get away with breaking the law and the law was really only for the poor people. Local people are a long way from trusting such an institution with their livelihood.

Villagers saw the park primarily as a means, not of environmental management - a task they believe themselves better qualified than the RFD, but of ridding them of their land rights and benefiting the pocketbooks of RFD officials. As Wilshusen (2002:23) states, "protected areas are not necessarily understood as a means of providing ecological and economic services but rather as territorial control strategies". One villager told me that "if this becomes a park then the RFD will get 20-40- baht per *rai* of forest that they take care of (from the government) but really it's

the villagers who take care of it." Villagers also explained that the RFD just wanted their monthly salaries and that consequently RFD officials couldn't understand what it was like to not have money and to rely on farming.

While territorialization explains well the pattern of expansion associated with protected area establishment and the tightening of state control over forests and their inhabitants, it does not entirely explain actions at the local level. In fact there are some practices which are closer to pre-modern forest management. For instance, when asked about reasons for patrolling in particular sections of the park, enforcement guards and senior foresters answered that they patrol where there are economically valuable species. In addition, the one arrest that occurred during the 16 months of my research was for the hunting of a deer. The park official explained to me that while he is usually flexible for subsistence use of the forest, the deer is a protected species in Thailand and thus he had to charge the villagers responsible under the law. However, the same official routinely spoke about nearby villages in terms of their land use categorization. He explained how he would allow *phunthi tham kin* (land for agriculture), *phunthi thi yuu asai* (land for housing) and *phunthi sawan* (private land for permanent cultivation) but that the villages couldn't possibly manage the forest for conservation. State representatives at a local level thus appear to meld territorial and non-territorial management mechanisms.

The territorial activities that continue to have a place in RFD activity are primarily occupied with spatially enforcing the separation of people from forest and are thus the source of much conflict. The presence of villages within the park boundaries has largely been accepted by park administration and relocation is not spoken of as a serious alternative. Instead the pilot project is attempting to draw small buffer zones around each village, areas that will be considered 'outside' (though surrounded by) the park.

The demarcation of boundaries between what is park (forest) and what is village (not-forest) as well as the demarcation of within village land use categories use abstract space with static boundaries and homogenous rules. The latter is conducted in partnership with an NGO and consists of 5 categories: dwelling land, swidden land, permanent agriculture, conservation forest and community forest. When asked what part of the village land will the RFD want to include in the park the answer was consistently – "just the forest." It would appear that both conservation forest and community forest is vulnerable to inclusion in the park. While officials recognized that villagers currently need the forest for survival they hold a future vision of the area as state

forest with small holes of intensive agriculture; a vision of forest as separate from people. The vision is facilitated by a model of conservation adhering to an abstract notion of space and is conducive to centralized territorial control over forestland and resources.

The delineation of fixed boundaries in areas of dynamic and overlapping land use was the source of considerable inter- and intra- community conflict in both Ban Pracha and Ban Insom. In Ban Pracha, the forestry department wanted to establish a sub district station. The villagers insisted that the external boundaries of the village be demarcated first and then the sub-district station be located outside village land. Knowing that all land within the park was going to be off limits, the villagers insisted on maintaining all the land they currently used. This caused conflict, not only with the RFD, but also with a neighboring village with whom their village land overlapped. As of July 2002, the sub-district station had yet to be built. In Ban Insom, the external boundaries had been negotiated prior to my arrival, but the delineation of agricultural land as separate from forest was the cause of much inter household strife. The convention of delineating agricultural fields as belonging to one household sparked conflict between households who in the past had shared land. Furthermore, the question of delineating fallows that, after many years, resembled forest, caused fear of and conflict with the RFD. Villagers of Ban Insom needed to continue farming all the land they had in the past and yet were scared that the RFD would arrest them. They explained that rice yields decreased if they only allowed three years of fallow. Meanwhile the RFD wanted to decrease the amount of agricultural land and to allow old fallows to return to forest. The intention of imposing a spatial organization with fixed, homogeneous land use categories has failed to recognize places where villages or families share the land, it has also failed to recognize the efficacy of a shifting cultivation system in the absence of viable means of intensification. Furthermore the delineation of boundaries demarcating forest from not-forest reifies a conception of forest as necessarily uninhabited – a state that has not been reality in this area for over 200 years. The simple spatial form of conservation, conducive to territorial management, has intensified conflict in the inhabited forests of Northern Thailand.

Conclusion

This paper has contributed to the understanding of Thai forest management by tracing the origins of the simplistic spatial form of territorial conservation mechanisms. It also documented how the local perception of institutional history and the laws that were formed through colonial and global relationships play a role in village resistance to the expansion of protected areas.

Thailand's relationship to its colonial neighbors and later its global partners has undoubtedly shaped the evolution of forest management policy. Modern forest-making intertwined with modern state-making are territorial processes that produce fixed boundaries and homogenous conservation spaces. This history is interpreted in the highlands of Thailand, a site of contestation over forest resources, in such as way as to undermine the legitimacy of the Royal Forestry Department and to create mutual distrust amongst stakeholders vis-à-vis forest management. Local villagers believe the RFD to be seeking territorial control over their ancestral land and farmers are struggling under the associated simple spatial form of territorial management. They understand the presence of the RFD as serving the needs of the national and global commons to the detriment of the local commons.

Indeed, both resident farmers and RFD field staff are struggling within outdated legislation that was shaped through interaction with colonial neighbors and global partners. The tools of forest management, including the laws that regulate forest use and habitation, have been developed to facilitate centralized management for the good of the nation and are not suitable for a political context that demands that the needs of local forest inhabitants be met. Policy makers, in their development of forest legislation must ask the very question a park official asked – "what does Thailand want from its laws?" It is critical that the National Park Act, unaltered since 1961, and other relevant legislation be adapted to the current needs of Thailand. The RFD requires tools that not only allow local involvement but that facilitate local participation. Such tools would need to abandon the strict demarcation of fixed homogenous spaces for the purposes of centralized management and find a more complex spatial organization that reflects local needs and visions. Such a development is necessary in order for Thai forest relations to outgrow its legacy as a territorial institution serving the needs of the nation to the neglect of local needs and move towards a future where mutual trust and cooperation, not conflict, shape forest relations.

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