

Social Movement and the Natural Resources Management : A Study of the Anti Nam Chon Dam Movement (1982-1988)¹

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Abstract

The natural resources management in modern Thailand (so far) had been centralized by the state, which had inevitably led to structural violence. Communities and local groups people were excluded from access to natural resources, which traditionally were their communal right. This article aimed to study this issue based on a study of the anti-Nam Chon Dam movement in Kanchanaburi, 1982-1988. It found that the anti Nam Chon Dam Movement was a “New Social Movement” rising from the collective actions of various groups such as the local residents of Kanchanaburi, academics, students, Non Government Organizations (NGOs), etc..

Their activities focused largely on cultural aspects of the issue through the inventing discourses, inventing of tradition, and constructing of common identity. Finally the Nam Chon dam project was cancelled in 1988. It showed that “New Social Movement” was an important trend of people, who were taken their right, to find a solution to the resources management related to structural violence.

Key Words: new social movement; anti Nam Chon dam movement

¹ Most issues and contents are collected and revised from Ph.d. dissertation, Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, “Environmental movements in Thai society, 1982-1992: A study of the movements against Nam Chon, Kang Krung and Pak Mool Dam.” Nevertheless, due to the limitation of the article length, only some details of Nam Chon Dam and a movement against it are given.

Introduction

The Anti-Nam Chon Dam Movement organized by groups of people, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), students, mass media, etc. between 1982 and 1988 was a phenomenon considered by academics and NGOs as the origin of a comprehensive expansion of environmental awareness in Thai society². An explanation of this phenomenon in terms of an academic issue viewed the anti-Nam Chon dam movement as a pressure group demanding the government to terminate the Nam Chon Dam project³. Another explanation viewed the protest movement as discursive practices of nature and environment conservation knowledge, opening a stage for an academic contest among the project protesters until it became a precedent for anti-dam movement in subsequent periods⁴. This article attempted to understand and explain the Anti-Nam Chon Dam as a social movement related to a problem of violence stemming from the state-centralized natural resources management. It emphasizes the background of the problem and the characteristics of the movement and the formation of the protest groups demonstrated in the form of “a new social movement”. This aimed at pointing out the complexity of the problem of the state’s natural resources

² Tsuruyo Funastu, “Environmental Awareness in Thailand: “Institutionalization” of Environmental Problems and the State of the Save-Nature Boom,” in Seigeki Nishihira et. al., **Environmental Awareness in Developing Countries: The Case of China and Thailand** (Tokyo: Institution of Developing Economies, 1997), pp.169-172.

³ Panu Yamsri, “Influence and Power of Influential Environment Conservation Groups on the State’s Decision making: A Case Study of the Anti-Nam Chon Dam Construction between 1982 and 1986,” Master Thesis, Department of Government, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1988.

⁴ Kittiporn Jaibun, “Truth about Dams: A Study of Discourse Operations in Thai Society during the Period 1947-1994,” Master Thesis (Anthropology), Faculty of sociology and Anthropology, Thammasat University, 1995.

management as well as the formation of a new social movement as an opposition to the problem of natural resources management.

Violence in the Natural Resources Management by the Thai State

It was no exaggeration to state that since the establishment of the modern Thai state in the reign of King Rama V until 1957, the state's natural resources management was carried out with an idea that all natural resources belonged to the state, which had supreme authority in their management. Nonetheless, the extension of the state's authority to manage the resources during this period was not much. Subsequently, when Thailand stepped into a development process in accordance with the various five-year National Development Plans starting in the late 1950s onward, all natural resources had been allocated only for government monopoly. In this connection, the natural resources management has been viewed differently. Not only are natural resources regarded merely as the state's property but, based on a new management concept, they are exploited for the utmost benefit by the state for an economic expansion. In this regard, the state had extended its authority in order to intensively control the use of natural resources.

Similarly, the state had allowed groups of people with potential to exploit natural resources for the utmost benefit or efficiency while generating highest income for the state to access and fully utilize those resources. On the contrary, it did not visualize the value that natural resources have on daily life of a large number of people whose way of life is binding closely with the resources.⁵

⁵ Attachak Suttayanuruk, "Resources of the state and Properties of Communities," in Ruangvit Limpanat (editor), **Locality-India: Collected Academic Articles to Congratulate on the Occasion of Retirement of Associate Professor Paradee Mahakhan and Assistant Professor Nongkran Charoensawasdee** (Bangkok: Usa Publishing, 2000), pp.116-117.

Typically, a significant issue of the Thai state's natural resources management since an establishment of the modern state according to the aforesaid National Development Plans indicated that the state's resources management had been characterized by "structural violence." This meant that a socio-political system or structure had interrupted or even eliminated one's chance and potential or did not allow them to come as they should or were able to do. For instance, a number of people were starving despite the fact that Thailand was one of the top-ranking countries of the world which produce and export rice. Such a socio-political system or structure had existed for a long and continuing period of time and had been formed or produced and reproduced systematically.⁶

The Concept of the Modern Thai State (mid 1960s-mid 1970s)

Philip Stott's article stated in conformity with Paritta Chalermphao Koranantakul's research that the conventional Thai state had typically divided its areas into 2 parts. The first part was natural areas consisting of forests and mountains. The second part was cultural areas composing of villages and cities. On the whole, areas including their population had different status. For example, natural areas were special ones located beyond the scope of the state's sovereignty and were habitats of beasts, spirits, celestial beings as well as people who were not the state's citizens. On the other hand, cultural areas were those situated within the scope of the state's sovereignty which were roughly classified into 2 parts, namely, cities and villages. Cities were residences of the people who were important to the state such as the king, aristocrats,

⁶ Chaiwat Satha-Anand, **Challenge an Option between Violence and Non-violence**. (Bangkok: Komol Keemthong Foundation Publishing, 1990), pp.25-28.

noblemen and merchants. Villages were areas next to cities which were for the cities' economic production as well as the residences of ordinary people who were regarded as the state's citizens.⁷

It was worth noting that a significant theme of the concept concerning the conventional state's areas did not encourage the state to concentrate on establishing its power for an absolute control over its natural areas. Instead, the state claimed its authority over those areas only in theory, which did not have much impact in practice. Similarly, it appeared that the conventional state did not generally include the populations in natural areas to become its citizens under its sovereignty.

Subsequently, when there was an establishment of the modern Thai state in the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the concept regarding the state's areas and their populations had altered in a more complicated direction. First, the state classified its areas into natural areas (forests and mountains) and cultural areas (cities and villages). Second, the concept of the modern Thai state categorized its areas in another way, namely, public areas, which were solely owned and controlled by the state, as well as private areas, which were almost absolutely owned and managed by people. Meanwhile, the state's authority, in turn, backed up individual's right.⁸

The problem of the modern Thai state's concept lied with the fact that the second type of area classification would overlap the

⁷ Philip Stott, "Muang and Pa: elite views of nature in a changing Thailand," in Manas Chitakasem and Andrew Turton (eds.), **Thai Construction of Knowledge**. (London: SOAS, 1991), pp.145-146; Paritta Chalermphao Koranantakul, **Languages of Thai Painting, A Study of Pictures' Code and Socio-cultural Meanings of Buddhist Paintings in Early Rattanakosin Period**. (Bangkok: ThaiKadee Studies Institute, Thammasart University, 1993), pp.89-98.

⁸ Attachak Sattayanuruk, **Questions of the Era: Modern political History**. pp. 4-5 (duplicate Document).

first type. This resulted that natural and cultural areas had been defined as public areas under the state's sovereignty, and as private areas under individuals' management. Additionally, the state was also able to centralize its power in ruling and managing its territory.

It should be noted that the modern Thai state's area classification had made natural areas become peripheral areas while the people in the areas such as those on the highland (hill tribes) and coastal people (Morgan), etc. were defined as "the other". These people, therefore, could not have an access to the state's natural resources. Meanwhile, cultural areas became the regions which the state gave importance to and their populations were taken care of by the state. In addition, these people could access the state's natural resources since they had a status of citizenship.⁹

Undoubtedly, the modern Thai state's complicated concept of areas had certain influence on the country's development based on the National Economic and Social Development Plan (since 1961). The concept concentrated on the centralized natural resources management by the state through various state agencies and legislations that demonstrated the state's authority and individuals' right over parts of the areas. A discourse which was a major current of Thai society at that period defined the state's natural areas as peripheral ones, and their population as "the other" who could not have an access to the state's natural resources. This was well reflected in an explanation of the "hill tribes," who were said to have no obligation to the state and create problems to it since

⁹ Attachak Sattayanuruk, "From Outsiders to Peripheral People," **Silpawattanatham [Art and Culture]** 20:12 (October 1999):70; Thongchai Winichakul, "The Others Within: Travel and Proto-Ethnography in Siam 1880-1920," in Andrew Turton (ed.), **Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States** (London: Curzon Press, 2000), pp. 44-49.

they were the people responsible for illegal encroachment and deforestation as well as narcotic production¹⁰.

Furthermore, it was also found that an alienation of the state's population during its development period had added a more complex dimension in which the people were classified by the assets in possession including individuals' income. This implicitly made the definition of "the poor" as the other groups or factions and caused them to lose their capability to access and utilize natural resources, which were the state's common resources.¹¹

In other words, a concept of state's management of people in areas through an alienation policy at this period was a superimposed one between the two concepts, which caused an expulsion of the people in natural areas including "the poor," who might include both the people in natural areas and those in cultural areas who had lower assets and incomes than the criterion defined by the state. Such an expulsion resulted in these people's inability to access and exploit natural resources. It should also be stated here that the late 1960s was a period when the state's centralized natural resources management as well as the concept of areas and their population were reproduced and strengthened though there arose the incidence of October 14, 1973, which was a transitional period involved in the relation between the people and the state in many respects.

¹⁰ Pinkaew Lueng-Aramsri, "A Discourse on Hill tribes," **Sangkomsart [Social Science Journal]** Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai University 11:1 (July-December 1998): 114-126.

¹¹ Attachak Sattayanurak, "From Outsiders to Peripheral People," pp.69-75; Nithi Aewsriwong, **The Poor and the State's Impoverishment Policy** (Bangkok: The Committee on Development Dissemination and Promotion, 2000), pp.2-11, 65-73.

The Concept of “the state” from the late 1970s to the mid 1980s

It could be briefly stated that a major current discourse influencing the state’s concept between the late 1970s and the mid 1980s focused on an exploitation of natural resources for the country’s economic expansion which was part and parcel of the state’s resources management as well as area and people classification during the development period based on the National Plan. Though the state had attempted to raise the standard and well-being of the people in Thai society using the conditions of the national economic growth, the problem of people’s poverty did not still diminish while an economic disparity among various groups of people as well as between the people in urban and rural regions (cultural areas) continued to increase.¹²

Similarly, it was also found that the state between the late 1970s and the mid 1980s possessed a characteristic of a “market state” of which the decision making and policy implementation gave priority to a marketing reason over other reasons. Furthermore, the issues of political security and stability including political participation had to advocate a marketing purpose. Likewise, during this period, various interest groups also gained their political power through a political mechanism in the parliament as well as had an influence on formulating the state policies.¹³

Based on the state’s concept and implementation that gave the importance to and facilitated the interest of the economic capital

¹² **Three Decades of National Development** (Bangkok: Thai Military Bank Plc, 1993), pp. 97-99, 122-127 and 154-156.

¹³ Rungsan Thanapornpun, “Strategy-State Process: A Passage Way of Prejudice,” in **The truth about Poverty** (Bangkok: Task Force on Social Agenda, 2002), p.43; Chai-anan Samudavanija, **From nation-state to market state concept of the state and society in the age of globalization** (Bangkok: Banphra-atitra, 2001), 66-111.

groups, the latter were able to increasingly exploit natural resources and expand their right over private and public areas much more than local people or communities could do with natural resources in their areas. This kind of practice occurred in communities of the people in natural areas such as hill tribes, who were defined as others rather than Thai citizens by virtue of their ethnics and cultures.¹⁴

Certainly, the state's concept during this period of time had been produced and reproduced through its mechanism such as laws, an educational system, etc. A trace of this could be viewed from the state's concept of the centralized natural resources management in the National Environment Promotion and Conservation Act, 1978 (B.E. 2521) and 1979 (B.E. 2522), or the concept of the nation emphasizing Thaism (being Thais) and being citizens who strictly performed according to the state's concept without doubt or opinions different from the state, which appeared in a textbook.

A Social Movement and the Natural Resources Management : A Study of the Movement against the Nam Chon Dam, Kanchanaburi Province (1982-1988)

A social movement was the demanding movement of certain groups of people who need to solve problems or change society in the direction desirable or favorable to their groups. Typically, the participants had an obvious goal and a common determination

¹⁴ Pinkaew Luang-Aramsri, "The Body of Knowledge of Ecology of Agricultural Communities in Thung Yai Naresuan Sanctuary," Master Thesis, Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology, Thammasart University, 1991; Rattanaporn Sethakul et.al., **The Right of Local Hill tribe Communities in Northern Thailand-Past and Present: A Case Study and Problems** (Bangkok: Nitidhamma,2003).

or ideal that their movement will lead to societal changes in a desirable direction. Each group might have different levels of participation. With respect to a movement's originating process, it could be stated that the condition of the movement arises from social phenomena which make the movement groups feel frustrated since they do not receive justice resulting from a discrimination, leading to a common belief that there is a problem. Furthermore, if the discourse on such an issue escalates into a broad circle and increases the number of supporters, this can give a rise to a resource mobilization followed by an organization including strategic development and operations aimed to achieve the goal.¹⁵ In a social science academic circle, "a social movement" was classified into two types, namely, an old social movement and a new social movement. This was due to the fact that both types are different in the following aspects.¹⁶

¹⁵ Suvida Dhammanee Wong, "Social Movement," **Warasarn Aksornsart Mahawittalai Silpakorn [Art Journal of Silpakorn University]** 23:2 (December 2000 - May 2001): 33-34.

¹⁶ Compiled from Chairat Chareonsin-olan, **New Social Movement, Public Social Movement in Foreign Lands: A Survey of Its Development, Status and Thinking/Theoretical Implications for Democracy Development** (Bangkok: Center of Research and Textbook Production, Krirk University, 1997); Phasuk Pongpaichit et.al., **Way of Life, Fighting Approach and Contemporary Popular Movement** (Chiang Mai: Truswin (Silkworm Books), 2002), pp.6-21.

Major issue	Old social movement	New social movement
1. Movement group	Have base from any class particularly worker or farmers.	Come from various classes.
2. Goals	Directly overthrow, usurp or oppose state's authority.	Protect the public from a capitalist state's threat and hold high special character/identity of the movement group to gain acceptance. Not emphasize a direct over-throw of or opposition to state's authority.
3. Organizational pattern	A formal organization with an obvious line of command.	Grassroots network or movement.
4. Movement issue	Politics of particular group interest.	The masses' problems of life quality, individuals' right including obstruction of peripheral people from political and social participation.
5. Strategy	A demand for interest bargaining or establishment of a political party to achieve the goal.	Direct movement in a cultural dimension, not through a political mechanism.

A significant issue lied with the fact that a social movement used to confront the problem of structural violence incurred by the state's natural resources management. In another word, a social movement brought about in Thai society between the late 1970s and the late 1980s (1987) was a "new social movement," which could be seen in a movement to protest against the construction of Nam Chon dam in Kanchanaburi between 1982 and 1988.

A Protest against the construction of Nam Chon Dam in Kanchanaburi

First of all, it should be noted that the period between the late 1970s and the late 1980s was one of the construction of gigantic dams. In 1980 alone, the number of huge dams was increased to 10 compared to 1970 or the previous decade, when there were only 3 large dams. Subsequently, in 1991 or the following decade, the number of large dams was increased from 10 to 26 dams. Large dams constructed during this period were carried out by EGAT (Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand).¹⁷ Meanwhile, there were at least 8 middle and large-sized dams constructed and overseen by the Royal Irrigation Department. It can be stated that the dam project during this period was for the river basin regions which were natural catchment areas including natural resources in those river basins. Therefore, the dam construction would give first priority to river basin management, principally aiming at generating electricity.

On the one hand, the state's dam project had led to a problem of the project impacts on local communities, particularly the problem of land use and management. This was because, for any large dam construction, local communities would have to be evacuated from the project site, which was normally a fertile area, while the new land allocated to evacuated communities was, more often than not, not appropriate for them to earn a living. Besides, small-scale agriculturists in the area under the dam basically lost their land to the private sector's business that in fluxed into the area to exploit an infrastructural system provided by the state for

¹⁷ David Murey, **Dams: A Cause of Conflicts in Thai Society**, Translated by Kannika Promsao (Bangkok: The Committee on Development Dissemination and Promotion, 1993), pp.5-8.

the dam construction.¹⁸ Additionally, a problem might sometimes stem from the project implementation without a survey of its impact or from merely a perfunctory survey lacking any detail.¹⁹ In a worst-case scenario, a report on the environmental impact assessment (EIA) might be concealed to hamper public acknowledgement before the project commencement.²⁰ (Such an act is regarded as against the National Environment Promotion and Conservation Act, Volume 2, B.E.1978 stipulating for a report on EIA for a state project- the author).

The Nam Chon Dam project in Kanchanaburi province was one of the mega-dam projects initiated for the Kwae Yai basin development plan. According to the EGAT project, Nam Chon Dam would be constructed as a “multi-purpose dam” which directly yielded power energy and other remunerations such as agricultural and economic ones. The project first started in 1965 and a feasibility survey was made in 1972. Subsequently, EGAT asked for an approval for the dam construction apart from revising an implementation plan on environmental impacts in order to build the dam between 1981 and 1982.²¹ (It was worth noting that since EGAT proposed a plan to eliminate the problem of environmental impact of the Nam Chon Dam project to demand an approval for

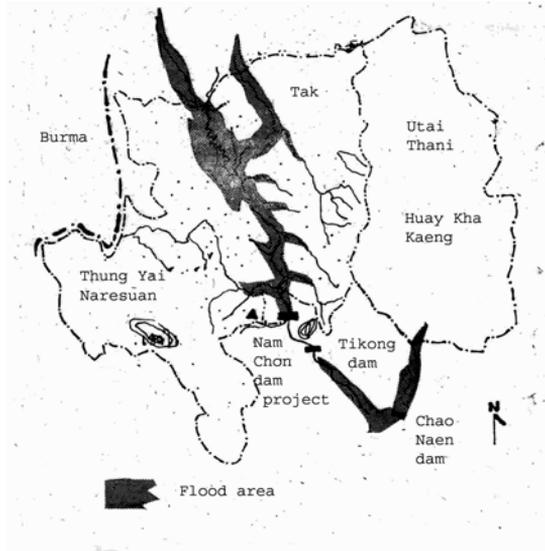
¹⁸ Vitoon Punyakul, “Impacts of Large Dams on Land Problems: Certain Respective of Local people,” in **Dams and People’s Loss of Lands, A Case of Bhumiphol, Chiew Lan and Pak Moon Dams** (Bangkok: Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University and NGO Coordination Group for Rural Development, 1991), pp.10-24.

¹⁹ Chainarong Sethchua, “Political Ecology of Large dam Construction in Thailand: A Case Study of Kang Sue Ten Dam Project,” Master Thesis (Management of Human and the Environment), Faculty of Graduate Studies, Chiang Mai University, 2000, p.91.

²⁰ David murey, *op.cit.*, 8-9.

²¹ Please see details in **Nam Chon Dam, National Development in a Wrong Direction (Ruins of Life and Nature)** (Bangkok: The Committees on Natural Resources and Environment Conservation of 15 Institutes, 1987), pp.6-7.

the construction, there had been a continuous protest against it during the period between 1982 and 1988)



Anti-Nam Chon Dam Groups 1982-1988

The anti- Nam Chon Dam movement emerging between 1982 and 1983 was a gathering of such groups as 1) officials of the Forestry Department, 2) some members of the parliament (MP) led by MPs of Kanchanaburi, 3) the Prime Minister's advisory board, 4) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Siam Environment Club, Forest Admiration Society and Arts and Environment Conservation Society, 5) students, 6) people in the project site and neighboring area, and 7) mass media.

In respect of time, a protest report against the Nam Chon dam project made by the Director of Wild Life Conservation Division, Royal Forest Department (Mr. Pairoj Suwannakul) as well as an urgent letter of the Forest Office of Ban Pong submitted to the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) to put an end to clearing a forest for the construction of Nam Chon Dam were regarded as the origin of the anti-Nam Chon dam movement

of other protest groups in subsequent periods²². Nonetheless, the groups that had been the key to protest since an initial period of the movement were composed of students²³ and social activists who were members of NGOs. Both groups played a significant role in mobilizing protesters due to the fact that they assumed an important part in a number of NGOs and used personal relation to draw a person or groups to their side²⁴

With regard to an organization of the anti-Nam Chon Dam movement, the gathering of the protest groups was a loose one and lacked unity or solidarity. A coordination among different groups was made only at some points because each group differed in its detail²⁵. Nevertheless, these numerous groups could connect to one another through such a major common theme as 1) a problem of damage caused to forests and wildlife in Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Conservation Zone, 2) impacts on the people's agriculture and way of life in case Nam Chon dam was constructed, 3) problems of dam leakage and earthquake in the wake of dam construction, 4) archeological impacts, 5) damages caused to mineral resources and 6) only one-side benefit of the dam in generating electricity, and power generation by other energy sources.

The protests between 1985 and 1988 were regarded as a serious movement of a wide variety groups of people once again. The protest groups still consisted of 1) local residents of Kanchanaburi, 2) MPs of Kanchanaburi, 3) students, 4) Non Government Organizations (NGOs), 5) officials of Royal Forest Department and 6) mass media. Additionally, there were also

²² Panu Yamsri, op.cit., p.48.

²³ Interview with Wanchai Tantivittayapitak, Managing editor of Sarakadee Magazine, 22 february 2006.

²⁴ Suparb Lekakul et.al. (editors), **The Struggle and Works of Doctor Boonsong Lekakul** (Bangkok: Dansuttha Publishing Company,1992), p.139; Panu Yamsri, op.cit., pp.66,82.

²⁵ Panu Yamsri, op.cit., p.48.

new groups of protesters such as academics and international conservationists. An interesting issue was that of local residents of Kanchanaburi between 1985 and 1988, when the Karen ethnic group, who had been living in Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Conservation Zone and would have to be evacuated out of the land on which they earned their living to pave the way for dam construction, emerged and obviously protested against the construction. Of course, they joined with Kanchanaburi's local people who were aware of the impacts and the risks of Nam Chon dam construction²⁶.

Another interesting issue was that NGOs had played a significant role in opposing the Nam Chon Dam project between 1985 and 1988. It was found that the Life and Nature Revival Project, which was an NGO originating from the gathering of former students who had conducted environment conservation activities and social activists who sought a way to resolve society's problems and were led by Vitoon Permpongsachareon, the founder and former director of the project, had pushed forward an establishment of the environment conservation group in Kanchanaburi. Vitoon's activities were based on his background as a Kanchanaburi resident and his kin network in the province, particularly a kin who was the chairman of the Provincial Council of Kanchanaburi. In addition, he coordinated with students through his background as an activist student carrying out environment conservation activities during his college years. Similarly, he also worked closely with the Karen by visiting Thung Yai Naresuan area in order to talk to as well as elicit opinions and data from the Karen²⁷.

²⁶ Srisuwan Kuankhajon, "NGOs and Democracy in Thailand," in Sangsit Piriyaarangsun and Pasuk Pongpaichit (editors), **Awareness and Ideology of Contemporary Popular Movement** (Bangkok: Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University, 1996), pp.164-165.

²⁷ Interview with Vitoon Permpongsachareon, the founder and former director of the Life and Nature Revival Project, 14 June 2005.

Concerning the movement organization in this period, the various groups of protesters still had a loose gathering based on such common protesting themes as 1) the damage caused to flora and fauna, 2) an earthquake and 3) only one-side benefit of the dam to be constructed and power generation from other energy sources. These themes helped link a variety of people together. It was worth noting that the key to an organization of the anti-Nam Chon Dam movement between 1985 and 1988 was typically based on the concept of civil society and learning experiences of environmental awareness in foreign countries, for instance, the Chipko Movement in India. It had been found that a strategic approach of the Life and Nature Revival Project was derived from the knowledge of civil society concept and experiences of foreign environmental movements, including from a conclusion of lessons on the failure of the student movements after Thailand's October 14, 1973 incidence and the disintegration of Communist Party of Thailand²⁸. Meanwhile, the mass media on the environment had agreed and advocated the course of movement that opened a dimension for all parties to take part and be aware of the environment conservation²⁹. Apparently, the coordination on strategic approach of NGOs and the mass media was the force affecting society when we took into account a communicative action by which a public sphere was created for discourses of social problems with a sense of public and popular politics through a process of public hearing or a common understanding among different groups in society³⁰

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Interview with Wanchai Tantivittayapitak, Managing editor of Sarakadee Magazine, 22 february 2006

³⁰ Jurgen Habermas, **The Theory of communicative Action Vol.1 Reason and the Rationalization of society**, Thomas McCarty (trans.) (Boston: Beacon Press,1984); L. Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, **Civil society and Political Theory** (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992).

Strategies for Protesting Movement

Anti Nam Chon Dam movement of various groups of protesters between 1982-1988 was implemented in different patterns, namely,

1. To push forward proposals to induce those authorized to make a decision to relinquish the project, which might be regarded as lobbying.

2. A protest through legal procedures in order to bring in a lawsuit against EGAT, which trespassed upon the national forest reserve and park to cut down trees and construct a road without getting permission from the Forestry Department. This included a demand to have nature preservation groups take part in an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the state's projects.

3. **To put questions and challenge the “development”** A significant characteristic of a dam project constructed or to be constructed since the late 1950s was that most dam projects were or would be built in the shape of multi-purpose dams and were typically regarded as a “symbol of country development” as well as were the infrastructure that the state had to materialize.³¹

Nam Chon Dam was one of the state's efforts to build the infrastructure perceived to be a symbol of country development. Protesters had posed questions on the national development. For example, students protesting against the dam construction had expressed their views in local newspapers' articles, indicating that EGAT's electricity generation policy was mainly attributed to the need for power energy to support an industrial expansion but it ignored environmental issues and other impacts. The students also pointed out that dams were typically not so efficient as mapped out in a plan since the calculation and survey for them were, in effect, roughly made. Above all, only some groups of people

³¹ Kittiporn Jaibun, “Truth about Dams: A Study of Discourse Operations in Thai Society during the Period 1947-1994,” pp.34-41.

derived considerable numbers of benefits from the dams built whereas a number of people inevitably suffered from them.

4. To create awareness through ceremonies. It was found that an activity in the form of a ceremony based on religious beliefs was one of the tactics used by protesters. For instance, a group of students got group ordained, which was regarded as a performance of the ceremony of supernatural arts (occultism) to offer a sacrifice to the spirit of King Naresuan (a great Thai king during Ayutthaya period) so that it might hamper or stop the dam construction. After entering monk hood, this group of students went on pilgrimage and gave a sermon on adverse impacts of dam construction for public acknowledgement.

It was worth noting that the students' group ordination seemed to be incongruous in itself since it was a performance of Buddhist rite as a supernatural arts ceremony. This was because basically, a Buddhist belief typically separated Buddhism from occultism. At any rate, it could be remarked that the students' activity was based on a good understanding of a religious system of Thai society, that the society's religious system was complicated but Buddhism and occultism went well together. In effect, Buddhism is a belief and principles of conduct that were most esteemed. Meanwhile, it had annexed supernatural arts (occultism) as its own sub-system as well as functioned as a link for communities and a variety of groups of people as a united and stable social system. In addition, as far as Buddhist ceremonies were concerned, an ordination ceremony was a significant one that pointed out Buddhism's supreme morality principle, and a symbol of an alternation of status of an ordinary man to a Buddhist monk, who was regarded as superior to the former since he had extricated himself from worldly affairs.³² Consequently, the protesters had

³² Thomas A. Kirsch, "The Complexity in a Thai Religious System," Translated by Bunjira Thuengsuk, **Jullasarn Thaikhadeesuksa [Journal of Thai Studies]** 3:2-3 (August 1985): 7-48.

an implication of inducing other people to agree with the protesters and join together, with an ordination ceremony functioning as a medium. Moreover, the credibility of the protesters' explanation was enhanced because it was a sermon of Buddhist monks.

Furthermore, it was found that the academics, students and local people had been of one accord to erect a temporary shrine to offer a sacrifice to the spirit of King Naresuan at a fork in the road which EGAT had made between Sri Nakin dam and Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Reserve zone. This phenomenon could be said to be an invention tradition aimed to protest the dam construction. Virtually, a sacrifice had a status of an "invented tradition" in the shape of a rite or symbol which sought to foster certain values and traditions for the society so that it repeated and carried on those traditions since they typically had a place in the history of each community. Meanwhile, such traditions, in themselves, were engendered in response to new circumstances of the society during a period of time or those of the current society.³³

The above discussion was made since, for an erection of a temporary sacrifice shrine, the protesters stated that they wanted to "bring forth the spirit of the King **to help protect the wildlife reserve zone on his behalf** to exist as a national treasure forever" and "as a legacy of Thai off springs like when he (the King) had devoted himself to redeeming the country's independence".³⁴ Based on an official historical fact, the Thung Yai forest was declared, in April 1974 to be the "Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Reserve zone"

³³ Eric Hobsbawn, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (eds.), **The Invention of Tradition** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp.1-14.

³⁴ **Dams in Kanchanaburi: Earthquake and Surrounding Impacts**. A Document for a Thorough Understanding and Protection of the People's Interests, October 1986, p. 43 (duplicated document) (emphasized by the author).

so as to uphold the honor of King Naresuan the Great, who moved forces through this region in the old days. Accordingly, it could not be linked directly that there had been a long relation since the past, based on the linkage between a historical place of Thung Yai forest and an event of King Naresuan during the Ayuttaya period, via an official fact.

5. To build the identity of protesters The protesters had established their common identity or self-definition in a pattern different from an identity determined by the state. This could be reflected in the Karen community in the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Reserve zone, who had defined themselves by pointing out that their lifestyle was based on nature and so they did not behave themselves in a way that would cause damage to it (nature), which was a custom or lifestyle that was the “ancestors’ teaching.”³⁵ On the contrary, the identity of Karen defined and reproduced by the state had described Karen and other groups living on the highland as “the others” and earned a living by shift farming resulting in the devastation of forest areas.

Similarly, it was also found that a faction of the anti-Nam Chon Dam movement had created its own identity as the country’s citizens who, unlike other groups of people, were discriminated or not treated as citizens that had the right to express their opinions as to the state’s projects (here was a dam project). These people felt that the government should listen to them and give importance to their voice (right) though it was just a “minority” like those citizens considered as a “majority” by the state.³⁶ Meanwhile, the citizen’s identity defined by the state particularly that in an

³⁵ Pinkaew Lueng-Aramsri, “ The Body of knowledge on Ecology....,” pp.69-98 and 124-131.

³⁶ **Stop...Nam Chon Dam...It Should Not Be Built.** A document disseminated for a true understanding and a protection of the nation’s interests, February 1983, pp.33-34 (duplicated document).

elementary school book during the period 1978-1990 did not mention or describe the meaning of a “citizen.” Neither did it refer to human rights or the derivation and preservation of citizens’ right or human rights. Instead, the book merely explained the relations between the “people” and the state, indicating that the people were those reasonable and respecting the majority’s decision making as well as fully giving a cooperation to the state.³⁷

Needless to say, a definition of citizenship of anti-Nam Chon dam groups had revealed a problem of the majority depriving the minority of their rights. In this regard, the former stated that the deprivation of the minority’s rights was carried out for the benefits of the majority or national interests. In other words, such a problem was characterized by the fact that the interests of a minority elite group (in term of quantity) were made the majority whereas different opinions were made the minority.³⁸

6. To present discourses Protesters of Nam Chon Dam had presented discourses opposing the dam construction and having data and technical reasons to support them. This was apparently reflected in an issue of Nam Chon dam’s advantages, which were rejected by the students. They explained that though the dam was said to be a multi-purpose dam fraught with advantages but in fact, it was used only to generate electricity and had no other benefits. The dam construction would inevitably contribute to an annihilation of forests which were sources of rain. Additionally, if there was not adequate water in the dam to generate electricity, it would not be possible to release water beneath the dam.³⁹

³⁷ Lakkana Punvichai, “Ideology of the Thai State in Textbooks for Elementary Education 1921-1990: No “Country of the Thai People” in Textbooks,” **Rathasartsarn [Political Science Message]** 21:3 (1999): 150-153.

³⁸ Kasian Techapeera, **Problems of Democracy: Identity, Majority, Right and Justice**, pp. 5-6. (Duplicated document).

³⁹ **Nam Chon Dam: National Development in a Wrong Direction...**, p.12.

Concerning the problem of earthquake, Dr. Nart Tuntavirun, an academic who disagreed to Nam Chon Dam construction, pointed out that the construction would only cause an earthquake particularly in Kanchanaburi province, where there were a large number of dams built, since it was an area of fault zones and a prodigious amount of water from the dam would press upon the narrow areas of the aforesaid zones.⁴⁰ (It should also be noted that while the protesters were presenting discourses in their opposition, the project supporters argued to the protesters' discourses by presenting ones opposite to them so as to disprove them.)

Of course, what needed to be stressed here was that the strategies applied to the protest of Nam Chon Dam as discussed earlier revealed a significant feature of a "new social movement". They demonstrated the movement to wrest for itself a leadership for the creation of a new series of definitions or meanings ("development," groups on the move) without falling under the state's conditions, rules and discourses. Above all, they (strategies) gave importance to an issue of culture (activities in the forms of ceremonies and invention traditions, as well as a presentation of academic discourses), which was an outstanding point of a new social movement and enabled it to earn a current status.⁴¹

Consequences of the Opposition to Nam Chon Dam Construction and Finding of the Study

The anti-Nam Chon dam movement was a success to a certain extent. In 1988, there was a suspension of the dam project,

⁴⁰ **Dams in Kanchanaburi, an Earthquake...**, pp.50-51.

⁴¹ Chairat Charoensin-olan, **Development Discourse: Power, Knowledge, Truth, Identity and the Otherwise**. Third edition (Bangkok: Wipasa,2002), pp.121-132.

which made villagers and NGOs rather satisfied and quit their protests. The students, on the other hand, did not consider their movement an achievement since their principal objective was to have the government entirely cancel the project, not just suspend it⁴².

In other words, the protesters' movement was fruitful at the level of an immediate problem solution, which meant a suspension of Nam Chon Dam construction. However, it did not lead to a direct alteration of power structure of natural resources management between the state and its population. Nonetheless, the concept of a new social movement might be considered based on four following conditions or components. 1) Protest participants realized their status as actors, not just witnesses or observers. 2) Protesters were aware who were friends or foes and what was to be eliminated. 3) Protesters were cognizant of the 2 aforesaid conditions and able to imagine future society.⁴³ 4) To establish the "citizenship" by glorifying the movement groups' individuality so that they were accepted to generate their social position and exercise their right to civil disobedience of the state⁴⁴. It should be noted that the anti-Nam Chon dam movement during 1982 through 1988 was a success as this was reflected in the protest activities demonstrating either one of the aforementioned attributes (conditions).

Furthermore, the anti-Nam Chon Dam movement also served as a model of a social movement fighting against and bargained with the dam project, which was part of structural violence

⁴² Interview with Vitoon Permpongsachareon, the founder and former director of the Life and Nature Revival Project, 14 June 2005.

⁴³ Nalinee Tunthuvanich, "A review "Popular Movements in the countryside since 1987: Success/Failure and Impacts," in Nuannoi Trirattana (editor), **Democracy, Popular Rights and Good Governance** (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2004), p.77.

⁴⁴ Chairat Charoensin-olan, **A Social Movement...**, pp.47-57.

incurred by the state's natural resources management which had been continued and developed for a long period of time from the establishment of a modern Thai state to the period of national development based on the national economic and social development plans. It was revealed that after the anti-Nam Chon dam movement had terminated in 1988, there were other movements of rural people affected by other dam projects initiated before Nam Chon dam to demand for justice since they were all adversely impacted by these projects⁴⁵.

At any rate, an accomplishment of the anti-Nam Chon Dam movement did not pave the way for an achievement of other social movement that protested against dam projects in subsequent periods. There were some cases in which anti-dam construction prevailed, for example, the anti-Kaeng Krung Dam in Surat Thani (1989-1990). It was found that the anti-Kaeng Krung Dam movement was also a new social movement similar to that of anti-Nam Chon Dam. However, the Kaeng Krung Dam project was finally cancelled through a specific political condition of Gen.Chatchai Choonhawan's government, which had earlier planned to issue a law to abrogate the forestry concession throughout the country⁴⁶, apart from the coup d'état in February 1991⁴⁷. Unlike its predecessor, the anti-Pak Mul Dam movement in Ubon Ratchathani, another new social movement proceeding continuously for nearly two decades beginning in the late 1980s through the late 1990s, was unable to terminate or even suspend the dam project while the project was ultimately completed and opened for operation.

The findings of the study on the anti-Nam Chon Dam movement in Kanchanaburi, as presented in this article in

⁴⁵ Chainarong Sethchua, op.cit., pp.116-117.

⁴⁶ **Maticchon** (7 January 1989).

⁴⁷ Kittiporn Jaibun, op.cit., p.64.

anthropological history dimension , did not reveal an evaluation of success or failure of a social movement opposing dam construction. However, it did reveal the relation between a new social movement emphasizing a cultural dimension, and structural violence stemming from the state's natural resources management, as proposed by Gene sharp, a professor in political science and sociology. Sharp argued that non-violent actions in such forms as protest, demonstration, etc. were powerful fighting approaches used to confront with a ruler's power structure while engendering an alteration of social viewpoints of the opponents of non-violent actions⁴⁸. Another line of thought on this matter belonged to Anthony Giddens, a German sociologist, who argued that social production and reproduction were activities establishing society's formalities and human being's daily course of life. Besides, they were activities that made both the formalities and human daily life continue for a long period of time, and that were used to alter social structure⁴⁹.

It could be seen that, based on the case of the anti-Nam Chon Dam movement, a new social movement stressing cultural activities and non-violent actions did not directly contribute to a change in the state's concept of centralized natural resources management. Nevertheless, an alteration was made on some points, for example, the state became aware of a social movement's strength and did not want to be engaged in a conflict with protesters having a solid gathering⁵⁰ (in the state's view). Meanwhile, we could see dam protesters' procedure of social production and reproduction

⁴⁸ Gene Sharp, **Power, Struggle, and Defence**, Translated into Thai by Chaiwat Satha-Anand and Komsan Hutapat (Bangkok: Komolkeamthong Foundation, 1986), pp.3-210.

⁴⁹ Anthony Giddens, **The Constitution of Society** (Cambridge: Polity, 1984), pp.23-25.

⁵⁰ "Stop Nam Chon Dam (temporary), Reveal EGAT's Strategy-Have to Build for Dignity," **Siamrath Weekly Review** 34:41 (27 March-2 April 1988): 10.

to discipline society and human beings' daily way of life. This was a reversal of the state's social production and reproduction which had proceeded consistently from the start of a modern Thai state to the late 1980s- the 1990s , and it would turn out as the people's formalities and daily course of life generated in relation to local norms. Definitely, it would be an exit from the centralized natural resources management structure which the state and a capitalistic system had implemented in a complicated manner.

In other words, the anti-Nam Chon Dam movement typically revealed a state of rebuttal for social hegemony and domination corresponding to Antonio Gramsci's concept of counter hegemonic movement⁵¹ and that of Arturo Escobar on the third world's encountering development⁵². This could, more or less, indicate an understanding of Thai society through a study of its specific attributes in combination with an adaptation to the concepts of neo-Marxist and the third world development, including through a comparative study of Thai society and third world societies.

⁵¹ Antonio Gramsci, **Selections from the prison Notebooks**, Edited and translated by Quinting Hoase and Geoffrey N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

⁵² Arturo Escobar, **Encountering Development: the making and unmaking of the third world** (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).

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