PROTECTED AREAS / CULTURE PROTECTED AREAS: SOCIAL MOVEMENT ON HOPES AND CHALLENGES OF ETHNIC GROUP

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ABSTRACT

This article tends to explain “Protected Areas” through ideas and discourses on “Conservation” along with the expansion of government power through institutional mechanisms and power-claim structures for comprehensive and intensive control including the management of natural resources, to conserve natural resources under the mainstream ecology knowledge. But it lacks a cultural dimension and pushes people out of the forest. This affects the livelihoods of communities living in forests and relying on forests for their cultural livelihoods, especially ethnic groups who practice rotational farming. Therefore, the movement effort to create “Culture Protected Areas” are the hopes and also challenges for the opening up a social space for ethnic networks that seek to create new mechanisms for protecting intangible cultural heritage. Allowing ethnic groups that live in the forest to live in a cultural way, which is an important cost for self-reliance with dignity. Hence Participate in eco-cultural resource management for ecological and social justice

I. INTRODUCTION

Thailand has about 60 ethnic groups with a total population of about 6 million or about 10% of the country’s population. The Thai ethnic group has their unique cultural identity and they possess their unique local wisdom and knowledge, that serves as the cultural capital of the nation, which should be protected, promoted and restored in the cultural way of life. But the lack of understanding of the culture of most people in society has become a cultural bias that affects the image of ethnic groups. And this ethnic bias also leads people in society to misunderstand that ethnic groups are destroying forests and natural resources, based on a lack of understanding of the agricultural methods and the local wisdom of ethnic groups on the highlands, where they focus on shifting cultivation methods. This plays an important role in maintaining and balancing natural resources. This misconception and ethnographic prejudice are causing problems for ethnic groups in many dimensions both at the level of access to fundamental rights as a citizen of a nation, losing of cultural right to maintain one's cultural identity, risk of losing identity and cultural wisdom, which is an important cost of self-reliance with dignity. (Kymlicka, W. 1995; Keyes, C. F. 1997; Senakham, T. 2004; Mills, M. B. 2012; Sunanta, S. 2020).

In addition, the current situation of forest resource management in Thailand after the expansion of government power over various territories, declaration of forest areas in the country as “Protected Areas” for conservation, such as declaring a park/wildlife sanctuary through institutional mechanisms, with the classification of forests into different types along with the determination of comprehensive and intensive management including control measures. Therefore, this affects indigenous communities that live in forests and rely on forests for their livelihood, most especially ethnic groups. In addition, laws were used to pressure communities out of the forest. Thus, this turns out to be a multidimensional complex problem. Especially the conflict between the people in the community and the government officials, that never end and there is more tendency the problems will become more serious.

Although the Thai constitution promotes and protects the rights of communities to access natural resources, the constitution enables communities the right to conserve, restore or promote their local wisdom. They can manage, maintain and utilize natural resources and even though the ethnic group networks try to push the government's resolution on the policy of restoring the way of life of Karen ethnic groups on August 3, 2010, on the principle of
acceptance and protection of ethnic cultural identity and to promote the community's right to access resources, by assigning relevant agencies to implement policies and practices for restoring Karen people's way of life. But in the past, both the Constitution and the aforementioned Cabinet resolutions did not affect real practice.

“Cultural Protected Areas” is, therefore, a social movement that seeks to create a new mechanism for collective resource management between the government and the community. To enable ethnic groups living in the forest to live according to their culture and communities are protected, stable in arable land and housing, allow them access to resources according to cultural rights, allow them to use cultural knowledge which is an important capital for self-reliance with dignity. Therefore, cultural protected areas are the hope and also the challenge of communities and agencies involved in the joint management of natural resources. Hence, will lead to ecological sustainability and environmental fairness

II. THE IDEA OF “PROTECTED AREAS” FROM A POLITICAL - ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

The studying and understanding of “Protected Areas” from a political-economic perspective through a review of ideas and arguments about protected areas. Both in anthropology, political ecology, and cultural ecology that develops an interest in the relationship between man and nature from the idea of "Protected Area" as a phenomenon of thought and practice, "Conservation", both at the global level and the ground level, as well as influential impact “Cultural Areas” of the communities living traditionally. There is power disparity in the claim of access to resources until it became a class conflict, spread and causes alienation around the world, which was extended to regional and local levels as well as ethnic groups that maintain a cultural lifestyle that interacts with nature.

Protected area formation scenarios occur around the world by trying to raise the issue of deforestation and large-scale cultivation industry or plantation as well as various development projects related to forest destruction. This is an important issue of debate at the international level, in terms of social inequality at the national level, transnational and cross-regional levels. Environmental change, biodiversity loss, natural extinction of living things, including the issue of development discourse and conservation (Sereeak, K. 2020; Kaiyurawong, S. & Kuaycharoen. P. 2005). However, from the 1970s to the 1990s, the concept of “sustainable development” became a keyword of the era. The controversy has shifted away from the "conflict" between "protected areas and the people,” also known as (Parks-Versus-People) and “Development and Conservation” that lead to another question: How will development and conservation go hand-in-hand both rhetorically and in practice, and how will local people participate in conservation? and respect for cultural rights to how to benefit from concurrent development, etc. (Bryant and Parnwell 1996; Colchester 1999; Dove, Sajise, and Doolittle 2005; Orlove and Brush 1996; West, Igoe, and Brockington 2006; Ek-Iem, B. 2021).

Expansion of the idea and practice of “Protected Areas” as a Social Phenomenon. It appears quantitatively to areas around the world with complex relationships involving ecological issues. Biodiversity, the relationship between conservation and development, human relationship with nature, local knowledge, right and access to resources, mechanism and power of government and international law are all associated with the exponential expansion of protected area declarations, sanctuaries, or parks around the world since the 1970s and reaches its peak between 1985 and 1995 (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008; Orlove and Brush 1996; West, Igoe, and Brockington 2006). As a result of this phenomenon, rapidly expanding protected areas have had economic, political, social and cultural impacts, which has various natural environment conservation projects followed by many others, which focus on related issues on Environmentalism. Therefore, protected areas, are an important area full of social production and social interaction, which have power relations behind them. Hence, the emergence of protected areas has influenced the transformation of territories around the world through Western discourses, practices and institutions of conservation that influence and dominate other ways of thinking, until the process of separating people from the environment, change natural resources into commodities and also change indigenous people into labour (West, Igoe, and Brockington 2006).

Political economics is about the relationship between people in society, full of material benefits and the economic status of each group. Among the social conditions with different classes and interests, such as the forest where the community is located. It is a resource site for food storage and food production. In the agricultural society of the primitive era, there was no social class division. The exploitation of humans and nature has not yet occurred, causing people in the society to cultivate on a piece of land temporarily and must be rotated to other people for
cultivation. At that time that piece of land/area is not in the personal ownership of anyone, and that is a common characteristic of agricultural societies in the primitive era all over the world (Kaewthep, K. 2020:10 -11: An Introduction. to Marxism). In addition to human interaction with nature, there are social, custom, and cultural patterns associated with wildlife. Because the reality is that the social world and the natural world are not separated from each other. Equality and interconnectedness in the economy, society and politics (Piampongsan, P. 1998; Santasombut, Y., Sathaarnun, C. & Tangsrifa, D. 2008, Shangmao C., 2021).

The perspective of political economics on “Protected Areas” amid a society with different classes, and differences in interests, what will be protected, who has the power to protect, the protected area is based on the interests of which classes, and who is suppressed and affected from the aforementioned protected areas, amid a class and alienated society. Political economics, therefore, tend to delve deeper into the roots / expose the structural causes that are the problem of domination or oppression, open new areas to explain to the community or the oppressed and search for the truth, which will lead to new practices and help achieve social justice (Piampongsarn, the P. 2014; Sretthachau, C. All 2016; Piampongsan, P. 2018). In addition, there must be an understanding and importance of community or cultural rights. The importance of people and nature as well as social and political movements on ecological and social justice.

III. POLITICAL ECOLOGY ECO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE ON NATURE AND HUMAN

In October 2007, “Eco-socialist International Network (EIN) gathered in Paris. EIN is a group that believes in a new green socialist system, decentralization, and people participation, and no proletarian party. This group believes that Global environmental crises are all products of capitalism, because of the problem of destroying nature and the environment and they believe that the only way to solve the global environmental crisis, is to uproot the capitalist system. Apart from that, they also believe that they must move to seek a new society or a new alternative society. But the key principle is to be based on social justice, by focusing on reducing inequality, reduce the gap between the poor and the rich, also ecological fairness must be taken into account. That is, protect and conserve the world's ecosystems and community culture must also be protected. (Piampongsarn, P. 2014, Pengjan, S. 2020).

Preecha Piampongsarn (2014) cited the article Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics (2012) J.P. Clark, a contemporary political ecologist, that two main factors drive people's attention. “Political Ecology” in this 21st century is more

1. Global Environmental Crisis and the loss of biodiversity

2. The global multi-disciplinary green movement against ecological destruction including the movement for environmental justice. (Environmental Justice Movement)

However, the development of eco-political, ecological thinking took shape in 1988, citing the scholarly work Capitalism Nature Socialism by James O’ Connor, along with the introduction of the first volume entitled The Second contradiction of Capitalism, it’s an analysis of production conditions according to Karl H. Marx’s that must contain the dimensions of nature and the environment, then understand the ecological and environmental crises which is an important new paradox in capitalism. This kind of crisis needs to be solved and there should be a change in the production relations and the productive power of capitalism (Piampongsarn, P. 2014). Competition in a capitalist world has driven widespread destruction of the environment and social communities. Both nature and human culture are heavily exploited, either locally and globally including various ethnic groups. There is only one solution to this problem, which is to use political strategies to create A “new socialist state” that considers ecological limitations and social justice.

In terms of the management of natural resources since the 19th century, mainstream ecology has been a source of discourse on the conservation of natural resources and the environment, under scientific rules that see nature as separate from people. This concept has become an integral part of many governments around the world, including Thailand. They established a policy for the management of protected forest, and conservation areas without human beings, communities in the forest are seen as aliens to nature, shifting cultivation methods are seen as a threat to deforestation and that was the origin of the policy of evacuating people from the forest in many areas. This, however, affects the cultural way of the community or ethnic group amid environmentalism. The policy of determining a policy to expand conservation forest areas without allowing communities to live in, on the one hand, was accepted by the people, naturalist organizations, and environmentalism. But on the other side, this policy has also afflicted many communities and ethnic groups living in the forest. It becomes a conflict of ideas or ideology that arises from the unequal power relationship of various stakeholder groups. From the mainstream ecology of the

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West and is recognized as universal. Hence, the government or the elite thus created legitimacy to exclude villagers from accessing resources. (Rakthuthit, A. 2005)

An article titled "Towards a Synthesized Critique of Neoliberal Biodiversity Conservation" written by Bram Büscher, Sian Sullivan, Katja Neves, Jim Igoe and Dan Brockington published in the Journal of Capitalism Nature Socialism in 2012. A group of political ecologists suggested that “Conservation” is associated with the expansion of the capitalist economy and neoliberal ideology, collectively known as “Neoliberal Conservation”. This means both the neoliberal ideology, capitalist economy and nature conservation regime correlates with conservative thought processes/beliefs under the logic of capitalist economic expansion through the process of separating human society from the rich biodiversity. At the same time, it is the main character and the process of creating protected areas/territories of conservation as part of the expansion of capitalism through displacing of communities (Sereeak, N. 2020).

IV. THE MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS IN THAILAND UNDER INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM AND DRIVING COMMUNITIES OUT OF THE FOREST

Achara Rakthuthit (2005) Thai Government began to seriously conserve forests in the form of forest conservation areas after the US government has recommended the establishment of national parks, as well as supporting grants for Thai civil servants to study at Yellowstone National Park, USA. Subsequently, the Thai government enacted the Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act B.E. 1960 and the National Park Act 1961. Within two years after that, the government announced 14 national parks, followed by a policy on conservation areas, such as the classification of permanent forest zones, basin quality classification, national forest policy, and specification of forest reserves, etc.

In addition, forest management under Thai law has begun to allow concessions. It is a phenomenon known as “concessions, lost forests”. From the statistics of forest areas in Thailand recorded in 1961, it was found that forests throughout the country were approximately 53 per cent of the area, and in 1985 the remaining forest area was at 29 per cent. This remaining percentage was an alarming number after the Thai government claimed ownership of forest control and management. This caused a wave of demands for the government to cancel the forest concession in 1989 and result in "forest closure" throughout the country. After the concession was cancelled, there was a movement of thought and action on “Conservation” across the country, various conservation groups emerged and together create a movement on the environment to protect and preserve natural resources. Also guiding the area of Thung Yai Naresuan - Huai Kha Khaeng forest to be a natural world heritage site in 1991. However, the idea/ideology focuses on ecosystems, by using forest science to manage the term “national parks”, wildlife sanctuaries” as well as the words “natural world heritage”. This becomes discourses/images instead of conservation of nature that does not include people who have lived before as well as abroad. Emphasis on the importance of natural biodiversity, is the definition of creating a green world without human culture, separate people from the forest, and lack community participation.

According to a research study titled “Ecological Sustainability and Property Regimes in Western Forests in Thailand” (Noppakaeaw, W. 2019), it was found that the project for actively managing protected areas in the western forests of Thailand, even project, that arises from the cooperation of many parties, both government agencies and non-governmental organizations both domestically and internationally to be one of the ways in solving the problem of people and forests, but the study found out that, they only focus on increasing the efficiency of operations for intensive forest conservation, through the support of international organizations such as The Western Forest Complex Ecosystem Management (WEFCOM) since 1999, with the core principle of preserving and sustaining the value of the entire western forest. After that, it was also continuously supported in the Joint Management of Protected Areas (JoMPA) programs, such as The WEFCOM Ecosystem Joint Conservation Project. The management of the ecosystem conservation or “Ecosystem Management” with the “forest group or forest area” or “Forest Complex” into different types, which is a pattern for Protected Areas Management of Thailand’s forests. Both the whole park area and wildlife sanctuaries, specifying the protected area and relaxation area, sustainably protect biodiversity and ecosystems of the forest.

Management of protected areas in the western forests of Thailand during the development of thought and action on conservation, government mechanisms established claim powers to control and manage protected areas, but those areas overlap with the cultural area of the community, thus affects the way of life and livelihood of people and forest, especially "shifting cultivation", which is the cultural heritage of the Karen ethnic group, it is related to

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nature, filled with knowledge, local ethnic wisdom management of protected area or other projects focus on the conservation of natural resources, biodiversity, plant diversity and rare wildlife. Under scientific rules that see nature as separate from people/ethnic groups. Communities in the forests are therefore regarded as aliens of nature. Cultural subsistence use of communities is seen as a problem and a threat, leading to the creation of a preservation discourse of domination/exclusion and decreasing the role of the way of life of ethnic communities, by claiming legitimacy to protect and conserve natural resources from extinction. Under centralized power through institutional mechanisms and progressive legal measures (Noppakaew, W. 2019).

Under the knowledge of modern science, allow government powers to establish a management model. “Protected Areas” fairly through the creation of a conservation discourse that focuses on protecting natural resources rather than protecting the cultural way of the people. Overlooking cultural rights with a discourse that Community knowledge is obsolete and unscientific. Most especially, ethnic knowledge is excluded from participation. Institutional mechanisms attempt to claim resource control with mainstream ecological knowledge. Draw a new boundary line to give power to the government over communities in the area of Thai forest conservation groups. This makes government claims suppress the cultural rights of communities or ethnic groups that live in the forest.

Therefore, the protection and ownership of the “cultural area” of ethnic groups living in the forest, besides the fact that it provides stability to the Karen ethnic group in their arable land and housing, they can use their knowledge, cultural wisdom, which is an important cost for self-reliance with dignity. Most importantly, communities will be able to participate in resource management with the government following their cultural rights. Because they have never been included in forest conservation in the past. The protection and ownership of the ethnic groups are therefore important and necessary. To serve as a participation mechanism in the management of resources between community ethnic groups and the government officials, including other agencies related. By upgrading the potential cultural area to the status of “Protection of cultural space” according to the law, allow communities to co-exist with the natural cultural rights with dignity. Hence, this serves as hope and a challenge for the ethnic groups.

V. CULTURE PROTECTED AREAS: SOCIAL MOVEMENT ON CHALLENGES

From the situation of the conflict between the people and the forest, especially ethnic groups who are facing the problem of cultural rights violations, as part of human rights with the lack of ethnic prejudice and cultural protection of legal status, apart from that, it also led many to mistakenly believe that ethnic groups are destroying forests and natural resources, based on the fact that, they don’t understand the people’s way of agriculture and local wisdom of the people on the highlands that engage on traditional “Shifting Cultivation”. Thus, result in other problems, both loss of privileges, inability to access resource base, loss of identity and culture, including the people’s quality of life. This, therefore, results in social inequality. The aforementioned problem leads to the social movement of ethnic networks, until the year 2010, which was an important turning point. The ethnic networks groups joined together to push for a cabinet resolution to protect ethnicity, which has evolved due to the needs of ethnic networks who want to upgrade the policy of restoring the way of life of the Lay ethnic group. According to the Cabinet Resolutions of June 2, 2010, and the Cabinet Resolutions of August 3, 2010, on the policy of restoring the Karen way of life. The resolution accepts the cultivation model according to the shifting cultivation system. There was a proposal to declare a special cultural protected area as well as solutions for solving the problems of arable land and the habitat of communities living with forests. Therefore, these two cabinet resolutions are a great advance for ethnic and indigenous groups in Thailand. Because it was the first time government accepted the cultural way of life at the policy level.

However, in the practical aspect, these two cabinet resolutions are still challenging and because they still have many limitations, until the past 10 years, there has not been enough progress in both the status of the law and the practice of protecting ethnic groups. In which related agencies still viewed that the Cabinet resolution has a status of just a policy that the agency may choose to implement or not to follow. Such challenges make the ethnic network group, together with many sectors, is trying to help push up the approach of ethnic regeneration to become an Act with legal status. To enable them to apply it to all sectors and proposed to amend the content to cover all ethnic groups in Thailand. This effort has been on since 2016 by offering a draft of the Ethnic Group Cultural Protection Area Act, which requires the government to protect the cultural rights of ethnic groups by “Cultural protected area”, but later changed the name of the draft Act to Promotion and Conservation of Ethnic Lifestyles by maintaining the important principles of protecting cultural rights of ethnic groups.
To push forward the draft Act on Promotion and Conservation of Ethnic Lifestyles. It is deemed as an important policy of the government in solving the problem of ethnic groups. The government has prioritized it as an urgent law and was set up in the annexe of the Government Policy Statement on 25 July 2017. Not only that, the drafting of the Act on Promotion and Conservation of Group Lifestyles was also in the announcement of the country’s social reform plan, that they should promote and protect ethnic Thais under the constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017, Section 70 (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017) and the Ministry of Culture was assigned by the Sirindhorn Anthropology Center to be the main agency in the drafting of the said law. Most recently, on November 12, 2020, the drafting of the said law was completed. Sirindhorn Anthropology Center (Public Organization) as the main agency to draft the Act, Therefore, continue to hold public hearings and create participation in this draft law. They aimed to cover all sectors especially the ethnic groups involved in the whole country. Under the direction of the National Social Reform Commission. Experts were invited to help draft this law and it’s scheduled to be completed by 2021. Pushing the law to promote and conserve ethnic lifestyles. Operate following the policies of the government provided in the constitution. National strategy and government policies, especially in the constitution. Apart from this, it is also consistent with the 20-year national strategy on creating opportunities and social equality. Emphasis is placed on empowering local communities to develop self-reliance and self-management to create a quality society.

Drafting laws to promote and conserve ethnic lifestyles was implemented according to international commitments that the Thai government has ratified, such as international human rights treaties that Thailand has entered. The parts that are directly related to the protection of ethnic groups are:

1) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

2) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

3) United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

The phenomenon of social movements of ethnic networks groups and related sectors has tried to push a draft of law to promote and preserve ethnic lifestyles, therefore, it is a hope and challenge that all parties must focus on. Most especially the Sirindhorn Anthropology Center (Public Organization) which serves as the main agency in driving this law has considered five important issues: 1) the protection of cultural rights of ethnic groups, 2) the establishment of policy mechanisms to address ethnic problems, 3) promotion of participation of ethnic groups in self-management 4) data preparation on the way of life and history of ethnic groups; and 5) determine the area to protect the way of life of ethnic groups, which is the heart of this law. That is the specification of “Culture Protected Areas” which was a concept from the announcement of “Special Cultural Areas” as a result of past ethnic network movements. Hence, it's both a hope and a challenge that ethnic groups can live according to their lifestyle, conventional wisdom amid conflicts of opinion and ethnic prejudices.

**VI. ACADEMIC OBSERVATION**

“Protected Areas” amid social conditions with different classes and interests, which of course, there are different concepts and practices. Therefore, “Protected Areas” as a current phenomenon “Conservation” through social institutions or elites, related to other dimensions under economic and political conditions, disparity of power, with the influence of globalization and new colonization, associated with the expansion of the capitalist economy and neoliberal ideals that formed and expanded throughout the world and in many areas.

Mainstream ecology knowledge becomes a source of knowledge behind supporting the conservation trend, created the idea of environmentalism and also created a discourse that dominates the idea, claims the right to centralized conservation of forest resources through scientific rules, create a protected area for natural ecosystems that separate from human society. This idea has become an integral part of different governments around the world, they formulated policies for the management of protected areas without humans. Forest communities are viewed as an ecological threat. Consequently, conservation of natural resources through mainstream ecological knowledge, creating “protected areas” / “conservation zones” is the process of separating human society from nature.

“Cultural Protected Areas” is a social movement aimed at upgrading and creating new knowledge areas, through the Deconstruction of the main discourse that dominates ideas and practice, hence, suppressing knowledge, wisdom and traditional culture of the community. Which, therefore, result in injustice and social inequality. This points out traces of errors and opens undisclosed issues to the resignification of “cultural space” with a significant coexistence
between man and nature. Through production, of discourse that comes from behind to show forms and, method of producing new meaning for the oppressed or socially disadvantaged, to come back and stand with dignity, through social movement that shows disagreement with the ideas and actions of current conservation that narrowly separates people from the forests. Instead, look back and focus on the new meaning, which will allow humans and nature to coexist in balance taking into account the ecological limitations and cultural limitations of the community, most especially the ethnic groups.

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