

ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES IN THE THAI MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, there is growing mass interest in the quality of the environment due to critical conditions in environmental degradation and pollution. It has become a global issue in the 1980s and would undoubtedly continue in the 1990s and well into the next century. The urgency of the debate on environmental issues will now involve local communities, the green movement, national governments, regional organisations and many international bodies. As the media have been one of the key institutions in creating public awareness it is important to look into how environmental issues are reported. Are news values in environmental issues different from other news stories? Do competing perspectives get equal reporting from journalists?

This paper is an attempt to explore how the Thai mass media respond to the environmental campaigns in the forms of news reports and documentaries. We would investigate if there is a significant differentiation between conservation and environmental concepts and how some of these controversial views are represented in the media.

Environmental Degradation and Economic Development

Whilst there are reports on Thailand's economic success in recent years there are also serious criticisms of its effects on the environment and the living conditions of people in the rural and urban areas.¹ On the one hand, the Thai economy was acclaimed for being the fastest growing economy in the world but on the other hand, the natural resources have been depleted at an equally rapid rate. (see table 1 and 2)

TABLE 1

Economic Growth of Thailand, the Newly Industrialised Countries in Asia and Other Selected Countries, 1987-1989²

Countries	1987	1988	1989	average rate (1987-1989)
Thailand	9.5	13.2	12.2	11.6
Hong Kong	13.6	7.3	3.6	8.2
Korea	11.8	11.3	5.9	9.7
Taiwan	12.3	7.3	7.7	9.1
Singapore	8.8	11.0	9.2	9.7
China	11.0	10.9	4.0	8.6
Japan	4.6	5.7	4.9	5.1
USA	3.4	4.5	2.5	3.5

TABLE 2

Forest Land in Thailand, 1961-1988³

Year	Forest land (million rai)	Ratio of forest and total land mass
1961	175.19	54.6
1971	141.88	44.2
1981	100.58	31.4
1985	93.16	29.0
1988	89.88	28.0

It is evident that since the introduction of the 1st National Economic Plan in 1961 forest land had been depleted by 85.31 million rai. This means that by 1988 there is a 48% decrease from the 175.19 million rai of forest reserve in 1961. One of the most catastrophic impacts from the severe deforestation took place when massive mud slides and flash floods swept away entire villages and killed more than 300 people in the southern province of Nakorn Sithammarat in November 1988. The government subsequently banned all logging concessions in the country. But questions on the control of the forests and other natural resources in the north, south, and the northeast arose as investors go in with agri-business and industrial development plans.

In 1989, the government of General Chatichai Choonhavan declared it the Year of Environmental Protection as part of its environmental policy. This is an effort to cope with the deteriorating conditions in the cities, especially Bangkok and its outlying areas. In Bangkok, water and air pollution have deteriorated well below standard levels followed by noise, industrial and hazardous waste.⁴ For example, there are at least two million vehicles of which 800,000 are motorcycles. In 1989, it was found that lead and carbon from exhaust fumes caused 900,000 people to suffer from respiratory illnesses.⁵ To cope with myriad environmental problems in Bangkok, the Cabinet has allocated 520 million baht (US\$ 21 million) to clean air and water pollution.⁶ And in November, an additional 276 million baht (US\$ 11 million) was approved on 38 new anti-pollution projects for 1990.⁷

The lack of industrial zoning and waste control in urbanised areas are also causing a great deal of poor living conditions. The lower reaches of the Chao Phraya and Tachin rivers which are densely populated and lined with factories have a very low level of dissolved oxygen (DO) and biological oxygen demand (BOD) whilst the coliform bacteria count is extremely high.⁸ It was predicted that by the year 2000 the Chao Phraya river would be pronounced dead.⁹ In 1991, designated as the Year of Waste Water Treatment, most of the campaigns were therefore, concentrated on waste water treatment around the country and the revival of parts of the Chao Phraya river which flows through the central region. And to further promote public awareness on environmental issues the government has extended the Year of the Environment into 1992.

Despite the government's claim of economic success however, environmentalists and the Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) argue that it is the rapid pace of growth which is the main cause of environmental deterioration. Efforts to clean up the environment are insufficient in solving the more fundamental problems of natural resources management and environmental conservation. They urge the government to reconsider the goals of economic development and to take into account the costs of natural resources and the environment which may otherwise be depleted or lost forever. They proposed that an environmentally sound and sustainable development policy should replace the economic growth model instituted as the dominant economic model in the 1960s.¹⁰

The Thai Media and Environmental Conservation

Prior to the 1980s, most of the environmental issues and conservation stories in the Thai media were picked up from the international news agencies. A couple of documentaries on television such as the Singer World and Life on Earth, were also imported. These programmes were largely the traditional natural history style documentaries. They usually divorced themselves from the social and political contexts

whilst emphasising on the conservation of natural environment. This strand of thinking was further deepened by environmental campaigns organised by the private sector.

During the 1980s, there was a significant increase in media reports and programmes on environment. Most of the press reports and television spots coincided with campaigns on environmental conservation supported by large corporations such as the Thai Environmental and Community Development Association (TECDA) of the Bangkok Bank which is well known for its Magic Eyes Cleanliness Campaign, and Think Earth Project of Siam Kolakarn which concentrates on the greening of the environment. These middle and upper class groups produce a wide range of media such as television cartoon, comic strips, posters and stickers to promote public awareness on environmental protection. In addition, they organised students to compete in their cleanliness contests as well as to join in purifying the Chao Phraya river.

Along with the declaration of the Year of the Environment in 1989 a new media policy for environmental conservation programmes on television was instituted. Environmental documentaries produced by local broadcasters suddenly came to life. There are programmes ranging from 5-minute to 45-minute during 7:30-9:30 pm on all channels as requested by the government.¹¹ Some of these spectacular programmes attracted support from banking institution such as Lok Salabsi produced by Inter-Pacific Communication, and some invited well known actors to present their programmes. The main theme of these programmes are to cultivate a conservation consciousness among the viewers.

As Kanoksak Kaewthep argued,¹² once public awareness on the environment is created the next step is on practical measures to solve the problems. He proposed that there are three levels of solutions depending on how environmentalism is interpreted. The first view is the conservationist view which concentrates on environmental protection and green consumerism. So far, this has been the dominant view constructed by conservation movement and documentary programmes on television (as mentioned above).

The second view is a reformist view which believes that an effective environmental control policy and waste management technology could be the real solution to environmental problems. This means that industrialisation should be the best strategy for economic development. But the concept is being questioned when most of the times control is neglected which often lead to serious disaster such as the case of chemical explosion at Klongtuey in 1991. In recent years, many leading Thai newspapers have reported on the problems of industrial zoning, hazardous waste control, and pollution in Bangkok and the industrial estates in the east and the south. Environmental correspondents try to refute the reformist view supported largely by the government and big industrialists. In this effort they often publish exclusive reports on environmental problems in order to draw public attention and criticisms.¹³

The third view, markedly different from the non-human environment and conservation aspects of the conservationists and reformists, advocates a humanist approach on the relationship between human being and the eco-system. It is both a critique of the industrial economy and a proposal for an alternative social system. In the 1980s, environmentalism which sees an inter connectedness between human and nature has gradually gained support from the media and the public. One of the major incidents was the dispute over the construction of the Nam Choan Dam at Kwaе Yai in Kanchanaburi province which turned environmental issue into a central social discourse.

Controversy over the Nam Choan Dam project initially broke out in 1982. A

different approach to environmental conservation began to catch public attention. Apart from the issues of wildlife and archaeological destructions two basic questions which have been the foundation of the new environmental movement were raised. Firstly, the up-rooting of the people and secondly, the production of electricity mainly for industrial consumption. The legitimacy of these two issues were seriously debated in the media. It led to the question whether industrialisation is the essential and only logical means of economic development. Strong public protests at the national and local levels finally suspended the project. Its recurrence in 1985-1986, once again, created storms of public demonstration and drew media attention. And in 1988, the Nam Choan Dam project was shelved.¹⁴

As a result, a coalition of 13 university environmental clubs was formed (later to become the Committee for the Conservation of Natural Resources and Environment of 16 Education Institutions). They became one of the central organisations to campaign for the conservation of the environment for a more humane society. With the creation of the Project for Ecological Recovery (PER) and the NGOs' Coordinating Organisation for Rural Development or NGO-CORD, in 1988, the environmental movement was able to gain wider media coverage. More significantly, in the reinterpretation of environmentalism away from a pure conservationist approach (advocate by the middle and upper class campaigns) it has politicised the environmental issue. This counter-discourse has opened the way to a holistic view on the eco-system as Doctor Prawes Wasi, Magsaysay Award Winner and leading humanist, pointed out.¹⁵ The new ecological ethics is, in fact, embedded in Eastern philosophy including Buddhism which holds that human being should live in harmony with nature. This implies that the co-existence of human being and nature should be for the sake of survival and not for profit-making which would destroy our life support system.

The Case of Kaeng Krung Dam, Surat Thani

At the turn of this decade, there were a series of incidents which accelerated concern on the ecological system. It started with the mud slides in Nakon Sithammarat in November 1988. In 1989-1990, several controversies which stemmed largely from landlessness and the question of who should have access to certain natural resources, erupted in many rural areas. In the northeast, there were confrontations about rock salt mining along the river Siew, between rice farmers and Thai Asahi company and some small peasants who turned to salt mining. There was the Mae Rim land dispute between the Army and local people in the north. And there were conflicts over the construction of two dams, the Kaeng Krung Dam in Surat Thani in the south, and the Pak Mool Dam in Ubon Rachathani in the northeast. The former was shelved in July 1990 and the latter is undergoing construction as of November this year (1991).

In order to understand how environmental news are reported the case of the Kaeng Krung Dam in Surat Thani is selected for our detailed investigation.¹⁶ In 1984, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) proposed to build the Kaeng Krung Dam at Klong Yan forest reserve to generate 80 Megawatts of electricity for the southern region. The project would cost 3,100 million baht and 21,200 rai of forest cover would be flooded. When the dam is constructed, 240,000 rai of farmland in Khirirat Nikhom district would be irrigated and fishing would increase 916 ton/year or 17.6 million baht.

Opponents of the Kaeng Krung Dam project, led by the Committee for the

Conservation of Natural Resources and the Environment of 16 Education Institutes and the Surat Thani Conservation Club, revealed that the ecological system in the Kaeng Krung forest area would be greatly damaged. There are 222 species of wildlife, 34 of which are on the verge of extinction. The threat to living condition of local people concerning contaminated water (from rotting stumps) and low level of dissolved oxygen was already exemplified by the Chiew Larn or Ratchaprapa Dam on the Pumduang River. Fishes and other kinds of marine life would also be affected. In addition, it is doubtful that Kaeng Krung Dam could be an all purpose dam as claimed by EGAT. There were precedents that EGAT dams are mainly built for generating electricity and not for irrigation.

There were 3 stages of the development of the events which took place during Chatchai government between August 1989 - July 1990.

1. *Cabinet approval on the principle of the Kaeng Krung Dam project on August 15, 1989*

This was the period from 1984 to 1989 in which environmental impact study was, supposedly, carried out by EGAT. However, the National Committee for the Environment commented on the lost of forest land, wildlife and water quality and asked the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) to review the project again. But it was not returned for second screening. After the Cabinet approval, a delegation of government officials, led by the Deputy Minister, Pinya Chuayplod, was sent to inform local officials and representatives of the government's decision.

But due to opposition from the villagers the Prime Minister set up an arbitrary committee comprising representatives from EGAT, concerned government agencies and villagers to assess possible environmental damages. It was the first committee opened to public participation on a large scale project with wide ranging effects on local residents.

2. *The first wave of protests led by conservationists in September 1989*

Information on wildlife species and plants was provided by the Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT) as opposed to information on the positive effects of the dam provided by EGAT. This led to the postponement of the project. The Government set up a committee to carry out another study. Based on the result of this study the Cabinet approved the project for the second time on March 27, 1990.

3. *The second wave of protests led by environmentalists and politicians during May - July 1990*

The three-month protest organised at the local levels and in Bangkok set many agenda for debate. These include; wildlife conservation, water quality in relation to the living condition of local people, the benefit of electricity as opposed to preservation of the forest, long term political interests vis-a-vis capital gains by loggers, government logging agency and politicians, and additional issues on freedom of expression, the right to know and to have access to public media and public information.

The Cabinet decided to shelve the Kaeng Krung Dam project on its July 31, 1990 meeting.

Credibility of News Sources and the Rationality of Environmentalism

From past experiences, environmentalists employed several strategies to catch media attention. But they must coincide with certain news values to get publicity. In 1989, when the project was approved protests by villagers and conservationists were reported with an emphasis on forest and wildlife conservation. Information was drawn from EGAT's study, National Committee on Environment, the Foundation for Wildlife Conservation, the Project for Ecological Recovery, and last but not least, from villagers who live in the area and near the Chiew Larn Dam. The first round of debates were, therefore, concentrated on scientific facts and figures. These include official studies, aerial maps of the area and testimony by local people.

Based on an extensive study of the National Committee on Environment, *Thai Rath* presented an excerpt of the report and hinted on the departmental politics between the Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative, and EGAT.¹⁷ The columnist, Worapoj Na Nakorn, ended his article with this comment,

"...The conservation of the environment and natural resources do not automatically clash with the development scheme. But to develop means to take into account the impact on the lives and natural resources of the entire populace. Development does not mean to open the way for the widest possible destruction of natural resources and the environment or to have access to virgin forest such as the case of the Kaeng Krung Dam." ("Quality of Society" *Thai Rath*, September 15, 1989.)

Matichon on the other hand, provided the proponent's view through Rewat Suwankitti of the Natural Water Conservation Club.¹⁸ It pointed to the economic benefits and water management for flood prevention in the community. The argument and the supported facts and figures were evidently drawn from information prepared by EGAT.

After the official sources, academics and the environmental movement were quoted in the news reports.¹⁹ These include; Prof. Surapone Sudara, marine biologist at Chulalongkorn University and Chairperson of the Siam Environmental Club, Pisit Na Pattalung, Secretary General of Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT), Witoon Permpongsacharoen, Director of Project for Ecological Recovery (PER), and Banpot Wichaidit Chairperson of the Conservation Club, Surat Thani. Their attempt was to present an ecological viewpoint using an entirely different set of facts and figures. They insisted that the dam, if erected, would destroy the last piece of tropical forest in the South. With the disappearance of 21,200 rai of forest the ecological imbalance would be devastating. This implies that flash floods or storms are inevitable. As for the abundant wildlife in the area, 4 endangered species and another 34 species might be lost among 222 species.

Furthermore, environmentalists argued that 80 megawatt of electricity, to be produced by the Kaeng Krung Dam, would merely supply 8-10 large shopping centers in Bangkok. They also charged that the "expected gains" proposed by EGAT, such as the growing circulation of capital - 300 million baht - during the construction period and 50 million baht per annum thereafter, could not possibly outweigh the negative impact which would befall on the people. On the contrary, loggers would benefit from 550,000 cubic meters of logs, worth about 500 million baht.²⁰ Information from the environmentalists was, thus, drastically opposed to the official view presented earlier by EGAT.

At a seminar held in June, Dr. Wathanyu Na Thalang, President of the Society for Conservation of Nature and the Environment, urged the government to "cease all dam projects throughout the country" because there are other alternatives.²¹ Evacuees from Bhumibhol Dam, the first hydro-electric project completed in 1964, told participants of their displacements. Academics added further evidences from their research of evacuees from other dams, such as the Sri Nakarin Dam in Kanchanaburi and Chiew Larn Dam in Surat Thani, that so far compensations were not forthcoming not to mention the tangible losts and spiritual lost of the people.

Although environmental groups could provide information from credible sources as well as present the rationality of the environmental movement these sources were soon exhausted. Without any new angle for journalists to update their stories the controversay would be easily dropped from the agenda. How did the pressure groups manage to keep the debate on the agenda for three months?

Mass Movement, Violence and the Making of News Headlines

The environmental discourses in the press took a new turn after the Cabinet approved the Kaeng Krung Dam project in March 1990. Protests groups of villagers and students were organised, in Surat Thani and Bangkok, in May and June whilst petition letters were sent to local and national authorities. This shift, away from environmental damages i.e., people and their natural resources, provided the necessary conflict condition for journalists to work on.

It could be seen that since early May protest activities became the highlight of most of the news reports. For example it was reported that "200 villagers and students continued rallying for the second day...and called on the Government to review its decision ...(and to) turn the planned 20,000 rai into a national park..." (*Bangkok Post*, May 2, 1990). In a similar report the actions were described in more detailed that, "...The villagers dismantled a sign in front of the (EGAT) office and erected a new sign declaring the site "The People's Park" (*The Nation*, April 30, 1990). The number of protesters reported was 100, half that of the first report.

When proponent of the dam project started to organise counter-protests and violence was looming news stories received more spaces with pictures and larger headlines. Emphasis was given to anticipated violence to draw readers' attention and hence, to make the story sell. On May 26 for example, it was reported that two groups of protesters would rally to coincide with the visit of Interior Minister, Banharn Silpaaaaarcha, and Minister Anuwat Wattanapongsiri of the Prime Minister's Office. The headline read, "Violence feared at rival dan rallies" and the lead stated that, "...local police, defence volunteers and military units (were) on alert to avert possible violence...". (*Bangkok Post*, May 26, 1990)

In a previous report headlined, "New twist to Kaeng Krung Dam dispute," the second paragraph of the lead announced the death of a leader of the protest group caused by exhaustion. Near the end of the story, it said that another leader threatened that "protesters would stage another `show of force'" if the Cabinet did not consider the opponents' call. (*The Nation*, May 14, 1990) On the following day, EGAT reacted by saying that, "protesters threatened to burn construction equipment" on a project which EGAT was confident would, "have no environmental impact." (*Bangkok Post*, May 15, 1990).

But in the May 14 story however, the argument between an environmentally clean development scheme and a conservationist-cum-ecologist perspective was drawn out. While local supporters said "technical measures to prevent (down stream) pollution" was possible, the protesters said it was "...selfish'..to expect to benefit from the electricity supply and...not to think of the invaluable natural resources that would be destroyed by the project..."

The Politics of Environmental Discourse

In June, the introduction of the political aspects provided a definite news value for the press and there was sustained news reports and analyses as events advanced. However, the ecological dimension gradually wane when the focus shifted to two parallel incidents. The first was on the confrontation of protest groups organised by both proponent and opponent of the Krang Krung Dam project. The second was on the inter-party struggle within the coalition government.

Questions were raised about the economic and political gains of the proponent and its supporters. For example on who would actually stand to gain from felling trees at the construction site? The Forest Industry Organisation (FIO), or the local loggers known as the Five Tigers of Surat Thani, or the Democrat Party? What were the long term political interests between competing parties, the Democrat Party and the Social Action Party and, not least, the Chathai Party, and what kinds of alliances were being forged with local political elites/longgers? Through these inquiries a visible connection was, thus, made on the environment, political decision and development scheme. But it is a highly complex relationship and political rivalry could easily over took the environmental agenda as the following analysis shows.

In June and July politicians became the major news sources for journalists²² The presentation of the political rhetorics, which reached climax on July 31, 1990, concentrated on whether MPs were really acting on behalf of the people. Along this line of argument the possible and immediate capital gains were too evident to be overlooked. And columnists began to slip away from their non-partisan view as the analysis in the artifice, "Dam(ned) Politics", demonstrated.

Prior to that, there were contradictory news headlines based on who the interviewees were. On July 27, for example, Matchon, said the Cabinet would reject the dam proposal. But The Nation said, "Cabinet likely to approve dam project" on the following day. Information from the first news item was derived from Mr. Pinya Chuayplod, MP from the Social Action Party, and General Harn Linanond, MP from Chathai Party, who were representative from the south, and were opposed to the construction of the Kaeng Krung Dam. The Nation's report however, came from the Prime Minister's interview with the press.

On July 31, both Siam Rath and the *Bangkok Post* were highly critical and proposed, in their editorials, that the project should be scrapped. They suggested that the government should heed to the call of the people because "Kaeng Krung was not in a Crisis". (*Siam Rath*, July 31, 1990) The *Bangkok Post* went so far as to suggest that if the hard decision means "having to sacrifice the Democrats, then so be it." (*Bangkok Post*, July 31, 1990).²³

From the outset, the newspapers have been the main arena in which debates on the pros and cons of the Kaeng Krung Dam project were played out. During the last stage

of the protest however, the environmental aspect of the issue has acquired a political dimension when members of the coalition government split along party lines. The Democrat Party led by Mr. Suthep Tueksuban, MP from Surat Thani, supported the dam project whilst Mr. Pinya Chuayplod from the Social Action Party, initially agreed with the government plan, turned to the opposition. The Chathai Party of Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan shifted its stand after more information on the environmental impact were provided. More importantly, prior to the Cabinet meeting in July, Mr. Kraissak Choonhavan, heir and advisor to the Prime Minister, went on a fact-finding mission and advised against the move to go ahead with the Kaeng Krung plan²⁴

But although debates on the Kaeng Krung Dam project have moved up the political agenda in June and July, television, on the contrary, chose to ignore the political dimension and continue with its information manipulation effort. News reports on television were mostly one-sided due to official restrictions. Under Public Relations ownership and control, radio and television were used to construct a reality according to EGAT. This has, however, brought on the adverse effect when, on July 10, 500 protesters staged a sit-in at Channel 12, the official Public Relations channel, in Surat Thani. It was reported that,

“..The dam opponents claimed the station broadcast only dam supporters’ views and not of its opponents. They demanded the station report on movements opposed to the dam at least once every three days and that the station chief be transferred...Dam opponents also called on the Forestry Department to declare Klong Yan Forest, in which the dam site is located, a national park...” (*Bangkok Post*, July 12, 1990.)

As the above example showed, environmental issue with a political edge is defined as illegitimate news item on radio and television. This has effectively detached the socio-political contexts from the concept of environmentalism. And this is exactly what environmentalist groups have to overcome in their campaigns.

The Media and The Road to a New Environmentalism

In this paper, I have tried to show how the Thai media responded to the government environmental policy and the environmentalists’ campaigns on a dam project. On the one hand, the media have played an important role in creating public awareness on conservation and environmental control. These are in line with the prevailing definition on the protection and correction of the environment and damages caused by industrialisation. The media environmental policy of the previous government has significantly legitimised the conservation discourse. Radio and television were thus, able to articulate some of the conservation issues on their programmes.

But on the other hand, the environmental crisis facing the Thai people has generated a counter-discourse which proposed a fundamental change in the relationship between human beings and nature. This means to rethink the economic development model that prioritises economic growth over everything else. The analysis of the Kaeng Krung Dam campaign showed how environmentalists attempted to rally public as well as political opinion through a variety of media strategies.

Among the three strategies, scientific argument, protest and political manoeuvre, the last two fall into conventional media news values. It was clear that environmentalists were trying to use a democratic means to convince policy maker. When facts and figures failed environmentalists and the people attempted to avert the dam project by

peaceful mass protests. This is contrary to the myth that environmentalists, in the first instance, employ violence as the means of gaining media attention. Actually environmental campaigns have to comply to the structure of news manufacturing and political hierarchy at the same time.

There are 3 significant points emerging from this case analysis. First, the press was eager to concentrate on the political rivalry and has, thus, assisted in sustaining the articulation of a new environmentalism. But in its working, it tried to define the issue according to its pattern of news presentation. And violence fell on such a pattern.

Second, the educational value in such a campaign was that it provided the arena for environmentalists to challenge the dominant conservationist perspective. It showed that the press could be a powerful force in developing a new environmentalism.

Third, the political dimension was the decisive factor in the final instance of the Kaeng Krung Dam campaign. The plan could be averted because of a strong alliance between the people, the environmental movement and certain political parties. But where this was lacking, such as the case of the Pak Mool Dam in Ubon Rachathani, in the northeast, the project was approved despite press campaign against political and local power abuse of the people. Evidently, if only the people's interests are at stake the environmental campaign stand to lose. Environmentalists must, therefore, attempt to convince the media as much as politicians in order to gain wide public support.

One of the central questions on how to further develop public awareness and participation on environmental issues is the notions of freedom of expression and the right to communicate environmental affairs. As the state media are highly restrictive against environmentalism, in which the people demand the rights to control their destiny and the natural resources, a conservationist perspective becomes the dominant discourse on radio and television. For the press, there is a section of journalists who understand and sympathise with the environmental movement. In 1985, for example, the magazine *Sarakadi* was created to promote a green consciousness. It has now an added emphasis on the new environmentalism. In 1991, *Decade* was expressly created for the new environmental discourse. A large number of its sources are drawn from the environmental movement. These publications and others would provide the arena for a continued debate on environmentalism. But at the same time, it is necessary to sustain the flow of argument on the news agenda in order to redefine and counter the conservationist discourse on the state media. On the other hand, environmentalists must struggle to have access over the official channels of communication in an attempt to expand its debate to a wider public.

In a situation whereby the environment in the Thai society is in crisis the public should be informed about the critical conditions and of all of the possible solutions. Conservationism is obligatory but insufficient. In order to promote a consensus on a development scheme based on a harmonious relation between human beings and nature how could the media participate in this important debate? What roles did it play so far in creating public awareness and actions? How are environmental issues defined in each medium? What is its priority when compared with other agenda and news beat? Could new presentation technique/style be developed to communicate environmental affairs in the future? How could the media break away from the conventional hierarchy of news sources and provide more space for people as news sources? These are only some of the research questions for communicators and researchers to come to grip with.

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