

Contesting Landscapes in Thailand

Tree Ordination as Counter-territorialization

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ABSTRACT: Recently, authors Vandergeest and Peluso have discussed the process of territorialization in Siam/Thailand, where the state has gradually expanded its control over natural resources through its legal machinery and associated classifications of the natural environment. While Vandergeest and Peluso focus on the process of territorialization from the perspective of the Thai State, this article examines the same process from the perspective of nongovernmental organizations and forest-dwelling farmers. Of particular interest is a project launched by the Northern Farmer's Network to "ordain" 50 million trees in community forests throughout Northern Thailand in 1996 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the king's accession to the throne. This essentially Buddhist ceremony has since been conducted in numerous Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist rural communities. The authors argue that these communities apply the tree ordination ceremony as a tool to counter the territorialization of the Thai state by reasserting local identities and environmental responsibilities. By invoking Buddhist symbols and the honor of the king, the rural groups — many of which fear eviction from forested areas classified as national parks — identify themselves positively with modern Thai society in order to contest their public depiction as "enemies of the nation." This article analyzes the process of territorialization and counter-territorialization in Thai society by discussing classifications and associated landscapes in the environmental debate in Thailand. Furthermore, the tree ordination project undertaken by the Northern Farmers' Network is analyzed based on cases from the Mae Chaem district in Chiang Mai Province.

Since the early 1990s, a Buddhist-inspired ritual known as *buad paa* or tree ordination has become prevalent in Thailand. Environmentalist nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and monk activists have played significant roles in the organization and implementation of the spectacular ritual in

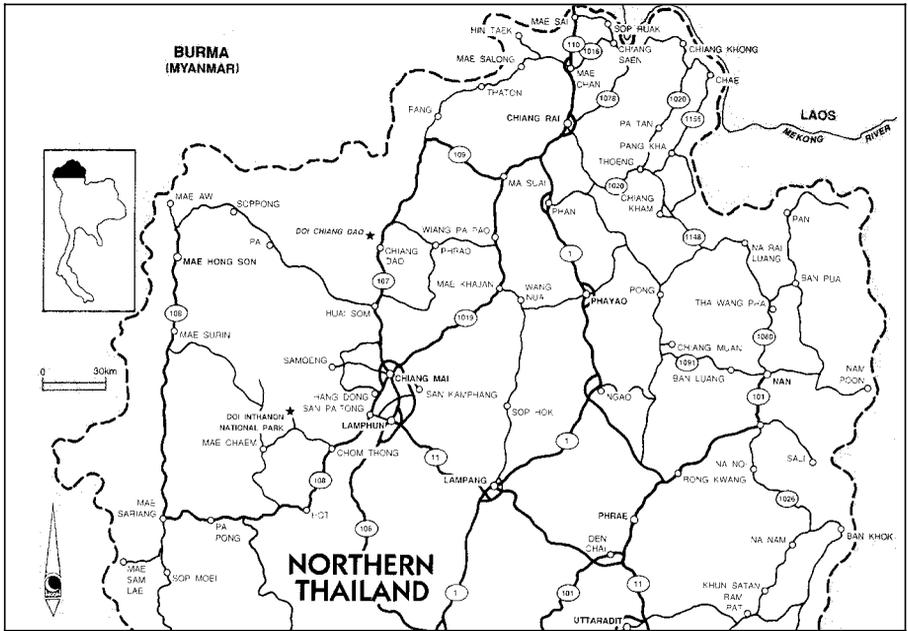
which saffron-colored monks' robes are wrapped around tree trunks. Strictly speaking the trees are not ordained — a status only attainable by men. Rather, they are sanctified in order to protect them from logging and to “symbolically remind people that nature should be treated as equal with humans, deserving of respect and vital for human as well as all life.”¹

In Mae Chaem district, Chiang Mai Province, the first tree ordination ceremony took place in 1993, when villagers from Wat Chan decided to ordain a nearby pine forest. This pine forest was intended to be commercially logged and replanted over a 26-year period according to a plan presented to the villagers by the Forest Industry Organization (FIO).² The project was met with local opposition, but in 1992 the FIO, despite these protests, put up a sawmill in the area. In response around one thousand pine trees were ordained in February 1993 in an attempt to prevent implementation of the project. Since this episode, tree ordination has become an idiom for the community forestry movement elsewhere in Mae Chaem and Northern Thailand. It is often used to demonstrate the capacity and willingness of villagers to manage forest resources and, at the same time, to contest stereotypical perceptions of forest-dwelling people. When the people in Ban Yang Mae Malo, a Karen village in Mae Chaem district, ordained part of their forest in 1996, they also acted with these two interests in mind. But other interests were at work in the performance of the ritual, as we shall see.

In this article we argue that several political, economic, and social interests are reflected in the performance of and participation in tree ordination rituals. The interests of participants vary from place to place according to specific local conditions in terms of official land classification, intervillage or interethnic relationships, or political affiliation. Performance of the ritual might therefore constitute an act of resistance against government territorialization or it might be part of a pragmatic process of land-use change; it might also serve as a strikingly visible symbolic mark of new social or political ties between groups hitherto not connected with one another. In fact, tree ordination may well be an expression of all these and other things. This makes the ritual a contested, changing, and, indeed, complex form of symbolic action.

Notwithstanding the variety of interests involved in the course of *buad paa*, landscape management appears to be a common concern for all parties involved in the rituals. As such, tree ordination rituals exemplify a by now well-documented argument that landscapes, despite their obvious materiality, are very much cultural constructs.³ By ordaining trees people culturally construct a landscape both in the material sense of “making” or “protecting” it and in the more symbolical sense of conferring particular meaning(s) upon it. In Thailand, landscapes — not least the forested mountainous landscapes — are sites of contest over their material form as well as the meanings attached to them. In this article, we emphasize the contested nature of landscapes by discussing tree ordination as counter-territorialization.

Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Peluso have analyzed the historical process of territorialization in Siam/Thailand as a process the modern state has used to gradually expand its control over the population and natural resources through



In Mae Chaem district, Chiang Mai Province, the first tree ordination ceremony took place in 1993, when villagers from Wat Chan decided to ordain a nearby pine forest. (Source: *Moon Handbooks: Thailand*, second edition, p. 428. © 1997 Avalon Travel Publishing. Used by permission. All rights reserved.)

legal machinery and coercive powers and by attaching particular forms of knowledge to particular parts of the landscape.⁴ From their work, and that of others, it is clear that the state's territorial strategies might appear complete on paper whereas practical implementation is characterized by considerable local variation.⁵ The state's unawareness or ignorance of local land resource claims has rendered boundaries on land and resource use highly contested. In many cases local communities' noncompliance with or resistance to the government's territorial strategies has forced the state to reclassify and re-map territories continuously and acknowledge local land-use claims. Since the 1990s, local communities in Thailand and elsewhere have begun to make their own land-use or resource maps to legitimize claims to local resources. Drawing on two Indonesian cases Nancy Peluso has discussed the wider implications of such "counter-mapping" activities.⁶ On the one hand, local maps represent an attempt to counter the state's strategies of control over resources and people. On the other hand, the very act of choosing and using maps as a tool to counter state control implies a reinterpretation of customary resource rights and the concept of land tenure to a territorially defined concept of rights. In this way, attempts to counter state territorialization actually help reinforce this process.⁷

Considering the variations in the implementation of states' territorial strategies of control it is not surprising that counter-territorialization takes many different forms in which counter-mapping is but one element. This article shows how tree ordination has been used as a tool to counter state territorialization. By focusing on the process of territorialization from the perspective of NGOs

and forest-dwelling farmers the article seeks to add a supplementary dimension to the understanding of territorialization in Thailand.

Deforestation and Territorialization

Thailand has lost more than half of its forests within the lifetime of one generation. An estimated 70 percent of the country was covered by forest in 1936. By 1952 the proportion had dropped to 58 percent and it declined further to 55 and 38 percent respectively in 1961 and 1973.⁸ In order to prevent further deforestation, the government declared a national logging ban in 1989. Since then, the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) has claimed that the forest cover has stabilized at 25 percent. Other sources, however, maintain that in reality only about 15 percent of the country is forested.⁹ What remains of the forest is unevenly distributed among the country's four regions with more than half of the forested areas situated in Northern Thailand.

While the total area covered by forest decreased during the latter part of the twentieth century, competition over access to the remaining forest for a variety of purposes — including agricultural production — increased during the same period of time. Following the creation of the First National Economic Development Plan (1961-66), major infrastructure development was undertaken and the extension of the road network enabled expansion of agricultural production throughout the country. The total planted area tripled from 43 million *rai* (one *rai* = 0.16 hectare) in 1950 to 130 million *rai* in 1990. This land development largely took place outside the central region along the so-called uplands frontier.¹⁰ Hence, between 1950 and 1980, farm holdings throughout Thailand expanded at a rate of 70,000 to 80,000 per year, with around 60,000 of the addition located in the north and the northeast.¹¹ During this period, the rural population outside the central region increased by 0.6 million people annually, or from 13.4 million to 31.8 million.

The combination of infrastructure development, logging, agricultural expansion, and population increase caused massive deforestation. It also resulted in social change of another kind, which has some importance for our argument. In the course of agricultural expansion in Northern Thailand land allocation and land sale often proceeded without any form of government documentation. Tax certificates held by upland-settlers as their only official document conveyed no legal right of ownership.¹² Enforcement of land ownership depended on a small village elite — typically entrepreneurs, village headmen, logging operators, or military men with external connections to state and market structures.¹³

Furthermore, the rural development experience in Northern Thailand had a particular cultural dimension inasmuch as it brought Thai and different non-Thai ethnic groups into new relationships with each other. The mountainous areas inhabited by fairly isolated groups of non-Thai peoples such as Karen, Hmong, Mien, Lisu, Akha, Lua, Lahu, Tin, and Khmu were connected to the lowland (Thai) society through improved infrastructure and state education and health services. Nation-building was actively promoted by the government in order for the non-Thai groups to become assimilated into the modern Thai nation. From being seen as distant, different, and exotic peoples who could be

treated with indifference, from the Thai point of view, the minorities came to be regarded as different in the sense of being antimodern and antinational or anti-Thai.¹⁴ This public image and the fact that highland minorities are not only non-Thai but in many cases also non-state people has rendered them vulnerable to the political power of the state bureaucracy.¹⁵

Given these developments, the allocation of natural resource access has for obvious reasons come to play a crucial role in the lives of both people and government authorities. The relation between state power and the allocation and realization of resource access rights has been discussed as an ongoing process of “internal territorialization” by Vandergeest and Peluso:

Territorialization is about excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, and about controlling what people do and their access to natural resources within those boundaries.... [Territoriality] involves classification by area... [and] the communication of both the territorial boundaries and restrictions on activities within the territory.¹⁶

The first stage of internal territorialization is marked by the establishment of the Royal Forestry Department in 1896 and the gazettelement of all unoccupied land within the national boundaries as state forest under the jurisdiction of the RFD. The second stage is associated with acts that provided the legal basis for demarcation of reserved and protected forests in the name of conservation. Passage of the Protection and Reservation Act of 1938 and the Forest Act of 1941 initiated this stage. With the National Forest Reserve Act of 1964, 40 percent of the land area in Thailand was allocated for conservation and economic forests and all forested areas were classified as National Forest Reserves.¹⁷ This act classified people living within the new forest reserves as illegal settlers. It is estimated that 20 percent of all Thai farmers, or at least 1.2 million families, “illegally occupy” these areas — land they rely on for their livelihood.¹⁸

The third stage of forest territorialization in Thailand is called “functional territorialization,” which means controlling what people do according to detailed land-classification criteria such as soil type, slope, and vegetation.¹⁹ This aspect of territorialization refers to the historical role of knowledge as power, albeit power in a less tangible form than the military and police force that backs the state’s territorial claims. Vandergeest and Peluso trace the beginning of functional territorialization in Thailand to the National Park Act of 1961. Since then, selected scientific criteria and methods such as modern mapping techniques have become the basis for laws prohibiting or prescribing specific activities in particular, yet ever-extending, areas. It should be noted that the protected-area system has expanded significantly since the 1960s. Seventy-five parks have already been created and an additional thirty-nine parks are being prepared. If all the proposed parks are established the current national park area will be expanded by 71 percent, or from approximately 13.4 million rai to 22.9 million rai.²⁰ Geographically, twenty-nine of the existing national parks and twenty-six of the proposed parks are located in Northern Thailand. Another example of functional territorialization is the National Watershed Classification of 1985. Under this classification all major catchments have been zoned into six classes — 1A, 1B, 2, 3, 4, and 5 — by parameters of topography, slope, elevation, type of

soil, rock, and forest. In class 1A, the highland area, all types of development and agricultural activities are prohibited.

Vanderveest and Peluso provide a well-documented analysis of the historical emergence of territoriality as a key aspect of state strategies of control and coercion in Thailand. While there is little doubt that the process of territorialization has been intensified in recent decades, as the state's bureaucratic and technological means of control have been developed, it should be noted that in practice territorialization has proceeded simultaneously with rural development that has been characterized by erratic state control and highly localized rather than nationally standardized law enforcement practices. Furthermore, ignorance of laws and resistance in various forms has presented major challenges to state power and control. Most recently, the resistance put up by environmentalist groups since the 1980s has questioned the government's legitimacy in regard to landscape management and classification. Interestingly, as we shall see later, many groups challenging the government on these issues have adopted the concepts of territory and landscape zones in their strategies.

Contested Landscapes: Environmentalism and the Community Forestry Act

The Thai government's policy of attaching a particular form of knowledge and power to particular parts of the landscape is not only an aspect of functional territorialization but also a part of environmentalist discourse in Thailand. Indeed, territorialization and environmentalism are intertwined, not least because environmental arguments are used to legitimize or contest the continuous territorialization of Thailand's forested areas.

The struggle over access to decreasing forest areas has been a constituting element in Thai environmental discourse since the 1980s as witnessed in violent clashes between military forces and villagers or, in Northern Thailand, between (Thai) lowland and (non-Thai) highland groups, each claiming that the other party is causing deforestation and water shortages. Environmentalism is further characterized by the symbolic struggle over the power to define causes and solutions to ecological problems.²¹ As such, environmentalism is a field of struggle in which knowledge is inevitably politicized and issues of contention tend to change over time. Among the key issues in the environmentalist debate are questions about what degree of deforestation deserves to be called "a problem," who is responsible for causing this problem, and who should be responsible for solving it. Community forestry is another big issue.

For the sake of an overview Thai environmental discourse can be divided between conservative and radical positions, using Kay Milton's articulation of these concepts. For Milton "conservative" means taking the position that environmental problems can be solved piecemeal within the existing economic and political order of society whereas "radical" means that society needs to change drastically if environmental problems are to be solved or prevented.²² In Thailand, the conservative position holds that forest and people cannot coexist, implying that "forest-eating" hill-tribes and others who inhabit the mountainous areas of Northern Thailand must be evicted in order to protect forested areas

classified as watershed classes 1A, 1B, and 2. Those who hold this position argue that deforestation is caused by population increases and by illegal forest encroachment for farming purposes, including shifting cultivation, in the highlands. Conservative environmentalism opposes community forestry based on local people's knowledge and decision-making. Instead, it favors expansion of the national park system and scientifically based land-management controlled by the RFD and other government agencies in accordance with the existing division of power between the state and the people.

The radical position within Thai environmentalism contends that major political and institutional changes are necessary at many levels of society in order to avoid further ecological devastation. Deforestation is not perceived as being caused primarily by population increases or by poor people's encroachment on land but, rather, by the lack of land rights among rural people, political and military oppression, or incompetence and corruption in the State bureaucracy.²³ Radical environmentalists have argued in support of community forestry by stating the people who live in the forests should manage them. Contending that scientific classifications of land and forest often ignore the ecological complexities of forests and landscapes, radical environmentalists have put much effort into documenting the kind and extent of forest-dwelling peoples' ecological knowledge, including the knowledge of non-Thai minority groups.²⁴

Thai environmentalism involves a complex and shifting pattern of social and political alliances, and environmentalists often draw on a diversity of ideological and religious traditions in their struggle for symbolic power. Different forms of knowledge ranging from Buddhism and Western natural science to local or indigenous knowledge have been invoked for a variety of intents and purposes by different groups of people.²⁵ Although some environmentalists defend a position in its "pure form," however defined, most people and groups integrate aspects of both conservative and radical environmentalism in their views. Therefore, we should be careful lest we too generally associate either position with particular social groups. While a political and economic elite, including the state, can in broad terms be identified as champions of the conservative position it should be stressed that the state has not acted as a single unambiguous category just as some members of the economic elite have backed radical environmentalist views. Likewise, NGOs and scholars can be identified as typical supporters of radical environmentalism even though there are influential NGOs in Thailand that promote conservative environmentalist views and goals. This complexity is evident in Buddhist environmentalism and tree ordination rituals as well.

Arguably, the conservative discourse of deforestation and forest management has lost ground to alternative discourses over the past decade. Radical environmentalists' rejection of the worldviews of conservative discourse has entailed changes in traditional Thai perceptions of the forest and of the ethnic minority groups inhabiting them.²⁶ Whereas the question of whether forest and people can coexist without damaging the forest was a major divisive issue in environmentalist debate during the 1980s, it is now widely accepted that people can stay in the forest. Now the "middle-ground" in the contest between

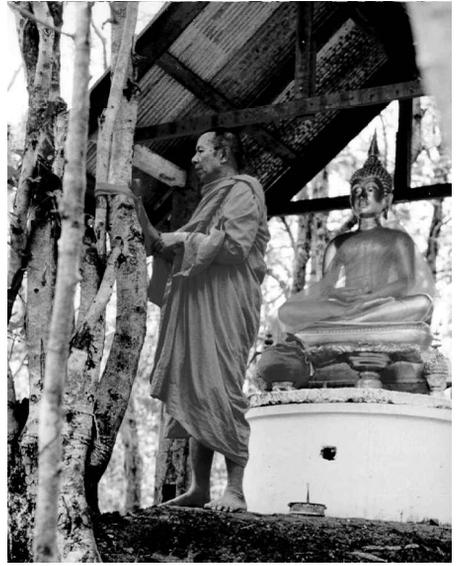
conservative and radical environmentalists is defined by questions about local people's and the RFD's respective roles in forest management and the validity of their knowledge about fire prevention and water protection.²⁷

Since the logging ban in 1989, the RFD has sought to change its role and powerbase from manager of forest logging and economy to manager of forest protection and ecology. On the surface, the RFD has moved toward a greater interest in the idea of people-managed forests. In the *Thai Forestry Sector Master Plan* (TFSMP), which was drawn up in 1993, the RFD proposed a "new partnership" between local people and the RFD — an idea that was a novelty compared to previous RFD policies. Responding, at least rhetorically, to radical environmentalists' critiques of top-down management and to their ideas about local people as forest managers, the RFD included the idea that an amount of land and the rights to this land should be given over to local management as a "community forest." The RFD proposed itself as the implementing agency of this community forestry scheme. As would be expected, the Master Plan met with skepticism from many sides. Radical environmentalists complained that talk about "new partnerships" had neither stopped eviction by force of forest-dwelling peoples nor hindered the establishment of new national parks.²⁸ Another issue criticized by academics and NGOs associated with radical environmentalism is that according to the RFD forest-dwelling communities should not be granted the right to establish community forests within national parks. In conformity with this approach to community forestry a handbook published recently by the RFD to guide local communities through the process of getting forests recognized as community forests refers only to areas classified as reserve forests or as forests in accordance with the 1941 Forest Act.²⁹ In opposition to the RFD's approach, NGOs submitted a "People's Community Forest Bill" to the government in 2001, proposing the establishment of community forests in all kinds of forest areas. In 2002, eight years after the Master Plan was first proposed, the government has yet to ratify the Master Plan and a Community Forest Bill is still in the drafting stage.

Buddhist Environmentalism and Tree Ordination in Thailand

During the past three decades Buddhism has gained an important place in environmental debate and action in Thailand. This merging between religion and environmentalism is linked with two trends. First, several NGOs are placing a strong emphasis on Buddhism and spiritual development as they see an environmental and developmental ethic derived from Buddhism as the solution to environmental problems. Second, several Buddhist monks have been praised or criticized for their active use of Buddhist symbols in order to protect trees from being felled and to support locally initiated programs of forest protection.

Since Buddhism and Buddhist symbolism entered environmental activism they have unsurprisingly been used as a cultural tool by various groups in Thai society to legitimate highly different positions. This differentiated nature of "Buddhist environmentalism" can be illustrated with reference to two cases in which Buddhist monks associated with divergent ideological positions have entered the environmental struggle.



“Buddhist monks ‘ordaining’ trees to protect them from logging and to ‘symbolically remind people that nature should be treated as equal with humans, deserving of respect and vital for human as well as all life.’” (All photos courtesy of the authors.)

The first case involves Phra Phongsak Techadhammo, a Buddhist monk in the Chom Thong district, Chiang Mai Province. Throughout the 1980s, Phra Phongsak led a campaign against a local upland non-Buddhist Hmong village. The Hmong were accused of causing deforestation of an upper watershed forest (along the Mae Soy River) resulting in water shortages in the lowlands. The monk worked closely with a local conservation group and repeatedly made appeals to local authorities, the RFD, and the army to relocate the Hmong. The lowland villagers even erected a barbed wire fence in the watershed to demarcate the area they believed it was necessary to reforest and protect. Phra Phongsak’s crusade against the Hmong village was nourished by environmental considerations buttressed by a potent Buddhist-nationalist discourse. In Phra Phongsak’s discursive universe the acts of the Hmong are not only associated with the destruction of the forest, but also with moving people and the environment away from a harmonious coexistence by acting against religious law. Ultimately the Hmong are presented as a threat to the Thai nation. Phra Phongsak’s “environmental Buddhism” is thus used to distinguish between “us” and “them,” in terms of Buddhists and non-Buddhists, lowlanders versus “hill tribes,” who is “good” and who is “bad,” and who is taking care of and who is destroying the environment. A dichotomy is constructed wherein Buddhism legitimizes an environmentalist position in which non-Thai and non-Buddhist hill-tribes are classified as “forest-eaters” and to policies implying that people should be removed from watershed forests.

The second case is the highly publicized conflict about access to land in the Dongyai forest reserve in Northeastern Thailand involving the monk Phra Prajak Kuttajitto. Here, in the early 1990s, a group of villagers struggled against a government-initiated reforestation/eucalyptus plantation project that would have forced most of the villagers to relocate. The villagers’ battle over the right

to stay on their land was framed in reference to political and environmental issues. They argued, first, that only their continued presence in Dongyai would prevent illegal logging in the Dongyai forest by capitalists linked up with the RFD, the military, and other powerful stakeholders — something they claimed is taking place under the current eucalyptus plantation program. Second, they questioned the viability of the eucalyptus plantation program because they saw reforestation through eucalyptus plantations — as opposed to reforestation with local species — as a short-sighted solution designed only to please foreign capitalists. In other words, the preservation of the remains of the forest in the Dongyai forest reserve was intimately linked with the continued presence of the villagers in Dongyai. The villagers saw themselves as “guardians of the forest,” while the authorities actually charged with protecting the forest saw them as “assassins of the forest.”

In 1989, Phra Prajak began supporting the villagers’ struggle against relocation. A favored means used by Phra Prajak to display the will of the villagers to protect the forest and keep outsiders from cutting down the forest through use of Buddhist symbolism was to “ordain” trees in the remaining forest.

To wrap brightly colored cloth or saffron monks’ robes around trees is a long-established practice in Thailand. This practice has been used to honor trees that are considered holy, like the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha reached enlightenment, or trees of an exceptional size, in which local guardian spirits are believed to reside.³⁰ The act of tree ordination, whereby a tree not already considered sacred, is wrapped in saffron-colored cloth and made sacred through ritual, is of a rather recent vintage. It is generally acknowledged that the first tree ordination of this kind was performed in Thailand in 1988 by the monk Phrakhrū Manas Natheepitak of Wat Bodharma in Phayao Province, Northern Thailand.³¹ According to Phrakhrū Manas, he invented the tradition of tree ordination as part of a local movement to bring an end to logging that was taking place in a watershed forest close to Wat Bodharma.³² This logging was done in part by private companies, which, in 1973, had been granted a 30-year concession by the RFD to log in the area. In the wake of the private companies illegal logging done by small-scale companies and individuals followed. In the second half of the 1970s and in the early 1980s the villagers repeatedly experienced periods of drought — a situation the villagers associated with logging (legal and illegal) in the area. As petitions both to the logging company and the RFD, requesting them to put an end to the logging, and attempts to block roads for trucks proved unsuccessful, Phrakhrū Manas decided to make use of religious symbolism in a final attempt to prevent the cutting down of trees in the local watershed forest. In doing this Phrakhrū Manas set out to sanctify trees in the local forest through an ordination ceremony.

According to Phrakhrū Manas he was inspired to sanctify the forest by a story told to him by an old villager. The story dealt with events from a time when a highway had been constructed in front of Wat Bodharma. A group of workers from the Highway Department had been ordered to cut down a holy Bodhi tree in front of the temple to make way for the road. Subsequently, the workers experienced “bad luck,” which was believed to have been caused by spirits as a

consequence of the workers' misdeed — cutting down a tree considered holy. By wrapping trees in monks' robes Phrakhru Manas intended to transfer ordinary trees from the profane world to the world of holy things. The saffron robes symbolized the new status of the trees. The “untamed and uncivilized domain” is turned into a “sacred and venerated religious artefacts” and within this religious universe anyone cutting down a tree would be committing a religious misdeed.³³ The sanctification of the forest was further enhanced through a ceremony in which local guardian spirits were called upon to help protect the forest by punishing people who felled trees in the forest. In this manner combined notions about the “good monk” and the “evil spirits” were invoked to keep people from cutting down trees.

Since the tree ordination ceremony was invented by Phrakhru Manas, other monks, alone or in cooperation with NGOs, have adopted the ceremony. Although the ceremonies performed may differ slightly from place to place they seem to have acquired a fixed form that merges the world of spirits and the world of monks, as when Phrakhru Manas first performed the ceremony. A tree ordination ceremony performed in the community forest of Nam Kian village, in Nan Province, in March 2001, exemplifies the ritual form.

Before the monks arrive at the ceremony a layperson presents offerings to the Four World Guardian Deities. The offerings typically include sweet-and-sour curry, cigarettes, and incense, which are put in four small trays made out of banana leaves. These floats are placed on a wooden structure and the deities are invited to take part in the ceremony. In doing this the deities are informed that the forest will be sanctified through the ritual to be performed and they are called upon to help protect the forest.

After the monks arrive a *syb chataa* ceremony is performed — an auspicious ritual used throughout Northern Thailand to prolong the lives of people and maintain good fortune. The *syb chataa* ceremony is normally performed in the following contexts: for individuals, in connection with birthdays, marriage, and sickness or to ward off bad luck predicted by a fortune-teller (*moo-duu*); when a new house has been built; for a village in connection with the Thai New Year; or for towns in case of war or some other threatening crisis.³⁴ In the context of tree ordination, the ritual is performed in order to protect or prolong the life of forests. (In Nan Province, in Northern Thailand, the ceremony has also been applied to rivers).

During the first part of the ceremony the monks are chanting while seated in a pavilion. The monks are connected with each other by a white thread (*saaj siin*) they hold in their hands. From the hands of the monks the thread is linked to a small Buddha statue placed on an altar next to the monks. From the small Buddha statue the thread passes on to a bigger Buddha statue, which stands in a newly erected pavilion on a small hill. This part of the ritual corresponds to a general practice of sanctifying things through the “force” produced by the chanting done by monks. Normally, however, the white thread encircles the object to be sanctified, but this is not the case in the ritual referred to in this context. Here the big Buddha statue represents the guardian of the forest and through this statue the power of the holy chanting is dispersed to the forest as a whole.

After the chanting, lay people participating in the ceremony take an oath whereby they promise to refrain from cutting down trees in the forest. A monk presents the oath and the laypeople repeat the wording. As part of the oath a call is made to the “gods” who regulate the weather (*aakaad theewadaa*), Mae Thorani (Goddess of the Earth), Mae Phosop (Goddess of Rice), and the spirits in the forest and mountains (*caw paa caw khaw*) to assist people in preserving the forest and punishing wrongdoers. Finally, it is noted that all the merit accomplished through efforts to preserve the forest is dedicated to the royal family in Thailand.

After the oath has been taken, the forest is “ordained” as both monks and laypeople tie saffron cloth around trees in the vicinity of the Buddha statue. As this ceremony is intimately linked with the syyb chataa ceremony it may seem strange that the term “ordination” (*buad*) is used. Associating the ceremony with the term “ordination” was a deliberate attempt by Phrakhu Manas to make people notice it. As Phrakhu Manas puts it: “The term ‘tree ordination’ sounds weird to Thai people since an ordination is a ritual applied only to men. This weirdness has helped spread the news by word of mouth.”³⁵

Today, more than a decade since the first tree ordination ceremony was performed by Phrakhu Manas, the tree ordination ritual has been adopted widely and is performed throughout Thailand.³⁶ Now no longer characterized as “weird,” the ceremony, by invoking the sphere of holy things and notions about spirits punishing wrongdoers, has become an important cultural tool for the building of a “symbolic fence” around forested areas to protect them from being cut down. While Phra Phongsak strung barbed wire in his attempt to keep the local Hmong population out from a watershed forest the lowland Thai population wished to preserve, both Phrakhu Manas and Phra Prajak have used the tree ordination ceremony to erect a symbolic fence with reference to Buddhist symbolism. At the same time the tree ordination ceremony serves as a potent communicative tool to show outsiders how the villagers intend to preserve a specific forested area by sanctifying it. The tree ordination ceremony in the community forest of Nam Kian village in Nan Province, for example, took place during a seminar on community forests arranged by NGOs. Participants included farmers from many parts of Thailand (although the majority came from provinces in Northern Thailand), NGO workers, and a few representatives from government agencies. The main message of the seminar was that forest-dwelling farmers should be allowed to remain on land gazetted as reserved territory or conservation forests. Community forests, which can be used by members of the local community in accordance with regulations agreed upon locally, were put forward as monuments that invoke both the desire and ability of forest-dwelling farmers to preserve and manage local forest resources in a sustainable manner. Part of the program also encompassed a demonstration in which the participants walked through the streets of Nan carrying banners announcing their desire to live in harmony with the forest. Following the people a car drove with different products from the forest — mushrooms, broom grass, herbs — symbolizing how the life of the farmers is interdependent with the forest. On the last day of the seminar a local community forest was consecrated



Monks and villagers at a tree ordination ceremony. White thread (*saa j sin*) links monks with the statue of Buddha on the raised platform (upper left corner of photo).

through a tree ordination ceremony, which, together with the other activities at the seminar served to communicate and reinforce the ideological position that community forests are a viable means for people to manage forest resources in a sustainable manner. In the following we shall see how non-Buddhist communities in Mae Chaem district have adopted the tree ordination ceremony.

Mae Chaem

The Mae Chaem watershed, situated in Chiang Mai Province, borders Chom Thong, the site of Phra Phongsak's campaigns against non-Buddhist Hmong. Being a mountainous area with stretches of valleys and a network of rivers and streams, the Mae Chaem watershed is typical of Northern Thailand in terms of topography just as the demographic distribution of people to a large extent fits the conventional classification of land use by ethnic groups in Northern Thailand.³⁷ The population can be divided into lowlanders (Northern Thai), highlanders (Hmong), and people who live in the intermediate zone (Karen, Lua), keeping in mind the numerous exceptions to this pattern.

Mae Chaem was known as an opium production area until the late 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, during the years of communist insurgency it was considered a "red area" (*phyyntii siidaeng*), as many inhabitants were perceived by the Thai authorities as a threat to national security. Since the late 1970s, Thai authorities have initiated a number of development efforts to eradicate opium production as well as poverty by modernizing the district's infrastructure and agricultural production, and by integrating the population — not least the Hmong, Lua, and Karen — into the Thai state through the extension of government services such as educational and health facilities for rural people. The

agricultural development programs have focused on substituting opium for other cash crops such as corn, soybean, cabbage, and other vegetables. Another important goal has been to prevent shifting cultivation, which is regarded by the authorities as a major cause of deforestation.

The deforestation of large areas for agricultural purposes has caused considerable environmental concern inside and outside Mae Chaem, not least in regard to the area surrounding Doi Inthanon, the highest mountain in Thailand. Between the peak of the mountain (2,565 meters above sea level) and the lowlands surrounding it, many climate and vegetation zones are represented and the diversity of plants and animals is considerable, with many rare species being native to the area. In order to protect plant and animal habitats Doi Inthanon was established as a national park in 1972 and extended to its present size in 1978. Since then the Doi Inthanon National Park (DINP) has become one of the most publicly contested landscapes in Thailand. Promoting its unique “Himalayan climate” and spectacular springs and waterfalls, authorities and environmentalists have all described the DINP as a national treasure and as a watershed of utmost national importance. The discursive conflation of natural with national treasure has been expressed, for example, in Phra Phongsak’s allegations against some of the park’s Hmong inhabitants as threats to the Thai nation. However, Phra Phongsak — and the Buddhist NGO associated with him, Dhammaanat — has never attained the same status and influence in Mae Chaem district as he has in the neighboring district of Chom Thong.

Following the establishment of Doi Inthanon, the Obluang National Park was created and the Mae Tho area of Mae Chaem is now in transition to become a national park. The establishment of national parks has resulted in significant land-use restrictions for people residing inside the parks. It has also led to new pressures on the land outside the parks and involved a new relationship with the land for most people in the area. Shifting cultivation has ceased and new rules for land use have been implemented, for example, the rule that fields left fallow for more than two to three years can be defined as “forest” by the RFD, meaning that additional agricultural activities are prohibited. This rule is mainly employed by the RFD in the buffer zone surrounding the DINP. According to farmers in the area, this stipulation requires them to cultivate fields permanently.

Environmentalist campaigns and the government territorialization of Mae Chaem have been carried out through a number of national and international agencies. Initially, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided financial backing for development of the infrastructure in Mae Chaem. Other foreign government agencies and international organizations have since played an active role in the area. Today, for example, the Danish Cooperation for Environment and Development (Danced) is supporting CARE Thailand’s activities in the area. The Royal Project under the patronage of His Majesty King Bhumipol Aduldej is immensely significant. Also playing important roles are private or semi-state organizations such as Suanpaa Sirikit and CARE Thailand.

The environmentalist debate has been part of the social and political life in the district since the 1980s. NGOs such as Dhammaanat, the Northern Farmers’ Network, and the most recent addition to the multitude of organizations at

work in the district, Hak Muang Chaem, have aided villagers in their conservation and village mobilization efforts — often supporting one village against others or against government authorities.

Tree Ordination in Ban Yang Mae Malo and the Northern Farmers' Network

Ban Yang Mae Malo, a Sqaw Karen village located inside the boundaries of the DINP, has a population of 350 people in sixty-three households. Except for a few households who practice animism the villagers are Christian Baptists. Living inside a national park as they are, the villagers hold no official land titles or certificates and within the foreseeable future they are unlikely to be granted any. In the early 1990s, following the implementation of the National Watershed Classification of 1985 and the intensified enforcement of national park legislation, the DINP authorities declared that shifting cultivation — the traditional land-use form of the villagers — was to end in Mae Malo. Since then, the villagers have regularly negotiated with the national park authorities in order to develop the village, but mostly without success. Requests for electricity supply and improvement of the bumpy road leading to the village have been rejected. If villagers want to bring any kind of construction material to the village, they must first ask permission from the park authorities. However, between July 1999 and July 2001, park authorities permitted repair of a bridge, construction of toilets for the school children, and improvement of the water supply system in the village. Still, the villagers are concerned about what they regard as the bleak chances of raising their standard of living as long as they live within the confines of the DINP. At the same time they fear eviction from their land if they do not abide by the national park legislation.

In 1992-93, precipitation in Northern Thailand was unusually low. The ensuing water shortage affected both highland and lowland communities and led to many conflicts, including one between Mae Malo and a neighboring Northern Thai village located downstream along the Mae Malo River. In the heat of the situation, the villagers downhill temporarily got involved with Dhammaanat, the environmentalist group linked to Phra Phongsak, and they set up checkpoints at the village bridge to control other environmentalist groups from visiting Mae Malo. The village headman in the Northern Thai village wrote a letter to the prime minister of Thailand to express the villagers' opposition to the idea of community forestry, which they at the time believed to imply that people in Mae Malo would gain the rights to control and, assumingly, cut down all the forest surrounding their village. Since then, tempers have cooled and relationships are friendly although not altogether peaceful. According to the lowland villagers the association with Dhammaanat was, in fact, very brief as they soon realized that the organization brought its own agenda into village matters and thereby added to the conflict instead of helping solve it. Still, in face of the conflict-ridden situation back then, some villagers from Mae Malo in 1994 got involved with an organization called the Northern Farmers' Development Network, which later changed its name to the Northern Farmers' Network (NFN).³⁸

Initially, the NFN addressed two issues. First, the network advocated government support for farmers in Northern Thailand who were suffering because of the low prices they were receiving for cash crops like yellow beans and onion. Second, the NFN was concerned about the expansion of protected areas in Northern Thailand and the growing number of villages coming into conflict with the RFD about their right to live in forested areas and manage their resources. After the RFD began moving people out of the Doi Luang National Park in the early 1990s, the question of land security became the most central issue for the network and the organization experienced a rapid increase in members. In 1997 it counted 107 member villages, made up primarily of upland villages of ethnic minority groups (e.g., Karen, Hmong, and Yao). Most of the member villages were, as with Mae Malo, located within proposed or already existing boundaries of protected areas.

Since 1994, the network has argued that forest-dwelling people are not the most important cause of deforestation in modern Thailand. On the contrary, they possess the knowledge and skills necessary for coexisting with the forest. The network has encouraged the government to involve local communities and people's organizations in natural resources management and in the development of forest policies and legislation. Together with organizations like the Bangkok-based Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFT) and the Chiang Mai-based Northern Development Foundation (NDF), the NFN has actively debated the ongoing drafting of the Community Forest Bill. On a more local level, the NFN endeavors to strengthen communities in administering forest resources in areas classified as ecologically sensitive. This was also their role in Mae Malo, where the network supported a tree ordination ceremony in 1996.

The tree ordination ceremony in Mae Malo was part of a major undertaking launched by the NFN in 1996 to ordain 50 million trees in approximately one hundred community forests already in existence in eight of Thailand's northern provinces. The project, conceived and organized by a cultural elite among Karen and Thai environmentalists, was inaugurated to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the accession of the Thai king to the throne. The idea of ordaining trees to celebrate this occasion was conceived by Pho Luang (village headman) Joni Odochaw, a Karen and then head of NFN. Joni wished to apply religious beliefs and traditions to sanctify forests in order to preserve them either with reference to Christianity, Animism, or Buddhism. Being a Christian with knowledge of the spirit beliefs of the Karen, he consulted with Buddhist monks — like Phra Manas in Phayao — to learn about the way these monks had applied Buddhist symbolism in the ordination of trees. Joni's usage of the term "buad" for the sanctification ceremonies regardless of invoked religions was primarily a matter of gaining communicative force vis-à-vis the world outside the forests, that is, the majority of the Buddhist population and authorities in Thailand.

Once the idea had been born, the NFN looked for a state agency to support it. The first to be approached was the RFD, which declined this role because many involved villages were located in conservation forests. Next, the Department for Environmental Quality Promotion was approached and it agreed to stand as an official supporter of the project. This department deals with the environment in

general, not solely with forests as the RFD does. The NFN then linked up with leading Buddhist monks and respected people like Prawet Wasi, who officially served as advisors and, no less important, helped lend credibility to the whole project. Finally, permission to associate the project with the king was received. Throughout 1996 and 1997, ceremonies were carried out in around 150 villages throughout Northern Thailand where community forests were ordained.

As mentioned earlier, local communities cannot acquire the right to establish community forests within national parks under the existing legislation in Thailand. Through the ordination ceremony launched by the NFN, however, a clear connection between local forest communities and the ordained forest as a community forest — between people and forest — is established. Through the ordination a claim by the local communities to the ordained forest is established — areas that often fall within areas officially declared “conservation forests.” In the context of the ordination project this claim is further reinforced as the forest ordained was offered symbolically to the king as a present from the “poor people.”³⁹ Within this discursive and ritual universe, to present the ordained forest to the king did not imply that the people had to relinquish the land in question. Instead, the communities involved perceive themselves as caretakers of the forest for the king. In this manner community forests and the right of forest communities to manage local forest resources in what is considered ecologically sensitive areas are reinforced with reference to two central markers of national identity in Thailand — Buddhism and the king.

When asked about the tree ordination, the villagers in Mae Malo tend to have slightly different recollections about whose initiative it was and how and why it



The site of a *syb chataa* ritual along a riverbank in Northern Thailand (Nan Province). The *syb chataa* ceremony is performed for a variety of personal and community purposes including the protection of trees and, especially in Nan Province, the protection of rivers.

was done. Some villagers emphasize the role of the NFN. Others mention the significance of the king's anniversary, still others attach greater importance to the process that led up to the ceremony than to the ceremony itself. Yet, there is general agreement that these three elements in combination constituted the tree ordination in this village. One elderly lady explained that they did it for the king's anniversary "because the forest belongs to the king." In her understanding, the DINP is "like someone put their clothes on the forest...so we had to take it off again by ordaining the forest."⁴⁰ She also compared the tree ordination ritual to the act of giving something (e.g., land) to deceased parents or grandparents after which this "gift" cannot be touched. According to her and other villagers' recollections it was the NFN that initiated the tree ordination — including the three-year process that led up to the actual ceremony, during which the villagers had to "separate the living place and the fields and the conservation forest" in order to restrict their land-use practices.

What these villagers refer to is a model generally applied by the NFN in villages to show outsiders that forests managed by village communities are not necessarily perceived as potential agricultural land and that rules concerning a sustainable use of the forest resources do in fact exist. In Mae Malo, as elsewhere, the villagers were advised to define and demarcate landscape categories based on use — residence, agricultural production, use-forest, and conservation forest. Rules were established for the use of the various areas and a management committee was set up to be responsible for the implementation of these rules. Furthermore, a map showing the above mentioned landscape categories was produced and the history of the village was documented based on oral history. Altogether the transition from shifting cultivation to establishing permanent fields (conceptually and materially) lasted three years. During this time many village meetings were held to negotiate the new terms of land-use.

According to another group of villagers in Mae Malo, the land-use transition process was not initiated by the NFN but by the Queen's Foundation (Siricharoenwasan). Yet another group maintains that it was the villagers themselves who first thought about the tree ordination project and then went to the Queen's Foundation and later to the NFN for advice about where to hold the ceremony, how to get the robes and make the signs, and so forth. One man remembers that "first, we would do it so people could change their land-use...but then arose the question of how to represent it to outsiders." The villagers heard about the NFN project to ordain 50 million trees to honor the king of Thailand in 1996 and they decided to join, although, as one of them admits, "we never counted the trees."

As in other places, tree ordination in Mae Malo encompassed rituals to "prolong the spirit of the forest" (*syb chataa*) and ceremonies in which trees were wrapped in cloth of the same color as the frock of the Buddhist monk and sacred thread was laid out to sanctify the forested area. Besides reciting Buddhist prayers, the villagers from Mae Malo prayed to the Christian God and promised Jesus not to harm God's creation, the forest. Three pigs were sacrificed for a communal meal, according to the Karen tradition of "do together, eat together" (*mae s'kan, au s'kan*). As such the ritual constituted a blend of Buddhist elements and non-Buddhist rituals and beliefs of the local population. Buddhist

symbolism was brought in to reinforce, not to be superimposed on local beliefs and customs, by providing the reference and reverence to this key marker of national identity in Thailand. Hereby, the Karen people in Mae Malo like those from Wat Chan defined themselves into the category of “we Thai citizens” by honoring the king and the Buddhist religion, while, at the same time, upholding their own beliefs and customs. Considering that the mid-1990s was a period in which conflicts with DINP authorities and with the neighboring Northern Thai village loomed large in the minds of the villagers in Mae Malo, the idea of tree ordination presented an obvious way out for them. Doing it “for the king” or “giving the forest to the king” was a face-saving and honorable excuse for submitting to the will of the DINP authorities and thoroughly changing their land-use traditions while, at the same time, maintaining the view of DINP as an illegitimate forest manager. They presented themselves as responsible citizens who sincerely address the environmental concerns of Thai society by sanctifying and thereby restricting their use of the forested areas with reference to the symbolism of Buddhism and the king. A far cry from the “forest-eating” forest dwellers of Phra Phongsak’s discursive universe, indeed.

Although the force of merging Buddhist symbolism with the monarchy is certainly not lost on people in Mae Malo, the villagers, interestingly, barely mentioned the Buddhist aspects of the tree ordination ritual, whereas they eagerly stressed that they ordained the forest as a gift to the king. They did not imply that they had to relinquish the land in question but clearly perceived themselves to be local caretakers of the forest in behalf of the king. And in line with the NFN they imply that cutting down trees or disturbing the ordained forest is not only a crime against the environment but an insult to the king as well.⁴¹ The villagers have strategically invoked this perspective to prevent downhill Northern Thai men from coming up at night to hunt in the ordained forest.

While describing the discussions about who to invite and how to do the tree ordination ritual, the villagers pinpointed a fundamental dilemma associated with the ritual. On the one hand they knew that they needed the assistance of the NFN throughout the whole process — particularly to represent it to outsiders — but on the other hand they did not want this or any other organization to symbolically or politically appropriate their land-use transition process and the ordination of their forest. Most villagers acknowledge the necessity of social and political connections outside the village because these connections bring social power that is highly useful in times of conflict with their neighbors or the DINP authorities. But many villagers are aware that NGOs and “outsiders” sometimes create as many problems as they help solve. Bringing Dhammaat and the NFN into the water conflict between Mae Malo and the Northern Thai village helped escalate the conflict by drawing it into a larger national political arena where villagers on both sides felt it did not belong. Therefore, the villagers differ in their opinions about the best strategies for the future. Some villagers want a close engagement with the NFN and are willing to confront the DINP authorities on land-use and development issues, while others prefer a less public and confrontational form of negotiating.

Conclusion

From the description above it is clear that zoning and territoriality are no less important for the NFN than for government institutions in Thailand. This shows how territoriality has become the language of contention and has thereby attained hegemonic status — not in the sense of a shared ideology or political program but as a common meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination.⁴² People in Ban Yang Mae Malo and Wat Chan, along with NGO activists, clearly act and express themselves within the framework defined and enforced by the law and by government authorities. From this perspective an ironic twist is that “counter-territorialization” becomes in fact part of the overall process of territorialization, but with the important difference that the tree ordination ceremony forms part of a strategy to contest the classifications of the territory built into the Thai state’s mode of territorialization. In this manner the association of tree ordination with counter-territorialization shows that the counter discourse of what we have called the radical environmentalists is subordinated to and works within the hegemonic discourse defined by the state. In the sense of opposing or resisting the government mode of territorialization, however, we can still understand actions by villagers and NGOs as counter-territorialization, while keeping in mind that neither villagers nor NGOs form homogenous entities with respect to their motivations and interests for participating in tree ordination ceremonies. In fact, multiple interests are at play. The tree ordination ceremony was used to reinforce a greater transformation of land-use. The ceremony, performed in honor of the king, was intended to comply with government regulations without formally recognizing the government’s right to the forest. The ceremony was also a symbolic means of asserting a right to be able to live in their present locality even as the Thai state’s process of territorialization had the potential to threaten their existence in that same location. At the same time the tree ordination ceremony demonstrated the people’s capacity to manage forest resources and contest negative stereotypical perceptions of forest-dwelling people. For people formerly positioned on the fringe of and defined as potential enemies of the Thai state, the ceremony has become an important tool for non-Buddhist as well as Buddhist communities in their struggle to become acknowledged as modern, responsible citizens. This illustrates the widespread perception among NGOs and villagers that natural resource issues are closely related to identity politics, or politics of difference, in Thailand. Finally, the tree ordination ceremony is an important occasion for villagers to reach beyond their villages to form alliances with NGOs and powerful others. However, such alliances present their own challenges. The NGOs may have their own agendas and political aspirations that are not necessarily in accordance with the villagers’ self-perceived interests — a situation that can lead to inter-village conflicts. Having said that, it is important to acknowledge — as villagers have done — that the support of NGOs and academics is of utmost importance for communities as long as Thailand lacks legislation that would grant resource management rights to local people.

Notes

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2. Yoko Hayami, "Internal and External Discourse on Community, Tradition and Environment: Minority Claims on Forest in the Northern Hills of Thailand," *Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 4 (1997): 558-79.
3. See, for example: Barbara Bender, ed., *Landscape, Politics, and Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg, 1993); E. Hirsch, "Landscape between Place and Space," in *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives of Place and Space*, ed. E. Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995).
4. Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Peluso, "Territorialization and State Power in Thailand," *Theory and Society* 24, no. 3 (1995): 384-426.
5. Nancy Peluso and Peter Vandergeest, "Genealogies of the Political Forest and Customary Rights in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (2001): 761-812; K. Sivaramakrishnan, "A Limited Forest Conservancy in Southwest Bengal, 1864-1912," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 1 (1997): 75-112.
6. Nancy Lee Peluso, "Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia," *Antipode* 27, no. 4 (1995): 383-406.
7. The government in Sarawak, Malaysia, recently passed legislation that makes unauthorized mapping illegal. In part this was in response to the effectiveness of the "counter-mapping" movement.
8. Royal Forest Department, *Forest Area in Thailand, 1961-1998* (Bangkok: Forest Resources Assessment Division, 1998).
9. Pinkaew Leungaramsri and Noel Rajesh, *The Future of Peoples and Forests in Thailand after the Logging Ban* (Bangkok: Project for Ecological Recovery, 1992), x.
10. Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52.
11. *Ibid.*, 55.
12. *Ibid.*, 66.
13. Andrew Turton, "Local Powers and Rural Differentiation," in *Agrarian Transformations, Local Processes and the State in Southeast Asia*, ed. Gillian Hart, Andrew Turton, and Benjamin White (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 81-82.
14. Mikael Gravers, "The Pwo Karen Ethnic Minority in the Thai Nation: Destructive Hill Tribe or Utopian Conservationists?" *Copenhagen Discussion Papers* 23 (Center for East and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Copenhagen, 1994), 24.
15. Today, an estimated 40 percent still have no citizenship.
16. Vandergeest and Peluso, "Territorialization and State Power," 388.
17. The "forested areas" category encompassed forests of very different degrees of degradation. Some areas were classified as forests even though they were used for agricultural purposes and, strictly speaking, had been more or less stripped of trees. Forest reserve land is today still legally defined by its Crown status

- rather than by the vegetation that does or does not cover it. See Hirsch, "Forest, Forest Reserve, and Forest Land in Thailand," 168. See also Santita Ganjanapan, "A Comparative Study of Indigenous and Scientific Concepts in Land and Forest Classification in Northern Thailand," in *Seeing Forests for Trees: Environment and Environmentalism in Thailand*, ed. Philip Hirsch (Chiang Mai: Silksworm Books 1996), 261.
18. Hirsch, "Forest, Forest Reserve, and Forest Land in Thailand," 168.
 19. Vandergeest and Peluso, "Territorialization and State Power," 412.
 20. Berit C. Kaae and Anny Toftkaer, "Tourism and the Doi Inthanon National Park," in *Forest in Culture: Culture in Forest*, ed. Ebbe Poulsen et al. (Bangkok: Research Centre on Forest and People in Thailand, 2001), 178.
 21. Lotte Isager, "Forest and People in Thai Environmentalist Discourse," *Working Paper 1* (Foulum: Research Centre on Forest and People in Thailand, Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences, 2001).
 22. Kay Milton, *Environmentalism and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1996). We find Milton's categories useful for our purposes in this article because they stress the political rather than the philosophical aspect of environmentalist struggle. Other researchers have used different sets of analytical concepts to categorize the diverse meanings and strategies represented within environmentalist discourse. See, for example: A. Dobson, *Green Political Thought* (London: Harper Collins, 1990); R. Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach* (London: University College London Press, 1989); Luc Ferry, *Le nouvel ordre écologique* (Paris: Éditions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1992); Philip Hirsch, "Environment and Environmentalism in Thailand: Material and Ideological Bases," in Hirsch, *Seeing Forests for Trees*, 15-36; Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
 23. It should be noted that the groups and worldviews subsumed under the term radical environmentalism are not necessarily in agreement with each other or united by factors other than their opposition to what is here defined as the conservative position (which, of course, also covers differing ideologies and strategies). When radical environmentalists express their critique of society, the object of their criticism may be either industrial society, capitalist society, modern society, Western society, patriarchal society, or all of the above. Hence, they are not necessarily talking about the same thing, but the environment serves as the arena for their different political agendas.
 24. For example, Anan Ganjanapan, "The Politics of Environment in Northern Thailand: Ethnicity and Highland Development Programs," in Hirsch, *Seeing Forests for Trees*, 207; Pinkaew and Rajesh, *The Future of Peoples and Forests*; Pratuang Narintarangkul Na Ayuthaya, "Community Forestry and Watershed Networks in Northern Thailand," in Hirsch, *Seeing Forests for Trees*, 116-146; Santita, "A Comparative Study of Indigenous and Scientific Concepts"; Robert Steinmetz, "The Ecological Science of the Karen in Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary, Western Thailand," paper prepared for the Asian Conference on Indigenous Rights and Protected Areas, Kundasang, Malaysia, 1998.
 25. Søren Ivarsson, "Man, Nature, and Environmentalism in Thailand: The Role of Buddhism," in Poulsen, *Forest in Culture*, 33-54; Jim Taylor, "'Thamma-Chaat': Activist Monks and Competing Discourses of Nature and Nation in Northeastern Thailand," in Hirsch, *Seeing Forests for Trees*, 37-52.
 26. Lotte Isager, "People and History of North Thailand," in Poulsen, *Forest in Culture*, 85-116.
 27. B. A. Conklin and L. Graham, "The Shifting Middleground: Amazonian Indians and Ecolitics," *American Anthropologist* 97, no. 4 (1995): 695-710.

28. Anan, "The Politics of Environment in Northern Thailand"; Pratuang, "Community Forestry and Watershed Networks."
29. Royal Forest Department, *Khuumyy kaan padibad. Kaan cad tham kbroongkaan paa chumchon* (Handbook. To establish community forests) (Bangkok: Section for Community Forest, no date).
30. Darlington, "The Ordination of a Tree."
31. For example, Pipob Udomittipong, "Thailand's Ecology Monks," in *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, ed. Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft (Boston and London: Shambala, 2000), 193; Jim Taylor, "Social Activism and Resistance on the Thai Frontier: The Case of Phra Prajak Khuttajitto," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 25, no. 2 (1993): 11.
32. Phrakhru Manas Natheepitak, "Buad paa ton naam (Ordination of a watershed forest)," in *Buad paa. Phuumipanjaa naj kaan fyynfuu thammachaaad* (Ordination of the forest: Using local wisdom to restore nature), ed. Nantha Bencasilarak (Bangkok: Project to Ordain 50 Million Trees and the Department for Environmental Quality Promotion, 1986), 99-104.
33. Taylor, "Social Activism and Resistance on the Thai Frontier," 11.
34. See Mani Phayomyong, *Wadthanatham laannaa thaj* (Lanna Thai culture) (Bangkok: Thai Wathana Phanit, 1986).
35. Quoted in Pipob Udomittipong, "Thailand's Ecology Monks," 193.
36. We do not know whether the *syb chataa* ritual figures prominently in tree ordination ceremonies outside Northern Thailand.
37. See Ganjanapan, "The Politics of Environment in Northern Thailand;" Peter Kunstadter and Sanga Sabhasri, eds., *Farmers in the Forest: Economic Development and Marginal Agriculture in Northern Thailand* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1978).
38. For information about the NFN, see Sayamon Kayjurawong et al., *Khabuan kaan klyanwaj khoong kbrya kbaaj klum kasedtakoon phaag nya phya phitag sidthi chum chon naj kaan cadkaan sabphajaakoon thammachaaad* (The NFN's campaign to defend communities' rights to manage natural resources), unpublished report, Bangkok, 2000.
39. Department for Environmental Quality Promotion, *Buad paa ton naam: Kbroongkaan buad paa chum chon baa sib laan ton* (Ordination of trees in watersheds areas: Project to ordain 50 million trees in community forests to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of His Majesty the King's accession to the throne) (Bangkok: Department for Environmental Quality Promotion, 1996), 92.
40. The phrase the woman uses is similar to the Karen saying, "the mountain puts on the red blanket" (*ta loo bko, ka btau ya gau*), a phrase normally used to describe the burning of fields before planting season.
41. Department for Environmental Quality Promotion, *Buad paa ton naam*, 92.
42. W. Roseberry, "Hegemony, Power, and Languages of Contention," in *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, ed. Edwin Wilmsen and Patrick McAllister (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

