

## Spaces of People and Nature in the PLON (Par Lar Uoo-Noi)

Aree Suwanmanee<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning  
60/1 Soi Pibulwattana 7, Rama vi Road, Payathai, Samsaen, Bangkok, 10400, Thailand.

E-mail: aree108@hotmail.com

### Abstract

This study was to examine differently spatial meanings in aspects of natural resource conservation and utilization that held by outside local experts and inside indigenous people. The space concept was a theoretical framework employed to interpret how space is being opened up for meaningful engagement between various groups in aspects of resource utilization and conservation. The qualitative method was employed to examine perceptions, objectives, values, practices held by different cultural groups. Informal conversational interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured direct observation were the techniques for data collection. Discourse analysis was the analytical method.

The results show that spatial meanings were embedded in discourse models of outside local experts and inside indigenous people. The PLON is a particularly spatial product of human/nature relationship. There are four important spatial themes uncovered from the PLON matters including spatial concept of the PLON: contradiction of policy practice, a space of natural resource integrity and threat, contaminated or pleasing space, and encroaching space. These themes revealed different discourse models in aspects of natural resource utilization and protection that led to tensions and contradictions between these different groups. This study suggests that villager's values and their uses of natural resources should be considered and recognized in local natural resource management at the national park arena. In this study, a joint management model is offered as an alternative to natural resource

management in the PLON. It can support both the needs and values of villagers and those of ecological conservation.

**Keywords:** space, indigenous people, discourse, conservation policy

### 1. Introduction

When landscapes are determined and constructed by officially scientific model through the bureaucratic system as national parks. The boundaries of national parks are managed and maintained by national park officials. As commonsense, scientific experts and particularly national park officials define national parks as being meaningful without human settlement. However, local villagers define such landscape as their homes and food sources. In this sense, national parks are viewed as space where principles of conservation shape the space in specific ways and they are challenged by villagers. As the national park refers to the arena of the interaction between different human groups who act on natural things within it, the conflict and incompatibility of the meanings of social issues are emerged.

The study area is named Par Lar Uoo-Noi (PLON). It is a part of village number 3 of the Houy-sat-yai sub-district, Hua-hin district, Prachuabkririkhan province. Historically, the origin of the study area has long been modified by human beings. It became a cultural space for 'ethnic minority people', namely the Karang. A first group of the Karang moved from a *Satu* community (a name of a Karang village that is located in the forest, the west of the study area).

Later groups moved from the surrounding areas. Initially, the Karang sustained themselves by using their indigenous techniques to use and adapt places and natural resources for their settlement and livelihood. In 1984, the government established the Kaeng Krachan National Park, all PLON area was incorporated into the park area. The Karang was pressed to evacuate from the PLON. However, in 1998, the government issued the cabinet resolution allowing the Karang be able to live in the PLON.

## 2. Objective

The objective of study is to look at differently spatial meanings in aspects of natural resource conservation and utilization that held by outside local experts and inside Karang. The result may suggest certain solution for natural resource management in the study area.

## 3. Theoretical framework

Philosophical perspective of the space concept regarding the relationship between humans in a particular place has been of great interest to social scholars [1],[2],[3]. The space concept has been developed in works of humanistic geographers [4], anthropologists [5], and political ecologists [4],[6]. Their works revealed the function and mechanism in physical and non-physical places. In the work of humanistic geographer David Sibley, space concept was employed to understand the relationship between social groups in different races, social stratum and age in a particular place [7]. Meanwhile, Vandergeest & Peluso [8] used territorialization as a space concept to explain certain productions of Thai official agencies for managing the landscape. They argued that the demarcation of the forest area as a conservation space is a production of official agencies to conserve forest and other national resources under the state power [6],[8]. This officially constructed space negatively impacts on the people living in the space [6].

The concept of space is employed to uncover the power relations between local villagers and bureaucratic authorities. The power of exclusion, rebuilding, production, and management provides opportunities to display the meanings of space in several forms. Some forms of this power are used to control certain groups of people [7]. Certain notions in the space application, such as exclusion, inclusion, purification, boundary, transgression, and resistance are employed to data interpretation. For example in the work of Sibley [7], purification and exclusion projected the understanding of construction and maintenance, of spaces and their boundaries under different powers and perspectives, ways of knowing of different social groups. These notions reflect the mechanism of dominant management of space. For example, resistance and transgression reflect exercises of social groups with spaces, responding to boundaries and sizes that are constructed and controlled by other groups. In addition, many studies employ concept of space to explain the status of natural resource conservation and reveal the power relationship of different relevant groups of people involved in national park implementation under the practice of spatial exclusion and transgression [3],[4],[6].

This study draws on the work of space studies of Sibley theorist, to examine how space is being opened up for meaningful engagement with power relationship between Karang and local experts in natural resource utilization and protections in the PLON.

## 4. Methodology

The qualitative method employed in the study. It is a useful mechanism to describe, interpret and learn about people and their way of life [9], to provide an appropriate method of inquiry into what people talk, think, and do about something, to investigate properly how people come to understand their situation [10], and to understand the meanings generated by certain groups of people. In addition,

qualitative methods are commonly employed for developing deeper understanding of the points of view of different people [11], and for describing in detail what is happening in a group, community, or society, and to accommodate multiple perspectives and allow gathering of rich information from people [12].

## 5. Data collection and analysis

Information was collected by interview and observation from ten Karang and five local experts. Ten Karang interviewees were selected from villagers who have long experientially living in the study area more than ten years, such as farmer, folk doctors and headmen of ritual practice, midwife. Informal conversational interview and unstructured direct observation were techniques for data collection.

Five local expert interviewees were selected from various agencies who have occupations, responsibilities and activities in the study area. They are a national park officer, a teacher, a health officer, a local Karang expert and a NGO manager. Semi-structured interview and unstructured direct observation were the techniques for data collection.

The interview data in tape recoding were translated into texts. The transcriptions were modified from the Jefferson transcription principle [13]. The discourse analysis method at the macro level is a fundamental to data analysis. The discourse analyse is based on the work of Gee [14], who outlined seven basic aspects or ‘seven building tasks’. The components of the seven building tasks consist of significances, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems or knowledge. Following Gee’s approach to analyse data, these seven building tasks involve asking questions about how language is used to build up different perspectives, opinions and understandings of natural resource matters. The analysis result revealed discourse model characteristics that held by interviewees.

## 6. Result

There were two discourse models emerged from data analysis. One is a self promoted discourse model that interviewees use their language to present self and their group doing good things in the PLON. Another is another devalue discourse model that interviewees use their language to point out other persons or other groups doing bad things in the PLON.

These discourse models were emerged in four themes including spatial concept of the PLON: contradiction of policy practice, a space of natural resource integrity and threat, contaminated or pleasing space, and encroaching space. The following is illustrates how the specialized spaces are confirmed and maintained, and how the Karang resist the mechanisms of exclusion in the specialized spaces.

### 6.1 Spatial concept of the PLON: contradiction of policy practice

There are two conservation policies play a role in the PLON. One is the orthodox national park policy based on the concept of separating humans from non human ecosystems. This policy was employed in the PLON in 1984 since the Karajan national park establishment. Another is a relatively new conservation policy based on the concept of sustainability that accept humans as part of and living in the ecosystems. This policy employ in the PLON after the cabinet resolution of 30 June 1998, form that time the government allowed the Karang can live in the PLON. The two different concepts are employed by different agencies in local practices at the PLON. The park officials have mechanisms to protect natural resource value. Whereas, other agencies who hold the new conservation concept support the Karang for their quality of life.

Under the orthodox national park policy, national park officials constructed the demarcation between humans and nature in the PLON. One of mechanisms revealed the demarcation principle is official activity to allot land for Karang living. Each Karang family

gained about 1-2 rais of land for house building and gardens. National park officials put the cement posts ground each block of surrounding the giving land, and required the Karang to avoid certain activities in other land that will impact on natural value. It is notable that national park officials did not use the full area of the PLON to subdivide into allotments for the Karang families. Rather, national park officials gave a small piece of land to each Karang family. So the living land in the PLON is not a homogenous zone, rather settlement is scattered in the PLON. The land between blocks is officially to be managed as national park land. The boundary surrounding the giving land and the rules in the PLON were constructed to separate the Karang activities within the PLON. Sibley [7] and Cresswell [2] pointed that the spatial boundary and rules of space can be seen as mechanism for controlling the people living in the area.

The separation of human living and natural resource habitats is unattainable [7]. It is a continuing cause of conflict between the Karang and national park officials. The Karang still disagree with the control of their lives and national park officials cannot control the Karang culture and identity. In addition non-park agencies such as Heal officier, NGO and local experts who held the new conservation concept helped the Karang using natural resources in the PLON for their sustainable living.

### **6.2 A space of natural resource integrity and threat: different notions of conservation in the PLON**

The issues of wild animals and wild plants were common in the interviewees' dialogues. All the local expert interviewees agreed that there are many wild plants and animals in the PLON. However, they linked the relationship between wildlife and the Karang in different ways. The national park interviewee held other devalue discourse model by maintaining the relationship where the Karang hunt wild animals. The other local expert interviewees have a different

devalue discourse model on the relationship of the Karang and wild animals and plants in the PLON.

Meanwhile, Karang interviewees held a self promoted discourse model by claiming that they are a group who exercise care in their use of wild plants and they do not kill wild animals in the PLON, as if they are positioned in a friendly relationship with wild animals. In addition, they constructed another devalue discourse model by indicating that the protected wild animals in the PLON were killed by outsiders. This is a cause that wild animals in the PLON were threatened.

The realities of the 'hunter' are constructed by the Karang and local expert interviewees in different ways. This different issue of who the hunters are leads to different ways of identifying and solving the problem of wildlife threat.

### **6.3 Contaminated or pleasing space**

The PLON is an upstream area that is preserved as a water source for the Pran River. The discourse models in issues of water resources in this area were a common subject of the interviewees' talk. The local expert interviewees labelled the PLON as contaminated, whereas the Karang interviewees viewed it as a pleasing space.

A contaminated space is another devalue discourse model constructed by local expert interviewees to point out the PLON as being a dirty place. The discourse model of contaminated space is linked with the Karang hygiene, and their activities concerning pesticide use, wastewater, garbage, and chemical fertilization. Local official expert interviewees alleged that the Karang are unhygienic people, polluters in the PLON because they were a cause of water pollution and garbage by leaving things in the walkways, stream banks and school yards and bathing in the stream.

Whereas, the Karang interviewees had a self promoted discourse model confirming that the PLON is a place in good environmental condition. They

argued that they live in the PLON with good natural resource practices, and are not contaminating it with garbage or chemical agricultural substances. They never used agricultural chemicals. They reasoned that the soil is sufficiently rich with natural fertilizer. Moreover, they argued that water pollution has never occurred in their living area; as a Karang interviewee stated ‘here water never has a bad smell, we drink it all year without boiling’. They argued that they have hygienic practices. They control human waste and pollutants in water, on land, and under their houses. That is, they never urinate or defecate in the stream. In addition, they argued that water in the stream beside their living area is clear. They swept garbage from the ground for their own convenience and for the appreciation of visitors. They used the term ‘*sa ard dee*’ to explain that they control garbage in their living area and make sure their houses are free of pollution. They also presented that they maintain the plants in a stream bank to protect the water from drying up. They know that plants in the stream and stream bank can retain water in the stream, and they explain the relationship between the waters, trees and sun in that the wild plants can prevent sunlight from reaching the surface of the water in the stream and thus reduce evaporation.

Meanwhile, the Karang interviewees held an other devalue discourse model by describing Thai villagers as polluters. They pointed out that they saw Thai rural villagers living downstream who do not look after water and throw garbage in the stream. In addition, they argued that when Thai people come to the PLON, they throw plastic bags and cans on the walkways.

#### **6.4 Encroaching space**

As the PLON is a specialised space to control Karang activities in the national park, the struggle between national park officials and the Karang over land in the PLON has resulted from the political change aimed at allowing all the Karang from the

national park area to have land in the PLON. In practice, national park officials have to make clear the PLON boundary in the national park area. The boundary to enclose the Karang living lands was constructed within the national park. It functions to control the Karang activities associated with their livelihood within their living land, and prevents them from extending into other areas of the national park. Several types of boundary markers, such as GPS, posts, and billboards were employed for this task in the PLON.

The boundary constructed by national park officials became a land-ownership conflict between the Karang and national park officials. The national park officials claimed that the land is nationally owned, whereas the Karang asserted that the land belongs to the first user. Each side accused each other of being the invader. The following revealed feature of discourse models at whether land ownership is based on the claims of the nation or the earliest occupations.

From the aspect of nationally owned land, local expert interviewees understood that all natural things in the PLON, including land, rivers, wild plants and animals, belong to the Kaeng Krachan National Park and are subject to laws administrated by national park officials, but some areas of the national park have been set aside for the Karang. They recognized that the Kaeng Krachan National Park is a national estate and national park officials have responsibilities under the bureaucratic system and official regulations, such as the National Park Act. The Acts and official regulations provide the power to protect national treasures, such as the national park area. The park officials can arrest the Karang and exclude them from the national park area. They strictly control the Karang activities within their living land and must prevent their intrusion into the national park. For example, a national park interviewee stated that national park officials have a legitimate role under the National Park Act and the bureaucratic system to arrest squatters.

With respect of land belonging to the first user, there are narratives and arguments from the Karang interviewees to claim the land in the PLON. The Karang built up a self promoted discourse model to recount the history of fruit tree planting to confirm that they were long-time occupiers of the land. They referred to their large cultivated trees, such as mango, tamarind, jack fruit, and wood apple as evidence of their long occupation of the area. This was used as evidence/proof of their claim that they should be the land owners.

The Karang attempted to use all lands in the PLON. They had used evasive practical tactics to extend their living land. Some Karang in the PLON had practical tactics to extend their living land by, for example, clearing the weeds from under the large trees in order to deceive the officials. They reasoned that officials could not see from the distance that the area under the large trees that are being cultivated. They also challenged national park officials citing different meanings of land ownership. For example, a Karang interviewee stated that she debated with an official about her long settlement history as evidence to claim land ownership. This is the other devalue discourse model construed by the Karang to criticise national park officials as the official ignored rights of own living land.

The conflict over land resources emerged from dialogues of the interviewees. Karang interviewees told me that they were bullied by national park officials who tried to evict them from their living land. One cause of the conflict of land owners is based on the unclear boundary between the Karang living land and the national park. This ‘unclear boundary’ leads to conflict between the Karang and national park officials with regard to squatting.

It is notable that an other devalue discourse model held by local experts and the Karang employed to argue about the land resource indicate a struggle between the Karang and local experts

regarding claims as to who are the rightful land owners in the PLON. Different other devalue discourse models of legal intention were advanced to argue their cases. The officials pointed that the Karang were too irresponsible and unable to develop the land. In addition, they alleged that some Karang squatters claimed land use as their right in the national park area. The officials maintained, but without proof, that the Karang cannot have the rights to use land in the national park because they are dishonest, and are a non Thai citizen group. Moreover, national park officials held a self promoted discourse model claiming that they have legitimate responsibilities to control the squatters under the legal requirements of the National Park Act and other relevant regulations.

The official zoning and the boundaries of the land are not accepted by the Karang. They still conduct activities to enlarge their living land into the PLON, and gather wild plants in the PLON without negotiating with national park officials. They resist the official boundary, space and rules.

## **7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Conclusions**

The PLON was constructed as a special space under two different conservation policies. The PLON has two roles: to protect natural resource values and support the Karang livelihood. This area of specialised usage reflects the practice of exclusion operated by officials and also illustrates resistance by the Karang. Karang’s practices determined by the use of scientific evidence and personal observation were advanced by official local expert interviewees to argue that the PLON is a national treasure with significant natural resource values, but that it is at risk from water pollution and forest clearance and its endangered species are threatened by Karang activities. In contrast, the Karang argued that the PLON is in good natural resource condition without any pollution; rather they feel violated by national park officials who want to

evict them from the PLON. The argument of Karang reflects their struggle and resistance to official power.

In addition, there is conflict about the land rights issue. Local experts claim that land in the PLON is a national treasure controlled by the national park under the appropriate Acts. Meanwhile, the Karang claim that they have the right to the land in the PLON. They offered evidence such as long occupation of the land, and the planting of fruit trees to argue that they were the original users of this land. The conflict over the land rights in the PLON still remains as far as the Karang and national park officials are concerned, as there are different interpretations of legitimate ‘land owners’. Meanwhile, the Karang held a self promoted discourse model by pointing their right in the land owner because of their long historical living

Therefore, the PLON is a space of contest of power between national park official and the Karang. The local experts have a stereotyped image of the Karang as a tribe who may impact on natural values. As Sibley [7] argued image is a significant tool in constructing a stereotype of a minority group as deviant. This imagine of the Karang provides reasons for excluding the Karang from the national park, or creating specialized space and spatial rules to control them. The national park officials identified a clear boundary in the PLON to enclose the area in which the Karang live. Such classification of land is produced by scientific knowledge [7],[15]. This infers that an area and borders between people and the forest are determined and controlled by officials. Roth [3] claimed that this principle to separate an area is simply for preventing human disturbance in the national park and also so park officials can authorize their activities under the National Park Act and other relevant regulations.

The idea and form of the national park cannot be divorced from its social origins. Such the idea as a space of wilderness or pristine nature is had to sustain. Rather, it is a cultural landscape that

embodies multiple cultural constructions of people and nature by both park officials and indigenous villagers. There are tensions and contradictions between these cultural groups. The tensions and contradictions are based on different values of the role of resources in the PLON for utilization or protection.

## 7.2 Recommendations

This study suggests that the villagers and their uses of park resources should be considered to a greater extent on social equality grounds. Their management and use of resources needs to be recognized in local natural resource planning and management. In addition, the park policy makers should renew national park management to integrate with the two different conservation concepts. They should accept the values of villagers who live in and adjacent to the national park and take them into account in national park policy and implementation. In this study, models of joint management are offered as an alternative to current Thai national park management. This model can support both the needs and values of villagers and those of ecological conservation.

A joint management model is offered as an alternative participatory that provides more respects of human values in resource conservation management [16],[17],[18]. This model facilitates villagers to share their benefits, ideas and power in the implementation of conservation [18]. It can be applied to solve problems of two different conservation concepts that operate in national parks or their buffer zones where villagers and their livelihoods cannot be excluded. The joint management model has various forms, and been long introduced in Australia national parks where Aboriginal people live [16],[17],[18].

Many benefits can arise from joint management model of a designated reforestation project in the PLON. It can address the intentions and contradictions regarding land rights and empowerment of local natural resource management for in the area. It can be a space for sharing knowledge and developing

practice. This sharing of knowledge occurs when national park officials learn from the Karang and how to cultivate and look after wild plants from Karang experts. The Karang can learn how to look after and gather plant products from national park officials. This situation will aim to facilitate positive relationships between national park officials and the Karang. Its results may shift the political ecology of conservation from a single purpose to multiple purposes. Further, it should work towards the change of the Karang, instead of obtaining wild plants in the core area of the national park to cultivating wild plants near their houses. This may reduce their use of the core area of the national park, and lead to greater conservation effectiveness there. Further, the joint management model should be taken into action research of local natural resource management in the PLON.

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