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Abstract

Debates about ecotourism are futile without an understanding of how concepts of ecologically acceptable and unacceptable forms of tourism are developed. This paper assesses the case of public opposition to the filming of the Hollywood film, *The Beach*, in Thailand on grounds that it caused environmental degradation. Evidence suggests that campaigners overstated the film's environmental impact in order to empower criticisms of the state. Yet the impact of the overstatement may strengthen other campaigns elsewhere in Thailand to exclude economic activities in national parks. The paper consequently argues that debates about environment and tourism need to assess the underlying implications of the environmental discourse used, and the extent to which this has been democratically constructed.

KEYWORDS: ecotourism, Thailand, social movements, environmental discourse, ephiphenomenal

Introduction

The concept of ecotourism is often discussed in terms of the local impacts of nature-based tourism in particular localities, and its ability to conserve threatened ecosystems (e.g. Cater and Lowman, 1995; Garrod and Fyall, 1998). Yet perhaps of more importance is the need to understand ecotourism as an environmental and sustainability discourse, in which the differing perceptions and conflicts about environmental protection are reflected and

institutionalized. Under such an approach, the concept of ecotourism is assessed according to what principles of conservation and policy it represents, how it evolved in this way, and whose views were represented in this process.

This paper considers the question of ecotourism as a discourse by looking in detail at recent conflicts about the ecological impacts of tourism in Thailand. The question is particularly important: much recent research has indicated the wide disparities in environmental perception and concern both within rapidly industrializing societies, and between visiting tourists and local hosts. Concepts of 'ecotourism' – or what is considered to be sustainable development – therefore depend on the current debates about what is ecological fragility. Yet research in environmental discourse in general has shown that such scientific debates are embedded in social and political contexts much broader than the specific topic of tourism itself, and indeed the particular definitions of ecological fragility may be 'epiphenomenal' – or reflecting short-term and pragmatic interactions of political actors – rather than indicating long-term and accurate understandings of ecological change and resilience (Hajer, 1995).

The focus of the paper is the dispute concerning the production of the Hollywood film *The Beach*, which was made in Thailand during 1998-1999. The film, which starred Leonardo Di Caprio, and was based on Alex Garland's sensationalist novel about backpackers and drugs, raised the concern of local environmentalists because it was allowed to be made in two national parks in contravention of laws governing economic activities in parks. The resulting campaign, fought on the streets, media and Internet, focused on both the illegitimacy and ecological damage of the filming. However, as this paper argues, the underlying context and implications of the dispute reflect wider concerns about environmental policy and development that are less democratic than the campaign suggested. Indeed, the dispute illustrates debates in general about the compatibility of 'ecotourism' with inclusive sustainable development (e.g. Tourism Concern/WWF, 1992; Wheeller, 1994), and the influence of social movements on the construction and communication of environmentalism as a legitimating scientific discourse (e.g. Eyerman and Jamison, 1991).

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first section reviews the topic of tourism and social movements in Thailand in general, and highlights the role these have played in democratization and the governance of natural resources. The second section then describes

the events of the dispute concerning *The Beach*. The third section analyzes the significance of the dispute for debates about sustainable development and ecotourism in general. The paper's key argument is that, although the dispute concerning *The Beach* highlighted the apparent abuse of national laws by the Thai government, the underlying discussions of 'ecotourism' did not necessarily indicate an understanding of environmental fragility or democratic governance. Instead, there is a need to understand how ecotourism and environmental fragility have been defined and by whom, and seek to highlight the wider politics and implications of each.

Social movements and tourism in Thailand

There is currently much media attention in Europe and North America about tourism in Thailand, and particularly the problems of tourism focusing on the 3S concept (of 'sun, sea and sand'), and also the fourth 'S' of sex tourism. Such attention, however, overlooks the long history of public protest against tourism for a variety of reasons, and often in relation to domestic as well as international tourism. Indeed, opposition to tourism has formed a major part in the growth of environmentalism in Thailand, and consequently in the emergence of an active and politically potent civil society.

In the late 1960s, the first prominent opposition to tourism emerged when a consortium of the Thai government and German contractors proposed to build a cable car to the ancient mountain Buddhist temple of Wat Phra That Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. The proposal was met with horror by numerous citizens, including many wealthy landowners who lived in the vicinity of the mountain, and after a series of street demonstrations, letters to ministers and informed debate, the project was postponed indefinitely in the early 1970s (Rüland and Ladavalya, 1993). As with many later disputes focusing on tourism, this protest was not against the principle of visitors coming to see the ancient landmark, but highlighted the public concern about the management of cultural heritage in ways that ensured their protection, and with sensitivity to the views of citizens. On a different theme, public protests in 1986 about the proposed location of a tantalum processing plant in the southern resort of Phuket was generated partly out of fear of damage to tourism as an industry. Later campaigns about the nature of tourism in national parks also highlighted the forms rather than the existence of tourism. For example, Thailand's first national park, located in the rainforest of

Khao Yai, northeast of Bangkok, originally featured a golf course and access roads so wide they presented barriers to the passage of gibbons from one side to the other. Later protests led to the closure of the golf course and the shutting down of buildings offering building overnight accommodation for trekkers.

The nature of these protests reflected a variety of themes apparent in the emerging environmentalism of Thailand. Perhaps most clearly, the protests showed the growing concern amongst Thais about the rapid environmental change occurring in their country as the result of industrialization and population growth. Until a national logging ban was established in 1989, Thailand experienced one of the world's worst rates of deforestation (put at 3.15 percent a year in 1982 by FAO/UNEP, in Allen and Barnes, 1985).

But in addition, Thailand during this period was undergoing a transition from its historic reliance on a bureaucratic polity and government removed from the people, towards a more overtly democratic and conflictual political process including a wider range of actors (Hirsch and Lohmann, 1989; Hirsch and Warren, 1998). In particular, Thai politics was changed by the emergence of new, powerful middle classes in society as the result of industrial growth, and secondly by the decline in authority of traditional state institutions and ministries. Political debates therefore became characterized by conflicts between ministries for political hegemony and control over resources, as well as disputes between different sectors of society over the best form of development for Thailand (Hewison, 1998).

Such changes were also reflected in disputes concerning tourism, particularly in disputes with the Royal Forestry Department and Tourism Authority of Thailand, which were most involved with new tourism development, and the administration of Thailand's growing number of national parks. In the early 1990s, for example, much concern was expressed about the possibility of tourism development encroaching on forests inside national parks that were supposed to be protected by law. Some individuals were also targeted for apparent corruption or lack of concern about Thailand's natural heritage. The Senator, Tri Devakul, for example, was criticized for being a member of the governmental panel responsible for devising plans for the original 'Visit Thailand Year' in 1987. The Senator was accused of vested interests by being the owner of the Phuket Yacht Club, and also a being close friend of the then prime minister Prem Tinsulanonda. The wife of billionaire businessman and future prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, head of the Thai Shinawatra satellite communications

group, was also criticized for alleged involvement in illegal land development in the Chiang
Mai area. Thai feminist groups have also criticized the toleration of sex tourism by the
Tourism Authority of Thailand. In the late 1980s, a group of feminists wrote an open letter in
condemnation of the Thai woman who had recently won the 'Miss Universe' contest for
fuelling stereotypical sexual images of Thai women. Delegates of the Friend of the Woman
Foundation in Bangkok traveled to the beach resort of Pattaya to protest against the overt
toleration of the sex trade for the US Navy. Campaigners cleverly posed in front of
newspaper cameras in costumes, with the provocative banner (in English), 'Stop using pussy
as bait for tourists'.[1]

It is therefore clear that public opposition to tourism development in Thailand has
summarized many of the dynamic changes in politics that have occurred in recent decades,
marking the rising ability of society to challenge entrenched state and business interests, yet
also allowing a greater voice for previously under represented groups such as women (see
also Ubonrath, 1991). Indeed, tourism itself is of great significance as an agent of economic
and social change, being Thailand's highest earner of foreign exchange outside agriculture,
and also representing the expression of national identity to outside interests, in a country
renown for its nationalism and political autonomy (Thailand was the only Southeast Asian
country not to be officially colonized by a western power). But despite the great political
energy expressed in the disputes about tourism development in Thailand, in common with
other locations two key questions can be asked about the influence on policy resulting from
disputes of this type.

First, how far are disputes about the specific topic of tourism also reflective of wider social
and political concerns about hegemony and governance in Thailand at large? Previous
research on social movements and political discourse have suggested that the emerging foci
of debates may be called 'epiphenomena' because they are simply short-term arenas for
longer-term and deeper seated social divisions (e.g. Hajer, 1995; Eyerman and Jamison,
1991). Under this scenario, political recommendations concerning the practice of tourism in
national parks may also be determined by the underlying struggle between state departments
and social groups, rather than simply the perceived best principles of managing parks. Indeed,
most work on communicative rationality has suggested that in order to gain political
legitimacy for certain campaigns, social activists have to change their discourse to issues that
are of greater immediate concern in order to gain greater saliency within political arenas

(Habermas, 1981). Indeed, Hajer (1995) has described that epiphenomena may result from so-called 'discourse coalitions' between different actors as a way to gain short-term agreement.

The second question is how far do dominant critical voices of social movements represent a wide selection of social groups, or just a limited number of powerful and politically connected individuals? Discussions of social movements and civil society are often characterized by an optimistic agglomeration of 'society' versus the state, but increasingly research is indicating that civil society may contain deep divisions. For example, Covey (1995) in the Philippines revealed that alliances between grassroots organizations and middle-class non-governmental organizations (NGOs) commonly led to the suppression of the objectives of the less powerful grassroots groups (see also Forsyth, 1999). Indeed, the so-called 'new' social movements such as environmentalism and feminism, have been argued in Europe to be characteristic of post-industrial society (Tourraine, 1981). Yet in rapidly industrializing societies, the importance of so-called 'old' social movements, or those based on the opposition of classes under industrial or capitalist society, may be overlooked by the assumption that new social movements such as environmentalism may speak for all sectors of society. In particular, there are clear differences between the social groups who wish to protect wilderness and forest in Thailand, and the generally poor farmers and shifting cultivators who often live in mountainous-forested zones, and who are often responsible for a proportion of deforestation. Indeed, the campaign for the protection of national parks in Thailand has been closely linked to the question of whether parks or protected forests should also include access for villages, and in fact some NGOs have called for the establishment of specific forest zones where no agriculture or human settlement is allowed (Hirsch, 1990).

It is therefore common that environmental social movements concerned with tourism may call for changes to state policy, or for the reform of specific state agencies. However, it is likely that such demands may be motivated by a variety of concerns in addition to tourism alone. Furthermore, it is also likely that such social movements may not represent all sectors of society, and instead be dominated by the concerns and interests of dominant groups. The following section now considers these dilemmas in relation to a case study of one specific dispute concerning the filming of *The Beach*.

The controversy of *The Beach*

The dispute concerning *The Beach* centered on the decision of the Thai Royal Forestry Department (RFD) to allow the creation of a film in a national park in the Phi Phi Islands, in Krabi province, south of Phuket. The RFD claimed the film was an attractive way to support tourism in Thailand. During the 1970s, a distinctive limestone cave in neighboring Phangnga Province became known as 'James Bond Island' after the film, *The Man with the Golden Gun* was filmed there, and has remained a tourist attraction since. It was hoped that *The Beach*, starring such a Hollywood idol as Di Caprio, and featuring a story about backpackers, drugs and self-exploration, would also generate a new flow of tourism and publicity for Thailand.

Unfortunately, however, the film crew wanted to change the physical properties of the selected beach in Maya Bay, Phi Phi Leh Island. Bulldozers were used to widen the area covered by sand in order to shoot a soccer game, and 60 coconut palms were imported and planted on the beach in order to make it conform to the image of a tropical paradise that the team wanted. This decision meant removing much pre-existing vegetation such as Giant Milkweed, Sea Pandanus, Spider Lily and other beach grasses. Protestors were quick to point out that such actions were in conflict with the National Park Act of 1961, which aimed:

> 'to protect and conserve existing natural resources such as plant species, forest products, animals, and including the landscape, forests and mountains, so that they remain in their original state, not to be destroyed or changed, for the continuing benefit of the state and the people both directly and indirectly'.[2]

The law stated that offenders should be punished by a fine and/or imprisonment. Clearly, the filming broke this regulation, and protestors highlighted this. One particularly prominent protestor, a woman who had been active for years as a freelance journalist and environmental campaigner against tourism was quoted as saying:[3]

> 'If they were just shooting the film, that would be fine, but they're going to take out the indigenous plants and keep them in pots in a nursery. The place is beautiful but it's not Hollywood's idea of a tropical island. For them a tropical island needs coconut trees so they're going to plant 100 coconut trees. This is a major ecological disaster.'[4]

The campaign started in earnest: protestors marched on streets in the Phi Phi Islands and Bangkok; banners declared: 'We welcome filmmakers, but we do not welcome destruction of national park'; campaigners wore masks carrying Leonardo Di Caprio's face with superimposed fangs, and the words (in English and Thai) 'I love to rape Thailand'. Websites were launched,[5] newspaper articles written in Thailand and abroad, and petitions sent to government ministers asking for the cancellation of the project. In November 1998, 18 conservation groups from the southern provinces of Krabi, Phangnga, Phuket, Trang and Surat Thani declared together that the removal of grass and beach plants would cause erosion and destroy the beauty of Maya Bay.[6] One particularly graphic editorial in *The Nation*, an English-language national daily newspaper stated:

> 'Imagine filming an ambitious Hollywood blockbuster on Phi Phi Island, one of the most beautiful islands in the Pacific. All the elaborate and crushing equipment and ravaging crew laying waste most of what they touch. This is what is about to descend on Phi Phi if 20th Century Fox gets the final go ahead from the Thai Government to shoot *The Beach*.'[7]

The female protestor quoted above also wrote:

> 'This is tantamount to bulldozing an ancient village, a national heritage site, to make way for a row of identical townhouses. Except it's much worse, since we're talking about living things.'[8]

At this stage the debate focused mainly on the presumed environmental impact of the filming. Andrew MacDonald, the film's producer, claimed that less than one third of the 100 meter beach would be affected, and that the grass removed, *Long scavolia*, would grow back easily. Furthermore, he pointed out that the filming also removed some two tones of garbage that had been deposited on and around the beach over the years by tourists.[9] Newspaper reports and websites, however, contained pictures of a bulldozer on the beach used to move sand, and questioned whether the imported coconut trees were native to the locality and therefore able to survive. In the face of such concerns, the film company offered a gift of 4 million Baht (approximately US$200,000) to the RFD for assistance with ecological recovery. Inevitably, the gift was seen as a bribe. Yet at the same time, a curious rumor circulated that the protestors were also being bribed by local entrepreneurs who controlled the collection of birds' nests (for soup).[10] The rumor suggested the birds' nests collectors had profited for years from the collection of illegal fees from tourists visiting the island on the pretence that

they were working for the national park. The filming process, and the subsequent presence of the RFD would make any further fee collection impossible. While it was apparently true that birds' nests collectors had collected fees, and opposed the film, rumors linking them to the main female protestor were questionable, as she is independently wealthy, and has a long track record of opposing illegal development.

In November 1998, the Environment Panel of the Thai Parliament proclaimed that filming had to cease while an environmental impact assessment was carried out. But shortly after this announcement, the film was approved by the government, and production continued. Campaigners responded by increasing the attention given to the ecological damage from the film, such as by claiming that the film crew had damaged a coral reef by dragging anchor cables. Furthermore, the campaign started to highlight the illegality of the decision to allow the film to be made. The number of protestors and groups involved in the campaign increased, including representatives from the Assembly of the Poor, a prominent representative of labor groups and small farmers. One local hotel owner was quoted as saying:

> 'The tourism business sells culture and nature. I sell nature too, but I don't sell it the way [*The Beach* producer] sells it. I sell it sustainably and with gratitude.'[11]

In January 1999, the campaigners against the film filed a civil suit against the agriculture Ministry, the RFD and 20th Century Fox through the Law Society of Thailand. Yet the court dismissed the case on the grounds that the forestry chief should be allowed a chance to explain why the filming was taking place. Later, a court accepted a reduced plea in favor of receiving a bond against potential environmental damage from the film rather than a demand for its immediate cessation. Later the same month, new concerns were raised about *The Beach* when it was revealed that the film would also be shot in the Khao Yai national park northeast of Bangkok. Two groups, the Khao Yai Protection Forum, and the Forest Conservation Group, voiced concerns that the company's attempts to control the flow of water over a waterfall during filming might cause a water shortage that would affect wild animals and people downstream.[12] Meanwhile, representatives of 20 civic and environmental groups filed a petition to the US Department of Justice alleging that Fox had acted corruptly by offering the RFD a bribe.

Yet, just as the filming was coming to an end, the protest reached new levels of anger. In February 1999, the Director of the RFD, Plodprasop Suraswadi was approached personally by two key protestors including the woman quoted above. The *Bangkok Post* reported the exchange as follows:

> '[The woman protestor] pointed her finger at Mr. Plodprasob and said: "Why should we be polite when you destroy this country's resources? You're very selfish. How dare you make a decision without asking local people?"
>
> Mr. Plodprasob became visibly angry when he was presented with a wreath bearing his image. He said "Enough is enough. How would you feel if it was your parents' faces? You treat me like an animal, like a dead thing."
>
> [A further male activist] told the director-general to "act like a man" and take responsibility for what he had done. He said he would "see" the chief again.
>
> "We can see each other any time, even now", retorted a testy Mr. Plodprasob.
>
> A forestry official stepped over towards [the male protestor] and it looked as if a fist fight might break out, but the pair were restrained from going at each other.'[13]

The following month, villagers on Maya Bay tore down the temporary houses built by the film company.

The court cases presented by the protestors were postponed until later in the year, and were eventually inconclusive. The filming has also ended by this stage, and so in essence this marked the end of the dispute. Yet while the campaign still existed on Internet pages, and occasional letters and reports in newspapers, some observers also began to question the ecological damage associated with the film. Two marine biologists from the USA wrote to Thai newspapers stating that, after their inspection of Maya Bay, 'no coral appeared to have been damaged in any way' and that the plantation of coconut trees had been done in an 'exemplary' way. One of the biologists had worked for Reef Check, a non-profit project endorsed by the United Nations. They wrote:

> '…why *The Beach* was the target of all this environmental ire?… Who put on this show? Who scripted it? If they were concerned enough to put together a coalition of environment groups, why aren't they complaining about the trawlers, the bombing of coral reefs in the Similans [neighboring islands], the nets that cover the shallow corals there, the rape of the rocks off Koh Phi Phi Don where all of the baby black-tipped sharks have been taken to be served up in local restaurants? Why are they not

protesting the dumping by boats of sewage that is destroying the water quality and diving off both islands?' [14]

Discussion: activism and the construction of ecotourism

So what happened in this dispute? The campaign combined many elements of concern: environmental damage; resentment of corruption and high-handed action by the state; and the abuse of Thai laws by foreign companies. During the dispute, one well-known Thai human rights advocate stated that the impact of the filming was to:

> 'Tell the world how a Thai government not only abuses its own laws but also allows foreigners to do it.' [15]

Yet within the dispute were also ecological claims that were arguably highly extreme, if not ludicrously overstated. The assertions that removing sand and vegetation on the beach was 'a major ecological disaster' or 'tantamount to bulldozing an ancient village' (see above) seem to be exaggerated for a dynamic, rapidly changing ecosystem such as a beach in the tropics. The idea that erosion *per se* – as stated in many newspaper reports – is environmentally bad as a matter of course is to take the process of sediment movement out of context. Sediment is removed and deposited all the time on beaches as a result of various high and low frequency events such as tides and storms. Similarly, the concern about leaving the beach in 'pristine' condition is also questionable, in part because of the pre-existing disturbance and garbage left by tourists and local settlers, but also because the ecosystem is in dynamic change (e.g. Adams, 1997; Zimmerer, 2000). The statement made by one forest biologist to support the campaign that:

> 'From years of experience and numerous experiments around the world, there's never been a case where the altered environment can be completely restored,' [16]

is ironic because it shows the futility of any attempts to keep ecosystems in supposed 'stable' states according to valuations from particular social groups at particular times. The implications of these kinds of statements are that the protestors were attempting to portray the film as ecologically damaging in order to increase the political power of their campaign. Furthermore, as the quotation from the marine biologist from Reef Check suggested, there are

plenty of other ecological threats that were not addressed by the campaign. It might be suggested, then, that the focus of the campaign on ecological fragility, and the beach itself, are effectively epiphenomena of the debate, reflecting the immediate subject matter of the filming, rather than how the filming affected political relations between the state and the protestors.

A more deeply set topic of concern is the dictatorial and apparently corrupt behavior of the RFD firstly in allowing the film without local consultation, and in conflict with national laws; and secondly in accepting the payment of the film company. On these topics there is no evidence that the opponents overstated their case. Regardless of the ecological impacts of filming, the decision to allow a foreign company access to a protected area when there is national concern at environmental degradation, and the 1997 Constitution stated that public consultation was necessary on all resource-based projects, was arguably foolish and undemocratic.

Yet despite the immediate concerns of the dispute in Maya Bay, the episode has wider significance for environmental policy and ecotourism in Thailand. The campaign is also relevant for debates about the representativeness of environmental discourse. The framing of the dispute in terms of 'a major ecological disaster' is based upon a perception of ecological fragility that is – as discussed above – complicated by natural rates of ecological change and response. In addition, the notion of ecological fragility implies the need to limit human impact and even exclude people from specific ecosystems. Such debates are controversial in Thailand where there is a long history of conflict associated with the rights of farmers to conduct limited deforestation for agriculture, particularly in the north and northeast (Hirsch, 1990). Indeed, the concern shown by the protestors may be considered characteristic of environmental groups concerned at rapid loss of wilderness as a result of rapid industrialization and urbanization, yet not necessarily with an understanding of how such changes may increase the perception of such land as attractive (Nash, 1982).

The dispute concerning *The Beach* is noteworthy because it adopted, and reinforced the idea of ecological fragility. Significantly, the female protestor quoted above is the daughter of another prominent environmentalist in northern Thailand who has campaigned for years to remove hill farmers from mountain areas on the grounds that their agriculture damages

watersheds and forests. Wildlife campaigners have generally supported this movement. However, the campaign has also been criticized by geographers and anthropologists for making exaggerated claims about the impact of agriculture on watersheds, and even by some for imposing a form of environmental racism in attempting to exclude hill farmers from forests (e.g. Hamilton and Pearce, 1988; Forsyth, 1995; Lohmann, 1999). The dispute is currently relevant to the debate about proposed Community Forestry legislation, which will determine the accessibility of forests to a variety of users. One proposed option is to exclude all people from national parks and wildlife sanctuaries on the grounds of ecological fragility. Social development campaigners have opposed this option because it would interfere with local livelihood strategies in rural areas, and effectively slow down development for forest users because such concerns might conflict with attempts to protect wilderness (e.g. PER, 1992).

The influence of personal networks in presenting this particular discourse is also increased by the strong friendships that existed between the protestors against *The Beach* and editors of newspapers, and their power in allowing the protestors space to publish articles. Such networks in disseminating viewpoints highlight further social factors in the adoption of discourses. Indeed, it is possible that this kind of alliance prevented further debate about the environmental allegations made by the protestors. On one occasion, a letter to *The Nation* newspaper criticizing one protestor for a long and allegedly biased article about the film was followed in turn by another half-page reply by the protestor, in which she was allowed to attack her critic.[17] However, it is worth noting that one attempt to make a television program on the subject of *The Beach* by an environmental journalist was apparently censored by the overseeing company, apparently because of its likely criticism of the state in the highly visible medium of television.[18] The reporting of supposedly neutral science or expert information under such circumstances is clearly compromised, and less balanced than often hoped for in the media.

The underlying influence of *The Beach* dispute is therefore in constructing discourses of environmental fragility that may have little to do with the land use proposed by the filming process, but which are seen to be necessary in order to legitimize and strengthen the criticism of the state (or specifically, the RFD). Yet the overall impact of such discourses may be to reinforce overall approaches to environmental policy that may be considered unrepresentative of many groups not included in the construction of the discourse (see also Chambers, 1997).

While it would be naïve to expect demonstrators not to adopt tactics that empower their campaigns, it is important to see through the rhetoric of ecological fragility in order to see the impacts of such discourse on wider policy and development options.

Conclusion

This paper has assessed the case study of the dispute concerning the filming of *The Beach* in Thailand as a way to understand how notions of ecotourism are constructed. The paper has argued that the main focus of the dispute upon the alleged 'ecological disaster' of the filming was overstated, but seen to be necessary in order to gain legitimacy and urgency for the campaign against the undemocratic behavior of the Royal Forestry Department (RFD). The campaign, however, cannot be called an example of good governance because it supported a vision of environmental damage that was based on the sensationalistic exaggeration of ecological processes, and which has implications for environmental and ecotourism policy elsewhere that may impact negatively on a variety of livelihoods of people not represented in this form of environmentalism.

The case also supports other pre-existing concerns about ecotourism. As discussed above, some critics have questioned how far 'ecotourism' as a current practice generally reflects a rarified and elitist view of nature, rather than the more pragmatic and catholic concern of so-called 'sustainable tourism', which focuses more on the public participation in tourism development, and the environmental impacts of mass, and not just nature-based, tourism (see Cater, 1995; Forsyth, 1997). Under this broader approach to environment and tourism, research is less focused on how consumers construct 'nature' but instead looks more to how tourism may be used long-term and inclusively for sustainable development. This paper has argued that debates about ecotourism are futile without an understanding of how concepts of ecologically acceptable and unacceptable tourism are developed. The campaign against *The Beach* in Thailand has shown that the purpose of the dispute was democratic in that it sought to increase public consultation about decisions to impact on the natural environment. Yet the discourse upon which it was based was more selectively constructed, and potentially has implications on other aspects of environmental policy that are far less democratic.

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[1] Ing K., environmental campaigner and journalist, personal communication, March 1990

[2] Source: http://www.cyberjedi.org.uk/content/the_beach/the_beach_petition.html

[3] The name of specific protestors involved in *The Beach* protest are kept anonymous because the aim of the paper is to discuss the influence of social movements on the construction of environmental policy rather than analyze or criticize the actions of individuals.

[4] *Bangkok Post* 18th October 1998

[5] For example, see endnote 1; http://www.wildrockies.org/wve.beach.html
http://thaistudents.com/thebeach/articles1/html

[6] *Bangkok Post* 11th November 1998

[7] *The Nation* 17th October 1998, page A4

[8] *The Nation* 13th November 1998, page A5

[9] *Bangkok Post* 25th November 1998

[10] *Bangkok Post*, 12 January 1998, page 1

[11] *The Nation*, 5th December 1998, page A5

[12] *Bangkok Post*, 26th January 1999

[13] *Bangkok Post*, 2nd February 1999

[14] *Bangkok Post*, 18th February 1999

[15] Pibhop Dhongchai, quoted in *The Bangkok Post*, 19th December 1998

[16] Surachet Chetmas, Dean of Faculty of Forestry, Kasetsart University, quoted in *The Bangkok Post*, 19th December 1998

[17] *The Nation* letter page, 27th November, 1998, page A4; and response in *The Nation* 1st December, 1998

[18] Television program *Rayngnan Si-khiow*, James Fahn, personal communication February 1999