

Never Far From Us

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I have been getting frustrated for a few weeks because of watching one news in Thailand. This news is about the expansion project of the road to Khao Yai national park. The project was an order from the Minister of Transport who gave reasons about a better transportation and more tourists coming to Khao Yai, which then will lead to the better economy. Because of this road expansion project, hundreds of trees were cut down to make a clear road, and most of them are more than 50 years old. The project has been started since March, but I think most people at that time lost their thought to the political situation so that no one ever talked about this until now. Many people were watching every step of the government and pushing it to do something. Some environmental non-governmental organization made a move in the form of demonstration. Until recently, the project has been shelved by the order of the Prime Minister, and he also ordered this case to be investigated.

Khao Yai national park is the second largest park in Thailand, which covers an area over 2,000 square kilometers, including evergreen forests and grasslands. It consists of various species of plants, birds, and animals. In 2005, the park together with other parks in the Dong Phrayayen mountains was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site under the name Dong Phrayayen–Khao Yai Forest Complex. This tells how valuable of Khao Yai is in terms of nature itself and in terms of money people can make out of it. According to the news, there were some rumors about politicians who made profit on the logs from deforestation and resorts nearby the road. Absolutely, the media play on this news, and people got angry after knowing the story. The government could not let this news spread out anymore that is why the project was stopped, temporarily.

The things are back on track now as the project has been shelved, the investigation is going on, and society is watching this situation; however, I kept asking myself why my frustration has not gone yet. After thinking for a while, I had an answer. This case is nothing more than a repetition of previous cases about environmental problems in Thailand, which will be gone and forgotten in a short period of time. Thai people have an idiom to explain the situation like this; it is “Fire burning on straw”, which refers to a thing that happens quickly and looks strongly as fire burning, but as it burns on straw it will be put out quickly, too. In this case, social media lit the fire, then people’s attention will keep this fire burning until people move their attention to more interesting news. What I am most afraid is that this project will certainly come back to construction, and the road will be finished before we recall about that.

Why do the project's owners not care much about this deforestation? Why do some people resisting the project easily forget this? I am sure that if that road is in front of their homes, no one will let the trees being cut down and will do whatever they can to stop it. This is because people usually think about themselves before others. If the word "environment" means "surroundings", how much of those surroundings we will take into account. Imagine that we all have a circle area around us with ourselves as a center. How big the circle means how much we are aware of surroundings. The circle includes us, our family, friends, houses, gardens, our town, but it absolutely does not contain forests far away from us. Similarly, the Khao Yai road expansion project is out of people's circle, which means it is "far" away from them, so they do not concern as they are still fine at home. This is a big misunderstanding in terms of environment. We must not separate environment from us because everything is in relationships. We must look through to see a network of relationships between water, soil, air, animals, forests, and humans; therefore, you cannot destroy forests in Khao Yai just because your place still have a forest nearby or you grew new plants to compensate the damage. There are more effects coming from the decrease of forests that we cannot compensate such as decreasing biodiversity of animals and plants, water and soil degradation, and global warming.

What happens when we separate ourselves from environmental problems is that we cannot efficiently solve the problems, and more problems will be sure to come. A good example is a waste problem in Thailand. People always see a campaign about using Green products such as recyclable plastic bags. They feel happy to use it and think that they are a part to protect environment because they dispose Green things which will not pollute environment. However, most of them never separate garbage before they dispose, and those "Green" plastic bags might not be recycled because of other wastes contaminating them. Therefore, this way of using recyclable plastic bags means nothing to safe environment. Furthermore, there is no campaign about waste separation in Thailand to arouse people. This problem will not be solved as long as people do not concern and relate their everyday life to environmental problems. In Khao Yai case, what we have to do is to keep this topic alive by spreading out more information to public, giving the true understanding about environment to people, increasing people's awareness, and showing them how this topic is much related to them. Although it sounds difficult, but it is important for dealing with this kind of cases and it will prepare people for similar cases that will come in the future.

Environment is never far from us. To take the right direction for saving environment in the long run, Thailand needs to emphasize its people more about this fact. My expectation for Khao Yai road expansion project is that this case will be a turning point for Thailand to look back of what we have done and start doing something better. What I do not want to see is not only Khao Yai being removed from a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but also the fact that we, Thai people, are the one who start destroying our own home.