

My family's relationship to nature and the environment

[Environment](#), [Nature](#)



The history of my family demonstrates the drastic change in the relationship with environment that has occurred over the past few generations. Seeing the change in attitudes and lifestyles between my grandparents, parents, and my own generation is very educational. Examining the changing relationship with environment across this timeframe, one can make conclusions about the relative importance of natural surroundings in the life of people as changing over time. My family history naturally reflects the situation in Thailand, as I come from this nation, but I believe that it to a great degree parallels the events in other parts of the globe.

My grandparents lived in a rural area in Thailand and made their living by farming. This is still a common situation in Thailand where 65% of the land is engaged in agriculture (Assumption University, n. d.). Their occupation made them strongly aware of their natural environment as they depended upon it for their livelihood. However, this relationship was not one of adoration or concern - land, water, plants were to them something matter-of-fact, something they perceived as their daily routine.

Besides, their attitude was one of consumption. They saw the resources of the land as something they were entitled to merely because of being born in this land, since soil, skies and water were simply vehicles for growing food, not much else. There was little concern as to what will happen in the next generations, and little awareness of the need to implement new agricultural techniques in order to extend the land's capability to generate harvests over generation. At that time, Thailand's population was not so large, and it was

at many times simpler to move to a new plot of land than to tend to the old one, trying to improve its productivity.

With all this said, I would like to note that my grandparents were successful as farmers and developed some new crops that allowed them to outstrip the rest of the farmers in terms of financial gain. In the next generation, the income received by my grandparents enabled my father to receive a college education and obtain a white-collar job. Thus, nature offered them this opportunity to improve their lifestyle and life standards. As a result, my father who grew up on a farm, found himself working in an office in Bangkok, only occasionally visiting his elderly parents in their place.

The same is true for my mother who also changed her rural motherland for an urban life. This made nature seem something of a holiday setting to them, rather than an everyday reality. In their office jobs, they did not need to care whether land preserved its fertility and whether the climate remained mild enough for the crops to grow. Although Bangkok and other cities in Thailand are made up of landscapes skillfully integrating trees, lawns and buildings to create a coherent image, this nature is very 'cultured' and very far removed from the roughness of the village landscapes. Thus, in my parents' urban life, nature was very much a distant reality, something they saw on TV and enjoyed in our little Sunday outings.

However, they identified with Thai nature as associated with their place of birth and motherland. Given their rural background, they remembered toiling in the fields and gardens, trying to turn the gifts of nature into material

benefits. Somewhere deep inside their souls, they looked upon this connection, although on a subconscious level.

One change that occurred in the relationship to nature in my parents' generation was the rising awareness of nature as a global phenomenon. Thanks to books, periodicals, TV, and now Internet, their generation was able to realize that the boundaries of nature transgressed those of nations, and that nature was facing a threat from too much human interference.

Seeing pictures of nature all around the world, they began to see in color how different various places on earth were, and realize how unique their own natural surroundings were. This 'global' realization, I believe, happened more or less in the time my parents' generation was active, as millions of people throughout the world realized that the rest of the world has become closer, and reality is such that we live in a small, interdependable world.

With the move to the US that happened when I was only 17, the connection with nature as some place in Thailand where my parents were born and grew up, has become even weaker. Here, we were surrounded by a rich and diverse natural setting, even if it seemed alien to us at first. However, the beauty of American nature took our hearts, and as a family we made quite a few 'nature-focused' outings, such as, for instance, a trip to the Grand Canyon or the Yellowstone park.

More important is, however, the revolution in thinking that occurred in my generation. With globalization trotting over the planet at a dramatically increased speed, environmental plight is no longer something distant and

incomprehensible, but instead has become something that threatens us already in our lifetime. With evidence of the global climate change and warming happening on a large scale, no one can ignore the significance of what is happening.

Basing my judgment not only on my personal experience, but also on that of my colleagues and fellow students, I can claim that we are much more likely to make environmentally conscious choices. Personally, I agree with the words of James Gustave Speth, dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, that environmental issues today have turned into “chronic problems,” that emerge and have a long-term nature” (Laverdiere, 2000).

The fact that today's ecological issues such as greenhouse effect, ozone depletion and loss of biodiversity cannot be solved by the efforts of one nation or dealt with effectively on a local level. Their solution requires the coordination of effort on an international level, translating into significant changes in our mentality. My generation is much more aware of the existence of other nations, better informed of their struggle for a cleaner environment and has better opportunities to join with representatives of other countries in the struggle for a safer and cleaner environment.

Personally, I have participated in a few demonstrations focused on environmental issues and at one point attended the Ecological Club in my high school. I also know a lot of peers who take this action seriously. This is something my parents and grandparents would not think of doing since they

had a totally different perception of their relationship to nature and environment.

Thus, over three generations, my family went through a revolution in our relationship to environmental cause. To my grandparents, land and nature was commodity, something they consumed in order to receive material benefits for themselves and their kids. My parents were to a great degree alienated from nature that remained to them very much a childhood memory that bound them to their birthplace; at the same time, their understanding of nature and environment was considerably broadened to include places far away from their motherland. Finally, in my present generation, nature became a source of concern, something that requires distinct political action to protect and save it for future generations.

References

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