
CHIANG MAI'S ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

NAEWBOONNIEN, VIRACHAI¹ and WONGBURANAWATT, JAKAPAN²

¹ Governor, Chiang Mai, Provincial Hall, Chotana Road, Muang District, Chiang Mai, Thailand

² Dean of Social Sciences Faculty, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, first of all let me thank the organizers and all the rest of you present for having chosen Chiang Mai as a venue for this very important meeting. Actually, as we all already know Chiang Mai depends on tourism so the more people we get to come to Chiang Mai the better the economy will be. Therefore, before I forget let me just say now that while you are here in Chiang Mai spend a lot of money, buy everything in sight, buy as much as you can. If you have a problem at all with that let me know I can help you. I am sure you have a lot more money at home so whatever you have brought with you spend it all at Chiang Mai.

A week ago Chiang Mai celebrated its 700th anniversary so this is a very old town, one of the oldest cities in the world, I do not know if you realize that. We have a lot of problems. My job this morning is to welcome you and then present something under the heading of Chiang Mai's Environmental Challenges. As a political administrator, I do not have much time to go into the details of the various aspects of our environmental challenges. My immediate problem is to raise the standard of living of the people within my country. Just yesterday the queen was up in the palace over the hill visiting the very outlying village, a very far away distance from Chiang Mai and about 1,000 hill tribes came and visited her and received her. Every time she goes out of the empire a medical unit goes with her to look at the problems of the people. The majority of the people are living below the accepted level. Only one district in all the 24 districts of Chiang Mai has proper toilet facilities. We have 23 districts that do not have proper toilet facilities. This is just one example of the need to bring up the level of living conditions. I personally think that is more important than the environmental problem of the sector. Not that we do not give attention to environmental problems, we do. The provincial authority at Chiang Mai has asked the Faculty of Social Science at Chiang Mai University to study the environmental problems of Chiang Mai and come up with a plan as to how to go about solving these problems. We asked them to identify the challenges we have so this morning I would like with your permission to introduce a colleague of mine who has prepared this environmental plan. He is the Dean of the Social Science Faculty of Chiang Mai University, Dr. Wongburanawatt.

I have been given ten minutes to give this speech and I have spent about five minutes in introduction. I think that's the limit of my ability to speak English at the moment. I would like Dr. Wongburanawatt to come up here and in the ten minutes remaining give you a picture of the challenges of Chiang Mai as concerns the environment.

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Thank you very much Mr. Governor, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is a great honor for me to have a chance to say a few words right after the Governor of Chiang Mai this morning at the Fourth Conference on Environmental Enforcement. As you know Chiang Mai just celebrated our 700th anniversary. Chiang Mai is a very ancient city that is still alive in Thailand. Even though we are a very old country the city has not died or passed away.

With time, particularly within the past five years, Thailand has put a great emphasis on environmental issues. Especially three years ago, when the Thai Government asked each province to come up with an environmental plan. As the Governor has just mentioned Chiang Mai University was assigned to study and to recommend ways to solve environmental problems. As the Director of Social Science we are honored to do so.

In the next ten minutes I would like to give you some background information concerning Chiang Mai. The population of Chiang Mai is approximately 1.5 million persons above the 2.4 million number of tourists each year. That means that though tourists bring a lot of money to Chiang Mai they also contribute to environmental damage as well. In Chiang Mai the population of 1.5 million consists of some tribal people and some island people. Right now we have about seven tribes the Meo, Karen, Yao, Lisu, Lawa Lahu and Akha. Besides those tribes we also have the Burmese minority and the Chinese minority right up to the second world war. For being a major tourist city with also a very ancient history we have remained open. Chiang Mai also has a future potential role in environmental issues. At present Chiang Mai is the principal city in the upper north region and also has the role of bringing corporations to the nearby provinces as well as form economic environmental policy which will try to promote corporate growth in Thailand, China, and Laos. It is predicted in the next fifteen to twenty years that Chiang Mai will become the center of progress in various areas such as the Center for Human Resources and Development for the country and also for Indochina as well. Chiang Mai will be the center for our international tourism, the center for international corporate banking and finance, as well as the center for communications, transportation, and telecommunications. Chiang Mai also expects to be the center of agroecology and industrial agriculture for local consumption and exports. Chiang Mai will also be the center for education and cultural conservation as well as the center for high technology industry.

The mentioned potential of Chiang Mai may also cause some environmental risk and pollution. For the limited time I would like to mention key points of environmental problems of Chiang Mai. The first problem is water pollution especially in the municipal community. As I indicated earlier Chiang Mai is host to 2.4 million visitors a year. Above this, the number of people in the Municipal area is 250,000 and they produce a waste of approximately 50 cubic meters a day. There is also water pollution from factories and from public housing sewage. In Chiang Mai we now have nearly 2,000 factories, more than 50 % of which are located in the city area nearby. These factories release both water and air pollution that can be harmful to health even though they have installed some pollution prevention and a treatment systems. Besides those factories there are about twenty public housing sewage systems in Chiang Mai. The amount of waste water from this comes up to 450 cubic meters per hour and even though they have some treatment some contamination was still detected in the water sources. The biological oxygen demand (BOD) checks indicate there was still a high level of BOD in the water.

The third problem is air and noise pollution. The statistics of patients suffering from respiratory diseases show that in 1994 there were as many as 500,000 patients in hospitals suffering from respiratory problems. This shows that the future of Chiang Mai will face more serious pollution of this type due to the present factories and also transportation that may cause more air and noise pollution. Of both problems another significant one is the community solid waste, solid waste has become a major political issue. When they were campaigning to run for the Governor of Bangkok metropolitan area one of the key issues according to Yingpan's lecture was to solve the solid waste problem in Bangkok. That is why in Chiang Mai we have the legend of the bear, of the city municipality, and one of the key issues that faces the republic is the residential solid waste problem. In Chiang Mai right now within the municipality we have about

250 tons of garbage and solid waste a day. We still have a serious problem and need to solve it. Besides those problems Chiang Mai also has special problems like degraded forest, according to statistics in 1976 90% of Thailand was in forest, in 1993 only 71% is forest.

Chiang Mai University is developing three major plans to protect the environment. The first concentrates on rehabilitation of present resources, water, land and air. Second concerns prevention of future pollution. Thirdly, is the importance of promoting public awareness of environmental issues and the importance of a healthy environment. We look forward to sharing our plans as they are further developed and ask that you please enjoy your visit to Chiang Mai.