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Wildlife Value Orientations in Thailand: Preliminary Findings

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This article presents the results from a preliminary study of wildlife value orientations in Thailand. Seventy semi-structured interviews were conducted. The study found eight wildlife value orientations (WVOs) including Materialism, Mutualism, Caring, Symbolism, Attraction, Repulsion, Concern for Human Safety, and Environmentalism. Caring, Concern for Human Safety, Mutualism, and Attraction were the most prevalent WVOs among Thai people in this study. Findings are discussed in light of the reality of the Thai society. Implications for future research are provided as well.

Keywords wildlife value orientations, modernization, Thailand

Modernization refers to a process in which society goes through industrialization, urbanization, and other social changes that can transform individuals' ways of thinking and life overall. Although urbanization refers to a process in which an increasing percentage of the population lives in cities and the suburbs of cities, industrialization focuses more on the change in proportion of agriculture and industry (Sengpracha, 2001). Thailand is among many countries that are going through this social change process. The 2000 statistics indicated that the Thai population in rural and semi-rural areas accounted for 67% of the entire population whereas 33% lived in cities or urban areas (National Statistical Office [NSO], 2000). The urban population in Thailand has increased in the past decade (Sengpracha, 2001). However, no recent national census data are available yet to confirm that population increasing trend. The proportion of people in the labor force age group (18–60) is another evidence of urbanization in Thailand. Approximately 58% of these people work in non-agricultural sectors (NSO, 2003). It is in this context of on-going social economic changes that we examine the possible shifting of wildlife value orientations among the Thai people.

A substantial amount of Thai literature has described values and value orientations in the Thai society (e.g., Komin & Samakkarn, 1979; Pongsapitch, 1998; Sengpracha, 2001; Suparb, 1975, 1998, 2001). The key values and value orientations of the Thais reported in past literature included "High Respect for the King," "Belief in Buddhism," "Independence," "Respect for Elders/ Seniority," "Gratitude," "Caring," "Helpfulness," "Respect for People with Higher Education," "Favoritism/Partiality," "Materialism," "Less Self-control," "Hedonism," and "Belief in the Supernatural." There is, however, very little

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literature on values related to natural resources and wildlife in Thailand. One study that had been recorded was conducted by Tanakanjana (1996), in which she measured local people's values regarding wealth, environmental protection, and conformity as independent variables predicting nonconformities to national park regulations.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study. The interview structure was developed by Colorado State University (CSU) researchers as part of the Wildlife Values Globally research project (see Dayer, Stinchfield, & Manfredo, 2007). Thailand's study sample includes local residents of two national parks: Khao Yai National Park in Nakhon Nayok province and Kui Buri National Park in Prachuab Khiri Khan Province and graduate students of Kasetsart University (KU) in Bangkok. Seventy people participated in this study. The researchers tried to recruit participants from various settings, such as rural areas, semi-rural areas, and urban areas, considering people from these areas may have different opportunities of interacting with wildlife. The second author and two other research assistants conducted the interviews. The interviews took place at the residence of each participant or on KU's campus in the case of KU graduate students. Forty interviews were completed in 2005, the other 30 interviews were conducted in 2006.

Eighty-five percent of the interviewees were local residents from Khao Yai National Park and Kui Buri National Park and 15% were KU graduate students. About 37% of the total interviewees were people who were living in rural areas, 34% were from semi-rural areas, and 29% were from urban communities. The highest percentage of interviewees (43%) completed only primary school education, the second highest percentage (29%) completed secondary-high school education, and the smallest percentage (3%) did not complete any formal education. Fifty-six percent of the interviewees were male and 44% were female. Their average age was 39.95 years.

The interview length varied from 20–40 minutes per person. No tape recoding was made during the interviews, as almost all interviewees preferred not to have their voices recorded. The research team had difficulty conducting interviews with urban residents as most of them did not see the benefits of academic research and they were busy with commercial activities in everyday life. Over half of the participants from the urban group were not the first person that each research assistant approached and asked to participate in the interview. People in the rural group, on the other hand, were willing to talk with the research assistants but they tended to hesitate when expressing their opinions and often said "I don't know how to explain what I'm trying to say." The graduate student group was the easiest group to deal with as they understood the study concept and they had experience in both formal and informal discussions. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed into a Word document and then coded by the co-authors to allow discussion and ensure coding consistency.

Results

The semi-structured interviews revealed eight WVOs among the participants including: *Materialism*, *Mutualism*, *Caring*, *Symbolism*, *Attraction*, *Repulsion*, *Human Safety* and *Environmentalism*. The frequency of coded passages is presented in Table 1. The total number of coded passages altogether was 326. The two most frequently expressed WVOs were *Caring* and *Human Safety* with 69 and 68 passages and 46 and 48 interviews with passages, respectively. The third orientation that also had a moderately high rate of

Table 1
Frequency of Coded Passages for Wildlife value Orientations in Thailand

Wildlife value orientation	Number of passages	Number of interviews with passages
Materialism	11	5
Mutualism	58	47
Caring	69	46
Symbolism	8	7
Attraction	54	36
Repulsion	22	17
Human Safety	68	48
Environmentalism	36	28
Total	326	234

frequency was *Mutualism* with 58 passages and 47 interviews with passages. The two WVOs that were expressed least among interviewees were *Symbolism* (8 passages and 7 interviews) and *Materialism* (11 passages and 5 interviews).

Table 2 presents the selected example quotes from interviews that expressed the eight WVO concepts. Our results suggest that the WVO conceptual framework developed by the CSU researchers mostly fits the situation in Thailand. However, we did find considerable overlaps between several WVOs. For instance, whereas the expression of *Attraction* among the Thai participants reflected some degree of positive emotions toward wildlife, they might also indicate a deeper compassion and/or need to protect the wildlife, which blended this orientation with other WVO concepts such as *Caring* and *Environmentalism*. By the same token, the concept *Repulsion* was found very closely related to the *Human Safety* dimension that viewed wildlife as a threat to human safety and security. Other overlaps of WVOs were found between *Mutualism*, *Caring*, and *Environmentalism* as evidenced by the example passages from interviews present in the Table 2.

Two specific notions in the Thai culture were also revealed in the *Symbolism* WVO concept. The first was the notion of *High Respect toward the King*, which was expressed by some interviewees from the Kui Buri National Park. Examples of quotes expressing this notion are "Elephants in this area were a gift from our king to his people, no one should disturb them" and "To hear about an elephant getting hurt is sad to me. An elephant is a large animal and has been the symbol of our country (as well as the king) since the ancient age." The second notion was the *Buddhism Belief* about taking life being a sin that was expressed through the passages "I don't know why some villagers been hunting, taking life is a sin according to Buddhism." These two examples are very common among typical Thais as the top two prevalent positive values in Thai society (Suparb, 1975, 1998, 2001).

Inglehart (1997) has argued that modernization causes a shift from materialist to post-materialist values. A concurrent shift in wildlife value orientations from *Materialism* to *Mutualism* has also been proposed in the United States (Teel & Manfredro, 2007; Teel et al., 2003 in Manfredro and Dayer, 2004). People who hold a *Materialism* WVO are more likely to focus on use of wildlife for human benefits, whereas those who hold a *Mutualism* WVO believe that people and wildlife should live in harmony together and that wildlife and humans have similar rights. Findings from our study provided supporting evidence for this trend to some degree. We found that *Mutualism* was expressed about 6 times as

Table 2
 Example Passages from Interviews Expressing Wildlife Value Orientations in Thailand

Wildlife value orientation and definition	Example passages from interviews
<p>Materialism: This is the orientation that focuses on a utilitarian or dominant view of wildlife: Wildlife exists to fulfill human needs, for subsistence and economic well-being and for higher order needs such as recreation needs, and/or humans natural dominance over and control of wildlife.</p>	<p>Interview 22: "I like to have a wild bird in a cage at my place, its color is so beautiful." Interview 23, 24, 65: "Elephants destroyed our farmland and ate our crops, I don't like it."</p>
<p>Mutualism: This is the orientation that reflects a belief that humans and wildlife should be able to coexist peacefully and that both are integrated with the natural world. Wildlife has rights just as humans do and nature should be respected like humans are.</p>	<p>Interview 9: "To see wildlife in its natural habitat safely made me very happy every time I visited a national park." Interview 6, 12: "Animals have life like humans, they should not be killed." Interview 35: "Seeing from some television programs, I feel that human and wildlife could live in harmony." Interview 36: "I feel sad when thinking about the fact that some people like eating wildlife parts. Wildlife should not be threatened like that as they have equal rights as human to live safely in this world." Interview 55: "If I were a captive animal, I would be very upset. Wildlife should stay in wild land, not in a cage. Animals in wild land represent a balance of nature." Interview 6: "I don't know why some villagers been hunting, taking life is a sin according to Buddhism." Interview 41: "To hear about an elephant getting hurt is sad to me. An elephant is a large animal and has been the symbol of our country since the ancient age."</p>
<p>Symbolism: This orientation accounts for the way wildlife contributes to, signifies, and/or reveals important elements of cultural institutions. Wildlife can also have a spiritual aspect and become part of rituals and religion.</p>	<p>Interview 55: "If I were a captive animal, I would be very upset. Wildlife should stay in wild land, not in a cage. Animals in wild land represent a balance of nature." Interview 6: "I don't know why some villagers been hunting, taking life is a sin according to Buddhism." Interview 41: "To hear about an elephant getting hurt is sad to me. An elephant is a large animal and has been the symbol of our country since the ancient age."</p>

- Interview 57: "Elephants in this area were a gift from our king to his people, no one should disturb them."
- Interview 2: "Wildlife in some areas do not have enough food, some are threatened. I wish I could help."
- Interview 15: "My friend who just got back from Khao Yai told me that she saw a lot of monkeys on the park road, they were hungry, may be they did not have enough food in the forest. If I were an authority I would do anything in my power to help them from that suffering."
- Interview 42: "Last year a baby elephant fell down the valley, it was separated from its mother. Other villagers and I rescued it and brought it to the park officer. Unfortunately, that poor baby elephant died shortly after. It was so sad."
- Interview 46: "I am so angry with news about elephants injured by stepping on a trap set by poachers. I don't understand why they did that. Animals have never done anything to them."
- Interview 5: "My best experience in visiting Khao Yai was to see a couple of hornbills flying over my head."
- Interview 18: "I really like watching wildlife, birds in particular."
- Interview 23: "Wildlife always has strange behavior. It is interesting, though."
- Interview 39: "Seeing from television, I like dolphins the most, they have a lot of talents and are so cute."

(Continued)

Caring:
This orientation involves compassion and empathy toward wild animals; Wildlife makes humans feel better and makes them want to help protect them from suffering.

Attraction:
This is the orientation that reflects general likes or interest in wildlife. Some people may have an attraction to all wildlife in general, while others may only be interested in charismatic mega-fauna.

Table 2
(Continued)

Wildlife value orientation and definition	Example passages from interviews
<p>Repulsion: This orientation reflects general dislikes of wildlife. Some people may be repulsed by all wildlife while others may dislike or fear only some species such as snakes and leeches.</p>	<p>Interview 6: "I'm disgusted by leeches, that's why I don't like going to the park in the wet season." Interview 16: "I don't know why I run into snakes so often. I hate them, they're disgusting." Interview 27: "Wildlife is terrifying." Interview 44: "I really don't like insects, I don't know what will happen when they come close to me."</p>
<p>Human Safety: This orientation involves concern for the threat wildlife poses for human safety and security.</p>	<p>Interview 10: "I heard that there are tigers in Khao Yai, that is why I don't want to hike in the late afternoon, it is dangerous." Interview 24, 27, 31, 33, 62: "Most wildlife are dangerous, they can hurt people anytime." Interview 63: "Once I was faced with an elephant while it was with its baby. It headed to me, I ran away and set fire to frighten it away. At that time I was so afraid that I might be killed by it."</p>
<p>Environmentalism: This is the orientation that reflects general concern for protecting wildlife as part of the natural environment/feeling that humans are impacting the environment in a negative way through their actions.</p>	<p>Interview 6: "I really like to see an abundance of wildlife as it was in the past, so that my kid does not have to merely imagine what they look like." Interview 7: "Some people that called themselves 'conservationists' behaved badly to wildlife, for example, they hunted while camping in a remote area. They should act in accordance with their words." Interview 25: "News on television the other day presented information about the wildlife trade. That made me feel worry about extinction of wildlife." Interview 27, 28, 49: "Many wildlife species have been threatened and became nearly extinct due to human actions."</p>

frequently (58 versus 11 passages) as *Materialism*. However, modernization might not be the only driving force of higher *Mutualism* over *Materialism* WVOs in Thailand. Prohibition of consumptive uses of wildlife by law might be another factor accounting for this trend. Moreover, the *Mutualism* concept is harmonious with the *Buddhism Belief* and over 90% of the Thais are Buddhists (NSO, 2000).

Conclusion

Findings from this preliminary study lead to the conclusion that it is possible to expand the WVO study guided by the concept and methods developed by the CSU researchers under the Wildlife Values Globally research project to Thailand. Although this study did not employ any statistical test to prove the relationship between modernization-related variables and WVOs, the evidence of *Mutualism* found in Thailand was consistent with the value shifting trend taking place in the Western societies because of the possible reasons mentioned in the last part of the results. As for the methodology, we propose that combined qualitative-quantitative methods may be more appropriate for the people of Thailand than the qualitative method alone. We argue that quantitative methods will provide more precise details of WVO concepts and are more feasible to apply with larger sample size than the qualitative method; it can reduce interpretation and translation error that might occur during qualitative data collection and analysis, and not many Thais are willing to participate in in-depth interviews for academic research, as previously discussed. Future research should include a larger sample size and should cover more diverse groups of Thai nationals across the country. Lastly, items of quantitative WVO measurement that tackle specific parts of Thai culture should be developed for future research. Example passages obtained from semi-structured interviews in this study could be used to develop some specific WVO measurement scales.

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