

ค่านิยมหลังการพัฒนาในการพัฒนาชุมชนโดยฐานเกษตรกรรมทางเลือก:  
กรณีศึกษาชุมชนเกษตรกรรมทางเลือก 3 แห่งในจังหวัดศรีสะเกษ  
Post-Development Values in Alternative Agriculture-Based Community  
Development: The Case Studies of 3 Alternative Agriculture  
Communities in Sisaket Province

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### บทคัดย่อ

ในกระบวนการพัฒนาระดับโลก แนวคิดพหุนิยมแห่งการพัฒนา (Pluriverse) ได้แก่ ค่านิยมเกี่ยวกับความหลากหลาย ศักดิ์ศรีและการพึ่งพาตนเอง การเกื้อกูลตอบแทน ความเป็นสาธารณะ ความกลมเกลียวกับธรรมชาติ ความเรียบง่าย ความยุติธรรมเท่าเทียม สันติภาพ และบทบาททางเพศ ฯลฯ มีบทบาทที่สำคัญในการสำรวจทางเลือกทางพัฒนา เพื่อส่งเสริมความเป็นอยู่ที่ดีร่วมกันอย่างหลากหลาย และเป็นการสลายกระบวนการทัศน์เกี่ยวกับมนุษย์เป็นใหญ่และการเน้นความเจริญเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจเพียงอย่างเดียว

บทความฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อเข้าใจค่านิยมที่อยู่เบื้องหลังของการพัฒนาชุมชนที่ใช้วิธีการทางเกษตรเป็นหลัก และทำการศึกษาในพื้นที่ ได้แก่ ชุมชนพุทธศาสนาของศีระะฮ์โศก ซึ่งมีการทำเกษตรธรรมชาติแบบพุทธ พื้นที่ที่สอง สมาคมคนทาม ขบวนการเคลื่อนไหวโดยกลุ่มที่ได้รับผลกระทบจากเขื่อนราษีไศล และมีความเป็นอยู่ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับป่าทาม และบริษัทไร่ทองและกลุ่มเกษตรกรศรีสะเกษสร้างสรรค์ ที่เป็นองค์กรที่มีแนวคิดทางธุรกิจสังคม ซึ่งสนับสนุนเกษตรท้องถิ่นให้มีส่วนร่วมทางการตลาดระดับโลก

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จึงมีข้อเสนอว่าภายใต้กรอบพหุนิยมแห่งการพัฒนาในแง่ของการพัฒนาชุมชนว่า ค่านิยมดังกล่าวนี้จะเสริมสร้างพลังในการพัฒนาชุมชนให้รักษาอัตลักษณ์ทางเลือกของตน และทำให้ชุมชนสามารถดำรงอยู่ในบริบทกระแสหลัก พร้อมทั้งยังรักษาจิตภาพที่หลากหลายไว้ได้

บทความนี้สรุปว่า ถึงแม้ค่านิยมและความเชื่อที่คล้ายคลึงกันจะพบในชุมชนทางเลือกทั่วโลก แต่รายละเอียดการตีความขึ้นอยู่กับบริบททางเศรษฐกิจ สังคม การเมือง และวัฒนธรรม บทความนี้มีส่วนร่วมในการสร้างองค์ความรู้ในทฤษฎีพหุนิยมในการพัฒนาชุมชนทางเลือก

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### Abstract

In reaction to the global development paradigm, the concept of Pluriverse, as articulated by Escobar (2020), has played a pivotal role in exploring alternatives to development, aiming to foster a world that accommodates multiple worlding<sup>3</sup> with the goals to facilitate various approaches to collective well-being, moving away from anthropocentric, linear growth within the modern capitalist development. This study seeks to understand the underlying values of alternative agriculture-based community development to realize their contribution towards Pluriversal worldings, by examining three communities in Srisaket Province, Northeast of Thailand.

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<sup>3</sup> Worlding: The term 'worlding' has emerged in the field of anthropology which defines active engagement of the world as a dynamic and interconnected entity rather than isolated departments. Worlding has an ontological connotation of the world-making process, which means that there maybe ontologically interaction and coexistence of other worlds (or reality). See more in Thinking-Feeling with the Earth (Escobar, 2019)

The study involves three distinct cases. Firstly, the Buddhist community of Srisa Asoke engages in natural farming guided by a stringent Buddhist moral code. Secondly, the Taam and People Association, a social movement comprises individuals whose wetland livelihoods are impacted by the Rasi Salai dam. Lastly, Raitong and SCFN Farmers, a social enterprise-oriented organization, that is dedicated to supporting smallholder organic farmers in participating in the global food market while adopting the principles of organic farming and fair-trade global standards.

This paper suggests that within the framework of Pluriversity in community development, practices and initiatives aligned with post-development and reformist values can empower communities to maintain their alternative identities, allowing communities to practically navigate within the mainstream context while holding onto diverse imaginaries. The post-development and reformist values discussed in this paper included for example inclusivity, prosperity and dignity, autonomy and self-reliance, solidarity and reciprocity, common ethics, oneness with nature, simplicity, justice, equity and non-hierarchy, rights, non-violence, the economy of care and gender.

The paper additionally argues that although similar values are found in alternative communities worldwide. The practical nuances of these values from Thailand differ from the Latin American context where Pluriverse was theorized. This article contributes to the making of the Pluriverse body of knowledge in alternative community development.

*Keywords:* Alternative agriculture, Development pluriverse, Post-development value

## Introduction

Pluriverse was theorized to challenge the notion of a ‘one-world world of knowing, being and living’, by offering a philosophical observation on how the truth is constructed through different ontologies, which has been single-pointed in modern history based on modernism (Strathern, 2018). Pluriverse is theorized heavily based on the Latin American context with decolonial and indigenous philosophies that seek to embrace and celebrate the multiplicity of worldviews and cultural perspectives. Notable scholars and activists in Latin America, such as Arturo Escobar<sup>4</sup> Aníbal Quijano<sup>5</sup> and Walter D. Mignolo<sup>6</sup>, have contributed to the development of pluriversal thinking. The pluriverse theory represents a shift away from modernity, universalizing narratives, as well as a recognition of the importance of local, situated, and diverse perspectives in shaping our understanding of the world. And as a subsidiary element of pluriverse, post-development has been scholarly discussed and theorized to challenge the notion of mainstream development theory.

To bring this to the Thai development perspective, although decolonizing development may not be translated in a literal sense, the universalized developmentalism ideals and modernism rooted in Western colonialism (Dirlik, 2014) could be unraveled to embrace the multiplicity of alternatives. This research attempts to dialogue with Pluriverse theory by trying to understand post-development

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<sup>4</sup> Escobar, A. (2018). 3. Transition Discourses and the Politics of Relationality: Toward Designs for the Pluriverse. In *Constructing the Pluriverse* (pp. 63-89). Duke University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural studies*, 21(2-3), 168-178.

<sup>6</sup> Mignolo, W. D. Ibid. Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. 449-514.

values as one aspect of pluriversal ontology through the study of post-development values found within 3 cases of alternative agriculture communities in Srisaket province, Thailand. Post-development values received scholarly attention as a response to the mainstream development values based on Western universalism, modern economic progress, capitalist market economy's surplus accumulation, modern state's bureaucracy, widen socio-economic gaps and inequality, resource extractivism and industrialization, secularization, privatization and individualization.

Three alternative agricultural communities in Srisaket province in the Northeast of Thailand demonstrated the diversity of the local-led alternative activities within a small geographic location. Srisaket was selected because of a high concentration and diversities of alternative agriculture movements as well as government promoted organic production. Case studies include Srisa Asoke Community -a Buddhist community that places food production at the heart of their community affairs towards self-reliance guided by a stringent Buddhist moral code; The Taam and People Association -an activist network that had struggled to keep their wetland livelihood from a detrimental dam ecology through exploring new means of sustainable livelihood. Raitong and SCFN Farmers -a local farmer network organized with the Raitong social enterprise to produce fair-trade and export-standard organic rice. Such diversity within such a small geographical location as Srisa Ket province has inspired this research to dissect different imaginaries by studying the values found within their initiatives.

The objective of this research is to identify the traits within the case studies that suggest post-development values as a critical notion toward the current mainstream development found within concepts or initiatives that are attributive to the Pluriverse. This section attempts to provide an analysis of ‘What are the post-development values found within the case studies, and how they can be discussed in terms of manifesting Pluriversality in the context of Thailand's agriculture-based alternative development?’.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study focuses on understanding one element of the pluriversal ontology through the study of ‘values’. Within this literature of transition discourses (Escobar, 2018), the values are at the core of post-development ideals. General elements of pluriverse theory suggest concepts such as diversity of knowledge, decolonization, alternative modernities, ecological wisdom, and intersectionality (Escobar, 2020). However, values are the underlying driving force that guides the imaginaries of those concepts. This research paid attention to the exploration of fundamental level of values whereby social norms and concrete observable behaviors are embedded, as forward-thinking into a transitional future entails ideal that could be abstract. (Jones, 1994; Hansson, 2001)

The list below summarizes the post-development values identified by Demaria and Kothari (2017, p. 29) which inspires as a referenced framework in finding the post-development values in the three areas of the study.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Diversity and Pluriversality</li><li>● Autonomy and Self-reliance</li><li>● Solidarity and Reciprocity</li><li>● Common and Collective Ethics</li><li>● Oneness with/Right of Nature</li><li>● Interdependence</li><li>● Simplicity and Enoughness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Inclusiveness and Dignity</li><li>● Justice and Equity</li><li>● Non-Hierarchy</li><li>● Dignity of Labor</li><li>● Rights and Responsibilities</li><li>● Ecological Sustainability</li><li>● Non-violence and Peace</li></ul>
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This study applies the identified post-development values as framework to examine empirical reality within the scope of Srisaket Province, in the Northeast of Thailand. Although this data may not represent a wider context of Thailand or the whole of South East Asia, a fraction of reality can be illustrated here.

**Literature Review**

The literature review summarized pluriverse as the theory that provides analytical lens to how each diverse case study in this research manifests alternative realities. It also drew on the theory of social values, as well as the transformative and reformative degrees of the values based on the post-development framework. Additionally, it also provides the overview of alternative agriculture as a dominant context of the cases’ community development. These sets of literature provide the foundation for further analysis.

**1. Pluriverse as an Alternative to Development**

Pluriverse was consolidated by many scholars to challenge the notion of ‘one-world world’, by offering a philosophical observation on how the truth is constructed through knowledge which has been

single-pointed in modern history based on modernism (Escobar, 2011; Rekhviashvili, 2021; Querejazu, 2016; Demaria & Kothari, 2017; Kothari et al., 2019). But in fact, the means toward truth can take different ‘viewpoint’ leading towards on its own epistemology (Reiter, 2018). In the assumption of many worlds, it invited a reconsideration on the positions of knowledge which acquired through epistemology from many worlds cannot be comparable or compatible with one another as they are contained in different domains. Nevertheless, it is natural that many worlds exist in their own domains, but at the same time partially connect. Strathern (2018, pp. 23-52) resituated those particular worldings by the divergence of knowledge. A status of objects or occurrence in one setting would always comprise of itself and the unknown else at the same time, called existential indeterminacy. And the borderline of the collision or friction between multiple worlds creates Pluriversal politics (Escobar, 2018).

A set of literatures especially in Anthropology sees the worldings in human and non-human relation, and that constructions of understanding towards the world around human-being have been based on the capability of human’s rationalization and available senses (Haraway, 2016). Thus, Pluriversality has been expanded to try to understand co-existence between human and non-human (nature, creatures, and materials) (Kitirianglarp, 2021). This article will place major focus on the worldings between the human relationship with their communities and the environment.

Escobar (2022) framed pluriverse through alternative to development in the context of Latin America, whereby indigenous knowledge and development paths collide with modernity. Pluriverse then is a call for an ontological shift from the modern,



universal and dualist worlding to multiple worldings where the transition to this alternative is at the root of questioning modernist system. Escobar (2020) pointed out that pluriversal politic is more politics of modernity than a leftist politic. Pluralism is a key contribution to a genuine, cultural-sensitive, and prolonged transition to sustainability. As heavily theorized from the Latin American epistemology of the alternative to development, core post-development values identified include decolonization, relocalization of economic activities, recommunization, depatriarchalization. The aforementioned values may become differently interpreted in different socio-cultural context, such as in this study context of Thailand.

Garcia-Arias and Schöneberg (2021) see pluriverse as hope of ontological reorientation toward alternatives to the uniformed world of the patriarchy, neo-colonialist capitalism, extractive development. And for that it entails de-growth in the economies in the global north and post-development that calls for abandonment of development in the global south. To them, the pluriverse narrative is based on the highlight of cultural and discursive position as well as the idea of cultural relativism. And hence, it has been argued for degrees of romanticising poverty. It was argued that despite the claim of being anti-capitalist ideology, pluriverse does not address the central aspects of exploitation inherent in the capitalist system such as the labour-capital relation, and the means of production, unjust global supply, and production. It is doing so by highlighting an idealized cultural and traditional societies and opting the internal tension and contradiction. Pluriverse is also critiqued for imposing a universality of the pluriverse and disregarding the sets of realist values that refuse to partake in this worlding.

## **2. Colonialism and Developmentalism**

Colonialism and Developmentalism are two intertwined concepts contributing to the framing of this research. Often when colonial power exploited the resources of their colonies, it left the colonial economies underdeveloped and caused inequalities. Developmentalism emerged as a response to these colonial legacies, seeking state-led industrialization and centralized economic planning (Grosfoguel, 2000). Colonialism created a global economic unequal relation between colonizers (the core), and the colonies (peripheries). This dependency posits that former colonies remain economically dependent and hinder the true ability for development (Wallerstein, 2005). In the selected case studies in Thailand, although not colonized, the legacy of colonialism and developmentalism impose onto the culture and economy through globalization left an impact on the mainstream economic development.

## **3. Theory on Values**

In understanding social values, a differentiation between social values norms is firstly clarified. In the general field of sociology, social values are abstract and broad ideas about what societies believe to be good, right, important, and desirable, which represent the belief and principles that guide behaviour or decision making. Whereas social norms are specific in certain settings for accepted behaviours. (Hansson, 2001; Jones, 1994) In other words, values are the imagined benchmarks and norms are stages of existing behaviours. Stern et al. (1999) proposed on theoretical work mentioned the value-belief-norm that, individuals who accept a movement's basic values, believe that values objects are threatened,

and believe that their actions can help restore those values through experience and obligation (personal norm).

#### **4. The Rise of Community and Alternative Agriculture**

In the realm of alternative development discourse in Thailand, it is crucial to incorporate the concept of 'Community Culture,' as it serves as the influencing factor for various alternative schools. The connection between community and development in Thailand emerged in the 1950s when development workers (NGOs) collaborated with local villagers to define the role of community in development (Rigg, 1994, pp. 123-135). And one notable milestone was the establishment of the National Economic and Social Development Board in 1959 where community development as a strategy for rural development and poverty alleviation gained momentum in the 1960s (Shigetomi, 2006). This idea became a key political concept in the 1990s, marked by significant events like the formulation of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) by King Rama 9, the establishment of the rural doctor's club, and the founding of the Local Development Institute (LDI) by Dr. Prawet Wasi—a prominent figure in Thai rural and community development. (Unno, A., 2004) Concurrently, this concept was initially integrated into the Thai constitution (1997) through the notion of 'community culture,' where policies and strategic documents were introduced to address political objectives stemming from the initial call for civil rights (Shigetomi, 2013, pp. 4-5) , and carried on until the current constitution in 2007. It evolved into a school of thought and a political discourse that idealizes villages as the essence of Thainess (Winichakul, 2008, pp. 575-591). However, the discourse on community culture faces similar criticisms as other utopian ideologies, such as overlooking the influence of neoliberalism and globalized forces.

In the agricultural and food sector, numerous active movements have emerged to advocate for alternative food and agricultural systems as a response to the drawbacks of advanced agri-food industrialization. Mainstream agribusiness practices in Thailand have traditionally adhered to the principles of efficiency and growth, leading to the widespread adoption of large-scale and contract farming, monoculture, pesticide use, genetic engineering, land-grabbing, and market monopolies, among other practices (Lienchamroon & Yaimuang, 2011).

The introduction of alternative agriculture in Thailand was a response to concerns related to the adverse impacts of chemical agriculture on farmers' health, mounting debts due to inputs, and fluctuations in crop prices for cash crops. Originating as a farmers' movement, it took to the streets and garnered support from civil society organizations (CSOs). In the initial stages, when chemical agriculture practices were gaining ground, various concepts of alternative agriculture emerged within the framework of rural development. These included the integrated agriculture school, political economy rural development school, socio-cultural school, appropriate technology school, Buddhist spiritual school, and organic agriculture inspired by overseas models. All these approaches shared common characteristics, emphasizing alternatives to chemical inputs, challenging market monopolies, and advocating against monoculture. (Unno, A., 2004)

The diverse rural development schools introduced by development workers coexisted and faced ongoing contestation before the institutionalization of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy which was integrated in the National Economic and Social development plan in 1999.

In summary, post-development values are the basis of post-development era whereby mainstream state-led industrialization influenced by globalized developmentalism rooted in colonialism, has been challenged. In parallel to the mainstream industrialization in agriculture in rural settings, attempts to conserve community practices, resources and cultures has been taken place in different contexts in Thailand in the past through concepts of rural development, community culture and alternative agriculture. However, streams of alternative development have shed the light on the patterns and underlying concepts of alternative development in agriculture over the years. And recently, sustainability agenda led by the United Nation's advocacy has been strong. In this paper, post-development values derived from post-development agenda are depicted and discussed in the study context. There have been ample alternative agricultural development related literatures, but little is known about alternatives through the lens of post-development and its values. This paper brought in new perspectives to Thai academia on the values being practiced in alternative agriculture in Thailand in line with post-development values.

### **Instruments and Methods**

The research employed a mix of social science qualitative methods for data collection using key informant in-depth interviews with altogether 21 community leaders (9) and members (12). Participatory observation (PO) was used in order to verify the interview information, and to observe the practices taken place in action to find correlation with identified post-development values. And document reviews mainly research, news and webpage articles, as well as academic studies on the case studies have been used. The author spent 2 weeks

per each case study to conduct interviews, observe, gain insight, and have a first-hand experience of the movement from people's interaction. The data was recorded, transcribed and a process of coding, categorizing, and theming was put in place to draw evidence from statements and observations indicating the case's underlying values in reference with Kothari et al. (2019) list of envisioned values.

### **Ethical Statement**

The data collection for this journal article is a part of Ph.D. thesis data collection process which was approved by Chulalongkorn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 14 February 2022 through the expedited review process, allowing 12 months of rightful data collection in the field. To ensure the protection of rights and welfare of human research subject, the interviews received signed approval and consent to record and disclose information for the purpose of this study only. All of the interviewees gave consent to disclose their names and photos for the purpose of this research only. All interviewees had full right for their privacy and thereby could remove any piece of information off record.

### **Results**

The table below summarizes the findings of the post-development values from the 3 case studies. The finding framework was inspired from Kothari et al. (2019, p. 29) who envisage pluriversal pathways based on the following post-development values. The post-development values below are found to be in all of the case studies to a varying degree, but highlighted evidence of each case associated with each value would be examined. It is to be concluded that the following post-development values are found

within the case studies suggesting pluriversal imaginaries, and in each case the values with advance degree of evidence will be highlighted, also indicative of different nuances of each case that are different from others.

It was found that values such as diversity and pluriversality, solidarity and reciprocity, common and collective ethics, and interdependence as indicated in Bold are fundamentally present as across all cases. In addition, 2 values namely prosperity and care are identified from the case studies and added to the list is indicated in Italic.

The finding also suggests that while post-development values identified by Kothari (2017) exist in the context of the Thai case studies, they are found to be nuanced and interpreted in the specific socio-economic and cultural contexts of Thailand. The data collected supported the importance of these values to the cases as agriculture-based alternative development movements, and the societies they envisioned.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Diversity and Pluriversality</b></li><li>● Autonomy and Self-reliance</li><li>● <b>Solidarity and Reciprocity</b></li><li>● <b>Common and Collective Ethics</b></li><li>● Oneness with/Right of Nature</li><li>● <b>Interdependence</b></li><li>● Simplicity and Enoughness</li><li>● <i>Prosperity</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Inclusiveness and Dignity</li><li>● Justice and Equity</li><li>● Equity and Non- Hierarchy</li><li>● Dignity</li><li>● Rights and Responsibilities</li><li>● Ecological Sustainability</li><li>● Non-violence and Peace</li><li>● <i>Care</i></li></ul>
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The following section describes post-development values identified from each case studies; Srisa Asoke, Taam and People Association, Raitong and SCFN Farmers, consecutively.

### **1. Srisa Asoke**

The Srisa Asoke community has emerged as part of the broader Asoke community within Buddhism, with a focus on achieving self-sufficiency in terms of food and essential needs through agricultural practices, personal and spiritual development, and communal sharing of resources. The Asoke Community, known for its history of rebelling against mainstream Buddhism, responds to the consumerist shift in contemporary Thai Buddhism, as documented by Satha-Anand (1990). Some scholars, such as Jackson (2002), view the Asoke Community's Buddhist practices as a reaction to economic uncertainties following the Asian economic crisis and the commercialization of Buddhism, signaling a departure from conventional norms.

Actively promoting community communalism or common consumption system, the Asoke community gained a niche popularity from the late 1970s to the 1990s. The formation of the Asoke community network subsequently provided alternative models in various localities. These solutions aimed to address the challenges faced by the Thai public in debt during the Asian Economic crisis, emphasizing self-reliance and simplicity (Asoke Network, 2015; Essen, 2005; Mackenzie, 2007).

#### **1.1 Post-Development Values**

The post-development values to be discussed here are Non-Violence and Peace, Simplicity and Enoughness, Common and Collective Ethics, Decolonizing and Self-Reliance. In the context of Srisa Asoke Buddhism at the basis of the community's belief, the



values that tie to their socio-economic practices are directly from the Buddhist's virtues. Srisa Asoke's common consumption system<sup>7</sup> is the exemplary practice based on communalism.

### **1.2 Non-Violence and Peace**

The Srisa Asoke community, inspired by Buddhism, aligns with Schumacher's 'Small is Beautiful' (2011) concept and the 'Buddhist Economy,' especially in agriculture. In a Buddhist perspective, the meaning of work involves developing faculties, fostering collaboration, and providing essential goods. This approach advocates globally for practices attuned to the earth's rhythms, prioritizing wisdom, discernment, compassion, and utility over industry-driven demands. This summarizes the correlation between Srisa Asoke's Theravada Buddhist ideology and Schumacher's proposal on the Buddhist Economy. (Essen, 2009; Schumacher, 2011)

The core of natural, aggregated, and non-chemical agricultural practices lies in the keynote of non-violence and peace, as emphasized by King (2009). The first precept of Buddhist practitioners, abstaining from killing, underlies the vegetarianism debated among Buddhists. While non-Asoke Buddhists may believe they avoid killing animals directly, the broader food value chain involves killing in the production of animal-based products, which explains Srisa Asoke's vegetarianism and natural and chemical free farming (Stewart, 2014). This underscores the emphasis on vegetation in natural and aggregated agriculture, aligning with non-violence principles to prevent harm to the earth and ecosystems, promoting human well-being. The simplicity of this approach not only ensures non-chemical farming, but also supports aggregated practices,

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<sup>7</sup> Translation in Thai: สาธารณะโภคี

fostering diverse produce for self-sustenance instead of relying on industrial cash crops.

### **1.3 Simplicity and Enoughness: Srisa Asoke's Frugality**

Srisa Asoke's frugality serves not only as a response to unnecessary materialism but also as a reaction to the commercialization of Buddhism in Thailand. While the country predominantly follows Theravada Buddhism, it is argued that Thai Buddhism is a blend of adjusted Theravada, Brahma, and indigenous animism, referred to as the 'Thai religion' within a capitalist society. This has led to the commercialization of temples and practices not originally inherent to Theravada Buddhism. Asoke monks strictly adhere to 227 precepts, including abstaining from money and luxury. Despite changes in Thai society's Theravada Buddhism, the Asoke community aims to revive traditional practices. They maintain a discrete approach to matters concerning monks and laypeople, allowing monks to pursue spiritual goals while supporting laypeople's righteous endeavors (Essen, 2005).

This cultural context has influenced communalism within the Asoke community, emphasizing abstinence from material wealth. Members contribute labor and receive shared meals, goods, clothing, housing, and medicine. The uniform of ordinariness, a blue self-died dress, represents this communal ethic.

In contrast to the self-interest-driven capitalist system, Asoke communities oppose the current by promoting a communal ethos that challenges the mainstream focus on self-interest. (Essen, 2010). This stands in contrast to Adam Smith's economic theory, which argues that self-interest fuels capitalism's success. Asoke communities limit external interactions to preserve their righteous ideals, a practice that may label them as non-

mainstream and, from an outsider's perspective, potentially as a cult.

#### **1.4 Common and Collective Ethics: Boonniyom as a Merit-Based Economy**

In the Asoke community, the 'Boonniyom' economic system, opposing capitalism, redefines 'Boon' or merit as the capability to detach from worldly desires rather than mere blessings (Siriraksopon Bundit, 2016). In the community market system, money is not the only currency here, but labor could be volunteered by management staff, so that products' price maybe kept low. The Buddhist economy emphasizes the need to overcome individual egocentrism, suggesting that collective tasks facilitate the detachment of the self and initiate individual purification (Schumacher, 2011) and hence merit is the currency.

Asoke Buddhism's 'common consumption' differs from communism, as it internalizes religious principles for spiritual merit, detachment, enlightenment, joy, and compassion. This internalized system contrasts with the external controls and punishment associated with historical communism. A Srisa Asoke teacher clarified that Asoke's communalism relied on common social norms guided by the invisible hands of Karma, whereas communism relied on external control and punishment. The internalized ethics of Asoke's system aligns with the concept of governmentality, where power and control operate through religious virtues, driving a non-capitalist accumulation economy (Ghatak & Abel, 2013; Puett, 2013).

### **1.5 Decolonizing the Developmentalism Mindset and Self-Reliance**

Srisa Asoke rejects globalization in terms of developmentalism while selectively engaging with international communities that share similar social goals. Although the concept around decolonializing was not mentioned during the interviews, communities frequently mentioned breaking free from globalized developmentalism to uphold communal and religious values. Despite technological engagement with like-minded international communities, the Asoke community opposes participating in the global market, emphasizing the importance of economic activities within the community for self-reliance through well-organized chemical free agriculture. (Community Leader, Interview, November 2021)

Globalized development is strongly condemned within Asoke communities, particularly fast-paced and unsustainable development that degrades local identity and religious virtues. However, the community selectively welcomes aspects of globalization, such as the exchange of ideas and practices with ecovillages worldwide. The following quote was from the spiritual leader of the community:

Development to me means to make things better. But nowadays we are looking more into the perspective of material, technological, and scientific development. Not to say that it is not a good thing, but a more important development aspect is our mind and soul. If humans only make progress in terms of things, we become attached to and enslaved by things. We become selfish and start polluting the environment ... The more the materialism grows, the more morality degenerates.

Development workers must know that material development is more crucial than moral development. (Interview, November 2021)

Srisa Asoke denied developmentalism by consistently criticized for its downsides and the deterioration of virtues. Political figures and entities associated with liberal development, economic progress, and technological advancement, such as “Thaksin Shinawatra” and “America” and “The West”, are condemned topics (as evidenced during the Participatory Observation). The community sets clear boundaries to align itself with common values, maintaining its identity through practices like communal agriculture and holistic health and agriculture reasoning (Rakprachathai, 2021).

Srisa decolonializing mindset is not anti-government or anarchistic but is centered on breaking free from developmentalism, capitalist accumulation, and rapid self-interest-driven economic progress. It is demonstrated through upholding communal and religious values and setting boundaries to preserve their practices and knowledge systems.

## **2. The Taam and People Association**

The Taam and People Association was formed as the result of the Rasi Salai dam movement for the destroyed wetland and local people’s deprived livelihood from the dam’s impact since 1992. The movement was mobilized with assistance from development workers and NGOs who equipped the communities with the right-based mindsets. In 2022, the association has office space at the dike of the Rasi Salai Dam, in Nong Kae Sub-district, Rasi Salai District. The Taam and People Association also gathered people living in the wetland forest on opposite sides in Surin and Roi Et provinces and formed a peasant movement under the

alliance of the Assembly of the Poor<sup>8</sup>. Although challenged by development, they were able to regenerate according to four factors: collective awareness and activism, the non-chemical and sustainable practice of agriculture, a collective effort of the green market, and the learning center. (Kantawong, 2017) The wetland forest known as ‘Taam’ supported the local people's lives by supplying food, firewood, wicker, and shelter. And the revisited local knowledge on wetland's livelihood called Taam-Mun agriculture has become the activism tool to combat against the dam impact which is symbolizing modern development.

### **2.1 Post-Development Values**

The following values will be discussed in the case of the Taam and People Association: Justice and Equity, Solidarity and Reciprocity, Right and Responsibility, Economy of Care and Gender Role, Oneness with Nature. The values correspond to the group activism on two main fronts including struggle against the Rasi Salai dam as a symbolism for modern development demanding for the state's compensation, and the peasant struggle for the right to livelihood.

### **2.2 Justice and Equity**

Originating from the Rasi Salai dam protest, the Taam and People Association has justice and equity as its core advocacies, focusing on two levels of struggle: dam development and agricultural-related peasant movements. The association recognizes the politicized nature of peasant movements, aligning with the

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<sup>8</sup> Assembly of the Poor (AOP) (Thai: สหประชาคนจน) is a non-governmental organization in Thailand that aims to assist those affected by development projects or industries. It is composed of urban and rural small-scale agriculture and manual laborers.

global alliance La Via Campesina, which champions small-scale sustainable agriculture for social justice and opposes corporate-driven practices.

The movement's alliance with La Via Campesina has evolved beyond organic agriculture, now emphasizing Food Sovereignty. This principle asserts people's right to healthy, culturally appropriate and sustainable food, allowing them to define their own food and agricultural systems. For the Taam and People Association, this entails access to land, smallholder production, local markets, and the preservation of native plants, biodiversity, and the Taam ecosystem.

Agroecology, as an emerging field combining natural and social sciences (Laura Gutierrez Escobar as cited in Kotari et al., 2019), is integral to the association's mission. They understand sustainable agriculture not just as a technological shift but as an institutional change in power relations, incorporating social, cultural, and political factors. A community leader commented during interview (2022) that in Thailand, farmers particularly in Rasi Salai, interpret Agroecology as aligning with their existing alternative practices and subsistence farming, emphasizing justice, livelihoods, and land rights.

### **2.3 Solidarity and Reciprocity**

The farmers of Rasi Salai demonstrated that the revival of the Taam wetland has not only been for their source of livelihood and income, it is also the act of political activism to show local solidarity. This was exemplified by the Boon Gum Kao Yai<sup>9</sup> was the ceremony where farmers joining the movement make donations

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<sup>9</sup> Rice God's ceremonial worship after harvest (บุญกุ่มข้าวใหญ่)

to the movement's activism. As a movement in alliance with Assembly of the Poor, they moved beyond their local boundary into often joining the national level peasant and inequality movement. From the interview below, it expressed how much this women movement's leader was committed to the movement;

Everything that we have now; the compensation, the movement's solidarity, and the revived livelihood has been because we have fought together. If we didn't fight, we each would be torn down. We will fight until either the dam or ourselves is demolished. (Community Member, Interview, June 13, 2022)

Charles F Keyes as cited in Manorum (2016) suggested that farmers operate on both self-interest and on the view of ethical economy in which reciprocity can be seen from exchanges of resources and support. This is also based on the Buddhist perspective of 'Karma' which takes the principal of reciprocity directly at heart. Solidarity and reciprocity go hand in hand as the farmers from Rasi Salai district mobilized together with other districts in the basin and form the Taam and People Association, a lot can be accomplished through a solidified organization.

## **2.4 Right and Responsibility**

With guidance from NGOs, the Taam and People Association has strategically built capacity of the movement including resource development for result-based negotiation, incubating local leaders, and processing legal issues. This has been observable to stimulate a right-based mindset to the movement, by realizing their right on land use and compensation, and the gathering of information and established local discourses to back it up. (Community Leader, Interview, June 5, 2022.)



## 2.5 Care Value

The Taam and People movement places significant value on "Care" with women assuming both leading and supporting roles in the socio-economic, political, and ecological aspects. This concept, as described by Gibson-Graham (2006) emphasizes diverse efforts aimed at building ethically responsible ways of negotiating survival, meeting basic needs, and generating surplus to enable life to flourish. It highlights the often-overlooked economic practices, such as the unpaid work of women and family members, subsistence farming, and indigenous land care, that sustain communities.

In the face of the loss of the wetland, the movement members engaged in discussions about rehabilitation. Some realized that the lump sum compensation was not sustainable, leading to a collective effort to grow vegetables and establish a weekly green market. This initiative not only helped rehabilitate lost livelihoods but also served as a sustainable means for members involved in the movement to support their families. (Community Member, Interview, June, 2021.)

The "unaccounted" labor<sup>10</sup>, contributing to both activism and family support, embodies principles of solidarity, reciprocity, diversity, and inclusivity within and beyond the movement. The gift economy, emphasizing giving and receiving without immediate or future obligations, is evident in the community's practices. (Community Member, Interview, June 2022)

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<sup>10</sup> Unaccounted labor refers to work or labor which is not officially compensated within the formal economic system, or recognized to have the contribution to the mainstream economic values. This is usually informal and within the domestic space including the activity such as subsistence farming, unpaid household chores, child and elderly care and others.

## **2.6 Matriarchal Values**

Matriarchy is here defined as mother-centered societies, based on maternal values: equality, consensus finding, gift giving, and peace building by negotiations (Goettner-Abendroth, 2007; Göttner-Abendroth, n.d.) Women in the leading role in the movement play crucial roles in conflict resolution, negotiation with state officials, and women of all social status and age range play the main role of sustaining household income. Their fluid roles connect various aspects of life and family, with women like Pha leading negotiations with a soft yet powerful approach. Women also contribute to ecological balance through their roles in the distribution of the wetland crops and green market activities.

In essence, the Taam and People movement recognizes and values the multifaceted contributions of women, not only in economic activities but also in sustaining the community's social, political, and ecological well-being. The movement values being put on care in this economy especially where women play both leading and supporting roles contributing to the socio-economic, political, and ecological aspect of the Taam and People movement.

## **2.7 Oneness with Nature**

The interdependence between nature and human lives, exemplified by the people in the wetland of Srisaket, aligns with conceptual frameworks of radical transformative initiatives. The Ecology of Culture, emphasizing the inseparability of biological life and the physical environment, reflects the cultural and ecological connectivity that made people's lives whole in the pre-dam era.

Deep Ecology, challenging anthropocentrism, underscores the loss of interconnected consciousness between humans and the

non-human world. (Devall, 1980; Naess, 2005; Sessions, 1987) This perspective, as observed in the wetland area of Rasi Salai, views the wetland or Taan as the "Womb of Esan," symbolizing matriarchal nurturing and connectedness. (Chusakul, 2013) Before the dam construction, the wetland served as a crucial resource for foraging, cultivating staple crops, raising cattle, and engaging in pottery making for various life events. (Thai Baan Research Rasisalai, 2005)

The people in the wetland basin possess a comprehensive knowledge of utilizing resources, from rice farming and cattle grazing to fishing. This multi-generational knowledge reflects a deep understanding of living harmoniously with the Taam ecosystem. Rituals like Boon Gum Khao Yai in the South of Esan express gratitude for rice and cattle, showcasing a realization of more-than-human consciousness and spiritual interconnection with the world beyond. (Community Leader, Interview, June 13, 2022)

### **3. Raitong and SCFN Farmers**

Raitong Organic Farm operates as a social enterprise closely collaborating with the Srisaket Creative Farmer Network (SCFN), supporting local farmers in cultivating, and globally marketing organically certified rice. Being organized in a cooperative form, SCFN farmers grow organic rice for Raitong Enterprise's export. Raitong enhances the farmers' technical capabilities, focusing on organic rice quality and Fairtrade certification. Through training and collaboration, farmers learn about organic cultivation practices and the Fairtrade standardization to sell to Raitong at higher guaranteed prices. While Raitong sustains its business in the global organic market through empowering local farmers with agricultural skills as an essential social contribution. Existing SCFN members, with years of practice, provide a solid foundation for the group, fostering a

sense of self-reliance and independence from mainstream market pricing. This approach inspires farmer families, particularly younger members, to take pride in farming and embrace new possibilities for the future. (Brian Hugill, Wanna Wongpinich, Korakot Meungkeaw, Interview, June 2022).

### **3.1 Post-Development Values**

The following values will be discussed in the case of the Raitong and SCFN farmers: Inclusiveness, Prosperity and Dignity, Reciprocity and Solidarity and Common and Collective Ethics. Two entities that are co-dependent on each other as they together merged as one to form an agri-food movement bridging local producers to the global consumers based on a guaranteed system. The values were analyzed based on the global sustainability discourse (Dryzek, 1998) manifested in Raitong and SCFN alternative agricultural production and agri-business practices.

### **3.2 Prosperity, Inclusiveness, and Dignity**

Tum sub-district farmers in the Srisa Ket Creative Farmer Network (SCFN) envision a community filled with opportunities, sufficient earnings, and a high quality of life through farming in their hometown. Although not familiar with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the farmers frequently use the term 'Sustainable' or 'Kwam Yang Yeun' during interviews. Their idea of sustainability, as interpreted by a community leader and a SCFN farmer, encompasses social inclusion, prosperity, and dignity. Farmers emphasize the importance of sustainable agriculture that ensures community abundance without incurring excessive costs. They underscored the need to care for the environment while maintaining a viable livelihood.

We want farming to be a sustainable profession which must embody community abundance. If implementing 'sustainable agriculture' by investing a lot on the cost of going under, that is not sustainable for us. True sustainability also entails caring for the environment while simultaneously ensuring a viable livelihood (SCFN Farmer, Interview, June 2022).

In response to the widely promoted 'Sufficiency' based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, SCFN farmers offer an unconventional interpretation. They view the philosophy as providing basic sustenance but perceive it as insufficient for achieving genuine comfort necessary for human dignity to flourish. (Community Leaders, Interview, June 2022).

### **3.3 Reciprocity and Solidarity**

Reciprocity and solidarity are the ethics that rely on mutual trust and devotion for any set purpose. Raitong case study showed that for the purpose of mutual development, both business counterparts have worked in solidarity towards improving the local farming economy. Both Raitong and SCFN farmers believe that true human well-being arises from successful businesses built on sacrifices and hard work. However, the certification processes for Organic and Fairtrade impose significant financial commitments for both parties. Raitong must invest in manufacturing facilities and processes to ensure raw material quality, while farmers incur costs associated with lost opportunities during the transition years, labor-intensive organic compost creation, and detailed record-keeping. Engaging in organic rice production is labor-intensive and challenging, making it less appealing for conventional farmers. Ultimately, Raitong envisioned the transformation of poor and underprivileged

rural farmers to middle-class entrepreneur farmers, particularly encouraging the younger generation to return to farming in their homeland. Raitong emphasizes the need for professionalism among participating farmers, stating that support is provided to those who excel and commit towards that vision. (Social Enterprise Leader, Interview, June 2022). These are the examples that both parties in this business partnership sacrifice in order to operate and supply products. Concretely, Raitong invested on the capacity building of farmers in production and quality outcomes, as well as the general well-being of farmers, while SCFN farmers also endure through the transition period so that the organic scheme is successful.

While SCFN farmers are not contractually bound to Raitong, they sell collectively in bulk, relying on trust. SCFN farmers adhere to group regulations, even when it comes to using non-approved fertilizers, demonstrating a commitment to ethical practices and mutual respect within the partnership. Hence it is evidenced that the partnership between Raitong and SCFN is built on reciprocal contribution, solidarity, and trust.

### **3.4 Integrity and Collective Ethics**

The SCFN collective ethic is bound by regulations outlined in its group constitution, emphasizing values communicated implicitly during assemblies. Two core values, 'Integrity' and 'Commitment to the Higher Purpose,' shape the group's ethos. (Community Leader. Interview, June 4, 2022).

Integrity is highlighted through the metaphor of planting seeds of love and respect in the organic pathway. Members are urged to be honest in their actions, avoiding chemical fertilizers even when not monitored to ensure the safety of their children. Empathy with consumers and respect for long-term members'

dedication are integral to this value. The quote from the farmer leader below show that integrity is highlighted;

This is like planting seeds of love and respect in doing the organic pathway. We want to ensure the safety of our children from sickness. And therefore, we must be honest on our action and must not sneak in chemical fertilizer ... Members are encouraged to empathize with consumers; no one would want to eat products tainted with chemicals ... Long term members are respected for their dedication and hard work. They are ready to commit both physically and mentally (Farmer Leader, Interview, December 2021)

Commitment to the higher purpose emphasizes the holistic well-being of members in livelihood and spirituality. Happiness and health are deemed more crucial than material wealth. This commitment extends to contributing to the birthplace and environment, fostering a sustainable and harmonious coexistence for all beings. Although these are not written values in the group constitution, they serve as guiding principles for SCFN members within the group.

### **3.5 Equity and Non-Hierarchy**

Raitong, positioning itself as a social enterprise, emphasizes fair business values through the Fairtrade system, fostering an inclusive approach. This transition shifts the dynamic of farmers to state officials from being development recipients to equal business partners, evident in interactions with state agencies marked by reduced hierarchy.

Fairtrade introduces a collective pricing system, empowering SCFN farmers to collectively determine fair sale prices

based on quality and moisture indicators. This cooperative system enhances camaraderie and inspires individual members to engage more actively in selling their farm crops, fostering a sense of merchant pride. (Social Enterprise Leader, Interview, June 6, 2022)

Successful business operations elevate farmers' social status and negotiating power with state officials, instilling pride, and dignity. Raitong's experience reflects a shift toward an egalitarian environment in interactions with government representatives. Members feel empowered to provide honest feedback, expecting mutual respect in these exchanges, emphasizing the collaborative potential between farmers and the government.

### **3.6 Ecological Sustainability**

The term "Ecological Sustainability" is frequently emphasized, particularly by Raitong as an enterprise. Raitong aligns ecological sustainability with contemporary initiatives like the Circular Economy, reflected in their mission statement. Raitong applies climate-smart agriculture strategies to optimize yield by balancing water and other inputs. They also reference the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their presentations, highlighting a practical integration of ecological principles into problem-solving approaches (Social Enterprise Leader, Interview, June 6, 2022).

In contrast, SCFN farmers approach ecological sustainability with a heightened sense of responsibility rooted in Buddhist philosophy. Their perspective, shaped by the concept of karma, underscores the consequences of causing harm to other beings. While both parties use the same terminology, their expressions diverge based on the foundational principles guiding their practices.



## Discussion

The post-development values identified in the case studies above illustrate the contextual understanding of how those values envision alternative cosmovision. With this study, the three communities reveal that common post-development values found across alternative communities maybe different as they are context-specifically nuanced based on agriculture-based development discourse influenced by Buddhism, peasant movement activism, sustainable agri-business and other narratives.

Srisa Asoke Community accentuates non-violence, peace, simplicity, enoughness, common and collective ethics, autonomy, and self-reliance, as the community was guided by Buddhist stringent moral codes. The Taam and People Association highlight justice, equity, solidarity, reciprocity, right and responsibility, economy of care, gender roles, and oneness with nature, as influenced by peasant movement activist network and struggle for justice. Raitong and SCFN Farmers spotlights inclusiveness, prosperity, dignity, reciprocity, solidarity, common and collective ethics, equity, non-hierarchy, and ecological sustainability as they are operated under the guideline of global social enterprise ecosystem.

In Latin America where the theory of Pluriverse is heavily theorized, it celebrates the emphasis of cultural diversity, ethic and indigenous knowledge, decolonized worldviews, and the way of life whereby the Kothari et al. (2019)'s list of post-development values are embedded. This too is context specific to the Latin American socio-cultural and historical context. For brief instance, in the context of long history of western colonization, the focus on decolonizing may imply a more literal translation than the Thai

context of colonization only of the mindsets and worldviews of western development. Values associated with concepts such as autonomy, decolonization and cultural diversity cannot be directly interpreted. Autonomy is applied in the context of Zapatistas in Mexico (Maldonado-Villalpando et al., 2022) may be referred to in a literal sense of the aim towards establishing territorial self-governing regime, whereas the interpretation for Srisa Asoke suggests a determination within their own group around their social and economic norms within the Thai law. Additionally, cultural diversity in Latin America is more apparent than in this Thailand context, where diverse group of indigenous co-exist with multiple groups of settlers. This is not to say that the Thai communities do not embrace cultural diversity. Thai communities experience cultural diversity in a subtle way through exchanges between local tribal, or urban-local practices and beliefs. Therefore, values associated with decolonialization, autonomy, cultural diversity may not completely be dialogue directly with the Latin America contexts where the literatures on Pluriverse are written, but the common understanding towards certain post-development values is commonly understood with contextual interpretation.

However, in the attempt to dialogue with Pluriverse through post-development values, both Latin American country and Thailand share similarities as countries in the global south as regards to finding alternative to development. (Escobar, 1992, 2000, 2011) For example, values such as common ethics attributing to recomunalization oneness with nature attributing towards the shift towards (or backward) to ecocentrism, matriarchal values attributing to depatriarchalization of development, or localism attributing to relocalization, justice and equity attributing to democratic governance are

prominent in the narratives of alternative community development pathways. (Escobar, 2022)

This paper would also like to respond to Garcia-Arias and Schöneberg (2021)'s critique on pluriverse for its idealized traditional societies and opting the internal tension and contradiction and critiques for imposing a 'pluriversal' universality, that the studies situated in the context of Thailand is contributing to a diversified context of pluriverse so that the making of pluriverse's body of knowledge is, in fact, plural coming from different contexts of the global south.

In the attempt to understand the concept of pluriverse, one angle of an ontological exploration was carried out by unravelling post-development values. Other angles can include the assessment of the alternative development discourse the case studies align with, and a more in-depth understanding of the cases contestations with modernity in the socio-economic and epistemological aspects, which is the skeleton of modern development.

### **Conclusion**

Pluriverse theory signifies a departure from universalized development narratives, emphasizing the significance of local, specific, and diverse viewpoints in shaping our understanding of the world. This study engages with the pluriverse theory, aiming to comprehend a facet of pluriversal ontology through an examination of post-development values found within three alternative agriculture communities in Srisaket province, Thailand.

The findings from these communities indicate that common post-development values (as listed by Kothari et al. (2019)) among alternative communities may differ as nuanced by context-specific

discourse, which in this case was an agriculture-based development discourse influenced by Buddhism, peasant movement activism, sustainable agri-business, and other narratives.

The diverse values within the small geographical location of Srisaket province inspire this research to explore different imaginaries by studying the values envisioning their different cosmovisions. While some values may not directly dialogue with the Latin American contexts where pluriverse literature is written, some values maybe directly interpreted across different global south context.

This study contributes to the pluriverse body of knowledge by adding onto the epistemology of a diversified understanding of the pluriverse, demonstrating pluralism the theory claims.

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