

## พหุจักรวาลแห่งการพัฒนาภาคปฏิบัติมีหน้าตาอย่างไร?

### กรณีศึกษาชุมชนกสิกรรมทางเลือก

### ในภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศไทย

## What does Development ‘Pluriverse’ in Practice look like in the Case of Agricultural Communities in Northeastern, Thailand?

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### บทคัดย่อ

ทฤษฎีเกี่ยวกับ ‘Pluriverse’ ตอบโต้แนวคิดการพัฒนาแบบโลกที่เป็นหนึ่งเดียว จึงเป็นแนวคิดที่ได้รับความนิยมในการถกเถียงเกี่ยวกับทางเลือกในการพัฒนา เพื่อสร้าง ‘โลกที่รวมเอาโลกหลายแบบเข้าไว้ด้วยกัน’ ซึ่งโอบรับความหลากหลายของพัฒนาความเป็นอยู่ที่ดีในการอยู่ร่วมกัน มากกว่าเป็นการพัฒนาโดยมีจักรวรรดินิยมทุนนิยม และความเป็นสมัยใหม่ เป็นฐานให้กับการเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจที่เป็นเส้นตรงโดยมีมนุษย์เป็นศูนย์กลาง งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อเชื่อมข้อมูลเชิงประจักษ์กับเข้ากับทฤษฎี โดยการศึกษาชุมชนที่ทำเกษตรกรรมทางเลือกในจังหวัดศรีสะเกษ ประเทศไทย

งานวิจัยนี้ประกอบด้วย 3 กรณีศึกษา ได้แก่ หมู่บ้านสิริชะอโศก ซึ่งเป็นหมู่บ้านที่ทำกิจกรรมยั่งยืนตามแนวทางจริยธรรมทางพุทธศาสนา สมาคมคนทาม ซึ่งเป็นกลุ่มผู้ได้รับผลกระทบจากการสร้างเขื่อนราษีไศลในการใช้ชีวิตอยู่กับป่าทาม และต่อสู้พร้อมกับเครือข่ายขบวนการเกษตรนิเวศ ไร่ทอง ออแกร์นิค ฟาร์ม ซึ่งเป็นธุรกิจเพื่อสังคมที่ทำงานร่วมกับเกษตรกรเพื่อเพิ่มศักยภาพในการผลิตข้าวอินทรีย์เข้าสู่มาตรฐานตลาดโลก งานวิจัยนี้เสนอว่ากรณีศึกษาทำกิจกรรมทางเลือกตามอุดมการณ์และภาพฝันที่มีโดยอยู่ในบริบท

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ของกลไกกรรมไทยก่อให้เกิดแรงเสียดทานและทั้งกลืนกลายสู่ความเป็นสมัยใหม่ ซึ่งในที่นี้ แทนโดย รัฐ ทุนกำไร และความรู้แบบวิทยาศาสตร์สมัยใหม่ เนื่องจากบริบททางสังคม การเมือง และวัฒนธรรมของกรณีศึกษา อีกทั้งอาจไม่ได้แสดงออกถึงการเปลี่ยนผ่าน อย่างสุดโต่ง แต่ก็ถือว่าความเป็นพหุนิยมนี้เป็นแนวทางสู่แนวคิด Pluriverse ที่เกิดขึ้นจริง เนื่องจากการปะทะกันของวาทกรรมการพัฒนาทางเลือกที่ซับซ้อน นำไปสู่สภาวะกึ่งกลาง งานวิจัยนี้ต้องการเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการเพิ่มองค์ความรู้เกี่ยวกับพหุจักรวาลแห่งการพัฒนา ในภาคปฏิบัติเพื่อเพิ่มการถกเถียงในระดับนานาชาติ

**คำสำคัญ:** พหุจักรวาลแห่งการพัฒนา กลไกกรรมทางเลือก ภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือ การพัฒนา

## Abstract

Pluriverse has been central to the discussion of development alternatives to create a world where many worlds fit. It is to allow diverse practices of social well-being rather than imperialist, unilineal growth, and capitalist modern Anthropocene.

The research comprises three case studies: A social enterprise-based organization, Srisa Asoke, practices natural agriculture based on the Buddhist economy and an alternative ‘green’ lifestyle. The Taam and People Association is a group of people whose livelihoods are impacted by the Rasi Salai dam. Their struggle in solidarity with other peasant movements is advocating for alternatives. Raitong Company and their farmers have co-existed to form an agricultural alternative ecosystem that links locals to global sustainability. The three alternatives illustrated coexist within the mainstream, creating friction and strategic self-assimilation with modernity represented by state, surplus, and science. This paper argues that communities practicing alternative agriculture in the Northeast of Thailand demonstrated the frictions and assimilations of modern systems, leading a pathway towards the stage of

‘becoming’ Pluriverse. This article contributes to the discussion of Pluriverse in practice.

**Keywords:** Pluriverse, Alternative agriculture, The North-East of Thailand, Development

## Introduction

Pluriverse was mentioned by Strathern (2018) to challenge the notion of a ‘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. But in fact, the means toward truth can take different ‘viewpoints’ leading towards its own epistemology. This research contributes to the literature on Pluriverse in practice (Kaul et al., 2022) by evaluating the multiple worldings of alternative agriculture in Thailand to illustrate contestations with modernity. Three areas of analysis will be made, including state, surplus, and science.

To put this in perspective, Thailand, as one of the biggest food exporters in the ASEAN region, has highly industrialized agri-food production. The mainstream agribusiness in Thailand lived by the doctrine of efficiency, hence the practice of large-scale contract farming, monoculture, pesticide use, genetic engineering, land-grabbing, market monopoly, and others (Chiengkul, 2012; Lienchamroon & Supha, 2011; Lienchamroon, 2008). Nonetheless, ‘localism’ as one of many concepts of agricultural development has been institutionalized for many decades through Non-Government Organizations and academics as measures to address the maldevelopment from the growth-oriented political economy in Thailand, and hence the

practices of alternative chemical-free, aggregated, and localized agricultural practices (Connors, 2005).

Alternative agricultures stemming from localism have been practiced in different forms due to certain influences and the time-place contexts. All have made up the interplay of discourse dynamics, resulting in social movements inspired by the complex amalgamation of alternative agriculture agendas that are overlapping, contesting, and regenerating on one another (Anusorn Unno, 2004).

Three alternative agricultural communities in Srisaket Province in the Northeast of Thailand demonstrated the diversity of the locally led alternative agro-economic activities within a small geographic location. Case studies include Srisa Asoke – practices natural agriculture based on Buddhist economy and alternative ‘green’ lifestyle, along with The Taam and People Association which is a group of people whose livelihoods are impacted by Rasi Salai dam. Their struggle in solidarity with other peasant movements is advocating for alternatives. Raitong Company and their farmers have co-existed to form an agricultural alternative ecosystem that links locals to global sustainability.

This research argues that although the three communities are practicing alternative agriculture, they are influenced by the nuances of different discourses and narratives, and thus depicting multiple ontologies of alternatives (Conway & Singh, 2011). Along the way, frictions and assimilations between state, surplus, and science identified by these case studies, indicate the stages of hybridity through the process of ‘becoming’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006) which is a reality that allows Pluriversal imaginaries to be pragmatic.

## Literature Review

The literature review summarizes Pluriverse as the concept that provides an analytical lens on how each diverse case study in this research

manifests an alternative reality through their practices based on socioeconomic, cultural, and ideological uniqueness. Following that, the overview of alternative agriculture seen as different discourses existing in the entanglement with one another in different domains is presented.

### **Pluriverse as an Alternative to Development**

The assumption of many worlds invited a reconsideration of the positions of knowledge acquired through epistemology from many worlds, which 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 and reconstitute those particular worldings by the divergence of knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2007 as cited in Kitirianglarp, 2021). The borderline of the collision or friction between multiple worlds creates Pluriversal politics (Escobar, 2018; Escobar 2020), and Pluriverse is a space of synergies and dialectic learning. A status of objects or occurrences in one setting would always comprise itself and the unknown else at the same time, called existential indeterminacy.

A school of thought, especially in anthropology, sees the worldings in human and non-human relations and that constructions of understanding towards the world around human beings have been based on the capability of humans' rationalization and available senses (Haraway, 2016). Thus, Pluriversality has been expanded to try to understand co-existence between the human and non-human (nature, creatures, and materials) (Kothari et al., 2019; Querejazu, 2016; Demaria and Kothari, 2017; Escobar, 2015; Kitirianglarp, 2021). This article would, however, place a major focus on the worldings between human communities and their development culture, and less on human-nature relations.

However, Garcia-Arias and Schöneberg (2021) argue that Pluriverse has degrees of romanticising poverty and imposes a universality of the Pluriverse concept itself, disregarding the sets of realist values that refuse to partake in this worlding. They, nonetheless, agree that Pluriverse is a hope of

ontological reorientation toward alternatives to the uniformed world of patriarchy, neo-colonialist capitalism, and extractive development. And for that, it entails de-growth in the economies in the global north and post-development in the global south alike. To them, the Pluriverse narrative is based on the highlights of cultural and discursive positions as well as the idea of cultural relativism.

### **Modernity and Pluriverse in Practice**

Escobar (2022) frames Pluriverse through alternatives to development in the context of Latin America, whereby indigenous knowledge and development paths collide with modernity. Escobar pointed out that the Pluriversal politics is more the politics of modernity, rather than leftist politics as often criticized. Modernity articulates the ontological identification of dichotomy, compartmentalization, progress, scientific disciplines, and others in understating and approaching the world, while leftist politics calls for egalitarianism, socialist economy, secular, anti-imperialism, and others representing political concepts sprung from an ontology that is reactionary to modern development.

Kaul et al. (2022) correspond to the above statement by referring to Pluriverse in practice, which states that frictions with modernity could be identified on the ground in 3 areas: frictions with the *state*, *surplus*, and *science*. It also calls for re-politicizing the debates on the science and practice of sustainability and weaving the contributions of anticolonial and indigenous science studies into neo-Marxist and post-development critique. This finding becomes important in this study's framework. Querejazu (2016) proposed that Pluriverse modern and Western ontologies are interconnected with and complement other worlds or other cosmovisions, especially 'modern rationality'. The Pluriverse approach does not oppose modernity; it is to be

stressed that it coexists with moderning simultaneously but is not absorbed by it.

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

In the discursive field of alternative development in Thailand, it is important to include ‘Community Culture’ thought as this has been the foundation for all alternative schools. The association of community to development in Thailand was introduced around the 1980s when development workers (NGOs) and local villagers worked together to conceptualize the meaning of community in development (Rigg, 1994). It gained momentum and became one of the key political concepts in the 1990s through several events, such as the framing of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy by King Rama 9. Around this same time, this was incorporated into the 1997 constitution, where policies and strategic papers were introduced to serve political purposes based on the initial demand for civil rights (Shigetomi, 2013). It became a school of thought and a political discourse that romanticized villages as the origin of Thainess (Thongchai Winichakul, 2008). Community culture discourse receives similar critiques as other utopian thoughts, such as the negligence of neoliberal and global influence.

Alternative agriculture was introduced to Thai farmers in response to the concerns over the introduction of chemical agriculture in regard to farmers’ health, debts from inputs, and crop prices from cash crops from the rise of localism (Anusorn Unno, 2004) started as a farmers’ movement that occupied the street and gained support from civil society organizations (CSOs). In the early days in response to the new chemical agriculture practice, the concepts of AA have been introduced in relation to the school of rural

development such as the integrated agriculture school political economy rural development school<sup>2</sup>, socio-cultural school<sup>3</sup>, appropriate technology school<sup>4</sup>, Buddhist spiritual school<sup>5</sup>, and organic agriculture inspired from overseas.<sup>6</sup> All of the above have shared traits of alternative to chemical inputs, as well as monopolizing market players and monoculture.

Before the institutionalization of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) school around 2002, when it was integrated into the national development framework, several rural development schools launched by development workers co-existed and competed with one another. Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) is one of the most widely pushed policy frameworks, and it has dominated sustainable development in Thailand for several decades (Schaffar, 2018). Nonetheless, SEP receives the majority of its

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<sup>2</sup> Political Economy Rural Development School emphasizes the relationship between politics and development; the approach to this school has been the cultivation of bargaining power to the less powerful by rights advocacy and group forming such as seed banks, input banks, milling groups, etc.

<sup>3</sup> The Socio-Cultural school focuses on the needs of the community based on their sociocultural identity as an asset for development. It opposed other development projects that impose activities by ignoring the existing cultural structures.

<sup>4</sup> The appropriate technology school supports the community with technologies that are locally initiated. This school was advocated through a foundation under the Faculty of Engineering, Chulalongkorn University Thailand.

<sup>5</sup> The Buddhist Spiritual school brings in the concept of non-violence and simplicity to the agricultural practice. The Fukuoka school inspired by the book 'One Straw Revolution' also took in account the Zen Buddhism practice of modesty in farm management.

<sup>6</sup> McCane Institute led by a German manager introduced organic agriculture in a Leprosy hospital as a missionary mission. It was not popularized as much as the Fukuoka Natural Farming School 'popularized by the book One Straw Revolution. Organic agriculture then and today has been very different.



criticism for being an elite program that encourages rural farmers and the working class to be self-sufficient and low-profile while advocating no structural adjustment in the elite society, allowing an unequal socioeconomic framework to persist (Unger, 2009). This SEP has been streamlined into policy implementation at every level, and state-imposed sustainability has played an integral role in Thailand's alternative agriculture agenda. Samchaiv Sresunt (2017) argued that the connection between Community Culture discourse, marrying together with the Buddhist self-reliance and sustenance, had created the Sufficiency Economy discourse.

There has been a gap in research and literature that bridges the concept of Pluriverse and the empirical evidence of Pluriverse in practice in Thailand. Although there has been some works in the literature about alternative agriculture in the global context and Thailand that have been laid out sparsely, there is no literature that displays the interplay of different alternative agricultures in case-based studies through the Pluriverse lens. The original contribution of this study to the body of knowledge is the portrayal of local-led alternative agricultural practices that are representing Pluriverse in dialogue with modernity, particularly state, science, and surplus.

## Methods

This research addresses the question, 'How could contestations with modernity lead to the Pluriverse in the practice of alternative agricultural communities in Thailand?' The research primarily employs a qualitative social science approach to data collection, incorporating key informant interviews, participatory observation, and document reviews. For this article, there were a total of 16 interviews from the case studies, including community and company leaders and farmer members of the communities. Documents from

relevant strategic papers, archived news articles, and previous research on the cases were reviewed.

The analytical framework references Kaul et al. (2022) concerning *state, surplus and science* as each case's empirical information is to be assessed against the three subjects within the discourse of modernity. The methods employed the social science critical discourse analysis (Sresunt, 2014; 2017) which not only paid attention to the expressions or text, but also the practices and the contexts around the expression that give meaning between the lines for the expressions (Weiss and Wodak, 2007; Fairclough, 2013), and the participatory observations provided overviews for the context in which the texts were situated. In this case, the research has the objective to distinguish between alternative discourses and the 3 discourses of modernity stated above, and additionally display contestations and assimilations. Discourses can partly depict the ontological reality that illustrates alternative worldings, although the literature on Pluriverse calls for the methodology beyond discourse and questions the limits of scientific methodologies (Dryzek, 1997 as cite in Tuler, 1998)

## Findings

The frictions between state, surplus and science identified by Kaul et al. (2022) indicate evidence of the process of 'becoming' whereby in this case, the frictions can be observed with the state-led agricultural development agenda (i.e. conventional agriculture and SEP), global and local capitalist markets (i.e. organic rice market, capitalist accumulation), and the clash as well as synergies between traditional agricultural knowledge and science. The three communities practicing alternative agriculture are influenced by different imaginaries, discourses, narratives, and epistemologies that lead to multiple alternative worldings. However, in the pragmatic contexts of those imaginaries, an assimilation process occurred to gain access to resources and

political stability. Both friction and assimilation in itself establish a stage of ‘becoming’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 23). The Thai northeastern agricultural communities are manifesting Pluriverse through alternative learning and practicing within their own adaptive capacity.

The following section has a detailed analysis of each case.

### **Srisa Asoke community**

The Srisa Asoke community has been formed under an umbrella of the Asoke community with traditional Theravada Buddhism. They are practicing community self-reliance for food and other life essentials which come from agriculture. They value personal and spiritual growth of detachment through the commonality of their farming activities and products. (Winyataro, Samana Thongtae, Interview, 2021) The Asoke Communities were described for their history of rebellion against the Thai state-endorsed conventional Buddhism and their response to the commercialization of today’s Buddhism in Thailand (Satha-Anand, 1990; Jackson, 2002). Their practices align with the self-reliance, frugality, and sufficiency inspired by Buddhist imaginaries (Taylor, 2016; Limprapoowiwattana, 2023).

### **Frictions and Assimilation with Modernity**

The bias against the newly established Asoke communities around Thailand started around the 1970s when Samana Bhotorak was banished from Buddhist circles, being accused of leading the communist movement because of the practice of communalism. They had been called ‘communist ghosts’ by the locals when they relocated here at Krasang District. (Udorn Nurun. Interview, 2021) Although the Asoke community still practices communalism, they have strategically aligned themselves with the state’s ideologies and bureaucratic system endorsing the state’s dominant authority which put them in an easier political situation if conforming to the set of discourse, including the endorsement of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) by King Rama 9.

The Asoke communities had their hard days of conflicts but are nicely assimilated through the SEP scheme. (Singkham, Interview, 2021)

Srisa Asoke refers to the commonality of resources as Satarana Pokee (shared consumption), which can also be interpreted as communalism. The very fact that members contribute free labor towards communal benefits does not settle with a regular paid-labor and private ownership system. The notion of Karma, which functions as the 'invisible hand' in communal life, provides ethical self-governance of people's behavior. (Taylor, 2016). In one way, the Asoke communities are saving surplus to allow capitalist reinvestment to flourish which could be seen as self-interest or greed, but in another way, the system of friendly loan support Asoke communities have for one another is anti-financialization by banking institutions and very communalist. Their billion-baht herbal consumer product businesses are growing and expanding through reinvestment from surplus, but they frequently give back to the members and non-members. In their claim, the expansion of the manufacturing business is also to disseminate good, natural, and ethical products to society. (Sridum, Interview, 2021; Chaoasoke, Interview, 2021; Reungrit, Interview, 2021)

Subsistence farming has been developed such that it may stay chemical-free while still intensifying. The science of microorganisms and soil health has been combined with traditional practice, resulting in research and development into microbial fertilizer, bio-fermented water, and natural hormones. Nonetheless, due to skepticism and onerous labor, there are still an inadequate number of practitioners in comparison to conventional chemical practice. (Sridum, Interview, 2021) To resolve the problem of trust, doubt, and discomfort, endorsing modern science is the approach they take to ease doubts. 'Biology' is the base science for microbial development that is compatible with traditional, non-chemical agriculture. (Udomrak Khwanta, Interview, 2021)

### **The Taam and People Association**

The Taam and People Association was formed as the result of the Rasi Salai people's movement for their deprived livelihoods from the construction of the Rasi Salai dam in 1992. Rasi Salai is one of the numerous dams constructed in the northeast of Thailand as a part of the hydro-modernization project, symbolizing modernity, progress, and power. The science of hydrology has been shielded by the engineer and expert community. As a result, there has been little room for local knowledge within modern development (Kaika, 2006; Jakkrit Sangkhamanee, 2010 as cited in Manom, 2020). The movement was mobilized with assistance from development workers who transferred the rights-based approach to communities affected by the dam. In 2022, the movement has an office space at the dike of the Rasi Salai Dam, in Nong Kae Sub-district, Rasi Salai District. The Taam and Individuals Association also collected people living in the Taam forest in Surin and Yasothorn Provinces and organized under the Assembly of the Poor's alliance as 'the peasant' wing, joining La Vie Campasina in the worldwide peasant movement. (Yuuwa, Interview, 2022) To re-establish livelihoods, the movement advocates for the conservation of remnant vegetation and wetland aquaculture. This relocalized economy is the community's recent phase of livelihood. (Chantasorn, Interview, 2022)

### **Frictions and Assimilation with Modernity**

'Taam' is a freshwater wetland forest named by the people of the wetland region, which is located in the south of the northeastern region, and is Thailand's largest wetland area. The Taam forest supplied livelihoods, food, fuel, wicker, and shelter to the local inhabitants, who learned to make the most of it by foraging, planting rice and other crops, fishing, and grazing their cattle in the forest's many diverse landscapes. This area has been recognized for its 'Taam Mun Agriculture', which is a combination of crop cultivation, cattle grazing, and aquaculture farming in the dry season, and fishing in the wet. This method is eventually referred to as Agroecology; however, Taam

residents had been doing so for hundreds of years prior to the invention of Agroecology as the terminology. (Suthawan, Interview, 2022; Chanpakorn, Interview, 2021) The destruction of the Taam forest entails the loss of a source of income and livelihoods. Development workers worked with the local community to estimate the cost of the loss so that they may bargain with the government. They also supported people's empowerment through legal knowledge and activism.

The existence of the dam after the 1990s has altered the seasonal practice of Taam Mun agriculture which is considered a devastating loss. The conservation and reinvention of local knowledge have been keys to the survivability of the Taam inhabitants (Manorom, 2020). By doing so, varieties of vegetation and aquaculture are brought into their home and the seeds shared among their neighbors. People have several sources of income from wetland farming in the dry season, in-season farming in the upper land, selling garden vegetables, pottery, and cattle kept as saving. It was also observed that this local economy has been revived using aggregated and natural agriculture to rebuild a traditional subsistence existence during the pre-dam setting. Taam plants and aquaculture are domesticated and raised for consumption and conservation in order to mimic the lost Taam environment. The group's localized economy can demonstrate frictions and assimilation with modern surplus through two incidents. Firstly, in the Bun Gum Khao Yai ceremony to worship the rice goddess after the harvest, it is ceremonial that the paddy (and cash) is donated to the Association to further their activism. (Kongtham, Pha, Interview, 2022). Secondly, the 'green market' initiative led by women demonstrates the economy of care (Gibson-Graham, 2006) as the liquidation of cash can support family members who in turn support their activism. (Chanpakorn, Interview, 2021)

Because the movement competed with the state's development objective and aroused demonstrations, they were frequently monitored and labeled by outside communities. To keep the movement under the security radar and break free from the stigma of being a 'mob', the movement accepted development funding from the Royal Irrigation Department and adopted the office title 'Sufficiency Economy Philosophy Learning Center' to align interests with the government, although some organization leaders are skeptical of the political rhetoric associated with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. (Suengsan, Interview, 2021) Taam Mun's agricultural practice relates to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in terms of frugal and subsistent living, but it differs in terms of interdependence with regard to the ecosystem.

Their movement is pushing for greater questions to be asked about the state's and capital's dominance over markets, as well as structural inequality in the agri-food business and natural resource management (Suengsan, Interview, 2021; Yuuwa, Interview, 2022). They continue to oppose the state's development authority by rallying for dam compensation funds and combining forces in opposition to big national and international businesses, such as the attempted ban on key chemical pesticides. They have done so in solidarity with the worldwide peasant movement. In the battle against modernity in disguise, the movement has organized not just against state-led development, but also against expert knowledge and transnational agro-food corporations, although some strategic co-optation alleviates tensions from the frictions.

### **Raitong Organic Farm and SCFN Farmers**

Raitong Organic Farm is a business that collaborates with the Srisaket Creative Farmer Network (SCFN) to promote the group's organic rice farming by providing technical assistance and advancing understanding of Fairtrade

and organic certification through training and group interactions. Members benefit from this by selling organic rice to Raitong at a guaranteed higher price than the market, as well as receiving Fairtrade's premium top-up. But even so, practicing certified organic rice for export may impose additional burdens, making it difficult to recruit new members or retain existing ones (Hugill. Raitong Organic Farm Founder. Interview. June 6, 2022). The two actors are collaborating to build an ecosystem of alternatives that connects local practice to the global market. On the one hand, Raitong, as a for-profit company, introduced sustainable development discourse brining in international actors and markets aiming at greening the economic ecosystem (Dryzek, 2022), which entails a set of norms, and restrictions. On the other hand, the local farmers (dedicated members) brought in natural farming based on the school of localism (See Literature Review Section) and would make a few adjustments to become organically certified. The interactions between the two actors within this ecosystem can illustrate a negotiation process that creates frictions and dialectic learning. Meanwhile, according to Natedao Taotawin (2011), the organic jasmine rice scheme cannot become intensely industrialised because imposing idealised agricultural environments on local northeastern farmers without considering the cost of investment and losses is unfair, and thus conformity to abstract ideals of international regulations, fair trade, and organic standards does not fit with the reality of peasant communities. As indicated by the interviews, it agrees with the aforementioned position concerning the difficulties of scaling up industrially in the instance of Raitong and SCFN farmers. However, the synergies of two discourses offer a place for new imaginaries to coexist.

### **Frictions and Assimilation with Modernity**

In the different alternative practices of agriculture, different bodies of knowledge based on differences in ontologies and worldviews are observed. In the Tum subdistrict, various agricultural methods coexist, including aggregated and mixed vegetation, rotational crops, subsistent non-chemical



farming, and organic rice farming for both government schemes and export. Despite these alternatives, conventional chemical rice farming still dominates 90 percent of paddy fields. The main contestations are found in two levels; firstly Raitong, aiming to promote organic rice farming, faced challenges to convert conventional farmers to export-purpose organic methods. For export purposes on the second level, the shift from subsistence to business organic rice farming is highlighted as a contestation of knowledge and management styles entailing marketing, and innovation in agriculture. Within the organic rice producers, Yai Pao, an SCFN farmer, illustrates differences in practices and regulations between traditional subsistence and SCFN organic rice farming, revealing a clash of pre-modernist and modern ontologies. (Chantarasorn, Somphan. SCFN Farmer member. **Interview.** June 8, 2022). The SCFN cooperative plays a crucial role in mediating these differences, facilitating uniformity among members to act in line with Fairtrade based on standardized modern trading.

Organic certification (IFOAM) and Fairtrade certification are the keys to accessing worldwide market demand. With this system comes power, which both benefits and contradicts the Thai government's agricultural policy objective and control (Eden, 2010). In this situation, some SCFN farmers participated in the organic certification procedure through Raitong due to government organic incentives, and may withdraw once the period expires. In other cases, SCFN farmers were caught using fertilizers provided by the Agricultural Extension Office, as some members were in Raitong's organic export scheme and other government promotional schemes at the same time. (Wongpinich, Interview, 2021)

Additionally, the merging of local farmers with the global market undermined the existing farmers-state relationship structure by leveraging negotiating power. The success of this business operation and the unionization of the SCFN farmer network allowed the group to gain significant

negotiating leverage with state agencies from international business deals, the public outlook on innovation and the portrayal of smart farmers, so the local agricultural offices as well as the senior level provincial authority wanted to collaborate and provide support to Raitong and SCFN to bring the effect of their initiatives to the mainstream. Now, SCFN farmers can collaborate in the government initiatives with agencies and in a more egalitarian manner. (Songklod, Mongkul, Interview, 2022) Raitong's founder has expressed his hope that one day Thai rural farmers will be viewed as entrepreneurs rather than patron-clients by the state. (Hugill and Wongpinich, Interview, 2021; 2022)

In engaging in the Fairtrade system, the premium top-up cost would be reinvested in the capacity building activities of the local farmers. Despite the labor-intensive work, SCFN farmers who survive years of contract activity feel independent from the conventional market-pricing system. The repercussions of such programs motivate farmer families, particularly young members, to continue farming with pride and optimism for the future. (Meungkeaw, Interview, 2021)

The arduous task of expanding SCFN members demonstrates that the underlying operational ideology of Raitong's company, and the farmers understandings, are not harmonized, although SCFN groups are trying hard to comply with required standard. For example, some members participate in the Raitong organic rice export project, while allowing rooms to undergo the government-sponsored Kok Nong Na scheme, while others do rubber plantations or experiment with agroecology. (Chaiyasarn, Interview, 2022) Their involvement in a variety of schemes to diversify their risks shows that not all farmers are geared towards the same vision as Ratong's intensified export-purpose organic rice production.

### The Becoming of the Pluriverse: Theoretical Discussion

The case studies reveal frictions and assimilations among state, surplus, and science, reflecting stages of hybridity in the process of 'becoming' (Gibson-Graham, 2006). This dynamic enables the practical realization of Pluriversal imaginaries. The aforementioned findings generate two main points of discussion; firstly, to discuss whether the stage of *becoming Pluriverse* through frictions and assimilations with modernity is itself Pluriverse; and secondly whether Pluriverse is universalized as a concept.

In the perspective of transitioning to Pluriverse - a radical social and ecological transition into multiple worldings, the question is at what point transition towards Pluriverse is considered completed and fully manifested. According to Escobar (2018), transition is the means and the end. Gibson-Graham (2006) suggested the in-between stage or 'becoming' indicating the area of hybridity, in-the-borderland, an unordered territory. However, this research observed that frictions created by a contestation with the modern state, capitalist surplus system, and modern knowledge based on scientific discipline, deviated communities away from mainstream practices with modernity at the foundation. While at the same time, communities conform with the state's influences, capitalist accumulation, and seeking endorsement from science in order to stabilize their existence on the ground. This is the practical reality of what Pluriversal imaginaries look like in the dynamic context of Thailand's alternative agriculture communities. It also agrees with Escobar (2018) that the borderline of the collision between multiple worlds creates Pluriversal politics.

In relation to Garcia-Arias and Schöneberg (2021)'s critique on Pluriverse which imposes a universality of its own concept, such on-the-ground research studies as this one are contributing towards how the Pluriverse is contextualized. Because it has been heavily studied based on the Latin America context, it runs the risk of concentrating Pluriversal debate

around this. This contextual explanation from Thailand might genuinely support the plurality of empirical findings contributing to Pluriverse.

## Conclusion

This piece of research demonstrates the cases of Srisa Asoke, The Taam and People Association, and Raitong and SCFN, that are communities practicing alternative agricultures based on various imaginaries, discourses, narratives, and epistemologies that lead to various alternative worldings.

The case studies in this research exhibit hybridity which agrees with Querejazu (2016) on the complementary nature of modernism in the alternative realities. All cases have alternative values which create frictions while strategically co-opting with state, surplus and science representing a framework of modernity. They are initiating deviations from modern hegemony based on the roots of the movements' ideology. However, in reality, the operations exist within the hegemonic regime of the Thai state policies and its alternative (SEP), national, and global trade standardizations, globalized markets, conventional agricultural intensification, and the hegemony of scientific knowledge. Therefore, the assimilation or strategic co-optation allow these alternative movements to stabilize their operations.

As a linear notion of progress driven by the capitalist global market has proved disastrous for future sustainability, the diversity of alternative methods is the key to agricultural development methods in the future. Moreover, scrutinizing frictions and assimilation reveals the process of developing beyond modernity, paving the way for a more environmentally balanced, politically equal, and socially inclusive future.

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