

Community-Based Research in Thailand: From Participatory Action Research to Democratizing Knowledge and Decolonizing Methodology

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Abstract

This article analyzes the evolution of community-based research (CBR) in Thailand through a power/knowledge lens. It examines three models—community forest research (CFR), Thailand research fund–community-based research (TRF-CBR), and Thai Baan Research (TBR)—as distinct configurations of participatory research, local knowledge, and political engagement. It shows how CFR recognized local knowledge yet remained externally framed; how TRF-CBR fostered community learning while bounded by state rationalities; and how TBR enabled villagers to pursue epistemic justice. Together, the three models show how local knowledge has contested state hegemonic knowledge, as villagers seek partial autonomy from market dependency, navigate agrarian transitions shaped by broader political-economic forces, and reclaim epistemic justice through research.

Keywords: community of practice, decolonizing methodology, knowledge/power, Thai Baan Research, epistemic Justice

Introduction

Community-based research (CBR) in Thailand has developed through long-standing contestation over land, forest, water, and knowledge. These struggles mirror broader agrarian transitions—the movement from subsistence livelihoods to market-oriented production under expanding state and corporate control. In this shifting landscape, knowledge itself becomes a site of negotiation: who has the authority to define problems, interpret environments, and shape development?

This article situates CBR within the historical trajectory of knowledge production in Thailand, showing how research practices have gradually shifted from externally-led data gathering toward inquiry grounded in local experiences. Rather than viewing CBR as a single model, the article treats it as an evolving field shaped by political conditions, social movements, and changing relationships between villagers, NGOs, academics, and state agencies. Methodological shifts emerged in response to real disputes over natural resources, expanding technocracy, and demands for community rights.

By tracing these developments, the article argues that CBR has moved from collaborative participation toward stronger forms of epistemic justice. This shift marks a transformation in Thai social science: from producing knowledge about rural communities, to producing knowledge with them, and eventually enabling communities to produce knowledge for their own struggles.

The following sections place this evolution within the history of village and community studies, examine how different approaches to CBR emerged, and reflect on their implications for advancing epistemic justice in Thailand.

Conceptual Framework

Genealogy of Village and Community Studies in Thailand

Knowledge on rural Thailand evolved along two related trajectories. The first emerged from anthropological village studies that initially treated villages as bounded cultural units before situating them within wider processes of state formation, development, and agrarian transition. The second arose from participatory and decolonizing approaches that shifted attention from observing villages to enabling communities to become producers of knowledge. From village studies to community forest research (CFR), collaborative research among academics, NGOs, and villagers, Thailand Research Fund's "Democratizing Research" (TRF-CBR), and Thai Baan Research (TBR), this trajectory expanded space for epistemic agency and challenges to state technocracy.

Across seven decades, the concept of the "Thai village community" underwent a major intellectual transformation, evolving from a bounded and harmonious moral unit into a historically-constituted, politically-mediated, translocal, and heterogeneous social formation. Classical village studies of the 1950s-1970s (Sharp and Hanks, 1978; Phillips, 1965) reflected a structural-functionalist approach that viewed villages as cohesive moral communities. Keyes (1967) situated Northeast villages within Buddhism, regional identity, and national integration. Moerman (1968), working independently from the Cornell tradition, examined how Northern Thai peasants pragmatically responded to agricultural innovation and state development schemes. Potter (1977), by contrast, portrayed the Thai village as an integrated cultural system structured by kinship, hierarchy, and personalistic authority.

Early Thai anthropologists expanded these perspectives. Vallibhotama (1971) and Smuckarn (1972) examined agrarian change and differentiated responses to modernization, while Rabibhadana (1975), Soonthornpasuch (1977), and Prachuabmoh (1980) explored urban settlement, ethnic boundaries, and identity negotiation.

A decisive break came with the political economy turn. Turton (1977) situated the village within broader processes of state formation, hierarchy, and capitalist penetration. Ganjanapan (1984) analyzed partial commercialization and class differentiation in a Northern Thai peasant village, showing how market integration produced uneven social relations. Vaddhanaphuti (1984) examined state-village relations and ideological reproduction of peasant consciousness through state apparatuses. Hirsch (1987) demonstrated how state interventions reshaped production systems, labor relations, and participation within recently-settled forest communities. Bowie (1988) further showed how rituals and spirit cults mediated villagers' negotiations with state power.

It was during late 1980s and 1990s that critical scholarship on Thailand argued that knowledge is socially and politically constructed rather than neutral or universal (Chitakasem and Turton, 1991). State-centered development institutions historically privileged bureaucratic and technocratic forms of knowledge while marginalizing local experiential understandings of ecology, livelihood, and territory. Turton (1991) identified a major intellectual turn in Thai studies: from modernization perspectives to critiques of development and state power; from elite-centered knowledge to local knowledge; from

essentialized notions of Thai culture to contested meanings; from positivism to interpretive analysis; and toward greater attention to the relationship between knowledge and power. The intellectual movement during this period also reflected the expansion of civil society and the becoming more “democratic” of Thai society.

In the uplands of Northern Thailand, where state territorialization (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995) rendered populations legible (Scott, 1998), development projects introduced cash crops to replace and subsistence agriculture. Hutheesing (1990) demonstrated how upland transformation disrupted Lisu social relations and contributed to changes in women’s status and labor migration.

Scholars increasingly moved beyond the bounded village model. Wittayapak (1994) examined community-based watershed management and highlighted state territorialization through mapping and forest zoning. Boonmathya (1997) argued that “development” in rural Northeast Thailand was understood differently by villagers, NGOs, and state agencies. Northeastern Thai villagers actively negotiated, reinterpreted, and sometimes resisted state-led development according to their own moral economy, livelihood concerns, and local knowledge.

Mobility and translocality studies in the 2000s further reconfigured the concept of community. Kitiarsa (2002) emphasized Northeastern villagers’ migration, religion, identity, and popular culture within transnational social worlds. Lapanun (2013), however, focused on transnational marriages between Northeastern Thai women and Western men, showing how obligations and moral responsibility toward parents were maintained despite geographical separation. Rigg (2019) showed how villagers adapted to capitalism through migration, diversified livelihoods, and “more-than-rural” strategies.

Tanabe (2008) reconceptualized “community” as a social entity that is continuously imagined, enacted, negotiated, and performed *through* social practice, ritual, memory, morality, and political relations. He was inspired by the concept of community by Anderson (1983), but he localized and anthropologized it. Herzfeld’s (2016) study of Pom Mahakan, an old community in the heart of Bangkok to be evicted by the Bangkok Metropolitan authorities, reflects a similar perspective.

The Paths of Community-Based Research and PAR

The trajectory of participatory action research (PAR) and community-based research (CBR) in Thailand began with the diffusion of Freire’s ideas during the 1970s through universities, NGOs, church organizations, and development movements. Father Nipote Tienvihan played an important role in introducing dialogical learning and collective reflection to development practice in Northern Thailand. By the late 1970s, Freirean ideas of dialogue, empowerment, and praxis had become influential within Thai development discourse.

Pongphitch (1986) promoted village self-reliance and community learning, while Nartsupha (1988) developed the concept of “community culture,” reframing the village as a moral economy grounded in local knowledge and collective agency. Later critiques by Kitihara (1996) warned against romanticizing community harmony and overlooking internal inequalities.

During the early 1980s, Thailand witnessed the surge of methodological turn toward PAR, as Khon Kaen University became the training center for rapid rural appraisal (RRA). The 1987 International Conference on Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) was a landmark event in participatory development as it brought together scholars, NGO practitioners, and development workers to challenge top-down, technocratic approaches to rural development. In Bangkok, the Qualitative Research

Association was established to promote qualitative research in an educational context. In the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the Research and Development Institute (RDI) at Khon Kaen University also played an important role in institutionalizing qualitative research for development practice and as a critique of positivist, quantitative research.

The period can be classified as an era of democratization and NGO expansion, as well as rapid capitalist and agrarian transformation in Thailand. There were growing critiques of technocratic development, while there was an emergence of participatory and community-based research. At the same time, Thai and international academics discussed “the old village study approach”—see Vaddhanaphuti (1988); the growing impact of capitalist penetration in rural Thailand, and the importance of participatory development—see Turton (1987) and Hutheesing (1990).

During the late 1980s, Alting von Geusau worked closely with Akha communities, combining ethnographic engagement with liberation theology and critical social science. Turton’s (1987) “tri-ologue” model, linking villagers, academics, and practitioners, anticipated later participatory research frameworks.

Conflicts between the Forestry Department and villagers during the 1990s also stimulated the emergence of community forest research (CFR) which documented customary rights, forest use, and local ecological knowledge, while linking participatory research with advocacy for community rights and forest governance based on the concept of commons.

After CFR, participatory research in Thailand developed along two major trajectories. Introduced in 1998, TRF-CBR sought to “democratize” research by supporting communities to collect data and solve their own local problems. Although politically-sensitive issues were largely excluded, the program significantly expanded local participation in knowledge production, funding several thousands of projects on agriculture, health, tourism, and rural livelihoods.

The second trajectory was Thai Baan Research (TBR), developed by Pak Mun fishers, the Southeast Asia Rivers Network (SEARIN), and myself as advisor. It became a powerful model of community-led inquiry, epistemic justice, and decolonizing methodology.

Theoretical Lens: Power/Knowledge, Epistemic Justice, and Decolonizing Methodology

Following Ferguson’s concept of the “anti-politics machine” (1990), development interventions often transform political conflicts over land, resources, inequality, and livelihoods into technical problems managed by experts, bureaucracies, and development agencies. While Ferguson critiques how development depoliticizes structural inequalities through technocratic interventions, Long (2001) shows that local actors do not passively absorb these interventions but reinterpret and contest them through everyday practices and knowledge production. Together, they provide a useful lens for understanding epistemic contestation and participatory research in Thailand.

This perspective connects closely with Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge, which views knowledge production as embedded within relations of power. What counts as legitimate knowledge reflects institutional authority, scientific discourse, and political interests. Through this nexus, states, experts, and development institutions establish “regimes of truth” that shape how rural communities and environments are understood and governed.

Scott’s distinction between *metis* and *techne* (1998), together with Li’s governmentality (2007a), helps explain how participatory approaches recognized local ecological knowledge while reorganizing it into forms compatible with bureaucratic and conservation agendas. Local voices were included, but epistemic authority largely remained external.

Thai Baan Research (TBR) represents the strongest epistemic shift contesting Thai state knowledge about development. By positioning villagers as researchers, while NGO workers and academics acted as facilitators, TBR disrupted hierarchical expertise and challenged dominant environmental narratives. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of "war of position" (1971) and Freire's critical consciousness (1970), TBR generated counter-hegemonic knowledge grounded in villagers' lived experiences.

This relates closely to Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice, which highlights how villagers, ethnic minorities, and small farmers are often denied recognition as credible knowers within dominant development frameworks. Fricker distinguishes between testimonial injustice, where knowledge is dismissed because of prejudice, and hermeneutical injustice, where marginalized groups lack the conceptual resources to articulate their experiences. Medina (2013) further argues that dominant groups often reproduce "active ignorance" by refusing to recognize marginalized experiences and that epistemic resistance can challenge such domination through alternative spaces of knowledge, memory, and testimony. Here, epistemic resistance refers to opposition to epistemic domination, while epistemic agency refers to the capacity to become an active knower and knowledge producer.

Although the concept of decolonizing methodology is discussed in this article, TBR was not directly influenced by decolonial scholars such as Smith (2012). After TBR emerged, however, Southeast Asian scholars like Zawawi (2015) argued that social science knowledge remained dominated by Western centers of theory production, while scholars in Asia and the Global South were treated mainly as providers of empirical data. His ideas resonate with Mignolo's (2011) critique of Eurocentric knowledge and call for "epistemic disobedience" and plural ways of knowing. Similarly, Santos emphasizes "epistemologies of the South" and "cognitive justice," arguing that dominant scientific knowledge often erases subaltern and experiential knowledges.

PAR in Community Forest Management

The community forest research (CFR) project (1991-1993) marked a foundational phase in the evolution of community-based research (CBR) in Thailand. It emerged after the 1989 national logging ban, a major turning point in Thai forest policy following decades of ecological degradation caused by commercial logging concessions. CFR aimed to provide systematic evidence supporting the expanding community forest movement, particularly in Northern and Northeastern Thailand, and adopted PAR in data collection across several communities.

Ramitanondh et al. (1993) organized community-forest research into interconnected phases ranging from collaborative data collection to joint analysis and policy engagement. The project began with academics and NGO partners visiting selected Northern Thai villages with established forest-management practices, consulting elders, monks, and village leaders to reconstruct local histories and form village research teams. Researchers and villagers then worked together through oral histories, participatory mapping, transect walks, group discussions, and household interviews to document forest use, ecological zones, and local governance systems. While academics provided methodological guidance and systematized the data, villagers contributed ecological knowledge and institutional memory, while NGOs facilitated logistics and connected local findings to broader rights and development debates.

A key conceptual outcome was the identification of what villagers themselves understood as "community rights"—collectively-held rights grounded in long-standing use, ritual obligations, and

locally-enforced regulations. Villagers managed forest landscapes as a form of “the commons,” governed through moral commitments and customary sanctions rather than individual or state ownership. Data analysis unfolded through iterative dialogue as draft maps, forest histories, and resource-use profiles were returned to communities for verification and interpretation. In the final phase, researchers and NGO allies helped villagers present their findings to public forums debating the proposed community forest bill.

The struggle over Thailand’s Community Forest Bill illustrates how state power and conservationist ideology continued to shape the limits of community-based resource governance. During the 1990s, villagers across the North and Northeast drafted their own version of the bill and submitted it to Parliament. However, the proposal was strongly opposed by conservationist groups and by some political parties, who argued that community forests inside protected areas would cause deforestation and undermine scientific forestry. Although the law was eventually passed, community forests inside protected areas were excluded.

This outcome demonstrates what Li (2007b) calls the “practices of assemblage:” state agencies and conservationist actors selectively reassembled community forestry into a governable technocratic model, stripping away villagers’ rights-based and commons-oriented vision. In short, state-led community forest management became participatory in form but not in substance, diverging sharply from villagers’ original proposal.

Thai Research Funds-Community-Based Research (TRF-CBR)

The Chiang Mai–Lamphun valley was shaped by irrigated wet-rice cultivation along the Ping, Tha, and Li rivers, supplemented by garlic, soybeans, and seasonal vegetables. Longan, once a backyard fruit sold locally or shipped to Bangkok, remained marginal until the late 1980s. As prices rose, farmers converted rice fields into orchards, marking a shift from mixed subsistence to specialized perennial cash cropping. This transition accelerated after AFTA expanded export channels, especially to China in the late 1990s. A major turning point was the discovery that potassium chlorate induced off-season flowering, enabling farmers to capture high-price export windows. The ensuing boom deepened dependence on external actors: Chinese middlemen (*lounj jin*) provided credit and inputs, established buying stations, dictated prices through *guangxi* (networks of reciprocity), and invested in logistics. Many farmers became tied to debt, chemical inputs, and volatile global markets.

Alarmed by chemical exposure confirmed through blood tests, a group of Lamphun longan farmers sought alternatives. They organized and applied to the Lamphun TRF node, which funded their organic farming initiative. TRF support shifted them from informal discussions to structured experimentation. A study tour to the Organic Agriculture Learning Center in Chiang Mai initiated collective learning, helping farmers adapt methods to local soils and pests.

A “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998) gradually formed. Mutual farm visits enabled farmers to observe techniques, exchange feedback, and troubleshoot problems. They experimented with composting, natural repellents, intercropping, mulching, and water-use management. Buffer trees were planted to shield organic plots from chemical drift, symbolizing a boundary between longan capitalism and emergent agroecology. Women played central roles in selecting seeds, planting vegetable gardens, and preparing organic fertilizers. Farmers documented soil changes, pest cycles, and yields, creating a

shared knowledge base and collective identity. Without women's consensus, men could not have adopted organic farming by themselves.

While organic longan remained central, farmers diversified into vegetables, herbs, and short-cycle crops to stabilize income and reduce vulnerability to price swings. They explored green markets, school lunch programs, and regional and international outlets. These activities supported ecological recovery, reduced partial dependence on *loung jin*, and positioned farmers as researchers and innovators within a shifting agrarian economy. Yet, following Li (2007a), this empowerment carried new constraints: entry into premium markets required compliance with certification and traceability regimes, shifting dependence from Chinese traders to regulatory systems embedded in state and global organic markets.

Seen through Borras and Franco's political-economy lens (2012), the Lamphun case shows both the potential and limits of TRF-CBR. It redistributed some power over markets, resources, labor, and knowledge, enabling farmers to experiment and reduce exposure to exploitative trade networks. Yet the project still operated within structural conditions shaping market access and legitimate knowledge.

Because TRF-CBR supported tens of thousands of projects, additional examples are necessary. The first is "Rice Seed Breeding: Reclaiming Knowledge in the Field" (Lapanun 2022), part of the TRF-CBR Evaluation Project. These rice seed-breeding initiatives, conducted by farmer groups in Northeastern Thailand, emerged from concerns about declining productivity of commercial rice varieties promoted by the Department of Rice. High-input Green Revolution seeds performed poorly under local conditions, increased debt, and undermined self-reliant farming.

Supported by small TRF grants, farmers experimented with nearly-disappeared local varieties. With mentoring from an agricultural scientist and a Northeast TRF node, they cross-bred, selected, and tested seeds under varying micro-ecological conditions in their own fields. Yield, taste, and resilience were compared across seasons, while village meetings facilitated discussion, seed exchange, and shared documentation. Instead of relying on state experts, they revived older epistemic traditions of seed selection and mutual learning. The project remained within TRF-CBR's development framework—productivity and livelihood enhancement—but also signaled an epistemic recovery, reclaiming the meaning of "research" and "innovation" from below.

The second case is Deekhuntod's study of "citizen science" in a human–elephant coexistence program (2022). The project integrated scientific methods into CBR to strengthen community capacity and negotiation with state agencies. Citizen science referred not simply to volunteer monitoring but to systematic methods validating community knowledge and producing credible evidence for policy engagement. At the Kanchanaburi site, villagers worked alongside NGO coordinators and officials under a scientist-led design. Standardized forms and photographic evidence allowed villagers to document elephant movements, pathways, and crop damage, while experiments with solar lights and alternative crops were adjusted through monitoring.

Interviews with a senior NGO revealed that elephant incursions were shaped not only by community-level dynamics but also by ecological and governance practices inside national parks, including declining food sources, lack of habitat restoration, and disrupted historical corridors. Yet the project focused mainly on community-level adjustments without critically examining park management or broader structural drivers. Following Li's concept of "rendering technical" (2007b), the project empowered villagers but channeled their agency into technical improvements rather than political claims, mirroring the broader limits of TRF-CBR.

Thai Baan Research and the Pak Mun Dam Movement

Thai Baan Research (TBR) emerged from the prolonged struggle of Pak Mun fishers resisting the Pak Mun Dam in Northeastern Thailand, built by EGAT with World Bank funding (Assembly of the Poor's Pak Mun Thai Baan Researchers, 2002). Villagers repeatedly demanded that EGAT open the dam's sluice gates to restore fish migration from the Mekong to the Mun River. Their position shifted "from street protest to knowledge production" (Heis and Vaddhanaphuti, 2020), following advice from the author as an academic advisor.

The name *Thai Baan* ("common people") was coined by villagers to assert their right and confidence to conduct research. The core objective was to produce empirical evidence demonstrating that opening the sluice gates would revive fish populations and river-based livelihoods, as well as restore riverine ecology—challenging state and EGAT narratives centered on hydropower development. The Pak Mun fishers did not trust the commissioned academics.

Contrary to EGAT's depiction of the villagers as simple rice farmers, Pak Mun fishers maintained a diversified moral economy rooted in both market exchange and reciprocity. Fish were sold in urban markets, exchanged for rice or salt, shared with kin and neighbors, and made into food to offer to monks. Whereas EGAT's feasibility study identified only a small number of species, villagers understood the Mun River as a complex ecological system with diverse fish species and seasonal dynamics—knowledge that TBR set out to document systematically.

TBR's methodology was initiated and directed by villagers, with NGO workers and the academic advisor providing only technical support. First, villagers collectively identified the research topic—primarily the dam's effects on fish migration, biodiversity, and riparian livelihoods. Second, basic training in documentation techniques ensured active involvement of women, elders, and master fishers. Third, systematic data collection took place each morning when fishers brought their catch to the riverbank, where species were identified and counted, while NGO workers photographed and recorded the data. Parallel women-led teams documented edible plants, medicinal herbs, vegetables, and other riverbank resources. Finally, villagers synthesized findings through group discussions, producing shared interpretations and diagrams illustrating fish migration, river dynamics, and the revival of trade and community life once the gates were opened.

TBR thus became both a method and a political strategy. It positioned local ecological knowledge (*metis*) (Scott 1998) as a credible counter to EGAT's technocratic feasibility study. Methodologically, TBR challenged extractive research by turning villagers into co-researchers and interpreters of their own world. Politically, this collective production of knowledge from below can be seen as a decolonizing methodology (Smith, 2012; Tadem, 1986; Zawawi, 2015), transforming research into epistemic resistance and reclaiming epistemic justice over the river, its ecology, and their livelihoods. At the same time, it was a "war of position" (Gramsci, 1971) which the Pak Mun villagers adopted to stage a "counter-hegemony" against the state's hegemony. It should be mentioned that during the time we implemented TBR, we did not think that it was a decolonizing methodology until the work by Smith (2012) came out. TBR has been adopted by NGOs relatively widely in Thailand and in neighboring countries, but it is often used as a methodology of data collection, not for an epistemic challenge.

Reflections

In this article, I differentiate “community” from the early anthropological concept of “village community.” However, the three participatory approaches discussed in this article invoked the language of “community,” while differing in how they addressed internal heterogeneity and local power relations. CFR often treated the community as a relatively cohesive unit capable of collectively managing natural resources through the concept of “community rights,” based on the concept of “commons” where villagers collectively own the property and establish rules of access. TRF-CBR moved further by recognizing differentiated livelihood problems and encouraging broader participation in local problem solving, though many projects still operated within administratively-defined notions of community, giving less attention to internal power relations. TBR, by contrast, emerged directly from resource conflicts and foregrounded villagers’ contested experiences with state development projects. While TBR used “community” as a collective form of representation and peasant movement, Mun River fishers conceived fish and river as “common property.” When subsistence ethics were violated, they protested (Scott, 1976). TBR was more explicitly concerned with unequal power relations between communities, the state, and technocratic institutions (Missingham, 2003), though less attentive to inequalities within the movement itself. The three approaches therefore reflected different understandings of community, ranging from bounded managerial notions to more conflict-oriented assemblages linked to social movements. Internal power relations are largely overlooked. However, in the case of Pak Mun, there were conflicts between those who wanted to receive compensation from the flooding and those who did not.

The concept of “citizen science” is also relevant to understanding participatory knowledge production. It generally refers to forms of research in which non-professional participants collaborate in data collection under frameworks defined by professional scientists. Science remains central, while villagers do not define their own research problems. Citizen science therefore differs from TBR, which is grounded in co-production of knowledge.

Recent debates on participatory action research (PAR) question whether participation necessarily transforms unequal power relations. Critics argue that participatory approaches may become technocratic, romanticize “community,” or incorporate local people into externally defined frameworks (Li, 2007a). Other scholars emphasize the transformative potential of participatory research when it redistributes epistemic authority and supports marginalized groups in producing their own knowledge (Smith, 2012). These debates are directly relevant to the three participatory approaches, which differed significantly in how they conceptualized participation, local knowledge, and epistemic agency. It is also important to consider the relationship between the research team and villagers. If the relationship continues after funding ends, villagers may become less dependent on externally imposed systems.

This article does not present the three participatory approaches as a linear continuum in which TBR represents the most advanced model. CFR can be considered a form of “tri-ilogue,” a collaborative research model (Turton, 1987). TRF-CBR can be seen as “democratizing research,” allowing villagers to collect data to address their local problems. TBR, by contrast, represents an attempt to support affected villagers in contesting epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) and discovering their decolonizing methodology.

While writing this article, my colleagues and I became involved in the People’s Environmental Impact Assessment (PEIA), developed in response to the state’s Environmental Impact Assessment for the Yuam–Salween water diversion project. PEIA was influenced by TBR methodology and epistemic

agency, but differed in using cultural mapping, household surveys, and community dialogue. Women actively participated in household economic surveys and forest products collection. Villagers challenged the state's technocratic representation of the river system while articulating alternative understandings grounded in local ecological relations and livelihood practices. The PEIA report was submitted as evidence to the Administrative Court in Chiang Mai.

The emergence of PEIA suggests that participatory and community-based research in Thailand has increasingly moved beyond consultation and local data collection toward forms of epistemic resistance and ontological contestation. Villagers are no longer treated merely as data collectors or "citizen scientists," but as producers of situated knowledge, capable of challenging dominant development frameworks and proposing alternative visions of human–nature relations. The trajectory from CFR to TRF-CBR, TBR, and PEIA therefore reflects not only methodological innovation, but also a broader transformation in the politics of knowledge and epistemic justice in Thailand.

One important issue related to PAR is the source of funding. Today, the Thailand Research Fund no longer has funds to support CBR by villagers, and only limited funds to support CBR projects are available from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation. Some international funding agencies provide funding support aimed at promoting epistemic resistance.

Conclusion

This article has argued that community-based research (CBR) in Thailand should not be understood as a single participatory methodology, but as an evolving field of power/knowledge shaped by struggles over natural resources, development, and epistemic authority. The three models discussed—community forest research (CFR), Thailand Research Fund–CBR (TRF-CBR), and Thai Baan Research (TBR)—represent different political and epistemological configurations of participation and local knowledge production.

CFR emerged through a "tri-alogue" model linking academics, NGOs, and villagers. Although it opened space for recognizing local ecological knowledge and community rights, epistemic authority largely remained with academics and development practitioners. TRF-CBR moved further toward "democratizing research" by enabling communities to investigate local problems and experiment with practical solutions. Yet the relationship between villagers, academics, and NGOs varied across projects. In some cases, such as farmer-led agricultural research, villagers became principal agents of experimentation and learning. In others, such as the human–elephant conflict project, communities contributed through forms of citizen science grounded in everyday ecological experience. However, broader structural issues—including park management, conservation territorialization, and changing human–forest relations—remained largely outside the scope of inquiry. Many projects therefore remained within politically acceptable development frameworks.

TBR represented a more radical epistemic and political shift. Developed through the Pak Mun Dam struggle, it reversed conventional research hierarchies by positioning villagers as researchers and knowledge producers rather than merely participants or informants. Research became part of a broader struggle over who has the authority to define river ecology, livelihood, and development. In this context, epistemic justice refers to the recognition of marginalized knowers and knowledge systems, while epistemic resistance and epistemic agency emphasize the capacity of communities to challenge dominant regimes of truth and produce counter-hegemonic knowledge.

Seen together, the trajectory from CFR to TRF-CBR and TBR reflects a broader transformation in Thai social science and participatory development: from research on villagers, to research with villagers, and increasingly toward research by villagers. The later emergence of people's environmental impact assessment (PEIA) further demonstrates how participatory research in Thailand has moved beyond consultation toward forms of epistemic politics that contest technocratic authority and reclaim communities' rights to represent their own social and ecological realities.

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