

**Contesting for Community Rights:  
Lessons from Villagers' Protests against  
Pak Mun Dam in Northeast Thailand**

Pattana Kitiarsa<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

In this paper, The author examines notions and practices of “community rights” in contemporary Thailand based on lessons and experiences of villagers’ groups in their struggles against a controversial state-funded dam project in Northeast Thailand in 1990s. What do customary or community rights pertaining to natural resources mean for local villagers, especially those who were effected by the state’s development project? When their rights were violated by the state, how did they respond? Did they stand up and fight? Did somebody come in and provide some helping hands? What are implications of state-villagers contests over the communal rights to the resources? These questions will be addressed in this paper. The author argues that community rights over local resources are at the central stage of state-villagers clashes in the Pak Mun case. The community rights were constructed as academic and development discourses and formed cultural-sentimental arguments as well as political tactics against modern laws and technologies of power of the state. Further implications of villagers-state contests will be discussed in the context of key economic and political transitions in Thailand in the post 1997 economic crisis.

**Keywords:** customary/communal/community right, villagers-state contest, natural resources, Pak Mun Dam projects, Northeast Thailand

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<sup>1</sup>The author is lecturer in School of General Education, Institute of Social Technology, Suranaree University of Technology, Muang District, Nakhon Ratchasima, 30000 Thailand Tel. 66-44-224504; 66-44-224258; Fax: 66-44-224205; Email: pattana@ccs.sut.ac.th. The paper presented in the XIIIth International Congress on Folk Law and Legal Pluralism, organized by the Commission on Folk Law and Legal Pluralism, April 7-10, 2002, Suan Bao Thani Resort, Chiang Mai, Thailand. He would like to thank the Commission on Folk Law and Legal Pluralism, Local Organizing Committee for their financial support, which enables him to attend both the Course and the Congress in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Special thanks go to Yonariza and his colleagues at Andalas University, Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia for their kind invitations to join this conference and other previous projects.