

Changing labor allocations and formation of new socioeconomic relationship under the influence of strawberry cropping among the karen in northern thailand

Tazaki Ikuko, author

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Abstrak

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In this paper I examine the interaction between the practice of cash cropping and villagers daily lives in a local community, from a case study of Karen people in Northern Thailand. By focusing on the transition from subsistence rice farming to cash oriented strawberry cropping, I discuss how the demands specific to strawberry production intersect with changes in labor allocation and the agricultural calendar. Shan laborers from Myanmar are employed seasonally, socioeconomic disparity among villagers is widening, and new leadership and patron client relationships are emerging. By describing the historical process of this interaction, I will demonstrate (1) the logic whereby Karen, who have hitherto been known as subsistence rice farmers, have accepted cash cropping; and (2) how cash cropping redefines the forms of labor and villagers socioeconomic relationships within and outside the village, including ethnic relationships. This paper avoids previous discussions that associate an ethnic group with the independent choice of a specific type of subsistence activity deriving from their own cultural background or as a social strategy to flee from state control. Rather, I try to figure out how specific crops with evolving cropping management and the local community have interacted within a historical and social cultural context to formulate labor forms and allocations as well as villagers socioeconomic relationships in their daily lives.