

Living ecology of “red shirt” peasants in isan: Examining diversity in support of “red shirts” in relation to transformation of livelihood and ecological conditions

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Deskripsi Lengkap: <https://lib.ui.ac.id/detail?id=9999920521478&lokasi=lokal>

Abstrak

The “Red Shirt” pro-Thaksin movement, which organized mass demonstrations in Bangkok in 2009 and 2010, reportedly consisted mainly of farmers from the North and Northeast (Isan) regions. However, within the Isan region, (1) in some areas, few people supported the Red Shirts; (2) within areas that had strong Red Shirt support, some villages were indifferent or negative toward the Red Shirts; and (3) within villages that strongly supported the Red Shirts, there were some villagers who did not support them. In this article I examine these diversities in Red Shirt support in relation to the transformation of local people’s livelihood and surrounding ecological conditions. I do this by means of case studies in two contrastive areas that support the Red Shirts but share similar characteristics in livelihood and other sociocultural aspects, including high dependence on a market economy: TM village and the surrounding area in Nam Khun District, and NK village and the surrounding area in Si Muang Mai District, Ubon Ratchathani Province. Core supporters of the Red Shirt movement were motivated not by personal benefits but by the collective benefits for “poor Isan peasants” thanks to various policies of the Thaksin and pro-Thaksin administrations. They expressed a need for a democratic government so that their requests for government support could be fairly considered. On the other hand, in areas where natural resources were still abundant, and in case necessary a self-sufficient mode of life was possible, local people tended to keep their distance from factional politics, including the Red Shirts. They did not depend on government support for leading their lives. Instead, they held the idea of living with what they had.