

Understanding the Emergence of Political Villagers and State's Counteraction in Northeast Thailand

Convener: Wataru Fujita (Osaka Prefecture University), watarufujita@gmail.com

Single session

Abstract: This panel examines the transformation of politics of the villagers in rural areas in Northeast Thailand (Isan), from multiple viewpoints including motivations, group identity, linkage to politicians or political parties, livelihood ecology, and their interaction with the military government. The main focus is the 'Red-Shirt' movement in Isan. Existing studies so far have argued about the socio-economic backgrounds of the Red Shirt participants in somehow generalized ways claiming that they are a newly emerging lower middle class engaged with commercial agriculture or small business, who is much benefited by the policies of the Thaksin administration. In this panel, in-depth examination of how the villagers did/not become 'Red' and how they have been maintaining their 'redness' until now.

Four papers in this paper take different methodological perspectives on the issues. Fujita's anthropological study compares how environmental diversities in different geographical areas affected people's economic and, hence, political preferences. Viengrat analyzes the transformation of Isan citizens by comparing politicians' narratives of Isan with those of other regions. Saowanee's paper employs linguistic methods to examine how ordinary Red Shirt activists maintain their political identity. Puangthong examines the impact of military's use of the Cold War-era methods to penetrate its control and influence in Isan area.