Organic Farmers’ Connectedness with Nature: Exploring Thailand’s Alternative Agriculture Network

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Abstract
Only recently has research begun to explore how individuals translate their values into actions towards the natural world. As Buddhist scriptures have been associated with environmental stewardship, Thailand’s rural agrarian communities provide a useful site to test farmers’ perceptions of nature. Studies have shown that the Thai alternative agriculture movement has advocated a closer connection to nature through organic extension programs. This paper explores the ways organic rice farmers work with each other and nature to sustain rice farms in rural Northeastern Thailand. In depth interviews with organic farmers shed light on why they form collectives and what holds these groups together. Subsequent analysis revealed the salience of organic fertilizer collectives as a medium of associations between farmers and nature. A final round of structured interviews with seventy-five organic farmers’ examined connectedness with nature through a study of fertilizer practices. Findings suggest that organic farmers perceived bountiful rice and good health as externalities of nurturing the soil. Organic farmers developed a physical association with nature that led to a collective ecological worldview. Although, this study points to the social and spiritual attributes of a close connection with nature, organic farmers also depend on access to capital, technology, and strong local leadership.

Keywords
agriculture farmer, fertilizer, organic, worldview

1. Introduction

The “alternative agriculture movement” has been focused on replacing modern food systems with sustainable agriculture. The movement has embraced a range of environmentally friendly initiatives including bioregionalism, community food systems, community-supported agriculture.