

Performing Political Identity



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出版者:Silkworm Books

出版时间:2008-5-14

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9789749511381

Performing Political Identity is an anthropological account of the multi-level dynamics that underlie the continuing electoral dominance of the Democrat Party in southern Thailand, a conspicuous anomaly in Thailand's political landscape. Based on extensive participant observation and interviews, the book presents a detailed study of candidates, support groups, and election campaigns in the province of Songkhla in the eventful years 2004 to 2005, highlighting the intimate links between local and national politics. Marc Askew argues that the Democrat ascendancy is based on a careful balance between "pragmatics" and poetics. "Pragmatics" comprises the management of the ambitions and needs of key supporters in tightly knit informal political groups, or phuak. "Poetics" involves the cultivation of powerful myths connecting ordinary voters to an idea of the Democrat Party as an embodiment of the idealized qualities of southern Thainess and guardian of "southern Thai political culture."

In the dramatic settings of political rallies, southern Democrat voters and politicians alike "perform" their loyalty and identity as a moral community against political enemies who are demonized as their evil opposites bent on buying votes and "eating the country." From 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai Party, although triumphant elsewhere in Thailand, faced stubborn opposition in the south. Again in

2005, against all national trends, southern voters stubbornly reaffirmed their loyalty to the Democrats. This book, the first detailed treatment of the southern Democrat Party in action, explores the symbolic and organizational strategies that the party employs to reproduce and sustain its regional political ascendancy.

作者介绍:

MARC ASKEW is a Senior Fellow in the Anthropology Program, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne. His previous books include Bangkok: Place, Practice and Representation (London: Routledge, 2002), and most recently, Conspiracy, Politics and a Disorderly Border: The Struggle to Comprehend Insurgency in Thailand's Deep South (Washington DC: East-West Center, 2007).

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