

Rethinking Moral Economy in Life's Work: An Anthropological Perspective

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Within production-oriented and capital centric economies, various forms of life's work are largely ignored and downplayed. Life's work encompasses a wide array of care practices that enable and maintain life. Care is rather a messy category that all includes wage work, domestic labor, sustenance and repair of community ties, and state welfare projects. As the marketization of care is based on what Karl Polanyi would call fictitious commodification, the question of how to secure and elicit care has been a core question of the emerging politics of distribution. Drawing on anthropological fieldwork in Thailand, I examine how poor people's claims on public health services and care from the state redefine the legitimacy of power. The concept of moral economy allows us to grasp how moral sentiments, affects, values, norms, and obligations play a significant role in the distribution of care, which goes beyond the realm of welfare politics.