

**UNDERSTANDING WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICS: STUDIES
OF WOMEN POLITICIANS IN KRABI PROVINCE,
THAILAND**

Pimrumpai Panvichatikul

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Development Administration)
School of Public Administration
National Institute of Development Administration
2009**

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October 2009

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation	Understanding Women in Local Politics: Studies of Women Politicians in Krabi Province, Thailand
Author	Ms. Pimrumpai Panvichatikul
Degree	Doctor of Philosophy (Development Administration)
Year	2009

In Thailand, women have become more and more active in various modern sectors ranging from academics to businesses. However, it is obvious that their presence in politics have been marginal. The number of female politicians was even lower in local governments than at the national levels.

In order to understand why such a disparity in men's and women's political participation at the local level exists, there is a need for holistic inquiry and a cross fertilization of ideas. This dissertation, therefore, provided an in-depth understanding of local women politicians—who they are, what their leadership roles in local government are, and how their services in the offices represent women voices in the communities, amidst the socio-political factors in local context. The researcher selected Krabi, a province in Southern part of Thailand, as the area of this study and used qualitative means—focus group and case studies, in addressing the interweaving and interpretative natures of this research inquiry.

The key findings of this study revealed that women politicians are groomed and socialized by their social and cultural setting. Since childhood, girls and boys alike experience politics not only directly, but also indirectly. Besides the political activities that they observed or took part in, a feeling for politics could also be developed through power relationships within the family, community, and society in which their development took place.

As with a person's political socialization, gender perceptions towards men and women's rightful place in society are also learned and become ingrained, forming an integral part of their mindset. Women are taught what constitutes a woman's place through their parents teaching, as well as through the responsibilities assigned to them.

It has been illustrated in the study that a feeling of self-reliance, self-worth and thus self-esteem, constitute the strongest driving force for women to enter politics and to make a difference. Many women politicians began to be interested in politics because they felt that the existing distribution of public resources was unjust. Consequently, the women saw entering politics as a channel to attain the necessary legitimacy to do what they deemed right.

Nonetheless, because the existing political structure was predetermined by men, women as newcomers face a number of personal challenges (family problems, livelihood problems, lack of education or lack of experience), as well as social challenges (social values regarding the gender roles of men and women, local expectations regarding women leaders). Finally, they face formidable political challenges once they had decided to take part in politics (the problem with entry into politics, marginalization or threats from male politicians, or the fight against corruption).

Meanwhile, external factors, such as the expectations of the locals towards the political status and political roles of a female politician, unquestionably shape, influence, and reinforce a woman's political means and goals. As long as villagers still view women politicians with the same attitudes, women politicians will be expected to carry on the same political role, in the same gender-biased way.

The study, therefore, recommends that supporting organizations, both the government and the NGOs, should take into account the socio-political context of the grassroots in developing their campaigns and programs. Training and development should not aim only to support women political aspirers, but also to instill democratic values in the villagers. This is because democratic values constitute the most important means for neutralizing inequality between sex, bigotry, or even limitations placed on women in developing to their full potential because of gender discrimination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Juree Vichit-Vadakan who has given me tremendous guidance regarding both research and several other important things in life. My appreciation goes to Dr. Amara Pongsapitch and Dr. Pusdee Tamthai, for giving their valuable time and feedback. Without them, this dissertation would never have been of this quality.

Such an opportunity to continue the Ph.D study would not have come to me without Khunying Supatra Masdit, my beloved aunt and my very first mentor, who introduced me to the issues of gender equality as well as opened my worldviews to public administration. I will always remember her kindness and blessings in whatever I do.

I also feel blessed for my opportunities to work with and learn from several great people at the Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, who gave me support in one way or another throughout these long years. I owe so much to this group of colleagues and friends, especially to Pee Meaw, Rewat and Keh, who flew to Krabi to assist me during the focus group dialogues. Special thanks go to Pee Kung, who handled all the coordinations during my field work, as well as Pear and Tappy who helped me enormously during the paper write up.

My sincere appreciation and warm regards also extend to all women politicians participated in this study, particularly my key resource persons—Ja Somsri, Pee Sunee and Pee Junya, who have taught many life lessons and given me inspiration to do more for others.

Above all, I also would like to thank my parents, my grandmother and my husband who have waited patiently for the completion of my Ph.D study. I would have never come this far without their support and, most importantly, love.

Pimrumpai Panvichatikul

October, 2009

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of Problems

Women constitute more than half of the world's population, yet their participation in formal politics, where decisions are made, remains slight. In terms of development, women's involvement in the decision-making process is not only the means, but also an end in itself. Since the term 'development' is inextricably linked to the concepts of justice, efficiency and diversity, the three elements could never be achieved if the other half of the world's population were to be left behind.

Among national and international communities, there has been increasing concern regarding women's exclusion from the structure of power in all levels of governance. To address the importance of having more women in political offices, different international conferences have emphasized the fact that women have the right to participate in political decision-making for reasons of equality, democracy and legitimacy (Evertzen, 2001: 5). In theory, many nation states have adopted the idea that "the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration, and sustainable development in all areas of life" (United Nations, 1995). However, mainstreaming the concept into practice is not easy. The impact of the traditional process of gender-role socialization that intrinsically limits women's roles to the domestic domain is still prevalent in most societies.

In response to the concept of engendering politics, which was widely discussed in the 1990's, many studies have been conducted around the world to identify the internal and external conditions and factors that can explain the under-representation of women in politics. The results are clustered into structural, cultural, and social dimensions, which are related to the pre-existing male-dominant nature of

social relations (Juree Vichit-Vadakan, 2004: 27-53). Due to the structural inequalities that societies inherit, would be difficult for women to be on a par with men in politics unless there are some supporting measures to encourage more women to run for political positions. A quota system is often advocated by women's movements and feminist scholars as a policy initiative aimed at providing women with their very first stepping stone into the political arena. This idea, however, is opposed by those who perceive that a special quota for women would be somewhat at odds with the democratic principle of equal opportunity, for instance.

Besides the issues of gender inequality as it pertains to the numerical representation of male and female politicians, the matter of how women's political voice would make a difference in public policies and their implementation have been widely studied. 'Substantive' representation of women in politics, therefore, is taken into account. It has been determined that women's absence from the political arena has resulted in an imbalance in public policy and its implementation. From childhood, men and women are brought up and socialized differently. Their gender roles in the household and in the community inevitably dispose them to cultivate different qualities. Therefore, it is believed that women would bring new perceptions and diverse concerns to the public administration sphere—which has long been the preserve of males. In addition, many researches have revealed the merits of women politicians as well as the impacts they have made, asserting that once a significant number of women are able to participate in politics, it would lead to a more transparent and sensitized governance, which in turn would result in a better life for the people—both men and women, and the communities they serve.

Most of the studies on women in politics have tended to focus on women in the upper echelons of the decision-making process. Gender differences in national legislative offices were measured by the number and types of bills male and female parliamentarians sponsored or voted for. Researches conducted at local levels, on the other hand, concentrated more on factors alienating women from participation in politics with regard to the issues of descriptive representation of women. The necessity for a quota system was often raised for the purposes of policy advocacy. From this traditional perspective, the significance of gender dynamics is often overlooked.

Recently, the concept of decentralization and localization has been prioritized by many schools of thought pertaining to the issue of development. Due to the fact that local governance is closely linked to the empowerment of voiceless groups, such as the poor and women, the linkage between ‘gender and development’, and ‘women in local politics’ has become more prominent. While decentralization is ideally believed to open up more space for women to participate in decision-making, the number of women who decide to run for political positions has always been marginal. From the experiences of many countries (even ones where parity law exists), competing interests are generally clustered around local government in ways that tend to exclude women (Bealle, 2007: 10-11).

In Thailand, there has been little systematic research on the impact of women in political office, and even less has been done at the local level. However, it is interesting to note that the number of women in local Thai politics is much lower than at the national level. For example, based on the statistics for 2007, women comprised only 11.25% of the Local Administration Executive elected, and only 4.56% of the Village and Subdistrict administration executive, whereas 11.67% and 15.79% were elected to national positions – as members of Parliament and senators respectively (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2008: 87-93). Owing the fact local politics is closer to women’s sphere of lives, and that the proportion of women representatives in local offices is seriously scarce, the issue of women in local politics is considered a critical area to be explored both conceptually and empirically.

This dissertation, hereafter, attempts to illuminate the work and lives of local female politicians who are regarded as marginalized groups in the Thai political domain as it exists today. The study explores their political attitudes and behaviors through their life experiences from childhood to adulthood, and will look into the impacts of women in various local political positions. Both the strengths and weaknesses of these women will be carefully analyzed and their determinants will be sought. Finally, their roles within the whole development process of the community are also examined.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Traditionally, development is defined in economic terms and focuses on issues such as growth, modernization, trade, employment, etc. However, there is an alternative view of development that highlights a people-centered perspective--as clearly elaborated in Thailand's eighth and ninth Development Plans. In this sense, it signifies the development of the political, economic, social, cultural and other dimensions of an individual's life and thus provides opportunities to broaden an individual's **capacity to do** and **capacity to be**. Individuals, after all, must include both women and men.

The study of women in local politics inevitably encompasses several meaningful concepts that fall under the umbrella of Development Administration. In this section, the rationale behind this study is divided as follows—why Development Administration should pay attention to women; why women in politics matters; and why specific attention should be on women and politics at localities.

1.2.1 Why Development Administration should Pay Attention to Women

Gender equality has become a global concern. The United Nations, the World Bank and many other development agencies have recognized gender equality as a core component of development and regard it as a development objective in its own right. As quoted in Maytinee Bhongsvej (2004: 1), a World Bank research study has provided evidence that greater gender equality can achieve the following:

...strengthen countries' ability to grow, to reduce poverty and to govern effectively. Promoting gender equality is thus an important part of a development strategy that seeks to enable all people -- women and men alike -- to escape poverty and improve their standard of living.

In September 2000, 189 nations endorsed the Millennium Declaration and set out a global agenda to promote human development and reduce the inequalities that

exist in today's world. The agenda included eight time-bound and measurable goals for combating poverty, hunger, illiteracy, disease, discrimination against women and environmental degradation. Among the eight ambitious Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015, is Goal 3, the aim of which is to promote gender equality and empower women (Office of National Economic and Social Development Board, 2004: 23).

Thailand is likely to meet most MDGs before within the established time frame; in fact, the country has already reduced poverty by two-thirds, and is advancing to meet the target for malnutrition, child and maternal health, and access to primary education. Despite many tangible achievements, a number of major problems remain regarding the question of equity as the merits of development have not been equally shared across different social groups, areas or regions in general; and across male and female citizens in particular.

In the Thai context, the progress in women's development is rather impressive in the areas of health, education and employment. Thai girls and boys have equal access to education, the Thai labor market is open to both sexes, and Thai women participate actively in the agricultural, industrial, and service sectors. But on the other side of the coin, many Thai women still suffer from widespread abuse or domestic violence. Women do not enjoy equal opportunities with regard to advancement in the workplace. Many types of violation of human rights and the dignity of women remain, and call for urgent action.

The inequality between women and men in society is in fact deeply rooted in the fabric of Thai culture and tradition. From birth, girls are accorded an inferior status in relation to boys. While boys are expected to grow up as strong and competent individuals, girls are expected to be beautiful and obedient homemakers. These gender prejudices, together with other factors, work to limit girls and women opportunities to develop themselves to the full, while at the same time allowing boys and men to maintain the status quo and their privileges in what is essentially male-dominated society. As long as cultural barriers and traditional prejudices against women persist, it is unlikely that gender equality can be achieved in society at large.

Against this backdrop of the assumption of traditional gender roles in Thai society, modernization and industrialization have driven more and more women out of

the domestic domain into the labor market. These structural changes, instead of putting women on an equal footing with their male counterparts, have even impeded them by saddling them with the triple burdens of housework, earning a living and social/community work.

Yet gender roles are dynamic and can be changed if the appropriate mechanisms are put in place in shifting social attitudes. In the UNDP's report (UNDP, 2006: 10), it states that gender roles are constantly being renegotiated from generation by generation. Government policies on gender issues alone are a necessary but insufficient means of mainstreaming an equality agenda, making it an integral part of people's mindset. As the report emphasizes,

While the Government has made efforts to amend discriminatory laws, rules and regulations, it appears to rely too much on formal policies and documents to achieve gender equality – while making few efforts to shift social attitudes and practice

In public administration, in order to attain gender equality, policy makers should never overlook the notion of gender dynamism inherent in society. To address women's issues, it is imperative to understand women and the context in which they are brought up. Understanding, therefore, is key. **Because public administration itself is also another male-dominated sphere, a supply of updated information on women's conditions, their roles and status in society, as well as their needs, would be helpful in defining and refining the means of arriving at the ideal society, in which individual's capacity to do and capacity to be is recognized and fully addressed, if they are in fact the underlying assumption of the new public administration as they are claimed to be.**

1.2.2 Why Women in Politics Matter

If development is to be people-centered, it must also acknowledge, listen to and make space for the heterogeneity of people. Since the early 1960's women's contributions and their roles in development have been increasingly recognized. As

change is made by people's action, women can and do take the lead themselves, and to promote women's rights and interests.

In Thailand, women have become more and more active in various modern sectors ranging from academic to business. However, it is obvious that the number of women entering political career have been marginal throughout the seven decades after Thailand's constitutional system has changed from absolute monarchy to parliamentary system in 1932. According to the statistics of 2004, the proportion of women in electoral politics at national levels is 10.6% for MPs and 10% for senators. In local government bodies, number of women representatives is even smaller (See Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Women Elected to Local, Municipal and Provincial Administration, 2004

Position	Total Number	% of Women
Provincial Council Members	2,322	4.8
Municipal Council Members	10,167	6.6
Sub-district Heads	7,263	2.4
Village Heads	61,344	3.3
Sub-district Administrative Organization Board Chairpersons	6,725	3.8
Sub-district Administrative Organization Members	127,594	6.7

Source: United Nations Development Programme, 2006.

The low number of women in politics is often noted as a fact, but not investigated as a failure of the democratic process. There are many lines of thinking concerning women and politics as raised by Juree Vichit-Vadakan's article concerning the under-representation of women in Thai politics. One line of thinking asserts that politics is considered 'dirty' so women had better steer well clear of the fray. Another line of thought focuses more on the necessity to maintain the division of gender roles. Simply put, it is believed that women should stick with their domestic roles in the household, while men should continue to dominate the public

sphere. Lastly, others believe that women are already burdened with enough responsibilities and duties, so they should not be convinced to take on more (Juree Vichit-Vadakan, 2004: 16).

In contrast, various international conferences have emphasized the ‘rights’ issue—namely the fact that women have the right to participate in political decision-making for reasons of equality, democracy and legitimacy. Evertzen (2001: 6) points out that the main reasons for the participation of women in politics as follows:

Justice: A society where half of the population is not part of the political system is an unjust society. Only by having more women elected to office will women feel truly represented and recognized in the democratic process.

Efficiency: Women have different and unique experiences and resources. It follows, therefore, that any political system that does not utilize both men’s and women’s experiences and resources is inefficient.

Diversity: Women and men do have different interests pertaining to many aspects of their lives. Women’s participation and representation in decision-making is essential in order to ensure that women can promote and defend their specific needs and interests.

Changing the Political System: It is believed that more women in politics could change the tenor of the entire political system. Women are less likely to be corrupt than men, for example; thus bringing more women into politics may have significant benefits for society in general.

All these arguments mentioned above reflect people’s diverse views towards women in politics. Despite resistance and criticism, there is now a global language of equal value and respect upon which most people tend to agree. However, “the ‘naturalness’ of gender characteristics, particularly those of women, is often used to legitimize traditional practices and explain away situations.” (Stokes, 2005: 1).

In discerning the linkage underlying the concept of gender and the concept of politics, we must first understand the dynamism of both concepts, which might be viewed differently in different socio-cultural settings. Above all, we need an accumulation of empirical knowledge to support our understanding of whether women could really make a difference in politics—and if so, how? If not, how would that affect development process as a whole? It is critical,

therefore, to review these constructs and interpret the gendered nature of democracy, politics, as well as development.

1.2.3 Why Specific Attention should be Paid to Women in Local Politics

In recent years, developing countries have increased the democratic basis of local governments, which in turn complement the restoration or deepening of democracy at the national level. Thus, local governance is believed to enhance both the legitimacy of the government by strengthening participation and accountability in policy making, and the efficiency of public service delivery by improving information, inputs and insights.

Within the Asia and Pacific region, the initiatives to encourage women's political participation have focused mainly on women's leadership at the national government level (Drage, 2001: 11). Women, nevertheless, have always been an integral part of their communities, taking a very active role in village life or community organizations. In this regard, local government is much closer to this level of participation and is often the first step into the political decision-making arena in which real differences can be made.

According to Drage (2001: 3), women have had more success at gaining access to decision-making positions in local government than to those at national level. The situation is attributed mainly to the fact that:

- 1) Women could fit in easier at the local government level as it still allow them to continue to fulfill their family responsibilities and works;
- 2) Women have greater access to local government as there are more positions available and with less competition, compared to the situation at the national level;
- 3) In some countries, there are seats reserved for women in local positions; and
- 4) Women's extensive involvement in community activities would be a good basis for them in gaining trust and acceptance from others in their respective communities.

These claims, thus far, seem to contain certain discrepancies in trying to address women's roles in the context of local Thai politics, in which the patron-client

model strongly prevails. Thamora V. Fishel (1997: 466) uses the patron-client model to explore gender dynamics in Thai society and analyze the power relations and structural inequalities inherent in the system. She looked at three specific roles played by women during local elections—as mothers, teachers and vote canvassers.

From Fishel's study, it could be inferred that women's initial involvement in politics is usually as supporters of male politicians, through whom their political affiliations are developed. Through personal relationships and connections both inside and outside the circle of power, they could gradually learn and accept men's rules of the game. Viewed from this perspective, the political roles played by local women, reflect their duplication of the male approach in attaining and retaining power, using politics as a means to support their status quo.

Fishel's ethnographical study also aptly illustrates the multi-complex nature of Thai local politics. **If her claim that women are also building their political path upon the existing patron-client scheme is true, it is even more interesting to challenge the idea that women would make a difference in local politics.** In other words, is it true that their presence would bring more benefits to local governance, or are they simply minor players in the existing male's power play? This is another big question that remains unanswered and thus needs to be explored in further detail.

In this section, I would like to conclude by stating that in order to understand why such a disparity in men and women's political participation at local level exists, there is a need for holistic inquiry and a cross fertilization of ideas. This study, therefore, aims to provide an in-depth understanding of women in local politics—who they are, what their leadership roles in local government are, and how their service in office represents the voices of women in their respective communities. On the other hand, it would be necessary to fathom the multi-layers and multi-dimensions of local politics in order to understand the possibilities and threats in bringing about gendered development, whereby women and men would have an equal share and equal influence in the development process.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The goal of this dissertation is **to understand women in local politics in Thailand-- as individuals, as locals, and as politicians**. In reaching such an understanding, the objectives of the study have been set as follows:

- 1) To explore the **general characteristics** of local women politicians,
- 2) To understand **the values and worldviews** of local women politicians, how these values and worldviews were formed, and how they may influence behaviors and decision-making,
- 3) To study local women politicians' **experiences** throughout their political path and how they cope with the realities of local politics,
- 4) To understand the **social, cultural and political factors** in the local community context that influence local women politicians,
- 5) To study **constituents' attitudes, satisfaction and expectations** regarding local women politicians.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) Who are these local women politicians? Are they different from other women? And what is special about them?
- 2) What are their underlying meaning, values and worldviews?
- 3) How do they conceptualize politics in general, and local politics in which they are participating, in particular?
- 4) What were the motives behind their decision to enter local politics?
- 5) What are the major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and barriers in running for election, or in achieving their political objectives as the people's representatives?
- 6) What are the factors that might enhance or impede their effective participation in local politics?
- 7) To what extent do they identify with women as their constituents? What are their outlooks regarding gender? Why?

8) What benefits can be derived for the community by having women in local offices? Why?

9) In what way might differences among women politicians and differences in political contexts influence their impact on public policy at different levels of local governance?

10) How do people in the communities perceive women's presence in local politics?

11) In what way are people in the community satisfied or dissatisfied with their local women politicians?

12) What do people in the community expect of local women politicians?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This research seeks to understand women leaders in the context of Thai local politics. Within the time and resources available, I selected Krabi, a province in the southern part of Thailand, as the area of this study. **This study encompasses all female politicians participating in all local political positions** ranging from Village Head, Sub-district Head (Kamnan), Municipality Council Member, Sub-district Administrative Organization Member, Sub-district Administrative Board Chairpersons, and Provincial Councilors.

In addition, **three women leaders taking part in local political positions were purposively selected as key resource persons for in-depth case studies.** Efforts will be made to include women from both urban and rural backgrounds, as well as from different religions- Buddhist and Muslim. In order to ensure that of each case receives comprehensive coverage, information will also be gathered from other sources, such as their neighbors, colleagues, as well as people in the selected constituencies.

1.6 Expected Benefits of the Study

There has been quite an extensive body of literature on the issue of women in politics. The majority of such studies, however, concentrate on developed countries, particularly the United States, Nordic countries, the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand. With regard to Thailand, however, there have been relatively few systematic research studies on women in politics. Most studies attempt to indicate the factors alienating women from politics by means of quantitative survey methods. Some studies were conducted through focus-group seminars, so the findings were somewhat biased, having been based on input gathered solely from the women's side.

This study aims to proceed beyond identifying those factors affecting women's representation and under-representation, or factors pertaining to success and failure. It aims to provide holistic view and in-depth understanding from the women politicians themselves, as well as from the context in which their leadership roles emerged. Therefore, besides identifying factors underlying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and barriers that exist regarding their political representation, the study further investigates the relationship among those factors and to achieve an understanding of how women's representation in local politics will bring about changes in their personal and social lives, as well as changes in the communities they represented. Mainly, the results of this study will add to a broader theoretical understanding of women in politics, particularly in the local context, where patron-client relationships and the old-boy network have presumably prevailed.

In addition, the results of this study will add to the knowledge base that supports political advocacy for women's involvement in decision-making at the grassroots level. In Thailand, there have been long, but not-yet-successful campaigns by the government and women's NGOs to encourage more women to enter politics. It is possible that such campaigns or training initiatives provided for prospective women candidates are not relevant to their needs. In this respect, the lives and experiences of women politicians involved in this study would help frame a multi-dimensional picture of what women politicians have to face, what people's expectations are towards their presence in political office, or what kinds of help they

need in order to successfully step into the political arena as well as to carry out their work as the people's representatives in local office.

From another perspective, the results of this study could also constitute invaluable input for shaping public policy regarding the promotion of special policy interventions such as a quota system that could be applied to the election of members of Sub-district Administrations. There have been efforts on the part of women's networks to initiate a quota system in politics at the grassroots level, in that this is where women tend to have more possibilities to win and feel at ease entering the political arena, since it is the level that is closest to their actual lives. Subsequently, this study may shed some light on the importance of having more women in local politics and thus serve as a knowledge base for the advocacy movement in achieving this goal.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Gender and Perception of Gender

As anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1975: 178) said, “A taboo against the sameness of men and women divides the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories and thereby **creates** genders.” Through societal rewards and punishments, people are induced to conform to the social construction of gender as well as cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity.

While sex refers to the genetic and physical identity of a person, gender differentiation is not natural or predetermined, but rather shaped by society based on its comprehension of what must be done, is proper to, or should be done by men or women (Hawkesworth, 1997: 649). Gender is thus inextricably related to history and culture. It can be interpreted as the sociological and psychological differences between men and women, constructed and developed by people in each society.

Society, however, often imposes gender in a dichotomous fashion, using sex as the basis for gender differentiation. The process of differentiating within a society is based upon the role and function that men and women play, roles that are learned from birth. The act of giving birth is presumed to be eventually linked to activities such as taking care of a baby, doing the washing, and everything else related to caring and nurturing.

Although gender is dynamic and adapts to changes in the times, it is somehow resistant to change since gender roles are inherent in the value system of society at large through the process of socialization within the family, educational institutions, the state and the prevailing culture. While institutions of socialization use gender roles as social control mechanisms that are internalized into societal moral standards and

thus the individual's personality, they simultaneously reinforce unequal gender relations within society as well.

2.1.1 Framing Perspectives on Gender

Risman (1998: 16) identifies three distinct theoretical traditions that help to enhance understanding of sex and gender. **The first tradition focuses on gendered-self.** This focus is on the individual level of analysis, and encompasses social identities. He notes that all theories of gendered-self posit that by adulthood, most men and women have developed very different personalities. Women tend to have become nurturant, people-oriented, and child-centered, while men have become competitive and work-oriented. This perspective believes that the male agentic role is characterized by concern for self, while the female communal role typically embraces concern for both self and others.

The second tradition focuses on how social structure creates gendered behavior. This approach argues that men and women behave differently because they fill different positions in institutional settings, work organizations, and families. In other words, they take on different gendered roles. Consistent with role requirements, this approach assumes that men and women in the same structural roles would be expected to behave identically.

The third tradition is the interactional perspective, which emphasizes contextual factors such as cultural expectations and taken-for-granted situational meanings. This approach articulates the fact that once a person is labeled a member of a particular gender category, she/he is morally accountable for behaving as individuals in that category are supposed to do. In other words, the individual is expected to "do gender", which implies legitimate inequality between men and women.

Each perspective inevitably has its own limitations, as the author emphasizes in the following observations:

- 1) In the first perspective, the coupling of male and "masculine" and female and "feminine" has been criticized by many researchers largely because "gender" is seen to be dynamic in nature, changing for the individual on an almost continuous basis.

2) As for the second perspective, there is a fundamental flaw in the logic supporting the role structure tradition; in other words, if women and men were to experience identical structural conditions and role expectations, then the empirical gender differences should disappear. However, logically, no society without a gender structure has ever existed; and empirically, researchers have investigated role structures as being as close to gender- neutral as possible and have still found gendered differences.

3) The third perspective is also incomplete as it overlooks the institutional the institutional level of analysis.

Risman (1998: 21) concludes that such complex interplay of traditional gendered selves cannot be understood unless the analysis is situated in the dimensions of the individual, the interactions among individuals, and the institutions. Therefore, a research on gender should put an efforts to seek an explanation of observed differences between women and men in the three planes-- at the individual (i.e. biography, fears, hopes), interactional (i.e. relationship, decision histories, social construction of norms), and institutional (i.e. rewards and sanctions) levels of analysis. In addition, the gender research need is to move toward a richer understanding of what the researcher observes rather than merely reporting what an informant indicates in paper-and-pencil task.

2.1.2 Society's Gender Ideology

Nearly all societies tend to use sex as the basis for a wide range of gender differences, from which men and women derive their roles and relationship. Social structures also influence and maintain gender roles. Women are intrinsically assigned the responsibility for caring for the children as they are the ones who are physically equipped to bear and nurse them. Hence, the female 'reproductive' function makes it easy to conclude that it is natural for women to stay home, taking care of children and other domestic affairs. The domestic domain is ultimately regarded as the 'natural' sphere in which women should operate. Society, on the other hand, assigns men different roles. Men's association with the 'productive' function of earning income for their families allows them to occupy "the world of production". In this connection, production refers to social production or the production of commodities,

namely goods and services for exchange rather than for immediate consumption (Center for Asia Pacific Women in Politics - CAPWIP, 2002: 16).

From one perspective, the gender division of labor (productive vs. reproductive), is regarded as a harmonious display of the complementary roles played by men and women. Durkheim (1960: 60) saw these complementary roles as a basis for holding families together, in the belief that families were units of economic activity involving some specialization of tasks by gender. Lerner (1986: 217) also proposed that gender inequality and its structural manifestation as patriarchy could be an exchange of “submission for protection,” or of “unpaid labor for maintenance.” This is based on the assumption that the human capital needed for production and reproduction are mutually exclusive, and efficiency is a prime consideration.

However, the feminist wing --the movements that grew out of the dissatisfaction with élite-dominated political conditions in the post-war world has posited an opposing argument. From the feminist point of view, the male-female division of labor would do no harm unless it accorded privilege to one sex at the expense of the other. A strong gender differentiation between paid and unpaid work brings dependency and the potential for exploitation between women and men. Starting with the “institutionalized male dominance over women and children in the family,” there follows an “extension of male dominance over women in society in general” (Lerner, 1986: 239). One recent school of thought also believes that the primary reason for the gendering of human activities is that it maintains the advantages enjoyed by males. Because society places greater importance on things of greater economic value, the fact that men’s tasks produce monetary income, while women’s domestic tasks do not-- undeniably implies / reflects the subordinate status of women.

Gender subordination in society manifests itself in various forms. Women, therefore, usually face drawbacks in the economic, political, socio-cultural spheres and even in the domain of their own personal development. Fasih (1999: 12-13) commented that a good test of whether there are problems with the gender ideology of a particular state or society is to check whether it creates gender inequality either for women or men. There are five forms of gender inequality including the following:

- 1) **Marginalization**—the process of impoverishing a group of people at any level, from the household to the state.
- 2) **Subordination**—when a group of people are put in an unimportant or second-class position. Positions of power and leadership in the home,
- 3) **Stereotyping**—when a group of people is labeled in a negative way;
- 4) **Violence**—every act that causes suffering physically, sexually or psychologically. This includes threats, acts of repression or deprivation of freedom both in public and in private life;
- 5) **Workload**—when one group has an unequal share of the work to be done.

Given these indicators of gender inequality, it is quite evident that women are still living in a world of male privilege. The economic marginalization of women's work, their political subordination in the domains of power and leadership, the gender stereotyping of women as "the weaker sex", the multiple burden they must bear in their family and working lives, as well as violence against women, still persist in many societies. These gender issues, if left unaddressed, will exclude the majority of women from the development process, resulting in development that does not respond to the needs and concerns of half of the nation's population.

2.2 Women and Politics

When the gender ideology of a particular society is passed from generation to generation, it is further enhanced by the ideology of those with power. As men have occupied political power down the centuries, social as well as political structures are inevitably created to support the maintenance of the status quo.

When Western political philosophy originated in ancient Greece, the first fundamental question speculating upon women's place in the overall design of society and their roles in the city-state (polis) was also posited by Plato and Aristotle, who concluded that females possessed qualities that were antithetical to politics. Building upon the social context of Greek civilization, the same premise continued to be

echoed across the centuries—through Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages, through Marxism and Liberalism, and finally cross-cut by feminism in the post-materialist era following the Second World War. (Stokes, 2005: 14)

To date, debates on women and their political roles remain at the center of contemporary feminist theories. There are a number of perspectives on the relationship of public and private life reconstructed with reference to politics. The issue has given rise to some important debates about the relationship between the public and private life of the individual. One key question is how the sphere of public and private life are created and framed within the prevailing democratic paradigm.

Joan C. Tronto (as quoted in Davis, Evans and Lorber, 2006: 418-427) portray the linkage between the public and private sphere by proposing the arguments of key thinkers-- from Aristotle's **Politics**, to J.S. Mill's account of liberty, and to the opposing views put forward by a number of feminist scholars. For Aristotle, private life is a prerequisite for the more important sphere of public engagement, and economic life is regarded as a part of the private sphere. For Marxists, economic activity is regarded as a public concern. As broad-scale change happens in the public domain, feminist theorists stress that the public and private spheres are inseparable and try to answer why and how women and their concerns have been so excluded from the public arena.

With regard to women and politics, Pateman (1988: 11-12) points out that women's exclusion from political life is determined by men, who predominate in the public sphere. Because what counts as 'private' is in fact shaped in the public sphere, only those engaged in the public sphere have the legitimacy to set the boundaries between the two domains. Women themselves have no way of contesting this decision as they have limited access to public life. It is thus the social contract imposed by men that limits women's opportunities to participate in public life and thus in the political arena.

The following statement by Diamond and Hartsock (1981: 721) might well support the feminist argument posited above: "To include women's concerns, to represent women in the public life of our society, might well lead to a profound redefinition of the nature of public life itself."

In this section, the issues of women and politics will be explored in five different dimensions—1) political socialization 2) political participation 3) political ambition 4) political representation, and 5) political leadership

2.2.1 Political Socialization

According to Virginia Sapiro (2004: 2-3), political socialization refers to the mechanism through which citizens learn how to behave and adapt to their political environment. At the macro level, political socialization sets out the norms and practices in the political system, while at the micro level it teaches the “patterns and processes by which individuals engage in political development and learning. As Fred Greenstein (1965: 4) elaborated political socialization as:

All political learning, formal and informal, deliberate and unplanned, at every stage of the life cycle, including not only explicitly political learning but also nominally nonpolitical learning of politically relevant social attitudes and the acquisition of politically relevant personality characteristics

Women’s and men’s political socialization process starts within their families. According to Kelly and Boutilier (1978: 1), “A girl’s and a woman’s sex and position within their families continue to define their lives”. They further explained that people justify females’ nonparticipation in politics in two accounts--firstly, by referring to women’s responsibilities in the households that prevent them from participating in public lives; and secondly, by referring to ‘weaker sex’ theories based on Freudian account of psychosexual development (assuming that women are born inferior and normal women do not develop an independent consciousness, intellect, or judgmental ability because psychosexual development compels her to seek a submissive position to their fathers or husbands).

Early studies of women and politics were somehow constructed on the ‘weaker sex’ assumption. In his famous book, **Political Role of Women**, Maurice Duverger (1955 quoted in Kelly and Boutilier, 1978: 415) stated that “women...have the mentality of minors in many fields, and, particularly in politics, they will accept

paternalism on the part of men, The man—husband, fiancé, lover, or myth—is the mediator between them and the political world”. Most studies of political socialization flourished in 1970’s also repeatedly echoed the findings of Duverger’s.

In late 1970’s, this track of inquiry was opposed by other scholars like Kelly and Boutilier (1978: 61) who perceive that empirical studies that emphasize women subordination merely ‘blame the victims’. By restating that women lack necessary qualification to involve directly in politics, the then existing theories did not explain why such differences occurred. Neither could they explain why more and more girls were developed into independent, active, achieving political women.

The scholars, therefore, turned their attention to the pattern of sex-role development of female political elites. Their approach is to study and analyze life histories and life patterns of achieving political women in many countries by means of inductive inquiries. They finally classified political women into six types—the private women, the public women, the elected/mediated women, the elected/personal efficacy women, the revolutionaries, and the terrorists. Each type is differentiated by their sex-role ideologies and extent of control over one’s life space (Kelly and Boutilier, 1978: 62-63). In sum, this line of study has led to new body of knowledge concerning socialization factors during childhood that result in diverse political behaviors of elite female politicians. These factors encompass both internal and external elements to political women such as socio-economic status, personal control over life-space, and ideological support for citizenship and independence.

As political socialization is regarded as learning, the scholars were also interested in the set of questions namely what is learned; through which persons and institutions does the individual learn; and circumstances under which the learning occurs. From the study, they came up with a theoretical framework of the socialization of political women which is built upon four stages of development—first, the child must develop an activist sex-role ideology; second, she must gain personal control over her life-space, gaining needed competencies and abilities to maintain control as the life-space expands; third, she must become politically salient; and forth, her efforts at political participation must have been sufficiently rewarded and her experiences sufficiently successful to encourage her to continue. (Kelly and Boutilier, 1978)

Recently, some studies still cite gender differences in socialization as explanations for continued gender gaps in political engagement (Atkeson and Rapoport, 2003: 495; Tong, 2003: 131). In these analyses, socialization helps reinforce traditional gender roles, characteristics and stereotypes.

On the contrary, there are some researches indicating that political socialization does not always account for female's non-participation in politics even in a country with seemingly masculine culture. Such studies have yield different implication on political socialization, for example, the study of Soule and Nairne (2006: 11) that tries to identify causal variables for gender differences that affect participation among Indonesian boys and girls. They found that while Muslim boys scored slightly higher on political participation and government responsiveness, they were not more interested in politics, they did not possesses more political skills, they were not more attentive to politics, nor were they more politically tolerant than Muslim girls. And where gender differences were found, girls were more politically engaged, expressed greater interest in politics across a variety of measures and had participated in more political acts. Another study of Ukrainian adolescents by Craddock (2006: 1) also yields similar results—that girls were more sensitive to the governments' responsibility to secure political equality and to immigrant rights to keep their own language.

It can be concluded from these literatures that socialization factors are permanently changing, so are women's comprehension of and reaction to politics. Even though women and men are socialized differently during childhood, it does not always be the case that women ultimately grows up to be politically subordinate to men.

2.2.2 Political Participation

Democracy is more than a way of selecting a government. As Keane (1988: 26) points out, "democratic procedures are superior to all other types of decision-making because they offer citizens the right to judge (and to reconsider their judgments about) the quality of these results". Therefore, democracy cannot be regarded merely as a choice of how to be governed, but also as a system that involves issues such as people's participation and citizenship.

Although women's political participation has been studied quite comprehensively, it is not a phenomenon that is well-understood. Many scholars attempt to explain diverse aspects of political participation through different models, for example through socioeconomic models and resource models, each of which has strengths and limitations in terms of explanatory power. The early study of political participation offered the standard socioeconomic model of participation or rational actor approach to political participation. Basically, the model assumes that people with higher levels of income and education participate more in politics.

However, income and education alone do not explain certain differences in women's behavior, including the gender differences in participation levels, the role of gender attitudes, and the gender differences in the types of political acts in which men and women engage. Resource models, on the other hand, attempt to account for these differences by the varying level of civic skills acquired through organizational participation and education, free time, and monetary resources. While this model explains some differences, it cannot explain the significance of time constraints, the importance of gender role attitudes, nor the effect of marriage and interaction with men on women's political behavior. (Verba, Scholzman and Brady, 1995: 281-287).

Most research studies on women's attitude and participation patterns focus on a number of factors. The three variables that appear frequently in the literature are **work experience** (Plutzer, 1988: 640-649), **egalitarian gender roles** (Conover, 1988: 985-1010), and **educational level** (Verba, Scholzman and Brady, 1995: 281). Other researchers focus on the **mother's work experience**, **childhood familial socialization**, **generational cohort**, **number of children**, and **marital status** as factors affecting attitudes and participation levels (Kelly and Boutilier, 1978). Other studies find that way in which **social interaction** impacts political attitudes and activity to be significant. Childhood familial experience (Kelly and Boutilier 1978; Glass, Bengtson and Dunham 1986; Beck and Jennings 1991), work experience (Plutzer, 1988), and other **social environment factors** are also deemed influential.

Work experience affects the patterns of relationships formed, gender role attitudes adopted, and opportunities for political recruitment; for instance "working women are more likely to try and persuade others how to vote" (Anderson and Cook 1985: 613). More generally, belonging to a certain group, neighborhood or

organization can impact the attitudes adopted and the actions taken (Huckfeldt, Plutzer and Sprague, 1993). Social environments at work provide information and opportunities beyond civic skills by providing recruitment networks and additional information. However, the social environment can also counteract a woman's socioeconomic status. Banaszak and Plutzer (1993: 156) found that women with the least education and non-working women are strongly affected by the general status of local women and expressed greater support for feminism than expected.

Other research studies attempt to explain the disparity in participation by the personal gender role attitudes of women, gender disparities in the home, and the gender role attitudes of fathers and spouses. Studies which currently consider the impact of men suggest that men act as constraints on women's political activity. Regardless of whether this activity is focused on women's issues or political participation in general, Sigel (1996: 128) made the following observation:

... a majority of women live in partnerships of one kind or another with men and, hence, in closer association with members of the dominant group than they do with other women...because they greatly value their association with the dominant group... the fear of jeopardizing it forms a serious barrier to the development of group consciousness in women.

The debates explore whether the non-egalitarian attitudes of husbands and the duties of family life reduce the amount of time and other resources which women devote to politics (Burns, Scholzman and Verba, 2001). Despite the common assumption that women's participation in politics is bound by their family burdens, some research results show that husbands, children, and marriage have limited negative effects on women's political behavior (Burns, Scholzman and Verba, 2001). While positive gender role attitudes increase women's political participation, a spouse's non-egalitarian gender attitudes do not affect her participation (Tolleson-Rinehart, 1986). There is one case in which a husband's attitudes impact political activity-- if her spouse has relatively greater respect for her than she has for him, her political activity increases.

Though a husband's respect matters, it is not mediated through his attitudes regarding gender roles (Bott, 1971: 95). An earlier study suggests that women who interact most with their spouses express more egalitarian attitudes. Potentially, a woman's ability to rely a great deal on her husband improves her freedom to act regardless of the husband's role attitudes. Or, perhaps, the husband's respect for his wife is communicated through the husband's network, and in turn increases the possibility of new political opportunities for the wife.

2.2.3 Political Ambition

The concept of political ambition was broached in *Ambition and Politics*, written by Joseph Schlesinger in 1966. According to Schlesinger (1966: 10), the political ambition of a democratically-elected politician ensures that 'he' is accountable for the citizens he represents. The author reasons that a politician wants to either remain in his current political position or, if the conditions are right, would want to move to the next highest position available. Simply put, an ambitious politician acts on the interests of 'his' voters because it would lead to 'his' own advancement.

As Schlesinger uses exclusively male pronouns when referring to a politician, this raises a big question—whether his assumption regarding ambitious politicians is applicable to women as well.

Louise K. Davidson-Schmich (2006: 5) asserts that in American academic literature there has been a consensus that American women are less politically ambitious than American men. The author has effectively summarized the body of literature concerning political ambition as follows:

1) Flammang (1997: 159 quoted in Davidson-Schmich, 2006) states that some of the earliest politicians in American politics were widows who served out their deceased husband's term and then returned to private life.

2) According to Diamond (1997: 120 quoted in Davidson-Schmich, 2006), most female state legislators in New England in 1997 expressed little or no political ambition of any kind.

3) In the study of women state representatives and senators by Kirkpatrick (1974: 78 quoted in Davidson-Schmich, 2006), the author posits that

“Women do not have the habit of making long range plans for themselves. Few plan careers, or even think about them; until recently, few planned families.”

4) Carroll (1985 quoted in Davidson-Schmich, 2006) found that limited numbers of female Congressional and state legislative candidates were interested in a life-long political career. Most of them did not have ambitions beyond state-level office.

5) Bledsoe and Herring (1990 quoted in Davidson-Schmich, 2006) points out that male city councilors regard a local political role as a stepping stone to higher office twice as likely as female councilors.

6) Lawless and Fox (2005 quoted in Davidson-Schmich, 2006) found well-positioned women less likely to run for political offices, compared to men with similar qualifications.

7) Lawless and Theriault (2006 quoted in Davidson-Schmich, 2006) found that women in Congress are less likely than men to remain in office under certain circumstances. In other words, women consider the choice of withdrawal from office more than men do.

Nonetheless, the gap in political ambition is closing as the level of female political ambition has increased over time. In earlier studies, most scholars stressed the role that political socialization plays in barring women from politics. In studies conducted during the 1960's to the 1980's, the focus was usually on the individual level, especially women's beliefs and qualifications. Women did not see themselves as players in the field of politics as this was branded as male territory. In addition, they lacked confidence in their abilities and qualifications to run for or to hold elective office.

At the present time, even though society is more willing to welcome women into politics, in practice traditional socialization processes still exerts an effect on woman's ambition in many ways. First, political work requires long and irregular hours so it is difficult for women to combine political duties with family responsibilities (Fox and Lawless, 2003: 22). Second, women are not totally committed to pursuing a career in politics since they also derive satisfaction from their role in the family (Bledsoe and Herring, 1990 quoted in Davidson-Schmich, 2006: 9). Third, women may still focus more on the impact of politics on their

personal relationships than male counterparts. Ruth Mandel (1983: 77) found that the level of spousal support is different when husband and wife decide to run for office. Husbands are less likely than their wives to support their spouses' political campaigns and are less available to work on their campaigns.

While the body of American literature has concentrated more on factors internal to women themselves, particularly their attitudes with regard to running for office, studies in Western Europe have focused on structural factors (i.e. electoral systems, gender quotas, political parties, women's movement) when explaining the presence or absence of women in national legislatures. With regard to the implication of gender quotas and women's political ambition, Davidson-Schmich (2006: 3) mentions that quotas could have both direct and indirect effects on women's political ambitions. For example, since the quota system requires political parties to fill the allotted ballot with female nominees, the parties then need to put more effort into recruiting and training women candidates. Once these supporting and mentoring mechanisms are institutionalized, women would feel more confident in their abilities, while outside confirmation would encourage them to be more confident in their qualifications to become good politicians.

Another theoretical argument pertaining to political ambition is related to the operationalization of the abstract concept. In political science, political ambition is usually measured by an individual's internal drive to attain political power. Feminist scholars argue that there is a divergence in women's and men's perception of political power as well as the ultimate goal in attaining it (Flammang, 1997: 74). While political power is defined in reference to men's comprehension of dominance or control over other people or the environment, women may perceive power differently.

It is possible that women are regarded as less ambitious politically because they are less eager to seek positions in office. Feminists proclaim that since many active women envision power as 'power to' not 'power over', holding political office is not the only means of achieving their desires to act on certain issues or advocate some policies. Since their aim is not political power per se or a political career for themselves, many women reported that they could make a difference by working within a party, lobbying elected officials, or joining an interest group in order to obtain their desired policy goals. In this light, Davidson-Schmich (2006: 3) concludes

that gender quotas may enhance women's enthusiasm to become directly involved as players in the field of politics.

2.2.4 Political Representation

Theories and practices of democratic representation have frequently been viewed from a feminist perspective, with the aim of discovering whether having more women representatives would shape politics in such a way as to be more responsive and accountable to the female population and if so, how such a process might work.

2.2.4.1 Descriptive versus Substantive Representation

In the existing literature on gender and politics, the importance of electing more women to political positions is always spelled out by feminist scholars. With renewed interest in representative democracy, feminist literature distinguishes between various aspects of political representation, specifically the question of whether it matters who our representatives are, and the question of what is represented.

One way of thinking about women in politics focuses on the relationship between women's **descriptive or numeric representation** and democratic legitimacy. The arguments in favor of gender balance in democratic institutions are made on the grounds of equality, justice and fairness. Janet Clark (1991: 64) has succinctly illustrated the concept of descriptive representation as follows:

Representative government is justified on the assumption that the representative body is a microcosm of the entire population and can be readily substituted for a democratic convocation of the whole people. An office holder represents constituents whose social characteristics he or she shares. The leader, therefore, empathizes with that constituency and identifies its interests with his or her own. Legitimacy is enhanced because members of the group feel represented just because one of their own holds office.

From this standpoint, many scholars assume that there must be something wrong with a political system that works to produce structural privileges for men. Descriptive representation is thus used to explain the presence of women as elected members in legislative or government bodies such as parliaments, assemblies, and councils. Women's presence, in this regard, is advocated to ensure gender balance in democratic institutions, and is based on the grounds of equality, justice and fairness—the three elements that legitimize the democratic system.

The notion of the so called '**role model effect**' is also raised by proponents of descriptive representation. As Anne Phillips (1995: 18) observes, women can make a difference just by their presence. In other words, women politicians represent women in a symbolic sense by '**standing for**' women in political institutions. Even though they are not acting differently or in women's interests, their mere presence signifies democratic justice, inclusion and recognition for the female population.

Confirmed by the recent work of Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006: 244), it was found that "the more politics is infused with visible female role models, the more adolescent girls report an expectation of being involved in politics." Moreover, women who hold elective office could inspire women citizens to overcome patterns of traditional socialization, not only politically, but also economically and socially (Lawless, 2004: 81). In other words, symbolic arguments also claim that the presence of women in politics provides options with regard to gender—that "being female entails choices other than domesticity and wife/mother identities." (Sawer, 2003 quoted in Stokes, 2005: 22)

Although the justice argument is the least controversial in that it simply assumes that ability is not the prerogative of one sex, and that the absence of women is a result of discrimination, whether direct or indirect (Stokes, 2005: 22), the actual political benefits of symbolic representation remain questionable. Despite references to the increased legitimacy that women representation brings to the political process, there has been little empirical evidence that symbolic representation independently affects citizens' political attitude and engagement (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001 quoted in Lawless, 2004: 82).

Substantive representation, on the other hand, deals with the expectations that women representatives will be **‘acting for’** women by voicing women’s interests, needs and concerns at policy-making levels, thus influencing policy processes and outcomes. From a policy perspective, women are more likely than men to promote legislation to improve women’s economic and social status, as well as policies that are responsive to women’s concerns such as health care, poverty, education, and gender equity. Another argument supporting substantive representation is based on the assumption that women bring special knowledge, experiences and values to politics. Many studies suggest that women legislators are more likely than men to conduct business in a manner that is egalitarian, cooperative, communicative and contextual (Flammang, 1985; Thomas, 1994; Kathlene, 1995; Rosenthal, 1998 quoted in Mackay, 2004). Hence, their female quality in **‘acting like’** women would lead to changes in the masculine nature of inheriting the process and norms of politics. (Mackay, 2004: 101).

Substantive representation has led to new lines of inquiry—what differences women presence might make; what impact they might have in the broader sense, and what factors or endowments determine their capacity to make a difference (Mackay, 2004: 108). In response to these new questions, literature related to the substantive representation of women is rather extensive. Empirical studies tend to focus almost exclusively on the manner in which women in positions of political power affect the kinds of issues brought to the legislative agenda, the way in which these issues are discussed and debated, and the policy outcomes that follow (Lawless, 2004: 82).

At the same time, scholars belonging to this school of thought have begun to emphasize the need to take into account the way in which gendered environments, rules and norms may complicate the relationship between sex, gender and substantive representation. For example, Fox (1997) found that in an attempt to appeal to women voters, male politicians often tailor their campaign, as well as their legislative priorities and styles, to respond more effectively to women’s agenda.

More recently, there have been alternative questions as to whether the a substitute could be found for the inclusion of women in decision-making in the form of supplementary channels, such as institutional mechanisms, or some combination of

these and other means (Sawer, 2002; Mackay et al., 2003). This broader sense of substantive representation provides a link with upcoming research on gender mainstreaming and gender policy machinery and also fosters theoretical discussion regarding inclusive democracy and ways in which representative democracy can be supplemented.

Debates on the relationship between the descriptive and substantive representation of women continue. In terms of forms and conditions, the debates take place against complex theorizing regarding gender differences, differences among women such as race, class and the nature of identity and post-modern concerns about whether the category 'women' is sufficiently stable to have collective interests at all (Pringle and Watson, 1992 quoted in Mackay, 2004: 101). The link between the presence of women and the substantive representation of women and their differentiated concerns is therefore complicated and contingent.

Anne Phillips (1995: 56) argues that the most troubling question surrounding the political representation of women is the question of accountability. Observing that "Representation depends on the continuing relationship between representatives and the represented" (Phillips, 1995: 82), the author concludes "there is no obvious way of establishing strict accountability to women as a group" (Phillips, 1995: 83). Thus, "Changing the gender composition of elected assemblies is largely an enabling condition... but it cannot present itself as a guarantee of greater substantive representation for women" (Phillips, 1995: 83).

On the other hand, many scholars have argued that the increased numerical representation of women among legislators is likely to lead to an increase in the substantive representation of women, and a number of studies have presented evidence suggesting a strong relationship between the presence of women legislators and attention to women's issues within legislative bodies (Saint-Germain, 1989: 956-964). For example, the 1992 British Candidate Survey into candidates' attitudes and priorities found although the 'party' remained the best predictor of attitudes, in respect of women's rights, such as reproductive rights and domestic violence, there were clear gender gaps between male and female representatives that went beyond party politics. (Norris, 1996: 95).

2.2.4.2 Critical Mass Theory

Critical mass is an idea that has moved from sociology to political science and into popular usage over the last 30 years. As Drude Dahlerup (1988: 275) notes, the concept itself is borrowed from nuclear physics, where it refers to the quantity needed to start a chain reaction, an irreversible take-off into a new situation or process. Critical mass is based on the belief that the form assumed by a public body will shape the processes and policies of that organization.

Critical mass is more a theoretical and popular expectation than a demonstrable effect. But there are common figures and expectations identifiable in the existing body of literature. The origins of the use of critical mass in political science literature can be traced to the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter (though the sociologist did not actually use the phrase ‘critical mass’). Kanter (1976: 965) pointed to four sets of proportions in her 1976 exploration of token behavior in a Fortune 500 company:

Uniform groups have only one kind of person, one significant social type . . . **Skewed** groups are those in which there is a larger preponderance of one type over another, up to a ratio of perhaps 85:15. . . . Next, **titled** groups begin to move toward less extreme distributions and less exaggerated effects. In this situation, with a ratio of perhaps 65:35, dominants are just a majority and tokens a minority. . . . Finally, at a typological ratio of about 60:50 down to 50:50, the group becomes **balanced**.

In the literature pertaining to the field of political science, the concept of critical mass implies that the election of an adequate number of female politicians will result in governance more responsive to women. But the existing literature fails to provide specifics on how changing the proportions of men and women will alter power relations within the political arena. For the most part, discussions of critical mass involve speculation about what might happen if women won the necessary numbers in legislatures: If the trend continues, quotas will soon produce a quantum leap in women’s political power. For the first time, women will form a “critical mass”

of legislators in many countries, able to set new agendas and perhaps create new styles of leadership (Jacquette, 1997: 34).

The other common features in the literature on critical mass are that women will have an impact upon the political agenda, political culture, and public policy once they reach critical mass in the political arena. For example, Drude Dahlerup (1988: 283-284) set out a list of six changes that are to be expected when women achieve critical mass, including changes in the 'political discourse'; changes in the 'social climate of political life'; and changes 'of policy'.

According to Dahlerup, the litmus test for the presence of a critical mass of women is the acceleration of the development of women's representation through acts that improve the situation both for themselves and for women in general. These actions constitute critical acts of empowerment. In her studies of women MPs in Scandinavia, Dahlerup found that women politicians worked to recruit other women, and developed new legislation and institutions to benefit women as a whole. As their numbers grew, it became easier to be a woman politician and public perceptions of women politicians changed accordingly.

Because critical mass theory is basically built on the assumption that, if and only if, there are a large enough number of women entering politics will they reflect the possibility for change, although empirical evidence to support this assumption has been limited. In some industrialized countries prior to 1970's, there were many countries where women composed between 2-5 percent of political positions, yet not much difference was made by their presence in settings dominated by males (Stokes, 2005: 23). It was explained that pioneer women parliamentarians were socialized into the legislature and became essentially the same as the men they replaced.

Nonetheless, this idea is doubted by other scholars. Kanter (1976: 965-990) expected changes with regard to culture and behavior once the composition of a group altered. For instance, men are known to behave differently when women are absent. Because it upsets gender boundaries, the presence of even one woman will alter male behavior; the presence of several women will alter it even further. Alternatively, rather than small percentages of women lowering role performance, perhaps women who enter male professions try harder as they perceive that they are

on trial. The Western European experience shows that where women MPs have a mission to effect change, even small numbers can produce significant results. From this point of view, it is believed that while the presence of even one woman can make a difference, long-term significant change will largely be realized when there is a sufficient number of women in parliament who are motivated to represent women's concerns.

2.2.5 Political leadership

2.2.5.1 Gender, Power and Leadership

As Karin Klenke (1999) states, political leadership is a phenomenon of universal importance, purposeful and intertwined with power, depending on its specific socio-cultural, political and economic context. Heifetz and Sinder (1990) define political leadership "as an activity which consists of '(1) providing a vision or taking stands, and (2) interacting effectively when managing power and authority in order to generate sufficient organizational and political alignment to realize the leaders' intentions'." In sum, political leadership means mobilizing members or a national or political community towards collective action for a common goal. In this regard, Blondel (1987: 5) offers four steps in analyzing leadership: 1) the personal origin of the leader's power, 2) the institutional instruments that help or constrain leaders, 3) the actions of the leaders and 4) the characteristic of the environment in which these actions take place.

If we assume that the core of political leadership is power, we should also explore the meaning of this concept within the engendered context in which women politicians operate. Women and men generally differ in the interpersonal use of power. According to M. Hillary Lips (2001: 851-2), interpersonal power consists of five traits: reward and coercion (as a perceived capacity to produce outcome for another person), expertise (perceived knowledge), legitimacy (perceived entitlement because of role, position, custom, interpersonal agreement) and referent power (as the ability to influence others because of their admiration, respect, or preference).

Gender-related leadership theories convey the fact that men and women find themselves in a different context of social approval when exercising power. The power options available for women leaders are determined by their respective socio-

cultural context, particularly the gender ideology held by their political constituents. Furthermore, because masculinism has predominated in the power system that underlies politics, it sometimes makes feminism seem radical and different (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly, 1995: 5). Women in leadership positions tend to end up facing a double bind—if they convey modesty, they may be perceived as appealing but as less competent; but if they are assertive and convey competence, they may risk rejection by others.

Referent power also poses another dilemma for female leaders--the more referent power female leaders attain from their electorate and followers, the higher the chance for them to face an expectancy dilemma after becoming a politician (Davies, 1997: 133). It frequently happens that a transformational female is able to inspire greater hope in the public than could an average male candidate. Like a double-edged sword, while the novelty and difference claim creates a higher level of referent power, it also creates higher expectations on the part of the public. And if such expectations are not met, the greater the disappointment people feel. Thus, a female politician's small mistakes or misdeeds that run counter to the public image could easily cost her leadership position. Besides, one woman's failure may serve as a basis for further gender-stereotype and prejudice against women leadership in general.

2.2.5.2 Transformative Politics and Transformative Leadership (Feminist Vision)

In 1992, a group of women leaders from the Asia-Pacific came together to share their experiences and future hopes regarding politics, as well as the dreams of women in their respective countries of equal access to political power and decision-making. In the First Asia-Pacific Congress of Women in Politics, 237 women from 23 countries discussed and formulated an alternative paradigm for change, which they referred to as 'Transformative Politics'. The feminist vision of transformative politics emerged to address the gender blindness of the existing political ideology and practices. With the aim of articulating their own vision of political transformation, women's movements set out the requisite strategies for targeting fundamental changes in values, processes, and institutions, as highlighted in the table below (see Table 2.1).

In order to bring about a fundamental change in politics, the value system, the basis on which traditional politics operates, needs to be changed. For example, power should not be used as a source of domination over others, but rather viewed as a source of liberation. The principle of a win/lose scenario based on a struggle for power needs to give way to a win/win scenario in which the peaceful co-existence of diverse interests and views is preferred. The goal of gaining authoritative control over the state in traditional politics needs to be replaced by the notion of “stewardship” and “service”, so that state power is a means to promote public interest and the common good, not the interests of certain privileged groups. Finally, politics needs to accommodate and celebrate diversity rather than homogeneity, thereby creating a situation where different views or opinions are cherished, not punished.

Table 2.1 The Feminist Vision of Transformative Politics

Traditional Politics	Transformative Politics
<p>A. Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Power as domination - Win/Lose - Conflict and war - Authoritative control - Homogeneity 	<p>A. Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Power as liberation - Win/Win - Peace and co-existence - Stewardship and service - Diversity
<p>B. Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Top down - Secretive - Corrupt - Burdensome - Selective 	<p>B. Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participatory - Transparent - Clean - Empowering - Inclusive
<p>C. Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hierarchical - Autocratic - Bureaucratic 	<p>C. Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Egalitarian - Accountable - Responsive

Source: Jahan, 2000.

In terms of the political process, the traditional top-down approach should be replaced with genuine grassroots participation. Elections should not be seen as the only channel for political participation; mechanisms for consultations

between elections should also be provided for citizens at the grassroots level. The secretive decision-making processes that currently prevail need to be changed to ensure that they are transparent. The corrupt processes that mark traditional politics, processes that ensure the continuation of a patron-client system, should be replaced with wholesome practices so that it would be easier for marginalized groups could be to take part in a process that is more inclusive and empowering.

Last but not least is the transformation of political institutions. As Jahan (2000: 13) suggests, transformative politics needs institutions that are egalitarian and not hierarchical, accountable and not autocratic, responsive to people's needs rather than serving the institutions' narrow organizational interests.

The concept of **transformative leadership** has also been highlighted by strong women's movements in the last decade. It is based on this new political paradigm and thus concerns much more than simply putting women in positions of power. Women's leadership is **transformative** in the sense that it challenges the existing structures of power; it is **inclusive** in the sense that it takes into account the needs, interests and points of view of the majority of the marginalized and poor in society; it is **integral** in the sense that it attends to all forms of social injustice.

According to Viezzer (2001: 12), participants in the **Global Development of Feminist Leadership** conference held in South Africa in 1997, raised some important notions of transformative leadership. As the author summarizes:

1) Transformative leadership challenges the idea of the "innate" leader. Women and men can learn to be leaders, committed, with self-knowledge and with values, attitudes and postures related to the humanization and democratization of social relations.

2) Leadership can be exercised in many ways and with different attitudes. It is something plural, structured and situational and must take into account the environment and movements in which it develops, and the characteristics of organizations and people with whom it is related.

3) It is not necessarily a permanent exercise of one single person in a community or social group. According to the challenge to be faced, a

leader can be one or another person who embodies the most appropriate conditions at a given moment.

4) Transformative leadership is organically connected to groups, communities and institutions. It always builds and rebuilds its vision of society and social processes.

A transformative leader, as defined by Jahan (2000: 13), is a person who can guide, direct, and influence others to bring about a fundamental change, change not only in the external world, but also in internal processes as well. Transformative leaders can be found at different levels (e.g. community, national, global), and in various sectors (e.g. society, the economy, politics). From the perspective of feminism, the focus of transformative leadership is primarily on women leaders capable of affecting fundamental changes. Presented below are some of the qualities of transformative leaders.

Table 2.2 Qualities of Transformative Leaders

Vision and Commitment	Institutional Behavior
- Equality	- Participatory
- Equity	- Egalitarian
- Empowerment	- Responsive
- Human rights	- Transparent
- Peace	- Accountable
- Sustainability	- Non-corrupt
- Shared power,	- Consensus-Oriented
- Responsibility, Well-Being	- Empowering

Source: Jahan, 2000.

In order to promote fundamental change, societies need leaders with a different kind of vision and commitment. These leaders must demonstrate a strong commitment with regard to the principles of equality, equity and empowerment, particularly gender equality and equity and women's empowerment. They need to be

committed to using power not as an instrument of domination and exclusion, but as an instrument of liberation, inclusion and equality. Such leaders also need to demonstrate a commitment to human rights and peace. Both principles should be envisioned in a holistic manner: human rights to encompass political, economic, and social rights, and equal rights of all groups; and peace to include the elimination of all forms of violence--war, colonization, gender-based violence, etc. “Transformative” leaders are driven not merely by efficiency but also take into account the issue of sustainability. Competition for growth must not compromise the amount of time and resources dedicated to care-giving, for instance caring for children and the elderly. Finally, they are committed to the principles of sharing power, responsibility and well-being.

“Transformative” leadership not only calls for a change in the vision and commitment of leaders, it also emphasizes the need for leaders to follow a different set of institutional processes and behavior. “Transformative” leaders make consultation and participation an integral part of their routine. Institutional decisions are not handed down in a bureaucratic top-down manner, but through democratic participation, whereby all members are involved in the process and its outcomes. In addition, decision-making processes are open and transparent. The leaders are responsive and accountable to the rank-and-file members of the organization. They set high standards for non-corrupt behavior, work towards building consensus through consultation and participation, and attempt to empower people instead of manipulating and controlling them.

In a comparative study of local women leaders in 13 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, Jean Drage operationalizes the abstract idea of transformative leadership and includes the variables in her questionnaire survey to assess the impact of local women as transformative leaders. Evidence from this research in the Asia-Pacific regions shows that these women:

- 1) Have a greater sense of social issues, well-being, and welfare and reflect it in the decision-making process.
- 2) Promote policies and activities that strengthen communities.
- 3) Emphasize the importance of good communication with the communities.

- 4) Encourage participation.
- 5) Have a different approach to local governance.
- 6) Develop a team approach
- 7) Set different priorities.
- 8) Bring the mediation skills that they have developed as mothers—the ability to have clear goals, to juggle many tasks at once, and to be practical.
- 9) Are dedicated, responsible, leading by example.
- 10) Stimulate and encourage other women to take part in development.

Women leaders all believe that they are practicing transformative leadership and the evidence from this study also suggests the same results. Their transformative leadership features are defined by the issues they promote, their leading styles, as well as their impact on equality (Drage, 2001: 7).

2.3 Women in Politics in Thailand

Although Thai women have legally acquired the right to vote and to stand for election since 1932, it was not until 1949 that the first woman was elected to parliament. Furthermore, from 1949 down to the present, the number of women representatives in formal politics has remained minimal. Despite the fact that women have consistently exercised their right to vote, they rarely engage in the race for political office at all levels.

Besides the right to vote, Thailand has many laws and practices that attempt to ensure women's right to participate in the public sphere, as can be seen from the following list compiled by Jean Drage (2001: 30-31):

- 1) Thailand has ratified the Convention on the Political Rights of Women that guarantees political freedom.
- 2) Formal barriers to the advancement of women in the civil service were removed in 1991 when the government ordered all government agencies to review

their discriminatory regulations so that female civil servants could hold any positions except those related to national security.

3) The National Women's Coordination Board, a government agency, was set up to strengthen the potential of Thai women.

4) At the village level, the Community Development Department promotes women's roles and works to set up women's groups and later women's networks nationwide.

5) At the local government level, local organizations have been established to strengthen communities and encourage participation and development. These should provide women with chance to be elected as community leaders. These organizations can also lead to the setting up of women's development groups that help strengthen communities and women's role in that improvement.

However, the question then arises as to why so few women have successfully participated in Thai politics when there is no legal barrier prohibiting them from doing so. Why have Thai women made such great advances in other fields (the world of business, academe, etc.) but not politics? As in most countries, other important questions concerning women's under-representation in politics are raised. Is it because women are somehow prevented from seeking and winning election, or is it because they have simply chosen not to enter the political arena?

Within the parameters of the above questions, this section describes Thai socio-cultural and political traditions, together with the situation of Thai women in the context of local politics.

2.3.1 Patron-Client Model of Thai Politics

Thai society can be characterized by a long tradition of the so-called Sakdina system in which individuals' identities are reflected by their social status, such as a family's nobility, wealth, or educational attainments. Social groups are formed by people from the same social stratum, who share the same interests, creating close interpersonal relationship within these groups.

Kanok Wongtrangan (1985: 336-42) offers a cyclical model of Thai relationships that is based upon the Thai cultural characteristic of personalism,

whereby people build relationships that are reciprocal in nature. The model suggests that personal relationships will be established only if individuals (friends, relatives, colleagues, etc) have the opportunity to meet one another on regular basis until they feel close enough to trust one another. Closeness and trust will lead to affiliation or friendship. Once they have become friends, Thai people tend to help one another as much as they can. When a friend needs help, others in the circle would feel the urge to help him/her even if they need to break some rules or regulations to do so. Reciprocal help and support among group members signify a kind of social contract that helps strengthen the relationship, as well as reinforcing continued and smooth interaction. Given the fundamental elements of this relationship pattern, it comes as no surprise that nepotism and cronyism are deeply rooted in Thai society.

As long as personal relationships shaped by the Sakdina system prevail in the domain of public life, they cannot be separated from politics. The patron-client model has been offered as a principal nexus for thinking about Thai politics. Referring to the Thai's circle of relations, an individual can accumulate power through personal relationships with more friends of the same status, who later provide linkages to others in the upper and lower tiers.

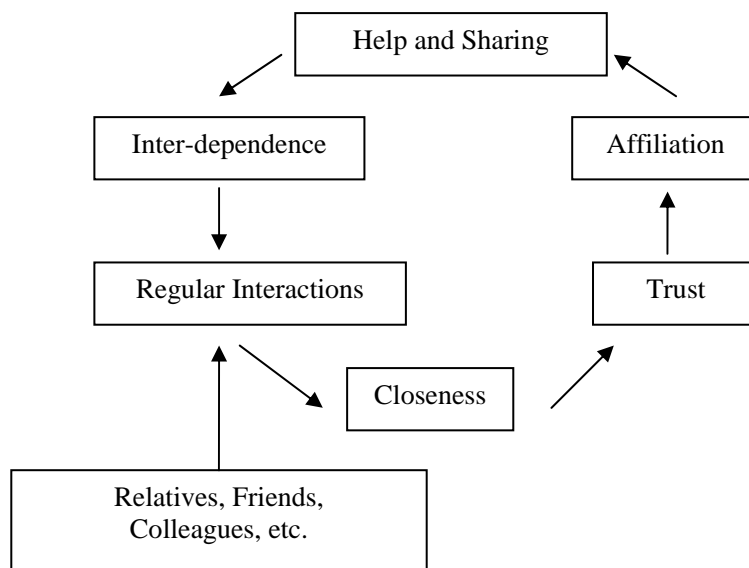


Figure 2.1 Circle of Relationships in Thai Society

Source: Kanok Wongtrangan, 1985.

In principle, a patron-client relationship lasts only so long as both parties gain something from it, and the relationship can be discontinued at the choosing of either party. Often, however, the client has few alternatives and will remain in the relationship in the hope of eliciting more benefits than had previously been received. To the extent, however, that prestige and power accrue to the person (or family) who has and is able to retain a large number of clients, the patron is motivated to provide benefits to those dependent on him.

The patron-client relationship also linked villagers and persons at other levels of the social, political, and economic spectrum. For example, a rich man in a village could be a patron of others in the rural community, while becoming a client of officials, politicians, or traders at the district or provincial levels. In such cases, clientship might reinforce the status of the rich villager who, at least occasionally, could call on his patron at a higher level for benefits that he might in turn use to bind his clients to him. The simple fact that the rich villager was known to have a powerful patron outside the village could enhance his status.

Thamora Fishel (1997: 446), in her qualitative study of provincial elections, makes the following assertion:

Although the personalistic ties between patron and client reflect long-standing traditional social norms in contrast to modern modes of organization based on legal codes, this does not mean that patron-clientage has been a static, monolithic aspect of Thai society. Economic, political, and social transformations have affected the hierarchies and strategies which shape reciprocal flows of favors and gifts between patrons and clients. The concept of patronage in the popular imagination also changes over time... To be useful, the patron-client model must be used critically, with sustained attention to social and economic context and power.

2.3.2 Thai Gender Ideology

Traditional Thai cultural values define 'good' and 'bad' women in terms of their primary duty to the family. Therefore, women's place in traditional Thai society

lies mostly in the home and domestic spheres. Suntaree Komin (1991), in her study of the psychology of the Thai people, asserts that Thai women have been socialized and their values internalized differently from Thai men. Women's concerns are associated with family happiness and security and with little value placed on equality and freedom. Thai men, on the other hand, are allowed to be more ambitious in life. Their success in life implies "success in career, position, and power, and a concern for freedom, social recognition and status- wealth" (Suntaree Komin, 1991: 41).

The inferiority of women in Thai society can be traced back to ancient Thai society, in which women's role as members of society was only to serve and tend to men. The influence of Chinese and Indian sexist traditions was widespread in ancient Thai society down to the Ayuthaya period, when women functioned merely as sex objects and did not share any rights as equal citizens. The status of Thai women was somehow improved for the first time during the Bangkok Era when King Rama VI issued a Royal Decree giving women the right to choose their own bridegrooms at will and declared that the acts of selling and battering wives by husbands were illegal and subject to royal punishment.

Juree Vichit-Vadakan (1993: 177) agrees that the socio-cultural tradition of Thailand evolved from the blending of three cultural traditions: 1) indigenous beliefs and practices prevalent in local areas, 2) Hindu Bhramanic and Buddhist traditions imported from India, and 3) Chinese values and beliefs as expressed through Confucianism, Taoism, and Mahayana Buddhism. Despite adaptation and adjustment over time, Thai gender ideology still retains the essence of values and traditions of the past. The author further points out examples of gender bias in Thai cultural traditions, such as male-centered genealogies and male-kinship reckoning; the sexual division of spheres of dominance; and male supremacy in politics, with its spill-over effects on other social organizations (e.g. men's role as head of the household, tacitly approved polygamy as a symbol of wealth, power and achievement).

Amidst the seemingly strong patriarchal characteristics mentioned earlier, Juree Vichit-Vadakan (1993: 179) points out the gender paradox inherent in the Thai socio-cultural context. The first paradox is related to the critical role Thai women play in family and community economics. While men seek to acquire formal authority, power and leadership, women control the household spheres, including

assuming responsibility for the family's well-being and economic activities. Functioning as family managers permits Thai women to gain managerial skills. Responsibility for their family's well-being permits them to gain experience in economic exchange and in trade.

Another explanation for women's control of the household economy is due to the structural requirements of the 'Sakdina' system, whereby male commoners had to perform corvée service for the king and the state. When men were required to leave home for long periods, women had to take care of children, the elderly and assume responsibility for all other household activities. Accordingly, they needed to be tough, learn to lead and be the breadwinner for their entire family. Given this first paradox, the author concludes that "historical conditions have propelled Thai women to assume the double burden of domestic and childcare functions on the one hand, and the management of household economy on the other".

The author also pins down the second paradox—if women were able to control economic production, why were they compliant in playing a subordinate role to men or accepting unequal treatment imposed by society at large? She asserts that women in the élite spectrum of traditional Thai society are the most likely to belong to a social level where male supremacy is strongest and part of the dominant culture. Women with a higher socio-economic status faced a totally different set of development experiences compared to those of women commoners.

The author goes on to explain this discrepancy by the fact that, since male elites from noble families were exempt from corvée labor, they were able to accumulate wealth and power through their political positions. Women belonging to the élite, on the other hand, had no exposure to life outside the domestic realm so their livelihood and status were acquired through either their father or husband. Given such cultural conditions, women's mindsets were ultimately framed to accept roles subservient to men. And because the élite were the ones who made decisions for society as a whole, their gender values affected the norm setting for Thai society in general. The author sums up the phenomenon as follows: "Greater gender equality and sharing between men and women of the early years were gradually eroded by the élite culture", adding that "Long years of cultural imposition by the élite have

supplanted the original, more egalitarian, male/female relations with the male dominance model” (Juree Vichit-Vadakan, 1993: 180).

Juree Vichit-Vadakan (1997: 434-436) further elaborates how the influence of the corvée labor system has continued down to the present time and how it is manifested in Thai gender relations. The first manifestation is **the evolution of women traders at the local markets**. Starting with a process of bartering, a simple exchange of household agricultural surplus, women eventually mastered the requisite business skills and passed them to their daughters, who were not subject to corvee service.

The second manifestation is a **clear-cut division of labor in the household**. Boys were assigned duties that permitted them greater flexibility and freedom, looking after water buffalos and such. Girls, on the other hand, were assigned chores that required discipline and close attention, i.e. cleaning, cooking, or babysitting. This work-related socialization during childhood is believed to indoctrinate women and men with the notion that they possess different qualifications and mindsets, thus deepening traditional sex-role ideology in society as a whole.

Finally, the third manifestation is reflected through the **emotional attachment of mother to male siblings**. Since the corvée system or warfare would sooner or later result in their sons drifting away from home to provide services to the state, Thai mothers feel the urge to lavish special love and care on them, and often overlook or condone their indulgences—drinking, gambling, womanizing, etc. Sisters were also taught to serve and to please both elder and younger brothers, whose fate was perceived to be harsh, difficult, and noble compared to that of women.

2.3.3 Factors Hindering Women’s Political Participation

Thailand’s Report on the State of Women in Urban Local Government (Drage, 2001: 9) states the following:

Some of the main factors which might prevent or restrict women from entering the political arena or local government service include issues such as family financial status, family agreement, as well as maternal status. Thai women are under great tension from the responsibility

towards their family. Their burden consists not only of the household work and taking care of family members, but also of its financial problems. The external factors preventing women from contributing to politics consist of the fact that some women do not get support from their family. A husband could not stand it if the wife were to play a leadership role since he is deeply convinced that she will never be strong enough. Family financial status, self-readiness and family acceptance might be barriers for women wishing to enter local politics.

Looking more deeply into these issues, women's under-representation can be analyzed in different dimensions. The structural and functional constraints faced by women are shaped by the social and political relations in a given society. Bari (2005: 3-5) elaborates that the common pattern of women's political exclusion is due to—1) social and political discourses, 2) political structures and institutions, and 3) the socio-cultural and functional constraints that put limits on women's candidacy

1) Ideological Factors

Patriarchy is a system of male domination that shapes women's relationship to politics. Andrienne Rich, as quoted in Bari (2005: 4), defines patriarchy as follows:

A familial-social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall **not** play in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

Patriarchy used gender role ideology as an ideological tool to place women within the private sphere (of home as mothers and wives), while men dominated the public sphere. Gender role ideology, nonetheless, intersects with the economic, social and political systems of a particular society. In Thailand, the domestic domain continues to be perceived as the legitimate space for women, while the public arena is associated with men.

Once women are socially defined as private, they are ultimately excluded from politics, which is regarded as a public domain.

2) Political Factors

The nature of politics is an important factor relating to the inclusion or exclusion of women in politics. Vicky Randall's definition of politics, quoted in Bari (2005: 4), is an "articulation, or working out of relationships within an already given power structure". However, this is in contrast with the traditional view of politics that defines it as an activity, a conscious, deliberate participation in the process by which resources are allocated among citizens. From Bari's perspective, the public-private dichotomy inherent in the traditional definition of politics is used to exclude women from the public political sphere, and even when women are brought into politics, they do so as mothers and wives.

In addition, since men have long occupied the political arena, women are usually not elected to positions of power within the party structure because of gender biases on the part of the male leadership. The male-dominated nature of political parties and culture of formal political structures intuitively work to hinder women's political participation. For example, a male-dominant perspective in political party often overlooks or even ignores women's perspectives on national issues, therefore, women's interests or concerns are not well-reflected in the politics of their parties.

3) Socio-Cultural Factors

As gender role ideology ascribes roles in the reproductive sphere, it ultimately creates a duality of masculinity and femininity while maintaining the status quo of male domination over females. The gender status quo is unknowingly maintained through low resource allocation to women's human development by the government, society and the family, as reflected in the varying degrees of gender disparities in education, health, employment, ownership of productive resources and politics in all countries around the world.

Besides, gender is mediated through other factors such as class, ethnicity, or socio-cultural dependences that structure female access to resources and opportunities and thus affect their level of political participation. Time is another detrimental factor. According to the report, given their primary roles as mothers and

wives, Thai women have limited time to take part in politics due to competing responsibilities relating to their domestic duties and housework. While politics requires women to interact with their male and female constituents and address public meetings, most Thai women find it too demanding a job for them to cope with successfully.

4) Economic Factors

As politics becomes increasingly commercialized, more and more money is needed to participate in politics. Women lack access to, and ownership of, productive resources, thereby limiting the scope of their political work.

5) Lack of Social Capital and Political Capacity

Women often lack social capital because they are often not the head of their respective communities or kinship groups, resulting in the absence of a constituency base for them and the means for political participation, such as political skills, economic resources, education, training and access to information.

2.3.4 A Summary of Thai Literature on Women in Local Politics

In “A Glimpse of Women Leaders in Thai Local Politics”, a recent work by Juree Vichit-Vadakan (2008: 128-130), the author has summarized the existing literature in Thailand that outlines the general conditions of women in local Thai politics as follows:

1) Prateep Chongsubthum (1985) studied the role of local female leaders taking up positions as village heads and sub-district heads. It was found that there were signs that women’s performance in local politics would lead to wider acceptance of their leadership roles.

2) Rawiwan Wannapanich (1997) found that women leaders usually have a horizontal relationship with their peers. Their approach, such as soliciting support, cooperation, and collaboration, was highlighted.

3) Voralux Manutaursiri (1995), in her MA. thesis, researched the factors affecting the performance of women’s development committees at the sub-district level. She found that the factors involved in the success of the women leaders were

self-confidence; being news-oriented and well-informed on public issues; and having some knowledge of the law and bureaucratic rules, regulations and procedures.

4) In the work of Boonsong Wetyasirin (1998), Piyaporn Labpromrat (1999), Rawiwan Wannapanich (1997), Smira Chittaladakorn (1986), Supaporn Yawattana (1993) and Suthinee Metheeprapa (2002); the researchers claimed that although women leaders are characterized as well-coordinated, sincere, well-mannered, or hard-working, people's acceptance of women's political performance is still low.

5) Likewise, Piyaporn Labpromrat (1999) found that men's ages and level of education correlate with their acceptance of women's roles in politics. Specifically, educated men and younger men accepted women's role in politics more than their older and undereducated counterparts did.

In addition to the above-mentioned studies, Juree Vichit-Vadakan also pointed out that many other scholars had also studied the political performance of women leaders. It was found that, despite their being perceived as "well coordinated, well-mannered, sincere and hard-working, the acceptance of women's performance results is still low" (Juree Vichit-Vadakan, 2004). In addition, she mentioned that studies relating to the topic of women in local politics are rare, as it was only 25 years ago that women were allowed to enter local politics. Therefore, an in-depth study on the topic was suggested in order to build a more solid body of knowledge in this regard, as well as to present a way forward to genuine democratic development in the country at both the national and local levels.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes an overview of the research methodology applied in this study, including the research design, unit of analysis, research procedures, methods of data collection, and procedures relating to the verification of data.

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Unit of Analysis

In this study, which aims at understanding female politicians at the local level, **the unit of analysis is the individual.**

3.1.2 Research Methodology: Qualitative Method

The research methods were selected in consideration of the ability of each specific tool to answer the research questions. In social science research, social reality is not conceived as static, but as relational and subjective. **This dissertation, therefore, utilizes qualitative methods in addressing the interweaving and interpretative nature of this research inquiry**—to understand women in local politics. This is because qualitative means could facilitate an in-depth and detailed study, thereby enabling the researcher to gain a holistic overview of the issue under study.

Since the qualitative method involves watching people in their natural environment, it permits access to information and knowledge from an insider's perspective. Qualitative research techniques, such as in-depth/open-ended interviews or direct observation, allow researchers to capture the breadth and depth of people's experiences, not only through verbal expression, but also by means of non-verbal language as well. Not only does this allow for a one snap-shot analysis after the data has been collected, but it also provides timely feedback while in the field.

Consequently, it thus yields a rich source of data that enables the researcher to understand the dynamism of the phenomenon in question, as well as to detect new variables beyond the scope of predetermined categories.

In general, qualitative research serves quite well as a method for ‘understanding’ social phenomena, rather than explaining relationships among/between presumably known variables. The tradeoff of employing the qualitative method is that an in-depth study of selected cases may not lead to the generalizability of the findings.

In this study, qualitative knowledge is induced through focus group study and case study, as different types of data require different data collection methods. Eventually, the analysis will be based on information from the two major sources and the conclusion arrived at in an inductive manner by seeking insights, connecting related variables, interpreting contextual meaning, and reconstructing the knowledge acquired in a new and meaningful way.

3.2 Focus Group

Focus group study is a form of group interview that capitalizes on communication between research participants in order to generate data. The method entails a group discussion consisting of approximately 6-12 persons that is guided by a facilitator, during which group members talk freely and spontaneously about a certain topic, using group interaction as a part of the method. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002: 182), “Group discussion produces data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group setting—listening to others’ verbalized experiences stimulates memories, ideas, and experiences in participants. This is also known as the group effect, where group members engage in “a kind of ‘chaining’ or ‘cascading’ effect; talk links to, or tumbles out of, the topics and expressions preceding it.”

Therefore, the method was chosen with regard to this study to obtain information on concepts, perceptions and ideas of local women leaders by encouraging the participants to discuss the topic among themselves, with the guidance

of the facilitator. In this study, the objective of focus group studies is mainly to identify general conditions and situations pertaining to women in local politics. The method is also of great help in identifying issues or problems to be further explored in in-depth case studies so that the relationship between and among variables or factors could be discerned.

3.2.1 Recruitment and Selection of Participants

To gain access to women politicians who could be resource persons in the focus groups, I utilized both formal and informal channels. I first tried to find a list of women politicians from government sources such as the Provincial Election Commission, as well as the Governor's office. Nonetheless, the procedures were too burdensome as there was no sex-disaggregated information available in the database. Besides, as a nationwide general election was then approaching, most officials tended to be highly reluctant to respond to this sort of request, fearing that the list would be used for political purposes.

Thus, I needed to use other means in reaching out to the group of participants targeted for the purposes of this study. Names and contacts were gathered from women's networks, as well as from male politicians in different constituencies. Then, I sent a fax to each Tambon and Municipality that was known to have elected female member(s). This was followed up by telephone calls to the women in question, as well as through the political networks with whom they are affiliated. All of the women leaders who agreed to participate in this study were informed of the date, time, and venue of each session prescheduled for different months.

3.2.2 Organization of Focus Groups

Four different focus groups were held on 9th August 2008, 8th November 2008, 21st February 2009, and 16th May 2009 respectively, with a total of 24 participants holding various political positions. There were 17 SAO members, 4 members of the municipal administration, 1 Village Head, and 1 Chief Executive of SAO. As the majority of women politicians in Krabi are SAO members, most of the participants were from this political tier. At the time of this study, there was no woman elected to

the Provincial Administrative Organization, so I invited one ex-candidate to share her experiences with the group as well.

Meetings were held on Saturdays (in different months) as it was deemed a convenient day for the participants, most of whom preferred to reserve Sundays for their families. In order to have more control over the environment and hence create the conditions for an effective dialogue, I chose to organize these sessions in hotel meeting rooms in Krabi city. This central -- and neutral -- location also made it easier for the participants to commute to the venue.

All the sessions started at 9.00 am. and ended at 3.45 pm., including time out for lunch and tea breaks. The first half of the session was designed to allow the participants time for self-reflection, while the afternoon sessions were dedicated to the discussion of their experiences in politics. All the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were encouraged to participate on a nickname basis to create an informal ambiance and openness, while at the same time affording them a sense of greater anonymity.

Further details on the organization of each group are presented in Table 3.1

Table 3.1 Organization of Focus Group Dialogue by Group

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Date of Focus Group Dialogue	9 th August 2008	8 th November 2008	21 st February 2009	16 th May 2009
Number of Participants	7	6	6	5
Political Positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Village Head • 5 SAO Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 SAO Members • 2 Municipality Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 SAO Members • 1 Chief Executive of SAO • 1 Ex-Candidate for PAO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 SAO Members • 2 Municipality Members
Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kanokkan Anukansai • Pimrumpai Panvichatikul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pimrumpai Panvichatikul • Rewat Krewyu 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pimrumpai Panvichatikul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pimrumpai Panvichatikul
Research Assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kanisorn Tubtim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buppha Sukra 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buppha Sukra 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buppha Sukra

3.2.3 Outline for Focus Group Dialogue

Instead of using a written list of topics or questions to be covered, I used two pictures to symbolize the theme of each dialogue session. In the first part, I opened with an illustration of the “Tree of Life”, using the picture diagram presented below. The later session then proceeded to the main essence of these focus group studies, using an illustration of a “Political Road” to outline the topics to be shared within the group.

3.2.3.1 Tree of Life

Because most of the participants did not know one another previously, each focus group session started with a five-minute sharing of personal stories, using the “Tree of Life” as a story-telling outline.

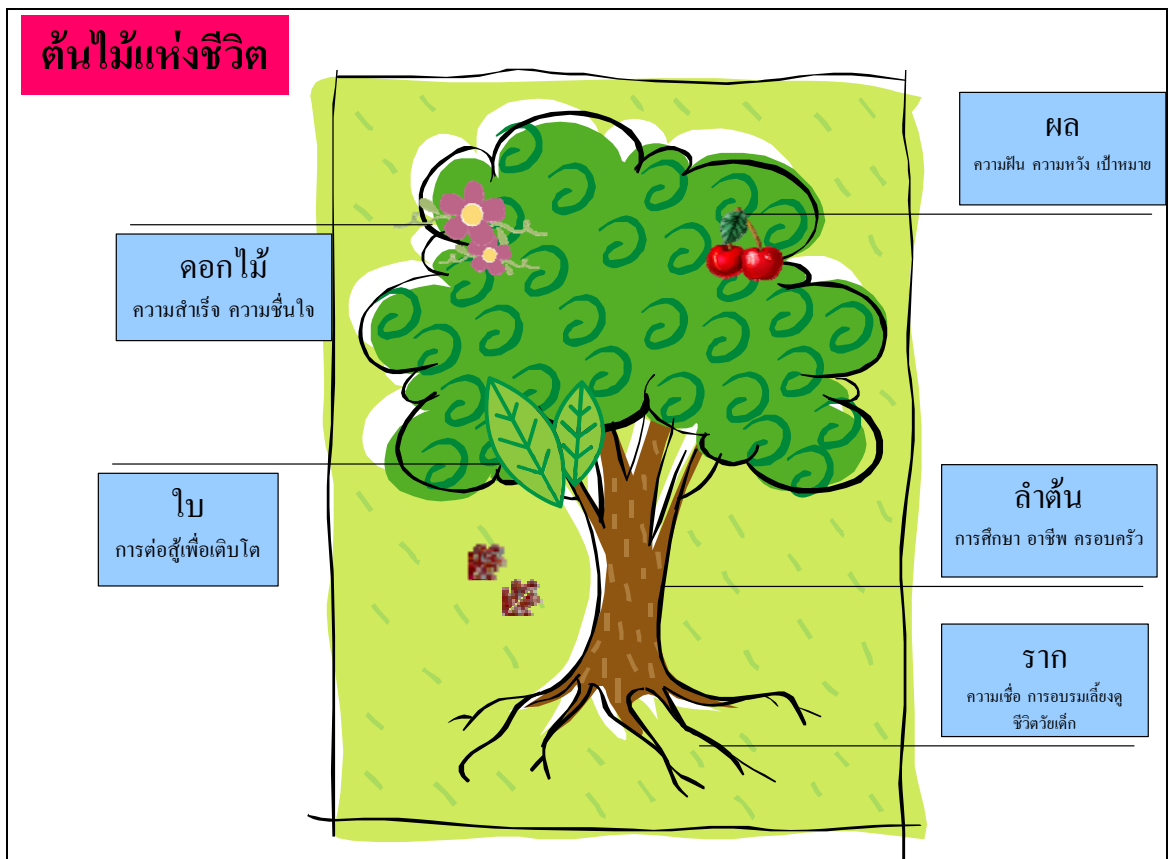


Figure 3.1 Tree of Life

I started this session with my own life story in order to clarify the meaning of each symbol using her story as an example, as well as to show her sincere desire to learn from and share with them. ‘Roots’ refers to one’s beliefs, values, or upbringing; The ‘trunk’ refers to something that sustains one’s life, such as family, career, or education; ‘leaves’ means striving to grow either through occupations as such; ‘flowers’ symbolizes the rewards one receives or one’s accomplishments in life; and ‘fruits’ stands for dreams, aspirations, or over-arching goals.

This technique proved to be rather efficient in setting the mood and tone of the discussion. When one person started to open up by telling her story to the other participants, others tended to do the same, and that led to a more comfortable, yet at the same time enthusiastic, group atmosphere. Although five-minutes was too short a time to gain a profound understanding of these women’s lives, it nevertheless helped provide a general idea of who they were or what they valued.

3.2.3.2 Political Road

The next session proceeded to the topic of their experiences in politics, using another picture called “Political Road” to enable them to exchange views on what each woman had faced, felt, and learnt ever since they decided to enter politics.

The diagram contains fourteen pictures that symbolize factors or incidents that may happen along a woman’s political path once she steps out of the domestic domain to set foot on the road to political involvement. The participants were asked to share their experiences with one another on topics relevant to the pictures they saw, for instance on issues such as the following:

- 1) Family obligations as a wife and/or a mother (mother and children)
- 2) What or with whom she had to fight against when embarking on the ‘political road’ (fighting people)
- 3) Obstacles she needed to overcome (fences)
- 4) The rewards (flowers) or suffering (tears) she had experienced
- 5) Money issues that might be related to her path (banknotes)
- 6) Supportive factors or persons she could rely on (big tree)
- 7) The roles she had to play as a woman in politics (a woman carrying a piece of a pie chart)

- 8) How to maintain a sense of balance on the 'political road' (tightrope walker)
- 9) Development perspective (bird's-eye view of a landscape)
- 10) Money politics or corruption issues (money with wings)
- 11) Relationships and political interests (two people holding hands)
- 12) Overarching goal at the end of the road (flag)

Despite the fact that the focus group approach is not the best means to arrive at the answers to more complex inquiries, such as a woman's political socialization, or their inner motives for entering politics, in-depth studies of three female local politicians were, in certain instances, able to fill in the gaps.



Figure 3.2 Political Road

3.3 Case Studies

Case study methods involve an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event. According to Babbie (2001: 285-286), the main purpose of a case study is to “seek in-depth analysis for a particular case that may yield explanatory insights”. As a result, the researcher may gain a more acute understanding of why the instance happened as it did, and what aspects it might become important to look at more extensively in future research.

Case study research excels at bringing understanding to a complex issue or object and can extend existing experience or reinforce what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Robert K. Yin (1984:23) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

In this dissertation, the case study approach is employed to fulfill the purpose of gaining an in-depth and multidimensional understanding of the topic by seeking insights into the life and work of women politicians.

Case Selection

According to Patton (2002: 230), the logic of selecting a ‘purposeful sampling’ is to focus mainly on the richness of information such case studies are able to provide. Thus, from the list of women leaders on provincial women’s development committees in Krabi, I **purposively selected** three women leaders to act as my resource persons, using the logic of purposeful sampling. The criteria for selection were the special quality or significance of the case, accessibility of the resource persons, and diversity within the cases selected.

Somsri, Sunee, and Junya were the women leaders who were invited to participate in the study. All of them had been awarded the title of “Outstanding Women Leaders” by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security in

different years, which has proven that their leadership qualities had been recognized by the public. Nevertheless, they were from different family backgrounds, had different experiences in terms of socialization, and their stories highlight the different aspects of socio-political realities at the local level.

While Somsri's case study primarily emphasizes the personal development of a woman who tried to step out of a cultural backdrop of male chauvinism and finally find her place in society to make a difference in the political arena, Sunee's case highlights the life of a local woman leader who has tirelessly dedicated herself to working on behalf of others. Her case also shed light on many important political realities at the grassroots level during election time. Junya's case, on the other hand, portrays how politics brings about social discord among families, in addition to illustrating the factors pertaining to the success of a woman politician, who has maintained a leadership position for almost two decades.

3.4 Data Collection

Data collection for this dissertation depended mostly on field research, which employed a series of interviews and direct observations. Interviews were conducted as the primary means for collecting the requisite data for this study.

3.4.1 Interviews

The research utilized a combination of informal and in-depth interviews, as well as focused interviews, depending on the context in which the interaction took place. To avoid communication problems, since many of the interviewees felt more comfortable conversing in their own Southern dialect, they were informed at the outset to use whatever dialect they might prefer.

In the focus group interviews, the process was semi-structured. Given the use of broad questions and illustrations as guidelines for the dialogues, it happened that some participants got carried away or spent too much time on their stories. Thus, intervention techniques needed to be applied to keep the session on track, as well as to ensure the participation of the whole group.

In the case study part, however, all the interviews took place in the resource person's own setting, for instance, at their homes or in their respective communities. Building the necessary rapport was crucial, particularly during the initial phase as trust is the key factor that affects the person's willingness to share their personal lives. I found that spending sufficient time explaining research objectives to the same extent as sharing my personal stories helped create a better rapport between the interviewer and interviewee.

The use of an MP3 recorder during the interview sessions was of tremendous help since it captured what was said and how it was said, while allowing smooth and natural interaction between the two parties. Recording allowed me to concentrate on taking strategic and focused notes, rather than taking verbatim notes. Verbatim transcripts of all interviews were made afterwards, so that repeatedly listening to the recordings could reveal previously unnoticed features of the organization of the talks.

3.4.2 Observation

In any qualitative research, observation is a useful tool for the verification of primary data as it allows the researcher to obtain tacit information on the spot. According to Supang Chantavanich (2000), what researchers should observe includes the following:

1) **Acts:** The normal daily activity and lifestyle of people in the community being studied

2) **Activities:** Patterns of activities, such as community rituals, agricultural methods and manners, community management conduct, etc. The observation of 'patterns of activities' will direct researchers to the roles, responsibilities, and even the class of members of the community under study.

3) **Meanings:** To understand what a person means, we first need to understand the socio-cultural factors and value system in his/her individual context. What is being observed is in fact the individual response to social expectations.

4) **Relationships:** Through relationships, whether they are harmonious or discordant, researchers will gain an understanding of the social structure within the actual setting. The kinds of relationships to be observed are kinship, economic relationships, and political relationships.

5) **Participation:** Analysis of participation (and non-participation) of certain activities in the community will help researchers to understand affiliations and conflicts within the community.

6) **Setting:** Holistic observation of the setting includes community history, geographical setting, culture, beliefs, occupations, community management, etc.

Thus, observational data incorporate a detailed description of activities, behaviors, actions, and interpersonal interactions that compliment, as well as verify, data obtained from other qualitative techniques. During the field research, observations were made at all times to obtain tacit information in order to gain an insightful understanding of the persons or situations under study.

3.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative data consists of words and observations, not numbers. Therefore, data analysis and interpretation are required to gain a clear understanding of the findings of the study.

Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process of data collection that takes place alongside data analysis. These two processes proceed almost simultaneously. For qualitative work, data is to be verified and analyzed both right in the study field and after the process of data collection is complete. Hence, the method permits researchers to refine or alter working hypotheses once more knowledge about the issue has been accumulated during the course of data collection. In other words, analysis begins when the data was first collected and is used to guide decisions related to further data collection.

According to Powell and Renner (2003: 342-347), the analysis process includes the following steps:

Step 1: Knowing the Data. The researcher must get to know the data by reading and re-reading the text or go through the tape-recorded interviews many times, then take note of impressions derived from the narrative data.

Step 2: Focus Analysis. The researcher should focus the analysis by referring to research questions. Though the research questions may change after the researcher has worked with the data, it could help in getting started. The focus could be done either by topic/event on the one hand, or by case/ individual/ group, on the other.

Step 3: Categorize information. The researcher categorize information by identifying themes or patterns such as ideas, concepts, behaviors, interactions, incident, etc. then organize them to coherent categories that summarize and bring meaning to the text. Organizing is the heart of qualitative analysis. As the researcher organizes her/his data, subcategories or other relevant themes could be identified as well.

Step 4: Identifying patterns and connections. Identify patterns and connections within and between categories allows the researcher to assess the relative importance of different themes. Beside, it opens room for the researcher to look for examples or responses that run counter to the prevailing themes. It is beneficial to look at those non-conforming data that do not fit into the categorized scheme as it may have implication on the interpretation or understanding of the overall picture.

Step 5: Interpretation. To interpret the data, the researcher must bring it all together, using the themes and connection to explain the research findings-
-What are the major lessons? What has application to other settings or studies? Or what those who use the results be most interested in knowing? Then, the researcher may develop an outline for presenting the results in a final report.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

In a qualitative paradigm, reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality. It is also through this association that the way to achieve validity and reliability in terms of one's research become affected by the qualitative researcher's perspectives, which are to eliminate bias and increase the researcher's truthfulness of a proposition regarding particular social phenomenon. In

this study, the techniques employed to maintain the reliability and validity of qualitative research were 1) Triangulation, and 2) Participant checks.

3.6.1 Triangulation

Triangulation is defined as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell and Miller, 2000: 126). It is an approach that utilizes multiple data sources, multiple informants, and multiple methods in order to validate the research findings. The main objective of triangulation is to entertain multiple perspectives to arrive at a more complete understanding of social realities or phenomena under study.

According to Denzin (1970 quoted in Supang Chantavanich, 2000: 129-130), there are four types of triangulation used in qualitative research—data triangulation, methodological triangulation, theory triangulation, and investigator triangulation.

- 1) Data triangulation: involves time, space, and persons
- 2) Methodological triangulation: involves using more than one method to gather data
- 3) Theory triangulation: involves using more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the phenomenon
- 4) Investigator triangulation: involves multiple researchers in an investigation

This dissertation draws mainly on the first three of the triangulation schemes mentioned above. As for the focus group studies, I invited two experienced qualitative researchers to help facilitate the group dialogues and one local assistant who was proficient in the Southern dialect, to help verify my understanding after the dialogues were over.

3.6.2 Participant Checks

The technique of participant checks was utilized both during and after the interview so as to improve the accuracy and richness of the information. During an interview, I restated, summarized, or paraphrased the information to ensure correctness of the data that was taken note of. Language is a crucial factor that may

lead the interpretation astray. Despite the fact that I could speak and understand the Southern dialect, words or proverbs used in a different local context sometimes differ. After the interview or in the course of writing, I always reported back to my resource persons, asking for their comments on my interpretation of certain issues and incorporating their comments into to the writing.

CHAPTER 4

SITUATIONS AND CONDITIONS OF WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICS

This chapter contains information from four focus group dialogues held during August 2008 and May 2009. Local women politicians from different political positions and from different districts in Krabi were invited to participate in the study. Using the “Tree of Life” illustration, participants were encouraged to share their personal stories in order to set a more congenial, yet more open. mood and tone within the group. Information from the introductory part provided a general idea as to who they are, while the “Political Road” illustration allowed them to exchange views on what they had faced, felt, or learnt ever since they decided to take part in politics.

The chapter, thus, works to compile the participants’ personal experiences and insights that, taken all together, provide an outline or general perspective of the situations and conditions of women in local politics in Krabi.

4.1 Overview of Focus Group

The objective of focus group dialogues is to provide a multi-dimensional picture of what female politicians in Krabi have been facing through the years, what politics means to them, and how they interact with political realities in their respective localities. I chose focus group dialogue as the main research method in the quest for these answers as it opens up the requisite space for interaction and the sharing of ideas among members of the group.

After invitation letters were sent out to all women politicians in Krabi, followed by a series of telephone calls to different individuals who had personal contact with them, 24 women agreed to participate in the study. Out of the 24 participants, there were 17 members of SAOs, four members of the municipal

administration, one Village Head, one Chief Executive of SAO, and one ex-candidate for a PAO position.

Each dialogue took five to six hours. As some participants were from different part of the province and did not know one another before, the first session started with each participant giving a five-minute monologue in which to share their life stories with the others. Then the following discussion flowed naturally from this, allowing the women to address their experiences in political life.

Though the time was too short to gain a more profound understanding of the women's lives as individuals, it helped provide a general idea of who they are, how they conceptualize politics, what is it like to be a politician, or what their thoughts, feelings and actions are with regard to political realities in their respective local settings.

Although the participants are a small number of women in Krabi who had succeeded in winning political seats or in putting themselves forward proposed as the people's representatives, they are in fact from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, have different characteristics, possess different sets of experiences, both personal and political, and experienced different kinds of success and failures in their lives. Their stories, however, illustrated some common patterns that could be classified under the following major topics: knowledge of politics, conception of politics, entry into politics, political opportunities and barriers, political performance, gender outlooks and corruption issues.

4.2 Brief Profiles of the Key Participants

Among the 24 women participating in the focus groups, there were some that contributed significantly to the discussion. To begin with, I would like to present a brief profile of each to enhance understanding of their thoughts and opinions pertaining to the different aspects reflected in the chapter.

Lamai Jaikleang (47) is the first women I would like to start with as she is the only female Village Head in Krabi Province. Lamai stated that she had completed her responsibilities as a mother and a wife before deciding to enter politics; all her

children were married, and her husband was well settled with his business, so she felt more comfortable venturing out to do social work. To Lamai, for a woman family must always come first, however.

Lamai's father had also been a Village Head before reaching retirement in 1998. Lamai had dreamt of becoming a politician since childhood. She had once run in an SAO election but did not succeed, having received only 6 votes less than the elected candidate. Nonetheless, when the preceding Village Head was shot dead in 2008, she immediately made the decision to run for the position. After her announcement, an assistant of the late Village Head asked her to give way to him but she declined, reasoning that politics was also her desired goal and she was ready to put herself into the fray.

Lamai reflected that villagers chose her to be their leader because they felt so despairing of male politicians, particularly the previous village head. Being obsessed with gambling, he did not pay any attention to the problems that existed in the village. Thus, during the 17 years under his leadership, the village had lost the opportunity to become fully developed.

Thus, after defeating the other three male candidates, Lamai tried her very best to prove that a woman could also be a good leader. The first project she was proud of was the construction of a village security checkpoint which was raised as an example for other villages to follow. Without corruption, Lamai proved that the same amount of money could bear more results, and the villagers began to perceive the differences.

Yupin Thongtao (50) is a member of the SAO and has been for the past four consecutive terms. She is from a small village with only three hundred potential voters. Most of the villagers had migrated from the province of Nakorn Si Thammarat, so every household was very close and united. The village's politics are very much in alignment and the village head, assistant village head and the SAO members worked hands in hand with one another.

Yupin's husband was the assistant to the village head for quite some time, which gave Yupin the opportunity to play a strong competitive role in the community as a member of the housewives' group. Back during the first SAO election in 1996, she received strong encouragement from her husband and the villagers to enter the

election. In doing so, she has won each election with the highest number of votes throughout.

During the fourth term, Yupin decided not to enter the election to allow the younger new generation to take on the role. However, it was discovered that most of the newcomers were less than candid, but had a hidden agenda underlying their candidacy. Therefore, the villagers insisted that Yupin continue to run in every election. With this solid backup, Yupin never had to buy votes. She announced that she was willing to work hard to support the villagers, under the condition that if the villagers ask for money or incentives in return during her election, she would drop out from the race. Asking for money in exchange for votes would indicate that the villagers had become more greedy than idealistic.

Yupin is an SAO member with outstanding achievements to her credit, as seen from her support of the village for which she had earned a number of awards and recognition, both in sports and in earning extra income. She was elected vice president of the SAO council amidst strong disagreement between the council and the administrative branch. Yupin insisted that her success in politics is a result of her integrity and neutrality, and courage to speak out and act on things she deemed to be right.

Saovanit (51) is one of the four Municipality Council members participating in this study. Saovanit resigned from government work within the provincial education system in order to start her own business. Aside from her political position, she is also the president of the OTOP organization at the district level and a radio broadcaster for the local radio station.

Since the age of 21, Saovanit has been continuously involved with community social work. Starting out as a member of the village scouts' organization, she has been instilled with the passion and desire to help others. Nevertheless, she was afraid to enter into politics because of her dislike of competition.

Saovanit used to be approached to run for the position of mayor. But she refused to do so, believing that she was not ready at the time. It was not until recently that she felt ready to run for a position as member of the municipality as her children had all grown up and her youngest had also completed a bachelor's degree.

Serving as member of the Municipality, Saovanit also continued her work with the co-op to earn extra income and increase the bargaining power of villagers that had their own small to medium-size enterprises within the community. At the same time, she also attached great importance to the area of education by using her previous experience as a government official within the education sector to provide as many benefits as she could to the villagers.

Karnjana Srisongkram (44) was another colorful participant who provided so many useful insights into the life of a woman in local politics. From a very young age, she had a strong affection for uniforms and always dreamt of being a soldier or a police officer. However, having to care for her father who suffered from illness, Karnjana did not have an opportunity for a higher education.

After finishing her ninth-grade education, Karnjana had to leave school to look after her ailing father, as well as manage her family's grocery store. Karnjana married at a young age and became a widow after her husband was fatally wounded in a gun fight. She was left alone to look after her four children.

Karnjana's village is located within an area once under the influence of the communists, a place where killing was common, occurring on an almost daily basis. Her village was deprived in so many ways, including a lack of the most basic necessities such as water and electricity. This made her extremely annoyed with the male politicians who had not accomplished anything to improve the villager's livelihoods.

Due to Karnjana's strong contribution to the village, such as being the key volunteer for funerals, ordinations, weddings or other social functions; her peers encouraged her to run for the SAO position in 2002. Karnjana won the election with a large margin over her five competitors, all of which are male. Thus, she was the first and the only woman from the village to be elected. When the second term came around, she invited another woman to enter the election for SAO members. Both won the election, thereby giving her village two female representative to participate in local politics.

Karnjana's achievements as a member of the SAO are outstanding. She was very successful in bringing public water facilities and electricity to the village, which give her a large support base during election times as the villagers had seen for

themselves that a hard-working politician can really make a difference for the community.

Yupayao Jitrrak (46) was a first-time member of the SAO. However, she has had extensive experience with local politics because her family has been part of the voting base for a nationally recognized political party for more than 30 years.

Yupayao's father was a teacher and her mother had served as the president of a women's group at the district level. This gave her the opportunity to learn about community development work since she was very little. At a young age, she often accompanied her mother to attend various public meetings. Once she was older, she would assist her mother in coordinating with government officials or those involved in local development. The involvement eventually earned her recognition as a contributor to women's rights and benefits.

Yupayao finished her education with a college degree in Tourism Management. She worked as a hotel manager for many years before returning to work on her family's rubber and palm plantations. After her divorce, she never felt alone, even though she had to raise her only daughter all by herself. Yupayao's mother was her role model on how to live life to the fullest, for oneself as well as for the family and society at large.

Yupayao entered politics after her daughter was accepted into a well-known university in Bangkok. Being a divorced single mother, she had to be very careful in positioning herself as women of her status are usually subject to gossip and rumor. Giving importance to the improvement of oneself in order to work effectively and efficiently, she continued her education at the master's degree level in the area of social development.

As a member of the SAO, Yupayao is recognized for her contribution to the development of women and in solving drug addiction issues within her community. Her role in women's groups built upon the legacy of her mother. She gave priority to issues related to children because she believed that they are the main drivers of the development of a strong community in the future. In addition, as the mother of a teenage girl, Yupayao has had to adapt, to be more up-to-date and more understanding of today's teenagers, making her a good counselor for many children within the village as well.

Ubol Chaisri (46) was serving a third term as a member of the SAO. Before entering politics, Ubol was an assistant to the Village Head in her home town. Since the Village Head was illiterate, she was the one who helped him with all documentation matters and was regarded as his right hand helper. Once she decided to compete in the SAO election, he was also the one who gave her full support in running for election.

In other civic tasks, Ubol has been serving as a Public Health Volunteer in her village, and as the President of the Women's Development Committee of the sub-district. Because of the effort she put into both these tasks, Ubol was awarded the title of "Outstanding Public Health Volunteer" and "Outstanding Women in Development" respectively. Recently, she had been appointed secretary of the Village Fund, being responsible for villagers' money amounting to over two million baht.

Ubol is married and has three kids (8, 10 and 11 years). Thus, she needed to carefully manage her time and balance work and family life. Her husband understands her political role and is a great help in taking care of the children. In the last election, she was offered the position of Deputy Chief Executive, but she turned it down, realizing that she was not ready to bite off more than she could possibly chew. Her children were still young, so she preferred to set aside some quality time to be with them as well.

Ubol believed that her political success stemmed from the experience she had accumulated over time. And because people in her village were rather well-educated, they were very cooperative in matters pertaining to development. Most importantly, most people in her constituency agreed with her that the development of human resources was as important as the development of physical infrastructure, if not more so. Thus, her work was not just to create a project to build things, but also to take into account social issues and the quality of life of the people she represented.

Wassana Buakaew (33) attained the position of the Chief Executive of SAO in 2007, making her the first and the only woman CE during the period in which the current study was conducted. Wassana graduated from a university in Bangkok, majoring in Accounting. After graduation, she came back to Krabi to work as an accountant in a hospital.

When her cousin, the previous CE was shot to death, Wassana was asked by her family to run for the position. Because her brother, who was the secretary to the ex-CE, was only 27, he was too young for the upcoming candidacy. In order to secure the seat for her brother in the next term, Wassana decided to enter politics for the family's sake.

With the help of her relatives, Wassana's candidacy received a warm welcome from the villagers. Wassana had only one month to conduct her first political campaign. It was also the first time she was able to see what the lives of people in the constituency were like. There were so many households that still used lanterns or needed to carry water from far away for household use. During the canvassing time, Wassana began to become more committed to her political mission—to improve the livelihood of her fellow villagers in the sub-district.

After having been elected, Wassana quickly learned about the SAO administration from the Executive team (the same team that had worked for the previous CE), and from SAO officials. She was lucky that the permanent secretary of the SAO was a woman, allowing Wassana to build close ties with other officials in no time. In addition, because the sub-district itself was not too big, the SAO members were somehow related to one another in terms of their family lines. For these reasons, there were no such things as Executive-Opponent conflicts as all SAO members were working together as one big team. Wassana perceived good relations as a crucial factor in local administration.

Pairat Plupong (42) was from a political family, most of whose members are politicians or involved in politics in one way or another. After her marriage, Pairat moved from her hometown in Nakorn Si Thammarat to Krabi to live with her husband in order to help manage his family's construction business. She had two children, nine and eleven years old.

Despite being a newcomer, Pairat participated actively in many community affairs, for instance as a Village Health Volunteer, and a PAO housewife. However, she said that politics was in her blood. Consequently, as the opportunity to enter politics presented itself, she did not hesitate to put herself forward as a candidate in the recent SAO election. With a solid family background, Pairat was well-supported by her husband and his family.

During her eight months in the office, Pairat had contributed a great deal of time to strengthening football and volleyball teams in her sub-district, using both personal and SAO sponsorship. Pairat also accompanied the winning teams to important matches at the provincial level, provided them with team uniforms, as well as helping them find more sponsors to help defray their miscellaneous expenses. Given her family's connections with local entrepreneurs, the teams were successful in fund-raising, and the athletes were highly motivated to perform to their best of their ability.

The other achievement that Pairat was proud of was a project to build a street and drainage pipelines in her village. She collected related information, wrote a project proposal, which she then submitted to the SAO. The project had been approved by the board. Pairat could not wait to see the new street, as it would be her first tangible accomplishment as a politician.

Supawadee Petchruentong (35) was also brought up in a politician's family. Her father had been a well-respected Village Head even before she was born. At a very young age, Supawadee was assigned to greet villagers who came to her home to meet her father. When she grew up, he father included her in his assistant team. Thus, she gradually perceived her father's work as a part of her responsibilities.

Supawadee was married to one of her father's assistants. They made a living mainly from their rubber and oil palm plantations. She was also a mother of two sons.

Aside from being a good daughter, wife, and mother, Supawadee was an active member of her community in many respects. For example, she was a Village Health Volunteer, the President of the village's housewives group, and lately the manager of the Village Fund.

When the SAO was established as a new local authority, her father (who was then a Kamnan) asked Supawadee to run for election as a member of the SAO in order to facilitate future works in their village. Though she was not so fond of being a politician, she could not fail to demur to her father's request. Supawadee won the seat, and has been serving as an SAO member for two consecutive terms.

During her eight years as a politician, Supawadee said that she was continuing to do similar work as before, as her role in politics undeniably complemented the work of Village Head. Due to her prolonged experience in local politics, she treated

politics as a part of her daily routine. She said that the election was simply a formality in democracy. In a well-united village, people already knew who was capable of doing what, and what was in the best interests of the village as a whole. To her, trust and coordination among leaders, as well as among fellow villagers, are crucial factors in development at the village level.

Nuannij Kerdsup (33), too, was encouraged to enter politics by her father. Although her father himself was not a politician, he always kept up with political matters and wished to see better and faster development in the community.

At the age of 29, Nuannij who had just become divorced from her husband, was encouraged and supported by her father to run for an SAO position. Nuannij was then living with her family, so she was persuaded to comply with her father's request. Nuannij's father was so happy with Nuannij's candidacy. He led her campaign, and covered all the expenses incurred during election.

Nuannij revealed that winning an election was not as difficult as hanging in there because the political ambience in the SAO was rather harsh. There were many times that the Council meetings collapsed, because the SAO members and the executive board were in conflict.

However, there were many physical infrastructures that Nuannij brought into her village, for instance a concrete street, a bridge over a canal, street lighting, etc. These were a concrete reflection of her political accomplishments delivered to the people in her home town. Nuannij felt good that she had a chance to do good things for the village. Above all, she was proud that, as a daughter, she had at least paid back her father by making his dream come true.

Niam Srichai (52) was a political veteran whose initial involvement in politics was as a canvasser. Because of her striking leadership in the housewives' group and in civic affairs, she had always been approached by both national and local politicians to lead their campaigns in the sub-district. Niam, however, had close links to a particular political party, so she usually assisted only that party's candidates.

Political competition in the sub-district was undeniably manipulated by rivals of higher-level politicians, Niam, as a prominent woman in her area, was asked by the party to run for the position of SAO member so as to secure a voter base in the constituency. Niam viewed the invitation as an honor that she could not turn down.

Niam's experiences in the first election were rather intense. She stood against five other male candidates who also had good backups. However, because Niam had immersed herself in social work for a long time, her efforts paid off well in her first candidacy. Niam finally won the election, being the first female SAO member in her sub-district.

In politics, Niam worked side by side with villagers' groups in composing the village's three- and five- year plans. All the projects she passed on to the SAO would be based on the demands or concerns of the local villagers she represented. On the other hand, Niam continued to perform her other social roles in women's groups while continuing to study in an extension school to complete her secondary-level education.

Tipsuchon Boonchuai (40) is another SAO member who built up a political based on the merit she had accumulated in the community. Besides her role as a woman leader, she served on the Village Committee, School Committee, Village Fund Committee, etc. And in any community events or gatherings, all the villagers knew that if Tipsuchon took the lead in the kitchen, things would come out perfectly for the guests.

After her graduation from the College of Agriculture and Technology in Krabi town, Tipsuchon got married and went to live in the same village where she was born. She raised her three kids, and managed the plantation work. Once her personal life had been settled, she began to become more and more interested in entering politics.

Although Tipsuchon's father was an ex-village head, he did not like his daughter to become too involved in politics as it required both time and money to attain office as well as to sustain the position. Her husband, on the other hand, encouraged her to stand for election. He, including other villagers, believed that her qualifications, either in terms of her education or social connections, outshone those of the other male candidates. When she had made a decision to run, her father finally came around and lent her his full support.

Having been elected to office, Tipsuchon faced a lot of difficulties in performing the work she was expected to do. Even though it was not easy to find money to fund a project, it was even more difficult to get through all the red tape involved in the administrative process. Most SAO members faced the same problems

so they needed to rely on SAO officials to launch any projects. During her three and a half years in service, Tipsuchon felt the urge to learn more about public administration as she deemed it the key, in the long run, to her political advancement.

Sirima Hiranruji (38) ran for election as a PAO member with the support of a leading political party. She was approached by a senior politician in her district as he saw her capabilities in dealing with different stakeholders, such as local entrepreneurs, vocational groups, women's groups, etc. More importantly, the party preferred to have more women in their team of candidates.

Sirima's father was a retired district officer who was rather powerful in the eyes of most villagers. At a young age, Sirima was a tomboy who always hung out with groups of boys. Thus, she had many good friends from childhood who were of tremendous help to her during the election campaign.

Sirima put a lot of effort into presenting herself to the public. Her election constituency was vast, covering 45,000 rai (72.23 square kilometers), so she needed to spend months visiting villagers in each and every household in her voting area. She also learned to give speeches with her team from a truck while wandering to places in the district, giving her extraordinary experience in public speaking.

Sirima's candidacy was well received by the people. As a woman candidate, she was challenged by so many rumors, especially those related to her personal life. Sirima was a widow, and it was on this point that her opponents always used to attack her during campaign time. Above all, a few days before the election, vote buying pervasive in the area. Consequently, in spite of the positive feedback from voters regarding her candidacy, Sirima realized that the possibility of her winning was slight.

As it turned out, Sirima finally lost in the election; nonetheless, her political ambitions were far from extinguished. She still keeps up the good work in her constituency in order to prepare for the next election. By that time, Sirima believed that she would have had enough experience and resources to compete with other candidates.

These are profiles of some prominent women participating in the focus group sessions. General information on all the 24 participants can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Information of the Women Participating in Focus Group Dialogue

Date	Name	Age (years)	Marital Status	Tenure in Politics	Position in Politics	Sub-district	District
9 th August 2008	Lamai Jaikleang	47	Married	3 months	Village Head	Pelah	Klongthom
	Yupin Thongtao	50	Married	8 years	SAO Member	Klongthomtai	Klongthom
	Warissara Jeulaong	33	Divorced	4 months	SAO Member	Klongpon	Klongthom
	Jinda Kaewtawee	38	Married	1 year	SAO Member	Klongthomtai	Klongthom
	Jurairat Aunno	44	Married	4 years	SAO Member	Lumtab	Lumtab
	Karnjana Srisongkram	44	Widow	8 years	SAO Member	Pelah	Klongthom
	Saovanit Buaket	51	Married	1 year	SAO Member	Kaopanom	Kaopanom
8 th November 2008	Yupayao Jitrak	46	Divorced	3 years	SAO Member	Pakasai	Nuaklong
	Ubol Chaisri	46	Married	12 years	SAO Member	Toongsaithong	Lumtab
	Somjit Promsiri	46	Married	4 years	SAO Member	Pelah	Klongthom
	Pairat Plupong	42	Married	4 years	SAO Member	Ao Luek Tai	Ao Luek
	Sukanya Promtansud	31	Married	1 year	Municipality Member	Lamsak	Ao Luek
	Siriporn Makchum	44	Married	5 years	Municipality Member	Lamsak	Ao Luek

Table 4.1 (Continued)

Date	Name	Age (years)	Marital Status	Tenure in Politics	Position in Politics	Sub-district	District
21 st February 2009	Nuannij Kerdsup	33	Married	3 years	SAO Member	Kokyang	Nuaklong
	Sopida Chaichangwat	53	Divorced	8 years	SAO Member	Prutiew	Kaopanom
	Rattiya Kaewsen	38	Married	3 years	SAO Member	Kokyang	Nuaklong
	Niam Srichai	52	Married	2 years	SAO Member	Din-Udom	Lumtab
	Wassana Buakaew	33	Married	1 year	SAO Chief Executive	Toongsaitong	Lumtab
	Sirima Hiranruji	38	Divorced	---	Ex-candidate for PAO	Kaodin	Kaopanom
16 th May 2009	Tipsuchon Boonchuai	40	Married	3 years	SAO Member	Pelah	Klongthom
	Vilai Meesuk	42	Married	4 years	SAO Member	Kiriwong	Plaipraya
	Supawadee Petchruentong	35	Married	8 years	SAO Member	Pelah	Klongthom
	Thitiya Mayam	49	Married	2 years	Municipality Member	Nuaklong	Nuaklong
	Supatra Doeiprakob	35	Married	2 years	Municipality Member	Nuaklong	Nuaklong

4.3 Political Learning

To understand how women politicians learn about politics, it is important to understand three factors: 1) From whom did they learn? 2) When did the learning take place? and 3) How did they learn? From the study, it appeared that women from different backgrounds learn about politics through different means.

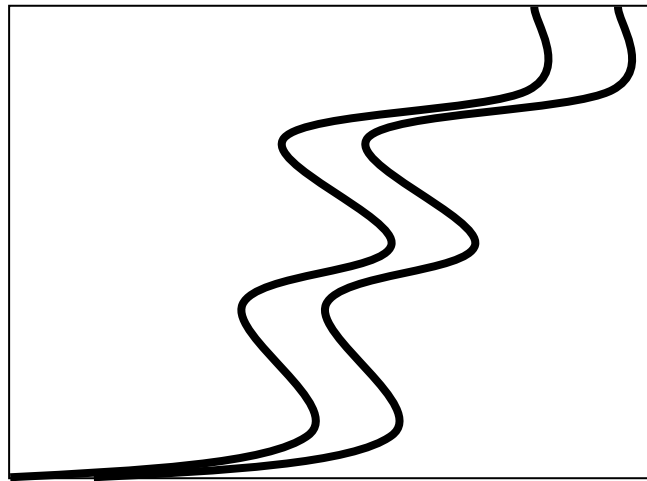


Figure 4.1 Symbol for Winding Political Terrain

Most women politicians in the focus group revealed that they learned about politics mostly through their families. About half of the women participating in the focus groups have family members who were either politicians or involved in politics. They reported that they saw and helped their father or husband with the latter's political duties. Basically, therefore, the women learned about politics from direct observation of the political activities that transpired within their families.

Pairat Plupong (2008) recalled the reason why she and her siblings started to take an interest in politics, and how politics became a part of her life since her childhood years.

I grew up in a politician's family. My grandfathers from sides, my dad and my uncles were all politicians. At present, my dad and big brother are SAO members, my younger brother is a village head, and even my

younger sister is an assistant to the village head. You could say that politics is in our blood. We live with it and it's become a part of our family ritual.

Likewise, Supawadee was also a woman politician who had constantly helped her father with his community work as village headman. From observation to hands-on experience in helping her father in dealing with the villagers' issues, she felt that it was also her responsibility to respond to the villagers' requests. In this regard, Supawadee Petchruentong (2009) stated the following:

I remembered that there were always people who came to my house for various reasons. When I was younger, I just listened to the grown-ups talk but when I got older, I sometimes helped them write official letters and so forth. I didn't see politics as a difficult thing.

Sopida Chaichangwat (2009), however, began to learn about politics in the later stages of her life. Sopida was married and owned a small beauty salon in her village. She said that she did not know much about politics until her husband ran for the position of Village Head.

When my husband wanted to run in the election for village head, he asked me to support him by participating more actively in community events. After he got elected, I also had my own position as village health centre volunteer and president of the local women's group. Later on, my husband was elected Kamnan, so since then I've carried on the role and responsibilities as a Kamnan's wife. I think that's how I've learned about politics.

The three cases illustrated above are common phenomena for many local women leaders who gradually take to politics as a part of their social activities. As a daughter or a wife of a politician, the women intuitively develop the ability to relate to

different people, to establish their own networks, as well as to form their leadership qualities within the established political circle of their father or their husband.

Nonetheless, there are also a few women politicians who reported that they learned about politics from their activist mothers. Yupayao Jittrak (2008), for instance, indicated that she grew up seeing her mother working as a prominent leader of women's groups in the district. At the same time, her mother was one of the most active supporters of a political party. In her own words:

After my father passed away, my mother spent a lot of time doing community work. Since a very young age, I have always admired what she did for others, so I also did my best to help her. When she went to attend meetings, I was often brought along to sit in the back row. And in every election for MP, my mother would ask me to distribute a candidate's flyers at school.

Up to this point, the information shows that women like Yupayao and her mother learned about politics from social activities. Once their social roles came to the notice of others, they would be approached by higher-level politicians to help out, especially during elections.

Yupayao's case was largely supported by the stories of many of the other participants whose political paths were built upon their leadership in women's groups. As mentioned by Sopida Chaichangwat (2009), a senior local politician:

Being leaders of the women group exposes us to the world outside our homes. From having to sit around within the house, now we are given the chance to represent our groups at various meetings and discussions. We get to learn more about government and politics, getting to know important people like the MPs, the Chairmen of PAO's, etc. Once we've worked long enough, we discover that politics is not as intimidating as we feared.

Nevertheless, there are also a few women who became politicians without much knowledge about politics at all. Some said that they entered politics by chance, or with the support of others. Thus, they started to learn about politics after they assumed political positions.

4.4 Conception of Politics

In order to understand the situation and the conditions of women in local politics, it is imperative to understand how women make sense of politics in general, and particularly the local politics in which they are participating. This is because their conception and definition of politics ultimately indicate their political roles and functions in their respective social settings.

Their conception of politicians, nonetheless, could not be separated from the local concept of politics as perceived by people in the community. Since politics is a culture-bound notion as well as a social construct, it is not defined by politicians or villagers alone, but is basically developed upon underlying patron-client values, whereby the interactions between patrons and clients determine the role and status of each party.

From the dialogues with women politicians in Krabi, it was found that the women conceived politics on two levels—politics as a stand-alone idea of power and governance; and local politics as a social mechanism for maintaining the relationship between politicians and villagers.

Once the question “what is politics?” was brought up for women politicians to clarify according to their own understanding of the term, they mostly took politics to be the **“power and authority to organize or manage public goods by politicians and political parties”**. In detail, they elaborated that politics concerned **“competition for power to lead the people, to allocate the resources, and to develop the communities.”** As the power was derived from the **“organized actions of leaders for interests of their own family clans, affiliate groups or political parties,”** if the leaders are good, the interests will be distributed or shared to the public; but if they are bad, people will gain nothing from politics. From their general

perspectives, the notion of politics relates more to the will and actions of people in power, while the roles and assertion of ordinary villagers were spelled out as electoral voters and passive beneficiaries.

However, when the question was shifted to the conception of “local politics they personally experienced as politicians”, the answers became more various and were more of a reflection of the relationship patterns and power dynamism, which can be categorized in reference to how they perceived politics from three points of view — as a mission, as social status, and as power.

4.4.1 Politics as a Service-Providing Mission

“As for me, politics is all about giving, and providing so that you can give”, said Thitiya, a member of the municipal administration, when asked to give the most suitable meaning of politics, in accordance with her personal experience in local politics. Similar to Thitiya’s account, most women politicians, both within and across the focus groups, perceive local politics as the responsibilities of leaders to give to or to help the villagers in terms of time, talent or treasures. In their view, the scope of political work transcends the official duties their titles imply. Political status means more than performing well in the administrative institutions in which they take part, but also includes their personal devotion to respond to the needs of individual villagers in many respects, as well as to support a series of community activities. In the focus groups, all women leaders expressed the fact that they serve their people through a variety of political service, as described below.

4.4.1.1 To Participate in and to Support Social Ceremonies and Community Events

All women politicians emphasized that attending and helping out in familial ceremonies such as funerals, weddings, and religious rites and supporting the communities’ social and cultural rituals, or events, were the most critical and fundamental duties of all local politicians. These events included typical ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and ordination ceremonies, all of which occur quite frequently. Besides this, there are seasonal occasions such as farewell parties for those going off to join the military during the month of April. Within the same month, there are baby showers and baby circumcisions that local politicians are

expected to support and help to facilitate. Another important event, one that all participants deemed the most costly, is the sponsoring of village sporting matches. Some of them mentioned that they usually allotted their own money, amounting to ten to twenty thousand baht a year, to support the purchase of uniforms for the various teams' athletes. These social expenses are so high that it causes them a lot of stress. As Sopida Chaichangwat (2009) stated:

These favors or support for the community cannot be avoided. During the first year, I was keeping detailed accounts of all related expenditures, but now I have stopped doing that. The simple reason is that the total amount was so high that it was shocking; and the fact was that recording and knowing the exact values gave me nothing but more stress.

While supporting community activities is a way to reemphasize a politician's visibility and leadership roles in the constituency, presenting and assisting familial ceremonies are ways to reinforce personal bondages with local villagers. Besides monetary assistance, extra effort such as helping out in the kitchen, arranging tables or mastering the ceremony are deemed important means of showing a politicians' gratitude to the villagers who elected them as leaders. Above all, villagers regard this assistance as an honor, which if absent could lead to dissatisfaction or even disruptive relationships with the family system. Word of mouth from one villager may affect a politician's popularity as well. In one focus group, Vilai Meesuk (2009) stated the following:

I will argue with anyone who says that it's not important to attend social events within the community. No matter how hard you've worked or how much good you've contributed, if there are people going around saying, "Don't vote for her because when my father died, she didn't even show up," more and more people will be influenced. They will start thinking, "if my father dies one day, she might not come either". And this can be a detrimental rumor at the next election.

All women politicians in all groups agreed that one core objective of political work was to return “something” to villagers who had elected them. They all felt indebted for being chosen by the villagers to be in leadership positions. In this light, a political position is regarded as a reward for someone who has continuously served the community prior to an election, as Karnjana Srisongkram (2008) said:

The people have chosen us and we have to consider ourselves as owing them something, because if they did not vote for us, then we would not have had the chance to be where we are now. Therefore, attending such events, offering support, or giving financial assistance is considered a minor form of payback that a politician must carry out.

Though helping fellow villagers in familial ceremonies or serving in communal social events are what the women did even before becoming politicians, once elected, they are expected to serve more and devote more time and money. “Before being elected I usually put in a one-hundred-baht bill, but now that I am a politician, I must put in at least three bills. Otherwise they will gossip and label me as being stingy”, said Supatra. However, she further added that the amount a woman politician is expected to pay is less than that of their male counterparts. In this regard, Supatra Doeiprakob (2009) mentioned the different expectation of villagers towards male and female politicians:

Though we are named leaders, we are still expected to help out in the kitchen, and do other women’s tasks, ranging from preparing food, serving drinks, to tending to guests. Meanwhile, male politicians can simply join in, have a few drinks, and mingle with the guests in the most visible spot. And this would be enough for him to be considered as honoring the host of the party.

In sum, it is interesting to learn that the types of services a local politician, whether male or female, offers are not limited to their roles in the political organization they serve. In addition, despite their leadership titles, female politicians

still perform, and indeed are expected to perform, the traditional duties of a woman as part of their political service too.

4.4.1.2 To Process and Accelerate the Development of Infrastructure

Many woman politicians participating in this study reported that they became a politician because they wanted their communities to have better development infrastructures, such as roads, waterworks, or electricity. However, they later found that in order to meet such objectives, they could not rely solely on local government, not only because of its limited budget, but also because of their limited political power to fight for the projects. As Niam Srichai (2009) explained:

If we rely solely on the budget from the SAO, then perhaps the villagers will pass away well before they get to see a paved road. If SAO members want to get things done, we usually have to seek support from outside sources, such as MP budgets, or PAO budgets. Or else, we need to follow up on what's already been listed in the central budgetary plan and help accelerate the proceedings. These are ways to make a significant contribution to development projects that benefit local villagers.

Thus, to fulfill this development mission, local women politicians require connections with external sources of power such as provincial or national politicians, government officials, or business people. Lamai, the female village head, revealed that she attached great importance to establishing connections. "Development budgets are floating around in the air, but only those with the right links and alliances can attract the money and turn it into tangible projects in the community," she said. Others agreed with this statement. One of them concluded that a local politician cannot deliver development services in an effective manner if he or she dares not to go out of the shell to seek external help or advice outside their small political circle in which local competition for development projects is higher, political games more burdensome, while budgetary resources are more limited.

4.4.1.3 To Help Those in Trouble or in Need

This type of service is another routine role for local politicians. It revolves around issues like bailing out someone from jail, finding connections within the government, helping someone to get a job, helping villagers if there is a water shortage or electricity outage, etc. To them, this is a 24-hour task with no office hours or days off.

“The home of an ideal politician must be like a 7-11 convenience store. When someone drops by or calls to ask for help, we must stop what we’re doing to help them first,” a participant gave an analogy of how villagers expect the provision of an around-the-clock and multi-purpose service from their leaders. Again, without pulling strings or connections, it is difficult for a local politician to be responsive to such demands by villagers.

However, Karnjana Srisongkram (2008) raised an interesting case that signified the villagers’ dependence on their leaders, even with regard to trivial matters that they should be able to solve by themselves. In her own words:

I was washing my hair when the electricity cut out one night. Then, I heard a phone call to my mobile so I rushed out of the bathroom to answer the phone. It was from a villager asking me to call the Electricity Authority to report the problem. Well, while dialing the electricity authority with shampoo in my eyes and face, I truly wondered why the person decided to call me, instead of calling the department himself. I would understand if he did it because he did not have their number. But in this case, he was the one who gave that contact number to me as well. It’s that strange.

Many more stories were shared on this topic. In all, they assumed that most villagers felt uncomfortable in dealing with state authorities of all forms, so their elected representatives are usually expected to be intermediaries in voicing their problems or needs to the relevant officials.

4.4.2 Politics as Social Status

It is noticeable that once one has become a politician, the title will be with that person always. Village Head, Kamnan, CE, MP, for instance, even after they are no longer in those positions, are still referred to by those titles. The privilege remains with those persons, just like doctors or teachers. Being a politician has made me very proud. It is also an honor to my family name.

The above statement, made by Niam Srichai (2009), one of the two female village heads in Krabi, implies a social norm that underlines the superior status of local politicians within their respective communities. Once the individual gets elected to their titled positions, they suddenly become “somebody” in the community, regardless of their family backgrounds, economic status, or educational attainments. With one’s political title, his or her personal and family status was believed to be simultaneously elevated. Jinda Kaewtawee (2008) also explained how her political status uplifted her sense of pride and self-esteem in the following terms:

Before this, I wouldn’t have had the right to sit in the front row. But politics has given me this honor. Whichever event I go to, people announce my presence, invite me to speak on stage. When I go to meetings, I get to sit at the same table as the governor.

It is possible that since the of status women has long been subordinate to that of men, the attainment of a political position signifies their extraordinary qualities, yet at the same time highlights their non-traditional achievements. From this research, it was found that about half of the women had experienced various kinds of inferiority at certain periods of their lives. Some of them were widows, some had a traumatic childhood, or some did not finish even their primary education due to their family being poor. These women illustrated a strong drive to serve in return for the votes granted to them by the people. They placed greater emphasis on how politics had changed their life or how much gratitude they had for those who had given them the

chance to come further than they had ever dreamed of. Presented below are more examples of their statements:

I never dreamed that I could come this far. I have very little education. I only finished Por 3 [third grade]. I still can't write very fluently, and I don't have that much money, just enough to keep myself going. The reason I ran for the election was due to the support of the villagers, because they saw that I always gave to the community and helped out in village events. Right now, everything in my life is better. After I entered politics, my financial status also improved. (Somjit Promsiri, Interview, 2008)

When I was a child, I was hit by my stepfather. I never thought the day would come when the villagers would choose me to be a leader. Politics has made me so happy. It is everything. Since I entered politics, my life has changed from back to front. (Jinda Kaewtawee, Interview, 2008)

My husband was Kamnan for a while, and then he left me and the children for a mistress who was only 18 years old, and drove me out of the house. This is one of the reasons why I'm not a Kamnan's wife, but actually, I am a politician in my own right, without relying on the merit of the Kamnan. I wanted to challenge him to a contest: while you only commit bad deeds, I'll only do good deeds. And we'll see who the villagers love more. (Sopida Chaichangwat, Interview, 2009)

These women, thereafter, regard politics as a means for self-actualization. Besides the pride derived from a job well done, they also value the social status which comes with their political titles.

On the other hand, a significant number of women politicians participating in the focus groups are from political families. They usually have better educational

backgrounds, family support, and are familiar with politics from what they observed from their parents, relatives, or husband.

This group of woman tends to come from the upper strata of society and may not have experienced strong pressure or inferiority as much as the others in the first group had. Many of them pointed out that they entered politics to continue or supplement the political status of their families, as exemplified by the case of Supawadee Petchrueantong (2009) and Wassana Buakaew (2009) respectively, whose observations are presented as follows:

My dad was a Village Head. When he retired, my brothers and sisters encouraged me to run for the SAO, but back then I was young and I failed in the election. I had another chance when the previous village head passed away months ago, so my family asked me to give it a try. This time I won and have been Village Head for three months now. I think villagers voted for me because they respect my father and the merit also got passed on to me. So, I am proud of that and realize that I also have a responsibility to maintain my family's credibility. (Supawadee Petchrueantong , Interview, 2009)

My cousin, the previous CE, was shot dead, so other relatives asked me to run to replace him because my younger brother, who was the secretary to the previous CE, was too young. They commented that I had a university degree, which was an advantage, so I should run instead of my brother, who would bide his time. Then, I was just back from Bangkok and knew very little about the locals. Fortunately, all my relatives gave me advice and helped me with the election. I can say that I basically learned about politics after I assumed the position of CE. I learned on the job. (Wassana Buakaew, Interview, 2009)

In sum, although the two groups of women seemed to enter politics by different means and with different goals, it is still worth mentioning that social status

was an influential factor that drove them, either directly or indirectly, into the world of politics.

4.4.3 Politics as Power

Last but not least, the participants echoed similar views on politics with regard to the fact that it definitely concerned their perception, acquisition and manifestation of power.

4.4.3.1 Perception of Power

Most of the women, especially the SAO members, reflected that their representative role in the SAO was rather limited as the administrative decisions depended mostly on the executive board. Consequently, many of them mentioned that **political power itself is less important than the social power derived from a political title, which implies public approval for them to take up leadership positions.**

It is my understanding that it is “social power”, not “political power”, that is their true means of exerting an impact on the community’s development. Simply put, the political title achieved reflects one’s social status. Social status gives rise to social power, a crucial element in enabling politicians to carry out their political commitments to the communities they serve.

4.4.3.2 Acquisition of Power

To be entitled to become a politician, the women perceived that the most difficult part was their decision to run. Entering the political field required strong determination, since the challenges a woman has to face not only involved competing with other candidates, but also settling the matter with their family members, as well as overcoming the traditional gender bias of some voters.

Even for a woman like Wassana-- Krabi’s first and only Chief Executive of the SAO-- who had the solid support of family clans and had an advantage over other competitors, entering politics was not an easy decision for a woman to make. She also needed to consider and reconsider the tradeoffs of maintaining her normal simple life versus becoming a public figure that is subject to criticism of all sorts. As Wassana Buakaew (2009) recounted:

Women who want to become politicians have to examine their readiness from all aspects, and have to have thick skins too. It means your own readiness, your family's readiness, and the readiness of those close to you too. Most importantly, you have to be a fighter, because it's difficult from the very beginning. You have to overcome all sorts of negativity; for example in my case, my opponents would go around saying it felt undignified having to compete with a "little girl".

Moreover, once the decision was made, some women revealed that they really feared losing the election. Unlike the male candidates, the women realized that their attempt to cross the border into a male domain would thrust them into the public eye. Karnjana Srisongkram (2008) recalled that to her, the fear of losing was a key stimulus during her first election:

If I lost, people would say it served me right, and it was my fault for not being happy with what I had. They'd say I was a widow who didn't know how to stay at home and take care of my children. I was scared of hearing these words, and I told myself that if I ran in the election, I had to go full steam ahead because if I lost, the person who would be the most ashamed would be me. Men, or even women, would talk behind my back and say I didn't know my place.

Despite the fact that Wassana and Karnjana are from different family backgrounds, currently serving in different political positions, have different personality traits and have been socialized in different political environments, they shared a common problem of local women politician. They are up against **the social gender norm that women should not want to acquire a power within the political battlefield**, which is generally earmarked as male territory.

4.4.3.3 Manifestation of Power

As elected politicians, some women leaders confessed that they were very concerned about how their political role and status are evaluated or criticized by their peers. Nuannij Kerdsup (2009) reflected that:

If you're a woman and you've been elected, and you act too big for your boots, you'll be criticized by the villagers immediately. If a newly elected female politician wears a new pair of gold earrings or a prettier costume, some villager will say: See., she's only been a politician for a while and already she's starting to show off.

Many women politicians echoed the same view, namely that they needed to act "down to earth" as much as possible because that was what villagers expected of them. Accordingly, most women leaders still need to reemphasize their feminine role, for example by helping out in the kitchen at every social event or by being responsive to villagers' personal requests. Bound by the traditional gender role dichotomy, women politicians understand that by playing down their power, their credibility as a politician increases.

On the contrary, male local politicians seemed to express their power in a different fashion. "One of the very first things they did was to buy a sleek black blazer and a gold color ball-pen", a participant noted. This is the uniform image of local male politicians. Despite the hot and humid weather, they usually wear "two-layered tops"-- a blazer or a jacket over a shirt.

Besides their appearances, their leadership was also manifested in different ways. Ubol Chaisri (2008) pointed out the following:

Women politicians normally identify themselves with serving and coordinating roles behind the scenes like one of the hosts. But when male politicians attend the same party or event, they usually identify themselves with one of the honored guests-- sitting in the front row to meet and greet other guests, singing a song or giving a speech on stage. The longer they spend at the party, the more honored and grateful the host would be.

From the dialogue on this topic, it can be concluded that both male and female politicians tend to manifest their political power in accordance with people's different expectations towards the traditional gender roles they subscribe to. Given

the cultural local context, women politicians choose to minimize the power gap between themselves and the people they represent in order to create an informal and lateral relationship, which in turn enhances their political credibility. Male politicians, on the other hand, tend to highlight their political status when relating to villagers. Political power is thus manifested through their traditional leadership image, with the social superiority this implies, but in a way that emphasizes their respectfulness or trustworthiness qualities.

It is interesting that this finding complies with one of the interviews with a group of villagers concerning the definition of “Phu-Num-Sa-Tri”, which means “Woman Leader” in Thai. The majority of the people I talked to, revealed that to them the term conveyed the meaning of “a woman who leads other women”, rather than “a leader who is a woman” or “a woman who leads a community”.

Overall, it may be concluded that **people in local communities generally judge or evaluate women politicians by different criteria from those used for their male counterparts. They expect women politicians to serve and to support them. On the contrary, they expect male politicians to lead, and to be in the forefront. Therefore, even though both are elected by popular vote, male and female politicians derive their power by different means, as well as manifest those powers in different manners.**

4.5 Motivation to Enter Politics

Women are motivated to enter politics for many reasons. Some were motivated by personal drive, such as dissatisfaction with current local politicians, wanting to use their capabilities to develop their hometown, or wanting to attain leadership titles. However, some women reflected on motivating factors external to themselves, for instance, to highlight their family’s prestige, to counteract offensive remarks, or to capitalize on their opportunities for winning an election.

It is important to note that these factors are somehow intertwined and that each woman may have more than one motive for entering politics. For instance, most women reported that their general goal in entering politics was because they wanted

to do something to improve the livelihood of their communities. However, after a short dialogue, many other factors arose, either in a direct or indirect way. The following factors are organized to reflect the different dimensions to the issues, using the participants' own statements to exemplify each point. The first two reasons are explicit while the rest are more implicit in nature.

4.5.1 Wanting to Do Something Worthwhile for the Community

It is significant that most women politicians enter politics because they feel that it is a way to make a difference in the community in which they live.

Thitiya spoke of the reason she ran for politics in the following terms: "I was a teacher in Bangkok. When I came to live at home in Pelah, I saw that people in my hometown were troubled and needed many things. I felt like I had a good education, so I should be able to help them to have a better life." Then there was Yupayao Jittrak (2008), who made the following comments:

I've been working in the community for a long time, having received training in so many things. So I thought if I could get in, I would push for a lot of things to be better, like drugs or gambling, which are really serious problems, but politicians don't want to tackle these things.

Yet, as I discussed earlier, the reason is expressed in broad terms, which could be a clichéd answer for all. For instance, it accounts for educated women who returned home and felt that they should use their capabilities to improve their communities, women from better-off family backgrounds with political connections, or community activists who saw room for development opportunities.

4.5.2 Dissatisfaction with Local Politicians

Many participants said that the most important reason they decided to run for political office was because of the ineffectiveness, unfairness, incompetence, or unresponsiveness of dominant politicians. These women, regardless of their political positions or localities, were usually those who had been in leadership, managerial, or

social positions, such as leaders of women's groups, heads of vocational groups, or Village Health Volunteers. Their reasons could be captured in the statements such as the following:

The previous village head that died had served for 17 years, but he was never here. He gambled on cock-fighting, bull fighting. The villagers pitied the fact that that the village lacked any opportunities. Having a village head was like not having one. There was no one who could give them advice. (Lamai Jaikleang, Interview, 2008)

I want to make the village better than it is, especially the roads, which are so inconvenient. Even though the villagers have motorcycles, they can't ride them, and have to push them around instead because of the big potholes in the road. No one will fix this problem. (Ubol Chaisri, Interview, 2008)

If I didn't do this, my hometown would never get developed. Whatever projects there are, they put them around their own homes. Even money for the seniors, they give it away to their own relatives. (Karnjana Srisongkram, Interview, 2008)

I have to say I supported the wrong person in the last election. When we were campaigning, I put all my effort into getting him votes. But when that person became an SAO member, he didn't do anything. He just sat there collecting his pay cheque. I was really disappointed. (Yupayao Jitrak, Interview, 2008)

Politics is about the system of cronyism. If you are not their crony, they will overlook you. So I decided to run. I am ready for whatever happens. (Sopida Chaichangwat, Interview, 2009)

In general, these statements signify the women's noncompliant response to the political leadership in their local settings. The participants felt that their voices would not be heard or their demands would not be accounted for unless they directly took part in politics as political players. As in the previous account, this point was explicitly discussed in every focus group.

4.5.3 Inclination for Social Prestige

Social prestige is another motive for a person to seek political positions, one that was widely mentioned in each dialogue group. Many participants admitted that a political position could fulfill their dream. At a young age, some women wished to be government officials, but due to family difficulties, they could not fulfill their childhood dreams. They revealed that leadership titles as well as government uniforms are symbols of pride and prestige. In their own words:

Since I was a child, I'd always wanted to be a soldier. I wanted to wear a uniform. I wanted to serve as a government official. Khaki is the color of government. If I were not in this position, I would never get to wear that color, or even to touch it, or even to hang it in my wardrobe. It gives me such a sense of pride every time I see it. (Karnjana Srisongkram, Interview, 2008)

Whenever I look back to the day when I wore white and was in audience with His Majesty, it brings tears to my eyes. I can guarantee that all female politicians are like this. Competing as if your life depended on it so that you get that feeling. (Ubol Chaisri, Interview, 2008)

The points they raised mirror the idea that politics represents one's social prestige. Though this factor alone was not their entire reason for becoming politicians, it could be a personal value that motivated them to enter politics in the first place.

4.5.4 Family Influence

Some participants entered politics because of the influence exerted by their family rather than their own preference to become a politician. The women saw that becoming a politician was a way to show their gratitude to their parents- by fulfilling their political wishes, as illustrated in the statements below:

My father worked for the electrical authority. He was widely known and well-respected by the villagers. Back then, the SAO had just finished its term. I'd just graduated and didn't have a job yet, so my father told me to run for in the election for membership in the SAO. I didn't have to do anything. He organized all the campaigns. He said he wanted his kid to be a leader. It would give him 'face' as well. (Rattiya Kaewsen, Interview, 2009)

Actually, I don't love politics, but I ran for my father. My father was a Kamnan. He said if I were a member of the SAO, it would make his work easier. When I ran, my father helped me until I won. I'll probably stay in politics until he retires, and then I might get my brothers and sisters or other relatives to run in my place. (Supawadee Petchreuntong, Interview, 2009)

It is likely that the two participants themselves did not yearn for positions of political power. However, as good daughters, they felt an obligation to assume responsibility for their family's good name, so that the social capital accumulated by their parents would not be wasted.

4.5.5 Capitalizing on the Opportunity to Win

As women often feared election time, they were reluctant to run for politics. Nevertheless, there were some who happened to have contingency factors that allowed them to attract votes or get support from local electorates. These women may not be very fond of politics, but once they saw the possibility of winning, they were ultimately motivated to take chances. As Jinda Kaewtawee (2008), a friendly

merchant who was unsuspectingly attracted into being a political candidate, expressed it:

I was asked to join the team because I have a lot of relatives and don't really have enemies. So I didn't have many problems campaigning for votes. Plus, that area is a military base, and I know them all because the soldier's wives are all my customers. I was pretty sure I was going to win, so I ran for election.

Because of Jinda's social affiliations and network, veteran politicians often see the benefit of having her on their team in order to gain extra electoral support from her voter base. There are other cases similar to that of Jinda's, which will also be discussed in the next section concerning women's roles and functions in politics.

4.6 Political Roles and Functions

Another crucial topic discussed in the forums concerns women's roles and functions as local politicians. The participants' answers encompassed both manifested as well as latent roles. Presumably, however, since one person can fulfill more than one role, this section tries to distinguish the different roles and functions women play as follows:

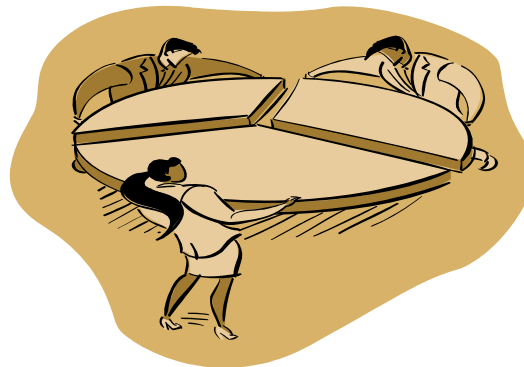


Figure 4.2 Symbol of a Woman's Roles in Politics

4.6.1 The Speaker

I was often asked by my male colleagues to speak for them, especially on serious or controversial matters. For instance, when opposition councilors had to confront the CE in meetings, they often handed the job to me. They reasoned that he (the CE) would not react too violently towards me because I am a woman. (Yupin Thongtao, Interview, 2008)

Yupin's statement indicated that a woman politician sometimes has to function as a speaker for the group, particularly if she is experienced and well-respected as a speaker. Yupin also explained that political situations in her sub-district were very intense as the executive board and council members were strongly opposed to each other. "The CE used to say that if I were a man, he would never spare me", she added.

4.6.2 The Advisor

Compared to male politicians, who usually paid more attention to securing their popularity by attending social events, women politicians also spared extra time for self-improvement by attending a series of seminars and training courses. Therefore, they gradually built up their knowledge, as well as keeping up-to-date on information from the central government. This was illustrated in the case of Yupayao Jitrak (2008), who ultimately became the resource person for people in her communities as well as her fellow politicians:

I am like an advisor in my community because I am wearing so many hats, so I am regularly invited to join seminars, meetings, and training courses. From these events, I have a better chance to get news and information from the outside. Well, I think participating in seminars is a good way to educate myself. I also meet a lot of good people from whom I could seek advice as well.

Like Yupayao, many women politicians agreed that they have learned a great deal from meetings of all sorts. They also pointed out that sometimes men are not patient enough to listen to lectures. “When attending seminars, they (the men) usually sit in the back rows so that they can easily get out of the room to smoke and to chat among themselves. They prefer to talk rather than to listen”, Jurairat mentioned when asked the reason their male colleagues are less informed compared to women.

4.6.3 The Lobbyist

All participants agreed that facilitating infrastructure development is deemed an important function of an effective politician. Some women proudly stated that their political success was derived from their attempt to strategically coordinate with different stakeholders involved in the process. As Karnjana Srisongkram (2008) mentioned:

It's not easy to put our concerns into practice unless we really know the rules of the game. I realize that as a member of the SAO, I don't have the authority to do much. I know that there are some discrepancies in the system. But in order to deliver our work, we sometimes need to close one eye and befriend everyone. We must know when to approach one person and by what means.

Karnjana maintained that she developed a good relationship with some SAO staff, contractors, and fellow politicians. She therefore gained insight into what was going on politically within the organization, which was a great help to her when carrying out her work agenda. Likewise, other participants supported the notion that it may not be wise for a woman to fight against all of the system, which needs incremental change. Consequently, in the end, women politicians could make an impact through bringing tangible projects to the communities they represented. Moreover, the accomplishment would not be possible without coordination with and support from others.

4.6.4 The Catalyst

Often, women politicians have a latent role as political catalysts with regard to their male counterparts once comparisons are made of their respective performances. In some communities, male politicians take their political power for granted, being less enthusiastic to serve. While women, as newcomers, usually put more emphasis on community service and attend more to people's needs. In this connection, men politicians, who for the most part felt in charge of their constituencies, began to see their leaderships challenged by the presence of women and were thus prompted to re-evaluate their political roles. This is exemplified by the following comment from Sopida Chaichangwat (2008):

A male politician, especially one who was in position for many terms, normally thinks that no one can beat him as long as he has solid backup. But since I entered politics, I have been working so hard to prove that a woman has abilities to do political work as well. Now many villagers began to blame his poor performance in the earlier years as they compared his work to mine. Well, I can say, he now works a lot harder than before.

Other participants asserted that sometimes they were not well liked by male colleagues because they did not comply with men's rules of the game. Nevertheless, once the women's work ethic began to be appreciated by villagers, male politicians also learned to adapt themselves in response to new expectations. As Karnjana Srisongkram (2008) concluded:

I think both men and women politicians want to do good things for the community. But some men were just too lazy, or some were complacent about their roles. Having effective women politicians in the team would pressure them to be more active, perhaps to prove that they are better at politics than are women. For whatever reason, it benefited the community in the long run.

4.6.5 The Nominee

Some participants openly stated that they entered politics on behalf of others. Wassana, for example, ran for election to the CE because of the sudden death of her cousin and because her younger brother, who was in fact positioned to take the seat, was not ready to take up the role. She was thus nominated by her family clans to occupy the seat for a term until the brother turns thirty in about four years, as Wassana Buakaew (2009) herself noted:

I think politics is a matter of opportunity. Sometimes, we are designated to attain a position for a certain period in order to smooth over or solve certain contingencies. If I had not run for CE last time, the seat would definitely have been occupied by others. So by the time my brother is ready to run, let's say in the next four years, he would have a slim chance to win over the incumbent.

Wassana's story signifies that a woman may be willing to take up political role for a while for the sake of her family. Her path into politics was well supported by the old power establishment, and her political role was facilitated by relatives, who were also stakeholders in the community. "The Tambon is very small. We are all quite united as a family. So I don't have difficulties dealing with my constituents, either villagers or SAO members. And my brother is also doing a good job of building up his own credibility," she concluded.

4.6.6 The Silent Partner

However, there were also some female political novices who mostly kept silent throughout the dialogue. It was rather noticeable that these women, despite their political titles, lacked the confidence to express their ideas or opinions. As exemplified by the expressions of Sukanya and Siriporn who were both elected members from the same municipality, however, the former seemed to be a political mentor of the latter.

When Sukanya was asked to share her personal political experiences, she replied, "I ran in the municipal election under a team led by the current mayor. I

think that basically people voted for the mayor and the whole team, so I received that merit.” She paused.

On other topics concerning their performance in local politics, Sukanya again entered silent mode. After the dialogue had gone on for a while, I asked her to share her views with the group, but she turned to Siriporn who was sitting next to her. “Just say whatever you want to”, Siriporn urged. At that point, Sukanya stated “I have nothing much to do as a politician. Most policies are created by the senior politicians. I attended meetings and voted in line with other teammates.”

Because Sukanya did not participate much in the group dialogue, Siriporn was compelled to cover most of the issues relevant to politics in their locality. After the session ended, Siriporn Makchum (2008) clarified the reason she called on Sukanya to join the team as follows:

We wanted more women candidates. Then, Sukanya’s mother had just passed on and people tended to have sympathy for her, so I saw her potential to benefit the team in term of votes. She purely got the sympathy vote because she was a well-behaved girl. Even though she was not very talented, the villagers took a liking to her and gave her the chance to have a job.

There were also other cases similar to that of Sukanya’s, which illustrated women’s subordinate roles in certain political settings. Focus group dialogue, however, is not an appropriate means of assessing the issue in depth.

4.7 Political Approaches and Outcomes

Many participants reported that they sometimes felt ‘powerless’ as a politician because many things that people expect from them were far beyond the scope of their authorities. “Decision-making on a project is largely centralized to the Chief Executive, so I cannot do much. Plus, SAO meetings are held only three times a year.

I don't think we can make a significant effect as an SAO member", said a woman SAO member.



Figure 4.3 Symbol of Approach to Politics (How to Balance Oneself on the Political Road).

In contrast, there were also many women politicians who acted more progressively to execute the power attached to their political status. To prove their leadership capabilities in carrying out development work, the women sought ways to attract external resources to their respective villages. Karnjana explained how she succeeded in bringing in a series of infrastructure development projects to her village, which have thus far helped secure her seat in the SAO for many terms. Karnjana's statement, as displayed below, sheds light on some of the outstanding qualities of a woman politician.

My method is to go full speed ahead. If you want the job, you have to be brave, because we're doing work for the villagers. **If I can ask for something, I will. I'm not scared of losing face.** When I was a member of the SAO, in my second term I accomplished so much. I got a road into the village by going to see the secretary of the PAO. I said that I was a second-term SAO member, and my villagers are in a lot of

difficulty due to the 8-kilometer mud road. I asked for support in making a concrete road, even if it was just for 1 kilometer. It turns out that they granted us 1.5 kilometers. The villagers were delighted. Also a lot of villages didn't have electricity because the electricity authorities would not connect the lines. **I asked around until I found someone who was related to the chief at the electricity authority.** Ten days later, they connected the power lines and **I took them to a huge dinner.** Three months later, the electricity in Moo 8 village was complete. Regarding water, there was a burst pipe when they were doing road construction, which meant there was no water for about a month for the villagers. The village head said he didn't know what to do because it wasn't in the plan. That was the time when the election for PAO was underway, so I decided to go and ask the CE again. I also got the budget for the metal pipes. When I got the stuff, **I got in and connected the pipes myself.** I called on a few male relatives to help and we finished it. Even though we are women, we have equal hands and feet. If other people can do it, so can we. So now the villagers say to me, whatever you position you run for, you're going to get my vote. Without you, I wouldn't have water to take a shower. (Karnjana Srisongkram, Interview, 2008)

Karnjana's approach is an example of how some effective female politicians sought to accomplish development projects in their communities, either through personal effort in coordinating with external budgetary resources, or through the establishment as well as deployment of personal connections. In addition, she also realized the importance of putting herself in the public spotlight. The image of a woman connecting water pipes side by side with men helps reinforce her image as the embodiment of leadership, which in the long run results in political advantages for her.

Another example is the case of Lamai, a newly elected Village Head who had been in that position for just three months. Lamai said that her first political

accomplishment concerned the construction of a security checkpoint in the village manned by volunteer night patrols. In her own words:

The budget for development projects that was allocated by the government totaled about 80,000 baht. The police station took 50,000 to handle the projects themselves, which left 34,070 baht over for the village head to build small security huts. The assistant said I could never do it on such a small amount of money, but I completed the work and the huts were really good quality. There wasn't enough money for a bathroom so **I contributed 14,000 baht of my own money**. The Sheriff said that I had a good head; I used things that were economical but of good quality, which meant the work turned out better than that of the others. Some people just use bricks and then cover it up with some roofing, he said. I told him, I can't do that. The villagers who are putting in their time to keep the community safe get nothing in return, so we should make the huts quite good. There should be a fan so they don't get bitten by mosquitoes, or at least if they want to go to the toilet, they don't have to walk into the grass and be at risk of getting bitten by a snake. **I think you have to put yourself into other people's shoes so that people who help with public work feel encouraged to do it.** (Lamai Jaikleang, Interview, 2008)

Lamai's case reflected a particular way of thinking of a woman politician, one that usually takes into account the concerns and wellbeing of others. Instead of completing a construction project within the scope of the budget, she focused on the real objective and usage of the security checkpoint, which needed to respond to the needs of village volunteers. From this perspective, her political work definitely reflects her female qualities, which value the quality of lives and relationships, as well as her careful use of the budget.

Nonetheless, due to time constraints, the political approaches of women politicians and their outcomes could not be fully covered in the dialogue groups. More in-depth information on the issues is presented in the case studies in Chapter 5.

4.8 Opportunities and Barriers of Women Politicians

Being women in politics entails both opportunities and barriers in carrying out their political work. This section tries to point out some significant issues which emerged during the dialogue forum.

4.8.1 The Positive Side of Tokenism

From the personal experiences of my participants, being a woman among men colleagues could subject them to the problem of discrimination or complete disregard. At the same time, however, their experiences reflected that for those women who positioned themselves wisely, with the requisite confidence, used their feminine intuition in a constructive way, or capitalized on their distinctiveness, being a political token could allow them to stand out from others and yet benefit from their political performance in both the short and long term.

In the dialogue groups, several women politicians revealed that they were not threatened or undermined by the number of men. In contrast, they saw that a woman must know how to present themselves by highlighting their roles as representatives, rather than being too yielding and submissive.

Being the only woman in a group of men, if you have the courage to speak up and act, you'll stand out from the others. When you want a project or you want something else, you have to find information that you can be sure of. But if you go in all timid and scared, that'll be the end of you. Confidence is important. Most men don't want to fight with women, but if you don't dare to speak up or to make an offer, they will completely ignore you. (Yupin Thongtao, Interview, 2008)

To this, women must first attain confidence in pursuing their course. And with this confidence, they may use their nontraditional presence in politics to capture the attention of those in power or those who could respond to their development requests. The point they raised goes somewhat against the old belief that women

politicians were usually treated as outsiders, making it difficult for them to connect to circles of power. Some of the women participants revealed that:

Women can approach seniors easily. Most of the time, when you go in to ask for help from the seniors in the province, whether it be MP's, Chief of the PAO, government officials or the police, you'll be treated with affection. Partly it's because they're in awe that you're just a woman, but you're putting yourself forward to help the villagers. This makes them see your importance and they want to help you, because they know that you're not doing it for your own personal benefit. (Niam Srichai, Interview, 2009)

When men approach the seniors, it takes a different form. You have to bring a gift in hand, you have to suck up; there must be a mediator to bring you in. Meanwhile, women can ask to meet them directly. They will be affectionate towards you if you just speak directly from your heart. There's no need for too much social protocol. (Sirima Hirunruji, Interview, 2009)

In addition, the participants also suggested that feminine attributes, if well utilized, would be of tremendous help in sustaining their standing in the political game. As a mother and a wife, some women politicians pointed out that they found it was not that difficult to understand their male counterparts. As Wassana Buakaew (2009) commented:

Women have better psychology than men. Raising children or taking care of our husbands, we can sense others' feelings and observe their behavior quickly. It's the same in politics. It's not difficult to see what a person wants and how we should respond in order to get what we want. If you really want to 'play' at politics, I think women can do it much better and more subtly than a man.

4.8.2 Obstacles for Women in Local Politics

“Obstacles are like waves in the ocean. They’re always coming. But I’ve chosen this path, so I can’t give up,” one participant stated. When asked about the factors they regarded as major obstacles in their political path— things or stories that hold them back or wear them down, the participants echoed a number of similar problems or issues they had been facing, as follows:

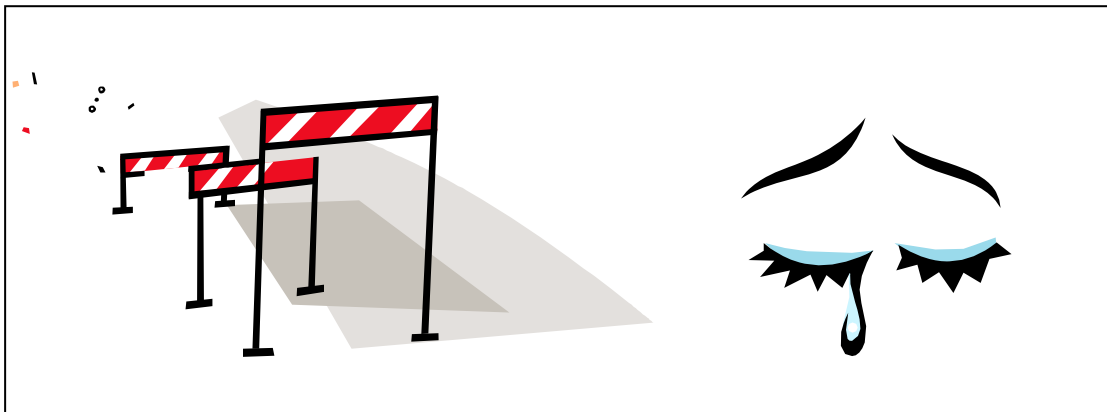


Figure 4.4 Symbols of Barriers or Discouraging Factors

4.8.2.1 Adultery Issues

From the four focus group dialogues, most participants asserted that for women in leadership positions, adultery was the most significant threat capable of undermining women’s credibility. As they stated in their own words:

The biggest barrier for women is adultery, because women usually stand out. When you go around with someone, you have to be careful. For example, if you have to get in the car to go somewhere with the mayor, the next day there’ll be rumors that that woman has been picked up by the mayor. (Siriporn Makchum, Interview, 2008)

Or

The villagers think that being a woman SAO you will be “gone”. You have to prove yourself that you’re not like that. No matter who approaches you and how, if you don’t play along, they will not succeed in getting their way. (Karnjana Srisongkram, Interview, 2008)

Rattiya Kaewsen (2009) gave the opinion that adultery had become a social issue in the locality, one that had noticeably increased. Moreover, because women in leadership positions are in the public limelight, they are more vulnerable to this sort of criticism. In her words:

For people over forty, having an affair is becoming a bit of fashion. I don’t know what’s wrong with society these days. It’s not just among politicians, it’s everywhere. But if you’re a politician, the sin is a lot more noticeable because you have to go places, meet people, and if you behave inappropriately, the villagers like to gossip about it more than they would about ordinary people’s stories.

“No matter whether you’re a man or woman, if you want your political life to go well, you mustn’t engage in adultery with your friends’ wives or husbands,” one added. However, it was rather apparent to me that adultery, or even the rumor of adultery, affected women leaders in a different manner than it did men. Adultery earned male politicians a certain degree of social disapproval, as it appears to distract them from their social work and thus affects their work performance. But in cases involving women leaders, people do not focus was on their work performance, but rather on their morality. Many women politicians have to deal with rumors and social sanctions in connection to accusations adultery, regardless of the work quality, or the facts behind the rumors.

4.8.2.2 Limited Political Knowledge and Experience

Women are usually new to politics. One problem resulting from their newness is that they have to struggle by themselves to obtain the necessary information or means to carry on their political works, as illustrated in the following statements:

There's no syllabus for politics. You have to use your experience and keep watching. But women who lack a thirst for information will never know what's going on in the process because SAO general meetings are held just three times a year. Some members of the SAO rarely step into the SAO office. Even the official letters baffle them, not to mention how to write a project proposal (Niam Srichai, Interview, 2009).

When I was a member of the SAO for the first time, it was like walking into a jungle, I couldn't see the way, I didn't know who to contact to get the job done because I had no experience. The work was so difficult. When I ran into an obstacle, I didn't know whom to ask. I had to find my way around and learn that if I wanted electricity, where I would have to go to get it. That's why I couldn't get too much done in my first term. (Ubol Chaisri, Interview, 2008)

The statements imply that many women politicians encountered difficulties in political territory unfamiliar to them. Moreover, there is no clear job description for local politicians, so most of them learn about politics through socialization and by instinct. Though the same problem may also occur among male politicians, it was assuaged by informal mentoring through their male network to which women have less chance to gain access.

4.8.2.3 Having to Uphold One's Leadership Image

Many participants reflected that to be a good leader, one must always maintain a good image of being solid and in control. Otherwise, they might be subject to criticism for being weak, and people often make a link between their expression of weakness and their female attributes.

Therefore, women politicians realized that they must not show their fragility, especially in times of personal crisis, as their leadership is put to the test. For instance, Karnjana told the following story about when her son passed away: "When my child died, I had to reserve the coffin myself, take care of the guests myself. I couldn't let anyone see me cry. I had to go and hide in my room to cry after all the

guests had gone.” Following Vilai, another participant supported the notion that it was necessary for a woman leader to be extraordinarily careful about expressing their emotions. “Women are emotional because of our hormones and many other factors. But if you want to be a credible leader, you should not allow others to point at you and say—see, she is no different from other women,” the person maintained.

4.8.2.4 Family Burden

Because most women politicians choose by themselves to enter politics, they usually have settled with how to manage their political and family lives. Thus, very few participants in the focus groups mentioned their family responsibilities as a political burden.



Figure 4.5 Symbol of Family Obligations

However, Ubol Chaisri (2008) was the only one who revealed that she chose to turn down an opportunity to enter politics because she did not want to compromise her responsibilities as a mother. In her own words:

CE asked me to run for the Vice position in the next term but I declined because my children were still small and the area was too wide for me to handle. Time management is an important thing. For me, I will not bite off more than I can chew. It was not because I am afraid of hard work, but I realized my limitation. If you’re a politician and you are

not good at organizing your personal affairs with your public affairs, when you make a mistake it becomes a big problem. It becomes a point where people can attack you for being a woman.

Another issue that could be discerned from the dialogue was that women usually do not expect their husband to help out with their political work. In many cases, they reported that if their husband did not stand in her way, that was considered good enough. As Yupin Thongtao (2008) stated:

My husband did not want me to run, but I was lucky that he did not force me not to. From the beginning, he laid down the rules: ‘No ultimatums, no arguing, but don’t expect my help’. He made it very clear.

Given this point of view, it was likely that a woman felt lucky to be permitted to take on a political role. Some of their reflections implied that married women who chose to enter politics felt indebted to their husband for allowing them to compromise their domestic roles at home; so they did not blame the husband for not helping with the campaign, or the housework, as they deemed it as a precondition for their political engagement anyhow.

4.8.2.5 Money Politics

One of the most widely mentioned burdens for women in pursuing their political path concerns money politics. They reported that money was an extremely detrimental factor, one that made politics unpredictable and unfavorable for women. Most of the participants agreed that “money is more threatening than a bully” as it corrupts people’s moral fiber from within. One compared the threat of money politics to that of local influence in the following terms:

In politics, women don’t have to fear a bully. There have been very rare cases of women candidate getting killed. If a male politician hurts a woman, villagers will definitely not accept it. But what is scary and what must be feared is the buying power of money, because in this

economy, money really can change people's hearts. And we also cannot blame them for that. (Sirima Hiranruji, Interview, 2009)



Figure 4.6 Symbol of Money Politics

In this regard, other participants commented that money also shaped new values for the villagers, who perceived money as the most tangible benefit they could get from politics, as implied in a widely heard phrase during election time--“without money, one doesn't know how to cast a vote”. The women leaders took this opportunity to express their feelings on this issue in the following manner:

The thing that really gets me down is the villager's way of thinking. In the first term, I worked hard and achieved tangible things, but in the second term, I had to put in the effort to campaign all over again. It's like doing good is not enough. At election time, it seemed like villagers forgot everything already. You have to wipe the board clean and start counting at one again, which can wear you down. (Karnjana Srisongkram, Interview, 2008)

In the focus groups, I decided not to raise the sensitive question of whether or not people's expectations of money compelled them to respond to such demands. The question is therefore further explored in the in-depth case study of Sunee in Chapter 5.

4.9 Making a Difference

One of the most questionable issues concerning women in politics is whether or not women's representation in politics could make a positive impact on the political bottom line. From the dialogues, there were some points made by the participants that illustrated their political outlook as well as their assertions or opinions regarding a variety of matters. Although the big question of women's contribution to politics cannot be fully answered, the opinions of different women leaders have shed light on some aspects of women's leadership that may have an impact on local politics in the long run.

Budget Allocation I found that women politicians, as political newcomers, have spotted some discrepancies in budgetary allocations or in the policy prioritization of local governments. One stated the following:

If you really get in there, you'll know that when they say they don't have the budget for this and that, it's not quite true. When I got in, I saw that they usually make up numbers. Like, in the budget every year there'll be an item on the budget for the housewife's fund for 100,000 baht, but this work never happens in the Tambon. When this money doesn't get used, at the end of the year they will put it in the central fund to go and do something else at their own free will. (Tipsuchon Boonchuai, Interview, 2009)

Having entered politics, many women found that they could make a difference by standing for women and voicing women's needs to decision makers. They began to see how administrative procedures have been manipulated to benefit some people more than others. Thus, as insiders, some female politicians could play a role in balancing the allocation of local budgets, making it more efficient.

Service orientation Women tend to emphasize the necessity to build close ties with villagers, through provision continued services to those in need. As illustrated in earlier sections, they positioned themselves as service providers in filling

the gap where their male counterparts failed to perform. Thus, most women believed that they were making a difference in politics by using their feminine strengths to serve others in their respective communities.

Reducing the atmosphere of political violence In areas where politics is frequently violent, having a woman in the political scene could help reduce conflicts or tensions. Siriporn Makchum (2008) offered the following opinion on the matter:

In a meeting where there is a woman, and where there is not, the former one will definitely be less aggressive. I may say that women presence could make the political environment better. This is because women will not tighten the knots in the tension, but they will loosen it naturally. Besides, men will feel guilty if they behave in a crass way towards women.

On the other hand, the participants pointed out that in confrontational situations women were often assigned by their male allies to be in the forefront, as earlier mentioned by Yupin, a senior SAO member.

The two incidents are somehow contradictory. The first incident indicated that women could use their compromising characteristics in assuaging political tension; while the second incident exemplified how some women were designated to act on men's behalf on sensitive issues. However, that was not because of the women were better at doing the job, but because it was assumed that men would not or should not react too aggressively to an opponent of the 'weaker sex'.

4.10 Gender Outlook

What are women politicians' attitudes towards other women? Do they act on women's behalf? How do they support other women wishing to enter politics? These questions were asked, both directly and indirectly, to get a sense of their gender outlook and how this was related to their roles as women politicians.

In general, it was found that the majority of the participants were of the view that they were not specifically representing women, but were speaking for both sexes. “We shouldn’t think that all men are evil. In any person there’s both good and bad. We have to work for the men and the women because we represent both sexes,” one participant stated.

In addition, they did not perceive gender inequality as an issue in their political context, as women and men seemed to gain equal benefits from any development projects.



Figure 4.7 Symbol of Women’s Roles in Families

However, when mentioning the matter of inequality, most women viewed as injustice the attitudes and practices in one’s household, where women tended to be bound by their domestic routines, so they had less chance to widen their world view or to improve themselves. Besides, for those who remain too isolated from others, their perspectives on other women usually turn out to be negative. This is captured in the following suggestion by Lamai Jaikleang (2008):

Women shouldn’t stay at home alone; they should get into a group, go out and find knowledge so that they do not become narrow-minded.

People who keep to themselves and don't go anywhere are usually jealous, gossipy, and worry too much. They should go out and do activities so that they realize their potential and stop their prejudice against other women.

Concerning the support women politicians provided for other women to enter politics, some women leaders reported that they were reluctant to persuade other female friends to embark upon a political path. The leaders reasoned that politics involved hard work and long-term commitment. Consequently, they felt that the initial decision to enter politics should come from the person's own assessment of her readiness, not from the persuasion or encouragement of others.

Vilai Meesuk (2009) further commented that if women leaders lend support to other women to enter politics, it could somehow backfire and end up undermining the leaders' credibility. As she illustrated:

The community is small, so it is hard to separate personal relationships from political affairs. If you declare that you are supporting this woman to run for the SAO, for instance, the initial feedback you will get from the other male candidates would be "I used to help her in other elections, and now she is supporting another woman to run against me." So, I wanted to raise this issue to tell you that in the local level, you cannot just overtly advocate someone without considering the relationship factor, as it can always backfire yourself somehow.

4.11 Corruption Issues

Corruption in local politics turned out to be a common theme, one that most participants loved to talk about. It was rather apparent that they were all eager to share what they had found with other friends, who were supposed to have experienced the same thing to a greater or lesser degree. To ensure confidentiality, in some parts of this section the names of the informants have not been revealed.



Figure 4.8 Symbol of Money Politics and Corruption Issues

4.11.1 Attitude and Experiences regarding Corruption

Women politicians accepted that politics and corruption are somewhat inseparable as corruption is deeply rooted in most political practices and in most areas. Many women pointed out that it all depends on the ethics of top-level leaders, such as the Chief Executive of the SAO, who has an important role in setting implicit rules for others. In an area where the CE has started to take too much benefit from his position, it would be a starting point, whereby other parties would also want to get into the office to seek the same benefits as well. Therefore, as some women noted: “You can take from time to time, but if you do, you should share it around and not just keep it for yourselves and your clan, or there will be problems.”

In detail, they also elaborated on male conspiracy, which in turn resulted in a vicious circle of corruption in most local projects:

The Head of the SAO staff, the SAO engineer, the CE, the sheriff, they’re all connected. Since they’re men, they can drink from the same bottle. When they get kickbacks, they share the money among themselves. There’s no hope of anyone upsetting that balance. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

The CE is big-hearted; when he gets money, he'll split it with each of the members. He'll take them to dinner, to restaurants, to drink, eat good food, or take them for massages. (Anonymous, Interview, 2009)

There are so many loopholes in the administrative system that allow politicians and their allies to derive personal benefits from public works. There were so many ways and many channels that politicians, government officials, project contractors, or even local villagers to take advantage where a local project is concerned. As the participants explained:

Whenever the budget is less than one hundred thousand baht, the CE can take out money himself without going through the council; therefore, bills from shops that come to ten or twenty thousand get cashed straightaway without any trouble. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

Contracting is usually done by relatives. Most of them already have their own team. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

The CE and contractors all know each other. If you're from the outside and you want to bid, you will never get it. So, even when the CE has served for just two years, he can definitely get rich. (Anonymous, Interview, 2009)

From the top leadership, corrupt attitudes were consequently transmitted down to their colleagues and subordinates. Some projects in the village took place somehow due to the fact that a politician had something to gain from it personally through some form of kickback, as one interviewee noted:

The CE said quite specifically that if you want money, you find the contractors and take a percentage. If you don't find projects, you don't get to eat. Some villagers know this, but no one says anything. As long

as an SAO member can get whatever projects into the village, it is better than nothing anyhow. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

Out of the 10 % that they get, if the executive branch is big-hearted, they will split it with the members too. In the next term, the members will support the CE again or join the same team. But if they don't split it, in the next election the members could go over to the opposition. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

Even though there are rules in place governing public participation in assessing a contract for a project, in reality it hardly ever prevents corruption attempts by politicians. Moreover, it draws more villagers into the loop, especially those who are close to people in power. Politicians usually appointed their friends to sit on a procurement monitoring committee. Therefore, one cannot hope for the committee to do much to go against corrupt practices. In different dialogue groups, women participants reiterated that the same incidents happened in their villages. In their own words:

In auditing, they will set up a people's committee to approve projects, but usually the committee will get a thousand or two thousand baht each for their approval. So they approve these things all the time, because usually these are the people that the CE has appointed. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

Members of the people's committee get a thousand each, and they sign right there. A well is supposed to be 30 meters deep, but they dig only 20 meters, but the people's committee wouldn't know that, because they don't know how to look at these things. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

Women who entered politics were all aware of this issue. Corruption is thus not beyond their expectations. However, their attitudes or reactions towards

corruption are based on their understanding that corruption could not be totally eliminated from the system, so they must learn to live with it, rather than try to fight it. The majority of women were of the same mind, as can be seen from the following comments in this regard:

If they want to be corrupt, they can be, but don't make problems for the villagers. As long as the work turns out well, I'm happy. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

Corruption is difficult to solve because everyone profits. If you tackle corruption, it means you don't get any work done because you're going to war all the time. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

If you spend all your time fighting other people about corruption, you can't get work done. The executives always get the benefits, it's a custom. The villagers know this. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

The villagers don't have a lot of education. They think that the 10 % that the SAO gets from each project is a normal rule that is written into the law. They think that the contractors take it out of their profit margin to give to the executives and that it's separate from the building fees. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

In the above statements, it emerges that the women tried to explain that, to certain degree, corruption is just another rule of the game, of which everyone was aware. Although it is literally, the wrong thing to do, people seemed to understand and accept the fact that politicians are entitled to get some benefits from their leadership status.

Despite that fact, it was apparent that even though women politicians tended to regard corruption as a normal part of political reality, they still perceived that men politicians were becoming more enthusiastic "to eat than to work". There were also some statements that reflected their attitudes regarding their male counterparts, for

example the fact that “They can be corrupt, but not so much that it appears too ugly.” Once asked about women politicians and corruption issues, the following answers or responses were put forward:

In corruption, if women were to take money, they’d only take the 10% right there, but they wouldn’t go as far being corrupt on the specs of the goods, and the villagers would not be troubled by the possibility that the road will fall into disrepair after a while. (Anonymous, Interview, 2008)

There were also some participants who affirmed that they did not want any extra monetary rewards, the main thing being to get the job done for the sake of their people, as shown respectively by Supawadee’s and Tipsuchon’s remarks:

I got 2,000 once after a project was completed. Back then, I was in management. One day, my senior colleague walked up to me with the money and said, “I spent your share already”. I didn’t say anything, and didn’t ask how much my share was supposed to be. I didn’t care, as money was not as important to me as the satisfaction that I had finally got something delivered to my villagers. (Supawadee Petchruentong, Interview, 2009)

I don’t want any type of re-compensation other than my salary. Whatever other people want to share among themselves, I don’t want to meddle with. I just want the job to get done and for the villagers to get the benefit from it. (Tipsuchon Boonchuai, Interview, 2009)

4.11.2 Corruption and Polygamy

One interesting finding from the focus group dialogues is about the linkage between corruption and polygamy, an issue on which many of the participants commented several times during our dialogues. The issue, they assumed, was one of the main reasons why villagers were more open to women’s candidacy as they were

disappointed with their male representative who, after being elected, were tarnished by adultery problems.

It was mentioned that men regarded political status in terms of power and superiority. Once they attained leadership positions, they started to show off their power by having a mistress, just as other male leaders did. In no time, they would feel the urge to earn more money to support the other woman with whom they were involved. The assumption was explained by Karnjana Srisongkram (2008) in the following terms:

When guys start to attain high positions, women will usually become involved, because the title is alluring. When the men have mistresses, their work declines, and they have to find ways to cheat because they need to give those women money. They can't take out family money because the wife will find out. Because of this, even the well off need to embezzle money. That's what's happened here and there. And it's eventually hurt the image of male leadership.

4.12 Last Words

From the focus group dialogues, there are many lessons learned that I would like to reemphasize. First, it was found that women politicians possessed both differences and similarities with regard to each of the topics on which they expressed their opinions. Suffice it to say that a woman's socialization is linked to her concept of politics, her motivation, and her approach to politics, as well as the way she views or responds to issues such as corruptions and gender. There is an abundance of factors, such as their family background, their socialization process, or the external factors such as the political atmosphere or political competition that, taken all together, contribute to women's motivation to run for a political position, the political approaches they chose, or the political outcomes they accomplished.

All the factors stated above are somehow related and intertwined. For instance, it appeared that women who seemed to be socialized in a politically intense

atmosphere usually act or react in a ways that reemphasize their strengths, power, or assertiveness. Conversely, there were also some women from political families who sailed rather easily into politics. Unlike the women in the first group, who were motivated by their inner drive to run for a position, the latter group seemed not to have that much passion for political affairs, and regarded politics as a family mission that need to be carried on. Nonetheless, it does not mean that this or that group is working harder or contributing more to their communities. However, it could affect their political roles or functions, either directly or indirectly.

Another big question is whether or not women politicians are making a difference in politics. From the focus group, the differences in their representative roles were rather significant. While some women have played outstanding roles in development and participated actively in community work, some newcomers simply assumed a subordinate role and were less assertive in political affairs. Seen in this way, it may be assumed that their work effectiveness varied in terms of their age, experience, concept of politics, personal capabilities, etc. and most importantly political socialization. Thus, it emphasized the fact that one should not perceive women politicians as a single homogeneous group. While this study portrays general factors or issues related to women and their participation in local politics, quantitative research, however, is a better approach in finding correlations between and among those factors. Thus, further researches in a wider scope using quantitative means are recommended.

Another issue that emerged from the research concerns women and corruption. With regard to the participants, it was evident that most of them accept that corruption exists and is deeply rooted everywhere. More importantly, people in the community did not perceive corruption as a crime, but as a fact of life that one had to accept. Even if the leaders were committed to serving their constituents, were not particularly eager to resort to corruption, and did not want to keep all the stakes for themselves, people still perceived money as a part of the fringe benefits they felt their leaders deserved. Besides, most women participants agreed that one should focus on the project to be delivered rather than on fighting against corrupt practices.

Nonetheless, from the dialogues, it could be implied that although for the time being cleaning up politics was not the prime concern for most women politicians, at

least they would not be a party to aggravating the problem as their motive for entering politics in the first place was not to seek personal benefits as much as to serve the people they represent.

Last but not least, I still hope that if more and more women could enter politics, the leaders' attention might be shifted toward people's benefits rather than personal wealth and power. Above all, it is imperative to put extra effort to reshape citizens' attitudes toward corruption and especially toward politics so that qualified women will become more interested in becoming a part of the solution, and that they will not be socialized into becoming part of the circle of unprincipled power abuse.

CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDIES OF WOMEN IN DIFFERENT LOCAL POLITICAL POSITIONS

In this chapter, three cases are presented of women politicians holding different positions in local politics. In each case, data gathered from the field is organized in a thematic manner, which encompasses the stories of the resource persons, which in turn encompass different aspects of their life experiences, values and worldview; following this, the research takes a detailed looking at their political ideology, representative services and leadership roles. The final part discusses the key findings and conclusion of each case study.

5.1 Somsri Pewdee: The First Female Member of Klongprasong's Sub-District Administrative Organization



Figure 5.1 Somsri Pewdee

5.1.1 Introduction

Somsri Pewdee was the first woman in her village to run for a political position. In the SAO election held in 2005, she not only successfully made her entry into local politics, but was also received the highest number of votes, outstripping other male candidates in the constituency. In the period during which this study was conducted, Somsri was in her second and third year of political service as a member of the SAO, representing the people of Moo 1 (Baan Koh Klang), Klongprasong sub-district. Later, in 2007, she was awarded the “Outstanding Women Leaders in Public Administration Award” by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, in the annual celebration of International Women’s Day.

I set up my first interview with Somsri on a rainy afternoon of July 9, 2006. She had business in town that day so we arranged to meet at the city pier where she

was to disembark. In fact, I had met her a few times in seminars but did not have a chance to talk to her in person. However, her opinions toward different issues, as well as the way she stated them definitely caught my attention.

I was at the pier when the boat was approaching. Unlike other Muslim women, Somsri's was wearing a casual pair of jeans with an oversized striped shirt. Instead of wearing the traditional veil for ladies, she wrapped her hair in a woven hat. I was impressed by her strong yet friendly personality.

While stepping off the boat, I heard Somsri shouting to greet a group of local boatmen who had gathered in their usual spot near the dock, awaiting their passengers. Noticing a peculiar look of interest from me, Somsri explained, "I used to queue up here to pick up passengers crossing the river. That's when I learned that one of her previous work experiences was as a female boatman with her own long-tailed boat." When I asserted that I had never seen a woman piloting a long-tailed boat, Somsri smiled as she stated-- **"Women can do so many things if we really want to, and also if we don't listen to other people's comments too much"**.

Somsri and I spent two and a half hours talking at a coffee shop. It seemed to me that she was enthusiastic to participate in this project. She referred to herself as 'Ja', which means 'sister' in the Muslim language, and called me by my nickname. I planned to start our first talk with general topics regarding Koh Klang, its people, and current issues within the community but after the first hour, the flow of the conversation gradually led us to more and more sensitive topics, such as her personal life, childhood experiences, and politics. Beside her extraordinary vision of community development, I was rather surprised by her political outlook, as emphasized by the remark "I am not against people who buy votes". Her political views and ideologies will be spelled out in detail later in this chapter.

From the first day we met, I realized that sufficient level of rapport had been created between my resource person and me. She insisted that I could ask her any question and it was also fine if I needed to talk to her rival politicians. Somsri is an open-minded woman, and is tough and willing to answer challenging questions. She agreed to bring me along to meet her family and/ or other people in the community, so that I could have a clearer idea of how rural people live and make sense of their lives. Therefore, our next meeting took place a few days later on the island, and went on for

the next two weeks. I usually went by myself to the pier, crossing to Koh Klang by shuttle boat, and then Somsri would pick me up at the other side of the river bank on her motorcycle.

Somsri and I agreed that I should come to the village in the late afternoon when the villagers were resting. This would allow me to naturally blend into their setting and become a small part of their daily routine. We usually stopped at a local grocery shop where her friends would gather each evening. I was rather surprised to see that most of the friends she kept company with were in their 50's. "This is where my political life started", said Somsri. "And these are the people who know everything about me and about the politics here".

I was introduced to Uncle Mee --the owner of this small shop; Ajarn (teacher) Aoan--the principal of Klong Prasong primary school, Ja Eiad—the Kamnan's (Sub-district chief's) sister in law, and some of her other friends, whose names were intentionally not mentioned. There were also customers, such as housewives who dropped by to buy things, or teenagers on motorbikes who came just to borrow a helmet as they were heading into the town. In my view, the place was a very good spot for my qualitative research as it allowed me to easily observe the social interactions of the locals. Above all, I was able to learn a great deal from the dialogue with Somsri's affiliates who were a great help in verifying what I observed.

From the stories Somsri told, her interaction with others, and the way people talked about her, I noticed many contradictions in the life journey of this lady. Raised in a traditional Muslim family and bound by rigorous religious rules and restrictions, Somsri found a way to break through traditional gender barriers and become accepted for who she is.

At the age of 36, Somsri is still single. Yet, she has collected various invaluable experiences for herself while contributing enormously to the people of her hometown. It is interesting that Somsri has learnt a great deal from her seemingly mundane, routine activities just by looking and experiencing them personally in a more meaningful way than others.

I took a month to gradually relate to Somsri and her surroundings. Besides formal and informal interviews, which usually took place at a bamboo shelter in front of her house, I had many good opportunities to accompany her to a series of meetings

held in the community, and one at the provincial hall. I talked to her father, a couple of her friends, rival politicians, as well as people in her constituency and nearby vicinities. Personal observations of the ongoing incidents will also be presented to solidify the underlying meaning of social and political realities as I perceived and interpreted them.

5.1.2 Getting to Know the Baan Koh Klang Community

Baan Koh Klang is the name of a village located on Koh Klang island, Tambon Klong Prasong, Amphur Mueng or Town District. Tambon Klongprasong consists of four villages namely Baan Koh Klang (Moo 1), Baan Klongprasong (Moo 2), Baan Klonggum (Moo 3) and Baan Bangkanoon (Moo 4). The first three villages are situated on the island, located between Krabi town and Nua Klong districts. The fourth, Baan Bangkanoon, is part of the mainland.

The main source of income for the locals is a combination of coastal fishing and agriculture. As the island is situated between Krabi River and the Andaman Sea, most of the area is surrounded by mangrove forests. Thus, many villagers can earn their livelihood by fishing, catching shellfish and fish hatchery. In addition, the middle of the island is a flat plain that is ideal for rice farming, as well as planting coconuts, rubber trees, or palm trees.

Among the people of Krabi, Koh Klang is known as home to the Muslim fishermen villagers. Though located only a five-minute ride by long-tailed boat from the town of Krabi, the livelihood of people on Koh Klang was completely different from that of residents of downtown Krabi. Almost one hundred per cent of the people residing on the island are Muslims, who are strict and diligent in their religious practices. Most of the men wear traditional costume—white long shirt and sarong (with geometric pattern). Very few wear modern outfits, such as T-shirts and jeans. Women wear loose shirts with sarongs (with a floral pattern) and cover their hair with traditional “Riya,” a women’s head-shawl or woven hat. Life in Koh Klang is quite peaceful, crime is nearly non-existent and the villagers can leave their homes without locking the doors. In most instances, the keys to their motorcycles are left in the ignition without any worries or fears of the bike being stolen. The island’s topography

is of tremendous help to the villagers in protecting and preserving their identity and the local way of life.

There was a small local market right next to the pier where I boarded the long-tailed boat. Early in the morning, when the small fleet of fishing boats returns from sea, the market would be crowded. Middlemen come to buy seafood products here and sell them for a profit at the municipal market in downtown Krabi. However, in the afternoon, the atmosphere of the market is completely the opposite. The area seems to be quite relaxed, and housewives form small groups to shell crabs in front of the small mom and pop's shops. Next to the group, one may spot children sleeping in a hammock or in a small nursery. The rest of the villagers, more than half, go into town for employment downtown and in the surrounding areas.

Crossing via the long-tailed boats, commuters can use the services of the motorcycle taxis that queue up in front of the wet market near the dock to get to their destinations on the island. When I visited the island for the first time, I found there was neither a concrete road nor a car on the island. Villagers commute from one place to another on foot, or by motorcycle using the only two-meter wide pathway, which interconnects all three villages. This pathway is mostly layered with corrugated bricks that can be rather bumpy, particularly during the rainy season. A smaller dirt road, which is much narrower, is used to connect the homes of the local residents to the brick-layered pathway.

There is only one primary school on Koh Klang. Students who finish Grade 6 at the primary school may decide to continue their education at a Muslim school in Krabi town, or may quit schooling should their parents decide. The dream for many of the local parents in the past decade was to have their children finish their college education. "The villagers want to have the graduation photo of their children framed and mounted on the wall, want to see their children dressed in uniform; preferably as a government official, and if not, then perhaps in a banker's uniform," one villager recalled. Nowadays, however, it is quite evident that most of the students who have earned a university or a college degree will end up coming back home after being unable to find jobs after graduation. Without personal connections, jobs in the cities/towns are too difficult to find. "Even with a college education, you still end up driving the long-tailed boats in the end," a villager revealed. Therefore, most

teenagers tend to enter the labor market at and increasingly younger age because they perceive that higher education does not make a difference, either in terms of increasing their earnings, or in improving their lives.

Some of these youngsters did not enter the formal labor force but helped their parents' work in the community. With plenty of free time, and without parental supervision, the teenagers still live a carefree life, hanging out in groups, and later form gangs. This unavoidably leads to other social problems such as motorcycle gangs or local thugs that are a menace to the community.

In terms of social development, one of the factors considered to be the cause of the inferior development of Koh Klang people is the limited access to information and news. Compared to those living in the inner city, the people of Koh Klang have inadequate knowledge resources, resulting in a narrower perspective of the world and society. When electricity was not available in Koh Klang, the villagers did not have access to television or radio. In addition, most of them do not like to read, which in the past contributed to the seclusion of the residents of Koh Klang people from the outside world.

When electricity reached the island for the first time, the sudden change highlighted the fact that the local people were not immune to the culture of materialism that came via advertising and commercials, either televised and or broadcast by radio. The income earned from fishing was spent on careless shopping and spending sprees. As one of the local leaders noted, "The villagers bought a lot of electrical appliances, such as televisions, washing machines, refrigerators, etc. In addition, the consumption of electricity was also careless and wasteful. For example, leaving the television turned on throughout the day without watching it, using the washing machine on partial load rather than hand wash. As for the individual, he would just sit and stare at the washing machine because there was not anything else to do.

In reality, these laborsaving appliances were a means for us to have time for other chores and responsibilities. But instead, what really happened here in the community is that people become less hard-working and more accustomed to spending money carelessly.

It can be said that Koh Klang is now in major period of transition. The people, while bound by religious beliefs and rituals, are simultaneously challenged by the forces of capitalism and consumerism.

In terms of the environment, the island is also in a critical phase of environmental degradation resulting from shrimp farms, mostly owned by outside investors. Wastewater from the shrimp farms discharged into the sea has caused an ecological imbalance, which in turn has resulted in a decline in the wildlife population near the shoreline. Villagers have since switched to other occupations. Some have taken up paid labor in Krabi town, while some have gathered together to form vocational groups such as the mushroom cultivation group, the patek cloth making group, the Hua-Tong miniature boat modeling group, the homestay group, etc in order to earn additional income. Many of these initiatives were derived from the promotion of Krabi as a tourist destination. When tourism in Krabi reached its peak, Koh Klang, as the island nearest to Krabi town, was also promoted as a cultural and ecological tourist destination.

Koh Klang's politics, on the other hand, is a struggle between the traditional norm of compromise and trust versus the democratic norm of accountability and transparency. Koh Klang is one of the areas within Amphur Meung that is notorious for the buying and selling of votes. This is because most of its residents have little formal education and the financial status of their households is relatively poor, rendering them more susceptible to vote buying.

Nevertheless, after the tsunami disaster in 2004, there were a number of charitable organizations and educational institutions that came to the island to educate the locals about the democratic system and other areas of development. This stimulated a great deal of interest in the area of politics for a number of the local residents. This group wanted to become more and more involved with planning and projects relating to local development. In addition, this was also the first time that women had the opportunity to enter local politics. The winning vote count was more than all of the votes for other male contenders combined. This was a significant breakthrough within the Muslim community, where women are usually considered as obedient followers.

5.1.3 Somsri Pewdee: Who Is She?

5.1.3.1 The Big Sister

Somsri told me that her childhood could be captured in one big word-- “a genuine country girl”. Like most Muslim kids in the village, Somsri was brought up in a large family, in which the children had to learn to take care of themselves and other siblings at a very young age, because the parents had to work hard to earn a living. She reasoned that the primary occupation of Koh Klang villagers is fishery. Fathers usually leave home in the late evening and come back at dawn the next day. Mothers, on the other hand, stay home with children and do agricultural work. Since birth control is prohibited by their religion, women usually have many children, one after the other, and thus have limited time to tend to their psychological needs due to the fact that the next baby is on the way.

Somsri is the second child in a family of five children. When she was born, her hair was so thick and curly that she was named “Yoi”, which means curly hair. Somsri had one elder brother, two younger sisters and other two younger brothers respectively. As the eldest girl in the family, she had to help her mother in doing all the household chores, as well as in taking care of the younger siblings.

As a child, I was not able to go play or travel that often because I had to help my mother with the household chores, since we always had lots of small children at our house. My mother would have to get up as early as 3 am to get our house ready for our mini-grocery business. Therefore, I had to take care of all my younger siblings, prepare milk for them, using condensed milk, even though it was labeled “Not for Infants.” By the time my siblings were old enough to care for themselves, I was ten years old. My chores changed to helping my mother with other tasks around the house. It’s as if the very first thing I can recall as a child was being assigned a chore, which is often a reminder that I have always had responsibilities to take care of.

In those days, she said, most of the kids on the island had a great deal of freedom to go outside the family compound with their playmates. As soon as children learned how to swim, they were automatically allowed to roam freely on the island. They could leave home early in the morning, and come back in the late evening for dinner. Because most of the villagers are related, when the children were exhausted from playing, they would be allowed to have dinner at their friend's house without worrying their parents. This is because the parents knew that the other villagers would keep a watchful eye on their children and care for them as if they were their own. "Every family must work to earn income in order to support the family and there may be insufficient time to teach and guide the children. So it's almost customary to allow older children to go and play among themselves, while under the care and supervision of the people in the community. This would allow their mothers the additional time to do other tasks and responsibilities." Most children, therefore, grew up among friends. The influence exerted by childhood peer groups was usually far stronger than from one's own family.

However, the tradition of playing outdoors applied more to boys since girls, especially the big sister like Somsri, were expected to help out at home. Somsri recalled that she often felt jealous every time she saw her brother go out with his peers while she had to remain at home doing all the housework. After school, she had to hurry back home to cook, clean the house, and care for the younger ones. This was the normal routine with which a girl was expected to be familiar. Somsri also accepted these responsibilities, but the big question mark in her head never faded away. While doing chores, her mind always flew out of the window to the rice fields where the other kids were having fun.

Thus, to young Somsri, playtime was precious. She preferred to go out and play with the boy gangs in the field, reasoning that in the short period of time she had, playing like the boys gave her more excitement, as compared to girlish games. Somsri liked to play "Look-Fud", a game where a player would throw a Ping Pong ball at the thigh areas of the other players. Sometime the throw is so hard that after several pitches, the thigh can turn red from the ball marks. But Somsri said that it was only then that the game got exhilarating and exciting. "I could not play with other girls because I would play too rough," she laughed as the old memory resurfaced.

Young Somsri liked to climb trees, catch frogs in the rice field, or swim out to the fishing boats floating in the sea. It was a time of peace and freedom. She liked to compete with the boys in all these activities. Her heart was filled with joy and pride when she could climb faster, swim further, or catch more frogs than the others could.

Her sense of competition was so strong that even when she was alone, Somsri challenged herself with every little thing. For instance, she felt very excited each time whenever there was a small robot or a put-it-together toy that was offered inside a snack box, and could not wait to rip open the bag, assemble the toy and play with it.

I am a kind of person that would take on tasks that other people think are too difficult or too complex. I do not know why I am this way, and even now I am still the same. For example, if I need to buy a drawer or a shelf that needs some assembly, I will spend all my time and effort in putting it together until it is finished, all night long if necessary. I would feel very irritated if it wasn't completely assembled; in other words, if I start something then I have to finish it.

“Is it for this reason that you ran for politics”, I asked. After a short period of silence, she looked at me and replied, “I never asked myself that question. But now, I would say yes.”

5.1.3.2 Inferiority

“Among all five children, I am my parents' least favorite,” said Somsri in a soft voice. She paused for a while before continuing, “but you know what... it's not that bad. They don't love me much, so they don't expect too much of me either. In the end, I have proven that I can make them proud.”

Somsri's elder brother was a polite and obedient boy, and the younger sister next to her was also cute and very ladylike. Somsri, with her stubborn character, always made her parents feel uneasy.

When I was a child, I would often feel resentful, believing that my parents were biased, that they had favorites among my siblings and me.

I've used those feelings as the inspiration to assert myself, to achieve and be successful in life, even without the opportunity for an education.

Education was always regarded as a major cause of her inferiority complex. Somsri was the only one among all her siblings that had to quit school at Primary level (Grade 6). Her family was poor, and it was too expensive for her parents to support her studies for six more years after primary school. The expense does not only consisted of the tuition costs, but also the cost of traveling to Krabi town, as there were no secondary schools on the island at the time.

My parents thought they wouldn't be able to support both my brother and me in studying in town. They also had three younger kids that were still in school. So, as the big sister, I should quit school to help out at home.

Her mother asked Somsri to go to tailoring school instead of pursuing a secondary school education. This would enable Somsri to finish the course and earn a living only within just 3 months. At the time, Somsri was extremely upset and did not accept her mother's decision. However, she understood her family's situation and financial needs, and finally made the decision to continue her education in the field of religion at a night school near her house. This would allow her to fully support her parents during the daytime.

During the many years that her siblings were getting their education, some earning high-school diplomas, Somsri did not even travel anywhere far from her home. She took on the main responsibilities in the household and was the primary figure of the house. She would get up at the crack of dawn to sell gasoline to the fishing boats, then buy sand-whiting fish from several of the fishermen and sell the whole lot to a merchant at the wet market. Afterwards, she helped her mother with cooking food to sell at the front of their house. In the afternoon, she would help her father with the netting and repairing of fishing traps, captain her family's long-tailed

boat, re-selling shrimps and fish, etc. Each day was filled with so many activities that she rarely had the time to observe or even notice the world outside.

Somsri kept these bitter feelings about being not being able to continue her higher education to herself. She put all her energy and effort into working and earning income for her brothers and sisters, so that they could have better opportunities in life. Somsri shared the fact that her younger sister was an exceptional student, and had even been chosen to represent the sub-district in a competition held in the town. This gave her family a sense of pride; nevertheless, she sometimes felt that her sister took her hard work and effort for granted. In addition, her parents would give in to her sister's demands, which Somsri felt was inappropriate or unnecessary.

I was upset when my sister was accepted to a nursing school in Surat Thani province but refused to attend. Her reason was that she did not have any friends, and was afraid to attend a school so far from home by herself. In the end, she followed her friends and applied to study Business Management at Ramkhamhaeng University, even though it had been her life-long dream to study nursing.

Somsri fought with her parents over this matter. She did not understand why her parents were irrational when it came to matters related to their favorite child. While she was taught to be tough, and had to sacrifice for others, her sister was allowed to be childish and self-centered. Somsri was so upset that she did not talk to her parents for three months.

While her sister was studying in Bangkok, Somsri was determined to save her own money. Apart from working for her family, she created other businesses on the side, such as duck farming, selling "Kao-Yum", and operating a long-tailed boat, which allowed her to save a substantial amount of money for the first time in her life. "It was as if there was a voice inside my head that kept telling me that those who want to go to school can go, because the real race is about who can make more money," said Somsri with a smile.

The feeling of inferiority gradually decreased as her sense of efficacy increased. Somsri was able to regain her self-esteem through the fruits of her hard labor. She now realized that her parents might love each child in different ways, and the treatment they gave to her brothers and sister did not mean they did not love her. “Deep down, I feel very proud that I played a part in supporting my younger sibling through school”, said Somsri who now has her own house, follows her own path, and leads her own life. Above all, she knew deep down that both Pa and Ma were proud of her. She has a motto for carrying on one’s daily life:

Do whatever you have to, just do not upset or shame your parents.
They had enough raising us when we were young. And now that we
are adults, we should not burden them anymore

5.1.3.3 Years in a Pornoh (Islamic School)

Somsri’s teenage years went by in a relatively fast and simple manner. But now that she is older and wiser, she looks back and concludes that those years as a teenager were a time of nurturing and shaping one’s virtues and moral consciousness. The Islamic religion has given her a framework of righteousness, especially in terms of sacrificing for the good of the community and others. The learning and teaching of Pornoh have all the fundamental characteristics of a teacher’s loving and caring attitude. The aim is to educate and develop their pupils, without wanting or needing anything in return. There was neither any salary nor any support by any government authority or organization. The teaching and sharing of knowledge of Islam is a natural duty. Those students who become more knowledgeable will take on the role of teaching those in the lower classes and the next generation of students and so forth. Somsri was one of those students who volunteered to teach Islam while she was still a student, a role she assumed ever since she was thirteen and only gave up at the age of thirty-two.



Figure 5.2 Islamic Teaching on a Pornoh's Wall

Somsri said that the primary role of a religious teacher is to teach the students to develop good virtues and the right way of thinking. Apart from teaching, the teachers would also care for the students on other tasks, such as taking them to religious examinations. If the students could not afford the boat fare, bus fare and or school books, Somsri regularly used her own money to provide financial support to her students as well.

Somsri often asked herself why her teachers and now herself, were willing to do all of this with all their hearts. The answer that came to mind was that it was simply the right thing to do. Therefore, religion played a very important and significant role in molding her into a charitable person, willing to make sacrifices for the good of others, more than for one's own benefit and well-being.

There was one day when Somsri had just finished teaching the children. She was feeling very tired, exhausted, and was thinking that there was just enough time for her to head back home for a quick shower and return back to work later on that evening. Just as she was packing her belongings, a person came by and called out for volunteers to help clear the grass growing along the side of the road.

Even though I was exhausted, I volunteered to help him because it was what my heart told me to do. The side of my heart that was telling me to go help clear the road won over the side that was telling me to go back home to rest. I felt it was my duty and my responsibility, because if I didn't do the work, who else would, especially if it is the road that I also walk on every day.

Somsri said repeatedly that she always had that feeling of wanting to do good deeds to earn merit. Whenever she had the chance to do good for the benefit of others, her heart was delighted and fulfilled, even as her body maybe aching. But there are those who distance themselves from their faith, preferring to live their lives without limits, believing that they must fend for themselves. Of such people, Somsri had the following to say:

Those who do not care for virtuous conduct may, for example, throw trash wherever they want because they consider that it is the garbage collectors' job to pick up after them. Or if they prefer to speed when riding, then it was their right to do so; and it's the local authority's responsibility to enforce the law and must pull them over.

In other words, for Somsri, it is conscience rather than rules or regulations that intrinsically shape people's behavior and actions.

Although Somsri spent nearly twenty years living and abiding by her faith, distancing herself from the world outside, it may be said that it was during this time that she was able to discover herself, establishing her virtues and developing a perspective of the world based on a strong and solid foundation and framework.

5.1.3.4 "Kob-Nai-Kala" - A Frog under a Coconut Shell

Somsri shared that ever since she left school at the age of twelve, her routine starts with daytime work, and in the evening she would wash up and get ready to attend school at Pornoh. The school would start from seven pm. and last until nine pm. everyday, Monday to Friday. On Saturday and Sunday, she would then teach religion to the children in the afternoon. This became the routine for her daily life.

Looking back, Somsri speaks of her life then as a “Kob-nai-Kala,” which means “A frog under a coconut shell”-- someone who is unaware or has no knowledge of the world outside. This is simply because she must attend to similar life chores, day in and day out. Nevertheless whenever there was some free time, she would question and wonder “what is to become of my life”. And the answer that came up each time was that it depended on Allah’s will. She believes that every question has its own answer which will emerge when the time is right.

The turning point in her life came one morning when she had to do some shopping at the market in town all by herself, the very first time ever. She was then 25 years old.

At the market, I stopped at a pork stand and asked for a kilo of meat. The butcher stared at me with a funny look and said, “Little sister, this is pork meat.” This may sound funny but I was so embarrassed then. I couldn’t tell the difference between pork and beef because I had never seen pork before in my entire life. On the way back home, I suddenly realized that there is so much more in this world that I had never learned about. I told myself that I had to learn new things every day, otherwise I would be nothing but a country hick with little intelligence and or common sense.

From that day onward, Somsri started to read every word in the newspaper, from the front page to the last. She read every advertisement that was printed. She said that even learning a small thing made her feel very proud. Once, for example, she noticed an article with an asterisk (*) at the end of a paragraph and later found out what it means. There is a further explanation provided within, and is also marked with an asterisk (*) at the beginning. She thinks that this correlation of the first statement and its further explanation is of critical importance; that most people are not aware of it or do not give it the attention it truly deserves. Most people are deceived because they are not aware and fail to read the additional conditions involved. Thus, Somsri would pay particular attention whenever she read a contract, or an invoice, and always look for the asterisk (*) and other special reference marks.

In addition to reading the newspaper, Somsri also enjoyed listening to political conversations among the senior adults during their daily get-together for coffee at her shop. “While my hands were busy selling groceries, my ears would tune in to the political discussions.” Back then, Koh Klang did not have electricity or television sets; for all the villagers, therefore, her dad’s coffee shop was the center and source of news and information. Particularly during the elections, her store would be overcrowded right from the early morning.

At her coffee shop, the men would form a discussion group to analyze and share their opinions on politics. Somsri also recalled that the front of her store had once acted as a stage for a politician’s public appearance and rally speech. By the dim lighting of the milk-can lanterns, she could not even recognize the face of the candidates. All she could hear was the various promises; that if voted into the position, the people would benefit from many projects and initiatives. However, in the end, nothing ever came of those promises. Koh Klang was still in the dark due to lack of electricity. Meanwhile, across the Krabi River, a few hundred meters away from her house, the city was well illuminated from countless streetlights, which stayed lit throughout the night.

Somsri was constantly curious about politics. On the so-called “Night of the Howling Dog”, she would come out to observe the illegal vote buying that was being carried out in the open. She had witnessed this wrongdoing over and over again each time there was an election, which went against her moral conscious.

At the time, I was completely devoted to my religion and part of its teachings was that taking bribes was a sin. We were taught this way and this was part of our teaching we passed on to the younger children. But the Muslim people around here are struggling. They have many children, which requires a great deal of financial support. Nearly all of them were willing to sell their votes and willing to commit a sin. Later on, someone else came and told them that it was alright to take the money, but they should not cast their votes for the candidate doing the buying. To me, such a deed was twice as sinful-- the sin of taking a bribe and sin of being deceitful.

However, Somsri's father was one of those who never took a bribe. He believed that it was not worth committing such a sin for money. "The Koran teaches us that every 25 satang we have earned will be judged by Allah. It is most likely that the poor will get to enter heaven, before the rich," he reasoned.

When I asked Somsri how Muslim villagers in general reacted to illegal vote buying and accepting bribes. Without hesitation she gave the following replied:

Muslims usually do not correct or blame one another for their wrongdoings, especially among the grown-ups. Everyone should be capable of deciding what is righteous and what is sinful. It's not our responsibility to judge the actions of other human beings. It is only between that individual and Allah.

5.1.3.5 Father

Somsri's father believed in working hard as the means of building a strong foundation in order to maintain the stability of the family. Her father, who was referred to as "Pa", is a person who does not like to take risks. His motto on life is "to be able to sleep well, have enough to eat, and be free of financial debt." Although her family was not rich or considered financially well-off, her household was living comfortably. Most of the children were able to get an education and did not have any financial burdens, unlike many other households in the village.

One afternoon, as we were riding on the back of the motorcycle, Somsri pointed to a piece of land that looked like degraded forest. She said that the area used to be covered with healthy mangrove trees. Now it was an abandoned in-land shrimp farm. At one time, the local people were lured by the success stories of investors who came to the island and started in-land shrimp farming. Many villagers rushed into the business without careful consideration or planning as to what to do if the farms failed.

In the beginning, many of them became wealthy and built enormous houses. Later on, however, problems arose and many of the farmers were making losses on their investment because their shrimps kept on getting infected with viral diseases. Many were forced to mortgage the land that was originally where their rice fields were to get more money to support their shrimp farms. Nevertheless, many

shrimp farming businesses failed and this was the major reason why most of the local people on the island were in debt. They no longer owned the piece of land that once was available for their rice farming. The only thing left for them to do to earn a living was coastal fishing.

Back then, other people thought that Pa was stupid when the opportunity for shrimp farming came and he did not take it. In the end, however, Pa turned out to be more far-sighted than his peers. He was determined, rightfully, that his financial strength was much less than that of the investors and that the chance of failure was relatively high. He thinks about everything using sound logic and reasoning, not based on current trends and gut feelings. This is the reason why he is now well-respected by the other villagers

Once Somsri had finished sharing the story about her father, I asked her to take me to see him so that I could greet and pay my respects to him.

I arrived at her father's house around 2 pm. It was the house where Somsri spent her childhood years. Pa is now 70 years old and even though his face has taken a toll from working under the sun as a fisherman, his physique remains strong. He is still able to ride his motorcycle around the island to collect electricity bills. Pa said that he has retired from fishing and as for his wife "Ma", she had also retired from selling groceries. Both of them are now living and enjoying their lives as elderly citizens.

The couple had some money saved as financial backup in case of medical and health needs. They take small jobs to earn enough money to sustain themselves so that they are not a burden to their children.

After retiring from coastal fishing due to old age, Pa looked for jobs that he was still in physical shape to perform, such as applying to the Provincial Electrical Authority for a position as electricity bill collector. The job was not too physically demanding, and in addition Pa got to go outside and meet other people, which he thought was much better than sitting around with nothing to do at home.

In the neighborhood, many people take advantage of the government's affairs because they think that the government has too much money, so sharing some of the money from here and there would do no harm. But for myself, I never ever thought like that, not even for one baht. I believe that honor is more sacred than money and when you pass away, you cannot take money with you; the only things you have left are your good and bad deeds that will be judged by Allah.

Before Pa worked as an electricity bill collector on the island, many people had worked in this position before him. But, as it turned out, all of them were stealing money and had to be terminated one by one. During the past four years Pa had worked in this position, there had never been any issue with the money collected. So he plans to keep this job until he is no longer physically fit to ride his motorcycle.

As for his role in the community, Pa was elected Chairman of the Village Mutual Fund Committee for six terms. During the six-year period in this position, the money circulating within the village mutual fund has been all accounted for and is continuously growing. Pa is dedicated to his work, continuously monitoring and managing, providing support and consulting with the group members. As a result, the Moo 1 Ban Koh Klang was chosen and recognized by the town district authority as one of the five top village fund committees in the downtown area. This is one of Pa's proudest achievements.

Nevertheless, Pa continued to tell another aspect of the people of Koh Klang. His concern was that most villagers usually placed their personal responsibilities onto the shoulders of the leader they had elected and did not pay attention to their own benefits. For example, for their convenience, the villagers would leave their saving account bank books, loans payment schedule, etc to Pa to care for. Since all of the transaction records and receipts were kept at Pa's house, the members had no idea how much money was in their saving account. Nor did they have any idea how much was in the village fund, how much was used and how much was remaining. For many villages, this was common practice, which in many cases resulted in the dwindling of the village funds without anyone being aware how the money was being used.

The village fund of Moo 1, which is looked after by Pa, is the only village where there is a continuous cash flow, and a profit of two to three hundred thousand baht. Pa conducted everything according to the rules and regulations and each transaction was clearly and specifically recorded because he realized that humans are capable of making mistakes.

The more the villagers trust you, the more you have to be careful. Making mistakes is what concerns me the most. Sometimes I get worried about my house catching fire. Hundreds of village fund members would definitely be in trouble because all their records are in here. To be frank this is very uncomfortable for me.

During the last election, Pa wanted to respectfully decline the position of Chairman but he had to accept the title because the villagers constantly pleaded with him. "If the social currents are strong enough for you to take the position and you refuse, then your friends will be very disappointed," said the old man. Pa will continue to take on this title, at least until the members find a new trustworthy chairman who can carry on this responsibility.

Toward the end of our conversation, Pa had some final words about his daughter who had volunteered to be a leader for her village. "Somsri can work as a leader because she is by nature a people person. She does not mind how much more tiresome it can get when helping other people with their problems. Somsri has always been this way ever since she was a child, without any guidance from me." Smiling, Pa went on to add that, although Somsri had little education, she was capable of supporting herself, yet still able to lend her support and assist others, such as her siblings, friends, and even those she did not even know. He finally concluded that:

Those who choose to be a leader must accept that their life will be more wearisome than that of others. This is because a leader cannot think only of oneself, but must think of others as well. Which is what Somsri loves to do and I fully support her. God has given her a special opportunity to do good and sacrifice for others.

5.1.3.6 Joining a Housewives' Group

Somsri participated in formal community activities for the first time in 1996. She was 24 years old. At that time, it was the government's policy to promote the role of women in rural areas in the belief that women could be effective agents for development. With the help of officials from a department of community development, a bunch of active women in each community were asked to organize themselves into groups to participate in social activities. They were given formal uniforms and named "the housewives group of Baan Koh Klang". The group was chaired by the wife of the Village Head, who also invited Somsri to join the group. She was appointed by other members to act as secretary and treasurer. Somsri said that the reason they chose her was because they believed that Somsri can coordinate with government officials. The job involves both a lot of paperwork and administrative skills, and no one wanted to take on such responsibilities because most of the women in the village were not proficient in reading and/ or writing.

During her first eight years, Somsri did not play a significant role in the women's group. Though serving in a seemingly key position, Somsri revealed that most of the functions were handled solely by the chairperson. The most frequent activity she and other members had to do on a regular basis was to dress up in uniform and line up to welcome high-ranking officials visiting her village. Other occasions were during such important days as Father's and Mother's Day, when representatives from women groups had to assemble to illustrate women power and unity.

There were a few times when government agencies wanted to create new development projects in the village by partnering with women's groups. While the projects themselves aimed to empower local women, mismanagement led to the breakup of relationships among members of the women's group. "Once money was involved, the group started to break up," said Somsri. In the project named "Assistance to Local People Making a Living by Coastal Fishing" which was led by the village head, one of the benefactors/ beneficiaries of the financial aid specified within the project was the women's group. It turned out, however, that out of the 50 members in the women's group, only 13 were called to attend meeting. All of those were close to the chairperson. When the discrepancy was disclosed, the rest of the

members were so furious that they filed a complaint with the state agency demanding the immediate removal of the chairperson.

Despite her position as the group's secretary, Somsri was one of those who were not invited to that meeting. But unlike the others, she did not have any strong desire to fight against the Chairperson. Somsri admitted that during that time, she still did not care much about transparent management, or proper control of the project funding. What she had in mind was merely how to avoid conflicts that might lead to the deterioration of personal relationships among the group.

Later on, Somsri had to get involved in the issue as senior villagers requested her to settle the arguments between the two parties. Somsri tried her best to talk with the chairperson, the village head (the chairperson's husband), as well as the frustrated members, but her attempts could not defuse the tension. After finding out about the petition letter, the chair became angrier and steadfastly refused to resign.

As the issue could not be settled among the group, concerned officials came to their village to resolve the problem, leading to an election for a new chairperson. This time, two names were proposed by the members—the previous Chairperson and Somsri. Somsri felt uneasy when her name was put forward, and was even more uncomfortable when the vote-counting revealed that she had won. On being elected as the new Chairman, Somsri commented that she felt deeply disturbed and uneasy. This was because she could sense the former Chairman's humiliation and loss of face, having lost the election to Somsri in front of more than fifty members of the women's group. "From being good friends, the village head's wife stopped talking to me for nearly two years; it's as if we've been avoiding each other ever since then"

After being elected to the position of Chairman in the year 2004, Somsri did not make any substantial contribution for the women group. This is because she was away from the village for several years, "I submitted my resignation several times but the members insisted on keeping me in the position because they could not see anyone else fit for the job," she said. Somsri perceived that the group members wanted to keep her as the Chairman because she was unbiased and impartial, and was able to coordinate with all the parties involved, especially with the government authorities. As a result, Somsri has held her position as the Chairperson of the Koh Klang Women's Group, since 2004 up to the present.

5.1.3.7 Leaving Home

For nearly 20 years Somsri worked for her family within and nearby her house. She was able to save quite a large sum of money for herself from her hard work, such as raising duck-farming, selling “Kao-yum” or rice salad, and running a long-tailed boat for hire. When Somsri turned 32 years old, her family shut down the grocery business because around the pier there were many new grocery stores opening up, which reduced the profitability of her convenience store. In addition, her mother was getting older and was too tired to go shopping on the mainland. Pa also retired from working as a fisherman because the price of seafood was on the decline. More and more villagers also gave up their jobs as fishermen, and went to the mainland to work as hired hands. Her father also did not have to provide any more educational support for Somsri and her siblings, which led him to work as an electricity bill collector for the Klong Prasong village instead. As the responsibility of supporting her family decreased, Somsri found the opportunity to explore the world outside for the very first time. She asked for her parents’ permission to go to work and accompany her cousin “Vi”, who was working as a saleswoman for a cosmetics company in town.

Vi was only two years older than Somsri, but she was like a big sister to her. She is very beautiful, “everywhere she goes, people cannot help but to notice and admire her.” Although Vi received little formal education, she was a well-rounded person, people-smart, and had good business sense. Vi was a woman very much admired by Somsri because Vi is very hard working. There were many occasions where Vi was working so hard that she did not have time to eat. She made house visits to her customers all throughout the day, “Sometime for the entire day, all Vi had to eat was a banana where she would take three bites, toss out the peel, and keep on working.”

Vi always had clear and specific goals in life; for example, this year she will buy a house, and next year she will turn in her old car in for a new one. Most of the time, she has accomplished the goals she has set out to achieve. Back then, she divorced her husband and was left to make a living on her own. When she had to pick up cosmetic products from Bangkok, she usually drove up by herself. When Somsri

went to stay with Vi, she learned to drive so that she could help her cousin when they both had to commute to distant places.

Somsri used specific words in describing her life while she was living with Vi as “the time for self re-learning,” that is, she started learning about everything all over again. She has to absorb new things like how to dress up, how to start a conversation with someone, how to drive, how to travel around, etc. In her thirty’s, she had to start again like an innocent teenage girl. Vi was the one who took Somsri to the world outside, beyond the Koh Klang island- the only place and sanctuary that she was familiar and accustomed with.

Vi was an independent saleswomen – she bought various types of products and resold them in Krabi, from cosmetics, to second-hand brand-name purses, herbal medicines, gift items, etc. Her work involved a lot of traveling, meeting various people from the rich to the poor, from the good to the bad. It was the first time that Somsri was able to experience the nightlife. Regardless, both of them refrained from drugs and alcohol because it was prohibited by their religion. In Bangkok, most people did not know that they were Muslim. Some even poured drinks for them, after which they simply smiled back. Then Vi would tell them that they were both allergic to alcohol and could only drink soft-drinks. Somsri concluded the following:

What matters most are the values inside our heart, not external things.
So even if you have to live in a society surrounded with temptations,
you still have Allah within your heart. Only then can you refrain from
any wrongdoing.

5.1.3.8 Journey of Learning

During the three years that she lived with Vi, Somsri almost never visited her home. She would often recollect Allah’s teaching that “Thou shall engage in continuously learning, from rocking in the cradle until passing away in thy deathbed.” This was one of Allah’s teachings that she has heard since she was just as a child. Somsri realized, however, that she had embarked upon her path to learning

much later than others, so when there was an opportunity to see the world outside, she wanted to see it from as many perspectives and in as much depth as possible.

Throughout Somsri's stay with Vi, she would offer to help with every chore, without asking for any wages or anything in return. On the other hand, Vi would be the one who managed the expenses. Somsri believed that, aside from her teachers in grade school and religious school, Vi was another kind of teacher, one that taught her about the world outside and its society.

As they traveled from Krabi to various provinces, Somsri liked to look out through the window to observe other people and ponder about their lives. When seeing workers squeezing into the back of a pick-up truck, she could not help but wonder "If the passenger's seat alongside the driver is vacant, then why the driver does not allow the workers to take turns in sitting inside, rather than squeezing so many people and materials in the back." Or when visiting customers at their houses, Somsri would observe the interior and living arrangements of each house. She could not understand why some women bought so many cosmetics, sometimes as much as twenty or thirty thousand baht's worth without any intention of doing so in the first place. When she visited a house belonging to a Chinese family, she could not understand why they would set up the sacred shrine and offerings on the floor, for example.

Somsri often thought that she was very lucky to be able to see all of these lives outside the island. These were valuable experiences that most people within her village would not have the opportunity to be exposed to. She started to understand more and more that having a worldly view and a broad perspective is very important to the development of the community and of oneself, especially when rural and urban lifestyles were becoming more and more intertwined and more complicated.

Visiting Bangkok for the very first time, Somsri felt so excited, as if she were traveling to a foreign country. She remembered the day that Vi took her to a shopping centre. After they had finished buying the items on their shopping list, she asked Vi if she could go sightseeing nearby by herself. She knew that Vi was tired and thought it was better that Vi go back to the hotel and rest. If necessary, Somsri could contact her on her mobile phone and thus there was no need to worry. Then

Somsri left to flag down a motorcycle taxi from the queue toward the front of the shopping centre to take her to the opposite side of the city. She felt liberated while riding on the back of the motorcycle as it crossed through the various parts of Bangkok.

Somsri tried to remember everything that she saw so that she could think about it later. She saw a little girl with her pleading little eyes, trying to sell a flower garland to a woman sitting inside a luxurious automobile. She saw a homeless man in dirty clothing living near a pedestrian overpass. She noticed female office workers asleep on the bus due to exhaustion. For Somsri, Bangkok was a very interesting city, but not one she wanted to live in. She also thought that the poor people living in Bangkok suffer much more than those living in rural areas.

Growing up within a Muslim community, in which most of the households had a relatively similar economic and social status, everyone believed in the same faith, shared the same beliefs, dressed the same way, and had a lifestyle that was quite similar; all of the things Somsri observed during her travels completely changed her perspective on life. She learned that the social world outside was full of different people, each with their own diverse habits and behavior. Each was different from one another in social status, wealth, background, values or beliefs:

I had so many questions, especially concerning the gap within our society between the rich and the poor. I wondered about the money that someone would spend on an expensive purse, sometimes up to ten thousand to one hundred thousand baht, which for a poor family could buy a whole year's worth of rice. I sometimes think that if I were the daughter of a wealthy family, I would ask my parents for 50,000 baht a month to help those in need. I do not like to see other people suffer. If we were eating and saw that others could not afford to eat, then how could we continue to eat?

Throughout the three years that Somsri traveled with Vi, apart from learning about the world outside, she also learned about herself in depth. The longer she was away from her home, the more she cared for and remained committed to her

hometown, the place where she was born and grew up in. The developments she had observed in other provinces became developments she wanted to implement in her hometown as well. Most important of all was that she was able to prove by herself that the teachings of Allah consisted of the right principles and the right way of life, which could be applied in any circumstances, in any place, and on any occasion. It is these teachings that she has been learning about continuously since she was a child, as she herself noted:

Allah does not grant wealth or poverty to rid one of the responsibility of doing good deeds. Rather, wealth and poverty have been willed to us as a test of our lives, that the rich should not be arrogant to Allah. Nor should the poor be so overly concerned about feeding themselves that they forget about their God.

She shared an example of this, explaining that there were Na-bee, prophets of the Islamic religion, who were extremely wealthy, such as the Na-bee Sulaiman. And there were indigent prophets as well, such as the Na-bee Ha-Rune. In the end, Somsri concluded that it was in these three intensive years that her core values from childhood were reinforced and her personal identity developed. It was a time in her life where a tremendous amount of valuable learning took place for a “country girl with little education” such as herself.

5.1.3.9 Boat Race

Somsri returned to live at home permanently after spending a sufficient amount of time living on her own. The decision for Somsri to return home came after she received a phone call from home, telling her that there were scores of official letters posted to her. She recalled that she had responsibilities go fulfill as the Chairwoman of the village women’s group. Her absence from the community while being elected as the chairperson would certainly make her community miss out on a number of development opportunities. Therefore, Somsri bade farewell to Vi so that she could return to the island, so that she could take care of her parents and continue the work that she had left behind her for several years.

Not long after Somsri returned to live at home, the government officials organized a Hua-tong long-tailed boat race for the Town district. This event was one of the annual activities designed to promote tourism in the province of Krabi. Somsri believed that the residents of Klong Prasong were well known as the sons and daughters of the sea, and that the women of Klong Prasong possessed superior rowing skills. When she saw the billboard for the event, she came back and asked more than a dozen women on the island whether they were interested in competing in the boat race. When they all agreed, she asked a couple of them to accompany her to see the leader of the community. She informed him that the women's group would like to enter the Hua-thong boat race and represent the sub-district in the event scheduled to be held in three months' time. The women's group was turned down by the leader of the village. Many of them said that the women could enter the boat race; however, they had to raise the money and to make the necessary arrangements themselves to prepare for the event.

Somsri and her friends felt that they were treated unfairly because the men's boat-racing team was given full support, including a budget and other benefits. This made Somsri want to compete even more. She made it a personal mission to send the women's boat racing team to compete in the event, and did her best to achieve victory. She started to brainstorm how to raise enough money to support the team, including the funds needed for building a boat, buying uniforms for the rowers on the racing day, and other necessities during the many practice sessions. Because Somsri had the experience of working outside the village, she had a series of connections and a network with various business owners. In addition, she also knew a few politicians that she could ask for sponsorship of the women's rowing team. As a result, many of these business owners and politicians gave financial support, while some donated items such as team uniforms, food, and drinks.

At first, finding a boat was the factor that made many of the women lose their will to compete. This is because a Hua-tong boat was relatively expensive; such a boat may cost more than 30,000 baht. The financial support that the sponsors had given them was barely enough to pay for the labor to construct the boat. Therefore, it seemed as if there was no way to find enough money to purchase the team's boat.

To Somsri, however, if the group could come up with a strong cause, then they could ask for more sponsorships and support, especially from the boat builder. Thus, she made the decision to go to consult many of the elders in the village that had the knowledge and skills needed for building these traditional boats. As a result, she met a couple of carpenters that had a passion for building such boats, but had never had the opportunity to do so. One of them told Somsri and the rest of the team to find and purchase the wood. As for him, he was more than willing to build the boat for free, without charging for the labor costs. This was good news for the women's group and made everyone really happy. As Somsri herself said, "One half loves to build boats, the other half loves to row, and when the two meet, everyone is happy. Therefore money is not always the most important factor."

Somsri and her team practiced hard every day. They rowed until the color of their skin turned dark from the sunburn-- "It looked as if the entire team was struck by lightning," she explained. The daily practice sessions not only made everyone physically stronger and fit, but also enforced a stronger bond among the members of the group. They felt more powerful and felt a sense of team spirit such as they had never felt before.

Two weeks before the race day, Somsri represented the women's group in attending the meeting with the event's committee. She grew extremely irritated when it was mentioned during the meeting that the prizes for the male and female team were different. The winning male team would receive a cash prize of 20,000 baht, while the female team would receive only 15,000 baht. Somsri could not understand the reason why there should be a difference because "It does not matter if it was a women's or men's team because when you practice you will be tired and exhausted in the same way, rowing and getting burnt under the same sun; even the boats cost relatively the same."

Another factor was the different races: originally, the women's team did not have a chance to enter the 500-meter race. This was because the committee in charge felt that the women's team would not be able to row the entire distance. Such concerns expressed by the committee made Somsri feel uncomfortable because from her long practice sessions, Somsri knew that her team could easily row the 500-meter distance.

Somsri, sitting at the back of the meeting room, decided to raise her hand to speak at the meeting for the very first time. Her reason and statement stunned the meeting's participants for a moment, before all the voting members agreed to raise the amount of the winning prize for the female team to be on a par with that for the men. As for the event in the years to come, the committee agreed to take into consideration the scheduling of a 500-meter event for the women team to race in as well. Somsri felt very proud that she had had the courage to speak out about her ideas and opinions, and that she was willing to do the right thing when necessary. Even if it seemed a trivial issue in itself, for Somsri the fact that she did not allow even a small injustice to prevail was considered another monumental milestone in her life.

On the day of the race, the event and the boat race went off quite smoothly. Somsri's team won -- the fruits of their hard work, effort and dedication. Somsri herself also received more recognition for her leadership from members of the women's group. She was also the pride of the people of Klong Prasong, who were very excited and impressed with the capabilities and skills of the women's rowing team, who became the talk of the town. Many of Somsri's friends encouraged her to register and run for the then upcoming election for the SAO council, reasoning that this could be a channel for Somsri to speak out on behalf of the women's group so that women could have more and better opportunities within the community.

5.1.3.10 Perception of Gender Inequality

Referring to the boat race story, Somsri continued to express her concerns regarding the roles and status of local women, who had long been subordinate to men.

Since a very young age, Somsri had always questioned why women and men did not have the same rights or share the same responsibilities. When helping her mother prepare family dinner, she realized that cooking was a long process: from finding wood for the fire, lighting the fire, cooking the rice, grating coconut meat and churning the coconut milk, preparing the fish, to flavoring the dishes, setting up the table, arranging the dishes and so on. She felt that all the males had to do was to come to the table, sit down and eat, without knowing or appreciating the effort and the hard work that gone into it in the kitchen. "They had nothing to do but to eat, and they even complained if the meal was not delicious," she asserted.

In school, the boys would pick on a girl, who usually could not fight back or do anything apart from standing there and crying. Somsri, being physically larger than her peers, had to constantly take on the role of protecting and looking out for her female friends.

Somsri went on to raise some examples of the normative practices within the community that she viewed as related to gender bias. For instance, in raising and caring for a child “Women who are housewives must do everything, from changing the diapers, feeding, bathing, sending the child to school, to attending parent-teachers’ meetings, supporting school activities and so on. And if the child turned out to be spoiled, most people would condemn the mother for not raising her child properly. But if the child turned out to be good and successful, they would compliment the family’s name. This gives the father most of the recognition.” At the community level, “every time there is a village function, the main driving force and the main workers are the women, but when it’s time to choose a leader such as a village head, all of the candidates are male.”

Somsri foresaw that in order to overcome the sex-role deviation / dichotomy that society had formed, women had to take on the role of protecting and petitioning for women rights, starting with being more self-reliant, particularly on small issues. She felt frustrated whenever she saw other women emphasize their inferior sex-status by being overly dependent upon the men, even with regard to things women could learn to do by themselves.

Somsri raised the following example: “When a woman wants to go into town, she must wait for the man to drive the boat. So, if the man is not finished with his coffee, then the woman cannot go anywhere.” Therefore, Somsri tried to do things by herself so that her needs or wants did not to depend on the whims of others. She learned to captain the long-tailed boat even though it was not a common thing for a woman to do. However, she felt that there was no harm in learning the skill. At least she could travel freely and it could be another income-earning opportunity when necessary. In her view:

Men should learn how to cook, the same as women must be able to fetch water from the well. Fundamentally, the chores themselves

should be not be dictated by gender. Anyone who is determined to carry out the task can always accomplish it, regardless of their sex.

Because of this, Somsri is confident that any job that a man can do, she can also do, with as much determination -- if not more.

5.1.4 Entering Politics

Somsri's decision to enter politics was not complicated at the time, because she had the momentum from winning the boat race. The success of the team made her feel confident and believe that if she were elected to a key position, then she could, to some extent, bring about changes in local politics and development. In the past, previous community leaders, such as the Chief Executive of the SAO or SAO member, had taken long absences from the locality without any regard for the local people who had elected them. Consequently, with ample encouragement and support from her friends and the women's group, Somsri was excited and enthusiastic about entering the contest once again. Even though she was a self-registered candidate, she never felt isolated because of the encouragement and full support she enjoyed from her friends. This section exemplifies the context and the key incidents which took place during Somsri's entrance into politics.

5.1.4.1 Political Atmosphere

The election for the Chairman of the SAO and member of the Tambon Klong Prasong SAO was held a few months after the province of Krabi had been severely shaken by the tsunami. Somsri said that the tsunami was an important factor that influenced many of the people in Koh Klang to become more involved in local politics.

During the tsunami relief period, there were many individuals and agencies, both Thai and foreign, that came to the island to offer help to the people affected by the disaster. At the same time, a number of local villagers served as intermediaries, bringing monetary and non-monetary aid from various donors to their respective villages.

As a result, the social debt and personal gratitude from those in need were deemed a form of political capital, which in turn encouraged many local

facilitators to run for political positions. When Somsri ran for election, the number of candidates in her village had increased from 4 in the previous term to 12 in the latest one.

Despite the triple increase in the number of people offering themselves as candidates, political rivalry in Koh Klang was not that severe. Though each candidate may have had different political resources, most of the cheering squad regarded the election as a “sports match” which brings them occasional excitement and pleasure. Nonetheless, there were some stakeholders that took the election outcome more seriously than others, because their interests or social status were directly linked to winning or losing the election. These were mainly the relatives of the candidates or the canvassers that linked the candidate to provincial-level politicians, who in turn would depend on the candidates during their next election to political office.

In general, politics in Koh Klang was competitive, but not hostile. Most villagers on the island were bound by kinship and no physical violence, such as killings, took place on the island even though this was not unheard of in other places during election time.

5.1.4.2 Female Fighting Fish

“How could a female fighting fish win over her male opponents,” were the usual discouraging words that Somsri heard time and again when she announced her decision to run for membership of the council of the sub-district administrative organization. However, this made Somsri and her supporters even more determined to prove them wrong.

Somsri’s candidacy may be regarded as a major political move in elections in Koh Klang. During the campaign period, she had as many as 40 canvassers who joined her in rallies. Having forty canvassers in her campaign was a major political move for Koh Klang because villagers across the board found Somsri’s rallies were appealing. This was the first time that a candidate had a majority of women and teenage supporters, and the first time that a campaign had created such good times and excitement. Thus, it came as no surprise that Somsri was the candidate that many people kept a close eye on.

Somsri said that she would often go campaigning during mid-day so that she could meet and greet the locals during their lunch. She would travel on foot and walk into every alley and every street until she was certain that she had met everyone and visited every household within her village.

Some days, Somsri would go campaigning in a big group with her friends, which was fun and entertaining. Those who were busy with their daily routine and could not join the group would provide assistance in other ways. For instance, a noodle seller would introduce Somsri to his customers, or put her introduction card in a plastic bag with take-home orders. On other days, Somsri would take the motorcycle out by herself in order to have lots of time to meet with the members of each and every household. She always talked with housewives working in the kitchen and the elderly, whom male candidates usually overlooked or did not pay any attention to.

Somsri noticed that running a political campaign was not too difficult a task for women if they know how to turn their strengths into votes. For instance, it is a lot easier for women to walk into a house and engage in small talk with the wife or the elderly, who usually stayed at home. Somsri always started by making small talk, which could naturally lead to other general issues relating to the election and politics.

Somsri preferred to use a one-on-one approach in relating to her voters. In relating to the villagers, Somsri simply told them her stance, and the reason why she was running for the position. However, she admitted that at that time she did not know much about politics, nor had a valid policy in mind. She just knew by heart that she wanted to make a difference by voicing people's problems and needs to the responsible authorities.

According to Somsri, what her people needed the most was a politician who stood by their side during the bad times and helped them solve their problems. In the past, most politicians in Koh Klang were absent from the village, to living out their lives in Krabi town. Therefore, the villagers had no one from whom they could seek advice. Somsri made a promise that she would not make the same mistake. If elected, she would be around the same way she had always been and would try her best to improve the quality of life for people in the village.

She knew that women candidates like herself were often subject to a challenge, particularly by men when they were gathered in a big group.

Men would always say things to make us uncomfortable and then observe how we reacted. For instance, they would tease us or ask us to treat them with food or drinks even though they knew very well that it was against electoral rules. If we could fix the situation, we were lucky, but if we made the wrong move, we would get criticized.

Somsri also tried to avoid campaigning at a coffee shop, which was a popular means of campaigning among the candidates. It was well known that a coffee shop forum was a place where lovers of politics came to talk about each candidate's popularity or methods of campaigning. Somsri, however, perceived that this source of information was of no use to her. She reasoned that the information might have come from certain candidates who liked to create the requisite 'buzz', which made such information untrustworthy. Even if the information were true, she saw no use to it, since it would make her either overconfident or careless if the trend showed that she was ahead, or discouraged if the trend showed that she was behind her opponents.

To avoid such unpleasant situations, Somsri chose to spend most of her time visiting the voters at their homes. Despite taking more effort and more time, Somsri saw that this was an opportunity to bring back relationships with old friends that became estranged such as friends or disciples from the time that she was a religious teacher. Somsri was acquainted with so many people from the days of being a religious teacher that she chanted at each house during a "Nuri" ceremony; thus, spending time talking personally with villagers was just like visiting old friends and listening to their problems. It was also an opportunity for Somsri to show her intentions and offer her services in the political arena.

5.1.4.3 Pa, the Key Canvasser

However, Somsri's campaign would not have been so successful without the help of a key person—her father. Pa's direct and indirect involvement was the most important political asset in making her way into local government. Somsri said that Pa's approach as a canvasser was so natural and effective. He

usually carried her personal introduction card with him when going to collect the electricity fee from each house on the island. The job allowed him to chat with each homeowner, telling them about his daughter's candidacy. Pa did not talk much because he thought that "If we do good, good will come to us." Therefore, he did not see the need to butter up other people for his daughter. His message about Somsri mainly concerned her determination to work as the people's representative. The decision to vote was up to them.

Pa also advised Somsri that she should not concentrate only on her constituency, but should spare some effort to pay a visit to people in the other three villages. This was because people in Tumbon Klong Prasong are somehow related by blood or by marriage. "Personal bonds always transcend the electoral constituency," he asserted. Somsri agreed with her father and extended her rally to include some of the major families outside her village. The strategy turned out to be fruitful. She believed that she gained substantial votes from following her father's advice.

Somsri firmly believes that the plus point for her candidacy was derived from Pa's long history of doing good and his credibility and social networks, which were of tremendous help in her election. As mentioned earlier, Pa had proved himself an honest and reliable member of the community. As his daughter, Somsri, benefited from his merits. In local politics, where people are very close to one another, a family's reputation is of great influence in strengthening or weakening a candidate's image and credibility. Without Pa, Somsri said that she would have had less chance of winning.

5.1.4.4 Final Stretch before the Election

Somsri spent three full months campaigning for her election. From the feedback she received from the locals, she felt it likely that she would win. During the last two weeks before the actual election, two opposing candidates for the Chief Executive of the SAO approached Somsri to join their teams. One candidate even asked her to give a speech during his final rally. However, Somsri turned down their proposals, as she perceived that it would be better for her to remain neutral. There were two reasons for this: First, she did not want any of them to take her voter base for granted. And second, if elected she wanted to be able to express her thoughts

independently without having to take either the elected Chief Executive of the SAO into consideration, and or the chief's political allegiance.

On the final day, it turned out that Somsri won the election, having received the highest number of votes. She sailed gracefully into the political arena, proud of the fact that she did not buy even one vote. From that point onwards, Somsri told herself that she must not disappoint those who trusted her and gave her the chance to assume this important position. She promised to do whatever she could for the betterment of her community.

5.1.5 Somsri as a New Politician



Figure 5.3 Somsri Helped Set Up Meeting Tables before Other Participants Came to the Meeting

5.1.5.1 Self-Resolve

Somsri saw that local politicians in her village, though coming from similar backgrounds, held different political ideologies:

Some people entered politics because of the titles. Politics made one look smart and enhanced the reputation of the family. But I perceived that only wearing a mask (Khon) in politics did not make our lives or the villagers' lives better. The villagers voted for us to work for them so that they could have more time to make a living. They did not vote for us to respect or worship us.

Once elected as a member of the SAO, the first thing that Somsri told herself was to be consistent with the villagers who had voted for her. She once had a bad experience with some politicians who were able to greet (wai) every villager no matter how rich or poor the villager was during their campaign, but after they were elected, they behaved as if they were the ruling class. Some politicians could listen to or discuss matters before they were elected; but after the election, they thought and acted by themselves.

These undesirable characteristics she observed were things that she firmly promised not to duplicate. **One principle she regarded as most important was justice.** She felt that politicians should have higher moral standards, and not only help their own clan. She gave an example relating to the tsunami. As head of the housewives' group, she was a representative for receiving donations at the PAO. She found that local politicians from the same area as her took donated goods and distributed them only to their close friends, even though some of those people were not really in distress. This was something Somsri wanted to change. Since she was a part of local politics, she was determined to create justice in the village and her community.

5.1.5.2 Political Role Model

Somsri was new in politics but she believed that she had a resourceful political guru in the village who she respected as her political idol. Kamnan Samak Jaidee was a political veteran who was also the brother-in-law of Eiad—Somsri's closest friend. Because Somsri and Eiad were like sisters, Somsri was also close to the Kamnan and had learned a great deal from him.

The Kamnan was born and bred in Koh Klang. Before marrying the older sister of Ja Eiad, he lived by the seashore, a few houses away from Somsri's

house. The Kamnan's older brother was an Islamic religious teacher for whom Somsri held the utmost respect. Somsri said that she used to be biased against the Kamnan while working with the housewives' group. At that time, there was no SAO, and the Kamnan would act as a link between the villagers and government agencies in terms of both information and budgetary matters. As a member of the housewives' group, Somsri perceived that the Kamnan did not give much credit to the activities of villagers, but placed too much emphasis on infrastructure. She did not feel so close to the Kamnan.

After being part of the SAO, however, and having more chance to work in cooperation with Kamnan Samak, Somsri was able to detect his more admirable characteristics. For instance, the Kamnan was a politician who never abandoned the villagers. He possessed nothing of value except for his small wooden house and a small piece of land, but he was the one who provided assistance to villagers the most, no matter what problems they had, whether with land or government documents. Kamnan made a promise that he would sign as a guarantor in every case and claimed he was afraid of nothing. He had been in jail several times. While he was village headman, the Kamnan had been imprisoned on charges of stealing ore in Phang Nga. After his imprisonment, however, he ran for election and due to his good nature, was elected Kamnan.

The Kamnan was well-loved by the villagers because he assisted them with personal matters and they relied on his authority to contact and negotiate with government agencies, in that he had built up a network of government officials, politicians and businessmen that he could always ask for help. Somsri noticed that whenever he was in town, important people from the province came to greet him politely or welcomed him with lavish hospitality. Nevertheless, when he was on the island, he never acted like 'the big man' or showed off, and still led a simple life.

Somsri said that from her direct experience, she had never seen a politician who did not have to ask for sponsorship from others but was brought money to use as expenses instead. During an election, the Kamnan would never have to spend money to treat others since there would be someone who would slaughter a cow or buffalo and cook it to treat people for him. Somsri believed that this resulted from prestige and virtue that was continuously reinforced. "This Kamnan will never lose

an election. Even though he did not want to run for a position, someone would beg or urge him to do so". Somsri concluded that a good politician should sacrifice everything. He should devote himself, be sincere and look upon others' troubles as his own, an example set by Kamnan Samak.

Nevertheless, Kamnan Samak's method of governing came under fire from another group of villagers who did not agree with his policies, for instance, when he rushed around to bail out teenagers who had been arrested on charges of misbehaving or motorcycle racing. Many villagers saw that this did not make the teens learn the lesson they deserved. Therefore, they still quarreled with each other and became hooligans, causing trouble for the villagers.

I had a chance to visit the island in mid-October when Muslim people observe Ramadan. I saw first-hand the problem with teenagers. Some parts of the street on the island were covered with spikes, which gave many villagers flat tires. One villager told me that the night before someone yelled at a group of teenagers who were roaring past their homes on their motorbikes while most of the villagers were praying. The next morning, the spikes appeared; they believed that those teenagers had put them there.

I talked about this issue with Somsri. As she was part of the SAO, I asked her ideas about the criticism leveled against the Kamnan for being over protective of the teenagers. Somsri explained that the Kamnan reasoned that he had to rush around to ensure the teenagers would not be put in jail because he thought they were not mature enough to distinguish between right and wrong and imprisonment was not the right solution for them. "A thief will still steal after being imprisoned. A hooligan will still fight after being imprisoned. The solution is not to put them behind bars. Their criminal record will be with them until they grow up and give them a hard time finding jobs. It will give them an inferiority complex for the rest of their lives."

On the other hand, Somsri agreed with the Kamnan that the solution was to look at their families. Nowadays, the people of Koh Klang went to work in the city. They supported their children with money, but did not have time to nurture them and teach them what was right or wrong. Thus, the teenagers alone are not to be blamed. We should look at their families and the community to see what their roles are in order to prevent the teenagers from deviating from such a self-destructive

course next time. The Kamnan thought it was more sensible to look at both the families and the community to see what their roles should be in order to prevent teenagers from going astray.

The answer that Somsri quoted from Kamnan sounded rational, but did not suggest a concrete way of solving impending problems. When I kept on asking what should be done to make families and the community take more care of each other, Somsri thought for a while and answered, “We should restore the Muslim way of life, which is hard to do since every family has to struggle for a living.” I felt dissatisfied with this answer. Somehow, some of the villagers might feel the same way as I did, namely that the Kamnan’s interference in legal procedures (no matter what his purpose was) meant that the problem of children and youths on Koh Klang remained unsolved.

5.1.5.3 An Alienated Member

There is a famous saying that well exemplifies Koh Klang’s politics: “Whoever owns the sun uses the sun to burn others”. This means that a party with power in their hands will certainly use that power to gain benefits for themselves and do whatever it takes to destroy their opponents. In local politics, one way of doing this was to prevent an opponent from having a chance to demonstrate their achievements.

When Somsri entered politics, she found out that refusing to go on stage with the Chief Executive of the SAO during the election gave her a hard time working as a member of the SAO, since they thought she was on the opponent’s side. Moreover, the Chief Executive and the Kamnan were on opposite poles of the national political spectrum. This meant that Somsri, who was close to the Kamnan, was closely watched by the Chief Executive. During the first year in this position, not only did Somsri have to learn all about the working procedures by herself; she also had to learn how to handle herself or fight back in the political arena at the same time.

“Men never stopped engaging in politics”, Somsri said. This was because the Chief Executive came from Moo 1, which was the same village as her. The work should have been well coordinated, but instead gave rise to trivial problems that should not have happened. For instance, if there was an invitation letter from a government agency, Somsri was never informed. She sometimes had to ask the other

SAO members whether any letters had come in. If, by chance, Somsri saw an invitation letter, she would join that event, prompting the Chief Executive to ask SAO officials who had told Somsri. The SAO officers had to lie that it was a direct phone call and the SAO office had never informed her.

I asked other members of the SAO to check whether this kind of hindrance happened to other members as well. The answer was there might be many invitations to meetings each month, especially to training seminars, which most of the SAO members did not pay attention to. As such, the officials would not inform them since they thought that the SAO members might not be interested in the training sessions.

Besides the issue of withholding information that Somsri observed, she noticed other incidents that made her feel that her ideas were always being turned down without any reason. For instance, she proposed that the eight SAO members should take turns in coming into the office once a week in order to learn about documentation, to meet villagers who came to complain, or to welcome visitors or members of other agencies that came to visit the SAO office. But the Chief Executive turned down her idea immediately with the excuse of “not having enough tables.”

At the time of my research, Somsri was fighting about the new SAO location, which was then planned to replace the housewife’s group vocational training center, located in market area. Somsri reasoned that the place was too crowded, with bad ventilation, as the location was hemmed in by an overcrowded neighborhood. Somsri, therefore, lobbied the other seven members to vote against this proposal, reckoning that once the office was built in the wrong place, it would be there forever. She convinced them that it was their job to make the right decision now, because there was no other chance for them to correct this mistake.

Though they agreed with Somsri, some members did not want to argue with the CE. “You should not cause trouble. Whichever project you want, you should tell me later,” said a member. **Somsri learned that in local politics, personal relationships often interfered with public issues as no one wanted to confront political colleagues who were also friends from the local neighborhood.**

As a new politician, Somsri felt alienated by the executive board, which was composed entirely of political veterans (for instance, the vice CE was the CE during the previous term. The Chairman of the SAO was a village headman who resigned to run for the SAO election.) **These people always looked at Somsri as a troublemaker who always asked questions that they did not want to answer, and was not in step with the others.** For instance, in the council, Somsri was the member who raised her hand the most in a debate, and was the only member to oppose the Chief Executive. Nevertheless, Somsri found that a debate in the council was good for nothing since the officials would find reasons to quote until one could not tell what was right or wrong, and finally every SAO member would raise their hands in the same way anyway.

5.1.5.4 From Self improvement to Work Improvement

As a new member of the SAO, Somsri found that there was much more for her to learn in order to build up her capabilities for this work. When she first resumed office, she realized that all the administrative work was in the hands of SAO officials, while most council members were nothing but a rubber stamp for legitimizing the process and output.

In general, building a basic infrastructure was usually the SAO's top priority. As Somsri had no background knowledge about construction, she did not know how to look at a blue print; nor did she know about making specifications or budgeting. Even when she did not feel right about some items in the project, she did not know how to put it in objective terms, and felt frustrated by this limitation. "If we have no knowledge, it is not possible for us to monitor or question the operators," she concluded.

During the first year of her term in office, there were some government agencies that helped provide basic lessons for SAO members. The courses included subjects such as accounting, writing a project proposal, plus others subjects related to the functions of the SAO. But for most members, the lessons were too difficult to comprehend within a short course. "You must understand that most SAO members do not have university degree. It was impossible for us to understand all the technical details in a single training course. We could grasp at most 20 percent of what they taught in each class."

Like her other colleagues, Somsri also struggled with this problem. The best solution she could think of was to jot down everything in her notebook, brought the notes home to look over once again, and tried to relate the stuff she learned to the information at hand. And when the next training was organized, Somsri was never reluctant to apply, even though the course was the same one she had attended before.

When her application was passed on to the CE, he was suspicious of why Somsri wanted to do the same course over again, saying that the opportunity should be given to other members who had never attended the class. Somsri answered that because of her lack of education, she still could not understand the lesson by studying one time only. But if there were other members who also wanted to go for the training, she was willing to give him or her the opportunity first. Or she might contact the organizer to see if it was possible for them to have an extra participant. Finally, it transpired that no one from the office wanted to join her. So she was the only one.

From Somsri's point of view, the objective of effective training was to equip the participants with the necessary competence to work effectively. Therefore, if a participant like herself was still not knowledgeable enough to perform her task, it meant the effort spent on the first training course was merely a waste of time. She also saw that it was important for those training providers to understand the importance of retraining, particularly when the trainees were villagers who had less exposure to matters beyond their everyday experience. "And please do not feel bored to see old names reappear in the list of applicants, because there are only these people who were able to attend. Others might be less interested or too busy with their own lives," she said.



Figure 5.4 Somsri Attending a Meeting in Krabi Town

Because Somsri was also holding many titles in the community such as head of the housewives' group of Tambon Klong Prasong, member of the PAO's housewives' group, village health volunteer etc., she was regularly invited to participate in meetings and conferences both inside and outside Krabi. Aside from community work, her weekly schedule revolved around making presentations at all kinds of training classes, meetings or seminars. Though these activities consumed a great deal of time, she still placed a high priority on them.

Somsri thought that attending meetings was a good opportunity to meet and share experiences with people from various fields, which was of great help in widening her view of the world. "For political novices, if we do not force ourselves to learn more or meet more people, we will never have the knowledge to perform our tasks or have the friends to seek help from when help is needed," she stated.

5.1.6 Somsri's Political Outlook and Approach

From my observations in the field, I noted that Somsri's role as a politician reflected her life values of justice, service, and inter-dependence. These values ultimately influenced her political outlook toward policy issues, as well as her various approaches in putting them into practice. This section contains a number of anecdotes

of how Somsri made sense of politics and how she accomplished her work as a local woman politician amidst all the social and political contingencies that existed during the period of my study.

5.1.6.1 Shrinking Street



Figure 5.5 Newly Built Concrete Street on the Island

There was only one main brick road on Koh Klang Island, which passed all three villages. It was by this path that all the residents commuted by motorcycle or on foot from place to place. The first time I visited the island, I noticed that the path or so-called “road” was so narrow; the width was less than two meters and the brick surface was very bumpy. Though most villagers were skilled riders, accidents were frequent, particularly in the rainy season when the street becomes extra slippery. “A person who isn’t too lucky can get injured from being hit on the head with a brick, since during the rainy season the path becomes muddy and the cement blocks are not anchored firmly in the ground,” Somsri explained to me while I was trying to balance myself on her motorcycle.

A year later, the old brick path had been replaced by a concrete one, which was also twice as wide. I was happy for the villagers when I saw the new street from the pier. However, only half a kilometer away, the street seemed to grow

smaller again because of the bushes and branches from big trees, which stretched into both sides of the street. Despite the enlarged street surface, the remaining usable space was not so different from the condition it had been in before renovation.

To me, it was difficult to understand why local residents, who had fought for a better street infrastructure for a long time, did not keep the newly-built street in good and safe condition.

I asked Somsri why the residents did not clear away the offending bushes so that their motorcycles could easily avoid one another while passing each other on the street. She said that before the concrete street was built, people usually took care of the brick street by cutting the grass or trimming the trees on the side of the street in front of their houses. When the grass started to grow too long, the locals would also occasionally gather in bigger groups to do the work; otherwise there would not be enough space for motorcycles because the old street was only 1.5 meters wide.

However, the tradition had changed since the previous year, when the current SAO had allotted substantial budgets for street-side maintenance work. The problem happened when the CE spent this budget in hiring only his own people at wages of 200 baht per day. Because of this perceived unfair treatment, most villagers no longer cared for the new street. “When work needs to be done for free, they called on us to collaborate in remove grass or weeds. But when they had a budget, they hired their pals to do the work. That’s the complaint from most villagers here,” said Somsri.

Once people experienced this feeling of unfair treatment, they just stopped clearing grass or bushes from the sides of the street and did the work only in their compounds of their houses. I noticed that most Koh Klang residents liked to do gardening. The trees and grass in their homes were neatly cut and trimmed with a lawn mower, which one could see in most households. Nonetheless, grass and weeds on the sides of the street were mostly neglected.

I asked Somsri for her solution of how to solve this problem and how to boost community spirit in taking care of public property. “I don’t see a way”, she said. “Because politicians have spoiled the system and people now do not want to do public work unless they get paid.” Somsri thought that the only way to deal with this

problem was by “Establishing a village fund, using the current practice, but the allocation of the jobs and wages must be more evenly distributed throughout the village.” In doing so, the villagers outside the CE’s clan would have an equal chance to share this benefit.

The other point she raised concerned management of the budget. Because it took a long while to withdraw money from the bureaucratic system, while waiting for the budget, grass and weeds would have grown too long and encroached upon the road, especially during the rainy season. Somsri thought that the work would be more efficient if the CE could advance his own money to keep the work running. At the end, she emphasized that a good leader should always put the interests of the people before his own and must not be stingy. **“People who think small and are too tight with money will usually not make a good politician,”** she concluded.

5.1.6.2 Fish Pier Debate

In the middle of July 2007, I had a chance to accompany Somsri to an important meeting that would affect the livelihood of the residents of Klongprasong. The meeting concerned the relocation of the fish pier from its original place at the PAO’s pier to Baan Bangkanoon (Moo 4), a village in Klongprasong sub-district. There was a project to develop the PAO’s pier into a marina for mooring tourist boats and yachts. All the local leaders had gathered at the meeting to discuss this matter with the Chief of the Fishery Association and PAO officials. If the leaders agreed on this project, the next step would be to seek a consensus from the residents of each village.

A few hours before the meeting took place, the CE stopped by at Somsri’s house. He asked Somsri if she would vote for or against the project and she said “Yes.” After the CE had left, she told me further that they had lobbied for the project for quite a while in the belief that it would generate more revenue in taxes for local government.



Figure 5.6 Somsri Was the Only Woman Attending the Tambon Leaders Meeting on the Fish Pier Issue

The meeting took place at the public health center of Moo 1 and there were 21 participants attending the discussion forum organized by PAO officials and the Chief of the Fishery Association. The politicians who came to the meeting included the Kamnan, 4 village headmen, the CE, the President of the SAO Council, and 8 SAO council members. Also, there were representatives from the people's side such as the Imam, heads of special interest groups (i.e. the elderly, local fishermen), and some village council members. Somsri was the only woman present at the long discussion table. The points raised by each participant are summarized as follows:

The Chief of the Fishery Association started with the objectives of the project and the potential of Klongprasong Sub-district. He explained that the association was doing well in its old location at PAO's pier. However, for the common benefit of the residents of Krabi people, members of the association were willing to move to another location so that this provincial development project could proceed.

The CE of Klongprasong asserted that the Sub-district would be greatly developed by having this fishing pier built in the area. Taxes and income collected from the fishery business would lead to more development opportunities.

He had asked Kamnan and each village head to provide feedback regarding the villagers' opinions towards this project, but only Moo 2 and Moo 3 had returned the survey results. He further mentioned that if the project did not happen in his constituency, he would have no worries because it would lessen his workload, but because the place was his hometown, he only wanted the best for it.

An SAO Council Member from Moo 4 said that he was speaking on behalf of his people, who would be directly affected by the project. The area called Hard-gruad in Moo 4 (where the project was planned to take place) was a small stretch of beach where people usually made a living by collecting shellfish and making hinged floating nets for keeping fish in the sea. Building the fish pier in that area would certainly destroy local livelihoods, as well as have a detrimental impact on the surrounding mangrove forest. Therefore, the pros and cons of this project should be considered without bias and Moo 4 villagers allowed to participate in the decision-making process. Plus, the area of Hard-gruad was a protected forest area under the supervision of the Forestry Department. So, before seeking the consent of the people, the responsible authorities should first check with the department. At the end, the council member concluded that to avoid future problems, a transparent process must happen before the final decision was made.

The Chairman of the SAO council countered that everyone should focus on the long-term development benefits for the majority, not just focus on the benefits of his or her own group. The grounds where the residents of Moo 4 collected shellfish to earn a modest living did not generate any benefits for the rest of the SAO. It depended on the communications skills of local leaders to persuade villagers to accept this project by letting them see what future benefits awaited them. "If the Klongprasong people did not accept this project, tremendous benefits will go toward people in other sub-districts because the project must go ahead anyway". As for the protected forest area, he argued that even the forestry department had destroyed some parts of the forest for public causes. If all the local residents were in agreement, it would not be difficult to ask permission from the forestry department to use that area.

Somsri, as a council member from Moo 1, pointed out that she used to captain the long-tailed boat before, so she could well understand how civilization altered the traditional livelihoods of the locals. However, it was very difficult to turn

away from economic expansion as all villagers are undeniably drawn by the current of modernization. Concerning this project, **she saw that the project would benefit a lot of people, particularly in terms of job opportunities because unemployment had long been a major problem for the people of Koh Klang. One reason was because traveling expenses from the island to town were relatively expensive. If the fish pier project were to really happen in the sub-district, it meant more employment opportunities for people in the neighborhood.** Villagers could be manual workers at the pier, and those in Moo 4 could sell goods and food supplies to the tourists who came with the ships. She perceived that the greatest merit of this project was the fact that the people of Koh Klang would no longer have to work outside the island. But it all depended on preventive measures and future operations regarding how to minimize the unwanted tradeoffs of environmental degradation and other social issues.

The head of the senior citizens' group said that he, as well as many other villagers, agreed with the project. But the key concern was about the decision-making process. "Listening to the people's voice is not about endorsing what the leaders deem right because all the leaders sitting at this meeting table are not fishermen along the shoreline" (some villagers applauded). Therefore, it was unjust for leaders to overlook the problems of little people who sustained their lives merely by collecting shellfish. There should be some measures to help them in finding other occupations or at least seek their opinions before a decision was finalized.

Kamnan asked the PAO secretariat to put down in the meeting's minutes that 99.99 per cent of local leaders agreed with the project. The next process was to hold a public referendum in the coming week. Meanwhile, PAO officials should list the pros and cons of having the fish pier project in Moo 4 so that the items could be presented to villagers on the day of the meeting.

At the end of the meeting, all the participants agreed that a public hearing should be conducted at Moo 4 first because the other three villages seemed to be more amenable to the project. Thereafter, a public hearing was scheduled for Friday at a mosque in Moo 4. All the leaders at the meeting were invited to the referendum.



Figure 5.7 Villagers Participating the Public Hearing in Moo 4. All are Male Villagers

I also went with Somsri to the public hearing at Moo 4 on Friday which was attended by about thirty villagers. The pros and cons were presented by the Head of the Fishery Association who pointed that the merits of this project for Moo 4 villagers. In this regard, it was explained that 1) the price of land in the area would definitely increase and 2) villagers could have more jobs, such as slicing fish or squid. Regarding the cons, he mentioned the following points: 1) the impacts on shoreline fishermen's occupations and 2) changes in community's environment, as the local street would be packed with trucks that carry at least one million kilograms of seafood would pass through Moo 4's community areas each day, which meant the area would be no longer as peaceful as it had been.

After the preliminary speech, Moo 4 villagers took turns in expressing their opinions on the issue. A few villagers, including the Imam, were firmly opposed to the project, reasoning that the fish pier would bring in too many undesirable and uncontrollable factors. For instance, it was the norm in Moo 4 that no liquor be allowed in the community as it was prohibited under Muslim practices. On the other

hand, it was widely known that wherever a fish pier appears, nearby areas would usually be crowded with karaoke bars because laborers love to drink after a hard day's work at sea. Eventually, the influx of laborers would lead to more gambling, prostitution, and crime in the community. Furthermore, he did not see a way to prevent this from happening.

Somsri did not speak a word at the forum, but listened attentively to every argument. On the way back to Moo 1, I then asked her opinion again. Somsri said that despite all the lobbying efforts of the various parties, she did not think the project would happen. "As Moo 4 villagers themselves do not see the merits of the fish pier, and as the Imam insisted on arguing the way he did, this will definitely turn into a long, drawn-out story", she stated. In her view, the signs of conflict were rather evident even before the project had gotten started. In the end, it meant the PAO had better find other suitable locations.

5.1.6.3 Start with Small and Doable Matters

Klongprasong is a small sub-district. Thus, the development budget of the SAO amounted to just a few million baht. With this money, it was not possible for the SAO to initiate big projects by themselves. Most major infrastructure projects still depended on central agencies, or on the provincial government.

With such a limited budget in hand, Somsri thought that the SAO should not spend a large sum on just a few big projects. On the contrary, local government should concentrate more on small development loopholes that required less money to solve, and that directly benefit people's daily lives. Sometimes, however, her ideas were rarely accepted by the SAO's Executive Board. Somsri thus chose to do certain projects by herself, seeking funds from some NGOs, or cooperating with like-minded people in her community. Some examples of her development efforts are as follows.

1) Village Database

After entering politics, Somsri noticed that the SAO did not have solid information on the communities they served. This included demographic information, verified important histories, or data on the current social and economic situation, which kept changing all the time.

Now, no one remembers the date when electricity was established in Koh Klang for the first time, although it just happened in last decade. I think if the SAO wants to promote this island in the light of cultural tourism, it is important to compile key historical highlights and record them in a systematic manner. I feel embarrassed every time visitors ask questions about our villages and we always begin our answer with ‘I guess...’

Somsri had proposed this idea to the SAO council, and while the CE and the other members seemed to agree with her, two years after they had been in office, nothing seemed to change. When Somsri brought the matter up with the CE again, he said that no one had the time to do it. Somsri realized that if she wanted it to happen, she had to collect the information by herself. Since that day, she started to do her own research. She visited each household to collect demographic information on villagers’ incomes, the number of children, their level of education, etc. She collected provincial reports that concerned major incidents in Koh Klang, such as the effects of the tsunami on its people. She interviewed old people in the villages to collect information about Koh Klang’s history and culture. Last but not least, she collected information on the handicapped and underprivileged to coordinate with the Public Welfare Department and help them to provide assistance to these groups of people.

Though the work was delicate and time consuming, Somsri still did not lose heart. She had gradually collected the information while paying visits to people in her village. By this means, Somsri kept herself connected to her political base, regardless of her busy schedule outside her own constituency. She saw it as an invaluable opportunity to relate to people outside her social circle as well.

2) Information and Direction Signage

One of the items on Somsri’s agenda after entering politics was to make road signs and information signs on the island. Because the island had long been a residential area, it was not necessary to have a direction signs on each walkway as all the villagers were well acquainted with their own neighborhood. But once tourism was promoted, more visitors came to Koh Klang. Somsri saw that Moo 1, as

the gateway to the island, should provide basic signage for tourists so that they could travel by themselves to different tourist spots on the island.

Somsri always felt frustrated when she saw the blank sign at the pier on Koh Klang overlooking Krabi town. She really wanted to put a welcome statement up there, so that tourists on the mainland could notice Koh Klang. “We may put something like ‘Welcome to Baan Koh Klang, the outstanding eco-tourism community’ or whatever. It will be a lot better than keeping the sign the way it is – blank.”

After this, Somsri talked to her friends in the Baan Koh Klang tourism promotional organization and the members agreed with her idea. As it was too troublesome to wait for the SAO to get the work done, they decided to seek outside donors for their signage project. Accordingly, the club members reached out to those NGOs who had given them assistance during the recovery period following the tsunami, and finally got help from a university professor from a well-known institution in Bangkok. With the help of this professor, a budget of 20,000 baht was allocated and the project was started. The money was enough for constructing four information boards, such as the welcome sign at the pier, a map of the island, and different tourist attractions. Unfortunately, the first set of finished boards contained no information in English so it did not serve the needs of foreign visitors.

Somsri had to find other sources of money, therefore, to move mobilize the project further ahead. She then went to a resort owner on the island asking for community sponsorship and here her efforts paid off. The group received an extra 10,000 baht to produce a few more English information boards.

Despite the efforts of Somsri and her group, it seemed to me that their utilization of money was not as effective as it should have been. For instance, the cost of building the information board was rather expensive. I knew that it was not caused by ill intention, but by their customary generosity in hiring local villagers at a higher cost, while it would have been cheaper to hire from outside sources.

The four information boards, nonetheless, become more worthwhile than the club members had previously thought. After the boards had been installed, they were widely appreciated by all villagers, and consequently, the matter

came to the attention of the CE. In no time, the SAO's Executive Board agreed to allocate s budget to build signs showing directions at key intersections. Moreover, spotlights were placed on the welcome sign at the pier so that people from the town side could mark out the island's location at night time.

Somsri and her friends learned that big changes started with small steps. Moreover, she firmly held to the belief that people should start to make a difference by doing whatever they were capable of. Even though it may not be perfect the first time round, it was a lot better than remaining apathetic, waiting for the results to come at an unspecified time.

3) Garbage Pick-up Day

Another of Koh Klang's problems was waste management, either at the household or village level. I frequently saw villagers throwing garbage on the ground, littering the area. The sides of the street were always full of non-degradable wrappers from children's snacks or candies.

On August 5, 2006, I talked to Somsri about the garbage issue. She ventured that it was due to ingrained habits, which could not be easily eliminated by providing more garbage cans. "You'll see that the cans are always empty, and the garbage is always scattered on the ground," she said. In her view, the most effective way to eliminate garbage was to create as little garbage as possible. Somsri said that she wanted to encourage people to use plastic wrappers as fuel for cooking. "Isn't that dangerous?" I asked and was a bit surprised to hear her reply "They are now using lantern fuel to pour on the wood before lighting it up and using it to build a fire for cooking, and that is even more dangerous than using plastic." I tried to suggest that either means was hazardous to health and there should be a better way to solve the garbage problem, but Somsri continued to say that sometimes we could not expect perfect results for everything. In doing so, she thought that it would at least help to reduce the garbage problem. I did not agree with her on that point, but reminded myself not to argue with her further on the issue.

The next time we had a chance to talk about waste management was on January 23, 2007 when Somsri invited me to join the village's Garbage Pick-up Day. She told me that the campaign had been running for six months with the cooperation of a sub-district public health official, who was also her friend. Each

month, there would be a day when school students and housewives gathered in a long parade to collect garbage from the sides of the street. News of the campaign was announced via the village news broadcasting tower, with the cooperation of the Chairman of the Senior Citizens' Group, who would announce it monthly. It was believed that the campaign would gradually eliminate their improper habits of disposing of garbage in a more sustainable manner.

On that day, I also had a chance to have lunch with the sub-district public health official who was running the campaign. He said that within the past six months, the amount of litter had significantly decreased. On the first clean-up day, the garbage was so abundant that the villagers have to plow it out from the ground. Now, however, Moo 1 was a lot cleaner and littering in the sea was hardly ever seen. "I think Somsri's idea works. The approach itself may not be exciting. It's the way people here change their behavior that's exciting," he concluded.

4) Parking Space for Motorcycles

As the people of Koh Klang have to go to work in town, they usually ride their motorcycles from home and park them at their friends' houses near the pier, then take a long-tailed boat over to the town. However, many of the residents from other villages had difficulties in finding a house where they could leave their vehicles. As a result, they needed to ask a friend or a family member to come along with them, in order that he/she could help ride the motorcycle back home. And in the evening, they needed to pay a motorcycle taxi service to take them home.

Somsri saw that it was inefficient, not to mention inconvenient, for these villagers, particularly when the price of oil had become more and more expensive. Thus, when there was a new project regarding street renovation, she convinced the other members to support the expansion of the road's shoulder, which could be used as a motorcycle parking space, before formally proposing this matter at an SAO meeting. The Board accepted her initiative and authorized a budget for the project. However, in practical terms, so many factors hindered its progress, such as obtaining permission to use public land for this purpose, construction problems etc. As it was her initiative, Somsri felt responsible for facilitating and monitoring its progress. She often stopped by at the SAO office to discuss the project with SAO's

engineer, who was in charge of it, and every time the engineer faced an obstacle, he called Somsri for advice.

Somsri mentioned that **establishing a good relationship with SAO officials was an important factor in the successful completion of any project because they were the ones who actually implemented the policy decision.** Therefore, she never failed to pay special attention to SAO staff members, and was rather well liked by them.

5.1.6.4 Attitude towards Money Politics and Corruption

Determining Somsri's attitude towards money politics and corruption was one of the most complicated pursuits of my entire study. The very first time I met her, Somsri surprised me with a sentence I that I can hardly forget: **"I am not against people who buy votes. It doesn't mean candidates who buy votes are bad. I have known many good people who had to buy votes to fight against the bad candidates."**

Somsri explained that she did not buy votes during an election because she spent considerable time visiting villagers and that was because the scope of one village was small enough for a single candidate to cover. For the bigger elections, however, in which a candidate cannot manage to visit each and every household, she would definitely understand the candidate's necessity to use money. "Villagers commonly thought that 'If the candidate cannot come and visit us, then at least they should show that they have guts and pay us a satisfactory amount of money'". They see that "showing the guts and paying a satisfactory amount of money" were a reflection of the politician's dependability and his/her willingness to serve.

Somsri raised another example of a candidate who paid the traveling expenses of villagers who came to vote as being an acceptable practice. Even though she been at odds with such a thing in the past, when looked at it from the opposite angle, she found that sacrificing their time spent making a living to vote had already caused the villager enough trouble. There were many villagers who wanted to come to vote but did not have the money for traveling expenses. Thus, **it was not surprising that the villagers would accept the kindness of a candidate who was willing to pay for their traveling expenses and repay him by voting for him.** Somsri said that there were some candidates who paid the traveling expenses of

students who studied in the city or in other provinces to come back to vote on election day. (She talked about this issue in very vague terms. She did not mention whether she had done the same thing or not.)

In her opinion, there was no definite connection between political spending and corruption either before or after election. Decent politicians must understand that they were spending money to gain credit and respect. They must not expect to redeem the money once having got into political office. Thus, Somsri was frustrated to hear a leader complain about his political expenses, even about making a contribution at a funeral, or paying for villagers' food or traveling expenses when he meets them at the market. She said:

Politics uses money all the time. You use money in a campaign during an election, and when you get elected, the money is used to assist others. Whoever wants to enter politics should get over this matter. If not, he/she should not enter politics in the first place. If I hear a politician complain about this, I always answer him or her back that they entered politics because they wanted to be famous, so they should not be complaining now.

I decided to ask her about a rumor I had often heard regarding the 10 per cent overhead commission for each SAO project. Somsri said that she was in the opposition, and was usually excluded from the decision-making group. Wanting to know what was going on, she sometimes came out and asked the contractors directly how much they had paid to the SAO for the project. Moreover, if a corruption attempted was suspected, she chose to notify the villagers about the discrepancy. "From the beginning, no one would talk to me about this because I'd go and tell the villagers everything I knew," said Somsri.

I once discussed this issue with Somsri's friends at Uncle Mee's parlor, where the group usually gathers in the evening. Their attitudes towards corruption, to me, were quite unusual. One of them said that **10 per cent was acceptable if, and only if, the leader did not keep all money to himself but shared it with all the members.** Another said that transparency was what he deemed important:

They should tell us frankly. For instance, from a project worth 1 million baht, 100,000 Baht would be deducted, so how much would each member of the SAO receive? How much would be kept as expenses in the community? How much would be kept by them? This should be made public and made transparent. I think the villagers can accept this.

“But there was a problem because they always share the money among their companions. They do it in an underhanded way. They have been criticized for this conduct, which constitute a lack of transparency and an injustice,” another friend added. “All human are intrinsically selfish. But the key is not to let it get to be too much or beyond all reason,” one said.

Then, I asked Somsri what she would do if the CE also shared some of the money from the 10 percent with her. While Somsri was thinking, a female friend said **“We should take the money first. Once we’d got it, we would use it to help the community. If we did not take it, the villagers would get nothing because men always take the money for themselves and won’t share it with the villagers anyway.”** Everyone at the parlor seemed to agree with the statement. Then I asked them why villagers did not keep a close check on the political wrongdoings because the money made from corruption in fact meant a shortfall in their development. The answer was:

Actually, the villagers knew who had cheated and for how much. But nobody wanted to humiliate themselves on this matter. Because firstly, they were all one of us. Secondly, they [politicians] cheated with public money, not one of the villagers’ money. Thirdly, even though not happy with it, ordinary villagers do not have time to do an audit and to submit documents. They don’t even know where to start. Even with some villagers who know how to do this, if they busied themselves only with auditing politics, they would have nothing to eat. Thus, only people who have the money and the time and do not depend on it too much can do this.

When I had some private time with Somsri, we continued our discussion of this issue. Somsri said that some politicians were tempted by corruption because they tried to elevate their social status by changing their lifestyles. Therefore, they had to spend a lot of money to maintain that status, as well as to save face. “Some people dress and live ordinary lives before entering politics. But once they get elected, their houses get bigger and they change to wearing only Levi jeans. Thus, the villagers conclude that for sure they must be corrupt. And once they have taken kickbacks, they should not be stingy with the villagers,” said Somsri.

Somsri articulated that she would not promise anything she could not deliver on or that she perceived as being beyond her capabilities. For instance, she said “not long ago, there was a person asking for a sponsorship to buy sport clothes. I gave some money for that. Later on, the person came back and told me that he wanted more support by asking for good material for the team’s shirts. I then told him that I had given what I could. Don’t be shy to tell them the truth, namely that we cannot assist them in that matter.”

Somsri admitted that being a politician was not easy because she had to take responsibility for villagers who might think in a different way from her. Some villagers made it a habit to ask for things; thus, this made her feel moody. However, if she saw them as underprivileged; and it was not beyond her capacity, she would never turn down a person who asked for help. This is how Somsri got her nickname: “Somsri 24 hours.”

Nevertheless, Somsri had never sought any benefit from being a politician. She had never deducted anything from the money that was brought in to assist the village. After entering politics, everyone could see that she was not getting any richer but in fact poorer, which should be evidence that she had proved herself in the role of a politician.

5.1.7 Looking Forward

During the three years that Somsri fulfilled her political role, she spent almost all of her time serving her constituents in every way she could. Accordingly, she had earned the trust and respect of the people she served. However, the political credibility she achieved did not come without monetary costs in that she spent almost

all her own money on miscellaneous expenses related to her public work. The following section illustrates how Somsri planned to pursue her political career, and how she would sustain her financial standing to support the cause.

5.1.7.1 Somsri's Political Ambition

Somsri's first term in local politics had been pretty successful. The people's response to her role in local political life was heart-warming. Ja Eiad, Somsri's best friend, said with confidence that in the next SAO election, Somsri will win by an even bigger landslide. **Her constant hard work made the villagers warm to her and see for themselves that she was different from the male politicians who they used to vote for.**

I also overheard an old grandma say to Somsri when she visited her at home, "Next term, enter the election again. I will tell my children and grandchildren to vote for you." From my observations, Somsri's career path in local politics is well paved as she had firmly established a solid base in terms of political capital in the village and the nearby constituencies.

I asked her, therefore, about her future plans for her political career or her desire to advance to a higher political position, for instance as the Chief Executive of the SAO. Somsri said that for the time being, she was still new to politics and had a lot to learn. "I have the heart to do the work, but I don't think I have the capabilities to do it now," she replied. She related that in her opinion, **before proposing oneself as a candidate, one must carefully assess oneself in all aspects: knowledge, experience, economic status, connections, ways of behaving in the society, how to read other people's intentions and so on.** She cited the case of her political role model, Kamnan, in that he was able to befriend diverse types of people, from the local mafia to professors, while Somsri grasped that she still did not have that quality.

Getting hold of a position is not as difficult as having support from the right people, such as teachers. If you're the CE, but nobody listens to you or you could not ask for their cooperation, that would be no use at all. SAO projects consist of many aspects. For instance, in education, you need to cooperate with teachers. I only finished Por 6, but the

teachers had graduated with a Master's degree. We are somewhat different.

With her limited education, Somsri realized the need to strengthen her other qualifications. **Thus, she plans to amass more experience in politics; to find more connections with key individuals, such as politicians, government officials, academics, NGOs involved in development; and to prepare to settle on a more stable business from which her political work could be smoothly funded.** If these factors were in place, she would definitely not hesitate to apply for a higher political position. Politics was her ideal vocation. Somsri thought that there was no other occupation that satisfied all her psychological needs: 1) opportunities to help others, 2) opportunities to constantly improve herself and 3) the opportunity to be recognized. As long as people still want to elect her as their representative, she would always run for politics, whatever the position, from Village Head to a member of the PAO.

5.1.7.2 Political Spending and the Income Issue

One day, I called Somsri and was told that she was in the field with a group of officials from the electricity authority, who had come to see about the expansion of electricity on the island. She asked me to wait for her at home and she would hurry back when the work was finished. When she came back, I saw that she looked exhausted. Somsri told me that she needed to take her motorcycle to lead the officials to the site on the other side of the island, where new households were being built and electricity was required. After showing them the place and introducing them to village leaders, Somsri also needed to treat them to lunch and give them some pocket money as a token of appreciation.

Having listened to what was going on, I questioned the fact that the SAO salary alone might not be sufficient for her miscellaneous social expenses. I was curious about Somsri's economic situation after entering politics, including her expenses, sources of income, and savings.

Somsri once told me that she had saved a sum of money when working with Pa. Recently, she had also bought a copying machine and placed it in front of her house to provide a photocopying service to villager at a modest fee. However,

considering the daily expenses that went with her political status, I suspected that Somsri might run into financial difficulties at some point because her income seemed to be far lower than her expenses.

When the opportunity arose, I decided to ask Somsri about this sensitive question. She paused for a while, before answering that before entering politics, she had savings of around 50,000 baht. Now, however, she had less than 10,000 baht left. Somsri said that she spent about 8,000 baht on the women's boat-racing team (in addition to the money they got from sponsors). Another 10,000 was spent during the election on application fees, having an I.D. photo taken, campaign posters, etc. The rest of the savings was almost used up after she had become an SAO council member. "I get a salary from the SAO of 4,800 baht, but the monthly expenses are around 7,000 to 8,000" said Somsri. She pointed out that the photocopying business was not that profitable as villagers normally made a copy of important documents only when there was an urgent need to do so. Consequently, Somsri needed to dip into her own savings to cover the monthly expenses.

Each month, most of Somsri's expenses went on correspondence and following up on village projects. For instance, when she helped to accelerate the installation of electricity in the village, she used her mobile phone to contact people who could connect her to the relevant agencies; she commuted on her motorcycle to town to submit villagers' requests, and once field officers came to the village, she still needed to facilitate their visit and take care of them. Despite the fact that she was doing these things on behalf of the people as their representative, all the expenses incurred were out of her own account. "During the past three years, my savings have slowly dried up. I now need to do something to cover these monthly expenses before I have to go into debt," she stated.

To Somsri, people who can do political work must possess a certain degree of financial stability. In a small community like Koh Klang, people did not require a lot of money to make a living. "For any local politicians, it would be good to have some assets that constantly generate money for us so that we don't need to worry about our own finances and can concentrate on helping others," said Somsri. When I asked what amount of money she deemed "sufficient" in sustaining oneself in

the community and in politics, she replied that “for a single person like myself, 8,000 a month should be enough both for personal and social expenses.”

Since a politician has to spend personal time on public work, it made more sense for her to have a small business that did not need close attention. Somsri hoped to own some properties like four or five small houses for rent from which she could collect monthly fees. For the time being, however, her savings were not enough for long-term investment. However, she already had an income-generating plan in mind.

“I haven’t told anyone yet but I think it might work,” Somsri started. She told me that she planned to borrow some money from Pa to build a small handicraft workshop at home. The other day, when Somsri went to visit a group of miniature boat-makers, some of the members raised the issue that there were not enough goods to meet tourists’ demands and people who were skilled in building miniature boats were rare. Thus, Somsri had the idea of making this her sideline. She thought that she could do the handicraft part by herself at home during the nighttime to earn additional income.

In terms of business, Somsri explained that a member sold one model boat for 350 baht to the group, and the group would mark up the price to 500 baht when selling to tourists. The surplus of 150 baht would be accumulated by the group and, after administrative costs had been deducted, the remaining profits would be shared among members at the end of each year. Consequently, what Somsri planned to do as a first step was to buy necessary tools for the woodwork, which would cost around 20,000 baht. Once the tools were in place, there were no other overheads because bamboo, the only material used in making miniature boats, could be collected in the neighborhood.

“I like this kind of work. I think I can do it well. If I am able to make one piece per night, I will have at least 7,000 baht a month. Adding to the 4,800 baht from the SAO, I think I will be doing just fine,” said Somsri with a smile. Somsri was confident that she could learn this craft in no time because she always liked to build things. More importantly, in doing this job she did not need to compromise her political work during the daytime as she herself said: “During the daytime, we are

busy with the villagers' matters, but during the nighttime, we can be busy with our own matters." "Well, don't you plan to sleep at all?" I asked. And she laughed.

5.1.8 Conclusion and Key Findings

Somsri is an example of an ordinary local woman who has succeeded in making a graceful entrance into politics. She has neither a high level of education, nor does she come from a wealthy family background, but with the sense of efficacy achieved in the later stage of her life, she has made a swift turn away from the normative life pattern of a local Muslim woman to a much more influential life as a politician. This section sums up the key findings that help one to understand Somsri as a person, as a local figure and as a politician.

5.1.8.1 Personal Characteristics and Values

There are some outstanding characteristics of Somsri that differentiate her from most of the women, or even men, in her community. Although she could not be described as possessing traditional female attributes, such as shyness or softness, Somsri was a very **compassionate and caring** woman who usually put other people's interests before her own.

Somsri is a big sister who has spent the first 25 years in her life taking care of her family. Through various responsibilities assigned to her by her parents from a very young age, Somsri was groomed to be **versatile, independent, tough, and hard working**. Deep inside, she was also a **competitive** type of person who regarded competition and difficult tasks as challenges to be overcome.

The first turning point in Somsri's early years, as I perceived, was when she needed to quit formal schooling and entered religious school. Religion was of great influence in reinforcing her **philanthropic spirit**, as well as giving her hope and faith in living a worthwhile life by helping others.

Even though Somsri had to sacrifice something that she wanted the most, education, to increase the opportunities for her siblings, until it became an inferiority complex, **she changed this feeling into a positive motivation, driving her to learn whatever she could in this later stage of life**. More than anything, Somsri **wanted to be successful in life**. She **wanted her parents to be proud of her** and **she also wanted to prove that her perseverance and determination made her**

life better. Nevertheless, the result of the feeling that her parents were biased in their love for their children made Somsri **seek justice and equality** all the time. In circumstances where she thought she was the target of discrimination, she would never be afraid to stand up against it or express her opinion in order to seek justice.

Somsri's case study exemplifies a situation where local women face a lack of opportunity to develop themselves because their world outlook is restricted by their surroundings during their upbringing and by their family responsibilities. Because family responsibilities occupied most of her time, she had very little knowledge about the world beyond the island. However, after realizing such limitations, she was determined to keep improving herself through whatever means she could.

One characteristic that Somsri constantly manifested from childhood to adulthood was her **strong determination to learn.** Despite her primary level educational, Somsri attached high priority to self-improvement either from reading, observing other people's lives, socializing with different social groups, or from attending seminars, participating in public forums, etc. Somsri was a living example of a lifelong learner who took lessons from even very small things she came across. She regarded new learning each day as a life-long mandate, as stated in one of her favorite phases from the Koran: "Thou should continue to learn from the cradle to the grave." The incident at the butcher shop's chopping block was a critical turning point in Somsri's life as it was the first time she had learned that there were so many things in this world that she had never known about before. Yet, it was also the starting point of her resolution to improve herself. And that value was also carried over to all aspects of her personal and political life.

Another turning point in Somsri's life was when she left home to live with her cousin-- Vi. The eye-opening experiences of those years were able to fulfill her dreams of seeing more of the world. Through these experiences, she began to perceive the inequality and diversity in society at large, which in turn, stimulated her **inner desire to make a difference** for the villagers in her hometown.

As a politician, Somsri was **creative, insightful, and persistent** as reflected by many of her inputs into the SAO's decision-making body. She worked very hard to prove herself as a woman leader who always stood on the side of the

people. On the other hand, she was also bound by the patronage system in her local area and was largely influenced by Kamnan, whom she regarded as her political guru. Her social attitudes often reflected **pro-villager** values, which could be a double-edged sword in community development. Somsri perceived that the use of connections or power to help the locals was one of the forms of service that a leader should perform. Thus, one requirement of becoming a leader was to be able to reach the center of power, which could benefit the villagers.

Somsri's assumption of development was to make people happy and improve their quality of life. To her, villagers had long been deprived of rights and had unequal access to government's services. As a result, she, as a leader, was responsible for serving them, giving them more opportunity to earn a better living, and if possible, allowing them to have a stake in the budget allocated by the government, either directly or indirectly. Her "pro-villager" attitude undeniably influenced her choice of actions, as exemplified in many cases cited above. As a whole, **part of her values toward politics still rests on the classic patronage system, which emphasized the passive status of villagers as dependents, where leaders or politicians had a role in winning and reallocating benefits from the government on their behalf.**

However, one characteristic of Somsri that made her different from most politicians was that she placed great **value on equality and justice**. Somsri did not work only for the benefit of her supporters and her clan, but was also concerned for the interests of the public as well. Thus, she worked harder than other politicians who merely wanted to serve their power base.

5.1.8.2 Concepts and Approaches Regarding Politics

Somsri's values undeniably shaped her political views in addition to determining her approach to the world of politics.

Most people in her village regarded politics as a sort of competition in which the winners would be given legitimate power and authority in distributing, allocating, or administering public resources. Furthermore, in so doing, the elected individuals also were attracted by political titles that signified their superior social status. Given this mindset, the most critical point in politics was an election, an event in which each candidate's circle of influence was put to the test. The influence itself,

however, could be either social power or monetary power. Vote buying, thus, is merely a manifestation of influence. Most villagers do not mind exchanging their votes for money, as they understand that the power of money was also an important condition in keeping the wheels of patronage rolling.

Somsri conceptualizes politics in the similar way. It was noticeable that **she did not express much concern as to how a politician got into power, but more on how he/she used that power to benefit the people. To her, vote buying was not a crime, but another way of wealth distribution that at least benefits the villagers' bottom line.** Instead, she placed greater emphasis on the role of politicians after they got elected. Good politicians, in her view, must not utilize administrative power only for the privilege of themselves or their clans. The beneficiaries of any policy or its implementation should be more inclusive. She did not see politicians gaining benefits from public policies as a serious matter as long as the benefits were distributed to the villagers as well, no matter whether it was in a direct or indirect way.

In this connection, Somsri's main requirement of a decent politician is someone who is willing to sacrifice him/herself to serve others, in the same way as the Islamic religion taught about sharing physical power, willpower and financial power to assist the underprivileged. To be more specific, **this concept of politics does not separate her from the system of dependency and the patronage system. At the same time, it does not rest upon the democratic ideal that emphasizes coordination and gaining or using power in an accountable way.** Because most of the local residents were relatives, auditing or complaining about injustice was perceived as an unreasonable in that it could cause unfriendly feelings and confrontation between villagers, which in turn could affect the unity of the community as a whole. When this happens, it is undesirable because it conflicts with the concept of the unity of a Muslim society.

5.1.8.3 Discussion on Somsri's Candidacy

Somsri's candidacy could be viewed as a political phenomenon on Koh Klang island for the following reasons:

- 1) Somsri was the first woman in her village to run for a political position.

2) It was the most competitive election on the island, with the number of electoral candidates being triple that of the previous election.

3) It was the first time that women and young adults played key roles in an election campaign in terms of supporting a particular candidate.

4) Despite being a woman, she won the election with the highest number of votes.

It can be said that her popularity, as well as her credibility, during her candidacy was partly built upon the triumph of the women's boat-racing team, which significantly highlighted her leadership role. Somsri used this momentum and turned it into political capital for her candidacy.

During campaign time, Somsri was also successful in presenting herself as a young-blood candidate in politics. Her rallies, with full support from women and youth groups, have resulted in a political trend that involves looking for a fresh face in the form of a female candidate like herself. Somsri was not a shy person. She dared to spell out her political outlook upon her visit to each and every household in the village, while giving villagers concrete promises of what she would or would not do if got elected.

Somsri proved that a woman candidate could be as determined or as assertive as men, despite insulting words from some villagers against a woman aspirant. Her campaign was able to effect change in local elections, as she was the first woman who won a political seat, and with the highest number of votes.

5.1.8.4 Factors of Success

Somsri's success in politics, whether in an election or in her subsequent political work, is partly derived from having good political assets. It is also partly due to Somsri having fewer restrictions than other female politicians. She also had opportunities and support in terms of the following:

1) Somsri's father was respected by people in the community; thus, her entry into politics was quite smooth.

2) Somsri used to be a teacher of the Islamic religion, which created a good image of her, and people in the community knew her well.

3) Somsri entered politics at an appropriate time, because she had just gained recognition from the villagers for leading the female boat team and winning a competition.

4) Somsri had the characteristic of not being too lady-like, so she could get along well with both male and female villagers.

5) Somsri had many social roles that opened up a number of channels for her in performing her tasks until she became well known, which then gave her opportunities to develop herself.

6) Somsri could devote herself fully to her work since she did not have to take care of her parents or her family.

7) Somsri had enough savings that she did not have to work extra jobs.

8) Somsri lived close to the center of power of the patronage system, namely Kamnan, who had connections with politicians, businessmen and government officials that she could rely on.

These factors of success involve both her personal qualifications and supporting environment. Factors 1-3 were those that were responsible for Somsri winning an election in the first term. Factor 4 was a non-typical characteristic that differentiates Somsri from other Muslim ladies. Number 5 signifies Somsri's social networks that broadened the scope of her socialization and learning opportunities. Factors 6-8 depend upon external factors that are potentially uncertain (for instance, if Somsri got married and had to take care of her parents when they got sick, her savings would be diminished, or if she could not rely on Kamnan for support or advice anymore, this could affect her network of connections). These factors would somewhat affect Somsri's success in politics. Nevertheless, as long as she performs her current duties to the best of her abilities, she will continue to thrive in the local political arena. By continuously improving her potential and spending time on developing her personal network and relationships with key stakeholders, together with finding ways to build up the income to be used as capital for political works in the long run, should enable Somsri to use her strength to maintain her political status.

5.1.8.5 Gender-Related Issues

Most of the villagers on Koh Klang Island, as in other Muslim communities, subscribe to a traditional gender-role ideology, where the roles and status of men are superior to those of women. Women were viewed as second-class citizens and their needs were always overlooked by men, who exerted control over vital resources. Without women's voices reflecting this imbalance on a decision-making body, the community tended to overlook such discriminatory practices relating to gender that were a regular occurrence in everyday life.

From a very young age, Somsri has been one of those who questions existing social norms. There were many examples of her going against the norm to prove that a woman is capable of doing many more things if she has the chance and the will to do so. Learning to pilot a long-tailed boat is a significant example of her rebellious nature in this respect.

However, for many local women in the village who have been molded by traditional gender-role ideology, socialization outside one's routine's domain has helped to alter their perception of gender. Participation in community or group affairs is a major factor contributing to an increase in a woman's self-confidence and self-worth. Not only Somsri, but also her female friends experienced this, once they got together to participate in the boat race. Sport is a good means of igniting women's sense of teamwork in fighting to achieve the same goal. Their success in the contest reinforced the idea that women should fight for the right for equal participation in social activities.

Once they occupy a space in community affairs, their hidden potential shines. The role of female agents for change in the community has become truly impressive. On Koh Klang today, there are a number of women leading vocational groups, such as the tourism (home-stay) group, health group, etc. At the same time, the group activities undertaken by these women shape their leadership qualities as well.

It was interesting to learn that most women, in spite of the dynamic roles they play in the community, were not interested in putting themselves forward as political candidates. They felt that politics was too dirty a game, in which very few "carefree" women could take a full part. Many women reported that they preferred to

lend support to a woman friend who was “ready”, rather than run for a political position themselves.

Although politics is still viewed as a male preserve, it is beyond question that Somsri’s presence and success in politics convey a clear message to the younger generation that women are also capable of being good leaders. To some extent, she could be seen as a female political role model in her hometown, setting a good example for women wishing to pursue a political career in the future.

5.1.9 Last Words

Somsri’s stories have provided many useful insights into the lives of local women, whose choices in life were rather limited. From childhood to adulthood, Somsri’s life was overwhelmed by daily routines, as a result of which she had very little chance for self development, no matter how much she may have wished for it. In the rather isolated context of Muslim villagers, I detected that the freedom issue basically impeded Somsri’s development in the early stage of her life. This included the freedom to know, as well as the freedom to develop oneself to one’s full potential.

Somsri recognized such limitations at the age of 25, which was comparatively late. As soon as she had this epiphany, however, she was determined to make a constant effort to improve herself. It may be said, therefore, that the foremost outstanding feature of Somsri was not the fact that she knew more than others, but the fact that she realized that there were many essential things in this world that she did not know about; it was this fact that differentiated her from others and ultimately brought her into a position of leadership. The drive to know led to the drive to learn, and thus to the drive to share and to serve.

Her roles as a politician are also worth studying. Somsri always played a leading role in several political arenas in which she has been involved. When there was a chance to meet with government officials or national-level politicians, she would perform her role as a representative of the people, accurately reflecting villagers’ needs. When she was at the village, Somsri always performed the role of a service provider more than the role of a leading political figure. Villagers knew that she could be called upon at any time, without any need to beat around the bush. **Somsri’s self-conduct brought her closer to villagers than most male politicians,**

who invariably made themselves the center of attention by maintaining the stance of a leader, even in an informal conversation.

When looking at problems, Somsri's way of thinking was clearly different from that of male politicians. For instance, in the case of the fish pier, even though Somsri supported this project, as did other male politicians, her reason for supporting it was different. Somsri looked at the job opportunities this would create within the village, while the male politicians saw it as a chance for the SAO to earn an income from tax etc.

Though Somsri was not in an administrative position, and was also in conflict with the CE, she wisely used indirect strategies to support her cause. It was significant that **Somsri always sought to build alliances in achieving her objective and carrying out the work.** Somsri maintained a good relationship with SAO officials to acquire inside information and to ensure that the work proceeded smooth. When the SAO's board rejected her proposal, she turned to work with other organizations or people's groups in the community. Alternatively, when she could not perform the auditing function in the SAO, she passed on information about the discrepancy to the public. These strategies were successful, not only in delivering the project at hand, but also in highlighting her leadership role in local politics.

Another point I would like to mention concern the sustainability of Somsri's political career. **Considering that her savings were gradually being used up, I sincerely doubt that her level of devotion and sacrifice could be sustained, and she would be distressed if she had had to start her next political term in debt. Moreover, her idea of "leader-give-all" would be a problem if she wanted to enter, or was urged to enter, politics at a higher level.** Somsri was functioning as a representative of the residents of Moo 1, which comprised no more than 200 households. Within these parameters, she was still able to devote herself to respond to each and every request, using her own resources in terms of time and money. However, at a level of political office, for instance if Somsri would like to run for the position of Chief Executive or membership of the Provincial Council, her "leader-give-all" approach would definitely push her into a dead end. In a nutshell, it is simply not possible for one leader to give personal assistance to several thousand

villagers within the constraints imposed upon him/her in terms of time, money, and human resources.

From a gender perspective, Somsri's subscription to justice also makes her an advocate for gender equality. She saw that women inherently occupy a subordinate position to men. Thus, she always felt the urge to speak out for women's rights and voice their concerns and demands to decision-makers. At the same time, she saw that women's self-improvement and self-esteem were key factors in women's empowerment. **Somsri's leadership roles in politics have directly inspired other women in these communities.** Given her success, many of her female friends have become more interested in politics. It can be said that Somsri, as the first female politician in her hometown, has paved way for other women to enter the distinctly non-traditional domain of politics, and has done it with great success.

5.2 Sunee Thepa-Anurak: Experiencing the SAO Election

5.2.1 Introduction



Figure 5.8 Sunee Thepa-Anurak

Sunee Thepa-Anurak is a well-known woman in the field of development, and received the award for ‘Outstanding Woman Leader of Krabi’ in 2006. Sunee started her community work in 1994 when she was elected by women members of her village to be the President of Women’s Development Committee, and as a committee member of the Children’s Development Center of Moo 5, Khao Khen sub-district, Plaipraya district.

Sunee’s most outstanding achievement was to push for the ability of the housewives’ group’s to generate income, and to strengthen the village’s women’s organization which was recognized throughout the province. Thus, when Sunee decided to run for the position of **member of the Khao Khen SAO** for the first time

in August 2008, it may be regarded as a success in terms of promoting women's role in politics. This is because Sunee is one of those women leaders who have been trained in politics, and who possess a knowledge and understanding of democracy and leadership. These political competencies were recognized by the Provincial Committee for Promoting the Development of Women. They believed that Sunee possessed the essential qualities to be a woman leader who would be effective in bringing about the necessary changes in local politics, if given the chance to enter the political arena.

Sunee is 50 years old, is married with three children, and has one grandchild. It can be said that Sunee is the breadwinner, the main source of income for her family. She has passed through several obstacles in her family life and has overcome these issues with patience, a sense of responsibility, hope, and love. Sunee's roles as a mother and a wife, therefore, were as intriguing as her roles as a local businesswoman and leader.

Given her outstanding profile, as well as the high probability of her winning the seat, I saw the merits of studying her life, as well as of observing her political activities during the election, a rare opportunity given the timing of the election and the political environment. Therefore, on August 24, 2008, I invited Sunee to participate in this study.

Despite her busy schedule during the final weeks before the election, Sunee willingly accepted my invitation. Two days later, I packed up my belongings and moved in to stay at her house in Plaipraya District. Because Kay, her daughter, is a public health official who works in another sub-district, it was arranged that I could sleep in her bedroom on the nights that Kay was on duty. So it was, during the weekend when Kay came back home, that Kay and we would have interesting exchanges on a number of issues. My informal conversations with Kay truly helped me to gain a better understanding of the life of Sunee, particularly with regard to the sensitive aspects of her family life that I may have felt reluctant to ask Sunee about directly. Therefore, I regarded Kay as another valuable resource person in that she gave me many important clues for validating the data I had collected from the fieldwork during the daytime, when I accompanied her mother.

During the final weeks before the election, I was able to observe nearly all of the activities Sunee engaged in, and followed her everywhere she went. To my surprise, given the fact that was during the run-up to the election, her activities were simple and rather mundane. Despite the impending election, Sunee still performed her normal routine, such as attending meetings, helping with community events, managing her mushroom business, visiting friends in hospital, taking care of her seven-year-old granddaughter, and handling all of the household chores. However, she could skillfully combine these activities with canvassing for votes.

Having observed her daily life, I realized that it was not easy to be a local woman leader who had to assume responsibility for work in both the domestic and public domains. I mentioned to Kay that I could hardly imagine what Sunee's life would be like if she were elected, as it seemed to me that her daily schedule was already extremely tight. "The major part of her public duties, in fact, should have been performed by higher-ranking local politicians. So, elected or not, she still has to do the work anyway," was Kay's comment.

As it turned out, Sunee was not elected to a position in local politics during her first run for the candidacy. Nonetheless, Sunee was not discouraged by losing. "If there were another election tomorrow, I would run again because I am not discouraged. At least my running in the election is another step forward for the movement for women's involvement in politics, just by being among the list of candidates for the people to consider. So nobody can say that there are fewer women in politics because women are afraid to run in an election," she insisted with a smile.

Sunee is a good example of a woman leader who possesses extraordinary qualifications and the potential to be a good politician. She is one of those women who see that politics should be a means to improve the quality of people's lives, rather than a battleground for power games. Sunee's stories, as illustrated in this section, not only portray the personal and social aspects of a woman leader, but also specifically articulate various aspects of her political experiences during the election.

5.2.2 Sunee Thepa-Anurak: Who Is She?

5.2.2.1 The Eldest Sister

Sunee recalled that she was born into a very poor family in Nakorn Si Thammarat, the eldest daughter in a family of nine children. Her parents were both laborers-for-hire in the rice paddies. They were illiterate and had to work very hard for their daily earnings. There were often times that the family had no food to eat. However, her parents never gave up and constantly did their very best to improve the family's living standard.

Though full of hardship, Sunee's childhood was warm and contented. Despite the fact that she had little time to play, no good food to eat, nor pretty clothes to wear, she always enjoyed the warmth and love of a big family. As far as she can remember, all of her family members would all gather around to eat together. It was during meals that her parents would talk and teach, spending quality time with their children. They always emphasized the virtues of honesty, hard work and gratitude, as Sunee illustrated in the following comments:

My parents told us that even though we were poor, we must be honest. When visiting other people's houses, we should not steal their belongings. They also taught us to work hard. No matter whether we would get paid or not, we should do the job first. One shouldn't be choosy with jobs, and whatever you earn, you should not spend more than what was necessary. Another thing that I distinctly remember was to be grateful to others. They stated again and again that a person who is not grateful will never become prosperous.

As the oldest daughter, Sunee intuitively absorbed another important value, namely a sense of responsibility. Since the age of six or seven, Sunee was assigned to do the housework, such as sweeping the floor, washing dishes, cooking rice, collecting firewood, etc. She also needed to take care of her younger brothers and sisters when her parents went out to the rice fields. After entering school, Sunee still continued to handle many of the family chores. Each morning, Sunee would wake up at 4.30am to cook rice and do other housework. At 6 am, she would go to work in the

fields with her father for a couple of hours, then rush back home to dress up in her student uniform, and run to school at 8 am.

5.2.2.2 The Poor Student

Accordingly, Sunee's four years of formal education were rather a struggle, as she needed to balance working and studying at the same time. This in turn affected her performance, as well as her social life, in school. Though her house was only 300 meters away from the school, Sunee was late for class almost everyday. Her tiring tasks in the morning made her too exhausted to concentrate on her schooling during the day. Thus, she would often fell asleep in class and could not finish homework assignments on time.

Because of her family burdens, Sunee's opportunities for a social life with her classmates were also rare. While her friends were able to play in groups during the lunch break, Sunee had to return home to prepare food for her siblings and have lunch at home. After school, she again had to hurry back to do her assigned chores. Therefore, she had no chance to play sport or have fun with her friends, nor to participate in extra-curricular activities as the other children did.

Besides, her family's financial status undeniably affected her self-confidence and instilled in her a feeling of inferiority. Sunee said that from Grade 1 to Grade 4, she had only one new school uniform throughout. The other uniforms were donated to her by other, better-off families. During the start of a school term, she had neither books nor pencils. Luckily enough, her friends' parents always bought some spare books and writing utensils for her. She never forgot the feeling when she received pencils from her friends' mothers. She told herself that whenever she was better-off, she would be as charitable to others as well.

There were also some unpleasant experiences at school that she still can recall. Sunee used to be punished by a teacher because her parents were not able to pay for the school tuition fee on time. Moreover, sometimes when the class needed to collect extra money for special events, such as to decorate a board for a school competition, or to prepare a flower bouquet during National Teacher's Day, Sunee could hardly sleep at night. She would be overwhelmed by the fear that her parents could not give her the money the next day. These issues, coupled with her family's

financial difficulties, forced Sunee to leave school when she finished fourth grade. She was only 10 years old when she left school.

5.2.2.3 The Child Worker

After leaving school, Sunee suddenly entered the working world. She was sent to live with a doctor and his wife in town as a servant. Her monthly salary of 250 baht were sent back to support her family. Though her home was only an hour away by car, Sunee seldom got to meet her family. She was allowed to return home only twice a year during the rice-planting and harvesting seasons.

At the doctor's house, Sunee's main task was to keep the doctor's wife company, and to do some housework, such as sweeping the floor, or helping out in the kitchen. Sunee had been familiar with house chores at a very young age, so she did not feel that her first paid job was too hard to bear.

Sunee spent nearly three full years working and living at the doctor's house. There, she was taught about simple health care and hygiene. The doctor's wife was rather strict, and Sunee noticed that living with them made her conscious of the need for discipline and leading her life in a systematic manner. At the age of 12, she was also assigned to do miscellaneous jobs at their clinic. Sunee was a fast learner. In a short time, she was able to acquire a basic knowledge of medicine, as well as the system of management in running a clinic. Sunee resigned from her first job when she was 14. Despite her love and respect for the couple, she had to find a better-paying job as she needed more money to support her brothers' and sisters' education.

Sunee started her second job at a grocery store as a salesclerk with a salary of 400 baht per month. It was here that Sunee was trained how to greet customers, and to work quickly. Sunee's hard work and honesty were well appreciated by the store's owner. Unfortunately, the store went out of business due to a fire during her second year at work. Thereafter, Sunee found a new job at an electronics store not far from her old workplace. However, Sunee also went to visit her previous employers every evening. She offered to help them with their housework without asking for any money. "We should be grateful to persons who were once helped us, especially when they are in trouble," she reasoned.

She found working at the electronics shop very exciting because there were so many things she could learn. Apart from selling, Sunee learned to monitor an inventory and issue bills, as well as keeping up the correspondence with multiple suppliers. Within three years, her salary was tripled. She then had a lot of friends and began to have a semblance of a social life for the very first time. It was then that she met and fell in love with a suitor, who later became her present husband. Moreover, it was also then, that the course of her life switched over to a different track.

5.2.2.4 The Daughter-in-Law

Sunee called her husband 'Bung', which means elder brother in the language of Islam. Bung was a truck driver. They saw each other for ten months before deciding to get married. It was while the arrangements were being made for their marriage that Sunee found out that Bung was a Muslim, and that she had to convert from Buddhism to Islam. First, she thought of canceling the wedding, but after re-considering that it in fact it was not his fault, she decided to go ahead with the marriage and change her religion.

After the marriage, they lived in Nakorn Si Thammarat for a year before his mother asked them to move to live with her in Songkla province. Her mother-in-law wanted Sunee to help out with her noodle shop in Songkla. At the time, Sunee had just given birth to her first baby. Although deep down she felt uncomfortable living so far away from her hometown, she realized that it was the duty of her husband and herself to take care of his mother.

At her husband's house in Songkla, Sunee had to work even harder than when she was living in Nakorn Si Thammarat. Sunee had to handle all of the housework. She prepared sweets and desserts in the evening in order to sell them in the morning in front of her mother-in-law's house. She assisted her mother-in-law in selling noodles and cleaning up from noon until evening. At nighttime, she also folded paper bags for extra income to support her family. Most important of all was that she had to take care of her firstborn child all by herself while her husband had to drive back and forth to Bangkok nearly all the time, which meant that he was hardly ever able to stay at home.

Nonetheless, Sunee sensed that her efforts were not appreciated by her mother-in-law. When Bung's sister came back home two years later, Sunee's family

was asked to leave the house because she was not getting along very well with her sister-in-law. Though living on her own means, and needing to pay for the rent on their new home, Sunee was a lot happier than before. She continued to fold paper bags and sold them in front of her house while taking care of her child. After living separately from her in-laws, Sunee gave birth to a girl and another boy.

I did not do any other job except folding paper bags since I had to take care of my three kids at the same time. During that time, one kilogram of paper bags was worth of 6 baht. I folded paper bags all day and all night until I had a substantial amount of money. Then, I bought a wardrobe, a bicycle, or gold necklace for my kids. And Bung earned 2,000 baht each month from driving. I thought we could support ourselves somehow.

When things settled down, Sunee was recalled to help at her husband's house again because her younger sister-in-law had just got married. But one year later when her sister-in-law got a divorce and came back home, Sunee and her children were asked to move out to live in rented accommodation once again.

Sunee felt that the 4 years she spent living in Songkla were unstable and unhappy. While looking for a solution, she found the "light at the end of the tunnel" when her father came from Nakorn Si Thammarat to visit her in 1982. He asked her to move and help him in pioneering an oil palm plantation in the Plaipraya district of Krabi.

5.2.2.5 The Pioneer Farmer

Sunee's father and mother had moved to Krabi in 1975 to participate in a land-development-for-farmers' project initiated by the government at that time. Back then, poor farmers in nearby provinces were offered 20 rais of land per family to grow palm-oil plants. The saplings were also provided by the state, but the farmers themselves had to prepare their own land by clearing the forest and opening up the top soil to be ready for cultivation. The purpose of this land development project was two-fold. Besides the agricultural development objective of the government's policy to promote oil palm as a new economic crop for the country, the secondary objective

was to bring villagers into those remote areas to prevent encroachment by members of the communist movement.

In those days, Sunee articulated that clearing forestland was an arduous task, as there was no tractor to help in clearing trees like these days. Villagers had to use their own strength and simple tools to clear a path into the thickly wooded forest.

After working for her father for a few years, Sunee had an opportunity to acquire a piece of land of her own because a villager who had the rights to the plot thought that the job was too difficult and tiresome, and gave up his rights. Thus, Sunee was able to take over the rights to the plot of the land located next to her father's.

From that beginning, her family became more settled. Sunee and her husband built a small hut on the land and made a living there with their three children. "We led our lives like prehistoric people—no electricity nor tap water. We grew our own vegetables and lived a self-sufficient and simple life," she said. They spent three intensive years working in the palm plantation. Meanwhile, her husband also kept his truck-driving job to support the family. Consequently, it was in their fourth year, when the palm trees were yielding palm fruit that their financial status significantly improved.

5.2.2.6 The Independent Wife

When the family's financial status improved, Sunee faced another turning point in her life when her husband became involved in an extra-marital relationship with another woman in Songkla province. During this heartbreaking time, Sunee realized that she had to stand strong to be the bedrock for her children.

As a truck driver, Bung's absence from home was considered normal to his family. Since Bung was not a womanizer, Sunee had never been in doubt or seen any sign showing that her husband would be unfaithful to her. However, there was a time when he went away from home for a long time, which was quite unusual for him. Sunee decided to look for him in Songkla because she was worried that Bung might have fallen sick, or had an accident. Because of this, Sunee caught her husband red-handed; in fact, he was seeing another woman, whom he had been living with for quite some time.

Sunee was so shocked that she could not do anything except come back home and cry the whole night. Her husband's unfaithfulness was something that she could not accept because Sunee and her husband had struggled together to overcome countless difficulties. However, just when their financial status was getting better, her family was destroyed because of his involvement with another woman.

After a few days of sorrow, Sunee made up her mind that she must recover from all the sadness and stand on her own feet. Sunee worked harder to live her own life and to spend quality time with her children. Amidst the breakdown of her marriage, Sunee decided to stand strong and lead her family out of such tragic time. Now she has fully become a single mother who needed to support her three children and to run her palm plantation.

Finally, her husband came back six months later. He wanted to make up with Sunee, and promised to be faithful to her. Sunee accepted his return, "At least he is the father of my children," she reasoned. Though the life seemed to be back on track, her attitude towards living together with her husband had significantly changed. Despite the fact that her husband has returned, she was no longer financially or psychologically dependent on him. She had a new mindset, namely that with or without her husband she could and would pursue her own life.

Sunee started another new business—cultivating straw mushrooms by using the leftover materials from the palm plantation. The mushroom business was going pretty well and Sunee was able to buy another plantation plot, in addition beginning to work for her community. At this point, Sunee thought that her life was rather fulfilling.

5.2.2.7 The Mother of Three Kids

Sunee has three children, two boys and one girl. As her husband was usually away driving his truck, Sunee took care of all the duties related to raising their children. Despite her busy schedule and workload, taking care of the kids was considered her top priority.

Sunee was very mindful of giving all her children as equal love and care – as much as possible. Her childhood experience taught her that each child, no matter how strong or weak, clever or silly, expected their parents to treat him or her the same

as the others. Naturally, when the children are all grown up, they can equally choose to pursue the lives of their own.

Still, Sunee admitted that she was not so successful in raising her two boys. When the boys become teenagers, they preferred to have their own space and tended to hang out with their peer group. She thought it was very difficult for a mother to relate to boy teenagers. Perhaps the father, who could understand their thoughts and relate to their problems better, could have better handled the duties. However, that did not happen because due to the nature of his work, her husband could not carry out those duties.

Both of Sunee's sons had been through serious problems during their teenage years- that are full of temptations for young male adults. While Sa, her eldest son, was in his second year of school, at the high vocational certificate level in Songkla, he had to drop out from school because he had an intimate relationship with a girl and she became pregnant. Em, her youngest son, also has a history of dropping out of school, and he finally stopped going altogether after completing Grade 9. It was not because of family financial problem, but because he did not want to pursue a higher education.

Sunee, as a mother, was rather disappointed by her sons' behavior. However, she decided to help lessen their problems every way she could. With regard to her eldest son Sa, she took full responsibility for "Nik," her granddaughter, when Nik was only six months old. Sunee would care for Nik so that the young parents could continue to pursue their own futures. They were both working in Songkla and usually came to visit Nik once every month or two. For fear that Nik would grow up to be a problem child, Sunee raised her granddaughter with extra loving care. She usually brought her granddaughter along to the plantation, and even to village meetings. Nik called Sunee "Ma", which means mother.

In Em's case, Sunee suspected that her son might be using drugs. She decided to send him to a treatment and rehabilitation school in Surat Thani for drug rehabilitation to ensure that he was far removed from the temptations of his current environment. She went to visit him at school every weekend, bringing him his favorite food, as well as food for the whole two hundred student patients.

On Friday evenings, Kay and I helped each other with the cooking. We would bring 80 kilograms of Kanom Jeen, cook the curry, chopped vegetable and arrange them in boxes for feeding the children at the school. I thought that if my kid was the only one who was able to eat, other children might feel disappointed. So if my kid gets to eat, then all of them must get fed as well. On Saturday, the children would wait in curiosity to find out what aunt Sunee had cooked for them. It turns out that we had a party every Sunday. Em seemed to be fresher. When he left the school, his behavior was clearly improved.

Once Em's had completed the forty-day course in the rehabilitation school, he came back home to help Sunee with the mushroom business but still refused to continue his schooling. It was two years since Em had dropped out from school before Sunee finally succeeded in persuading him to enter a non-formal education program. Her strategy was to enroll in the same program with her son to ensure that the boy would have less chance to skip classes. In doing so, her relationship with her youngest son has been significantly improved. She told him that despite all her family responsibilities, social work, as well as her old age, she still put effort into equipping herself with knowledge. She also challenged him by saying that "Let's compete and see who will finish school first."

Realizing that his mother sacrificed so much for him, Em's misbehavior gradually improved. The mother and son helped each other until they both graduated with grade 12 certificates in the same year. Though Em refused to go to college, Sunee did not force him. "At least he now has some basic knowledge to take care of himself, to make a living and to be a good member of society," she said.

Kay, the middle daughter, is the least worrisome of her three kids. Kay has always been a responsible girl and is always well-behaved. She is now working as a public health official, which is a job that enables Kay to assist troubled people. Sunee is Kay's idol. In her own words:

My mom is a person who must bears all the problems, in both family life and her public work. It could be said that she was constantly

confronting issues, no matter which way she turned. But mom never gave up and never felt a sense of hopelessness in terms of her children. Whatever could not be solved today, she would leave it aside for a moment. She would then work on something else, and/or help other people first. As for personal family matters, such as Nat's problem, she would solve it one step at a time, until the problem had been fully solved.

Kay concluded that Sunee's life history was her greatest inspiration. Her mother started everything from zero or actually from less than zero. However, despite all the odds against her, she was able to establish a good status for herself, and was successful to enough to become a leader/supporter of others. All these things made Kay want to live a worthwhile life just like her mother.

5.2.3 Sunee as a Woman Leader

5.2.3.1 Sunee's Daily Routine

Sunee's roles as a mother, a family main source of income, and a woman leader definitely mean that her daily life is fully occupied by her numerous obligations. Sunee wakes up at 4 am, and goes to bed at 10 pm, and never has a chance to sit back and relax throughout the day. The following is an example of her daily routine that I had the opportunity to observe during ten full days of living at her home.

At 4 am, Sunee would start her day with the house cleaning and laundry. At 6 am, she wakes up Nik, her grand daughter, and prepared breakfast for her. Once finished she would wake up Em to send Nik to school, and for Em to also pick up mushrooms on the way back. At 8 am, she would wash up and leave home to collect and weigh mushrooms picked by the rest of the family members. At 10am, she come back home to sort and prepare the mushrooms, getting them ready to be delivered to Bangkok. Once finished, she would spend some quiet time to make a daily summary account. At 11 am, she would prepare one or two dishes for herself and set them on the table for Em, who will come back for lunch at noontime. She also cooked a pot of curry for dinner, and quickly collected the dried laundry from the

clotheslines, before leaving home again to participate in other social functions in the afternoon.

Sunee's usual schedule in the afternoon and evenings involves meetings and conferences. However, on certain days when she needs to attend meetings in the morning, she would assign Em to handle all the mushroom work, while she would still take on the morning housework as usual. After the meeting, she would stop by at the market to buy some food for dinner, then proceed to pick up Nik from her tutoring school at 6.30 pm. Sunee tries to make herself available to pick up her granddaughter every evening during weekdays, as it is the only time that she could teach and relate to Nik without any interruption from others.

Once, having arrived home at around 7 pm., Sunee would cook rice and warm the curry that she had made earlier. She also prepared one or two more simple dishes for dinner while listening to the television news. After dinner, she would wash the dishes (with Nik's help), iron some clothes, take a shower and go to bed at around 10-11 pm.

Given this daily routine, Sunee's work schedule adds up to nearly 17 hours per day. She rarely has time to stop working from the moment she wakes up until the time she goes to sleep.

5.2.3.2 Leading Women's Groups

Sunee has participated in community development work since 1994. She currently holds a number of titles in her community: as a member of the sub-district council, the woman chairperson of Plaipraya district, the chairperson of a Kaset Raum Jai housewife's group of Plaipraya district, a member of the committee of small and micro community enterprise groups, and a member of the village fund management committee, etc. However, her first leadership roles in the community set her on a path that led to her contribution to women's development projects.

While actively participating in the housewives' group and its numerous activities, Sunee was just an ordinary member. However, she demonstrated that she was capable of quite a distinguished performance since she was able to raise a large sum of money for the group. One of her fund raising activities that was relatively successful was selling sweets whenever there were festivals in her community.

Early on, the chairperson of the housewives group was the wife of the village head. However, she resigned because she could not carry out the job, and assigned her sister-in-law to take the position. However, there was an incident that resulted in a change in the chair one more time.

What happened was that the members had been informed by a representative of a doll factory in another district that they had paid an amount of money to the chairperson for traveling expenses and for lecturing. The purpose was to send housewives from the Moo 5 village on a trip to learn how to make dolls from another group of housewives. However, the money disappeared without informing the members of the housewives' group. Thus, the chairperson was forced to resign and Sunee was elected as head of the village women's group in 1994.

With the creation of the village women's group, other sub-groups, such as women vocational groups, gradually emerged. Members of these vocational groups were usually members of the village women's group as well.

Often, there were times that Sunee had to act on behalf of such vocational groups, and that led to conflict with some women in her village. Sunee mentioned the story of the Batik group that taught her an invaluable lesson in leadership.

At that time, there was a budget from the Ministry of Agriculture to support a women's group amounting to 150,000 baht per project. The Batik group wanted this budget, but they did not qualify because they were not registered as a group. They asked for Sunee's help to write up a project to request funding via a housewives' group from Khao Khen, of which I was the chairperson.

It turned out that there was a problem at the central authority which caused a delay in withdrawing the money. Someone spread a rumor that the money had actually been withdrawn and that Sunee had used it all up. She had tried to explain what really happened but nobody listened. The members even went to the administrative office to look for evidence that Sunee had withdrawn the money. When the sheriff explained to them that the money had not yet been withdrawn, they still insisted on seeing the account of the Khao Khen housewives' group at the Bank for Agriculture and Agriculture Cooperatives to check whether the money had been transferred into this account.

However, when the members found out that the money had not been transferred, they never apologized. Sunee felt so upset. She told the administrative office that if the 150,000 baht would destroy trust within the village, then perhaps it would be better to return it to the government. The sheriff suggested that she should have taken them to court for wrongful accusation and having destroyed her reputation. Sunee told him that she would not do that because “they are one of us, people belonging to the same village. One day when the time comes, we will be cremated at the same crematorium.” Nevertheless, Sunee swore never to get involved with the Batik group again.

However, the story did not end there. Later, when the Batik group faced a serious cash flow problem, the group leader, who disliked Sunee, came to see her at home. Without any word of apology for the previous incident, she asked Sunee for help.

Sunee tried to look beyond their personal conflict. She considered that if the group collapsed, other members would also get into serious trouble. Therefore, she lent the group 20,000 baht of her own money, and even helped in promoting their Batik products. Whenever she traveled to attend conferences in other provinces, Sunee always gave the name cards of the Batik group to others.

It turned out that the group had received numerous customers through Sunee’s networking. Each member earned about 5 to 6 thousand baht per month. Later, the chairperson of the group asked Sunee how much commission she wanted. “I told her that I wanted the group to be better-off, and that I did not want any money,” was her reply.

Sunee concluded that, to be successful, the most important factors for a group are trust, insightful management and effective product development. Without these factors, the group might be able to make profit for a short while, but eventually would stop growing and eventually be dissolved.

5.2.3.3 Establishing a Mushroom Group

The mushroom group, which grew mushrooms using a cluster of palm leaves, was the accomplishment that Sunee was the most proud of. Because it had been established by her and enjoyed continuing success, it had become a model for other provinces to follow. Sunee got the idea of growing mushrooms as a business

from a training course that taught farmers how to use leftover agriculture materials to generate income.



Figure 5.9 Sunee and Her Mushroom Farm

Sunee started out by trying to grow mushrooms in a small barn built at the back of her house. However, her first attempt was not so successful. Later on, she moved the planting site onto the ridges of her plantation, which yielded better mushrooms, both in terms of quality and quantity.

Mushroom farming has become a supplementary business for palm oil farmers, as it requires only small investment, while yielding a very good return. The product also has an assured market. Furthermore, the rotten palm cluster used in growing the mushrooms can later be used as fertilizer. This also helps the palm oil farmers to save money on fertilizer for their palm plantation.

Sunee started the mushroom business on her own, and when the business grew larger, she shared her success with her employees who worked in her plantation. Initially, Sunee was the only mushroom grower in the area. Later, she also became a coordinator, collecting mushrooms from the other workers in her mushroom network. She would then deliver the group's mushrooms to a merchant in

Surat Thani. She also earned extra profit from selling mushroom spawn and other farming equipment.

Actually, the profit made from being the middleman was less than from growing and selling my own mushrooms. But I thought I should look and think from several perspectives. When I first started the business, I had my workers to help me and they would earn only their daily wages; therefore, I could not expect them to be as devoted or committed to the work as if they themselves were the owners.

Thus, Sunee made the decision to step back and let her workers run the business instead. They could work on her farm and she would be the middleman. Sunee reasoned that even though she earned less money, she would have more time to do other things.

Sunee further explained that growing mushrooms was a very complicated job. A farmer must constantly check and monitor the humidity and temperature, the key factors that have a tremendous effect on the yield. Therefore, she believed that the job would be better handled by the plantation workers, who had more time to take care of the process. She allowed her workers to plant their own mushrooms on her plot of land. She also advised them on how to invest, how to plant, how to monitor the growing process, as well as how to manage the yields. In addition, she loaned them the initial funding to start up their own mushroom businesses.

In no time, the workers were able to make lots of money from their own mushroom farming. They were much happier and felt more secure with their lives. They were able to save up some money for their families back home in the provinces of Isarn (North West). In addition, Sunee was also much happier to see her people making significant progress in their lives, as she mentioned in the following remarks:

Whenever we can, we should not think only of ourselves. We should share with others and not be greedy or selfish. I have tried to look at things from a different perspective, that is when my workers are better-

off, they would be much happier. This in turn made them even more willing to work hard and take very good care of my palm plantation.

Compared with other plantations, the yield from Sunee's plantation is much better. She also saves on expenses for fertilizer and nobody steals the palm products. Above all, Sunee and her workers have built a stronger bond and better lives from helping each other out.

The story of Sunee's workers spread to their friends, who worked in other plantations. They came to Sunee to ask if they could join her farm and have their own mushroom farming business as well. Within three months, her mushroom network quickly expanded. Sometimes she had to lend out money to those who did not have sufficient savings to buy the necessary mushroom spawn and farming equipment. She said, "I was not afraid of bad debts since I knew that they would use the money to buy equipment. And in the next 15 days, when mushrooms produced their yield, I would get my money back. It was counted as an investment, not spending money carelessly."

According to Sunee, the mushroom business was currently her family's major source of income. While the price of oil palm has fluctuated due to uncontrollable factors in the global market and the economy, the price of mushrooms is quite stable. Equally important is the fact that the market demand for the product has constantly increased. Each day, she and Em, her youngest son, would divide up the work of collecting the mushrooms from the group's members, which consisted of more than 20 families. When all the products are piled up at her home, Sunee is responsible for weighing the mushrooms and preparing the day-to-day accounting and transactions.

All the work must be done before noon each day. This is because the merchant would send a truck to pick up the mushrooms from her house at that time. Every day, the truck would transport them to a plane bound for Surat Thani by 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

Nowadays, Sunee makes approximately two thousand baht per day from this mushroom business, but has no plans to expand her business network. She is committed to "doing every job with all one's strength, and not to do additional jobs

which are beyond one's physical capabilities." Sunee did not want to get richer; she just wanted to have a balanced and meaningful life in which she could take good care of herself, her family and extend a helping hand to others.

5.2.3.4 Participating in Social Activities : Rice-Planting Festival

During the ten-day period of the field study, I accompanied Sunee to several social events and meetings. Presented in this section are my field observations pertaining to the occasions when Sunee participated in a social activity that illustrated the sex-role division of women and men in the community.

On the first day of my fieldwork, I followed Sunee to a Rice Planting festival in the district hosted by the Office of Agriculture in Plaipraya. Sunee joined the festival as a chairperson of the agricultural housewives' group. Her main role was to welcome the visitors, especially the Governor of Krabi, who was the honorary chairperson of the festival. He came to the festival accompanied by his wife, who was the chairperson of the provincial Red Cross group.

Sunee and I arrived at the festival at 9.00 am, the same time as the other housewives were arriving. The main organizer of this event was the wife of the local sheriff. Every housewife wore a dark blue Moh Hom shirt and wore a wide-brimmed rice farmer's hat. They also put on make up and showed off their recent hairstyles, done especially for the festival. When they got together, they gathered around to gossip and chat with one another in a very joyful atmosphere. One housewife asked Sunee why she had not told her that Sunee was running for election. Jokingly, Sunee answered back, "I will tell you when I have lost so I only have to feel the same shame once."

As I noticed, Sunee was quite cautious when talking about the election with her woman friends. She told me later that, regarding those friends with whom she was not so close and/ or did not live in the same village, she did not want to talk too much about her running in an election because she was not sure what these people would think about her candidacy. Thus, she did not want to mix the issue of the election with other activities at the district level.

While waiting for the Governor to declare the festival officially open, I walked around and looked at the exhibition and activity boards. I noticed that there were many pictures of Sunee, thereby helping to confirm the major role she played in

the women's group, which relates to the conversations among the housewives that I had overheard. One said, "Come here quick; since you have already put on make up and done your hair, let's get some pictures taken together." The reply from the other was, "I don't want to take a picture since it will never be on a board."

At the back of the stage, a group of girl dancers was waiting to go on stage. Some of the young dancers had a bored expression on their faces because of the hot and humid weather, which was really making them uncomfortable since they were wearing thick, heavy dancing costumes. I talked with a teacher who took care of these dancers and found out that the girls had had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to queue up to get their make-up done and to get dressed.

The dancers were not the only ones having to make a sacrifice and spend time preparing for the festival; their parents also had to pay 600 baht for the dancing costumes. Suffice it to say that, while the younger dancers looked bored, the older teenage dancers looked bright and cheerful, because once in a while some of the visitors to the festival came to take pictures with them. It was obvious that a girl who was asked to have her picture taken more often than the others looked so proud of herself, and stood out among her peers.



Figure 5.10 Small Girl Dancers after Four Hours of Waiting



Figure 5.11 Teenage Girl Dancers Posing for Their Pictures to be Taken

At 10.00 am, the housewives' group lined up at the entrance, getting ready to welcome the Governor and his wife. At the front of the line was the wife of the local sheriff, who was teaching the women the proper gestures in welcoming the governor and his wife, "Bow only to 15 degrees. Smile to show only your 8 front teeth, no more and no less," she advised.

When the Governor arrived and stepped out from the car, a number of men, local politicians and government officials, went to greet him. Meanwhile, the sheriff's wife and the women's group went to welcome the Governor's wife. At the same time, a drum procession consisting of elderly people that had lined up at the front of the festival, started the welcome with drumming and escorted the chairperson to the stage. After a welcoming speech, an opening speech and the giving of certificates to "farmers who continue working in the rice fields" (all male), the Governor and his wife gave presents to about 50 elderly women who had come to the festival. Before leaving, the Governor and other honored guests were invited to symbolically plough the rice field and to plant rice seedlings to sanctify the festival. The only women that were invited to plough the field and plant the rice seeding were the governor wife, the sheriff's wife, and Sunee.

After the planting ceremony, we came back to the stage area. A girl in a Moh Hom shirt, whose duty was to hand out water and wet iced napkins to visitors,

gave me a one to freshen up. There was a tag on her shirt saying, “Thida Na Khao” (“daughter of the rice field” in Thai). Five of them were assigned to assist with welcoming the VIP guests.

In contrast, in the rice field, there was an activity called an “eel catching competition” which was the only sporting activity of the festival. Whoever caught the most eels would receive a prize of 1,000 baht from the sheriff. There were about 30 boys participating in this competition, and the cheering squad consisted of boys in school uniform jumping up and down and yelling loudly on the side. Again, I noticed that there were no girls participating in the competition at all, while there were only two or three of them watching the competition from the dyke at the side of the rice field.



Figure 5.12 Boys Competing in the Eel Catching Competition

The festival ended at noon. Sunee was invited by the sheriff to have lunch with the Governor and the group at the palm oil cooperative store located nearby. Even though she joined them as a guest, Sunee still did her duty as a housewife, which was to help with serving the dishes. The issues discussed on the table were mostly about the price of palm oil. Almost all of the people having lunch

were men except for the two women, Sunee and I. The other housewives who had been on hand to help since the morning were still serving and waiting outside the house to see the Governor off.

5.2.3.5 Attitudes and Contributions Regarding Social Development

Although Sunee's family is one of the most affluent in the neighborhood, having experienced poverty earlier in life, Sunee said that she could understand how much poor people really suffered. Therefore, she is never reluctant to extend a helping hand, either in monetary or non-monetary form, to the needy. Exemplified in this section are some cases that I had observed during the course of the field work. The stories reflect Sunee's attitudes toward her community and her contribution to society, which in turn influenced her decision to run for a political position.

1) The Cases of Yai La-ong and Yai Dang

Yai Daeng and Yai La-ong are two old women who lived their lives in the direst of conditions compared to the rest of the people in the village. In the past, both old women had been cast aside, and the political leader of the village paid no attention to them at all. This is probably because they had no voting rights and had very few relatives.

I was with Sunee when she stopped by at Yai La-ong's home to give the old woman a bottle of cough syrup. Sunee told me that Yai La-ong, in her 80's, was left unattended after her husband passed away many years ago. They used to have a large piece of land in the area, but were cheated by their siblings, who sold it all off. The old woman was currently living with her youngest son--"Bai", who was born deaf and was psychologically unstable.



Figure 5.13 Grandma La-Ong in Her Newly Built House

Yai La-ong's was living in highly impoverished condition. Because both Yai La-ong and Bai could not work, their only income was from selling garlands that they bought from someone else alongside the street. Their monthly income was only several hundred baht. Thus, villagers who lived nearby, including Sunee, took turns taking care of them. Some brought food, bananas or medicine when the two became sick.

Sunee said that earlier, Yai La-ong's house had been very old and very rundown because they did not have any money to repair it. Things were literally falling apart. The roof was leaking so much that they had no shelter whenever it rained. Luckily, the Red Cross had a project to build houses for the underprivileged, so without delay Sunee passed on the cases of Yai La-ong and Yai Daeng, another old woman in the village for their consideration.

Sunee's effort finally bore fruit. Within a short period of time, the two houses were rebuilt, bringing Yai La-ong and her son so much happiness. "On the day that government workers brought cement to their house, they were so happy that their eyes were filled with tears of joy," Sunee said with a smile.

Located not very far from Yai La-ong's new house, was a similar house belonging to Yai Daeng. Sunee mentioned that the old woman had never received any form of old-age pension, while some elderly people, who were not actually qualified for the allowance, would receive it just because they were close to, or connected with, an authorized official. The allowance was one issue that villagers frequently talked about concerning the unfair allocation of the SAO budget.

This matter was an important issue that made Sunee feel disappointed with the local politicians they had elected "I think that the most underprivileged people should be taken care of first, people like the elderly, the disabled and children. If most people think it is none of their business, it means that socially, our community is in a very bad way," she said while driving away from Yai La-ong's house.

2) The Case of a Blind Boy--Tunva

The case of a blind boy called Tunva was revealed to me by Kay, Sunee's daughter, during one of our bedtime chats. Tunva is a seven-year old boy who is living with his grandmother in another sub-district, about 20 kilometers from Khao Khane. The next morning, therefore, I asked Sunee about Tunva. She smiled while telling me the story at the breakfast table.

Sunee met Tunva and his grandmother the previous year, when Sunee was on a field visit with the Krabi Red Cross. In a small house, she noticed a blind boy who was entertaining a group of visitors by smelling a car and then telling them its color. She was surprised by his talent, but was more worried about his future. Tunva was then seven years old, but it seemed that his grandmother had no plan to send him to school.

When she asked the grandmother about the boy's physical condition, she found out that Tunva had been born blind. Tunva's parents were divorced and Tunva's mother, her daughter, was currently working in Bangkok. When the chance arose, Sunee asked the grandmother about Tunva's schooling. The question, however, upset the grandmother, who preferred to keep the boy in her sight. "My grandson is a cripple and he cannot take care of himself. I don't want other people to make fun of him," said the grandmother. Sunee worked hard to convince

her that the boy could go to a school for the blind in Surat Thani, which was not too far from their home.

A villager whispered to Sunee that previously someone else had made the same suggestions to Tunva's grandmother, but the grandmother got mad and did not talk to that villager again for several days. Since the grandmother and Tunva were a twosome, Tunva was her only mental support. Thus, Sunee should not talk about this again to avoid hurting her feelings.

Instead of keeping silent, Sunee insisted that she needed to make it clear to the grandmother that Tunva still had an opportunity for a better life. Before leaving the home, she gave the grandmother her mobile number and said "How old are you grandmother? If you pass away, who will take care of your grandson? He cannot see and has no knowledge. You must think about how he is going to live without you, too." Two days later, Tunva's grandmother called Sunee. She agreed to send Tunva to school, but was still worried about the school expenses. "If you really decide to send him to school, we might be able to find a way to get financial aid," Sunee replied. After hanging up, Sunee called many people she knew in order to find a channel to get the requisite financial aid for Tunva to go to school.

At the end of the day, she was connected to the school principle who informed her that Tunva could go to school the next semester. Furthermore, the principle informed Sunee that there was a scholarship available for Tunva as well. That night, Sunee was overjoyed to convey this good news to the boy's family. The next morning, Tunva's mother called Sunee to say thank you; throughout the entire phone call Tunva's mother was in tears.

On the day that Tunva was about to leave for school for the first time, he cried and struggled pitifully since he had never been away from his grandmother. Sunee understood his feelings but she knew in her heart that the boy would finally adapt to the new environment at school. It would be the right place for him, somewhere where he could make new friends and learn to take care of himself.

Two months passed and Tunva was allowed to take a school break to visit his home for ten days. On the last day before returning to school, he asked his grandmother to call the aunt who had taken him to school. On the phone, he asked Sunee, "Did I do well? Today I am not crying anymore. I have already made

plans to see all my friends again.” Sunee almost broke into tears hearing his small voice. It was a moment that she will never forget.

3) Case of a Runaway Girl

Sunee was like a big sister to the local women in the community. Everyday, I observed female friends dropping by her house to ask for advice. That morning, Sunee’s friend Duj and her son came to ask for some advice. The problem was that the boy (who was only 16 years old) had brought his 15-year-old girlfriend to stay with them at home for two days. The girl’s reason for wanting to stay was that her parents beat her, and she no longer wanted to live with them. Both kids decided to elope from home, and said that if her friend did not allow them to live together, they would run away to some place else where no one could find them.

Duj went to see the village head for advice. She was afraid that her son would be charged with the abduction of a minor because both of them had not reached the legal age. Thus, she wanted to inform the village head so that he could be a witness that the girl had come to stay at Duj’s place and would be under her supervision to ensure that nothing improper would happen. The village head, however, refused to acknowledge the matter. He recommended that Duj should let the two kids run away and hide somewhere else for a while, which might help to cool things off. “If her parents come to your house, just tell them that you have no idea what happened regarding this matter,” was his recommendation.

Having heard the story, Sunee became so furious with the village head’s advice. The following was how Sunee viewed the situation, and how she advised her friend:

Sunee: Duj, you should report to the police that the girl has come to stay at your house. If her parents come after her or report a lost child, there would at least be evidence of where the girl is. If you hide the girl somewhere else, it could turn out to be a serious offense. It is as if we are encouraging our kids to do the wrong thing. Let’s think about how you’d feel if she was your daughter. Her parents may want nothing

more than for their daughter to return home safely. If they come here but do not see their daughter, how much worry would they suffer?

Duj: If they demand 100,000 baht, I might faint.

Sunee: Just listen to them, no matter how much it is. But tell them the truth that “I have lived through half of my life and I’ve never had more than 100,000 baht in my savings account.” But I think they may not want any money.

Duj: I thought so too. They own three to four hundred rais of farmland. But I heard that the parents always beat the girl.

Sunee: That is their business. We can never know if it’s true or false. But the point is the kids are not at the legal age yet. They are unable to think for themselves or even know how to make a living.

Duj: The kids said they would ask aunt Sunee to find jobs for them.

Sunee: Tell them aunt Sunee said it was impossible. Even a security guard has to show his diploma.

Duj: The girl said staying with me was comfortable. I cook for her every meal. But at home, she had always been hit.

Sunee: Now that they are still in love; they are good to each other. But not for long; they will beat each other because they are not mature yet.

Duj took Sunee’s advice. Finally, the girl was asked to call her parents. Duj apologized to the girl’s parents for her son’s behavior, and drove the girl back home. “At least both kids regained the chance to continue their education,” Sunee said to me after receiving a call from Duj about the news.

4) Case of Teen Gangs Fights

Due to the fact that there were more boys than girls in the neighborhood, one of the recurring issues that Sunee often worried about was fighting among the kids, car racing, and drug problems, all of which are interrelated. She admitted that her two sons had once experienced all these problems, so she did not want the same things to happen to other parents.

One evening, Sunee drove past a group of teenager gathered in the bamboo forest along the roadside. “They might be there waiting for a fight,” she said. While I was scared by this peculiar gathering of teenagers’, Sunee stopped her truck at the next street corner to call the police station to report the unusual gathering. “Please come and check. I am afraid there may be a gang fight tonight. Please come before someone gets killed.”

When we returned home, I decided to ask her about the situation as well as her opinion on this disturbing social problem. Then Sunee told me the story. She noticed that there were two teen gangs in the village—Tum’s and Chao’s. “Any kid who came to the house of these two kids would go out and get into fights all the time,” she said. Sunee had known all the children in the village since they were very young; therefore, she believed that the boys were not intrinsically wicked, but were temporarily out of control.

I asked Sunee about the teens’ parents-- why the parents of the two boys--Tum and Chao, would allow other children to hang around at their houses. With an understanding smile, she said that no parents in this world thought that their children were bad. Sunee once talked to Chao’s mother, who revealed that her boy was just following his other friends. Therefore, the mother preferred to have him and his friends hang out at her house rather than letting the boys out of her sight. Sunee thought that it was no use convincing the parents, who were usually too lenient to discipline their kids.

The next day, Sunee and I ran into a teenage gangster at the market. Sunee greeted them with a smack on his arm. I could see some bruises on his face. “You caused trouble again, didn’t you?” she said in a stern voice. “I’ve already been beaten up by a friend, and now you are hitting me again,” he responded and laughed. “When I hit you, it’s not hard enough to make your head bleed; but if I let

you out and let others hit you, you might not be able to come back to see your parents,” she scolded.

I decided to walk to another spot while they continued to talk. When we returned to the car, Sunee further explained to me that the boy lived just next door to her. He was only 13 years old, but had started to hang out with the gang. As an experienced mother, Sunee reflected on the teens’ problems as follows:

These teenagers are in their troublemaking years. They behave when they are in front of their mothers. But once they leave their houses, they are something else. It is the same with my two sons as well. Before I could get them away from causing trouble, I had to use both force and care to deal with them. I utilized both tough and soft approaches. Kids nowadays are smart. If the parents do not keep an eye on them, then they might not be able to keep up with their children. We always think that our kids are good and it’s other people’s kids that lead our kids to astray. It’s the way most parents see the problem. But before they know it, their kids have already been beaten up or are involved with drugs. But if they’re still alive, then it’s never too late. We can help them solve the problem one step at a time.

Sunee also raised another issue regarding children addicted to drugs. Many children had dropped out of school and begun to take drugs at a very young age. “They started by skipping school to go out and have fun with their friends. Then, they began smoking and finally got addicted to drugs. These kids wore school uniforms and left home every morning but did not make it to school. Their parents did not know and eventually the children would quit school or be expelled,” she pointed out.

5) Case of an Outlaw Child

Phayung was an Isarn worker who worked in a plantation near Sunee’s house. One evening, while Sunee was busy doing her mushroom accounts, Phayung rode her motorbike to Sunee’s house to buy more equipment on credit to grow mushrooms. Later on, she asked for Sunee’s advice on her nephew, who was 15

years old but could not apply for an identification card. The reason was that his parents failed to register him officially at the time of his birth. He is an illegal alien who does not have any rights, nor has he received any support from the government during the past 15 years.

Phayung told Sunee that the boy's name was Jon. He was 15 years old. His father was a worker from Myanmar who left Jon's mother even before Jon was born. His mother ran away when Jon was 5 years old, and had never contacted home since. Jon was raised by Phayung, who was his mother's relative. Since Jon does not have any evidence of birth or any other related documents, he could not register and thus could not attend school. He had grown up on a palm plantation and had been helping out with all the work as an illegal laborer all along.

Having listened to the story, Sunee advised Phayung to look for evidence of the birth from the hospital where Jon was born, in order to be able to prove that Jon was born in Thailand. It might be the only possible method of confirming the child's nationality. However, Phayung was not sure that the government office would allow this since Jon's parents were not present to process the request. Sunee assured Phayung that she would help her to the end.



Figure 5.14 Phayung Came to Seek Help for Jon's Case

Before leaving, Phayung greeted Sunee and again asked Sunee to do her this favor: “Please help the kid. Don’t let him become an illegal alien for the rest of his life.” “I’ll do my best,” Sunee answered. But don’t call him an illegal alien. He is not an illegal alien; it’s his parents that are illegal aliens. When Jon was born, if he could have walked, I think he would have registered his birth by himself already.” Phayung smiled at Sunee’s insinuation before leaving.

5.2.4 Political Context of Bann Kuan Sian

5.2.4.1 Demographic Overview

Most villagers in Baan Kuan Sian were originally from Nakorn Si Thammarat. With a population of only 597 people, the village is rather small in size. Sunee had the following to say of the villagers in her home town:

Most of the villagers were just like me; we did not have much education. When we moved here from Nakorn Si Thammarat, we moved because of poverty. Everybody started from zero. If a family had five kids, only two of them were able to get an education. But after the price of palm oil got better, people around here were better-off. Most of them own a palm plantation. They have pick-up trucks and money to buy motorcycles for their kids.

In general, it can be said that people in the community are somewhat well-off and they treat each other like relatives since each family moved into this area at almost the same time. They are confronted with the same difficulties. Thus, it could be said that there was no significant gap among the locals in terms of wealth and social status.

However, there is a minority group in the village. They are from “Isarn”, migrant workers from the Northeast, who work as wage laborers on large plantations. These workers usually live in accommodation provided by their employers, located further from the main streets, and they often have less chance to socialize with others in the community.

Despite their apparent minority status in the neighborhood, the group was known to be a major variable in every local political rivalry. A politician who can relate to these workers will have a higher probability of winning, as their collective votes comprise as many as one-fourth of the total number of eligible voters in the village.

Ever since there was a local election, a lot of Isarn workers have transferred their household registration here. These votes could be controlled and bought since the locals hardly knew who these workers on the palm plantations were. Fifty votes from these Isarn migrants thus became an important factor in local politics. For example, the number of eligible voters in the village totaled only 449 votes. Because some of these eligible voters may work in other provinces, only 300 or more people would show up on election day. Therefore, a candidate who can woo these Isarn workers and their 50 votes would have a much higher chance of winning the election.

It is said that the Isarn voters were registered under and guided by the current village head, who arranged for transferring of their household registration into the area. Of even greater significance is the fact that the village head also had the power to bestow benefits on these new residents from Isarn or cause them harm. Therefore, the village head tends to have influence over this group of people, resulting in his ability to manipulate and control the village's political arena.

5.2.4.2 Street Reconstruction: A Case of Corruption and Discrepancies in Local Government

Since the politics of Bann Kuan Sian has long been under the control of the village head, the candidates in his network have a greater chance of getting elected. In the last election, he supported his nephew to run for the SAO position and was eventually elected into the title. This incident led to many debates and issues regarding conflict of interest, which made some villagers very disappointed. However, because of their easy-going nature and their dislike for confrontation, most of them did not dare to keep a close eye on or criticize the work of the local politician

directly. “It’s like drowning in floodwater. You want to scream out but you cannot. You knew with all your whole heart that he was cheating and how he was doing it, but you dared not say it out loud,” a villager told her view.

I was in Baan Kuan Sian village during the end of August when the rainy season was also about to end. While Sunee was driving us to a conference in Krabi town, I had a chance to talk with a group of female villagers who sat with me at the back of the pick-up truck. While passing over a very bumpy road, I asked a villager why the SAO did not get to the bottom of this issue. The villager laughed, and pointed to a sign on the side of the road. The sign indicated that the reconstruction had been finished just a month ago; after only a few rainstorms, however, the street had returned to its original poor and bumpy condition.



Figure 5.15 Condition of Street One Month after Reconstruction



Figure 5.16 Project Information Signage

Sunee added that the SAO needed to repair the street surface two or three times a year, and each time they spent 100,000 to 200,000 baht on the cost of reconstruction. As she elaborated:

The problem was they did not fill in the street surface with rocks first before topping it off with soil. They simply overlay the old road with more soil and paved over the dirt. Therefore when it rains, the water erodes the soil, causing it to slide down the slope. The trick is that they will buy and dump more soil again and again. Not only is there the cost of the soil, but there are also other charges as well, such as transportation expenses, roadwork expenses and expenses for compacting the soil. These have become regular costs in the annual budget for the village's expenditure. The soil itself doesn't have to be loaded from somewhere far away; it can be taken from a nearby plot of land, but I do not know why the local SAO did not do that. Maybe they like to spend a lot of money.

On this project, there was a widespread rumor that the real cost of the street renovation was 80,000 baht, but the budget had been set at twice that amount. Moreover, when completed, the work was not as durable as specified in the specification document. This seemed irrational and unreasonable since the budget used in filling and rolling the dirt road each year is just as high as the cost required for building a concrete road. Yet a concrete road is more durable, more comfortable and much safer to drive on during the rain. “If the street was built properly to begin with, the officials could pocket the money only once, so they intend to keep the street as it is so that they can have more of a chance to pocket the money every year,” another woman asserted.

Though most of the villagers realize the cause of this problem, no one wants to ask for trouble. It was widely known that such a problem could only be caused because the SAO member of Moo 5 was the nephew of the village head, who was also acting as the chairman of the committee responsible for inspecting the work that has been done. This might be a reason why several projects funded by the SAO throughout the past four years were carelessly constructed and not built according to the engineering specifications.

Thus, some villagers wanted to see a change in the local political scene; a change that would develop the village, making it better than it used to be. “If we had a good leader, our village would already have been much better off. Just compare our village to Klong Panya that used to be less developed than ours. Now their village is more developed and has surpassed ours, and our village is less developed and outdated,” the villager summed up while the truck was heading out of the rugged road onto the main highway.

5.2.5 Sunee as a Political Player

5.2.5.1 Development Perspective and Political Agendas

Sunee firmly believes that the development of a healthy society must start from the smallest institutional unit—the family. She believes the roles of the mother and father directly affect their children, and furthermore that it is the quality of these children that defines the future of the community that they reside in. In order to attain a peaceful and prosperous society, Sunee said that everything “begins with the

mother, is corrected by the father, and starts with a child that is nurtured by society.” From her perspective, women or mothers are the agents of change in their families, as well as units of the larger community. Men, or the father figures, should reduce, refrain and abandon their egoistic nature, and be proper role models for children. Also, children should be the focus of the family’s attention. Once the children are raised in a good family environment, they will certainly become good assets to the community, just like good seeds planted into the land.

Sunee also holds that the disadvantaged in the community should be properly assisted, so that they could have the same rights and opportunities as others. She also has great concern for the elderly, the disabled, women, as well as marginalized people such as migrant workers from other regions. At the same time, she emphasizes the importance of community empowerment and collaboration. Such ideologies were constantly reflected in her words and deeds towards relating to a variety of issues. In this section, I have quoted Sunee’s statements concerning her major development perspectives and agendas.

1) Children’s Issues

From many of Sunee’s statements on children’s issues, it emerged that her concerns are centered on education, drugs and socialization, as seen by the following:

Our children have two main problems, which are: not completing school, or completing school but not finding work or making a living. Most of them think that their parents already own a plantation and that they have no need to look for jobs. They reason that their starting salary is not worth the effort. Most of the children in this sub-district finish grade 12 and do not continue their studies. Not many of them graduate with a Bachelor’s degree.

Children nowadays are very fragile. If they feel hurt, they go to their friends and use drugs. Partly, this is because they have lots of money from their inheritance. Modern technology makes communication much easier and traveling to other places is also not much of a

problem. Thus, when their friends call, they just get on their motorbike and take off. Therefore, for the children, it's easy for them to degrade themselves. If we leave things as they are, we will pass the point of no return.

As for children addicted to drugs, if I am elected as a member of the SAO, I will find out which of them are addicted and will take them to the doctor. Sometimes, parents do not know that their kids are addicted to drugs, even though they live together under the same roof. Most of the parents would consider us outsiders, and if we try to help, they will criticize us for interfering in their personal family matters. Thus, we cannot do much even if we want to. Similar to the drug issue, no matter how much the administrative office had done in developing the children of the community, nor how much the office has accomplished to eradicate drugs; the problem will not go away if local people do not keep a watchful eye themselves. Thus, everything revolves around the strength and involvement of the family and the community.

And as for the misbehaved and misguided children of my acquaintance, I want to enroll about 10 of them in an informal education program. I told them that it was not difficult. I am 50 years old, and even I could finish grade 12. They're not even 30 years old yet, so they shouldn't give up and do less than an old woman like me. Some of them who later finished schooling would come to thank me because once they completed their education they felt really proud of themselves. It is perhaps what they needed to overcome their sense of inferiority, which they made up for by misbehaving and always getting into trouble.

2) Issues Regarding the Elderly

Sunee often emphasized the importance of ensuring a good livelihood for the elderly, as illustrated in the following remarks:

With regard to helping out the elderly who have been abandoned by their children, what has been done is really not sufficient. One of the reasons that the elderly are left behind is because their children are also struggling to take care of themselves. The children of these elderly people are living a difficult life. Take Yai Daeng's case: she has a child, but sadly he has contracted HIV. She was not intentionally abandoned by her child, but her son cannot take care of her. These people do not get any assistance from the local government because they do not meet a certain set of conditions and I think this is unfair.

If I am elected, I intend to buy "Tup Yao" (a Tom-tom set) with my salary for the local elderly group. Because whenever there is a festival, we have to hire the tom-tom procession from Pra-saeng, a nearby district. No matter if it is a procession for the Buddhist monkhood ceremony, or a candle procession during Lent, we normally have to hire people from out of town and spend about 4,000-5,000 baht each time. If we have our own tomtoms, our elderly would have something to do and could also earn some money in the process. Most of our elderly like to sing and dance, but they do not have a chance to do so because they do not have the proper musical instruments and equipment. Elderly people who participate in community activities are typically healthy and hardly get sick, but those who stay idle at home tend to get sluggish and worse off due to feeling worthless, and eventually become unhealthy.

3) Women's Issues

Sunee always believed that women could be effective agents for change in the community. She saw the need for more and more women to become engaged in the public domain by doing community and political work. In this way, the women will realize that they possess unique qualifications that can make a difference, and can constantly improve their capability for making things happen.

I think moral, cultural and family closeness issues are at the center of every community development program, but men always overlook these issues. It is not because they are not good, but it's because they think these issues are not as important as other issues. Thus, more women should participate even more in doing community work.

Women should come out and work more, no matter if it is personal or public work. But most women around here do not work. Their kids have grown up. They have workers to help them with their work. Staying at home doing nothing makes their world narrower and limits their potential. We shouldn't only think of finding something to eat in the house today, we've got to think further ahead than this. We should think of others. We should give something back and contribute to the community and mother earth. One value of being a human being is in learning and knowing how to share.

In the neighborhood, I am the only person who gets up at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning to look for something to do. Other women stay at home and do nothing, except for playing cards in the afternoon. When they see that I have more money, they dislike me. I have to tell them that we have to work to have money. If you want more money, you have to work more.

I tried to persuade other women in the village to join the meeting. At first, I told them that they would get a meeting allowance and traveling

expenses of about 100 baht. It was better than just staying at home doing nothing. I had to entice them like this. Later on, when they joined the meeting more often, it is obvious that their points of view have changed, little by little. They can see things from a wider perspective. Now, I have three to four open-minded housewives and friends that look at things similar to the way that I do. We can ask each other to perform certain duties during one's absence.

4) Community Issues

Sunee sees the community as the second most important institution after the family. Because the community is home to everyone, all villagers, as community members, should have the sense of unity, sharing, and accountability for one another and for the community as a whole.

Society in the past was very comfortable to live in. Everybody loved one another and got along. I still remember that when someone wanted to build a house, their neighbors would mobilize the resources to help build that person's home. And by the afternoon, the owner could move into the house already. But nowadays, people only mind their own business, plus our community has also changed. Everybody has begun to have a better financial status and has more free time. So, I think several of them might want to work for their community, but lack the motivation and leadership. If I am elected as a member of the SAO, I will be a leader and motivator, getting more people involved with community matters.

We cannot think of living just for today, but we've got to think and plan ahead for the future and the coming generations. We have to contribute to the community and to our country.

If I am elected as a member of the SAO, I will make questionnaires asking the villagers what they want and what changes are necessary for

the community. Then through discussions, we will form a development plan for the community. A project plan will be developed and proposed to the SAO. And if approved by the sub-district council regularly, the project's budget will not be under the control of the leader only, but rather the budget information will be shared with all of the villagers. This will be different from the past with regard to managing the village funding, where the villagers have no idea what is happening and how the money is being used. Back then the villagers found out only when the budget had already been approved and the work had already been started. By that time, nothing can be done to change the details of the projects.

In summary, these statements reflect Sunee's perspectives on development, together with their implications for her political agendas. To Sunee, these problems should be the local government's top priorities, as it directly affected the lives of everyone within the community. She commented that most politicians usually overlooked the social and moral elements of the community. In this respect, Sunee was willing to do something to improve the situation. Without the authority, however, she could not have the power to put these ideas into effective action.

5.2.5.2 Decision to Run

Sunee has long been interested in politics. She had actively participated in politics as a supporter in many elections, both at the national and local level. However, it was the first time that she decided to put herself forward as an electoral candidate. Despite the support from her husband and children, her decision was opposed by some of her relatives who loved and worried about her.

Some [relatives] believe that being involved in politics requires a significant financial investment. They were afraid that I would spend all of my life-savings on politics. Others were concerned with the accusations and gossiping targeted toward women politicians. They were worried that I could not handle the mudslinging. A few were concerned about the possibility of me getting in the way and getting

into trouble with the local gangster; that the local mobster may threaten or interfere with my life. As for my sister, she was afraid that I might lose in the election. She said that if I decided to run, then we have to do everything that we can to win.

Therefore, Sunee had to explain her reasons to each group of her relations for wanting to be more involved in the local politics. Her reasons for running are the facts that her relatives must learn and be willing to accept her candidacy. Accordingly, based on my series of my personal talks with her, I may recap on her decision to run for politics as follows:

Firstly, Sunee entered the election so that the current politicians will not take the election for granted. She felt that they can do anything they want, and simply get away with it, and she thought the people deserved a chance to choose. As for the election itself, Sunee said that, “I am not so worried about winning or losing; it’s not a life and death situation for me. I just want those in power at the moment to feel more responsible and more active in working for the people.”

Thus, for Sunee, there was no need to invest so heavily in campaigning for votes, which some of her relatives worried about. In addition, she repeated that, “Winning or losing is not up to me; it is the responsibility of the candidate to present an option. So elected or not, this will be decided by the people. If they see that I can lead and support their community, then they may choose me.”

Secondly, Sunee determined that if she was able to get involved in the local politics, to a certain extent she will be in a better position to make the necessary changes. Sunee and many other villagers are tired of unfair treatment and the hidden agendas and personal benefits that come from abusing the system by the local politicians within the village. For example, that fact that the village head is the uncle of a member of the SAO, or the fact that the president of the SAO can also bid for government projects. With his own fleet of tractors and trucks, there were allegations that the president of the SAO often used his personal resources to handle government projects. She thought that this kind of corruption must be eliminated. In her own words, “If nobody steps in and stands in his way, then he can do whatever he pleases and will get away with corruption.”

Thirdly, the community tasks that Sunee is currently engaged in are more than the handful being performed by the local politicians. Being a politician, therefore, does not add or subtract from the amount of work that she usually takes on anyway. But **being in a formal position authority would allow her to reach deeper and into some areas of the work in which previously she was unable to get involved**. She gave an example of the work ethic of Lek-- an SAO official that she used to support in the past. But after having been elected, he really did not carry out his duties. In her own words:

When I go to the SAO meetings as a representative of the village committee, I observed that of the total of five meetings that were held, he [Lek] was absent from three of the meetings. In summary, I am rather certain that I attended more meetings and carried out my responsibilities more than the local official.

In addition, with regard to this election, Lek had previously informed Sunee that he would not enter the election. It would not have been proper for Sunee to enter at first because she did not want to take the vote away from Lek as they both had the same voting base. However, now that Lek had decided not to run, Sunee decided to enter. As it turned out, however, Lek- the current SAO official, changed his mind about entering the election on the very last day, without ever explaining to Sunee why he had done so.

Fourthly, Sunee perceived that she was in the prime of life and was ready to contribute more to society without compromising her family's welfare. As she herself mentioned:

I think my family and I are ready in every respect; for example, work experience, knowledge, and family financial status, etc. Therefore, when I came up with ideas for the development and improvement of the community, I want to see them implemented and accomplished. This means that I have to get stuck in and start working on my goals. You can't expect other people to complete your dreams for you.

If I did not have the knowledge and the work experience, I would not dare enter the election. That's the reason why I've never wanted to enter past elections. I believe that a political leader must have the requisite knowledge and a strong commitment, and not just the desire to achieve the position. Many people enter the election because they are encouraged and cheered on by their friends, thinking it would be fun, so when they get elected, they see it as only a question of social status. It's bad to be attracted by the idea of entering and winning the election, but not be committed to working and being a leader. These people enter politics, but cannot carry out the roles and responsibilities required of them and are content to just get their 4 years' worth of salary and accomplish nothing. The most important thing is that it's the villagers that really suffer.

And the fifth reason for her running was to advocate gender equality at the macro level and to promote women's roles in local politics. In her own words:

The fact is that when I entered the election, I was not thinking only of the village, but also thinking of helping the nation as well. I wanted to be an example in supporting the SAO-related policy of one woman and one man from each village. My friends from the other villages and I agreed that we would all try running for the election in our village. Even if we did not win the elections, at least the poll would indicate that more women had entered the election. If no women entered the election, policy makers might claim that it was the women themselves that were not ready to become involved in local politics. This may affect the bargaining power of the women's movement regarding the women's advocacy program at the national level.

Sunee also said that a woman who decided to enter the election must have a strong will and determination, because she would be pressured from all sides,

both directly and indirectly, until she lacked the confidence and would eventually pull out of the election. As was the case with one of Sunee's female friends from another district, with whom she had worked on several women's programs; she had entered the election early and dropped out near the final election day.

Sunee articulated that this friend of hers was a local woman leader who was very persistent about entering the election. She had prepared three months in advance before the first day of registration. She made the official announcement and took part in an all-out photo shoot for making campaign posters. Nevertheless, the friend decided to drop out of the competition because her relatives were not supportive of her decision to run. She then decided to nominate her brother-in-law (who had not prepared for the election at all) as her replacement and became his campaign leader. The following is Sunee's account of her reaction to her friend's decision:

I confronted her about why she did not stand by her decision, pointing out that if you made a choice then you should not waiver. You shouldn't let other people's words or comments affect your intentions because others might say that women lack the competency for leadership; that we are not capable of backing up our values and our needs.

Sunee signed up and entered the election for membership of the SAO on the first day of registration. She picked the designated candidate's number at random from the ballot box and pulled out the number "3" from a total of 5 candidates. She was the only woman running in the election.

5.2.5.3 Political Campaigning

Sunee started campaigning in a very simple manner from the very first day. Her rally to gain votes and support was not extravagant because she perceived that most of the people in the village were already acquainted with her. Therefore, there was no need to advertising her qualification or competencies beyond simply continuing to do what she had been doing in the past.

Despite her candidacy, Sunee still takes on a full range of responsibilities of running her business, her social work and her household chores. After having finished her routine, she would spend two or three hours in the evening visiting voters at their homes.

During two months before the election, Sunee would get on her motorbike and go to each house by herself. Sometimes she would take Nick, her granddaughter, if there was nobody around to baby-sit the girl, and would normally visited five to ten houses each evening. From my observation, Sunee usually started with small talks on general topics, then gradually led to the topic of her candidacy. Often that she did not mention anything about politics. After half an hour of general conversation on topics such as the recent increase in the price of fertilizer, or listening to issues facing the local resident, Sunee would say farewell and leave her campaign card. She also asked the owner of the house if she can put up her campaign posters, a very common practice by all candidates that it has become customary.

However, unlike what the other candidate were doing, Sunee had her own practice of not sticking her poster on a newly painted house. "I feel bad about putting a poster on a newly painted wall of a house, and do not want to leave any marks on the wall," she reasoned.



Figure 5.17 Sunee's Campaign Poster

There were times that the villagers complained about candidates who came with a bunch of promises, but once they were elected, never came back to visit the people. In such circumstances, Sunee would say, “Maybe its time to choose someone different.” Or sometimes, she gave them her mobile number, telling them, “No matter if I am elected as an SAO or not, if you ever need any help or support, please do not hesitate to call me; I will do whatever I can to help.”

Throughout her running of the candidacy, Sunee never had any vote canvassers. All she had were people stopping by to share the latest news and updates on the other candidates. She was determined to visit all houses herself because the entire village consisted of only 100 households. And all of them are situated next to the road, which makes it much easier than other areas where the houses are dispersed inside the plantations.

Apart from the social aspects and characteristics of her village that made it unnecessary to have a canvasser, Sunee pointed out that there are cases where some candidates who are backed by powerful and influential individuals, would have canvassers stage rallies and stir things up among the voters, particularly within those groups of villagers who like to talk about politics. One of the most common tactics

used by these canvassers is to start a rumor to discredit the competition. Sunee admitted that she had to be careful in dealing with rumors:

During the election, handling and managing rumors is very important. Any action can be used to discredit a candidate; for example going to withdraw money from an ATM may be used against you by claiming that you are withdrawing money to buy votes. There will be someone to watch you, someone who comes to visit your house and wherever you go. If you were to go visit a doctor then they might say that perhaps you are aware that you will lose the election and are therefore suffering from stress.

Sunee mentioned that during the election she actually used less money than normal. Under normal circumstances, she frequently treats children and people in the neighborhood to meals and desserts; even teenagers would ask her for special treats. But during election time, no one would ask her for any treats because they did not want to get her into trouble as it is against the election laws. Thus, Sunee was sure that nobody could accuse her of vote buying. Sunee spent less than 20,000 baht of her own money on funding her campaign, which included campaign posters, campaign cards, and registration costs.

Nevertheless, there were accusations regarding Sunee that were often raised by canvassers for her rival candidates such as “Sunee is wealthy, so she does whatever she wants and does not care about anyone. So when she wants to be in politics she just enters,” or “I feel sympathy for newcomers, especially Sunee, because she has no idea that it’s all decided by the big shots, influential people who will get elected and all the votes are already locked.”

Others rumors ran something like this, “Sunee is always badgering others and has a loud mouth, so she will have difficulties when it come to working with other people,” or “Everybody knows that Sunee paid for the number 4 candidate to run.” There were also people who shouted to her on the street saying, “Why should a woman run for an office, it would be shameful when you lose.” She would answer back in a humorous tone, “And shouldn’t you men worry about losing to a woman?”

It can be observed that in the battle of words at the local level, politics is not insulting or distasteful. Rather in attacking the competition, mockery or indirect accusation is used. In addition, the technique of giving the wrong impression or giving false information is often used. The candidates would not directly accuse one another, but there would be someone else, usually those who were very close to the candidate, such as their wives, that is always spreading rumors and rallying for support more than the candidates themselves.

In the final run-up to election day, Sunee went on a walking rally to visit all the houses that she had previously visited to solidify the vote and or to check her support base. that, “When visiting a house where only one of the occupants, the husband or wife was at home,” she said, “ I considered it a lucky sign for me. Because when it’s close to election day, there would be a solid reason for coming by once again to visit the other person who was had not been home during my first visit. It’s important to visit a place more than once, but you should not wait too long in between visits, otherwise the other candidates may buy their votes.”

In general, it may be concluded that Sunee’s campaign for votes and supports was quite simple. As mentioned earlier, **her view on local politics is one which requires no more effort than to make house calls to all of the local residents with whom she is already familiar. Sunee spoke little about herself and of her political agenda beyond the fact that the home visits seem like general conversation and casual house visits more than campaigning for votes.**

5.2.5.4 Kinship and Other Vote Granting Conditions

Another political factor that is well recognized by all candidates is the influence of kinship. From my interviews with local voters after the election regarding their voting criteria, most of them said that they definitely gave their relatives top priority. Their voting criteria were revealed as follows:

- 1) Though each voter can cast two votes for two different candidates, they will vote for only one candidate if that candidate is their close relative.
- 2) If two relatives run for an election, each relative will receive half of the votes.

3) If distant relatives run for the same election, one relative will get one vote. Another vote will be given to a candidate that the voters are most familiar with and not necessarily the other relative.

4) If no relatives run for the election, they will vote for the two candidates that they are most familiar with.

5) If there is only one familiar candidate, another vote will be given to a person who asked for it first.

6) If there are more than two candidates with whom the voters are familiar, family members will cast their votes equally to ensure that everybody that comes to ask for their votes is covered.

7) If the voter is a relative or close to a former politician (i.e. Kamnan, village head, a member of the Provincial Council, or MP), they will vote for a candidate who is on the same side as that politician.

8) If they are familiar with is none of the candidates, they will vote for candidates who are perceived by most people as being good leaders.

Given these conditions, their voting criteria could be ranked as follows: **1) kinship 2) personal acquaintance 3) political polarization and 4) the candidate's popularity** respectively. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned criteria do not take into account the vote-buying factor.

Despite all the seemingly multiple factors, it was not too difficult for a candidate to guess the prospective voting turnout because the constituency is small and there are always some 'allotted' votes that can be estimated from the number of relatives.

The familiarity issue, which is based on a personal relationship that a candidate uses to provide assistance to the villagers, is not always a predictable factor as to how it will translate into actual votes, since there is a possibility that other candidates are familiar with the same voters as well.

Regarding the issue of political polarity, each candidate must weigh the advantages of announcing specifically which political polarity they are associated with, as it could prove to be a double-edged sword in soliciting votes.

As for the last issue, namely popularity, each candidate must use certain tactics to estimate and create trends during the campaign. It is important to make the

last day before election day an impressive one since it can determine your victory or defeat. Nevertheless, Sunee has her own perspective on this topic, as seen by the following:

We must accept the fact that relatives will not abandon their kin, no matter how good we are or have been to them. So it's better not to go asking for their votes, which would create an uncomfortable situation for you and them both. The people that will decide whether we win or lose are those in the middle who are undecided.

Accordingly, each candidate must pay specific attention to the “people in the middle”, for the campaign to be fruitful.

5.2.5.5 The Opposite Side of Vote Buying

A common occurrence in every election is vote buying. It happens so frequently that there is a saying among the villagers that, “Red combo, purple bulls-eye,” which reflects the custom in vote buying that, if given a couple of hundred (a red bill) or more, then the voters that accept the money would choose two numbers. But if the buyer wants to lock onto one particular number then he must pay 500 baht (a purple bill) or more.

“If one’s political career starts off by being about money, then there is no integrity,” Sunee remarked. Therefore, she does not put money as a priority in her campaigning even though she has the capability to do so. For example, if she was to pay 500 baht for each vote under the Purple Bulls-eye payment scheme, she would need 50,000 baht for all the 100 votes in her village. Of course, this is no problem for her because of her financial status. However, Sunee entered the election for the sake of the people, so that they would have the opportunity to choose; if she wins the election, it is important for her to be able to say in all honesty that she won it fairly and squarely.

Nevertheless, Sunee said that the only payment that she had to hand out, even though she knew it was wrong to do so, was the bus fare for those who went to study or to work outside the village in another province so that they could come back and exercise their right to vote. This is because politics in a village level that consists

of approximately 300 voters only, every single vote that a candidate gets is as important and as valuable. Statistics show that the number of votes that the candidates receive during a village election is quite close. It frequently happens that the margin of votes between a winning and a losing candidate is fewer than 10.

In the last few days before election took place, I was particularly interested in the dynamism in the communications between Sunee and her voters. There were many times that Sunee was bored, disappointed or even frustrated with the people she related to during the election, most of whom were members of her mushroom business group.

The first incident happened at Juan's house. Juan and his wife own a small palm plantation. They have two daughters, one of whom was studying in a college in Nakorn Si Thammarat, which is about a hundred kilometers from their home.

Juan had told Sunee that he would tell his daughter to come back for the election on Sunday. However, on Friday when Sunee and I went to collect mushrooms at his home and asked about the girl, Juan said that he was not sure if his daughter would come back or not. Sunee sensed that they might be waiting for her to offer some money for traveling expenses. Then, their conversation began as his wife came out of the house:

Juan's wife: Have you come to buy our votes?

Sunee: Why would I buy votes, you cannot weigh or eat them. There is no vote buying today; it's about buying of something else.

Juan's wife: (in silence while putting a mushroom basket on the scale)

Sunee: So is your daughter coming back? Would you like the travelling expenses now?

Juan's wife: If you put it that way, who would dare to accept?

Sunee: Well, some families said to wait until their children arrived home first; then they will take the expenses for the bus fare. So I had to ask because I do not want to violate your rights. My wallet is back on the

truck, I only have 200 baht on me now, so will you take a deposit first?

When both Sunee and Juan's wife had finished weighing the mushrooms and loading them onto the truck, Sunee pulled 200 baht out from her wallet and handed it over to Juan's wife, and reminded her that, "give me your word that if I pay for the bus fare, you must vote Bulls-eye, and that the money I gave is for the bus fare and not for anything else."

After Sunee finished saying that, someone shouted from inside the house, "So you only pay outsiders and not insiders, right? Just want to be clear." Sunee did not reply to this because she had just turned her back toward the house to drive away.

After driving for a while, Sunee began to reveal her feelings to me, saying that she never thought she would hear such talk from Juan and his wife because in the past Sunee had helped out this family so much in everything matters they might ask for. In an upset voice, she said:

Throughout their lives, they always called on me whenever they needed my help, like the time when a storm took down their house door; I was the one who brought over the replacement. When their car had a flat tire, they called me to help out. And now that it's election time, they are still asking me for the 200 baht to cover the bus expenses from Nakorn. Did you hear what they were asking me earlier? About paying outsiders and not insiders? I am still confused because I do not know what it means. Or did they mean I am supposed to pay off those people who live here in town as well? I am not upset about the money because I have given them much more to help them out, it really hurts deep inside because when you get into politics, you often get to know what people are really like. If it were not election time, I would have cursed them, and to tell you the truth it took a lot of effort to hold back say nothing.

After leaving Juan's house, Sunee went to Noi's house to pick up more mushrooms. Noi and her daughter were preparing the mushrooms as we were pulling up to their house. Noi is around the same age as Sunee and has recently become a member of the mushroom business network. But she is very close to Sunee and the following was their conversation:

Noi: It's almost election day. How much is Number 3 handing out?

Sunee: What's the matter with the people in this house? The first thing after seeing each other is to talk about money already. Haven't you been? watching the television lately? They're promoting democracy you know.

Noi: It's become a catch phrase whenever you see a candidate.

I got used to saying it in case they might give out some money (chuckling)

Noi's daughter: If Aunt Sunee really handed out the money, we would not accept it. But we asked because it's already become customary

Sunee: So you are saying it's the catch phrase of the election then. People get caught because of this, you know?

From the two different scenarios, I noticed that many villagers regarded a political election as "the festival of taking back," from which the voters are entitled to get some money from the politicians.

Another tactic that some villagers used in order to trick the candidates and get money from them is to tell them that other candidates had offered them money for their votes, or to tell them they had actually received a certain amount already. Of course it was not really true, as can be seen from the case of a voter named Nouy. Sunee had visited Nouy at his house earlier and later when Sunee ran into a friend of hers at the market, Sunee's friend told her the following:

Her friend: Did you visit Nouy's house lately? How did it go?

Sunee: It was okay, he was very welcoming. Why do you ask?

Her friend: Nouy told uncle Korb that you were giving out 1,000 baht per household when you visited them yesterday.

Sunee: And what did Uncle Korb say (laughing)?

Her friend: He went around paying that much and asking them not to vote for Number 3, what else!!!

Sunee: And which number was he asking you to vote for?

Her friend: The person who told me did not say exactly.

I was with Sunee when she went to visit Nouy's house, so I was certain that Sunee did not buy votes as Nouy had mentioned. Therefore, I asked Sunee if she had any conflicts with Nouy, and why he was saying such things about Sunee that were patently untrue. In response to my question, Sunee explained that Uncle Korb was a very close friend of the village head, whose nephew was the current SAO member who might be afraid that she would go all-out and buy votes during the last stretch of the election.

The other candidates do not believe that I will not buy votes. Most political insiders suspect that I will do so during the 2-3 days before election day. Because if I were really buying the votes then, I could outdo them quite easily. In reality, Pee Nouy is a nice person and I think he was just playing a trick on Uncle Korb to get some money from him.

5.2.5.6 Count-Down Moments

On election day, Sunee still woke up at 4 am to do her regular housework. At 8 am, she went out to the election booth with her family. After exercising her rights as a voter herself, she believed that there was nothing else she could do for the election.

Sunee then went out to pick up mushrooms as usual and did not mention anything about politics. In the afternoon, she came back home to take a rest and spent some time with her family. However, a number of friends dropped by with news about the movements of other candidates the night before the election. Some told Sunee that there were some villagers that she had helped out in the past that had turned against her and accepted her money from her rivals. As a result, the atmosphere at her house was quite tense because nearly everyone was saying, “The other side has bought up all of the electoral positions already.”

After hours of news and gossip, Sunee’s family members started to feel uneasy and began to accuse some of the local villagers for of political backstabbing. Sunee, however, insisted that no matter if she won or lost, from the election day forward she wanted to make sure that everyone would forget what had happened during the election and move on. In her own words:

We are people from the same community; therefore we must stand together -- united. The election race is only temporary, so when it’s over we must make sure we remember who we are. The reason I entered the election was so that I could represent the people of this village. If we start fighting with other people within our very own village, where would we end up? If entering a race means we come out angry at one another, then I would rather that we did not enter at all. All of the candidates and all of the villagers are all members of our community, trying to live their lives.

Sunee’s statement helped ease the family’s tension. At 3 pm when it was time to start counting the ballots, her son Em, together with a few of his friends, went to observe the counting at the voting unit. Meanwhile, Sunee and her other family members went to wait at her parents’ home. It was also the time that I decided to excuse myself, so that she could have a few private moments with her family. Kay, Sunee’s daughter, said that she would inform me about the election result as soon as she got the news from Em.

I arrived at Krabi town at 5 pm, but still no news from either Sunee, or Kay. I sensed that Sunee might have lost the election; otherwise they would have called me to deliver the good news. At 8 pm, Kay called to inform me that her mother had lost the election, “She came in fourth place and the votes were really close. Mom received 30 votes less than the candidate that came in second.” “Is your mom upset about losing?” I asked. “Not more than usual, but she is determined to keep her chin up. Now she is having dinner with my grandparents; they are laughing and I think she is in good shape now,” Kay said before we hung up.

I decided to give Sunee a call the very next day. Her voice contained no trace of sadness. “You do not have to feel sorry for me, my sister. I am a fighter and this does not discourage me at all. If they were to start accepting registration for the next election tomorrow, I would enter without any hesitation,” Sunee said with a chuckle.

She continued to say that since last night she had received calls from many people who were supportive of her, and that gave her a lot of encouragement. Sunee believed that she could be a good politician, and would keep putting herself forward for people’s consideration. “If at first you do not succeed, you must try harder the next time,” she concluded.

5.2.6 Conclusion and Lesson Learned

5.2.6.1 Personal Characteristics and Values

Sunee grew up in a poor family. As the eldest child, she needed to take responsibility for doing the housework and caring for the other eight siblings. With so many limitations in life, Sunee was taught to be **responsible, hard-working, and grateful to people** who had extended help to her family during times of hardship. On the other hand, her experiences of poverty made her **sensitive to other people’s suffering**. She has a very warm heart that never overlooks the indigence of the needy.

Sunee was unflagging in her efforts to do good things. For instance, she was willing to work extra hours in the evening for no pay in order to help her ex-employer after his store burned down; she was willing to move from her hometown to help her husband’s mother even though the mother did not seem to appreciate her

hard work; or the time that she helped out the Batik group's chairperson despite their prior conflict. These incidents reflect her values that always put good deeds before personal feelings. She could easily **forgive those who hurt her, and always responded to them with kindness.**

Another quality I saw in Sunee was that she **had an ideology that meant she would hold firm to the things she believed in and was not afraid to express those beliefs to others.** In the case of the blind boy Tunva, Sunee refused to compromise her values despite other people's comments. She insisted on offering a helping hand to the family, even though they might get angry with her intrusion into family matters. In Sunee's view, however, being scolded by the old grandma was better than giving up any hope for the boy's future. To me, it is indeed courageous of a person in **making an extra effort to fight for the betterment of others.**

As a mother, who is also the breadwinner of her family, Sunee tirelessly takes responsibility for the kids, the palm plantation, and the mushroom business. Bound by so many duties, she is concerned enough to provide sufficient love and care for her three kids. Despite their various problems during their teenage years, Sunee as their mother, did her very best to put them back on track. She raised her granddaughter all by herself so that the eldest son and his wife could finish school and find good jobs. In case of the youngest son, who had dropped out of school, she even registered with him in an extension school for adults to encourage him to study. Sunee has never given up on her kids. Consequently, this value gave momentum to her concerns for the children of other people as well.

As an employer, Sunee treated her people in a very kind way, and was well-loved by the workers on her palm plantation. Having experienced poverty and hardship herself, she realizes how important it is for ones to be given a chance to grow so that they could sustain themselves and their families in the long term. Sunee gave them business opportunities and a better quality of life, so they reciprocate her generosity with hard work and loyalty.

As a community member, Sunee participates actively in community affairs and has done a lot to improve her community. She is **not afraid to stand against the wrongdoings of people in power.** Once she was cautious of corrupt practices in her village; she dared to find out facts and make things known to others.

Although her outspoken characteristics may disturb some people who are complacent with the malpractice of their leaders, Sunee does not see it as something that should be accepted. She always believes that one should not stand for a leader's wrongdoings. And in doing so, she is willing to get her hand dirty in order to send a message to those in power.

As a person, Sunee also has a very optimistic view about the world. She does not think too highly of herself, and easily accepts the fact that things do not always turn out the way she wishes. Despite her losing the election, she was strong enough to understand the situation and did not give up. Sunee is still determined to work as hard, and had set a clear goal to run for the next election. This also reflects the self-respect and goal-oriented values she possesses.

5.2.6.2 Concepts and Approaches Regarding Politics

Sunee sees politics as a means of development, of bringing about a fair distribution of resources so that people in the community as a whole could have an equal share of the benefits of development. In other words, **politics is a means to achieve the power to change the things she does not deem right, and to create a sustainable livelihood for the villagers.**

Sunee's interest in entering politics stemmed from her frustration with corrupt and ineffective local politicians. To her, local politics is a twilight zone dominated by an entrenched and closely-knit power group in the villages. Nonetheless, it is also a zone to be revamped by right-minded people who are ready to give back to the community, and to fight back against those who use their leadership status for personal gain.

Sunee comprehended that to be a good politician; it requires strong determination and devotion in delivering services to the people one represents. She also believed that an effective politician should be able to give good and appropriate advice, and to provide assistance to those who are in trouble. In order to do so, the person must have a sufficient knowledge base, social connections, as well as a well-established family background.

Sunee's decision to enter politics was based on this belief. After having accumulated valuable experience from her active participation in community development affairs, she began to see herself as a potential agent of change in politics.

However, in so doing, she first needed to pave the way by becoming elected to a decision-making body, which means she had to win the election to attain a formal political status as an SAO member.

Sunee has had a specific and clear agenda in running for election, for instance to solve drug problems among teenagers, to improve social welfare for the disadvantaged, and to fight against power abuse by existing leaders in the locality. Although she had been involved in fixing these problems for a long time, without a formal role and status for doing so, the scope and potential of her social work were rather limited. Thus, her initial approach to politics was the expression of her willingness to get her hands dirty, and to set an example for other disappointed villagers to raise their voices against the things that were amiss within their communities.

5.2.6.3 Discussion of Sunee's Candidacy

Sunee decision to run in the SAO election was driven by her strong aspiration to improve the quality of life of the people in her community.

An essential part of Sunee's case study is her experiences during election campaign. There could be so many factors that accounted for her losing. Despite her personal capabilities and resources for accomplishing political work, Sunee still faced a lot of difficulties in turning her social credit into political capital during her campaign.

To me, the very first limitation of Sunee's candidacy was that **she spent too little time campaigning for votes because she also had to work during the day**. In addition, she frequently had to travel outside the area to attend meetings, which made it difficult for her to remain well-connected with her voter base during the election period. Her visibility was far less compared to the male candidates. Besides that, the fact that Sunee often had to bring along her granddaughter might have had an indirect effect by conjuring up the image of the domestic role of a woman.

Sunee's second limitation was the fact that **she did not have a group of canvassers capable of speaking for her or helping to spread information about her**. I have observed that without canvassers, it is dubious for a candidate to talk about their superior qualifications, as well as their political plans and projects. This is

because they may feel too shy, especially in the case of a woman candidate. In Sunee's case, she was able to share her views with those close to her, but for those who were not quite familiar with her, Sunee only chatted with them on miscellaneous issues and rarely mentioned her political vision for the village. Given this limitation, it was difficult for Sunee to energize the campaign drive, or to defend herself against rumors or false speculation during pre-election time.

Thirdly, **I observed that Sunee's strong leadership competencies from her previous social work made her the leading contender, especially in the eyes of the other (male) candidates.** If she were elected, it could undermine the current network of personal interest and gain that they had already established. Thus, women such as Sunee are targeted by all of the established local politicians, who even unite in opposing her and preventing any possibility of her winning. An example of this is the last minute entry of Lek, the previous SAO member, who had given his word to Sunee and other villagers that he would not enter. Despite villagers' criticism of his inefficiency in the past four-year term, it turned out that Lek won the election.

Fourthly, **it was apparent that Sunee's financial status was to some extent used as a way to discredit her.** On the one hand, her competitors tried to raise the point that a rich person like Sunee could do whatever she wanted to, and politics was just another form of business for her; on the other hand, some voters thought that even if she lost the election, Sunee would not suffer as much because she was a well-to-do person. And even if she lost, she would still be able to help out with social and community programs and activities, as she has mentioned during her campaign. Nonetheless, these claims were not applied to other wealthy male politicians. Consequently, it is possible to hypothesize that people somehow took a woman leader for granted. They expected her to work for the community, but did not equip her with the requisite political power or resources.

Fifthly, **Sunee's social network and beneficiaries were not of much help in her political race.** I have talked to some politicians and other local leaders on Sunee's losing the election. They also pointed out that Sunee's assistance to the disadvantaged or marginalized usually could not translate into a significant number of votes per se. Those people who Sunee had helped out in the past returned her generosity by casting one vote, while sparing the other vote for another candidate. As

for those disadvantage villagers like Yai Dang and Yai La-ong, they were too old to go to the voting booth anyway. More importantly, they do not have any influence on others. Similarly, the Isarn workers to whom Sunee had always lent a hand, could not be of any help either, as they are from other provinces and do not have voting rights. Most of them did not transfer their house registration to the village because the mobile nature of their work meant that they might not stay in the area in the long term.

A political veteran in the area whose opinions I sought on Sunee's case, made the following comment:

People that have an impact in one's political career are those with lots of relatives and a network. So most politicians like to forge links to influential people, such as heads of big families, who could induce others to vote for certain candidates. The other approach was to befriend trend-makers, such as the group of coffee drinkers at local coffee shops. If they are fond of a candidate, they would sit there to promote their favorite ones all day long. But apparently, Sunee did put serious effort into wooing the target groups during her campaigning.

On the other side of the coin, Sunee's alliances with people such as the sheriff, the governor's wife, or the government officials with whom Sunee is acquainted did not do her much good in that they did not lend their support that much. This is partly because she did not ask them for any favors, so many perceived that Sunee's qualifications and leadership experiences would be more than enough to help her win the election quite easily. Likewise, Sunee herself did not like to make her candidacy known to other women leaders outside the village. She once stated that she was not so sure what they would say about her running for politics. Therefore, Sunee was unlikely to utilize her social network for political rallies either.

5.2.6.4 Political Realities at the Local Level

There are many parts of the case study that shed light on various aspects of political realities at the local level. Each point could be summarized as follows:

Perception of voting Most of the villagers do not associate local politics with the development of the community. In casting their votes for a

candidate, the villagers do not have their community's best interests in mind when choosing their representative. The casting of votes is considered a gesture of giving something back in return for the support they received from the candidate, or even the candidate's family. For instance, if candidate A used to drop by to visit their sick father, if the candidate is a son or daughter of their friends, they would cast their vote for him. In local politics, the perception of voting as a gesture of appreciation is more prevalent than the perception that the vote entitles a candidate to represent and work for the members of the community.

Travel expenses for voters In spite of the election rules against vote buying and other attempts to use money to gain a political advantage over other candidates, in reality, there were some election rituals that a candidate could hardly refuse. Notwithstanding the fact that vote buying is considered illegal in the eyes of all candidates and villagers, providing travel expenses for some voters to return home to cast their votes is regarded as a must-do practice that was not counted as a cheating in local society. As most villagers do not see that election is a part of their duty as a citizen, they feel that a voter's returning back home to cast a vote should be at the expense of the candidate whom they might elect. Likewise, the candidate sees it as a kindness to those who have to travel a long way to vote for him/her. In village level politics where the margin between winning and losing is a factor of only a few votes, providing money for bus fares is a necessity that has become a common practice in local elections even though, interestingly enough, it involves money changing hands.

Compassionate voting In choosing a candidate, the villagers are not so concerned with the community work involved. Some households that do not have relatives in the candidacy, or are not familiar with any candidate; would not be reluctant to vote for all of the candidates who just pay them a visit. For example, if the house has three people capable of voting, then the six votes may be distributed to all candidates, one vote for each. In fact, the votes of this group of neutral people that is the deciding factor of an election. But this kind of voting nullifies the concept of using the right to vote. Numerically, the end result, in which the votes are distributed equally, is actually similar to not voting at all.

Effects of Bull's-Eye voting Each voter has two votes that he or she could possibly cast for two candidates. However, in bull's-eye voting, it is the voter's

choice to elect only one candidate, and discard the right to vote for the other. As a result, it ultimately increases the gap between the candidate's and the other competitors' score. Some even say that in order to win the election, a candidate must receive at least 50 bull's-eye votes. Then, the next question is "Where do the bulls-eye votes come from?" They could be from 1) Relatives of the candidate 2) Locked-in votes, such as the votes from the group of people from Isarn or those people that have received traveling expenses from the candidates to come back home and vote. 3) The votes that were bought by the candidate's campaign team (Red combo, Purple Bull's-eye). From this information, it is likely that for a candidate who does not have a large number of relatives, their probability of winning is slim, unless the person could take other steps to attract more bull's-eye voters.

Roles of a candidate's spouse: The family of a male candidate would have the wife as another representative of the candidate to send various messages to the rest of the villagers. Since most of them are housewives, they have the time to fully support their husband by campaigning. On the contrary, in the case of a woman candidate, the husband is less likely to stand up in public during the campaign. This is because of the fact that the husband would have to work and thus lack the necessary time. In addition, another reason is the fact that the wives that are capable of running are typically more active than, or equally as active as, the husband in the area anyway. Thus, males often feel that they do not need to be involved as much. In Sunee's case, her husband is largely absent from the area and could not be a huge help to her campaign.

Timing of women's candidacy: The opportunity and readiness for women to take a role in politics usually occurs within a very short time frame. This is because there are many factors that must be in place before a woman decides to pursue a political career. For example, when there are no longer any children and/ or household responsibilities to tend to, when the family financial status allows them to run in an election, when the candidate has significant knowledge and work experiences related to public service, and when the candidate's leadership competence are accepted by community people. Only when these factors were in place did Sunee decide to enter the election. In contrast, for a male candidate, the factor that influences his decision to run is mainly the probability of winning, as exemplified by

one of Sunee's friends, whose brother-in-law entered the election without any knowledge of or work experience in public service.

Voters' assessment of a politician: During the week I visited the village before the election, I noticed that when the villagers complained about a politician they often referred to personal matters rather than his work performance. A frequently heard statement about a candidate who assumed the position in the last term was, "Lek once told us that he would give us traveling expenses, but after becoming elected, he never gave us the money as promised." Anyway, none of the villagers mentioned anything about his role and functions in politics during the past four years. Some of them did not understand what the roles and functions of an SAO member should be. Consequently, they did not pay much attention to his actual performance, as much as they did to other personal interactions.

5.2.6.5 Gender-related Issues

In Sunee's case study, there are many aspects pertaining to local perception and interaction that reinforce traditional gender roles of women and men in society. The findings from my observations at the rice planting festival, for instance, reflect the gendered nature of local events in which male and female members of the community took part.

It was significant that women and men were doing or expected to do different types of work. Women are always assigned to serving or nurturing duties, such as serving food and water, entertaining the audience, or lining up with other women to illustrate uniformity and cooperation so as to formalize the ceremony. Men, on the other hand, were hanging around, socializing within their group. Once the Chairperson of the ceremony arrived, however, it was the men that stood in the front to greet the honored guests.

Despite the commonly observed roles of men and women in most societies, the gender differentiation of men and women's activities undeniably shapes their attitudes and behaviors towards members of the opposite sex. Yet, it is also on this basis that men and women derived their roles and relationships, either in the private sphere of the household, or in the public sphere of politics.

From the same scenario at the rice field, even the interactions among the women's group to accentuate the traditional gender role of women. For instance,

when women gathered in a big group, they usually expressed a great deal of interest, or even competed with one another, regarding their looks and beauty. They were even trained how to smile and to bow in a uniform manner.

The perception of gender differences is instilled in boys and girls by their family and their social context. While girls are encouraged to beautify themselves and to serve others, boys are encouraged to compete and partake in outdoor activities—as exemplified by the girl dancers and the boy eel catchers. In terms of social activities, the girls were expected to entertain and provide hospitality for others, even at their parents' own expense. Nonetheless, the boys were allowed to play and compete with one another in the games from which girls were totally excluded. More importantly, the winner also received up to 1,000 baht in prize money from an activity he had already enjoyed. Without a 'gender lens', the unfair distribution of resources to male and female beneficiaries would be disregarded by people with administrative authority. Gender inequality persisted and no one was suspicious of it. It was a case in a small event, and it might be a case at policymaking in the larger scale as well.

5.2.6.6 Last Words

Looking into the personal and social lives of Sunee, the local context she is bound by, together with having first-hand experience with her during the election, has definitely helped me to understand this multidimensional picture of a qualified women leader striving for power in order to make a difference. To me, Sunee is an extremely hard-working person, who spent almost 17 hours a day in juggling household, business, and social matters. During the week I spent with her, I could observe that she was always busy helping others by giving advice, lending money, driving them to meetings, etc. Besides, she still needed to carry out all her routine duties such as doing housework, picking up her granddaughter from school, for instance, while other candidates could leave the duties to others and focus only on campaigning.

Regardless of her losing in the first election, Sunee --and also myself-- have learnt a lot about local politics, which is so dynamic, unpredictable, and sometimes irrational. Though my limited time did not permit me to go into more in-depth and acquire more information from the villagers' accounts after election day to

analyze the reasons behind her defeat, I have had a few chances to talk to Sunee to follow up on her life after her first candidacy. Sunee told me that she could feel some changes in people's response toward her. For instance, the CE asked her to be a consultant on some SAO projects. Other elected candidates became friendlier to her and treated her with more respect.

After all, Sunee's stories gave me an invaluable insight into a local context that somehow works to limit women's access to politics. A candidate's qualifications or capabilities did not matter, but the social interpretation of politics and the roles of politicians that influence people's decision making when they are to elect someone to assume political positions. Therefore, I have learnt that civic education is key. We can never successfully advocate women's participation in politics, or expect women to make a significant difference in the political arena unless people in the community have the right perception of what politics is for, and what politicians are supposed to do for the people they represent.

Finally, I also have learned that there should be a lot more competent women with the right political mindset, with gender sensitivity, and with transformational leadership qualities. If these women could break into politics, they could have played a role in changing the political and social environment for the betterment of others. Therefore, some measures should be introduced to support the right women leaders, whether in conducting their election campaigns, or in instilling the right concepts and expectations of people in the community regarding politics.

5.3 Junya Pannarai: 19 Years of Services as Village Head

5.3.1 Introduction

Junya Pannarai, also known as Poo Yai Mhee, is a familiar name to most local politicians in Krabi due to her long years of service as the first female Poo Yai Baan (Village Head) in the town's central district. Junya was elected leader of Baan Nai Chong, Tubprik Subdistrict when she was only 30 years old and has continued to lead her village for 19 consecutive years.



Figure 5.18 Junya Pannarai

Junya is 49 years old. She is married and has three children. She ran for the position of Village Head when she was only 30, while her first baby girl was just six months old. It is interesting to learn that her roles as a mother and as a local leader started at about the same period. Junya revealed that her children had all adapted to the fact that their mother was a public figure. She often brought them along to

meetings or to patrol the village. With the support of her family members, Junya was able to balance her domestic and public roles-- as a wife and a mother on the one hand, and a woman leader on the other.

However, Junya's long political path was not always so smooth. Despite her outstanding political capital, such as her father's good reputation, a better-off family background or a degree in Political Science from a university in Bangkok, she still faces a lot of difficulties stemming from her disruptive relationship with a national politician.

In this study, I perceived that Junya's case reflects many interesting aspects of women's participation in local politics. Junya is a good example of an educated woman filled with volunteer spirit and determined to use politics as a means to make a difference in developing her home town. At the same time, her long political path as a village head also encompassed series of political and personal conflicts with old power in the local which, interestingly, revealed how a woman politician strove to cope with political power play at the local level. Therefore, her participation in this study is of great value in enhancing my understanding of women in local politics at the grassroots level.

I met Junya for the first time in January 2008 at a school fundraiser in her village. To me, she was a person who was full of energy and was very pleasant to talk to. I explained to her about the objectives and the scope of my research and asked her to be one of my resource persons. "About politics here, I have the heart to tell you all there is, but I am not sure you could write them in your paper," she stated, after having agreed to participate in the study. After that, I could not wait to know why she had said those words.

We arranged to meet Junya at her house for our first in-depth interview. She and her extended family lived in a big wooden house located right on the main road, only twenty kilometers away from Krabi town. Her house was not hard to find, as it is close to the residence and office of a famous MP for Krabi. I took a quick glance around the house. From the outside, I could say that her family was rather well established. There was a European sports utility car parked in the garage. As I proceeded into the reception area, I saw a long table with dozens of chairs.

Seemingly, it was the area where Junya received her fellow villagers so I found myself a seat at this table.

By the time I arrived, Junya was in the back of her house doing laundry and was about to hang up the clothes to dry. Like other local women, she was a housewife who still needed to do the household chores. She wakes up at 7 o'clock to water the plants, wash the dirty dishes left over from breakfast, clean the house and do some laundry (most of the laundry was sent to a nearby laundry). At noon, she usually meets with her assistants, either at their homes or hers, to follow up on community work. She also needs to supervise her subordinates in her rubber plantations. "All these jobs require a well-established work schedule in order to avoid a clash with social events and meetings," she further explained.

I did not meet her husband that day, but had a few chances to talk with him in my later visits. Visuth, called "Ko Suth", Junya's husband, was a well-respected man in the village. He worked for the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, one of the country's most prestigious organizations in the eyes of Krabi villagers.

Junya had two daughters and one son, Meaw (20 years) Aod (19 years) and Mod (17 years). In the period that I visited their home, Meaw- the eldest daughter - was preparing for re-admission to university, so I had more of a chance to relate to her than to the others. Meaw always sat close to her mother during my interviews and listened attentively to our conversations. Then, she occasionally reminded Junya, "Mom, don't forget to tell the story when you...." Apparently, Meaw was very well informed of her mother's work, as well as of village politics. The girl was socialized in a political environment as her mother had been a village head since day one, so she could remember things. Therefore, in this study, Meaw was of great help in helping me to build up a rapport- either with Junya or with other villagers we met. Despite their invitation, I did not spend the night at Junya's home as I did not want to distract Meaw from her studies.

After the first general conversation to get acquainted with my resource person, I visited Junya a few more times at her home to talk about her personal life and political work in the village. Subsequently, we usually arranged to meet at other places on the days she had meetings or special events. This provided opportunities for me to meet more informants, such as a school director, teachers, SAO members,

her assistants, as well as her fellow villagers. Through informal discussions and observations, I gradually learned about Junya's leadership roles and the context in which she interacted. As in the previous case studies, her stories are spelled out in a thematic manner in order to illustrate her life as a person, a woman leader, and a political veteran. An examination of her life and work can enhance our understanding of a woman village head—a political position that very few women had attained.

5.3.2 Junya Pannarai: Who Is She?

5.3.2.1 The Child Sent from Heaven

Junya was born in 1959, delivered at home by a midwife. Before she was born, however, her parents had nearly given up hope of having a baby as they had been married for more than seven years. With the last attempt, they decided to go see a renowned monk to pray for a baby.

My dad told the monk that he wished for a baby boy; instead, the monk told him that there were only baby girls left if he still wanted a child. While he was thinking about this, my mom seized the opportunity and quickly replied “yes sir!” Shortly afterwards, my mother became pregnant. My father later told me that even though I was born a girl, there were so many aspects to me in which I was just like a boy, so he could only assume that it was because the monk had granted his wish too.

Baby Junya was named “Loog Mhee”, which means “Baby Bear” in Thai. The name was given by her aunt because she was born with dark skin. As she grew up, her nickname was shortened from “Loog Mhee” to “Mhee”. Still, “Mhee” sounds like a male name. Once she had become a politician, people usually imagined that “Poo Yai Mhee” would have a “grumpy old man” look, which later led to confusion among those who had not actually seen her in person. Junya mentioned that when she first attained her position as village head and had to attend social events in the town, “Both monks and other guests were amazed once they saw me in a laced top

and a skirt. This is because there are only a few women named ‘Mhee’ and even fewer women who are a village head.”

Junya is an only child. Even though her parents did not use any means of birth control after her birth, her mother never became pregnant again. Thus, to her parents “Loog Mhee” is a beloved daughter who was like a gift from heaven. And even if she was not born a boy as her father had hoped, her parents raised her at every possible opportunity. Thus Junya had never felt a lack of love, but instead, an oversupply of it.

5.3.2.2 The Good Old Days

The main occupation of Junya’s family is agriculture. Her father owned a rubber tree plantation while her mother sold groceries at home. When Junya was growing up, her father saved up enough money to buy a mini shuttle bus to ferry passengers around, so he hired someone else to take care of the rubber plantation for him.

As their financial position improved, her mother also invited many of her cousins to come live with the family. Some would help with the rubber plantation, some with rice-farming, and some would assist her father while he was driving between Krabi town and Ao-Luek district. “We were one big family, living together happily. Everyday, mom would cook a big pot of rice and everyone would gather around for all three meals,” she stated.

Junya was very close to her mother and her aunt, who took a major role in taking care of her. According to Junya, the two ladies were very kind and raised her in a rather non-traditional way. Unlike some girls, who were taught to be obedient and allowed to play mainly inside the home, Junya was groomed to be more independent and extroverted. For instance, she was always allowed to go play outside with friends, both boys and girls, and encouraged to participate in community activities, such as helping out adults when there was a festival or other events in her village.

Because most of the neighbors were relatives in one way or another, being surrounded by her beloved family and friends filled Junya’s childhood with beautiful memories. As a result, she has never encountered loneliness from being an

only child. She played, learned, and made the most out of her childhood, especially in a community filled with friendship and sympathy as she described.

People in that time loved and each other helped one another out. When we were planting rice, everyone would gather and lend a hand, even though they never got paid. I would call it unity. If one family were holding any kind of festivities, my friends and I would go out and gather coconut or palm leaves to build a tent or weave colorful cloth or paper to make decorative ornaments for them.

As Junya turned seven years old, her mother took her to apply for a place in a famous primary school located in Krabi town, where she finished Grade 7. After that, she entered the most famous secondary school in Krabi where she completed Grade 10. Junya was a bright child and in the classroom, she would sit at the front so that she could hear and pay attention while the teacher was teaching. “I always got the fourth place in examinations. The subjects that I especially excelled in were Thai and geometry and I remember that the teacher gave me a piggy bank and a ruler as presents,” she recalled.

Other than that, Junya often had the opportunity to go on excursions with the school. For example, on children’s day, her parents allowed her to travel to another province with the school, while other parents would worry and preferred not to allow their children to do extra-curricular activities. However, like Junya said, her parents loved her but were not too overly-protective of her, so she had a chance to spend her student life to the fullest, and did pretty well both in her studies and in other activities.

Thinking back to that period of life, the only negative story she could remember was when she first got into secondary school. During the academic semester, while a teacher was checking the rows of students, the teacher stopped and pointed at Junya and said in a teasing manner, “Trying to flirt, huh?” The teacher’s words really hurt Junya’s feelings, first because Junya did not mean to break the rules and second (and more importantly) she did not like the accusation at all.

Usually, when I was home, I tied my hair up so the ends would naturally curl up every morning. At the time, to say “Trying to flirt” were really strong words for me. So that evening after school, I went straight to the nearest salon and had my hair cut to the length of my earlobes. Also, when I was wearing a bra to school, I would be embarrassed and afraid that other people would see the outline of my bra; I didn’t like being pretty and I didn’t like wearing girly clothes.

Junya asserted that she couldn’t care less about her looks because she preferred living her life like a boy. Although her mother was the village beauty, young Junya had no interest in feminine beauty. Some people even teased her, saying, “This apple fell so far from the tree.” Laughing, Junya described her appearance at the time as “a chubby dark girl wearing pants like a tomboy.” She further mentioned that despite being a girl who was not cute or sweet, she was a really happy child. This is because her childhood was perfect, either in terms of her family, education, friendship or social life.

5.3.2.3 Politics and Kinship

When Junya was small, all the families in her village were connected, either by relationships or by kinship. However, Junya’s family was especially close to the family of Krabi’s current Member of Parliament (referred to as MP X). Apart from being a distant relative on the mother’s side, Junya’s father and the village head at the time (who was the father of MP X) were best friends from their time in the monkhood. Moreover, the children of the two families were also of a similar age and their houses were only fifty meters apart. Thus, the two families always visited each other and helped one another out. In addition, because Junya was the only girl and the youngest kid in the group, she would ride with MP X’s family to school, so she met them on a daily basis. Junya further defined the relationship between the two families as being that of “siblings rather than relatives” and went on to explain this further:

In addition to going to school together, their children always came to play and sleep over at my house, especially the MP’s little brother, who come over very often. Because their house was a grocery store,

the house was always busy and noisy. As such, he would bring over his textbooks to study at my place because it was quieter. We lived together like brother and sister.

The relationship between the two families went rather smoothly. Although the children of both families were sent to Bangkok for their high school education, they still tried to get together with one another pretty often.

MP X's family had long been a political family while Junya's family stood on the sidelines as supporters. Though Junya's father was a well-connected man and well-liked by his fellow villagers, he was never interested in becoming a politician himself. When MP X's father was accused in a lawsuit, forcing him to resign from the position, a number of villagers then asked Junya's father to apply for the position.

Junya recollected that her father felt so uneasy about the incident that he went to stay with a relative on an island for quite a while. This was because he did not want to listen to the villagers' requests, nor did he want to become estranged from his best friend. "In those days, one could not refuse when others asked you to be their leader as it was an honor that signified people's trust in the person," she explained. Once her father was away, it turned out that Poo Yai Kloi, another applicant, was elected as the new leader and took care of the village until his retirement.

It was not until Junya put herself forward for the position of village head after Poo Yai Kloi's retirement that conflict arose between the two families. Looking back, Junya had never thought that the political opportunity her father had rejected 20 years ago would revert to her; or that her path in becoming the village head would cause a break in a relationship that was once went beyond normal family ties.

The conflict that her father had been trying his best to avoid finally blew up in her generation as the context of local politics and personal relationships are nearly indistinguishable. Junya left the subject on the following note "Politics causes disagreement in a community. From being loving and sharing families, people began to hate one another because of politics. It is such a pity." In this regard, the details and the history of the conflict between the two families will be elaborated in a separate section.

5.3.2.4 Leaving home

After completing Grade 10 from the Krabi provincial school, Junya's parents decided to send their only child to continue her studies in Bangkok. Junya remembered that her mother cried her eyes out as she said farewell to Junya and her father as they were getting on a "red bus" (an interprovincial bus service). At the time, traveling between Krabi and Bangkok was very difficult because Krabi did not have a rail link. Moreover, the road from Krabi to Bangkok was still far away and unpaved, not to mention the winding road across the mountains. Because of the limitations of the transport system, throughout the seven years Junya spent studying in Bangkok, she came home only a few times.

Living in a dorm far from her parents somehow made Junya a self-dependent yet sharing person. University life brought with it a new perspective of friendship that was greater than laughter among friends; it was a learning experience for life at the Volunteers for Rural Development camp, which helped create an awareness of the importance of caring for society at large. This experience became the important reason that brought Junya into politics later in her life.

5.3.2.5 Life Lessons from "Pee Toi"

Junya continued her Grade 9 education at a famous private school in Bangkok. She lived in a girl's dormitory with her relative, who was six years older. Junya called the relative "Pee Toi" ("Pee" means "sister" in Thai). Pee Toi was in the senior year of her tertiary education at a Teacher's College and was also a college basketball player. Junya described Pee Toi as a pretty, tall, light-skinned girl with a prominent nose. Pee Toi was also frequently approached by talent scouts in the entertainment business for casting, but she often refused since she did not like being a movie star and preferred to excel at sports.

To Junya, Pee Toi was a sister, a teacher and a role model in terms of her behavior, education and perception of the world. Pee Toi played a very important role in making Junya a better person, as Junya herself noted:

When I first went to Bangkok, I was honestly so out of place. Pee Toi helped me clean myself up, took me out shopping and told me to put on some lotion because my body had scars and marks all over. Most

importantly, Pee Toi taught me about life. Her way of teaching didn't involve her saying much, but she set herself up as an example instead. At first, I was bit of a loner, very possessive and didn't like to share. I didn't do much of the housework because I was never told to at home. Pee Toi took care of my things; she cleaned my room and washed my clothes. So I looked at myself and realized this was "not nice"; it was what made the other three roommates so unwelcoming towards me. After that, I started improving myself. To be more precise, I started taking an interest in others.

The fact that Pee Toi was an athlete gave Junya had the opportunity to watch competitions at various universities. Often, Junya listened to "music for life" like her. Sometimes, Pee Toi would bring along Junya to listen to political speeches at Thammasart University, which was where Junya became aware of the problems of society on a broader scale and where she began to take an interest in politics.

Junya told me that she had listened to a political speech for the first time at the Krabi town hall when she was about 14 years old. The university students who gave the speech were Saowanee Limmanond and Theerayuth Boonmee, the two key student activists of her time. She vaguely remembered that the speech they gave was about driving three tyrants out of Thailand. Though Junya was still a child and did not understand the essence of politics, she felt "shaken and speechless, as if their words had been absorbed into my veins".

However, ever since coming to live with Pee Toi, she started to have a better understanding of politics and democracy. Retrieving information about the people's fight for democracy made Junya want to be a part of the country's social development, especially to assist the poor and the people who had fewer opportunities. Junya could not help but feel regret for the rice farmers when she saw anyone who left food uneaten, like in the lyrics of the song by Caravan, Pee Toi's favorite band. Junya listened to it so often that the tape nearly became unlistenable.

After Pee Toi had graduated and left the dorm to be an instructor in Rayong, another girl from Krabi came and lived there instead. Junya took this opportunity to teach the girl things that she had learnt from Pee Toi. Junya thought

that everyone that came from the rural area to study in Bangkok should care for, rely on and learn from one another as much as possible. Junya realized that she was lucky to have Pee Toi to take care of her and guide her along the right path.

Subsequent to finishing her secondary education, Junya applied for her tertiary education at Ramkhamhaeng University, at the Faculty of Political Science. She said that a part of the inspiration for this move came from this establishment and the teaching from Pee Toi.

5.3.2.6 Joining the World of Volunteers

The fact that Ramkhamhaeng University was an open university, allowing the students so much freedom, gave Junya the opportunity to learn from both inside and outside of the classroom.

The first thing that the university students often did was to look for a group or a club to join. Although many students would choose the group in accordance with the province that they came from, so that they could mingle with friends from their hometown, Junya went straight to the main activity hall, the center of all activities to search for a club with the kind of activities she wanted to take part in. By the time she enrolled in Ramkhamhaeng University in 1980, the political movements led by students had already subsided. Instead, so many development clubs sprang up, targeting diverse social issues. Junya recalled her experiences during that time:

The first club that I joined was the anti-drug-abuse club. Shortly after, members from the rural development camp for the south invited me to join their club because there was no female member, so I decided to join just to help them out. At first, I was quite afraid because the members looked rather scary and some even grew long beards. But after being a member for a while, I found out that they were kind people.

Junya was really excited by the world of activities. In the first year, she nearly earned no academic credits because she was so occupied with activities and neglected her in-class education. In her club, Junya took responsibility for

administration and coordination because she was the only woman. However, the value of these activities at the time was that they were gender-free so everyone, either males or females, stayed together like siblings. Junya pointed out that all the student volunteers had one thing in common. That is, no one would care about looks and would carry a hand-made satchel and women would wear no make-up.

5.3.2.7 The Dorm Girl

For the sake of convenience and to save money, Junya and her female friends from the anti-drug-abuse club lived together in a dorm near the university. Compared to her other friends, she was in a better position financially. Regardless, they still cared for each other financially and shared things with each other. Each month, Junya would allot a portion of the allowance she received from home for her friends to borrow or to spend on miscellaneous items for her roommates, such as ground coffee that she never drank.

At the time, the families of Junya and MP X were still in constant touch. Junya told me that MP X had a younger sister living in Bangkok, not far from the Ramkhamhaeng area. As a result, this house became a center for all those who came from upcountry to study in Bangkok. Around the end of the month, when most students were broke, they would gather at this place and wait for money orders to arrive from home.

As time went by, those who visited the house began to make themselves a little too much at home and the owner started to feel unhappy about it. For example, some visitors even picked mangoes from the tree without permission. Later on, the owner began to count the mangoes on the tree so that she knew if a mango was missing.

Regardless of what happened, Junya was still the house owner's favorite. This was because every time Junya visited the house, she always helped out with all the chores—the cleaning and laundry, for instance. At the time when the house owner delivered her baby, Junya even took leave of absence from her examinations to look after her at the hospital. Junya said, "I'd learned these things from the club I joined. It taught us to help others as much as we could, either in big or small matters. Put it this way: I was the only one who was allowed to eat the mangoes". She then added with a smile that the most memorable thing about living in

Bangkok was meeting good people. She learned about generosity and caring, which were some of the activists' characteristics. "In-class education gives us knowledge, but outdoor activities give us experience of life," she concluded.

5.3.2.8 Unforgettable Experiences at the Volunteers' Camp

During the four years that Junya spent in the rural development club, each year she would be given a role as a coordinator for the annual camp. However, when it was time to do the actual fieldwork, she never got to go, and so she never had a chance to go the camps in the north and northeast.

When Junya was in her third year, she proposed that the camp be held in Baan Bang Hien in Krabi, a truly underdeveloped area. At the time, there were still terrorists everywhere and the roads were still unpaved. "So many times we fell into a pothole so big that everyone had to get out and help push the car. The wheels were spinning like they were about to fall off," Junya recalled of her first camping activity.

The mission of the visit was to build a four-classroom building for the kids in the village. That was when Junya realized the true meaning of exhaustion. All the volunteers worked against time because a summer storm was striking the area. "My dad came to see me at the camp. The very minute he saw me, he asked me to go home and promised he would bring 100 kilograms of rice to the camp as my replacement," she recounted. Then, Junya could only laugh because she knew that she could not leave her friends and simply go rest at home in town by herself.

Nevertheless, Junya had to go into town because of an unexpected incident. Lightning struck her camp and a volunteer was badly injured. He needed to be hospitalized immediately. In the end, the volunteer did not make it and passed away at the hospital. As Junya was waiting for a doctor in a hospital, she felt so disappointed that, while her friend was laying on the gurney, no doctor or medical attendant came to see the patient. She could not help but think "If only the road from Ban Bang Hien were in better condition, or only if the hospital in Krabi had sufficient equipment and medical resources, my friend might still be alive." At the same time, she started to question how many people would have to die due to underdevelopment and lack of access to services.

Although what happened was a huge source of grief to her group, Junya did not give up. The year after, Junya was still the mainstay in organizing a camp in

Krabi, again at Amphur Lum Tub. It was the last time that Junya participated because, after that she would have to study hard to graduate. “I spent five years in university because I did so many activities. Combined with two years in secondary school, I spent seven years away from home. It was already time to go back and help my family,” she thought. Thus, after graduation, Junya did not apply for a job in Bangkok like everyone else because she had to go back to her family.

5.3.2.9 Settling into the Hometown

As the only child, Junya’s parents expected her to continue to run the family’s business. When she first came back, she had to learn how to manage the rubber plantation from scratch. “Previously, Junya did not even know where her parents’ land was. She had no idea how to manage the plantation and how to supervise the employees. “I had to learn those things from the ground up from my dad because I had been gone from home for so long,” Junya said.

Other than work, Junya settled down and married Visuth, an employee of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT). They have three children together. Five or six years after she came back home, people started to wonder why Junya was still single, but she did not care. Junya finally met and married Visuth or “Ko Suth” when both of them were 29 years old.

Visuth met Junya for the first time at a bank, but the most memorable event was when they ran into each other again at a school reunion. “There was a dance floor at the reunion. He saw me dancing with my girl friends, bare foot, and he thought I was funny.” They spent six months getting to know each other before getting married. Because Visuth’s hometown was in Pattalung province and Junya is the only child, they decided to settle down in Krabi and live at Junya’s parents’ place. Visuth and Junya have three children, two girls and a boy, 17, 19 and 20 years old, respectively.

Junya was elected village head at the age of 30. This means that she started to assume the roles as a wife, a mother and a politician at the same time. When Junya first applied for the position of village head, Visuth did not quite agree with the idea because their first baby was only six months old. However, when Junya insisted, Visuth did not stop her, although he could not give her much support as he was from a different area. Not so long after, Visuth got used to the idea of his wife being the

village head. Both of them learned that, as a leader of the community, Junya could not only be a wife at home, but also needed to be a shelter for the villagers as well.

Junya's family is a loving family. Weekends are family days to Junya. These days Junya spends with the members of her family and tries her best not to work. Each family member also carries out one tradition; everyone would go out and have breakfast together every weekend.

Junya described her husband as a loving, caring, responsible and generous man. Thanks to Ko Suth, Junya could do her political work with ease. Other than working at the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, Ko Suth also does shrimp farming, which contributes a significant portion of the family income. Besides, Ko Suth is also a good father who cares for his kids. When the kids were younger, he would help her feed them. At present, he is still the one who takes them to school. Junya knows that it is Ko Suth who fulfills and completes the family while she goes out working for the community.

Apart from her husband, Junya's parents and her aunt help Junya in every way they can. Junya is especially thankful to her aunt who is of tremendous help in taking care of the house and the children, and to other relatives who help her with the business. In this regard, she had the following to say:

I'm less worried because I have a very understanding husband who gives me great support. Also, my aunt helps me take care of the house. There are relatives whom I can trust to take care of the rubber plantation, so I only have to go down there occasionally. Because of all these things, I have more time and the strength to go take care of other business.

Junya thinks that she is luckier than many other women in terms of her marriage and her family. Her strong financial position and support from her family allow her to perform her role as a community leader effectively. Nonetheless, Junya tries her very best to allot time for politics, business and family on an equal basis because she realizes that all of them are the factors that fulfill her life. If any of these factors is thrown out of balance, her life would proceed with difficulty.

5.3.3 Preludes to Politics

Junya had been interested in politics long before she decided to run for a political position. In terms of political pursuits, she and her family had been involved a great deal in politics. Though her father was not a politician himself, he always took a key part in every national and local election, both as a canvasser and a supporter. These roles were eventually passed on to Junya. While in terms of political ideology Junya's political will was derived from her experiences as a student activist. Thus, when the chance presented itself, she did not hesitate to give it a try, even though there were many personal and social factors that could have deterred her from pursuing such a course.

5.3.3.1 Political Affiliations

Ever since Junya could recall, she always saw her father busy with politics every time there was an election. Even after the election, her father was still the right-hand man of the village head, who was his best friend.

Junya reflected that her father admired Poo Yai Y because of his goodness and generosity. For example, "every time a villager passed away, Poo Yai would help construct the coffin." Poo Yai was also well-known for his honesty. The villagers even called him "Pao Boon Jin", after the Chinese judge who was known for his unwavering integrity. Due to a close relationship with Poo Yai Tuan, when Poo Yai Y's son applied to become an MP, Junya's father gave him his wholehearted support without hesitation.

Junya's father is the kind of person who would give wholehearted support to the side he had chosen. According to Junya, he did not mind spending his own money on political affairs. He never asked for the transportation costs that he paid out of his own pocket to bring voters to the election site. "In the past, a canvasser normally helped out a political candidate because they wanted to, not because they were paid to," she said.

Junya continued her story. She told me that, at the time, the election for MP got so intense that someone was shot to death. Her father also nearly lost his life

in the war of politics, even though he was not even a candidate or a politician. In her own words:

On the night before the election, my father went out to canvass in a village with another friend of his. That time, there was no electricity just yet; each household used an electricity generator. At dusk, the area would be completely dark. Therefore, my father and his friend would take turns in visiting the villagers as one of them had to stay with the car. As it turned out, my father's friend was shot to death that night. The news traveled so fast that people all over talked about it. My dad dodged the bullet by an inch. If my father had been in the car that night, I would have been an orphan.

Due to the fact that local politics relies on the patronage system, a person's role in politics was often passed down from one generation to the next. As such, after the death of Junya's father's friend, his son became a member of MP X's team and has remained so until today. Even Junya herself has been an election campaigner for MP X on many occasions. Junya told me of her experiences in her own words:

The first time MP X applied to become an MP; I went all-out canvassing for him, so much so that people thought I was his wife. I helped out at the election's administrative center. The responsibilities ranged from coordinating with personnel to serving food. When MP X wanted to become acquainted with the chief official of the National Park, I was also the one who took MP X to meet him. The entry way was a creek; we had to take off our shoes and wade through it.

All the experiences Junya has shared with MP X's family since childhood had made Junya feel that she was a part of the canvassing team. She made the utmost effort to help him in the same way she would for her own brother. Because

of this, Junya felt sorry and disappointed when all she got in return when she decided to take part in politics, were only insults and rejection.

5.3.3.2 Decision to Enter Politics

Many years after Junya had returned home, she thought that, if possible, she would like to join politics. This is because, at the very least, she could utilize the experience and knowledge that she had learned to develop her village. In 1990, the year that Poo Yai Kloi retired, Junya saw that she was ready to present herself as another alternative to the villagers. Moreover, Junya also thought that it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for her to enter politics because, at the time, there were no other local politicians. Had she let the chance slip, she would have had to wait for many more years until the new village head retired again, and she did not know if she would still have any more willpower left by then.

After she had thought this through, Junya went to discuss things with her father because she knew that the fact that she had spent time somewhere else had severed the connections she had with many of the villagers' groups. Although her father's first reaction was one of disapproval, he later came to terms with the idea after seeing how determined she was he even gave her full support in canvassing for her. At the time, Junya was unsure if she would be elected, but she had faith in her father. He was a well-respected man in the village. Regarding the disadvantage in gender, Junya was hoping that a bachelor's degree would compensate for the fact that she was young, and a woman.

Prior to the application date, the villagers engaged in intense discussions about the candidates and the possibilities that each of them would win. When Junya acknowledged that MP X intended to support his brother as another candidate, she was worried that her decision might affect the relationship between the two families. After the general reaction towards her candidacy turned out to be positive, she was surprised when MP X came to visit her at home, and asking her "Competing for the village head position? Aren't you afraid of getting killed?"

After having heard the MP's veiled threat, Junya no longer hesitated and decided to apply for the position without giving it another thought because she hated

that fact that she was being threatened for doing nothing wrong. Junya thought that politics should not be monopolized by one single family. In a democratic society, everyone has the right to compete. Candidates are judged by the people, not by a single man with power.

Having perceived that she was being treated unfairly, Junya became even more determined; she was even the first person to apply for the candidacy on the very first day for applications. After, Junya and the MP drifted apart. “He even stopped inviting me to birthdays”. Junya felt sorry for knowing that the good memories and the relationship between the two families were now worthless, although there was nothing she could do about it. The fact that MP X’s father, Junya’s father’s best friend had Alzheimer’s, made it impossible for her to seek advice from him. Since there was no intermediary on hand, the small conflict arising from Junya’s decision to run escalated into hatred from then on.

5.3.3.3 Campaigning for the Position of Village Head

The competition / election roster comprised five candidates and Junya was the only woman. When asked about her experience of canvassing, Junya told me she had very little because the tenure of a village head is an extended one, making it different from other political positions, such as MP, PAO or SAO, in that they are re-elected every four years.

Junya pointed out that 20 years ago, a village head would be elected based on his reputation, goodness and family background, rather than on his wealth. In those days, therefore, money was not a big issue for a political aspirant.

Junya added further that while she was canvassing, her father was the key. As she said, “People chose me because they loved my father. He was frank and funny. No matter where he went, people would gather around him and burst out laughing.” Hence, Junya’s father was both the canvasser and the guarantor for her first and only attempt to run for a leadership role.

Owing to her father’s personal credibility, together with the nature of village politics at that time, it was hardly necessary for Junya herself to canvas for votes. Normally, in canvassing for the position of village head, the candidates would not lobby the various groups in the village. Junya explained to me the characteristics

of canvassing for position of village head, which somehow differed from other elections, in the following terms:

Originally, the village heads were mostly those who presented themselves as possessing the necessary leadership characteristics. At that time, the election was merely a formality but lacked substance because people already knew in their minds whom they would pick, so one could hardly call it a competition. Later, there was probably no one who stood out, so the competition among the candidates became more evident. However, the candidates don't really go knocking on doors. There are no posters, no speeches; candidates would lobby by sending a representative to talk to family leaders. And mine is my father. The candidates hardly ever go themselves, which I think is different from other political positions. But who knows? Things change and so can the next election for village head.

As mentioned previously, when Junya applied for the position, her daughter was only six months old and still needed to be breast-fed, so Junya did not go out much. Nonetheless, when on the occasions she needed to meet people, Junya would leave her daughter with her mother or her aunt, who were of great help in taking care of the baby girl.

Even though her husband, Ko Suth, who came from another province, could not help Junya in the election as much as her father could, he tried not to stand in her way. Junya thought she was very fortunate. If her husband had been against what she was doing, she would not have had the will to go out and enter the contest.

Junya gave one woman's case as an example. The husband, who not only refused help his wife, undermined her by telling other people behind her back that he did not want her to compete. The act, regardless of whether it was intentional or not, was "...humiliating for his wife. It would greatly affect the election results. It emphasized the fact that the candidate herself did not even have the power to persuade her husband, so therefore she wouldn't be able to lead others either."

5.3.3.4 Winning the Election and the Aftermath

Finally, Junya won the election, beating the first runner-up by 25 votes (this was out of approximately 400 voters). Although the figure seemed small, when compared to the number of the candidates, it implied that Junya was undoubtedly trusted by a large number of the villagers.

After the election, Junya mentioned that her leadership roles were often put to test. “Many people had doubts about a female Village Head,” she stated. The most difficult thing for Junya to deal with, however, was the false rumors. “Sometimes I feel like giving up and sometimes I feel angry. On these days, I try to think of these things as jokes and try not to worry too much about it.”

A major source of rumors derived from her conflict with MP X. Even though the election was over, the disagreement between Junya and the MP worsened. MP X, who at the end supported his cousin as a candidate for village head, gave the reason for not supporting Junya that it was because Junya had assisted one of his rivals in committing electoral fraud by distributing money to buy votes.

Junya, who at the time was seven months pregnant insisted, that she had done no such thing and that she had been being wrongly accused.

At first, no one dared to tell me about what they’d heard. I only heard of it after the rumor had already been circulating for a long time. When I was told about what was going on, I felt extremely disappointed because it wasn’t true. I even told the informer that if I had really done it, I swore that my baby would fall right out of my belly.

As to why MP X came up with such stories, the only reason Junya could think of was that she had been a classmate of his rival’s sister. To Junya, the accusation of buying votes greatly damaged the perception that people had of her. After a while, Junya learned not to care about these rumors and became determined that she would do her best to repay the trust the villagers’ had placed in her.

It is common knowledge that conflict among leaders often results in less development than would otherwise be expected because coordination between the upper and lower levels of leadership is not as effective. “I always felt saddened when I heard the villagers complain that, if only their leaders were on better terms, the

village would have been more developed.” Junya accepts this fact unconditionally, although she has no idea how to solve this problem. Nonetheless, Junya is confident that she has done nothing wrong by participating in politics, especially when her goal is not to gain power for herself or her allies.

5.3.4 Junya as a Woman Village Head

5.3.4.1 Drought: The Number One Challenge

The first year of Junya’s role as the village head was the most arid year she could remember. All the villagers lacked sufficient water for agricultural consumption, let alone household consumption. As Junya described it: “It was so dry that durian trees had died standing up.” As the new village head, Junya had to find a way to relieve the villager’s suffering. At the time, Junya was eight months pregnant with her second child, getting closer to the date of delivery. Regardless of her pregnancy, Junya showed her leadership qualities to prove that the simple fact that she is a woman cannot be used as an excuse to do less work than men. Junya continued her story:

During early pregnancy, expecting my second baby, some villagers complained that I got pregnant again so soon. They were worried about my ability to work if I kept on getting pregnant and they were afraid that I would rather stay home taking care of the newborn baby. Thus, I wanted to show them that I could be the person they could come to whenever they needed help. It was lucky that my husband is an acquaintance of the brother of the mayor’s wife, so I was successful in getting the municipality to send in a water truck. The fact is, under normal circumstances, the municipality would not allow the mobile water truck out of the area, so I was really happy when they granted my request. I even climbed up the truck and showed the truck driver the way to the canal. After filling up the water truck, I distributed the water to every household. First, I went to the houses that were the farthest away because they were ones most in need. Actually, my tummy was already very big at the time, and I weighed nearly 90 kilograms. But it felt good to know that I could be a great help to them.

Junya told me that what she did during the drought, other than being the first task she had completed, was the work that she felt most proud of. She felt overwhelmed and delighted just seeing how happy the villagers were when they saw the water truck coming and the enthusiasm with which they went about getting their containers. It was as if the weariness suddenly disappeared when she saw children jumping up and down cheerfully, yelling, “The water is here, the water is here!”

With compliments come criticisms. Some villagers who were not so fond of Junya criticized her, claiming that she was trying to put on an act but Junya did not care. With a baby kicking in her belly, she knew in her heart that as a Village Head she had done the best she could to help the villagers in their time of need.

5.3.4.2 Team Building

“In the context of a community, a leader can only take the lead when they are given the full cooperation of their associates,” said Junya, who gradually learned the role of a leader while on the job. Because Junya had never worked in any kind of system or company elsewhere since her graduation, she had never had superiors or subordinates before. As such, she had never been taught anything about personnel management before either.

During her first year as the village head, Junya admitted that the job had given her so much of a hard time that she was unable to deliver the results she wanted. Other than the political conflict that made things more difficult, Junya had found the assistants to the village head, who were the existing employees, could not be of any help to her at all. At that time, Junya had just had her newborn baby. The fact that she had to do everything from the ground up herself, ranging from drafting documents, coordinating jobs to organizing village patrols, became too heavy a burden for her to bear. It made her feel like giving up on everything. The workload seemed too much for her to handle alone. One day, Junya decided to go see her district official to resign:

I went to the official’s house with a very strong intention to resign. I felt so tired. I really wanted to work, but nothing turned out the way I wanted. I don’t know if it was fortunate or unfortunate that the official’s dog chased me up the street so I had no choice but to retreat. So at the end of the day, I didn’t get to resign.

After she failed to meet with the district official in question, she decided to consult her father and her husband, who gave her support and told her that there was a solution to everything. They told Junya that if this team would not help her, getting replacements for them might be a good idea. Junya never thought that she could ask for new assistants because these people had been in their positions for so long.

Finally, by taking into account the goal, Junya decided to talk to one of the assistants who seemed the friendliest. She mentioned the problem at work to the assistant, explaining that the work in the village these days was different from in the past. Before, there was not much work to be done, but things had changed, and the village had to adapt and apply the Government's policy, which delegated authority, and more tasks, to people at the local level. After the discussion, the assistant came to terms with the problem and later, Junya asked the assistant to help out on Ko Suth's shrimp farm instead.

After the relocation of the assistant, Junya approached some young-bloods that had shown an interest in community service to replace the assistant who had resigned. Suddenly, the two remaining assistants who belonged to the old generation started to feel motivated to work, and as the years went by, those who could not keep up with the change stepped down to let more suitable people work instead. In this regard, Junya added the following comment:

In the past, the village head assistants perceived the position merely as a sign of social status, and they did not really have to work. Now, we have established a new norm, namely that whoever has a title must work harder than those who don't so that we can achieve more effective outcomes. If we followed the old tradition, we would not be able to catch up with other villages.

To select new assistants, Junya chose to seek advice from her fellow villagers in identifying potential individuals suitable for the job. In this way, Junya saw that it would help facilitate the working process. If villagers take part in the

selection, it is more likely that they will be more cooperative and more helpful to the person they chose from the beginning.



Figure 5.19 Team Meeting in Front of Junya's House

During the period in which this study was conducted, Junya had three assistants, all of whom were in their 30's and were very enthusiastic about doing social work. In addition, each of them was also endowed with different strengths, allowing the working process to run smoothly.

Junya tried to expose her team to new learning experiences. She usually sent her assistants to attend seminars or training courses. Her long years of service as Village Head had given her many excellent opportunities to participate in such courses, so Junya saw that it was more than worthwhile to send the assistants in her place. However, after coming back, they also had to share what they had learnt with the other team members, including herself.

Realizing that everyone has his/her own path to follow, Junya always gives her teammates the chance to grow. As she explained:

I am not the type to keep knowledge, connections or titles for myself. I told my assistant to use this opportunity to learn from the work as it would be a good stepping-stone for them in the future. And that I myself may not stay in this position until my retirement. If there is another person who can do a better job than I can, I would be happy to step down.

During the twenty years Junya has been serving as the village head, she has had three generations of assistants, some of whom resigned from the position to run for political positions on their own as a member of the SAO, for instance. A few of them succeeded, and one is currently an SAO member representing her village. However, that SAO member, her ex-assistant, is still working for the same cause as she is. With formal authority, the SAO member is doing a very good job in reflecting local needs in the administrative body, where decisions on the allocation of resources are made. This allowed Junya and her teammates to respond more effectively to community issues, because her position as village head entails no such power to get things done, particularly those involving administrative budgets.

5.3.4.3 Political Role Models

Junya learned about politics by observing politicians that she admires, both at the local and national level. Other than their performance, Junya also pays attention to their behavior and attitude in public, which she thinks may be even more important than the work outcome itself. To Junya, one characteristic that she uses in judging the quality of a good politician is the attentiveness and friendliness he demonstrates towards the people. In this regard, the person whom Junya regards as a role model is the current Chief Executive of the PAO, whom she called Ko Nguan. Junya gave examples of the way this individual conducted himself:

Ko Nguan is a politician who can win all people's hearts because of his friendliness. After the tsunami, there was a person who showed up wearing a single piece of loincloth requesting to meet him at the Provincial Administration Organization office. While Ko Nguan was

in a meeting with the person, he did not show a single sign of disrespect, and this made people love him very much.

The way Ko Nguan relates to villagers impresses most of the people he meets, which in turn has led to his good reputation that has spread by word of mouth from one person to another. Boosted by his strong bond with the PAO's housewives' network, his political popularity has undeniably increased.

Prior to the previous election, Ko Nguan briefly mentioned to a group of housewives that he was considering not running for the position anymore because of bad health. After they heard this, the housewives told him, "Don't worry. Just stay still and we will take care of everything." After that, the housewives called up their relatives and friends, and asked them to vote for Ko Nguan.

Junya takes Ko Kguan as her role model in terms of her public demeanor. Although Junya is in a leadership position, she has never put herself above others. Every time there was a feast, a wedding or an ordination, she would go help out in the kitchen, setting up tables and serving water. Sometimes, the residents of another village would come and ask "Aren't you a village head? Why are you setting up tables?" Junya often replied "Because I'm good at setting up tables, the villagers let me be their village head." Junya told me that as leaders, women are expected to be more "down to earth" and "friendlier" than men are. She does not mind living up to these expectations because it is in her nature anyway.

With respect to community development, Junya is impressed by Banharn Silpa-archa, the former Prime Minister of Thailand and the former MP of Suphanburi Province. Junya told me the following about her experiences in a business visit to the province with the PAO's housewives group:

It became clear to me why Suphanburi is so-called 'Banharn-buri'. That's because no matter in what direction you turn, you always see the names Banharn-Jamsai. It means that he really did develop all aspects of Suphanburi, with roads, schools and hospitals. Someone told

me that if he is sitting in the car and sees rubbish on the street, he would pull over just to pick up the rubbish. And if he sees someone littering on the street, he would scold the person right there. I think politicians should truly love their hometown like Banharn does. They should simply be good at telling off other people and nothing else.

5.3.4.4 Leading by Example

Aside from learning from a good role model, Junya herself is determined to set an example for her villagers as well. When asked about her way of life, Junya said that the values that she had always adhered to were “patience, frugality, and being free of debt.” Junya would like her villagers to understand the true meaning of living in a self-sufficient manner and being independent of materialism. Junya believes that this is the important factor that enables us to lead a happy life.

It is not like you see your neighbors buying a new car and you have to buy a new one too. My family has two cars. One is in good condition because we use it for long-distance travel, so it needs to be safer. The other one, on the contrary, is really worn out and used only when we travel a short way. Mostly, Ko Suth drives it to work. My friends often tell me to buy a new one because the old car doesn't look good. But my husband and I think that the old one is still in working condition and so we see no need to change it. We still use the old car and some people say we are stingy, but I don't really mind.

Junya told me further that the role model that she follows with respect to her way of living is a family that works for her aunt. This family immigrated from Trang and is now working in her aunt's rubber plantation. From them, Junya has learned that even those who are the most unfortunate can have a better life if they are willing to work, be frugal and do not give up. Junya explained further:

This family hitched a ride from Trang to Krabi in the hope of finding a job; the only things they had were a mat and two cooking pots. While

they've been at the plantation, they've all been working hard and have saved up money. Now they have everything, a motorcycle, television and refrigerator. Moreover, they have saved up so much money that they could buy six rai of farmland for themselves. The two daughters have now graduated with a degree in management from Ramkhamhaeng University. Observing their lives, I am astonished. I can only think that if someone who had absolutely nothing could get this far, then I, who have much more capital than they had, must be able to make a better life too.

As for her role as a politician, Junya's case is not much different from those of other two female leaders who participated in this research. They are expected to show generosity in social events held by people from both inside and outside the village. Junya added that leaders, apart from helping out the villagers physically, are expected to help the villagers financially too. Thus, the lion's share of Junya's salary of 4,000 baht is returned to society for the benefit of her villagers. However, this kind of help does not go without thinking; rather, she considers the needs of the individual in question.

With respect to the funds for the public, for example the 'Villager's Crisis Relief Fund' amounting to 12,500 baht per village, Junya thinks that the money should be spent only when necessary. "That money should be saved for emergencies. If a storm hits the village, for instance, and the temple's roof is blown away, this money can be used fix to the roof." Furthermore, the money from this fund has produced interest, increasing the original sum to 18,000 baht. As Junya herself put it:

I told the villagers that whoever is really in dire need can come and use this money. If they need an extra two or three thousand baht, they can come and approach me, but they must have a clear reason. I heard that someone has put a case before the Ministry of Social Development that I should be audited with regard to the funds. I've been waiting for them to show up, because I want to show them that the money in the account is still intact. I've never used it for personal purposes, and I don't want

the villagers to go spending it frivolously. I want to save it for when they have a real need for it.

Because of her caution in spending, some villagers have complained that this female village head is tight-fisted and is not as generous as the male ones. Junya, however, thinks that the habit of spoon-feeding the villagers can hurt them in the long run. As a result, she would like the villagers to be able to stand on their own two feet by working hard and saving. Later, this idea resulted in the establishment of the Sajja Savings Group, which Junya described with great pride.

5.3.4.5 Establishing Sajja Savings Group

“I prefer giving people the opportunity to think about things rather than money. If they don’t know how to think, they will never have enough money,” Junya emphasized. Given this value to which she holds fast, Junya tried to establish a financial system that introduced the idea of saving to the villagers, including a community forum in which they can share ideas and interact with one another.

Junya got the idea of establishing the Sajja Savings Group from a book written ten years ago by Phra Subin Maneetoea, a famous Buddhist monk. When she finished reading the book, Junya realized that a savings group should be a long-term project for her village. In the past, villagers usually coped only with their day-to-day problems, without thinking or planning ahead for future; to a certain extent, therefore, having such a fund should give the villagers a sense of security and a forward-thinking attitude.

Junya started to learn how such funds work in the nearby areas, such as Moo 5 in Tubprik District and Baan Klong-Pia in Nakorn Si Thammarat, and applied these ideas to her own village.



Figure 5.20 Sign of the Sajja Savings Group Identifying Its Establishment, Its Objectives, and the Group’s Vision

As the chair and founder of the project, Junya set out the objectives for the establishment of the savings group as follows: 1) for the welfare benefits of the members who are at target of the funds, 2) to reduce loans from illicit sources and loan sharks, and 3) to constitute a meeting point for villagers. Junya hopes that the saving group will bring the villagers a better quality of life. She hopes that “every villager will have a salary from investment in the fund. For instance, if they could get an additional 2,000 baht per month, they won’t face such hardship in terms of their livelihood.”

Regarding the establishment of the savings group, Junya started by discussing the outline of the project with a few villagers in her village (Moo 1). Once the idea was accepted, she then brought more and more people into the circle. The fund was finally established on 10 March 1999 with 25 members, each of whom was to contribute 100 baht a month. Shortly afterwards, after hearing the news, the Moo 2 villagers also asked to participate. At present, the group has 667 members and capital circulating in the fund of approximately 5-6 million baht.

During the early days of its establishment, the fact that the villagers did not see the benefits of having the saving fund was considered a significant hindrance for the group.

“Some villagers disapproved of the idea because their initial loan of 1,000 baht that the group lent out seemed insignificant to them. However, as the villagers came to see the benefits they were entitled to receive, they started to recommend the fund to others. After Moo 2 joined, the fund became more attractive in the eyes of Moo 1 villagers as well,” said Junya.

Although the fund has grown in size and has been operating continuously for over 10 years, Junya still thinks that she has not yet achieved the goal she expected. In her own words:

At present, I think the objectives have not been met. Instead of the welfare benefits, the villagers are more interested in taking out loans. They are happy as long as the fund lends them the amount of money they want, while overlooking the long-term benefits. Plus, I have found that only a certain number of them use the fund money to repay their debts to loan sharks. The majority of the villagers spend the money on urgent matters, such as fertilizer, children’s tuition fees, or, regrettably, gambling.

With regard to the villagers’ problems in terms of spending, she also mentioned the following:

Many villagers spend more than they have or can earn. As such, they need to borrow more money to repay their existing debts, which usually leads to a vicious cycle. In the end, the debt accumulates to such a degree that the villagers are unable to pay it off. I have observed that this group of people cannot find any peace of mind because they are worried about money all the time.

Regarding the objective of the community exchange forum, Junya expressed the following opinion:

Regarding the last objective, a meeting place for the villagers, I do not think that the villagers are getting it quite right. What is actually happening is half of the members leave their passbook with their friends and do not come to the meeting. Even the committee members, who are expected to raise issues for the group to solve, do not express their opinion because they are afraid of offending one another.

5.3.4.6 Administering the Fund

Junya worked as the chairperson of the savings group during 1999-2001. After having successfully established the group, Junya wants to enhance the stability of the group to avoid the kind of collapse that happened in many other areas. As such, Junya tried to connect the group to a larger network by merging with other savings groups in the sub-district. Accordingly, she created a clear working structure for the group, for instance by establishing an election to choose a committee and introducing monthly meetings for the committee members to discuss further investment opportunities relating to the fund for the benefit of all its members.

In this respect, there are health benefits of 1,500 baht per member per every 6-month period. Also, the 'Tubprik's Condolence Network' was established in an effort to contribute to the funeral expenses of deceased members amounting to 15,500 baht each. Furthermore, 'Savings Group's Drinking Water' was formed to manufacture bottled water using the maintenance funds from the savings groups' network.

Two years after the start of Junya's chairmanship, conflicts started to arise within the group. One example was when the majority of the committee approved a "joint loan" which allowed all the members from a particular family to combine all their accounts in taking out a loan, thereby giving them the chance to borrow more money. For instance, if a family had 5 members, the family could open up to 5 accounts. Thus, the family could take out a joint loan of up to 50-60 thousand baht at a time.

This decision was contrary to Junya's intention of minimizing the debts incurred by villagers. This fact has also raised Junya's concerns that the villagers may not be able to pay off the debt on time. This is because these families often borrow money from sources outside the system and take out loans from other groups as well. Personally, Junya did not want the Sajja Savings Group to focus on borrowing instead of saving money.

The next conflict occurred in 2001, which was the year that the Government started the Village Fund Project, distributing 1 million baht to each village with for the villagers to borrow from. Junya thought that it would be to the maximum benefit of all if this amount of money were to be managed in combination with the money in the Sajja Savings Group. However, the majority of the committee thought that they should be managed separately and disapproved of the Sajja Group's members loaning money from Village Fund, which offered a lower interest rate.

After thinking it over a few times, Junya thought that it would be in the best interests of everyone if she stepped back to work as a consultant, rather than being the chairman. Her responsibilities as village head alone took so much of her energy already. Thus, the best solution for her was to regard the savings group as a way for to the villagers meet together. Every savings day, on the 10th of every month, Junya would take the opportunity to meet with the villagers as village head, not as the chairperson of the saving group.

Junya herself concluded that there were many ways to improve the quality of life of the villagers and a sole solution would not succeed. It must be done through various methods involving education and regular participation in community activities. This fact has brought Junya to the decision to take on an additional role as a local media figure in order to integrate her work and increase her accessibility to villagers.

5.3.4.7 New Role as a DJ

Junya did not plan in advance to assume role in media as a program manager and a DJ, but when the opportunity presented itself, she took it without hesitation because she saw that local radio programs can convey positive thoughts to the audience more naturally than was possible in formal meetings. Junya described her beginnings in media as follows:

Back then, Baan Nai Chong organized a Local Durian Day. Our village is one of the best durian producers in Krabi. To assist the durian farmers in advertising the event, I asked for cooperation from the Public Relations Department in town to publicize the event. Fortunately, there was a free time slot available, so the station director asked me if I'd like to utilize the time for my own program and offered it to me free of charge. At the time, I didn't know whether what I was about to do would be much help, but if they were willing to give me the chance, I knew I should take it. Regarding the skills this required, I believe that practice makes perfect.

Ever since the durian event, Junya has been organizing radio programs at the Public Relations Department (PRD)'s station every Monday, from 11.00 am. to noon. The program that Junya is responsible for is called "Thai local wisdom". Mostly, Junya would pick a story from the books she read about community initiatives and narrate them to the audience. Sometimes, Junya would tell the audience about the events that had happened in her village.

She commented that the feedback from the audience had been fairly satisfactory. Many villagers called in to ask about matters of general interest. Some of the audience are female vendors, some are palm tree farmers. Junya has observed that her audience is not limited to the people in her district, but also includes the people in the municipality and other areas as well.

After three years of being a radio program organizer at the PRD, there was a major restructuring of the time slot. As a result, Junya's program was withdrawn from the timetable because it was a free program to begin with. Thus, Junya moved to another station called "The Channel for Sustainable Development". Some of Junya's fans even followed her to the new station too.



Figure 5.21 Junya While Visiting the Community Radio Station

Junya spent another three years at this radio station; being a radio program organizer has increasingly brought her to the people's attention. Although later Junya started to include country music for a radio-for-life program, she never forgot to include stories about local events and living self-sufficient lifestyle whenever she had a chance. However, as the number of advertisements increased, the radio station subcontracted the programs to private companies for commercial purposes. Currently, Junya no longer organizes the radio program herself, but she still regularly takes care of the station's business. This is because the newest radio station is located at the Saving Group's office.

5.3.4.8 Balancing Work and Personal Life

I was pregnant with one child after another, four years with three babies. One good thing about it was that I could get the pregnancies over with quickly. Now, my children are all grown up so I am free from family obligations. But I must admit that being a nursing mother and a village head at the same time really did take its toll. Luckily, I

was still young then, so I could do two things at once, although I always felt so worn out at the end of each day.

Assuming the role of a nursing mother and a village head concurrently was no easy job. Junya paid particular attention to balancing her work and her personal life. Although nursing a baby alone is already a very difficult job, being a mother while being a good leader is ten times more difficult. It was especially true when the motherly instinct made her feel like being home with her children all the time.

Regardless of the fact that her aunt assisted Junya in taking care of the children, many times Junya had to bring the babies with her to meetings. For instance, when Junya had a monthly meeting at the District Office, she had to leave her babies with her acquaintances at a pawnshop. Sometimes, during the meeting, Junya physically needed to breast-feed her baby and the milk stained her khaki official uniform. Consequently, during the break, she had to sneak out to breastfeed her baby, and then rush back to the meeting.

Occasionally, when Junya needed to attend seminars in other provinces for a long time, she had no choice but to leave the baby with her husband. As she put it:

There was one time I had a week-long meeting to attend in Korat. Before I left, I had to teach my baby how to drink milk from a bottle. Ko Suth helped with taking care of the baby, preparing milk and changing diapers. While I was in the meeting, I missed my baby so much. I wanted to go back home to see my child, but I couldn't. I had to remind myself that I had a job to do because other than being a mother, I was also a community leader. I had to make it.

Balancing her working life and personal life was never easy, but it was also a trade-off that Junya had to accept. Junya admitted that one person can never give his or her heart and soul to two things at the same time. The most important

things were the understanding and sympathy she received from both her family and the villagers.

When I asked Junya about the reactions from those around her towards her motherhood and wifehood, and her role as a leader, Junya shared the following experiences with me:

Actually, when I was pregnant with my babies, I was also concerned that the villagers would have hard feelings about it. Well, it turned out that the majority understood me. Some even offered to help take care of the young ones. Domestically, my husband never objected to the idea of working outside, though, sometimes he would complain when he felt that the plantation work was being neglected and he would go on to ask why I could dedicate myself wholeheartedly to working for the public, but not do the same for the family's affairs.

Junya never felt diminished by what her husband said and she admitted that she was unable to balance her workload. Junya thinks that a nudge from her husband was a good reminder that Ko Suth himself also had affairs of his own to take care of. Apart from working at EGAT, he also had to oversee his shrimp farming business too. Furthermore, he also looked after the children so closely that the three teenage children are equally close to their mother and father. Therefore, Junya had no case to argue. She accepted her husband's comments with an open heart and mind and always tried to work things out the best way she possibly could.

5.3.4.9 Gender perspectives

Based on the interviews and the discussion I had with Junya, many of her conversions reflected Junya's own perceptions of gender as well as those that of the people surrounding her.

1) Women's Roles in the Community

As a woman herself, Junya revealed that she usually prefers to ask for cooperation from women when there are community activities to be carried out. Junya claimed that, from her experience, "women are more cooperative and are more trustworthy than men when it comes to community issues." Regardless, Junya

did not think that women were more willing to respond to her because simply because she was a woman and a village head. On the contrary, Junya believed that it was because of one characteristic that women have in common, which is being reliable on and responsible for given assignments and more determined to get the work accomplished successfully. Junya gave the following example:

There was one time I was the head of the 'Kratin' [a seasonal merit-making] ceremony. It was very obvious to me that men are not as productive and require a constant reminder to get the work done. Sometimes, they just don't turn up at work because they drank too much the night before. On the other hand, women are very cooperative and productive. Some even drag their husbands along to help with the heavy work, such as moving tables and setting up tents. At most, the men would only do what they'd been asked to do.

Junya believes that this behavior comes from the way women are taught to be caring and considerate, resulting in an effective outcome when they have to work with others on a mission that requires cooperative effort. Meanwhile, men generally do not take things seriously and lack the determination to get things done. They usually prefer individual work, or work that they could get done in one shot. More importantly, Junya noticed that local men have shorter attention spans than their female counterparts, as she explained in the following remarks:

In community meetings, men usually gather together and chat rather than listen to the presenter. Some would go out for a smoke. In the end, they don't get the whole message from the meeting. Conversely, women are more willing to participate and are more attentive. This can be seen through the number of attendants; over 80% of the participants are female. Then again, when it comes to making decisions, women are more reluctant to give their opinion. As a result, a group of men can easily manipulate the meeting by acting more assertively.

2) Women and Politics

In almost 20 years as a village head, Junya had frequently met many capable women whom she recommended to apply for positions at the local level. However, these women often refused her offer for the reason that they preferred to work behind the scenes.

Nonetheless, Junya has never convinced anyone to enter politics. “If the person herself does not have the self-motivation to compete, what good does it do to try and persuade them? We can take them on, but we can’t be responsible for their lives,” Junya clarified. To succeed in politics, women require many contributing factors, including family, financial status, and most importantly, mental readiness. In Junya’s case, she realized that without a well-known father, an understanding husband, a sound financial status and a caring aunt who took care of her newborn babies, she would not be able to compete in politics, nor could she have remained working as a village head for this long.

Junya went on to recount that in an SAO election two terms previously, there were two women who applied for this political position. Unfortunately, both of them failed. Junya briefly told me that the first candidate was a wealthy, educated woman. Sadly, she did have good interpersonal skills. As the story was told:

This candidate was a widow. So, when she went out canvassing, men liked to tease her. In return, she responded, “Even if I am a widow, I am an upper-class widow. Not one of those karaoke widows.” As soon as these words reached the ears of others, she lost quite a bit of her popularity. The twenty-odd widows who usually went out singing at karaoke parlors were furious with her and boycotted the applicant. In the end, she didn’t win any votes.

When asked about the other woman, Junya told me that she was a good person, although she did not have that much influence within her community compared to the other (male) candidates. As such, she did not win the

election either. Sadly, the lady did not have a second chance to continue building up her voter base for the next term because she died of a cancer shortly after the first election.

3) Housewives' Groups as Political Supporters

According to Junya, most of the women who are now playing an important role in community politics started off by being a member of a housewives' group. Some of these groups are founded through the gathering together of local women for the goal of increasing their income from additional endeavors, for example, the housewives' group for making curry paste, handicrafts, and so on. The rest had been established by government agencies for the purposes of distributing information and coordinating with the various communities, for instance, the housewives' groups of the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Fishery, or the Ministry of the Interior. Junya gave the following opinion:

Most of the women who joined the housewives' groups are active members of their respective communities. At least, they must be able to allocate their time for meetings and discussing public matters. I think women in our southern region have more free time than those in other parts of the country because plantation work is not as time-consuming as farm work. Therefore, southern women have free time for social activities and most of them are very fond of the housewives' group because it provides a space for women to express themselves. It is also a forum for where women can socialize with each other.

Even so, Krabi is the only province in Thailand that has a 'PAO Housewives' Group', established by the PAO itself. However, many people see that the Housewives' Group is a means to gain favor in politics. This is because, generally, every province already has Provincial Housewives' Groups down to the village level, known collectively as the "Women's Development Committees' Network", under the supervision of a government agency—the Department of Community Development, under the Ministry of Interior.

As I have mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, the establishment of the PAO Housewives' Group was believed to be politically motivated as the two major power clans were competing to gain access to the female electorate, who constituted more than half of the eligible voters in each election.

Before the PAO Housewives' Group was established, most female leaders in Krabi belonged to the women's development committee's network as it was the first network initiated in the province. However, since the existing network was chaired by an MP's wife, the other power group controlling the provincial government saw the benefits of persuading these female leaders to side with their political clan as well. Thus, they established another women's group that came under their own wing. This unavoidably created an overlap in membership as the members of the two groups were essentially from the same pool of women.

As time went by, the group that became more active turned out to be the PAO Housewives' Group. This is because the Chief Executive and the organization itself have been working with the Housewives' Group in a continuous and close manner, creating a tight bond between members, resulting in an increasingly stronger organization. On the other hand, the Women's Development Committee network, whose president is the MP's wife, became less and less active due to the restructuring of the government system, leaving the group idle for years. Apart from that, the tight budget allocated by the Government and the bureaucratic system in the organization were also contributing factors. While the PAO's Housewives' Network continued to expand, the Women's Development Network began to die out as there were not sufficient funds or activities to unite its members.

An experienced politician once told me that "the housewives are sincere and highly decisive. If we give them respect and show them how important they are to us, they will be completely loyal to us as our election campaigner. Men, on the other hand, are double-headed eagles and halfhearted in doing things." This point has been made even clearer in Junya's case.

Junya herself is a member of both groups. As such, she is able to give a clear analysis of the matter, commenting that the success of the PAO's Housewives' Group is a result of the love, trust and loyalty that each member has for the CE. Some even compared the group as the CE's genuine champion, while some

said “This CE will always win the election as long as he wins the housewives’ hearts.”

Other than the CE’s polite personality and his excellent interpersonal skills, his continuous patronage and effective socialization through various activities, for example, meetings and business trips, contribute to the firm relationship between the CE, the patron, and the local housewives—his admirers and supporters. In this regard, Junya stated the following:

The field trip is an extremely exciting event that most housewives look forward to. If the PAO did not take charge of the arrangements, it would be very unlikely for them to have a chance to go to the North or North-Eastern regions. Going on a trip widens the women’s horizons. Additionally, they also get to make friends, learn new things and have some fun. With all this, how could these women not love the trip’s organizer? Above all, with the CE himself joining the trip, the housewives consider this an honor for such a respected man to associate with commoners.

Junya added that women are an important variable in politics, especially when they gather together for a certain purpose. As a result, politicians, regardless of their political level, have been paying more attention to these groups of women as it has become obvious that the women clearly take sides. Moreover, the women are more accessible through many channels, as the groups have usually been organized in each and every village. A politician could take this opportunity to link up with them, using various approaches, such as by supporting the village’s vocational groups (in which most of the members are women), or just by taking them out on an excursion.

Junya told me that, last year, the PAO took the housewives on a trip to the east and Junya was one of the participants. The program consisted of observing successful Housewives’ Groups in many provinces in the east. At the end of the day, Junya thinks that the trip benefited everyone, more or less. Those who were interested in the group’s development could apply the knowledge from the trip

for the benefit of their group. On the other hand, those who were rather more focused on the vacation could also have a good time away from their day-to day routines at home. Regardless, those who seemed to benefit from the trip the most were the trip's organizers, who definitely won the hearts of these women. In politics, popularity also means votes. Consequently, I assumed that popularity among women's groups implied a sustainable pool of votes for the next election.

I raised this issue with Junya, asking her if she thought that the housewives were indirectly exploited or manipulated by politicians in one way or another. To my question, Junya replied:

It is not for me to say if the housewives are being exploited as political pawns or not. It depends on how you view the issue. In my opinion, I think that the women benefit from this too. Nonetheless, because our society is based on the patronage system and women were not given much attention in the past, the women tend to lend importance to those who value them. Anyway, I also see that if the women can see more of the world, the more they can discern whether they are being manipulated or not.

At the same time, many outstanding leaders of the Housewives' Network are being talked into entering local politics by many high-level politicians. From Junya's observation, the majority of potential women candidates tend to decline the offer, as they think that politics is men's business and women are more suitable in a supporting role. "The CE himself has encouraged many women to take part in politics but the women don't really want to because they don't want to create problems for themselves. Politics is complicated. Even women who really want to get into politics also have to think twice, because once they decide to step in, it means they are ready to get their hands dirty," she concluded.

5.3.5 Field Observations

This section draws on the field data to illustrate Junya's social and political work which encompassed several aspects of her leadership roles as a village head.

5.3.5.1 Land Issues

The fact that the village head has the authority to sign off on the documents in requests for land title deeds has given the person in this position a great deal of power. Since Krabi is a tourism province, the value of the land in this area is extremely high. Often, signing papers gives Junya hard feelings because some of the applicants are not doing it legitimately. Sometimes, Junya also acts as a middle person in mediating disputes between people in the area. During the interviews, I noticed that Junya often received phone calls about land. As such, I asked her to tell me about it in further detail, as described below:

1) Land dispute mediation

In this locality, mediating disputes is not an easy job because the two parties are often close to each other. As a result, the resolution cannot be reached bluntly, but requires the ability to achieve a compromise in order to avoid any possible conflicts. Junya gave an example of her mediation experiences:

It was a land invasion dispute that killed good men. I think this is a very delicate subject. As a village head, I cannot act with too much haste. When I first encountered this kind of problem, I couldn't find an appropriate way to solve it. When I recommended a cadastral survey by a land officer, the two parties refused because they didn't want to pay the fee, so, we couldn't reach a conclusion. Finally, I decided to ask a person whom both parties respected to help with the negotiations. Had it been me who negotiated, the two parties could have accused me of taking sides. At the end of the day, a conclusion was reached; the three parties walked alongside one another to mark their territory. And we dug out the boundaries of the land to make the perimeter look more obvious so as to prevent future disputes.

After solving this particular case, Junya used this case as a model for ending land disputes, because she sees this as a more appropriate way of solving the problem in a village context, more so than using the law by-the-book. She did not want disputes that led to a loss of lives. However, land disputes are still one of

the most important problems in that they are the cause of shootings, leading to a loss of lives, especially in this time where villagers have turned to the profession of land broker. Sadly, they sometimes see monetary rewards as more important than the lives of friends in the community.

2) Land certification

Over and above land disputes, Junya related that another problem which makes her feel uneasy is certifying land, which the village head must do if the villagers need to use it to file deeds or ownership papers. I overheard Junya on the phone while I followed her around her constituency, and noticed that when the phone rang, it was often about matters involving land. Junya gave me an example:

The other day, a man called me and told me he needed me to certify a piece of land. After asking him a few questions, I felt that the land was close to protected forest, so I answered that I would send my assistant to check. The next day he called again many times and said that he was really in need of money and really wanted to sell that piece of land. He would put money in an envelope and I could ask for whatever I wanted; then he'd come and see me at home. So I answered that if he wanted to come to see me for this purpose, he needn't call again because I didn't like it. After that, things were quiet and I found out later that he was a public surveyor and a broker, and wasn't really the owner of the land, as he claimed.

Corruption is something that Junya's family feels strongly against, especially Ko Suth, her husband, who handles procurements for EGAT, as she herself elaborated:

Ko Suth absolutely forbids taking bribes, because he works directly with this. At bidding time, people will try to call him and many will want to meet with him, which he continuously has to refuse, insisting that everything must follow the proper procedures. "Ko Suth tells me

that once you accept a bribe, all the good that you've done will be gone, and you can never look at anyone in the eye when you go outside." As for herself, Junya thinks that her family has enough to eat, maybe even more so than other families; therefore there is no need for her to trade the good name of her family for extra "tea money."

Junya recounted that village heads in the past were very wealthy because of the age-old custom that villagers who cleared the forest to make a living would set aside land for the village head too. The children and kin of the village head, therefore, were usually real-estate tycoons, because their fathers and their father's fathers would receive a lot of land for free, back when land was still not worth a lot. Junya recalled a time when kamnans and village heads suddenly became richer. That was under the government of M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, who had a policy of assigning money directly to the village community:

I was studying in Bangkok then, and I remembered coming home once when the university was closed. I met a village head, who was my mum's brother-in-law. He had suddenly become so rich that I was startled. Back then, let's say the money that came to the village totaled five hundred thousand baht; the village head would spend one hundred thousand of it on infrastructure like digging ponds or making roads and keep the rest for themselves. Kamnans and village heads back then could afford two or three new cars and were loaded with money. Some of them didn't take the money, so they were poor, but they were well-loved by the villagers.

Over and above land disputes, some of the village heads made a decent living selling their signatures, which they saw as a fee for their service. "A village head in Ao Nang was rumored to ask for a fee whether he had to sign a birth certificate or a death certificate. They called it the "pen fee". Finally, there were so many complaints against him or her that the person had to resign." Therefore, Junya

thought that a leader who only sought personal gain would amass lots of riches, but lose the trust of the villagers. Furthermore, the image of being corrupt would be passed on from mouth to mouth, across villages and Amphurs. Junya said that, although some leaders may not care, to her, trust and respect were the most precious things which, if left to wither away, could never be bought back, even with money.

5.3.5.2 Jae Tong

On one afternoon, I met with Junya in a restaurant in the village to interview her about her work in the community. While we were talking, a middle-aged man dressed as a woman walked in and greeted Junya with a friendly demeanor. Junya introduced me to “Jae Tong”, who collected rubbish in the area for recycling. I related the topic of my dissertation, and my aim to study the life and work of local female politicians. When I finished, Jae Tong told me briefly:

I’m not from here. When I first came here, it was very difficult because most people could not accept the fact that I’m like this. I was really lucky that Poo Yai Mhee helped me. I’m glad she doesn’t look down on me, doesn’t see me as a monster like other male politicians. It’s good that you are studying Poo Yai Mhee because she is a good person. I can only say that if I didn’t have her, I wouldn’t be who I am now.

When Jae Tong excused herself to continue working, I asked Junya to elaborate where Jae Tong had left off. Junya recounted that Jae Tong is from Isarn, from Chaiyaphum province, and had been working in the village for about five or six years. Jae Tong’s occupation is to buy garbage from homes and shops, and from the garbage dump in the sub-district.

Since she is not a local and is a transvestite, Jae Tong was often the subject of teasing and pranks from male villagers. Jae Tong became acquainted with Junya when she had to approach her to endorse a document for the replacement of the identity card which she had misplaced.



Figure 5.22 Junya and Jae Tong

To get a new ID card, Jae Tong had asked a number of officials to verify her status but was refused. At first, she thought I would not sign the papers for her, because others had refused before, thinking that she was Burmese. But I've seen her around for a long time. She speaks in such a clear Isarn dialect, I thought she couldn't be a Burmese immigrant. So I took her to the Amphur office to get a new card. After that day, she brought me a present to say thank you. She left it with my son, and when I opened it I found a five hundred baht note. I told her that I wouldn't accept it, and if she wanted to be friends with me, please don't do this again.

From then on, Junya and Tong became friendly with each other. On New Year, Jae Tong brought her a big box of cloth towels as a present, and every time she came to collect newspapers or cans at the house, she usually gave more money to Junya than anyone else. For instance, 50 baht would become 70 or 80 until Junya would have to watch carefully so that she could give the money back. Junya said that Jae Tong made an honest living and was a good villager who never caused

anyone any problems. To her, whoever lived in her village was one of her villagers. Whether that person is an out-of-towner or a transvestite, they deserve equal treatment and care from her.

5.3.5.3 Village's Security Check Point

I accompanied Junya to many of her meetings including once, when her mission took her out at night to talk to and learn from volunteer fire fighters from another village, so that she could organize a similar project in her village. Junya chose to go and observe the work being done at Baan Khao Kao, a village in an adjacent Tambon because she had a friend there called "Na Tien", the leader of the volunteer fire fighters group in Baan Khao Kao, who "frequently called to request songs on the program." Junya saw this as an opportunity to learn from her work, and took her colleagues along to build networks for the future.

Before departing for Baan Khao Kao, ten minutes away from Baan Nai Chong, Junya made appointments with the three village heads and two members of the SAO to meet at her house so that they could travel together. Junya said that the idea to build fire fighter's huts, or checkpoints, came from the central government's initiative, stating that every village should have its own security checkpoints. Part of the construction costs would be supported by the budget from the Ministry of Interior; however, she thought that the organization and management were more important than building the actual huts themselves. Therefore, she wanted all her colleagues to go and see the models from the huts in Khao Kao, which had been finished and had already been in operation for a while.

On the journey to Khao Kao, Junya explained that the civilian fire fighters volunteers, or home police unit, as they are called, are a group which had been organized by the central government so that the villagers could have a role in protecting the peace and facilitating projects that improve the quality of life in their own village or community instead of the police and PAO officials. They have the right to search a person for possible concealed weapons if a stranger or suspicious character enters the village. The volunteers therefore are often called "home police". They get no remuneration, but some benefits are provided by the government, which is similar to other volunteers, like the village health volunteers.

Junya fully supported this way of thinking, because she had once been a volunteer herself. She believed that no one would take care of the community as well as people from that community, because those who volunteered usually came to work with their hearts in the job. Therefore, she sent her assistant, who was in charge of peacekeeping, to attend a training course by the Department of Provincial Administration so that they could come back and be a driving force in seeing the project through. After the training, her assistant suggested that they should build a hut so that the village volunteers could have a definite assembly point to change shifts when they are on patrol. Junya supported this because she thought that having an assembly point would make the volunteer's work more orderly, and because there is a clear assembly point for logging in and out of work, plus there are welfare and safety benefits. Therefore she thought that this should not be overlooked. Furthermore, this hut would provide a good assembly point for government officials to meet with the villagers, because the hut would be constantly attended to by the villagers.

With these reasons to support her argument, she took this matter to the village community meeting and was granted 45,000 baht from the SML project to build a hut. Her SAO council members also coordinated with the PAO to find budget grants for the equipment, uniforms and training for the volunteers, while the village head would look for personnel and a suitable location, and supervise the construction and completion of the huts.



Figure 5.23 Team Visit to Baan Khao Kao’s Village Check Point

When we arrived at the volunteers’ hut in Baan Khao Kao, Na Tien and about five firefighter volunteers welcomed us. Junya introduced her group to their new friends, then they started to discuss the way the group worked on a stone table in front of the hut. Her assistant asked questions about working hours, the patrols and setting up checkpoints. Junya would ask questions and offer opinions regarding welfare and services, as some excerpts below demonstrate:

“Na Tien, you said that if the volunteers get injured during duty, there will be provided for, but if they patrol until they get sick, like catching a cold or catching malaria, would they get benefits too?”

“Should we put the red boxes outside big stores like C-Pac or Macro? We might ask them to give a small contribution and we’ll look after their properties for them too.”

“When there’s a funeral or a wedding ceremony, the volunteers can go and help them too, right? Like looking after traffic so that it doesn’t block the roads and checking for irregularities, because when there’s a ceremony, people get drunk and like to fight with each other. If we can do that, then we don’t need to rely on the police so much.”

Junya’s group spent about an hour exchanging ideas with Na Tien’s group. While they were making their way back to the village, a female assistant village head said that if there was training for the firefighter volunteers in Bangkok, she would like to attend. A male attendant chipped in, “When we went to training, there was not a single woman in the entire group, just the cook who made us food.” Junya said, “If you want to go, I will let you go. If you attend once, the next time people will say that women have attended this course, and other female assistant village heads will have the courage to attend too.”

When they separated to go home, Junya encouraged her assistants by saying, “We’ll do just as well as the Baan Khao Kao volunteers, because I’ll make boiled mung bean dessert to encourage you every night,” she said with her usual huge smile.

5.3.5.4 Community Leaders’ Meeting

Since December 2009, Baan Nai Chong has organized the Tambon leader’s meetings every month at the school so that community leaders, whether in governance (village heads, assistant village heads), management (SAO members), civil servants (principals and teachers) and civil society (volunteers, representatives of savings’ groups, and zoning representatives) can gather to exchange information and cooperate. After the meetings, each one helps the other to disseminate information to the villagers.



Figure 5.24 Community Leaders' Meeting



Figure 5.25 Junya Discussing with the Principal of Baan Nai Chong School

The third meeting took place in February 2009 and was held at the library of Baan Nai Chong School, like the previous two times. Since Junya and I arrived at the meeting before the appointed time, we had the chance to talk to the principal about the livelihood and problems of Baan Nai Chong. Baan Nai Chong is in

a semi-developed part of town. Most of the villagers are laborers, working in factories or orchards; therefore most of them do not have time to attend the meetings. Junya said, “Those who are laborers leave home early, and those who work on rubber plantations do not finish work until midday. Most of them sleep after they finish at midday. The villagers who work day to day have difficult lives.” Therefore, the community leaders agreed that there should be zoning for easier contact with the villagers. Each zone has its own leader and two or three representatives from the villagers who attend the monthly meetings and act as intermediaries, passing along information to the villagers in their own zone.

“We thought about it and agreed that we should have subgroups to talk to each other first and then let the representatives spread the word about what’s happening in the villages. In the past, some families didn’t even know that the SML project had already started. So I wanted a core group who could really work for us to sit down and exchange ideas, and then circulate the word from the meetings around to everyone else. After two meetings, everyone said that the village was doing better, and any confusion or conflicts that we had in the past seems to have lessened.”

The principal added that one of the reasons the village had developed faster than in previous times was because in this term, both the SAO members in Baan Nai Chong were on the same team as the executives. Most importantly, problems with street lights and drinking water had been fixed one by one. Moreover, the village had its own FM broadcasting station; therefore the core leaders like village head, teachers, disabled group, savings group, have taken turns to host the radio programs, which has another way that the community can better stay in touch.

At the meeting, Junya took on the responsibility of chairing the meeting, while a teacher from the school acted as the secretary. It was noticeable that in whatever meeting took place in the village, the village head would be honored as the number one person even though there are other leaders present in the meetings, such as the school principal or SAO members.

Junya conducts meetings with a friendly demeanor. She gave everyone an opportunity to express their opinions; giving every person the chance to report on progress related to their own work; for example, the principal spoke up about the drinking water scheme where the school had received a grant to set up a water

provision point to allow villagers to receive free drinking water for their consumption. The SAO member reported on matters from the general meeting of the SAO council and other concerns from the villagers that had been discussed at the meeting.

I noticed that Junya usually delegated the task of reporting on the area of work under the responsibility of the village head to her assistant village head; for instance she delegated reporting on the construction of the volunteer firefighters' huts to the assistant responsible for taking care of security, and delegated the task of reporting on the Amphur's Valentine's Day activity, where special benefits are given to people registering for marriage on those days, to her assistant in charge of governance.

Nonetheless, Junya continued to facilitate the meeting as village head, adding information, asking questions, or raising talking points that clarified the discussion. In my opinion, I thought that she had very good communication skills, and had a way of speaking that was direct and to-the-point, concise, and a rhythm in speaking that did not interrupt the flow of the meeting, adding jokes when the meeting became too serious. Most of all, she was not the type of leader to dominate the stage for herself until others were put on the sidelines.

The meeting went on for about two hours. At the end of it, the school prepared snacks and beverages for the attendees. I heard Junya approach the secretary of the meeting, saying, "Next time we should take turns bringing the snacks, so that it won't be the school's burden every time. The school only needs to provide the meeting place, that's enough. The teachers don't need to trouble themselves with finding snacks too."

5.3.5.5 Various Views on Junya's Leadership

While making visits in the community with Junya, I had the opportunity to meet the villagers, politicians and a number of civil servants who could give good opinions about Junya's role as village head. Therefore, I started to collect their names and telephone numbers so that I could get back to them for further information either on aspects of Baan Nai Chong's political situation or on Junya's leadership roles in particular.

Besides, I also had the chance to talk to business people in the area as well as women leaders in other districts who used to cooperate with Junya in social

activities. I talked to her fellow politicians such as member of the SAO who had worked side by side with her. However, one of the limitations of this case study was that I found it too sensitive to talk to her political opponents as it might lead to mistrust between my resource person and me. Moreover, digging down into the issues may exceed the scope of my study so I decided to limit my quest for this section only to those issues relevant to Junya and her leadership role in the designated settings.

From my interviews with seven sources (some of whom asked to remain anonymous), I have found that their assessment of Junya's leadership turned out to be pretty much positive. They perceived that Junya was a village head who had made their village more well-known as one mentioned "Having Poo Yai Mhee as our village head make Bann Nai Chong famous. She got many rewards as a prominent woman leader, so we gained face from this too." They saw that Baan Nai Chong has several well-known public figures-- MP X who has done well in national level politics, a young PAO member, who also running a media business that broadcast all over the province, and Junya, the one and only female village head in the town district.

However, in each and every interview, I found that all then interviewees started by mentioning the long disruptive relationship between Junya and MP X. It was even more interesting to note that most of the people I talked to did not want the conflict to end. They reasoned that the village needed someone to counterbalance the power of the MP, and that the conflict had gone on so long that the two sides knew how to manage their work without confronting each other. As one asserted, "Junya is good at picking her assistants. She chose someone who could coordinate with the MP to be on her side, so now when there are budgetary requirements that need to be discussed with the village head, the MP will coordinate with her through her assistants instead."

In terms of leadership, villagers tend to like her both as a person and as a leader. They did not see any drawbacks of having woman as their village head. They described her as friendly, generous, straightforward, open-minded and unyielding.

Junya's long years of service have proven to many people that a woman can also be a good leader "... because a woman pay more attention to detail and is more caring than men". Another villager said that having a woman village head is somehow an advantage for the community. "Junya is so good at coordinating. If you had come here during the funeral of Luang Por Lop, you would have seen that a man can hardly organize that kind of ceremony. You have to give her credit for this," he exemplified.

From my talks with local villagers, there were very few negative comments on Junya's leadership. There was a housewife who mentioned that Junya sometimes placed too much emphasis on her family; for instance, there were occasions that she took her kids on long vacations to other provinces during their school breaks. Another said that Junya had taken on too many roles at the district and provincial levels, so she had less time to be around in the village.

Moving to my interviews with government officials and politicians in the area, some of them have different views on Junya's leadership. As quoted from my conversation with a high-ranking male officer:

I think Junya's most significant strength is that she has Ko Suth as her husband. Many people like her because they are fond of Visuth. He is a truly sociable person who can connect with people of all sorts. The last time when Junya was the chair of a large merit-making event, Ko Suth got hundreds of thousands of baht in sponsorship from EGAT. If Junya had done this by herself, it wouldn't have been this successful. Another strength is that she has good subordinates. Actually the people who do the hard work are the assistant village heads who dive into each matter, while Junya just goes to meetings and that type of thing.

On the other hand, some officials I talked to have a different opinion about Junya's leadership roles and about today's local context. In one of my interviews with a schoolteacher, she commented that these days, women had been widely accepted as leaders because the social context in the village had changed

significantly from the way it was in the past, and Junya has done a good job in being a role model for local girls. In her own words:

Our community no longer needs someone who can fire a gun or chase a robber. If that is a case, maybe a male leader would be better-suited for the job. But right now we need someone like Junya. Someone who can communicate well with people at all levels, someone who is patient enough to listen to diverse opinions in meetings and knows how to get other people to collaborate work towards achieving the same goals. I've noticed that most male leaders lack these qualities. Having a female village head also inspires girls to take leadership positions, as they do not see it as a peculiar thing to do. In school, you know we now have a lot more girl prefects than boys

From the perspective of local entrepreneurs, Junya is a leader who knows how to create a win-win atmosphere. She does not take it for granted that big businesses must contribute without question. On the other hand, she accepts each form of assistance or sponsorship with gratitude and is willing to acknowledge all the partners once the work is done. This is illustrated by the following comment by a owner of a quarry concession operation in her local area:

I have a quarry concession, so you have to admit that you're part of what troubles the villagers, like the noise, or the fact that the lorries drive past their house and create a lot of dust. In the first years of the business the villagers went to the village head non-stop, and threatened to close the road so that the lorries couldn't drive past. When we finally got to talk, Pe Mhee gradually helped me find a compromise with which both sides wouldn't be too dissatisfied. After that, whenever there was a village meeting, she called on me to go and meet the villagers, and things gradually improved. I support community events, and if there is a road that is damaged or needs repairing, when

the village head asks, I'll supply the stones for the materials for free, which is now a well-known fact. Pe Mhee is charming in that she gives me credit every time we do something for the villagers; before now, the villagers used to hate the factory, but are now our friends, and so everyone's happy.

Last but not least, when I talked to a provincial politician who used to work with Junya on some village projects, he made the following observation:

Most village heads don't really throw themselves into anything, because they are the governing body and they don't have keep on being reelected so many times like with other political positions. For me, Junya is a village head who works harder than others because most of them just take it easy and no one can say anything. She is a new-generation politician. Yes, she is a woman, but she is a fighter. Think about it. She dared to go head-to-head with an MP. So I think she is an extraordinary woman.

From speaking with the villagers and those who know Junya, it can be said that she is a village head who has been accepted by most of the villagers, both for her work methods and her personal characteristics. Furthermore, she is widely admired as a woman leader who has not only brought fame to the village, but also made the villagers more accepting of the roles of a woman leader. Even though one of the interviewees thought that Junya's success came from external help rather than her personal capabilities, such as having a good husband or having good assistants, there was no arguing that her achievements as a village head were lacking or faulty in anyway.

5.3.6 Conclusion and Key Findings

Junya Pannarai's case study illustrated the life and work of a woman village head who seems to be well-equipped with good political fundamentals, such as

knowledge, wealth, or family connections in politics. Nevertheless, her political journey over 19 long years was not strewn with roses. Junya has overcome many political and personal challenges from the very first day she decided to step into the political arena almost two decades ago. From that day down to the present, suffice to say that she has been a successful local politician. Junya has received recognition as an outstanding woman leader and has so many awards from various organizations. At the community level, many villagers described her as “the woman leader who brought honor and pride to the village of Baan Nai Chong.”

5.3.6.1 Personal Characteristics and Values

Compared with the cases of Somsri and Sunee, Junya had a rather carefree childhood, with no pressure to be responsible for household duties. At a young age, she had the opportunity to study at the best school in the province. She was able to spend her childhood playing with other kids, able to participate in school functions and activities. Therefore, it can be said that Junya’s childhood years formed a positive and solid foundation that groomed her to be an optimistic individual with a positive perspective of the world. In addition, it instilled in her the eagerness and willingness to learn new things because there were no obstacles or issues that she had to be responsible for back home.

Being away from home during her years studying in Bangkok, Junya had experienced so many different things in a much bigger society and community. The experiences in her dormitory taught her **to extend help and to share** in order to live in harmony with her dorm mates. Junya was lucky to have a good mentor like Pee Toi, who not only gave her invaluable advice during her formative years, but also opened up her worldview. Moreover, from Pee Toi, she learned that there were many other important things to do in one’s life, rather than merely study or to make a day-to-day living.

Later, her involvement in the university’s voluntary clubs helped emphasize the same values of giving and sharing. It also ignited **her passion to help those who are less fortunate, not only among her friends, but also other disadvantaged people**. Due to the heartbreaking incident when her friend passed away in Krabi, Junya was keenly aware of the poor development of her hometown, as well as the less fortunate villagers who often lived far away in the countryside. Her

decision to enter politics also arose from her desire to improve and develop the lives of those people for the better.

Her pathway toward a political career, along with her responsibilities as the village head, all reflect the values that she adhered to, whether in her interactions with fellow villagers, colleagues at work, or her political rivals. As implied in the case study, another admirable quality of Junya lies in her **respect for others, and in honoring their rights as fellow human beings**, even to those individuals who are different or stand out from the mass, as was the case with Jae Tong. Some politicians may perceive Jae Tong as someone of a lower social status, so they were deaf to his needs or requests; for Junya, Jae Tong was a member of the village that she had to take care of the same as she would other villagers.

Junya lends a great deal of importance to **maintaining good relations**, whether it involves personal or work-related matters. For example, with regard to her family, she spent as much time with her family as she did with her work. Therefore, when her husband commented on her mistake in managing the plantation, Junya accepted the feedback and planned to improve. She did not use her leadership role as an excuse to compromise her family duties.

One story that demonstrates her relationship-oriented nature was when she realized that her assistant was not the right person for the job, Junya tried to figure out the best solution that did not upset the person in question. Offering him a new job at the shrimp farm seemed to be a sound answer to keeping the relationship intact. Another incident was when she resigned from the committee of the Sajja Savings Group as she foresaw there could be friction, which might lead to the splitting up of the saving group. This also includes the occasion she helped to achieve a compromise between the concessionaire of the limestone quarry and the villagers, so that both side could coexist in a win-win scenario.

Nevertheless, although Junya considered relationships and harmonious and peaceful living, she also **had the courage to stand up for her values and fight against those that she believed were wrong**. For example, when she decided to run for the position of village head, the MP's attempt at intimidation suddenly confirmed her decision to run and not vice versa. Once having felt that her rights were being

violated, Junya decided to take up the challenge as she did not want to yield to what was clearly an abuse of power.

Another value to which Junya held firm was to have a **sufficient and balanced lifestyle**. Therefore, Junya is a person who is **content with what she has**. She has tried to live a balanced life in every respect such as social affairs, business, and family. Junya comprehends that to be successful in life does not involve devoting all her energy to one particular activity while neglecting the others.

In addition, her value of living in a self-sufficient manner is illustrated in both her private life and in her perspectives on community work. In addition to the fact that Junya and her family spend their money quite carefully and proficiently, she also communicates the same value to her fellow villagers. First, she set herself up as an example, and then she would initiate a project such as Sajja Savings Group to put her ideology into practice. However, as it turned out that the ideology somehow became distorted, Junya sought to pass on the same message using the medium of radio. All her efforts were driven by the values she believes in.

5.3.6.2 Political Conceptualization and Approaches

It can be said that Junya grew up in the era of political movements in which university students played an important role in questioning the then existing governing system and fighting for social justice. At a young age, she had a chance to listen to speeches at a gathering organized by key student leaders. During the years away from home, she met a number of good people, while participating in development activities that inspired her to do more for other disadvantaged villagers who lived in underdeveloped localities.

Thus, Junya had an ideal conception of democracy. She believed that political leadership should be a means to equalize the gap between the rich and the poor, or the powerful and powerless people in the society.

Junya also perceived that social inequality was a result of the unfair distribution of power and resources, allowing powerful people to take advantage of the powerless. Thus, she always strived for justice, and had a strong reaction towards normative practices that she deemed unjust.

Junya, thus, approached politics in a very straightforward manner. In spite of the friction with MP X just before her candidacy, Junya did not turn away

from her course. She still proposed herself as a candidate for village head as she thought it was her right, and it was the right thing to do in a democratic system.

Junya signified that a person who possessed a political title should also shoulder a leader's responsibilities. While some village heads may simply lay back and enjoy the privilege until retirement, Junya constantly put effort into her work to improve the quality of life of the villagers she led. In the very first years after having achieved leadership status, Junya understood that she had then stepped into a non-traditional domain for a woman, and thus needed to prove herself to all the villagers that a woman can also be a good leader.

Junya is not the type of leader who prefers to work alone, but rather wants to work as a team. She will unite all those involved, such as other local politicians, local officials, volunteers from the community, as well as the village support group, bringing them together in discussions in order to brainstorm and discuss projects and issues. This resulted in the development of Baan Nai Chong, making it much more systematic and efficient when compared to other villages. By uniting all of the various leaders from different levels, they were able to meet and exchange ideas and information, as well as to re-align and coordinate their work with one another. Working together in an efficient and effective manner is vital to accomplishing their common goals, which are to develop the village, and to improve the lives of the villagers.

5.3.6.3 Factors of Success

Becoming a woman village head at a rather young age, Junya's journey along the political highway started with many challenges. Entering herself for the election lit the fuse for confrontation with a key political figure; then there was the problem of balancing family and social work, along with learning about and building up the requisite leadership competencies that earned her the respect of all villagers, both within and outside her village. From the case study, Junya's factors of success can be described as follows:

First, Junya has a **personal background** that allowed her to pursue a path in politics. For instance, she was from a good family, had a good education (B.A. in Political Science), and had experience in community development during her

university years. These all contributed to her potentiality during election time as new blood in the local political domain.

Second, after being elected, Junya could be considered very lucky when compared to many other women politicians as she has **excellent support from her family**. She has a very stable financial status and does not have to worry about problems related to the economy. She has other family members, such as her aunt, to help take care of her children and the house. She also has her father and her husband to consult and enjoys moral support from most of the villagers, who understand her responsibilities in terms of both family and social work. This helped her to manage and overcome the troubling times at the beginning of her political career.

Third, unlike other political positions that require re-election every four years, the position of village head could be tenured until one's retirement. **The continuity regarding this leadership position** has undeniably allowed Junya to accumulate a vast store of leadership experience for as long as 19 consecutive years. Thus, Junya's leadership image was consistently highlighted. Most villagers appreciated her leadership role and no longer feel that it is strange for a woman to be in politics.

Fourth, considering the scope of her work, a village head technically reports to the Sheriff, under the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior. A person who functions as a village head is expected to be a consultant to villagers on the one hand, and a mediator representing state authority on the other. However, with the emergence of the SAO, which is smallest local government unit with administrative authority, the position of village head tends to be set apart from the local decision-making body.

However, in the case of Junya, who had **attained the position of village head even before the SAO came to existence**, she was a key person who laid the foundation for many projects within her community. Some of the projects are the village saving group, and the community radio station. Thus, she still earns the respect and trust of other village leaders, and is given the honor of acting as the chairperson at almost every meeting.

Fifth, with regard to her working style, Junya **emphasizes the importance of teamwork and the empowerment of her team members** to become

involved in management and make the necessary decisions. Another noteworthy characteristic of her leadership is her ability to put the right people in the right job. All of her assistants are young people who are enthusiastic about working for society. Junya supports each of the assistant village heads so that they can apply their learning and their skills to the fullest. It can also be observed that although Junya delegates the works to her assistants, as a good leader, she does not leave them alone and without guidance. Junya learned from working with her team consistently, as seen from her weekly meetings at her house, that everyone must attend in order to update the members of the team regarding the progress/issues of the work assigned.

Sixth, Junya was good at **building and empowering her networks**. Even though Junya only has three official assistants, as stipulated by the Ministry of Interior, in reality she has many more supporters to assist her in her line of work since some of her colleagues who have advanced in their political career still worked with her as a team. Because of this, Junya has a very strong team, one that keeps getting bigger and bigger.

Seventh, another leadership competency that Junya has demonstrated is her **continuous effort to constantly learn new things**. Before starting any projects, Junya and her team will gather as much information as possible prior to the planning and or decision-making stages. This was the case during the site visit to Ban Khao Kao's village watch project, where Junya used the opportunity to study and observe the management of another village. She planned to take and adapt what she had learned to improve her management back at her village.

Eighth, as for the ability to connect with the local villagers, Junya is the type of leader who **attaches the highest importance to communication**. Her decision to try out new initiatives, such as launching a radio program to convey her innovative ideas to the village, had never been done before. This is a perfect example of her creativity as a leader and of her usage of a modern communication channel for the effective development of the village.

5.3.6.4 Gender-related Issues

With regard to her gender perspective, Junya did not see that women are discriminated against, either in terms of development or politics, as their involvement in community affairs or the community forum even outshines that of their male

counterparts in term of number and frequency. In Junya's view, the fact that women take a secondary role in a male dominated society is exacerbated because of the women's lack of confidence to express their opinions in a public forum and often hesitate to voice their opinions and their needs.

However, an interesting issue that is worth mentioning concerns the power relationship between men and women, as reflected in their interactions in the public sphere. Despite their numeric participation in terms of numbers, the far more confident males, who are much better at representing themselves, are dominating the women's group. Therefore, it may not be sufficient to use the number of participants in a public meeting as a single measure to determine the involvement of women and men. However, one must take into consideration that there is an equal opportunity for both women and men to voice their opinions and needs as well.

In terms of women and leadership, Junya assumed that women's underrepresentation in politics is largely because women, even those who are qualified, considered themselves unfit for politics and thus decided not to become involve in the game. This may be due to their family commitments or the fact that they are more comfortable in the role of a supporter, rather than becoming a player themselves.

Those women who decided to take a chance in political contests also faced harsh criticism regarding their candidacy from both men and women voters. As depicted in the case of the widow, the candidate who was verbally offended by a group of male villagers, it appeared that no one blamed the male gang for their misbehavior, but the statement the woman candidate made to defend herself was used against her throughout the election.

From such examples, I perceive that women and men aspiring to positions of leadership are judged by a different set of social criteria. It was more difficult for a woman to make any move at all in politics, as people usually keep a close eye on her, noting even the most trivial things. Besides, a female candidate was exposed to gender prejudices, not only by men, but by other women as well.

5.3.6.5 Last Words

Junya's case study shows the influence of the surrounding environment and social upbringing, which allowed a fortunate woman who had a better chance in

life than others to enter into a leadership position. These opportunities included the following:

1) Even though Junya was born into a male-dominated society, for instance her father wanting a son more than a daughter, she was lucky to be an only child, which allowed her to develop her full potential in every respect.

2) Because the family was quite well-off, Junya was not expected, as many other girls were, to carry the burden of doing housework and chores, or helping with the family's finances.

3) Having good opportunities with regard to education, as well as the chance to see other sides of life and live alone, allowed Junya to have a wide range of experiences and exposure to the world outside her hometown.

4) Having a good role model, like Toi, shaped Junya into a caring and generous person, which is an important quality for a leader to have.

5) Having the opportunity to do activities during volunteer camp at university, which helped to developed her political and social ideology

6) Having good political capital, that is, her father, who was respected by the villagers and had constantly had a political role in the community.

7) An understanding husband allowed her to work without causing problems in the family.

8) Entering politics at a young age allowed her to amass experience and the skills of being a leader until she became accepted in this role.

9) Other new opportunities such as being a DJ or hosting a radio show, which made her a well-known figure, recognized by people outside her constituency.

10) Since a village head does not have to be reelected over many terms, Junya was able to escape the political games practiced by her political rivals. Working continuously in her community has also emboldened her leadership role and allowed it to develop.

From this case study, it emerged that Junya never felt that she received selective treatment because she was a woman, because she is a women who is more privileged than others are. Nevertheless, there are some events in her life that pointed towards inequality, such as when she was the coordinator for the volunteer

development camps but when the time came, she was appointed to stay behind and look after the camp because she was a woman. However, Junya did not think of these things as a limiting factor resulting from gender bias. She saw it as men and women doing what they did best, which she accepted without question. Therefore, Junya did not wear a gender lens through which discern the inequalities of men and women, and she gave more weight to getting the results she wanted for community development as a whole.

In term of woman and politics, I have learnt that

- 1) Women's roles in leadership have become more widely accepted if they are allowed to work continuously. Meanwhile their achievements and their work are the best indicator of their capabilities.

- 2) As more women step into the public domain, such as the housewives' group, women have become a targeted voter base for politicians, who have incorporated the patronage system into building their relationships with women's groups. Therefore, the political inclusion of many women has been framed with the male political mindset in mind without the women realizing it.

In the next chapter, the lessons learnt from Junya's case study will be analyzed along with lessons from Somsri's and Sunee's case studies and information collected from the four focus group studies. They will show women in the local political landscape in breadth and in depth, with the ultimate aim of enhancing the understanding of women in local politics.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND EMERGING ISSUES: INSIGHTS INTO WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICS

This chapter contains an analysis and synthesis of different aspects of women in local politics by putting together information and the lessons learned from the previous chapters, each of which has its own merits in providing certain aspects of information on this topic.

While Chapter 4 portrays the general situation and conditions of women and local politics using the focus group approach as the means to arrive at the research. In Chapter 5, more in-depth case studies of three prominent women leaders helped illustrate the interconnected factors of women's life journey from childhood up to the point where they embarked upon their political path, the turning points in their lives, as well as the ways in which they made a difference in their respective communities.

This Chapter, therefore, further analyzes and synthesizes information gathered through different means to provide insights into women in local politics.

6.1 General Characteristics, Values, and Worldviews of Local Women Politicians

Before reaching an understanding of local women politicians, the first thing to be explored is to know who they are, in what way they are different from other local women, and what is special about them. Then, we must understand their values and worldviews, which in turn influence their behaviors, either as a person or as a politician. Thus, the following insights can be identified:

6.1.1 Socioeconomic and Political Background

Women politicians participating in this study are from diverse backgrounds, either in terms of age, education level, economic status, marital status, or even religious beliefs. For instance, Somsri and Sunee were from less well-off families, which restricted their educational opportunities. Their childhood was filled with family burdens and chores, and as the eldest daughters, both had to work extremely hard for their own futures, and for the sake of their younger siblings. On the other hand, Junya was an only child from a relatively wealthy family and had the opportunity to study up to the Bachelor's degree level in Bangkok. Without the constraints regarding money or the need to struggle to make a living, one could say that she had more choices in life than the other two women. From the vantage point of political capital, Somsri and Junya have well-respected fathers who are locals in the community and have a lot of relatives. Sunee and her parents, on the other hand, are migrants from another province, and it could be said that Sunee's political capital comes from her work in the community and accumulating a good name for herself.

The diverse socioeconomic and political background of female politicians is further reflected by the participants in the focus group dialogue, who had diverse levels of education, marital status, etc., as mentioned above. **However, a common factor shared by the women is that most of them have quite a sound financial status.** Even though some of them are not too wealthy, they are in the position where they can support themselves quite well economically. The most common occupation is farming, and secondly being a merchant.

I discovered that **there is a correlation regarding the age of entry into politics and the woman candidate's political background.** For example, women whose fathers are politicians enter politics at a young age, that is, around 20-30 years old. Other women are slower to enter politics while they wait until their family is ready; for instance, they may wait for their children to grow up or for the family to attain a secure financial status before running for a political position.

Regarding marital status, **women who are single or widowed** such as Karnjana and Yupayao, **have more freedom in their decision-making to enter politics as they do not have to worry about family issues** as much as the women who have husbands. An exception to this family-oriented view are the women whose

husbands are already male politicians, as in the case of Yupin, whose chance of entering politics increased, since it was considered that she would be performing a supplementary role to that of her husband. Plus, she was able to use her husband's political capital to increase her chances of winning the election.

6.1.2 Uniqueness/Special Qualifications of Women Politicians

The uniqueness of female politicians does not come from their financial status, education or capabilities that are better than those of other women, but stems from a different set of social values and views towards society.

Women like Somsri, Sunee and Junya **entered the political realm out of a wish to create change in society or their own community. Each had a clearly defined political agenda regarding what they wanted to do**; for example, Somsri wanted to support women's groups and activities and the development of these interests because she believed that women had fewer opportunities than men in many respects. Sunee entered politics because she wanted to find an effective solution to society's problems, such as drugs, children's problems and youthful rebellion, welfare for the elderly and disabled, etc. Junya, meanwhile, entered politics because she wanted to develop her hometown according to the democratic values that she had studied about and had been ingrained in her from her work in volunteer camps.

It can be seen that the values shared by all three women are as follows:

- 1) **Compassion**—the willingness to help others who are in trouble or in needs.
- 2) **Sacrifice**—the determination to devote themselves for the betterment of others.
- 3) **Justice**—the strong wills to stand up against unfair practices.
- 4) **Courage**—the passion to fight for righteousness, even though they have to go against the norm.
- 5) **Continued self-improvement** —the eagerness to develop themselves to their full potential

The first four values they hold drove Somsri, Sunee and Junya to step into a male-dominated domain, to seek political power, which they hope will bring about the

desired changes in their communities. To make it happen, they were willing to give freely of their time, talents, and money. Often, this means they have to compromise their family responsibilities for the public good.

The last value—yearning for self-improvement, was reflected in both their personal and working lives. It can be said that Somsri, Sunee and Junya love to learn. Even though some of them have little education because of the restrictions in their youth, such as Somsri who needed to finish her schooling at a young age, but she still sought to learn and develop herself by reading and listening. Sunee and Junya also like to learn new things and attach importance to disseminating that information to others.

Apart from their preference for learning, another factor which motivates female politicians to continually develop themselves is the realization of the social bias against female politicians, who are seen as weak or incapable. Therefore, attending seminars and conferences is a good way for them to learn, as it not only gives them new knowledge, but also the chance to meet people, and broaden their horizons and create a network for future accomplishments.

6.1.3 Turning Points in Life

The case studies of women leaders revealed that each woman's values and way of thinking had been reinforced by certain turning points in their lives, which affected the way they live and the way they work later on in life as follows:

Somsri: Somsri's turning point began with **a feeling of inferiority that she did not know enough, resulting in the determination to go out and see the world.** Somsri questioned social inequality and wanted to return to her hometown and make it better.

Sunee: Sunee's turning point was the result of her **husband's infidelity, which made her feel that she had to be more self-reliant** and be a pillar for the family. She started the mushroom business and built up her financial status. After that, she was able to engage in more social activities and accumulate enough experience and accomplishments to be accepted.

Junya: Junya's experience where **a fellow volunteer died before her eyes made her realize the lack of opportunities for people in rural areas,** especially

regarding the development of infrastructure and the quality of life. This turning point allowed her to see the necessity of applying the knowledge she had gained in university and returning to her home; this was the main driving force which compelled her to run in the election for village head later on.

Some participants in the focus groups also briefly reflected on the turning points in their lives. As mentioned by Siriporn, an SAO member, her life had changed significantly since her husband, who was a Village Head, left her for another woman. Because of this, she decided to run for a position as a member of the SAO in order to prove that she could be a better leader than he could.

6.2 Political Socialization

Political socialization, as Greenstein (1965) explains, encompasses all political learning, which includes both formal and informal learning throughout one's life. Thus, political socialization is not limited explicitly to exposure to politics, but also incorporates a series of indirect political interfaces with different people in the context one is bound by.

Socialization starts as soon as an individual learns to relate to others. **The socialization pattern of men is generally different from that of women as they are involved in different activities that are 'gendered' in nature.** For example, boys are taught to be strong, adventurous, and to do activities and games that are considered "manly", such as fish-fighting, bul-fighting, cock-fighting or raising birds for competition, which is the local way of instilling in small boys a love of, and familiarity for, fighting and competitiveness that remains with them into adulthood. Therefore, local men view politics as a game and a competition of sorts, that is, there is a player, supporters, spectators, gambling and risks.

In comparison, girls are taught, and indeed expected to, take care of the house and pay attention to the wellbeing of other family members, and are discouraged from engaging in thrill-seeking activities, unlike men. Thus, women and politics are seen as incongruent, and women who want to join the political arena are often subject to

skepticism from society, which regards them as stepping into an area that is seen as off-limits to women. (See Table 6.1)

Table 6.1 Gender-Role Socialization of Local Males and Females

	Society's Gender Ideology	Activities	Personalities Developed
Male	Masculinity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brave • Strong • Extroverted 	Out-door activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish-fighting • Bull-fighting • Cock-fighting • Raising birds for competition • Piloting long-tailed boat 	Active <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive • Risk-taking • Fun-loving • Outgoing • Striving for social recognition
Female	Femininity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obedient • Gentle • Introverted 	Indoor activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooking • Taking care of younger ones • Providing hospitality to others • Traditional dancing • Batik painting 	Passive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliant • Careful • Reserved • Striving for family security and happiness

Nevertheless, a number of women have decided to cut through gender bias and enter politics, as in the case of Somsri, Sunee and Junya. Therefore, it is important to analyze whether the socialization of these three women is different from other women, and if so, how it is different. Socialization factors and the process of personal development of each of these women will be analyzed later in this chapter.

6.2.1 Socialization Factors

As political socialization concerns the process of learning, the questions to be answered are what is learned; through which person and institution do they learn; and what are the circumstances under which the learning occurs (Kelly and Boutilier, 1978). The agents of socialization, such as family, friends, teachers, religion, workplace, etc do have an extensive impact on their political socialization as well.

In the case of Junya, it is rather clear that she has been politically socialized via her father's active participation in local elections and her involvement in university activities. From her father, she learned that politics is a part of one's life and is not separate from the private sphere. Junya's political mindset was formed and reinforced by her interactions with her dorm mates and friends at university. Her participation with the volunteers' development club also formed her vision to work for others.

In Somsri's case, the key institutions from which she learned about politics are her family and religion. Somsri absorbed her political ideology from her father, as well as from political discussion she overheard at her mother's grocery store. From such experiences, she was exposed to corrupt political practices, such as vote buying, and started to relate them to Muslim teachings. At this point, Somsri revealed that she was confused about the sinfulness of selling one's vote, and the necessity of local villagers who needed money to sustain their lives. Thus far, she began to question the work of elected politicians, who never kept their promise in improving the basic infrastructure of her village.

Sunee, however, learned about politics from her social work and her continued participation in community activities. As a member of the housewife's group, for instance, she could meet and relate with different people, both inside and outside her community. From these experiences, she sensed that politics and politicians do not respond to the needs of the locals because politics at the local level is institutionalized to benefit the group of decision-makers, not the people they were supposed to serve.

Accordingly, the differences in the institutions or agents through which the three women were socialized or the circumstances under which their socialization took place, definitely affected their political perceptions and actions. While Junya

learned to be a development-oriented leader, Somsri yearned for social justice and stewardship. Sunee, on the other hand, possessed an activist's view in wanting to change existing political practices. However, one thing that they have in common is what they have learnt-- they all wanted to do something good to improve existing and impending problems in their localities.

Some participants in the focus groups also reflected on their political socialization experiences. For instance, Lamai, Pairat, Tipsuchon and Supawadee were all born into politicians' families, so they were able to absorb politics into their blood as they learned about politics from their father's works. Niam, on the other hand, got involved in politics as a key canvasser of a political party in local elections. Thus, she was able to learn of political games and to carry out political work as a team. Nonetheless, there were also other women leaders who entered politics by chance. Wassana, for example, learned about politics for the very first time after having decided to enter the election for the position of Chief Executive of the SAO.

6.2.2 The Four Stages of Development of Women Politicians

This analysis is based on the theoretical framework of Kelly and Boutilier (1978) who believe that the political socialization of a political woman was built upon four stages of development of the individual, starting from her childhood. According to them, the four stages are presented respectively as follows:

- 1) The child must develop an activist sex-role ideology,
- 2) She must gain personal control over her life-space and must have gained the needed competencies and abilities to maintain control as the life-space expands,
- 3) She must become politically salient, and
- 4) Her efforts at political participation must have been sufficiently rewarded and her experiences sufficiently successful to encourage her to continue.

Based on the case studies of Somsri, Sunee and Junya that allowed me to grasp a more continuous picture of the different development stages in their lives, the results also reflect the four stages mentioned above.

Somsri: Somsri questioned the tacit norms for boys and girls at a very young age. She wondered why boys were allowed to play outside of their own free will,

while girls had to be responsible for housework and has less chance to play. When she grew up, Somsri learned to pilot a long-tailed boat, reckoning that she did not want to ask for favors from men or be too dependent on them when she wanted to travel somewhere. As such, Somsri started her small business, raising ducks, to accumulate her own savings. She chose to move out from home to live with Vi. All these incidents indicated her personal control over her life-space in accordance with Kelly and Boutilier's framework.

After returning home, Somsri also started to engage in community activities -- women's boat racing. As the key mobilizer of this project, her outstanding leadership qualities were manifested. The success in these activities definitely encouraged her to move on to the political arena, in order to get more support for the women's group as she deemed that women usually have less opportunity to have their own space in the community. This incident also echoes the fourth stage of development proposed by Kelly and Boutilier.

Sunee: In Sunee's case, though the first phase of her development regarding sex-role ideology was not so clear, she has definitely developed control over her life space and gained the necessary competencies through her series of occupations since her childhood years --as a servant, a grocery seller, a farmer, etc. Sunee became more acquainted with politics after having participated in social activities. Last but not least, her success in assisting other marginalized people has encouraged her to continue her good deeds, in the belief that politics would be a means of achieving what she was aiming for.

Junya: Junya related her childhood experiences in which she resented being discriminated against for being a girl. For instance, she did not see a woman's worth as coming from beauty or appearances, and even at the university level, she never let her gender become an obstacle to her working for society. Life in Bangkok enabled Junya to exert control over her life's dreams and shaped her long-term goals. She had great freedom to make her own choices and to pursue her dream. Plus, once she returned home, the environment permitted her to become more interested in politics, which finally led to her decision to run for the position of village head. Each phase of her socialization from childhood to adulthood could also be explained using Kelly and Boutilier's framework.

In conclusion, the study reflected the fact that **the three prominent women leaders have been socialized in a way that enabled them to develop their self-dependence and later self-esteem, which in turn resulted in their political affiliation and achievement.** Thus, the following could be implied from the results of this study:

- 1) Women are not born to be submissive, nor do they have they mentality of minors. In contrast, they are basically socialized to become so; and
- 2) If girls are socialized in a way that allows them to fully develop accordingly, their potential as well as propensity to become political achievers increases.

6.3 Political Motivation and Ambition

Women are motivated to participate in politics by many factors, ranging from their **internal drive to do something worthwhile for their communities, dissatisfaction with local politicians, the inclination to acquire social prestige, family influence, or capitalizing on the opportunity to win** (as discussed in Chapter 4). However, there is a link between women's political socialization, their conception of politics, to their motivation and ambition to pursue political paths.

From the focus group dialogues, I noticed that **women from different family backgrounds tended to possess different political means and ends.** For instance, some female politicians reported that they had entered politics just to help out their father or husband, who were already in leadership positions. There are also some who aspire to social status, using politics as a means to achieve their inner desires.

Aside from my in-depth case study of Somsri, Sunee and Junya, whose lives reflect women's motivations to serve and to make a difference in their respective communities, there were also other women in my focus group dialogues, who helped diversify my views on women's political motivation and ambition. I would like to bring up another two cases of Supawadee and Karnjana, who are both prominent SAO members in their respective constituencies.

Supawadee, whose father is a Kamnan in the same constituency, mentioned that she was asked by her father to run for this position so that she could help facilitate his work. Since her genuine motivation is to pay her father back, the political status she acquired was not for her own sake, but for his. Supawadee also said that she had no desire to attain a higher political goal. She could easily withdraw from the game as soon as her father decided to quit or retire. In other words, she did not expect to advance in her political career and further political ambition was unlikely.

In contrast, Karnjana's case typifies a female politician who is highly motivated by her inner drive for political attainment. She revealed that, from childhood, she had always aspired to hold a titled position as she conceived it as a symbol of social acceptance and prestige; as she is a widow, she could decide on her own what course to take to pursue her childhood dream. In politics, Karnjana plays along with males' political games and believes that she could outshine all of them with harder work and a stronger determination to serve the people she represents. Although she did not expect to acquire a higher political position, she tends not to back off from political gamesmanship.

Even though their motivation for entering politics is self-oriented, or even though they have potentially absorbed ways of politicking from male politicians, Supawadee and Karnjana are both functioning very effectively in their political duties. From my observations, they accepted politics as it is and fit themselves into the existing political paradigm just like most women politicians did. This could be because they are self-selected with regard to entering the game and are thus willing to abide by its tacit rules as laid down by men.

In terms of political ambition, despite varying degrees of determination to continue their political roles, **none of the women I interviewed aimed for a higher political position, at least in the short run.** It was also interesting to note that despite their potential to win the seat, many women thought they were not capable enough or not ready for higher level politics. Ubol, for instance, turned down the opportunity to be the Deputy Chief Executive of the SAO, reasoning that she was not ready to bite off more than she could chew. Likewise, many saw that they could still do something good for the communities through other voluntary work channels,

without a political commitment or a political position. From this finding, it was interesting to compare women's political motivation and ambition to that of their male counterparts. Future research on this topic is thus recommended.

6.4 Political Experiences of Local Women Politicians

Another major goal of this study is to understand local women politicians' experiences throughout their political path and how they deal with the realities of local politics. Thus, this section provides an analysis of the women's experiences from their entrance into politics, to their roles as representatives and leaders, as well as the opportunities they embraced and the barriers they encountered on their political paths.

The decision to enter politics is a major turning point for a woman to make. From the case studies, it emerged that Somsri, Sunee and Junya overcame the most important hurdle when they decided to become a politician, which is the decision to run for political office. Each case involved different factors pertaining to their political capital respectively:

Somsri: Somsri had the advantage of having a **well-respected father**, with the added momentum from the **success of the boat race**, which made her well-known, added to the fact that she had a **vocal group of supporters**, especially the group of women who wanted her to represent them. Furthermore, the fact that Somsri is single made it easier for her to decide, as she **did not have family burdens** to worry about.

Sunee: Sunee ran for the election at a moment when she was well-prepared in terms of **seniority and accomplishments**. It was a prime moment for her to be in politics as all her **children had grown up**, plus she had a **secure financial status** and **social status** to work in politics without this being a burden on her family.

Junya: In Junya's case, her political capital was provided by her **father**, who was a well respected member of the community, a scenario similar to Somsri. What makes Junya different from Somsri and Sunee is her **high level of education** and **direct experience in politics**, since she was an assistant to an MP before. Even though Junya entered politics at a time in her life when everything was happening all

at once, be it starting a new family or having a baby, with **help from her extended family** and **sound financial status**, she was ready for politics and dealt with the limitations that presented themselves.

The case studies of Somsri, Sunee and Junya, combined with the dialogues from the focus groups, showed that women politician's experiences at election time had many similarities, which can be described as follows:

1) **Political determination is imperative for a woman to make an entrance into politics.** For a woman to enter politics, the foremost factor is the determination to reach the first goal, which is to register as a candidate for the election. Even though that woman is talented or capable, without determination, the surrounding environments and those close to them can easily distract a female politician.

Since a woman's entry into politics is often in conflict with old beliefs and expectations regarding the roles of women in society, many women have changed their minds at the last minute before registering, due to objections from those close to them. This was illustrated in the case of Sunee's friend, who had prepared for a long time to run in the election but changed her mind at the last minute when her relatives suggested that she allow her brother-in-law to run in the election instead. Discouraged by her relatives, therefore, she retreated to the role of his canvasser and supporter, instead of being the electoral candidate.

2) **Female candidates usually get attacked or ridiculed for being a woman.** Statements such as the following exemplified this: "How can a female fighting fish beat a male one?", "If a woman candidate runs for the election and loses, she will be shamed.", "You're a woman and running for village head. Aren't you afraid of getting killed?", "I don't want to compete with a little girl." etc. These insults reflect the values of society, which sees women as being inferior to men and believes that they should stay away from politics, which is a male domain.

However, these statements only provoked the women into wanting to prove that they could do it and only served as a driving force for their wanting to win, out of the desire to prove those claims or challenges wrong. Moreover, women candidates are often confronted with the spread of gossip and rumors, or negative publicity during election time. Those attacks often seek to discredit the virtues of

being a woman, as happened to Sunee, who was attacked for being a loud-mouthed woman, where “loud-mouthed” is a derogatory word that would not normally be applied to a man. Alternatively, rumors of love affairs are often used to damage the reputations of female candidates and discredit them.

3) Kinship has significant effects on electoral politics in general and on women’s candidacy in particular. For a political candidate, having a lot of relatives and political canvassers is extremely important. During a small-scale local election, most villagers will always give priority to their own kin and family; therefore, political candidates who have a lot of relatives do not have to work as hard as others.

The case is rather evident in many local elections when a candidate was believed to lose an election despite his or her long-proven social services in the area. During my follow up on Sunee’s case, many villagers revealed that they personally like Sunee, but have to elect other candidates because of their kinship. In the last moments of the election, villagers cannot quite remove themselves from kinship ties. Even if they realize that the particular member of their clan is not as well-qualified as the other candidate, they cannot bring themselves not to elect them. A villager spoke of why he must always choose a candidate who is a member of his own clan in the following words: “Being related, you can talk about anything more easily,” or “If I don’t choose him, how can I look at his father and mother’s faces?”

Therefore, every candidate realizes this, and this in turn leads to lobbying, since before deciding to run in the election, the same family should not send different candidates who will compete with each other for votes because this will result in a phenomenon called “split vote”, which causes both of them to lose. However, many cases indicate that if two relatives want to compete in an election, the female is often pressured to make way for the male in the family to enter first. Furthermore, kinship becomes a loophole for influential persons to use money to interfere with the candidates’ selection process, for example by hiring the relative of their opposition to run to cause a split vote and increase their own chances of winning.

4) Most women confess that they are more scared of monetary influence than any danger or violence to themselves. Many female politicians say that, due to the traditional cultural view that sees women as being the gender of their

mothers and the ‘weaker sex’, male candidates are often hesitant to use force against their female competitors, because this will result in huge social condemnation, more than using force to attack a male counterpart. On the other hand, using money to buy votes is more socially acceptable behavior in society’s eyes.

5) **Women admit that paying for some costs in the election, even though it is illegal, is necessary.** A very clear example of this, which was mentioned in both Somsri and Sunee’s case, is paying for transportation costs for the voter to return home to vote, which is a practice that most candidates engage in. Those that refuse stand a high chance of losing, because in a local election, the margin of votes is often small. Moreover, buying coffee, or throwing a huge celebration to celebrate the victory is considered a ritual in politics, which, even though deemed illegal, is widely expected by the villagers as a display of generosity and gratitude to the voters.

6) **Women’s campaigning approach relies mainly on door-to-door visits.** Women share similar approaches in election campaigning, namely they focus on meeting voters by door-to-door visits. Women candidates feel more at ease with this approach than giving public speeches at rallies, and in election campaigning, they will approach the female homeowners first, sometimes known colloquially as “meeting in the kitchen”. Moreover, I found that female candidates do not favor campaigning or creating a buzz in coffee shops, as male candidates prefer to do. Most of the women expressed that when men are in a large group, they use this opportunity to make female candidates feel uncomfortable, whether by asking her to treat them, making flirtatious comments, or circulating rumors about them. Even though campaigning through the coffee shop is an effective way of disseminating information, many women politicians confirm that using this approach can create more harm than good for their candidacy.

6.5 Opportunities and Barriers for Women on the Political Road

Women’s political path encompassed both opportunities and barriers. Though the opportunity side seems to be relatively small compared to the burdens they are up

against, it is still worth mentioning as it reflects the changing socio-economic factors in the local area, which may encourage more women to pursue political careers.

6.5.1 Opportunities

Based on the findings of this study, I would like to analyze the opportunities for women's access to politics as follows:

1) **Occupation:** The main occupation of southern people is working in orchards and plantations. It was observed that women politicians participating in this study mostly made a living from agriculture, such as oil palm orchards or rubber plantations, which are occupations that can bring about a significant level of financial stability. In plantation work, workers can be hired to help out, which allows women to have more free time to participate in social activities.

2) **Family structure:** In the family structure of a large extended family, even though some houses are nuclear families, some households which are financially better-off will invite their less well-to-do relatives to live with them to help out in the household or on the farm. Alternatively, they have adults in the house who can be trusted to look after the children and alleviate the burden of chores in the family due to having reliable and trustworthy helpers. These conditions open up more room for women to take on political roles in public domain.

3) **Group activities:** Housewives' groups or other social groups enable women to learn new things through interaction with different stakeholders on a wider scale. In addition to acting as a capacity-building mechanism, participating in various groups is also an important channel for women to build networks and is an opportunity for them to accumulate and to illustrate leadership skills, an opportunity which many may have missed earlier on in life. When women are in a group, it gives them a political identity and impact as a group. This can be seen from the fact that politicians increasingly come to the realization that women are an important voter base. At the same time, the presidents and chairpersons of women's groups have increasingly taken on roles in local politics as well, as electoral supporters and electoral candidates.

4) **People's dissatisfaction with male politicians:** The fact that many male leaders often neglect the villagers, for example paying so much attention

to their mistresses that their work suffers as a result, causes the villagers to tire of or become disappointed with the leadership of such male politicians. This makes them favor giving women a chance to enter politics because they think that a woman's gender roles might make her more responsible regarding her duties, more approachable, and quicker to respond to the villager's problems than men.

5) **Changes in villagers' perception of women's leadership:** When women are given the continuous opportunity to express their potential as leaders, the perception of traditional gender roles on the part of people in the community changes. It can be seen that in areas where women politicians have performed well, the villagers increasingly see women as a good political alternative and are deserving of the chance to be a leader, which is not only restricted to politics but includes other social organizations as well.

6.5.2 Barriers

Even though many societal components lend themselves to women's participation in local politics, traditional obstacles and new obstacles that have arisen due to other social changes are still in evidence. This study has revealed a number of new observations, such as the following:

1) **Personal Factors:** Women in rural areas, especially those who have had a difficult childhood, have less chance to learn things in society than men. Their lives are often limited by factors such as taking care of things in the house and home, as the case of Somsri and Sunee, who had engaged in hard labor since before their teens. However, given the chance to develop, or the chance for education, they are driven to succeed, and take responsibility for their own lives, turning disadvantages in their lives into opportunities for learning and doing good to others. Therefore, it can be said that a **difficult childhood is not always a limiting factor for the development of leadership qualities in women, nor does it lessen the opportunity for them to enter local politics**, and not as important as other factors, which will be mentioned below.

2) **Family factor:** Overall, I noticed that **women did not see children or household chores as an obstacle to their entry into politics as much as their husband's approval**. As one female politician frankly stated, "You can hire

someone to do your laundry, you can ask someone to look after your baby. If your husband doesn't have any problems, then there are no problems.” It can be observed that the **spouse's support is an important factor influencing a woman's entry into politics**, and is evidenced in focus group dialogues, which found that most female politicians who are married attached a high degree of importance to creating a balance between family life and political obligations. Many affirm that before women can be leaders outside the home, she must convince people in the home to believe in her first. However, in this research I only looked at women who had already decided to enter politics, so there is a high possibility that the women had already settled this point with their families to a certain extent. In other words, their family had already accepted that they would step outside the home to take on a different role, as well as carrying on a role inside the home too.

3) **Social factors:** For a woman to succeed in politics, she **must prove herself through harder work and greater devotion**. For women politicians to perform well in the political arena and gain acceptance from the community, they are required to work many times harder than men to prove their leadership qualities due to gender bias that has been ingrained in the thoughts of the villagers. Local politics still display attributes of the patronage system, where politicians are expected to give back to their clients, whether in the form of personal or communal favors. Most of the time, the locals expect the leader to take on more roles than just political responsibilities, for example by providing financial assistance to villagers who have financial problems, by using or finding connections to gain benefits from the state, or by providing other social services. All of these burdens take an enormous amount of time, money and dedication. **Success in the political arena for many female politicians comes at the cost of other opportunities in their lives**, such as the opportunity to engage in other livelihoods due to the time and resources consumed by politics, as I concluded at the end of Somsri's case study.

4) **Political factors:** Women have a prominent social role, but **are often sidelined by male politicians from the inner circles of politics** for fear that women would interrupt the existing structure of benefits and gains, such as Somsri and Sunee, who are regarded as troublemakers. Meanwhile, Junya, who entered politics at a young age, encountered a similar problem: being intimidated by a

powerful politician not to enter politics in order to give way to someone who was closer to him. Therefore, a female politician who wants to work effectively needs to rely on external persons or factors, such as networking with the bureaucracy or higher level politicians, or civil society, to achieve a successful outcome, because they cannot rely solely on political institutions per se.

From the above, it can be seen that **the obstacles encountered by women, whether personal, familial, social, or political factors, are all interconnected by the gender role ideology of that particular community or society.** However, the society's gender role ideology or gender role perception is not static and is constantly evolving due to better education, and increasing opportunities for women to display leadership potential in their respective communities.

6.6 Political Representation of Women Leaders

Political representation is regarded as an important issue that is always highlighted in studies of women in politics since it serves as a fundamental question of whether politics may require larger number of women representatives to take part in its decision-making bodies, and why. Though the women's representation question has usually been answered using quantitative means, a qualitative approach could help identify the possibilities of other emerging issues and to a certain extent explain the context of why it is happening that way.

6.6.1 Descriptive Representation

Notwithstanding the issue of democratic justice concerning women's inclusion in decision-making bodies, which is a less controversial issue in terms of descriptive representation, Ann Phillips (1995) points that women could make a difference in politics merely by their presence. She goes on to add that, although they are not acting on behalf of women's interests, their presence sends a symbolic message to society that women are also capable of being leaders, which in turn makes other women and young girls more interested in participating in politics. Ann Phillips calls this particular phenomenon the "role model effect".

Even though this study does not examine the role model effect in detail, I have found that **having women on the political stage has allowed society to learn more about gender equality, especially with regard to women's entry into the non-traditional domain of politics.** At the same time, women's presence on the political scene would more or less alter the behavior of male politicians, as the men would feel uneasy behaving in a crass way towards a woman. However, due to the limitations of this study, it was impossible to go into too much detail regarding this matter. Future research is thus recommended.

6.6.2 Substantive Representation

Substantive representation is one of the most essential topics in this dissertation. It helps answer whether and how a woman could voice the needs, interests, or concerns of other women in politics, where decision-making power is concentrated. Another assumption of substantive representation was that women politicians are bringing special knowledge, experience, and values into politics, leading to changes in the political norms shaped by men.

In the light of the substantive representation of woman politicians, there are a number of lessons to be derived from this study as follows:

1) Women politicians emphasized social issues in the community.

They usually have empathetic views of others, especially disadvantaged individuals or groups. In terms of the cases of Somsri, Sunee, and Junya, the lives of the three women leaders clearly signify their attempts to improve the quality of life and well-being of others, as well as to stand up against the malpractices of male politicians. However, the findings from the focus group dialogues show that, though women politicians seemed to share similar concerns regarding social development, their efforts in carrying on political work vary. While some women decided to become involved in politics to make a difference in their communities, there are some who entered politics by chance and do not have a clear political agenda which they are committed to. Nonetheless, ineffective women were usually singled out and chastised that they are ineffective because they are women, while other male politicians in a similar situation are criticized on an individual basis rather than because of their gender.

2) **Women politicians could detect gender inequality in family and private life, but were unlikely to discern issues of inequality between men and women as beneficiaries of public policies.** In both the focus group and in-depth case studies, the women saw that both male and female villagers equally received benefits from development projects in their communities. An exception to this is Somsri, who is the only female politician to see that women are discriminated against and are allocated less of the budget to do activities than men, as the case of the boat race demonstrated. Therefore, Somsri was also the only woman again to state clearly that she wanted to enter politics to represent other women and become a voice for them; while Sunee, Junya and all the participants in the focus groups gave a broad overview of society's problems rather than emphasize male or female issues.

3) **Many women politicians are reluctant to identify themselves as representatives of women.** When asked in focus groups—"Do you think you are a representative of women in your political work?" to my surprise, most female politicians were quick to defend themselves that they are not representing women or working for women's groups, as if admitting to this matter would spoil their leadership image. This somehow reflects women's attempt not to identify themselves with women in particular.

4) **Women politicians are not very supportive of having too many women in politics.** From discussions with these female politicians regarding extra measures to encourage women to join the political arena, I discovered that most of them see that having more women in politics is probably a good thing. However, when asked for their opinion of the appropriate ratios of female to male, most replied that in an SAO council with twelve members, there should be no more than three women, because having too many women in political bodies would complicate things. They reasoned that women are often too particular and get jealous of each other. A ratio of one to four was identified as the number that would allow them to work most comfortably and effectively.

Subsequently, I will suggest the potential reason why most women do not perceive the gendered nature of development; why they have the attitude that they do not want to identify themselves specifically with other women's groups; and why they

do not have confidence in the leadership qualities of other women leaders. These questions also worthy of further in-depth studies.

6.7 Political Leadership

6.7.1 Discussion on Women and Transformative Leadership

Women leaders reflect their leadership qualities in the issues they promote, their leadership styles, and their impact on equality. Under the framework of transformative leadership proposed by the feminist movement, a woman who is a transformative leader must demonstrate the principles of equality, equity and empowerment, as well as a commitment to human rights, peace, sustainability, and shared power. On the other hand, the vision must influence their institutional behaviors described as participatory, egalitarian, responsive, transparent, accountable, non-corrupt, consensus-oriented, and empowering (Johan, 2000: 13).

The findings from this study also reflect such transformative qualities in the cases of Somsri, Sunee, and Junya in each and every aspect mentioned above. The three women attend to the needs of the disadvantaged, despite the fact that those people may not give them political benefits. Their development outlooks incorporate the empowerment of people through different means. For instance, Somsri tends to direct the villagers to irregularities within management, giving the villagers opportunities to question and to audit; Sunee emphasized building a stable basis for the family by offering assistance to the villagers via job creation and supporting career building. Junya, meanwhile, attached primary importance to savings and building the values of moderation in living life.

Nevertheless, it cannot be concluded that all women politicians are transformative leaders in accordance with the feminist proposition. This is due to the differences in their ages, experience, conception of politics, personal capabilities, and especially the political socialization process, as well as the political circumstances in each locality. Accordingly, it should once again be emphasized that one should not take women politicians as a homogeneous group.

It was also noticeable that **women leaders who have been exposed to external knowledge and experiences beyond their day-to-day routines and local life envision a more holistic view of leadership and gender, resulting in their stronger motives to mobilize their communities towards achieving an equal, empowered, peaceful, and sustainable future.**

6.7.2 Discussion of Perceptions of Power and Relationship to Power

I would say that to understand women's leadership in local politics, one of the most complicated things is to understand the perception of power and relationships to power on the part of women and other stakeholders in their respective contexts. Political power as proposed by Lips (2001: 851-852), comes from interpersonal power, which consists of five traits: reward, coercion, expertise, legitimacy, and referent power.

Referring to the study results, I have learned that **most women based their leadership on their “referent power”** (ability to influence others because of their admiration, respect, or preference), **and “expertise”** (perceived knowledge and ability). **“Legitimate power”, which is derived from a person's political title, however, has less impact on leadership** since most women leaders basically function beyond the scope of the work their titles imply.

Somsri: In Somsri's case, for example, suffice to say that her representative roles in local government are not comparable to the other social roles she serves. This is because Somsri is on the side of the opposition on the Executive Board, those with the requisite decision-making power did not take kindly to her ideas. Thus, instead of relying on her legitimate power as an SAO member, Somsri seeks other means to fulfill her social duties in response to villagers' diverse expectations. I would also like to mention another power Somsri possesses, namely her **“connectional power”, which refers to the social networks she has built up that allow her to tap into and draw on external resources** for the sake of community development.

Junya: Besides the referent power mentioned earlier, Junya's leadership is also based on her political and **“social expertise”**. With her extensive experience in politics, Junya's knowledge and abilities as a leader have been proven beyond reproach. She knows how to motivate people to work toward the same goal; she has

excellent skills in moderating and leading meetings; she is able to ask the right question at the right time, etc. In all, Junya's leadership capacity has been widely accepted by the people in her village and beyond.

Sunee: Sunee's case, on the other hand, illustrates the scenario where a well-qualified women leader failed to attain political leadership through election, which means she **did not succeed in translating her other forms of power into genuine political legitimacy**. Nevertheless, the points of interest in Sunee's case lie in the fact that she has long been involved in various social activities and occupied a number of positions of leadership, so she was able to make a difference in her community without a political title. In this light, her achievements could have outweighed those many of the existing politicians.

6.7.3 Supplementary Measures to Highlight Women's Leadership Role

If the election process is the main obstacle to women's participation in politics, there should be some supplementary measures which enable capable women to enter the political arena more easily. This can be done through the following measures:

- 1) Applying a minimum quota for women as a temporary platform for women to make their debut in politics.
- 2) Strengthening the roles of women in civil society may translate into a positive influence on political decision makers.
- 3) Extending the scope of politics to include other political titles which do not require election. Positions like Vice-president of the SAO or treasurer would be likely positions to propel women into a more prominent role. In spite of their political influence in policy making, however, these positions are usually left out when addressing women leadership roles in politics as technically they are not electoral positions.

6.8 Corruption and Money Politics

6.8.1 Local Perception of Corruption

Distorted perceptions or attitudes on the part of local residents towards corruption are the root cause of a number of problems, since this not only reinforces money politics, but also bars right-minded individuals from political arena.

According to this study, politicians and villagers, both male and female, admit that politics requires money and that, to varying degrees, politicians should be rewarded for their work. Therefore, **if politicians did not seek personal gain or cheat too outrageously, the locals did not see this as a life-or-death situation**, since it has become somewhat of a social custom that a leader would be rewarded for his superior status. More importantly, **as long as the leader shares the derived benefits with the villagers, either directly or indirectly, the practice of corruption is not deemed immoral in the eyes of their fellow beneficiaries.**

A further complication in local politics is due to the fact that the size of the constituency is so small, so the villagers can clearly see when each politician only extends benefits to their own families and clan as opposed to the villagers in general. If the latter is the case, instead of being chastised, that politician will only gain in popularity.

As analyzed in chapter five, **the bottom line of this problem is that most villagers do not see the nation's budget as a monetary resource with joint ownership that is theirs to protect.** Therefore, once their leader can draw the budget into the local area, whether by honest or dishonest means, or whether that money is used sensibly, is not of main concern to the villagers, who do not mind as long as that money has been shared among them in various forms, such as banquets, merit-making, community activities, etc. As one villager described the profit-seeking behavior of politicians, "I don't mind if they cheat, but they shouldn't keep the gains all to themselves."

This type of thinking is an indicator of the patronage system, which is deeply ingrained in Thai society at every level. Politics is simply another institution which helps to entrench such values.

6.8.2 Effects of Corruption and Money Politics on Women's Political Participation

Corruption and money politics were mentioned as the main barrier to women's participation in the political arena. **The attitudes of the locals in the community, the conduct of local politicians, as well as the overarching political culture, are all factors that define politics as a dirty game**, with the assumption that those with political ambition are those who seeking personal gain, etc. Hence, there are a number of **qualified women who are reluctant to step into the domain** because they see that within the existing rules of the game, and that women are not likely to be able to bring about much change. Getting involved is a waste of integrity and money, especially money that has been honestly earned.

It was widely accepted that politics required money, not only during election time, but also throughout one's political life, as exemplified below:

Preparation period: In order to build up ones' social network in a particular constituency, sometimes years before the actual election, it is a customary for political aspirants to prepare themselves by extending help to others on a regular basis. They are expected not only to show up at each and every social gathering— weddings, funerals, ordinations for example, but also to give out larger sums of money to the hosts than to the other guests, as it was signified as a leader's attribute to scarify more.

Candidacy period: In the candidacy period, the power of money also plays a role in manipulating the selection of candidates among different kinship groups. Because the most valid voting base of a political candidate is one's family clan, there are many cases where the political opponents hire another person from the same extended family to run in order to undermine the voting base of his rivals.

Election period: During an election, money is used both directly, in terms of vote buying, and indirectly. In terms of providing travel expenses for eligible voters who live or studying outside the constituency. While female candidates more or less considered direct vote buying as a form of malpractice, everyone thought that donating traveling expenses was something that was common and acceptable. In a small constituency where every vote counts, it was undeniable that each candidate had to 'grease the wheels' of their voter base in every way possible, which required a large sum of money.

Representation Period: After the election, female politicians realized that there are so many corrupt practices in local administration. However, it was indicated in the study that not many of them identify themselves as being strongly against corruption for the following reasons:

1) Women politicians have been socialized to accept corruption as a normative practice in politics.

2) Women who question the norm, or are too keen to audit the existing system, are usually ostracized by male politicians.

3) Some women perceive that fighting against the system may disrupt relationships within the administrative body, making it more difficult for them to deliver development outcomes to the village.

Although for the time being cleaning up politics was not a top priority for most female politicians', information from focus group sessions shows that women leaders would at least not play a part in aggravating the problem.

6.8.3 Effects of Corruption and Money Politics on Gender Advocacy for Women's Representation

On the other side of the coin, **while 'money' politics diverts some potentially outstanding women politicians away from political causes, conversely it can encourage under-qualified ones to enter.** The study shows that there are some women politicians who are attracted to enter the political fray, not because of their political will or agenda, but because they are used as a political tool to win a seat in a particular election. This was clearly illustrated in a case of a female SAO member who was invited to participate in politics merely because her mother had just passed away, and some politicians saw this as an opportunity to capitalize on people's sympathy for her and translate this into votes.

On the other hand, there were also some women who took politics as a stepping stone to arrive as a superior social status. Thus, they tended to end up playing men's games to win seats, just to attain or retain the perpetuation of power for personal gain. Without integrity, women politicians would likely be as destructive as male ones.

With regard to the gender movement, therefore, this would constitute the worst possible scenario in terms of encouraging women to enter politics if female politicians were also drawn into the vicious circle of corruption that was dominated by men. Thus, if women's representation could not make a difference in development, from the substantive point of view, people would see no point in electing a woman in the first place.

On the contrary, from the perspective of descriptive representation whose proponents believe in the so-called "role model effect". If female politicians are inefficient, or their agenda reeks of corruption, and this made repeatedly made public, it could have an antithetical impact on the image of females in politics, which in turn works to weaken the validity of women's advocacy for gender equality and empowerment.

6.9 Constituents' Attitudes, Satisfaction and Expectations Towards Women Politicians

In this research, most of the villagers I interviewed have very positive attitudes toward, and were satisfied with, the competencies and working performance of women politicians. This could be due to the extra efforts that women put in order to prove their leadership abilities, or it could be due to the fact that this study focuses mainly on three women leaders, all three of whom have exemplary records vis-à-vis their constituents.

6.9.1 Constituents' Satisfaction with Women's Leadership

Based on the case studies of Somsri, Sunee and Junya, people's level of satisfaction regarding women leadership basically stems from the women's dedication to providing personal help and services to the villagers. They usually commented that, compared to male politicians, women politicians are as follows:

- 1) More accessible
- 2) More willing to provide service
- 3) More dedicated to problem solving

However, they also asserted that the quality of a female politician that they most admire is they “**can get tough like a man**”; in other words, they possess a lot of stamina and perseverance, as well as the ability to work side-by-side with men.

Most female politicians realize that the level of satisfaction the villagers feel towards stems in part from the inefficiency or laziness of male politicians in the past. Therefore, the women who have made it into the political arena usually dedicate themselves to their work to maintain this competitive advantage and use it as political capital for upcoming elections.

While factors such as accessibility, willingness to help, and responsiveness to others’ sufferings are in some way related to the type of ‘feminine’ qualities most women are groomed to cultivate, the “toughness” factor is more relevant to males’ gender roles. This point in particular dictates that many female politicians have to “get tough” to a greater degree than one finds in most women **to prove that their gender is not an obstacle to their political work**. This might such things as being able to drive a long-tailed boat like Somsri, getting on a pickup truck to distribute water even though her pregnancy had nearly come to term like Junya, or climbing down to lay the water pipes for the villagers like Karnjana.

On the other hand, there is also some evidence to suggest that villagers feel more comfortable seek personal help from women politicians than from their male counterparts. Many women politicians reported that villagers sometimes took female leaders for granted. As leaders, women were asked to solve not only critical issues within their communities, but also trivial matters, such as driving someone to some place, or calling the electricity company to report a blackout, for instance.

Overall, it can be concluded that in order to satisfy their constituents, female politicians need to work many times harder than their male counterparts. Moreover, to reach people’s hearts, they also need to combine both masculine and feminine qualities in delivering their services.

6.9.2 Constituents’ Expectations of Male and Female Politicians

Most locals are satisfied with a female politician’s performance, whether this involves tasks that need physical labor or social tasks that require coordination and good communication. Nevertheless, it has been proven that they have different

expectations towards male and female politicians; in other words, female politicians are faced with the burdens of service, while male politicians are the face of the community.

For instance, I have observed that in local events or gatherings, whether a female leader likes it or not, she has to assume the predetermined role of a woman, for instance by helping out in the kitchen and overseeing the preparations for this or that event. To assist the host, women leaders are expected to arrive early (to prepare food, arrange tables, etc.) and be the last to leave (to clear tables, wash dirty dishes, etc).

Male leaders, on the contrary, came to the events as guests. They are expected to sit and be a main attraction. While women politicians are dealing with tough work in the kitchen and associate mostly with members of the women's groups, male politicians are usually invited to give a speech, sing a song, or present token gifts to the performers on stage, allowing them to increase their political visibility in the public. In addition, they also have a greater chance to expand or enhance their social networks as they have more time to drink and socialize with villagers, fellow politicians, as well as other honored guests, such as high-ranking government officials or upper-echelon politicians.

Thus, it can be concluded that these unreasonable gender **expectations towards male and female politicians serve to emphasize the inequality between men and women. Accordingly, this means that women have to work harder than men in order to achieve equivalent or even fewer political gains; and that villagers evaluate a male and female politician's work using different standards in judging the frequency and quality of the work that was done. At the same time, their conceptualization of a male and female politician's work are also different. That is, male politicians are supposed to serve in a leadership capacity, while female politicians are simply supposed to serve.**

6.9.3 Constituents' Understanding of a Politician's Roles and Functions

To be able to sustain one's political status, the main task for both male and female politicians is to respond effectively to the villagers' expectations that leaders, regardless of the scope of their political title, must be someone that they can rely on for any reason, and at any time.

Although villagers' expectations toward the roles of male and female politicians differ, their expectations regarding their leaders in terms of the development of infrastructure and support for social activities remain more or less the same. In this study, it was found that villager's expectations have caused both male and female politicians a great deal of stress, especially when **villagers do not understand the boundaries and limitations of authority that come with each political title**. The most common problem relayed by the female SAO council members is that villagers do not understand that SAO members cannot make decisions regarding the budget because the administrative power lies with the executive body, namely with the Chief of the SAO Council.

Because of villagers' unrealistic expectations, it falls to the women in the SAO to seek the resources from elsewhere to respond to their requests. Sometimes this can be done through the bureaucracy of the civil service, through higher-level politicians such as MPs, through the sponsorship of well-known shops or companies in the local area, and sometimes even from the women politician's own personal resources. Although it is true that these same expectations apply to male politicians also, women, as the newcomers, feel more pressure to do so, partly to maintain their leadership image so that it does not fall below that of a man's.

In retrospect, I would like to offer the following analysis: that despite current social realities that require women leaders to augment their capabilities and social networks to accomplish the kind of work that answers to people's various demands, constituents' mismatched expectations must also be changed, as these clearly reinforce the misunderstanding or misconceptions of a politician's roles and functions. It was obvious that local villagers tend to identify politics with the patronage system, rather than view it as a system of administration or governance. Thus, in order to bring about the thorough transformation of such values, political education for local citizens is another key element that in the long run would reshape and correct people's distorted understanding and perception of politics, as well as politicians.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The initial aim of this dissertation was to provide a holistic view and in-depth understanding of women in local politics. In attempting to do so, it has combined a series of studies, from various sources and through various inductive approaches, to assimilate related information that can help to explain the relationship among sociopolitical factors that, taken all together, lead to a profound understanding of local women politicians as individuals, as local citizens, and as politicians.

In this concluding chapter, conclusions and recommendations, as well as the implications of this study for future research, are presented.

7.1 Conclusions

The study of women in politics in Krabi province has brought to light many aspects of how a woman develops into be a politician, what differences, if any, they bring to politics, or the response they receive from the people they represent.

From this study, I have found that all the questions are interrelated. Women politicians are groomed and socialized by their social and cultural setting, while at the same time possessing the ability to make an impact by altering their context. Since childhood, girls and boys alike experience politics not only directly, but also indirectly. Besides the political activities that they observed or took part in, a feeling for politics could also be developed through power relationships within the family, community, and society in which their development took place.

As with a person's political socialization, gender perceptions towards men and women's rightful place in society are also learned and become ingrained, forming an integral part of their mindset. Women are taught what constitutes a woman's place through their parents teaching, as well as through the responsibilities assigned to them.

Gender-segregated tasks within one's family somehow limit women from developing political affiliations since they may see it as something that lies outside their domain of interest. At a relatively young age, local women are so overwhelmed by their household responsibilities that they have less chance to interact with the outside world beyond the circle of their families and the cycle of their daily routine. As a result, their self-esteem, or the feeling of efficacy, is not fully developed, and their hidden capacities go untapped until a later stage in their lives, if at all.

Conversely, local men have few responsibilities in the household and the opportunity for exposure to the outside world, to games, competitions and racing, where their self-esteem and self-confidence can be developed at a much earlier stage in life, allows them to fit into the 'game' of politics much more easily.

It has been illustrated in the study that a feeling of self-reliance, self-worth and thus self-esteem, constitute the strongest driving force for women to enter politics and to make a difference. Significant turning points in life can make women realize their hidden potential to lead their own lives. Consequently, they gradually feel the urge to serve, or to give something back to their communities.

It was also observed that **many women politicians began to be interested in politics because they felt the existing distribution of public resources was unjust.** Women, socialized to possess feminine characteristics and have been conditioned to take care of others, such as siblings or other members of the family from a very young age, are quick to empathize with the suffering of those who are marginalized, people whose plight went unheeded by politicians who have power and resources. **Consequently, the women saw entering politics as a channel to attain the necessary legitimacy to do what they deemed right.**

Nonetheless, as the existing political structure was predetermined by men, women as newcomers face a number of personal challenges (family problems, livelihood problems, lack of education or lack of experience), as well as social challenges (social values regarding the gender roles of men and women, local expectations regarding women leaders). Finally, they face formidable political challenges as well (the problem with entry into politics, marginalization or threats

from male politicians, or the fight against corruption). These challenges accord male and female politicians a different status, even though they work in the same political setting. In other words, the political reality for the female politician is vastly different from that of her male counterpart because of their respective political education, conception of politics, political motivation, political roles, approaches to politics, and political obstacles, well as in term of their political ambitions and aspirations (as illustrated in Chapter 4).

Meanwhile, external factors, such as **the expectations of the locals towards the political status and political roles of a female politician, unquestionably shape, influence, and reinforce a woman's political means and goals** as well. Therefore, as long as villagers still view women politicians with the same attitudes, women leaders will be expected to carry on the same political roles in the same gender-biased way, such as helping out in the kitchen at different events, or through the mismatched expectation of accessibility and servitude.

As mentioned previously in the study, local expectations are for the male politician to lead, and for female politicians to serve or facilitate. These expectations put undue stress on female politicians; for instance, female SAO members, who have no administrative powers, must find outside support to accomplish things, because otherwise they will be looked upon unfavorably.

Again, both the internal and external factors mentioned above are inter-related and dynamic in nature. Changing any of the above factors would of course have an adverse affect on the others. Therefore, it was perceived that any attempts or measures that aim to change women's roles in politics need to take into account all these various factors, and take a multi-dimensional approach to supporting the right women to enter politics and to assisting them, especially in the earlier stage of their political career.

7.2 Implications for Women Movement and Policy Initiatives

There has been an increasing effort on the part of both the government and women's NGOs, both locally and internationally, to encourage women to join politics.

This is because women's representation not only acts as an indicator of a mature democracy, but also the absence of women from the political arena is a drawback to development since the potential of women, who make up more than half of the world's population, is not fully utilized while the voices of women are not heard in the decision-making process. Therefore, if more women can enter the political arena, it is believed that there will be more justice, diversity and efficiency. In addition, women will act as agents of change, influencing politics in a way that it will be less corrupt, because it is believed that women have less tendency to be corrupt than men. (Evertzen, 2001: 6).

That being said, this study has found that encouraging women to enter politics also comes with other considerations, for example, whom to support, when to support, and how to support them. This study recommends the following:

7.2.1 Whom to Support

Another important point to recognize is that women are not a homogeneous group and not all women can make a change in the political landscape or have the intention to do so. Therefore, my most important recommendation is **to encourage the right type of woman, not just any woman, to enter politics if one expects women to act as a political change agent.** In my view, having under qualified women in the political arena will only serve to reinforce the perceived "incompetence" of women and might prompt more wrong women to enter politics as well.

Nonetheless, it is not easy to identify who "the right women" might be. Thus, **supporting organizations should work with women networks at least to discern which women have potential to be transformative leaders. Then, there should be an extended period to work with the women and equip them with sufficient knowledge and skills required to function effectively as politicians.** This is in contrast to the present practices of women advocacy movement that focus on supporting a woman who express their wants to run or has an opportunity to win.

7.2.2 What to Support and When

Women in local politics can be supported at different stages of their political involvement. However, the major point of concern is that different types of support should be provided in accordance with their needs at different times, starting from their socialization process, to their candidacy stage, and throughout their political tenure.

7.2.2.1 Socialization Process

Kelly and Boulitier (1978) postulate that women who can be agents for change in the political arena must be molded by experiences since childhood, starting from the four stages of development.

- 1) The girl must develop an activist sex-role ideology;
- 2) She must gain personal control over her life-space, gaining needed competencies and abilities to maintain control as the life-space expands;
- 3) She must become politically salient; and
- 4) Her efforts at political participation must have been sufficiently rewarded, and her experiences sufficiently successful, to encourage her to continue.

Therefore, supporting women through the stages of political socialization must start from their formative years and continue well into adulthood. In practice, this can be done in the following manner:

- 1) **Socialization through institutions:** family, school, religion, and especially the media, all play a part in laying the foundations for an understanding of gender equality. Accordingly, they should modify the traditional gender ideology so that it is more accommodating to women's learning process and the expression of their leadership abilities. They should encourage women to play sports or express their potential, which will build their self-confidence in the future as well.

- 2) **Women should have the opportunity to choose their own life path, and should be given the opportunity to develop themselves, thereby enabling them to do whatever they choose to their fullest potential.** This particular point covers educational opportunities and vocational opportunities. Nowadays,

women in the countryside might not have much of a choice because their family or society dictates that they follow a certain path.

3) **Women need access to information and the chance to acquire experience outside their traditional domain**, such as listening to and exchanging ideas with other people, experience in politics or democratic values, thereby advancing the agenda of civil society, etc.

4) **Women should be recognized for their work or their activities**, which implies that women should receive awards for things at that they excel in order to reinforce their self-esteem and motivate more women to want to participate in society and in politics. This might galvanize them, and arouse in them the requisite passion, to enter the political arena at the appropriate time and occasion.

7.2.2.2 Candidacy Stage

If political socialization imbues women with the inner drive to enter politics, the next step is their political candidacy, which is one of the most problematic obstacles for women entering politics, and an area to which great needs to be paid. Over and above being financial prepared and negotiating within the immediate family, this study has found that kinship and power relations between kinship groups are some of the most important deciding factors that affect a woman's decision to enter politics.

The role of women, who have always been expected to make sacrifices, has caused many capable and politically equipped women to drop out of the running when their male relatives wish to run in the same election. In this study, it has been found that women have been asked to withdraw from the political race to make way for their male relatives. At the same time, the political capital accumulated by women has also been borrowed in order to help their male relatives get into office. Even women who have overcome that obstacle and are running for election are restricted by traditional beliefs regarding the roles of men and women.

To make matters worse, women also encounter a great deal of gender bias during their campaign. With the odds stacked against them, given the number of obstacles and palpable gender bias both before and during their campaign, not to mention afterwards, when they have entered political office, should they succeed, there is hardly a chance of the average woman succeeding in the political arena.

From this perspective, the “quota system” presents an interesting choice. These measures could encourage women who are ready for politics to run for office, making the decision easier if gender is not presented as an obstacle. However, one important factor that needs to be taken into consideration would be that some women would act as nominees for men and not as agents of change in line with the agenda of the women’s movement. Even so, this worry is not enough to take away the benefits of having a quota system for women, since by the same argument there are currently a large number of male politicians who act as nominees for other male politicians anyway.

Therefore, if the quota system is really passed into law, it will become the duty of those who are responsible to propagate the right political view for those female politicians who are political newcomers. I believe that if women receive the correct information and understand the need to make a difference in order to improve the climate of local politics for the benefit of all, female politicians can develop the quality of transformative leadership that is necessary for producing long-term benefit to themselves and others too.

7.2.2.3 After Assuming a Political Position

After the election, there is no guarantee that women will be effective at their job and satisfy the expectations of the villagers. As mentioned before, most of the locals do not understand the role of the politician that they have selected. Most still have a traditional mindset regarding the roles of men and women, even those women who have entered a position of leadership. The villagers still hold to the expectation that women should provide a social service, as before.

Many female politicians have noted that these false expectations cause pressure, firstly because the villagers usually ask for things over and above the politician’s authority, and secondly because female politicians feel that being given a chance to work in politics constitutes a debt a gratitude that they have to pay back to the villagers. Consequently, they have to work doubly hard to prove that they can be just as good as their male counterparts, if not better.

In order to highlight women’s leadership roles in this connection, the requisite support can be provided by the relevant political units, for instance, political parties, development agencies, or women’s NGOs. These organizations or groups

could assist female politicians by providing them with the knowledge necessary for their job, and opening up opportunities for them to network with organizations or outside sources, because it is clear that in order to fulfill the villagers' expectations, they must rely on sources other than the local political machine. Outside sources, including the know-how and the resources that can help to solve problems in the village, of which the building of infrastructure ranks as a top concern. Therefore, networking with government officers, local businesses, NGOs, or other women's groups could facilitate the establishment of a network to provide backup for a female politician.

Since many local female politicians did not receive a high level of education, training is another method that women leaders claim to be an important factor in helping them to develop their capabilities and broaden their horizons. Even though they have good intentions, they may lack experience, and lack the basic knowledge, thereby becoming an obstacle to their further development, or their problem-solving approach may be based upon the wrong knowledge base. Development opportunities, if provided in an effective manner, could fill these gaps in the capabilities of local women.

7.2.3 How to Lend Support

Both the government and women's NGOs have launched many campaigns or projects to address the issue pertaining to the inequality of women in politics. The activities of these organization, however, tend to tackle the issue of women's under-representation in politics, thus their efforts were primarily concentrated on training women in order to equip them with the requisite skills to compete with the men during election time.

Despite a certain degree of success from these campaigns in terms of encouraging more women to enter politics, it was still likely that there were drawbacks in the design of many of these programs. The latter were found to lack any real relevance to women's needs, or forgot to take into account the sociopolitical context at the grassroots, which are in some ways different from those in elections at the national or provincial level.

7.2.3.1 Training and Development: Needs Analysis

The training courses, which are activities organized by various organizations and bodies, need to take into account the political reality of the locality too, both in terms of the content and the trainers. It was noticed that sometimes the women's training programs were not geared to benefiting local women politicians in the long term, or it did not take into account the context of local politics. As I observed in one women's training class concerning effective campaigning for female candidates, the women participants were trained how to dress differently to draw attention to themselves, or how they should behave while campaigning and giving speeches, for example.

It was evident that these lessons were able to address the immediate needs of women who wanted to enter politics at the national level. However, when these sessions are tied into the findings in this study, I found that in local politics, there is hardly any need for women candidates to use any of these skills in campaigning in elections for the SAO or village head. In such a small constituency, where villagers were from the same neighborhood, it was obvious that women candidates did not need to give speeches on a big stage, neither did they need to dress up to attract attention.

Most women candidates capitalize on their knowledge and use it as one of their strengths. They are happy to go door-to-door because they know that most villagers want them to be down-to-earth (many villagers have learnt from their past mistakes in electing a male politician who marginalize them after having won a seat). For a woman candidate to dress up differently or to act like a high-flyer would cost them votes because it runs counter to villagers' expectations and perceptions of politicians in local-level elections.

Therefore, it could be said that the organizers of training courses for women leaders, women candidates or women politicians at the local level need to understand that in **local politics there are a multitude of factors that are vastly different from the level of townships and above. Women who enter politics at different levels need a different type and manner of support.** Consequently, an analysis should be conducted to determine the different training needs to get to the

heart of the matter and to successfully achieve the various goals of the support provided.

7.2.3.2 Points of Concern for Women's Advocacy for Other Women

Another recommendation which I would like to offer to those who are working to increase the number of women in politics is this: that the expectations that a woman politician would draw other women into politics, or act as mentors to new women candidates during election time fail to take lack the local context into consideration.

Since local politics is highly influenced by kinship and clans, as well as familiarity and indebted favors, it produces a complex set of interactions involving both personal relationships and political relationships. Thus, for senior politicians, whether male or female, it was not easy to announce ones' support for a political newcomer during election time as that could easily disrupt their relationship with their own voting base.

In this study, many female political veterans echoed the same concern, noting that during election time, lending direct support to another female candidate could be a double-edged, sword, which may come back and hurt them. For instance, a second-term woman SAO member revealed that she was questioned by a male candidate in an adjacent village when she lent support to another female candidate who was running against him. He reasoned that she helped her in the previous election, so it was not nice of her to act as her advisor in this contest. Therefore, the way of thinking that urges female politicians to invite new women candidates into the political arena, or to baby-sit them, is not a very practical suggestion in the context of local community, where personal relationships intersect with political relationships. **Moreover, the factors of indepthness or closeness usually come before gender.**

However, a woman politician's support aimed at increasing the number of women politicians in local politics should be a long-term agenda rather than a short-term solution. **More easily and more appropriately than openly supporting another woman candidate, women politicians should use their role and status as leaders to offer the opportunity for other women in the community to participate in social activities.**

Firstly, participation in social affairs would help the women to attain more experience in social work. Many woman leaders remarked that when women are self-absorbed and only concerned solely with matters of the household, their horizon narrows, causing them to reflect badly on other women. The best remedy for the pitfalls of being a woman such as gossiping and/or jealousy, is for them to become more involved with community activities, because when women realize their own self-worth, they will in turn see more worth in other women too.

Secondly, community work is a platform that allows them to develop and demonstrate their leadership qualities to the public. In this study, it was found that the majority of women politicians started to assume leadership roles in women's groups or vocational groups. The social affiliations that emerge from interacting with a diverse group of people also become political capital for the woman, should she choose to run in an election. Moreover, it motivates women to want to create change or develop their community, and should lead to more women putting themselves forward as political candidates in the future.

7.2.3.3 The Roles of Women in Auditing and Creating a Movement.

One of the main problems with local politics is the absence of any kind of audit relating to the powers of politicians. I propose, therefore, that women's roles in local politics should not be limited to being politicians only. This study has revealed that many women leaders have taken on the roles of politicians even though they do not hold a political position, such as facilitating coordination, helping the villagers, leading projects and teams, etc.

In fact, conducting a political audit on a local level is not such a difficult task, because the decision makers in the local area are so close to the villagers and the political results are obvious for everyone to see. **However, the missing element in local politics is the role of an auditor.** Even though women have entered the political arena, it turns out that many female politicians do not dare to audit existing mechanisms because they have accepted that, to a certain extent, politics must involve personal interests or because they fear that resulting internal conflicts will put the organization in jeopardy.

Civil society, therefore, will serve as a mechanism that changes the political reality. As exemplified in Junya's case, Junya as a Village Head was

successful in applying the theory of civil society to the grassroots by encouraging a gentle system of audition. With her participatory leadership style, she was able to pool together all the key stakeholders since the initial stages, which in turn produces participation, lessens conflict, encourages good relationships, as well as making development policies or plans more transparent, as opposed to being a game of “winner takes all” with regard to benefits and personal gain. In this connection, it can be said that women possess the right kind of characteristics to audit or to create a movement using civil society to support their political course in a decent manner.

Thus, **supporting women’s participation in civil society is another key success factor in strengthening their auditing roles.** Through their effectual participation in civil society, women who aspire to make a difference can play an auditing role without having to become a politician. Moreover, even for those who have a passion to enter politics, participating in civil society also helps to shape and concretize their political agendas. At the same time, the women would have networks on which they can rely once they have successfully sailed into political domain.

7.2.3.4 Altering the Context: Working from the People’s Side

Gender is another dimension of the democracy in terms of the big picture, because there can be no real democracy without equality between the sexes. Fakhri (1999)’s five indicators of gender inequality namely, marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, violence, and an unequal share of the workload show that any display of these inequalities in a family, or even in a community, can hardly be conducive to a democratic society. To work from the people’s side, the following strategies are recommended:

1) Instilling Democratic Values

Democratic values constitute the most important means for neutralizing inequality between sexes, bigotry, or even the limitations placed on women to develop to one’s full potential because of sex discrimination. Moreover, democratic values cover the role of civil society in electing and auditing a leader, and a social conscience that puts public benefit above personal gains.

However, just as instilling the correct values with regard to gender, **implanting a democratic conscience is a long-term project for society, one that must be encouraged in the form of a movement for change.** It was clearly

illustrated in the findings of this study that many women politicians are concerned with money politics, and many even admit that it is one of the rules of the game that they must live with. The complacency that exists towards these important problems indicates that the country's democracy is in a fragile state. It is quite unrealistic to expect any woman with good intentions to be able to correct the ills that have previously existed as long as people accept these political malpractices as normal, without feeling an urgent need for change.

2) Political Education

In addition to instilling democratic values, which involves a more long-term approach, a more immediate approach should be involve **political education-- getting local people to understand how political mechanisms work**. I also believe that women politicians, as well as male politicians in general for that matter, could benefit from a clearer education or the provision of political knowledge to the villagers based on the duties of different political positions. For example, the expectations towards the female politician (SAO) who does not have jurisdiction over budgetary allocations to build roads and electricity lines could be avoided and make the job less stressful for women newcomers (who have more limited networks) if the villagers realized that they were placing a burden on the politician in terms of unrealistic and unfair expectations.

A campaign to **educate villagers about the different functions of each different political title** will prove beneficial to local politics in general and allow villagers to choose their representatives more wisely. Likewise, a campaign to educate them about **the disadvantages of corruption and the ways in which corruption takes place at the local level** would change their traditional political perceptions as the link between politics and their quality of life is brought to light.

With regard to the presence of women in local politics, **political education could indirectly highlights the merits of having more women in leadership positions**. If villagers started to question the existing political games dominated by men, they might also start to give women a chance to bring about positive changes in local political systems.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

This dissertation has shown that a true understanding of women in local politics can only occur when the researcher truly understands the local context of gender, politics, and the political realities on the ground, all of which are inextricably intertwined. Nevertheless, a number of questions arise which encourage further exploration and research. Consequently, I would like to propose some recommendations for future researches in the field as follows:

1) The political socialization of women is a delicate and interesting topic to study in depth. In Thailand, research studies on this topic are very limited, especially those using qualitative means to observe the makings of a woman politician from childhood into adulthood. This will lead to a better understanding of other topics such as political motivation, political approaches and outcomes.

2) Unsuccessful cases of women politicians were not thoroughly examined in this research. However, a comparative study between successful and unsuccessful cases will lend interesting insights and may pinpoint some defining factors of success cases.

3) A limitation of this dissertation is that it did not explore the issue from a male politician's point of view; therefore, the gender dynamism in local politics could not be displayed. It should be noted that gender is not defined by women alone, but occurs from the co-construction of meanings from both sexes. In future therefore, this should be explored and male politicians in the local context should also be studied too.

4) Culture is clearly an important factor in social research; therefore, studying local female politicians in other regions of Thailand, who deal with different cultural realities, would greatly expand the knowledge base.

5) Many political positions at the local level are undergoing important and necessary structural changes. Researchers should follow up on any new laws to determine whether that change affects power relations in the local area and, in turn, whether it affects the ability of women to participate in local politics.

6) In the past, the term “female politicians” was usually taken to mean only those women who had been elected through elections, but did not look at women who had entered local politics by appointment, such as the Deputy Chief Executive, or the treasurer, who are handpicked by the Chief Executive of the SAO. These positions are very important because they are management positions, but there is often very little research about them.

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