

# From Local To National: Politicizing Southern Thai Women

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地域から国レベルに  
— 政治化する南部タイの女性 —

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## Abstract

Southern Thai women play a significant role in local politics. Mainly, they play hard in the election of the village because the vote result has a direct impact on their daily lives to allocate the village resources. However, the political role of local women is not openly evident in a public space like men's. They are the advocates behind the scene. This study found that southern women were highly politically motivated at the local level. They were news-followers and spread the word through gossip. Additionally, they secretly managed the vote-buying in their village. However, the roles of these women were not prominent in the national elections because they were less interested in national politics. In contrast, southern men were interested in, knowledgeable, and following national politics, so the local public sphere was dominated by village men. However, more women from the South openly participated in the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) actions to overthrow the Shinawatra government. They distributed information, political agendas, and ideologies from the protest's leaders to other women in their villages. These women expressed their pride in being part of the PAD and PDRC because they publicly showed their loyalty to the monarchy and supported the Democrat Party. My research demonstrates that women in the South were not politically apathetic, but they both accepted political discourses from state ideology and acted energetically in local politics. Also, participation in local politics affected them as part of politician's patronage networks that encouraged them to join the national demonstrations.

**Key Words** : southern Thai women, local politics, demonstration, yellow shirts

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## 1. Introduction

Thailand is the first major country in the world where women have the right to vote in both local and national levels, as equal to men. Grassroots women have had the right to elect their village leaders since 1897 under the Local Administrative Act from the absolute monarchy era, when it was reforming bureaucracy for the modern country (Bowie 2010, p.709). Women and men have the right equally to vote and to be the candidate according to the first constitution after the revolution to democracy in 1932. Later in 1982, the Local Administrative Act was amended so that women could be eligible to be the candidate for village headman and subdistrict headman. In 1999, the number of female village headman was 2.4 percent (Ockey 2004, p.57). In 2016, there were 265 female subdistrict headmen from a total of 7,016 subdistrict headmen, or 3.7 percent (National Statistical Office, 2019). According to the data, the numbers are quite clear that although the law provides women the opportunity to play the role of local leaders officially, there are still a small number of women candidates and elected local authorities. Similarly, fewer women are elected MPs. After the Constitution of 1932 granted women the right to be the candidates, it took 17 years for the first female MP to be elected in 1949. From 1932-1991, there were 41 female MPs representing 2.8 percent (Loos 2004, p.179). The first female prime minister was in the 2011 election. She was Ms. Yingluck Shinawatra, a younger sister of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In this election, there was 15.6 percent of female MPs, the highest number of female MPs ever. The latest elections in 2019 had female MPs at 14 percent. Accordingly, there are a few female politicians in southern Thai societies; the constituents in Phatthalung province have just voted for a female MP since 2007 and there has never been any female MP in Songkhla province. Also, at the local level, as far as I have interviewed people in various communities in Phatthalung, Songkhla, and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces, most local politicians are men. Therefore, considering the number of women holding political positions, it can be explained that Thai women play a minimal role in national and local politics. However, focusing on the number of official positions of women cannot explain political participation thoroughly because politics does not mean just parliament, and taking office does not guarantee women's point of view representation (Phillips 1991, p.61). It is consistent with the studies of Bowie (2008), Arghiros (2001), and Ockey (1999), which demonstrated that women played hidden roles in politics at both the national and the local levels. Accordingly, my study researching rural south women found that women were involved in politics at the village and national demonstrations by being indirect supporters. They were not the main characters as candidates, leading campaigners, or heads of the election canvasser, but they were quite effective as hidden supporters. However, the previous studies did not focus on the relationship between the political participation of women in villages and women's participation in national demonstrations. This study argues that local political participation has connected women to a local politicians' network, and this network encourages southern women to participate in national demonstrations.

For a decade, a vast number of southern women participate in the demonstrations to remove democratically elected governments. The political conflict in Thailand that occurred in the past

decade is a conflict that divides politics into two poles, between the yellow-shirts and the red-shirts. The yellow-shirts have a conservative ideology and show their loyalty to the nation, religion, and especially the monarchy. The yellow-shirt movement has two episodes: the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) was established in 2005, and the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) was established in 2013. The opposite group is the red-shirts, who have a liberal democratic ideology (Thannapat 2019, p.661). Many red-shirts support former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was overthrown by the military in 2006. It is noted that both movements had a large number of female participants. Women from Bangkok and the South, which were areas of the Democrat Party, joined the yellow-shirt movement. In contrast, women from the northern and northeastern regions, who support Thaksin and his nominees' parties, joined the red-shirt movement (Duanghathai, Doneys, Kusakabe, and Doane 2016, pp. 4-7). In considering the political participation of women in the color-coded protests, Duanghathai (2016) argued that women in the Red and Yellow shirt movement obtained political knowledge and engaged in politics. This previous study focused on the role of general women during the rallies; however, my research concentrates on the political participation of local southern women that relates to the expansion of women's local public sphere and the maintenance of the political network in the village.

This study focused on the political movement of women from the South that participated in the yellow-shirt movement, both in the PAD and the PDRC rallies. This was done by studying the political participation of southern women in the village to understand the network of women's relationships with local leaders who were informally linked to the politicians of the Democrat Party. When the yellow-shirt, which was supported by the Democrats, called the people to rally, southern women - who are a network of local politicians - actively participated. Aside from the loosely linked networks between the Democrats and southern women, the central political discourse - protecting the monarchy as the fundamental ideology of the yellow-shirts - was well accepted by southern women because this was usually reproduced in their daily lives.

For this study, I have observed the PAD rally since 2005 and the PDRC rally since 2013, and I interviewed around 60 southern women who participated in rallies from 3 provinces - Nakhon Si Thammarat (March - April 2016), Songkhla (August - September 2016), and Phatthalung (March - April 2017), all of which have similar cultural and political characteristics, with most people working in agriculture. The informants worked in a variety of occupations, such as government officials, nurses, rubber plantations, pharmacists, teachers, general contractors, restaurant owners, vendors in the market, and club heads in the village. They had different incomes, socioeconomic statuses, and education levels from accredited primary school to the Ph.D. level. Their ages were 30 - 65 years. In addition, to understand the role of women in political participation at the village level, in August-September 2019, I surveyed women's participation in the village headman elections in Phatthalung. I observed from the preparation to the completion of the elections and interviewed voters in the village. However, the role of women in supporting local politicians is not just after the protest rallies. Still, it is a phenomenon that generally occurs during the local elections.

To understand the political role of women in southern societies, the article starts by providing a picture of the status of women in southern culture, which did not have much of a role in the public space - a network of male patronage. But, after the decentralization in the decade of 1990, women became more politically active, even if they were supporters behind the scenes. After that, the article shows the expansion of the political participation of southern women in the yellow shirt protest against the Thaksin regime.

## **2. Status of southern women and masculine political society**

In southern communities, women play an essential role in the trade, household management, and inheritance of land from their parents. Southern married culture in the past required that a husband live in the wife's house. The groom helped the bride's parents work, and the produce belonged to the bride's parents. In some families, the wife's parents used male labor for three to six months. After that, they were allowed to marry. After getting married, the groom still has to live in a female parents' house for approximately a half to one year. Then the woman's parents divide the land and separate the house into a new property. The groom, therefore, is not considered based on economic status or family status but finding the ability to protect a woman. The southern locals say that "if a man can steal cows and buffaloes, or play 'Nora,' female parents would give their daughter to this man." The ability to steal cows and buffaloes shows that a man is brave. The ability to play "Nora" means a man has many friends who can be reliable. It is because he has to travel far from his village to show Nora so that he can make friends from different areas (Askew 2008, pp.53-54). In the past, the ability to provide family safety was an essential quality for a man, while the crucial attributes of a woman were taking care of family, earning and managing a living.

The status of women in the south is therefore quite stable because they are the landowner given by their parents. Even though after marriage, the spouse moves to their house, they are still in the neighborhood of the woman's parents and relatives. The youngest daughter often receives more land than other siblings since the youngest daughter is responsible for looking after the parents. The youngest daughter, therefore, often inherits her parents' house, land, and other possessions after their parents pass away. Nowadays, even though such custom of marriage has entirely faded, women are still the caretakers of their parents and the inheritors of their property. Rural women diligently help their husbands work in the fields. They are family workers like men. Therefore, the wife has the power to make economic decisions such as household expenses, child education expenses, parenting expenses, and to be both creditor and debtor. In other words, women play a crucial role in making important family economic decisions (Jawanit 2005, p.220). However, even though women in the south have a high status in their families, they are only management in the domestic and economic areas. Women's power does not expand into political participation in public areas. Politics is a public sphere for men.

Southern Thai society accepts leaders who are 'nakleng' or gangsters. The local scholars claim that 'nakleng' is one of the southern identities. 'Nakleng' is the character of a person who is brave,

decisive, generous, loyal, and has dignity and integrity. According to the qualities of 'nakleng,' it possesses characteristics that are expressed in the public space. It is beyond the scope of women's power, as only men have been regarded as 'nakleng.' Therefore, the feature of 'nakleng' in southern society is tied to masculinity (Craig 2011, p.42). In the past, 'nakleng' had to have black magic and amulets. These southern men learned from the local temple. The abbot or senior monks taught new monks not only Buddhist doctrine but also black magic; each temple had signature magic. The temple was, therefore, a collection of exclusive sacred knowledge for men that women could not access. The villagers respected the magicians. Khun Pantarak Rajadet, who was an expert at fighting and also at black magic, was voted as the MP for Nakhon Si Thammarat province in 1969 (Craig 2011, p.45).

'Nakleng' identity, which features many friends and loyalty to the group, has a positive effect on the patronage politics network. Accordingly, the culture of 'Kler' is another southern culture to expand the patronage network. 'Kler' is comrades; two or more people promise to be best friends: they are more bonded than regular friends and more helpful than relatives. Klers can count on each other for a lifetime. When one Kler friend makes a new Kler friend, all of them join in the network of Kler. Consequently, being Kler of the southerners is the beginning of building an extensive patronage network. However, Kler has to be made up of same-sex friends: only men and men or women and women. In most cases, men have more Kler than women because they have more opportunities to travel to various places to meet many friends, while women can tie up female friends in their local area. Therefore, men can make an extensive friend network and also a vast patron network more effectively than women. MPs from the Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phatthalung, and Songkhla provinces in the south not only receive vote scores from relatives but also have 'Kler' networks as significant support as well. Prom Boonrit, former MP of Democrat Party, had been a shadow puppet performer or "Nung Talung" for a long time before he got MP of Phatthalung province. While he traveled to play shadow puppet in various areas, he always made male friends, or Kler, everywhere. When he applied for MP, he relied on a network of friends to support him. He was a three-time MP in Phatthalung in 1979, 1983, and 1986 (Sanit 2007, pp.84-85). Nakleng and Kler relationship builds a patronage network of men who help them play an essential role in politics. Therefore, most southern politicians and leaders are men.

When the first National Economic Development Plan (1961-1963) began, the state began to develop rural areas by building roads, providing electricity, water, and developing economic communities. Before that, southern villagers lived on sufficient subsistence and relied on product exchanges with other villagers (Chattip and Kitti 2017, pp.289-292). Throughout the 1960s, the government developed infrastructure in the countryside. Roads, as well as trade, had been expanded. The rural areas had become more urbanized. Local people were interested in higher education. Notably, southern farmers changed from rice farming to rubber planting, following government support and encouragement. The Office of the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund was established in 1960 to persuade the villagers to grow quality rubber species instead of native rubber

species. This office encouraged farmers who had never planted rubber to try to plant rubber by providing funds and advice to increase productivity and income (Stifel 1973, p.127). Nowadays, working in rubber plantations has become the main occupation of people in the southern region. Southern people were interested in the government's policy on rubber plantations and rubber prices. Although the rubber markets were foreign countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia, it seems that southerners do not need to rely on the state, but actually, small rubber planters have relied on rubber funds and government policies since the beginning. Rubber farmers require the government to support rubber prices and rubber insurance. Notably, the representatives of the villagers who negotiated with the government tended to be men because they had more knowledge about politics and economy than women. After the Second World War, the rubber market expanded, so the rubber farmers had higher income and better living conditions (Stifel 1973, p.120).

The rising price of rubber causes many families to have enough money to support many boys in higher education. Southern boys and men go to study either in Bangkok or regional teacher colleges (Lom 2010, pp.159-163). The families depend on their patronage networks to help their children live in a big city. More men ask the local abbots, who ordained them, to help them connect with an abbot in Bangkok to serve as a temple boy. Moreover, men make male friends in the temple and help each other in the future as a new network (Sanit 2007, pp.32-34). After graduating, most of them return to work in their hometown as teachers, civil servants, lawyers, local politicians, writers, local media, and NGO staff members. They are very active in providing information about politics and economics. They also set up a bargain group for the local and national governments. The sophisticated men hold debates and exchange opinions on matters relating to society, economy, and politics in public areas. Therefore, the local public sphere is an area for men who know the law, society, economy, and politics. The local public sphere is not an area for women without knowledge, especially knowledge about politics. It was similar to the bourgeois public sphere in the 18th century; according to Habermas's concept, the educated men participated and deliberated rationally in public debate for the common good. During that time, women and uneducated men were also excluded from the public sphere (Sitton 2003, pp.112-116).

In short, southern women in rural societies play a vital role in managing the family economy and household chores. They participate in making family decisions equal to their husbands. Women have much power in the domestic area, while hardly any women play a role in public areas outside their home. Political and economic discussions are the area of local educated men. Southern public sphere had become an area for men with knowledge of politics, society, economy, law, and national politics. The critical leading roles are teachers, civil servants, lawyers, local politicians, NGOs, and writers; most of these people are educators, while women were barred. However, since the 1990s, the government decentralized into the local government. Therefore, there were local elections in various positions and more frequently. As a result, many female villagers participated in local politics actively. Despite not being a leader, women are an essential advocate for helping candidates to be elected in the local political arena (Jawanit 2005, pp.218-219).

### **3. The role of women in local elections**

With decentralization to local areas under the Subdistrict Council and Subdistrict Administrative Organization Act 1994, people can elect the subdistrict council and committee every four years to manage their local resources. Moreover, the amendment of the Local Administrative Act 1992 stipulated the terms of subdistrict headman and the village headman for five years from able to hold the position until the age of 60 years. The decentralization of local areas and the participation of ordinary people in the new constitution during the 1990s affected local people, who were highly enthusiastic about politics. There were frequent elections at the village and district, and more people were involved in politics. The government and NGOs began a campaign for women to participate in the election for a village headman and subdistrict council (Jawanit 2005, p.218). Nevertheless, there were still few women who applied and voted for local leaders. Among all local government organizations in Thailand, only 6.74% have women holding leadership positions (National Statistical Office, 2019).

This research studied the election of village headmen in a rural village in Phatthalung province in September 2019. The study found that it was competitive because the village headman has the power to allocate local resources and receive financial support from the government to develop projects in the village. The village headman could distribute the various projects and funds to his relatives and friends. In the latest election, there were two candidates, Mr. Khem, 47, a rubber buyer in the village, and Mrs. Phen, 50, a local civil servant's wife. Under the Local Administrative Act, amended in 2008 after the coup, that village headman was in the position until the age of 60. That means that a new village headman will have the power to manage various local projects and receive state funds for at least ten years.

After the former village headman had cancer and the condition worsened, the assistant village headman and supporters began to raise funds and prepare for the next election. They decided to choose Mrs. Phen for the competition for the new village headman. They were quite sure that Mrs. Phen would win because her family and her husband's family had many relatives in the village. Therefore, she would have great support from her relatives. However, in this election, Mr. Khem, who has the same surname as Mrs. Phen, ran for the position of the village headman. Both Mr. Khem and Mrs. Phen needed support from the same relative. The relatives divided into three parties: close relatives with Mr. Khem, close relatives with Mrs. Phen, and the relatives not yet decided. A male cousin who supported Mrs. Phen blamed another male cousin who supported Mr. Khem at home, causing controversy within the family. The conflicts, disagreements, and distrust were told throughout the village by gossip among women. The village news was told and realized quickly in the market, the temple in merit, and the club group of the village, where women gathered. In general, women talked about livelihood, household economic problems, and the well-being of village members. However, during the village headman election, the analysis of the local political situation was the central issue in women's conversation. Because villagers knew both candidates, they did not support either side openly to avoid conflicts. The election campaign used women to

visit female neighbors to find support. The campaigns began to visit the housewives, who were relatives and friends. In general, female villagers often came to visit female neighbors to chat in the mornings or afternoons after they finished the housework; visiting a friend's house for campaign purposes did not make another person feel uncomfortable. Besides the temple, market, and savings groups, women's meeting areas became informal election campaign spaces.

With southern culture in the past, if someone asked relatives or neighbors to help - such as harvest rice or build a house - the host would prepare food for those who came. Likewise, the candidates prepared food to welcome the supporters every day. Closer to election day, housewives called female relatives and supporters to help prepare food for guests and shared food with other supporters who did not attend for thanks in advance to the vote. Besides just distributing food to ask for votes, the local election also used a lot of money to buy votes at a higher price than the MP. In this election, each candidate spent about 1000 - 2000 baht or \$30 - 60 per vote, while the national election used only 500 baht or \$15 per vote. Notably, in this case, both candidates were relatives, so women began paying and receiving money for vote-buying. Unlike other elections where candidates were not relatives, the canvassers who paid the money were men. However, the villagers did not call those women canvassers because vote-buying happened in secret when the housewives visited their female neighbors to talk just like every other day.

Both candidates trusted relatives to support and distribute the money to the villagers. Mrs. Rab is a relative of Mr. Khem and Mrs. Phen, and both of them contacted her to buy the villagers' votes. Mrs. Rab is a rubber farmer and general labor. She is familiar with Mr. Khem because she sells latex at his shop regularly. Mr. Khem's wife asked her to help distribute money to the villagers while Mrs. Phen asked Mrs. Rab to do the same. They were unaware that she received money from both sides. The price of rubber and palm oil has been continuously declining since the dictatorial government took over the country, which affected most southerners whose primary income came from rubber and oil palm plantations. Therefore, getting money from the candidates of the village headman made many villagers feel satisfied. Many villagers did not clearly show support for either side in order to receive money from both parties. It is worth noting that more housewives accepted money from both candidates. Men accepted money only from the candidate they supported as it showed the loyalty of the followers, which was a characteristic of nakleng (Ockey 2004, pp.81-83).

After the election, the winner held a feast to thank the supporters. Housewives asked female villagers for help in cooking and distributing food to their guests. After that, it was a significant role of women to reconcile conflicts between relatives during the election. In the first week after the election, female relatives visited the opposition relatives' house and brought food, snacks, and fruit to show forgiveness and reconciliation. Because the southern political society is under the patronage system, they recognize that the relatives are the vital network. Conflicts may arise for a short time and then return to compromise because they know they do not want to get out of this network. Also, local women have already linked themselves to the patronage network of local politicians. Consequently, they benefit from local leaders. For example, they are on a committee on projects created by the village headman, and they receive financial support for their club activities.



Because of the lack of funding from the central government, women's groups in the village have to rely on financial support from local politicians (Jawanit 2005, p.217). Moreover, they can call the village headman personally to help when they get into trouble. Conversely, the village headman can also ask them to help with his work.

In short, women play essential roles in participating in local elections. They work both as housewives who prepare food for supporters and informal campaigners by visiting the constituents at home. New local political areas for women are the market, temple, and village clubs. Notably, although women are not seriously involved in local politics in everyday life, they are the hidden key during elections. Ultimately, women are mediators of conflict between relatives after the election. Apart from women playing an important role in local politics, many southern women joined the demonstrations against Thaksin's government in the period 2005-2014, which led to two coups in a decade.

#### **4. The participation of southern women in national protests with the PAD and PDRC**

Southern women who traveled to Bangkok to join rally against the Thaksin government were mostly new protesters who had never participated in major political demonstrations in Thailand, such as the events of October 1973, October 1976, and May 1992. Participation in the PAD and PDRC rally was the first and vital political experience of their lives. They are proud to be a part of the history of Thai politics to protect the monarchy from fraudulent governments. Although the beginning of the protest was a result of the corruption of the Thaksin government, later, the main purpose of the demonstrators was to destroy Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin was accused of disloyalty to King Bhumibol. The royalists were very concerned about the growing power and prestige of Thaksin because his party won in the second election with overwhelming votes. Thaksin was able to form a single-party government for the first time in Thai political history. Therefore, a massive wave of people has poured into joining the PAD and PDRC rallies, which were the largest and longest ever political rallies in Thailand.

The PAD rally began in late 2005 when Sonthi Limthongkul criticized Prime Minister Thaksin for corruption on the TV program "Weekly Thailand" implying that Thaksin did not respect the monarchy. It caused his program to be withdrawn from television in the middle of September 2005 (McCargo 2009, p.8). Thereafter, Sonthi started to criticize Thaksin in public areas in Bangkok and big cities. In addition, he broadcasted via his satellite TV-ASTV, YouTube channel, and website. Later, civil society activists and NGOs, who disagreed with Thaksin's policies but could not hold a rally for a long time and could not gather many people, joined with Sonthi and became the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). It was established on February 8, 2006. The yellow shirt was the main symbol of PAD, and later, it added a blue scarf. Yellow symbolizes King Bhumibol, and blue symbolizes Queen Sirikit. PAD announced a request to return royal powers to the king by the king could exercise power to appoint the prime minister under Article 7 of the Constitution. The PAD interpreted that as when the political crisis occurred, the king could use his power to solve the situation (Post reporters 2006, pp.1-3).

The PDRC (People's Democratic Reform Committee) began with a campaign against the Amnesty Act that allowed former Prime Minister Thaksin to return to Thailand without criminal offense. The Democrat Party, the opposition party, could not fight in the parliamentary, so the MPs of Democrats needed to fight on the streets by holding a public protest. The rally was led by Suthep Thaugsuban, Democrat Party Secretary and former director of the Center for Emergency Situation (CRES), who used violence to suppress the red shirts in 2010. The anti-Yingluck government is directly linked to anti-Thaksin (Yingluck's brother). The leaders of PDRC used the idea of fighting for the King from the PAD to call people to join the rally. Moreover, they used the religious ideology of good people as the dharma army against the devil, Thaksin and Yingluck governments, which were dangerous to the nation, to religion, and to the King. PDRC had to eliminate Thaksin and Yingluck from Thailand completely (Anusorn and Apichart 2018, pp.55-57).

Loyalty to the monarchy, which is the country's central ideology, is closely linked to the local religion, rituals, and festivals of the south. The local monks always mix royal duties and royal speech to the Lord Buddha's teachings. For example, The Vessantara sermon, which is very popular in the south, is linked to the King Bhumibol as the King who sacrifices for Thai people (Jory 2016, pp.3-5). Therefore, the King was regarded as the highest virtue of the villagers. Southern women believe that participating in PAD and PDRC rallies are comparable to accumulating merit because they are devoted to protecting the monarchy as having great merit. A female shopkeeper who joined the PDRC rally said, "I joined the protest because I was worried about King Bhumibol will be destroyed from Thaksin. His Majesty is the best person in Thailand. He has sacrificed for our country for a long time. Protecting the King is like making significant merit because I am protecting the country's highest virtue" (interviewed on September 14, 2016). The important reasons that southern women join both rallies are: firstly, they want to protect the monarchy from Thaksin, and secondly, they support the Democrat Party, which was the opposition party to the Thaksin Party since 2001. Thaksin won the national election in 2001; after that, the Democrat Party had never won until now. However, the Democrat Party gained more votes from the south in terms of both scores and the number of MPs. It can be said that southerners voted for the Democrats to show that they were against Thaksin.

Although southern women are active in local politics, many did not get involved in the national election because they were sure that the Democrats would win in the south. However, the number of MPs from the south was not able to make the Democrat's government. Therefore, they agreed with the proposal of PAD for the new law of parliament: 80% appointed MPs and 20% elected MPs. Moreover, they supported the proposal of the PDRC that all MPs should be appointed by PDRC leaders close to the Democrat Party. The PDRC was, therefore, the first political protest that did not accept the democratic electoral process. Southern women joined the PDRC in blocking the general election on February 2, 2014, causing violent clashes in Bangkok. However, blocking polling stations in the south was peaceful because the officials and voters were willing to stop the poll. Also, the Democrat Party, which the southerners intended to vote for, boycotted in this election. Ultimately,

the Constitutional Court determined the election as invalid (Anusorn and Apichart 2018, pp.51-52).

Apart from the Democrat Party supporting the yellow-shirt rally, many southern NGOs joined the protests, both the PAD and PDRC. Previously, around the 1990s, local NGOs were concerned with women's issues on income, health, education, environmental conservation, and political participation. Many NGO schemes worked with women, which engaged the NGOs with women in the villages and built their network (Jawanit 2005, pp.218-219). When the NGOs supported the yellow-shirt protests, they also informally encouraged southern women in their NGO network to participate in the protests. The pattern of traveling to the PDRC rally in Bangkok by southern women can be divided into three groups: (1) the greatest number of interviewees, they traveled with sponsors from the patronage network of local politicians who had a relationship with the Democrat Party. This group traveled by bus or van provided by local politicians, and local politicians supported the cost of the trip. (2) some of them traveled with the local NGOs network, which is against the populist policies of Prime Minister Thaksin and local capitalism. Southern women and NGOs were quite close because they worked together, and they had a firm network in the south. Some women's groups, such as the environmental conservation group, joined the rally to request their group's proposal. And (3) the same amount of the informants as the number 2, they traveled by themselves. They might travel alone or with relatives or friends without any connection to the local leader network. These women themselves were responsible for travel expenses. Most of them were government officials and private employees who worked outside the village. They did not actively political involvement at the village; therefore, they were not networks of local politicians and NGOs.

The women are close to the local politicians' network because they support local elections. When the local politicians, who relate to the Democrats, persuaded and facilitated travel to join the rally in Bangkok, women, who were in the local politicians' network, were willing to join the PDRC. Additionally, it was not only to express political awareness at the national level but also to maintain relationships with local politicians. At the rally in Bangkok, southern women often listened to the leaders' speeches throughout the day. At night, they rested in front of the stage, while people from Bangkok tended to join in the evenings after work until late at night and then went home. They volunteered to help in the kitchen - to cook and distribute food for the protesters. They completed miscellaneous tasks for which the leaders asked their cooperation (Anusorn and Apichart 2018, p.84). These activities were similar to the tasks in a temple in village festivals.

Generally, when it came to local politics, women did not clearly show which politicians they supported; in this instance, however, they openly revealed that they supported the PAD and PDRC, as being part of both rallies meant that they were loyal to the monarchy. Moreover, they thought that they became political experts after joining the rallies. They enthusiastically followed political news on satellite television - ASTV of PAD and Bluesky channel of PDRC. These women took the content from ASTV and Bluesky channel and discussed them in female public spaces, such as markets, clubs, and temples. In particular, women who had just returned from Bangkok shared their political experience and disseminated the ideas of PAD and PDRC with female villagers.

These women were regarded as knowledgeable and experienced in politics like men. A housewife, who joined the PDRC rally, said, “After returning from the protest, I realize that I had much understanding of the corruption of the Thaksin government. I had to tell this story to the people in my village to let them know the badness of the Thaksin regime. I felt that my neighbors were interested in and accept my knowledge and my opinions. My fellow men who did not attend the rally also came to my house to talk, and they respected me for being courageous to join the rally” (interviewed on September 9, 2016).

In short, southern women joined the PAD and PDRC rallies for two essential reasons: to protect the monarchy and to support the Democrat Party. Most of them traveled to central rallies in Bangkok by supporting local politicians who had the patronage network with the Democrat Party. Some of them joined the rallies with the local NGOs that they worked with in the village. When these women returned from protests in Bangkok, they were respected as political experts. They were responsible for sharing the ideology of the PAD and PDRC with other women in the village. These women took part in local public sphere, which initially belonged to men.

## **5. Conclusion**

Southern men occupy the local political public sphere with political knowledge and political experience. For women, their power appears only in areas within the household. They do not openly participate or play a key role in the public sector. However, when decentralizing local areas, people have more opportunities to vote at the local level. Women are more enthusiastic about getting involved in local politics. Although they are not leaders, women are vital supporters in the electoral process and conflict resolution.

Additionally, during the last decade, women from the South played a prominent role in joining the PAD and PDRC rallies, two movements against the democratic process. They joined the demonstrations because they wanted to protect the monarchy and support the Democrat Party. They actively follow, as well as disseminate, information and the ideology of the rallies to other women in a village. The local public spaces where women met and discussed were markets, temples, and local clubs. They have a significant increase in political knowledge and experience through participation in rallies. Importantly, local political participation has bound women to build and maintain local political networks; formerly, political patronage was specifically for local men. It helps women gain respect, benefit, and expand their political area.

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