

Politicizing Gender and Cleanliness: Roles of Elderly Women in Municipality Waste Management in Southern Thailand



Nisane Chaiprakobwiriya

Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

This study explores the role of elderly women in municipal waste management in Southern Thailand, focusing on how they navigate and influence local leadership through gender and cleanliness. As Thailand transitions into the most aged society in Southeast Asia, elderly women increasingly use community waste management as a political tool. Through their involvement in these activities, they advocate for urban land ownership and exert political influence within their villages, leveraging their extensive social capital to organize and lead environmental initiatives. Applying the Social Relations Approach developed by Kabeer (1994), this study examines the gender and power dynamics at play in municipal waste management. As women age, their caretaking responsibilities extend beyond their households, with both men and women in the community expecting them to lead efforts in maintaining cleanliness. While this expanded role might seem to empower these women, the study reveals that elderly women involved in waste management still lack access to leadership and decision-making positions at the municipal level. Despite their significant contributions to community cleanliness and environmental sustainability, elderly women remain marginalized within the formal structures of municipal governance. This study highlights the need to recognize and support the leadership potential of elderly women in waste management, emphasizing the importance of integrating their voices into decision-making processes to create more inclusive and effective environmental policies.

Biography:

Nisane Chaiprakobwiriya is a lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration at Chiang Mai University, Thailand. She holds a master's degree in International Development, with a specialization in Gender and Development, from the School of International Service at American University in Washington, D.C. Her research interests focus on gender politics and intersectionality, particularly exploring the connections between environmental issues and gendered power dynamics. Nisane previously served as a Gender Advisor for UNDP Thailand, as well as consulting firms and NGOs, where she contributed her expertise to areas such as civil engineering, urban development, clean energy and disaster preparedness.