Casting a Critical Lens on Global Development: A Multimethod Investigation of the Masculine Hegemonic Forces That Marginalize Women in Agriculture

Morgan Alyse Richardson Gilley
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations

Part of the Agricultural Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/5687

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
CASTING A CRITICAL LENS ON GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT: A MULTIMETHOD INVESTIGATION OF THE MASCULINE HEGEMONIC FORCES THAT MARGINALIZE WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Agricultural and Extension Education and Evaluation

by
Morgan Alyse Richardson Gilley
B.S., Louisiana State University, 2010
M.S., Louisiana State University, 2018
December 2021
This dissertation is dedicated to my very beloved late grandmothers; first to my Nana, Doris Turner Padgett, whose passion for learning and other cultures serves as a constant inspiration in my life. My love of learning and appreciation of other cultures comes from hearing stories about and watching you explore the far reaches of the world. I would not be who I am today without your influence. To my Maw-maw, Daisy Huguet Richardson, thank you for showing me the true strength of a woman. Raising and corralling six boys as well as serving as a strong family matriarch showed me how important a woman is and has played no small part in my desire to research and study women empowerment efforts.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my family, without whose support, my education would have never happened. To my husband James, thank you for your support, encouragement, and love throughout the entire exams and dissertation process. Your academic experience and willingness to provide little pushes is probably the only reason I made it this far in the process. I will never forget our mutual friend Frank the Focus Fox. To my mom Ann and dad Mike, thank you from the bottom of my heart for teaching me about the importance of education and the thrill of discovery. Your support and love throughout this process has been unending. Without you, absolutely none of this would have been possible. To my cousin Jesse, thank you for listening to me talk about my research and hanging in there when I became overwhelmed with everything. To my friend and academic confidant Whitney Figland, I could never have gotten through my time in graduate school without you as my sounding board and class buddy. To my many other family members and friends, thank you so very much for your support and encouragement; it has been invaluable.

I would also like to especially thank my committee chair, Dr. Richie Roberts, and committee members, Dr. J. Joey Blackburn, and Dr. Kristin Stair. Your patience, guidance, insights, and instruction were very much appreciated and were a crucial part of my success. Your investment in my (and others) achievements and success in this field is unparalleled, and I was lucky to have you all. A special thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Richie Roberts, without whose guidance and expertise, this project would have been nigh on impossible. Navigating the pandemic year and the movement to virtual research was certainly difficult, but with your help and support, it came together in the end.
Thank you also to all the other important academics who have contributed to my learning and success: Dr. Melissa Cater for your early guidance and support in my academic career. Dr. Janet Fox for many wonderfully spent class periods and discussions as well as your willingness to serve on my original committee. Dr. Michael Burnett for introducing me to the joys of research design, for caring about your students’ wellbeing, and for your guidance as head of our department. Finally, thank you to all my fellow graduate students that have come and gone throughout my purview as a graduate student. You have served as sounding boards, emotional counselors, and heated discussion partners. Thank you again to all of those that have supported me over the years it has taken me to complete this project.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................................ iii

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ vi

CHAPTER

1. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY ................................................................. 1

2. TROUBLING THE DISCOURSE ON GLOBAL AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF GENDER INEQUALITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA .............................................................................................................. 8

3. THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, MEDIA, AND POLICY: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS ON THAI NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE ........................................................................................................... 25

4. A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES AS AGRICULTURAL FACULTY IN THAILAND’S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM ......................................................................................................................... 47

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ......................................................................................... 66

APPENDIX

A. IRB APPROVAL ......................................................................................................................... 73

B. CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION ................................................................................ 75

C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .......................................................................................................... 77

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................................... 79

VITA ............................................................................................................................................... 100
ABSTRACT

A critical link between gender equality and agricultural development has been established in the literature. However, disparities between genders have persisted in many areas of the developing world. One strategy that has been used to reduce gender inequalities has been educational outreach opportunities through agricultural extension, which has provided women a critical pathway to empowerment. Despite this, a lack of knowledge on the experiences of women in agriculture throughout Southeast Asia has served as a barrier to the advancement of such work. This investigation sought to better understand the issues facing this region’s fight to attain gender equality. To achieve this, I researched the phenomenon through a three-article anthology. In the first article, I used a feminist critique to compare the gender inequalities experienced in agriculture across two developing regions – Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. The second article explored how gender, media, and policy intersected in Thailand through a content analysis approach. In particular, the article examined to what extent Thailand’s newspaper coverage focused on women in agriculture and described how they had been portrayed since the introduction of the Thailand 4.0 policy in 2016. In the final article, I used an instrumental case study design to examine the experiences of women and perceptions of female agricultural faculty in Thailand’s higher education system. Findings from this study provided a better understanding of the status of gender equality and women’s empowerment in Southeast Asia while also creating a case for regionally targeted agricultural extension programing to better address gendered issues. Moving forward, future research should explore these issues more in-depth with a larger sample size to determine what strategies could be scaled to create regionally specific agricultural extension programs for women.
CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Agricultural development and women’s empowerment have been inextricably linked as solutions to many of the world’s complex problems. In fact, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, asserted that addressing gender equality in the global arena is a prerequisite to furthering development goals (Duflo, 2012). Women empowerment has played an important role in combatting global gender inequality and other related issues such as poverty, poor health outcomes, and chronic malnutrition (Ugbomeh, 2001). Further, empowering women and promoting women’s rights can impact multiple facets of society, including political, economic, and cultural development. Reducing gender disparities, therefore, has been advanced to positively contribute to a nation’s development and prosperity (Malhotra et al., 2002; Sundström et al., 2017). For that reason, women’s empowerment has been considered a critical topic that has frequently been the subject of reports, policies, funding, and development goals for organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank (Duflo, 2012; Longwe, 2000; Malhotra et al., 2002; Mosedale, 2005; Sundaram et al., 2014; Unterhalter, 2012).

With the growing emphasis on reducing gender inequalities, women’s empowerment has become “a global phenomenon” (Mandal, 2013, p. 18). The ever-increasing movement of women’s empowerment has become a central issue because women across the globe, within almost every society, experience inequalities. Therefore, efforts to advance women’s positionality in society have become essential (Mandal, 2013). The definition of women’s empowerment is somewhat complicated and nuanced. For example, the term empowerment has been used to describe a wide variety of concepts related to advocacy and intervention strategies (Tandon, 2016). However, at its core, empowerment was created to describe the concept of power and the transfer of power that occurs over time (Mandal, 2013).
It is also important to understand that the women’s empowerment movement has a long and varied history. The movement began as an understated effort in which women bucked societal norms through quiet dissidence in the mid-17th century during the U.S. colonial era when women’s discontent had reached an inflection point. Soon thereafter, some prominent women began to seek to expand females’ agency and power in society. For example, Anne Hutchinson preached to women out of her home, and Abigail Smith Adams, the wife of John Adams, advocated for women’s rights and representation during the drafting of the U.S. Declaration of Independence (Kendall, 2001). Inspired by these efforts, the women’s suffrage movement and female organized protests began appearing in the early-to-mid 19th Century. As a result of this work, a cascade effect began in which the women witnessed more significant enfranchisement and rights across the globe (Markoff, 2003).

The global women’s rights movement focused primarily on the legal rights of women in its early days. However, more recently, the focus has shifted to addressing the gender gap in the workforce and inequalities experienced by women globally (Kaur, 2009). These issues have remained at the forefront of many human rights movements worldwide. In fact, women’s rights have been considered by many to be an integral aspect of human rights (Bunch, 1990; Sundström et al., 2017). Although women’s ability to vote has been expanded throughout much of the world, in the 21st Century, women have been reported to continue to experience discrimination, economic and educational disadvantages, sexual objectification, violence, and pressure to be ladylike (Kaur, 2009; Robinson, 2003).

Because of the persistence of these issues, empowerment and gender equality have, understandably, become a focus in international development efforts over the past century. It has also become a central concept discussed in development literature (Hennink et al., 2012).
Therefore, finding effective ways to engender women’s empowerment efforts is vital to global progress. Perhaps the most effective way to advance women’s empowerment is through education. For instance, educational programming has been shown to foster gender equality by helping women cultivate the skills and technical knowledge needed for success (Akter et al., 2017; U.N. Women, 2018). Agricultural extension, a form of educational programming, has been used across the globe to reduce gender inequalities in rural populations (Lecoutere et al., 2019).

To this point, extension programming has been shown to profoundly impact agriculture, rural development, and women in spaces across the globe (Lecoutere et al., 2019; Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019; Roberts & Edwards, 2017). Extension programming can not only lead to direct benefits for women in these rural areas, such as training in employment and technical skills but can have indirect benefits as well. Some of these benefits include lowering fertility and maternal mortality rates as well as leading to impactful improvements in health and nutrition (Ugbomeh, 2001).

Further, the use of “participatory, people-centered, agricultural extension approaches” has the potential for far-reaching impacts on women’s empowerment (Charman, 2008, p. 6). For example, agricultural extension has been used to improve women’s knowledge, capacity for decision-making, and adoption and use of modern agricultural practices (Ugbomeh, 2001; Lecoutere et al., 2019). Moreover, Charman (2008) suggested that agricultural extension could also improve women’s empowerment by introducing them to new methods of commodity production, processing, packaging, and marketing.

Agricultural extension can also address critical aspects to women’s empowerment such as (a) access to markets, (b) financial freedom, (c) community organizations, and (d) collectives (Charman, 2008; Lecoutere et al., 2019). By providing women with the tools they need to
produce better products, they can gain financial freedom, decision-making power, and more autonomy (Charman, 2008; Lecoutere et al., 2019). Because of deeply entrenched gender inequalities in the developing world, many efforts have used female extension agents to conduct training for women by women. Utilizing women in extension “enables more meaningful interaction and training to occur” (Wilcox et al., 2015, p. 5). Research has found that expressing their needs, issues, and concerns openly with other women results in increased and more impactful positive outcomes (Wilcox, 2015). Despite the advances that agricultural extension has brought to the women’s empowerment movement, persistent gender disparities endure in the developing world that limit, mute, and minimize women in agriculture.

**Statement of the Problem**

Women’s empowerment has been strongly linked to the global fight for gender equality (Malhotra et al., 2002; Sundström et al., 2017). Although significant strides have been made to advance women’s position in the agricultural sector, more progress is needed (Richardson & Roberts, 2020; Roberts & Edwards, 2017). On a global scale, women comprise approximately half the population, but they remain heavily oppressed and marginalized (Mandal, 2013). For example, compared to their male counterparts, women in developing countries typically have fewer legal rights, access to extension services, representation in the media, and opportunities in higher education (Dominick, 2002; Nguyen et al., 2019; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011; Neubauer, 2019; Oosthuizen, 2012; Rola-Rubzen et al., 2020; Richardson & Roberts, 2020; Roberts & Edwards, 2017; Simon & Hoyt, 2013).

Addressing the aforementioned gender inequalities has been shown to lead to greater economic, personal, and political empowerment for women (Lecoutere et al., 2019; Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019). Despite this, a problem endures because little is known about the
positionality that women have assumed as they navigate gendered disparities in extension, the media, and higher education, particularly in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand. As a result, a need emerged to understand how these forces have marginalized women and limited efforts to advance global gender equality.

**Overview of the Study**

**Population and Data Collection**

In order to fully identify women’s empowerment and extension efforts, I researched the phenomenon through a three-article anthology. Each article analyzed women’s empowerment in Southeast Asian agriculture using a qualitative approach to promote a more in-depth look at the phenomenon. The first two articles used data from primary and secondary sources, including a comprehensive review of the literature and online news articles. Additional details regarding the data collection methodology for each of the first two articles can be found in the article text.

I conducted the third article with female faculty from three separate agriculture higher education institutions in Thailand. Because of its nature as a qualitative study, I developed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). Before initial contact with the participants, I received approval from the LSU AgCenter Institutional Review Board (IRBAG-20-0048, see Appendix B). Per requirements, each request for an interview included a description of the study, statement of confidentiality, informed consent, and contact information.

**Organization of Dissertation Articles**

As mentioned previously, this study was organized into a series of three articles that aimed to contribute to a growing body of literature about women’s empowerment efforts in Southeast Asia. This chapter provided a background of the study and an overview of the relevant issues. Chapters two, three, and four include a targeted background, purpose, methodology,
findings, and conclusions for each article. Chapter two intended to answer part one of the purpose statement by exploring the regional differences between two regions—the widely studied region of Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, a region often neglected in women’s empowerment research. Chapters three and four sought to answer the second part of this dissertation’s purpose—to examine and explore the gender inequalities experienced by women in Southeast Asia’s, specifically Thailand’s, agricultural sector. Specifically, these two chapters provided a more in-depth look at the realities of gender inequalities faced by Thai women in the agricultural sector. The final chapter summarized the comprehensive conclusions, implications, and recommendations resulting from a synthesis of the three articles’ findings. Finally, the remaining sections of this chapter provide a brief overview of each article’s purpose, guiding questions, and methods.

**Article One.** I employed a feminist critique approach in article one to provide a philosophical look at the prevailing ideas in the global women’s empowerment narrative, specifically within Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. The purpose of this first article was to critique how gender issues and inequalities in the two regions have served to marginalize women in the agricultural industry. Additionally, this study explored the differences in women’s lack of power and whether those differences have implications for the implementation of women empowerment efforts and agricultural extension programming. The major guiding question was: *How are Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa similar yet unique concerning gender inequalities in the agricultural sector?* This exploration of the potential differences between the two geographical regions was achieved through extensive review and critique of the research on women’s issues in each region.
Article Two. The purpose of article two was twofold: (1) to determine to what extent Thailand’s newspaper coverage focused on topics related to women and the agricultural industry; and (2) to describe how women in agriculture have been portrayed in newspaper coverage from 2016 to 2020. To investigate such, I used a qualitative content analysis approach to examine textual, visual, and other forms of media. The analysis employed a qualitative coding process to reduce the information gathered, as outlined by Saldaña (2021), through coding the data. This coding process allowed me to assign meaning to data and determine patterns, categories, and emergent themes (Saldaña, 2021).

Article Three. The purpose of article three was to examine the experiences and perceptions of women faculty in agricultural programs in Thailand’s higher education system. This study focused on potential barriers and gender issues experienced by the participants’ positions as women working in higher education. There were two guiding objectives: (1) gain insight into participants’ experiences as women faculty in a historically male-dominated field within a still developing country, and (2) explore the potential barriers women agriculture faculty experience regarding gender disparities in higher education. Data collection involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews guided by an IRB-approved interview protocol. Following collection, data were analyzed via the previously mentioned qualitative coding process outlined by Saldaña (2021) to develop study findings.
CHAPTER 2
TROUBLING THE DISCOURSE ON GLOBAL AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF GENDER INEQUALITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Introduction and Review of Literature

Development in the agricultural sector is vital to small-scale farmers and rural inhabitants across the globe, especially in developing nations (Davis et al., 2020; Msuya et al., 2017). For example, previous research has suggested that small-scale farmers in these regions play an essential role in creating food security because their agricultural output constitutes a significant proportion of their nation’s food supply (Altieri, 2009; Azadi et al., 2015; Jouzi et al., 2017; Tscharntke et al., 2012). Further, nations in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have also demonstrated the critical role of agricultural production in driving national and regional economic growth (Azadi et al., 2015; Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2011a). However, the roles of gender equality and women empowerment in these spaces have been historically ignored in global agricultural development (Lecoutere et al., 2019; Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019; Richardson & Roberts, 2020).

Despite this, some researchers have demonstrated that a lack of gender equality in emergent economies has slowed progress by stifling agricultural development (Malhotra et al., 2002; Sundstrom et al., 2017). To demonstrate, previous evidence has shown that a statistically significant and positive relationship existed between the empowerment of women and improved food security for developing nations (Akter et al., 2017; Harper et al., 2013; Sraboni et al., 2014). However, a complex array of intersecting trends has further compounded gender inequalities in these regions, particularly in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.
Perhaps the most common factor reported to diminish opportunities for women in agriculture is the gendered roles that women assume in the agricultural industry. In Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, women have been relegated to specific agricultural tasks because of socio-cultural perceptions that have shaped views about gender and abilities (Akter et al., 2017; Mogues et al., 2009; Richardson & Roberts, 2020; Roberts & Edwards, 2017). In particular, women are often responsible for menial and repetitive tasks such as manual harvesting, post-harvest production, seeding, transplanting, weeding, and more (Akter et al., 2017; Mogues et al., 2009). Further, they are also accountable for household management duties such as childcare, food preparation, and water sourcing (Mogues et al., 2009). On the other hand, men engage in administrative and management roles in which they often possess more power to make decisions and mobilize resources in agriculture (Akter et al., 2017).

Another trend that affects Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa is a lack of educational access (Beeby, 2013). Specifically, over 50% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa have only completed between one and seven years of schooling (Lewin, 2009). In rural spaces, the trend is more striking. For example, 43% of women in rural Rwanda have not obtained a formal education (Kemirembe et al., 2007). Similar trends have been reported throughout the region of Southeast Asia. In an analysis of gendered educational disparities in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand, most women had only finished one to six years of education (Akter et al., 2017). In contrast, more than 50% of their male counterparts had achieved a secondary diploma. Therefore, finding innovative and sustainable ways to support women in agriculture through education and training is critical to meeting global development goals (FAO, 2011b).

One approach that has been advanced to address gender-based disparities in these regions is agricultural extension programs. Extension programming, a form of educational outreach, for
women has been shown to promote alternative farming methods, commodity processing, crop production, and the marketing of agricultural products (Charman, 2008; Ugbomeh, 1995). However, the benefits of extension programming have been reported to extend beyond the development of technical agricultural knowledge and skills. For instance, some evidence has suggested that extension programming can improve women’s attitudes about adopting new agricultural practices while empowering them to have the agency needed to make critical business decisions (Lecoutere et al., 2019; Ugbomeh, 1995).

More recent literature in extension (Lecoutere et al., 2019; Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019; Richardson & Roberts, 2020; Roberts & Edwards, 2017) has examined the roles of gendered norms and stereotypes. These studies have concluded that excluding women from extension programming negatively affects agriculture. For example, although women account for more than 50% of the workforce in developing countries (FAO, 2011b, 2014), in Ethiopia and Timor Leste, women have been disproportionately represented in agricultural extension programming, which has negatively affected each country’s agricultural productivity, family incomes, and food security (Akter et al., 2020; Tarekegne & Dessie, 2020). This trend has been reported to extend more broadly throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia (Bosch et al., 2014; Girón & Kazemikhasragh, 2021).

As a result, Richardson and Roberts (2020) called for extension professionals to reimagine programming in ways that can empower women in agriculture to better traverse male-dominated spaces. To accomplish this, it is critical to understand how gender-based inequalities converge and diverge for extension professionals as they navigate deeply entrenched gender norms at the regional level (Roberts & Edwards, 2017). Pursuing this notion further, Akter et al. (2017) explained: “If region-specific information on gender gaps, gender needs, and constraints
remain unknown and unaccounted for, the commonly utilized gender intervention frameworks...will be incompatible…” (p. 271).

**Theoretical Perspective**

In framing this investigation, I used a feminist theoretical perspective to guide my decision-making (Crotty, 1998). When using this lens, researchers seek to critique gendered forces in hopes of spurring social change to improve the lives of women and other marginalized populations (Bailey, 2012). Instead of traditional forms of inquiry that focus on the creation of knowledge, feminist scholars call for action by critiquing norms and traditions that preserve systems of oppression (Bailey, 2016). In particular, Fonow and Cook (1991, 2005) advanced five values that guide feminist work: (1) a spirit of critique, (2) opposition to declarations of objectivity in the research process, (3) consciousness that gender is a force that has historically guided beliefs and thought, (4) ethical and equitable research practices, and (5) an intent to transform cultural, institutional, and societal norms that limit opportunities for women.

In this investigation, I embedded the values advanced by Fonow and Cook (1991, 2005) in each phase to critique the roles that women have assumed in the agricultural systems of Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In these regions, women regularly construct their professional identity to fulfill job duties and tasks perceived as more feminine based within local customs and traditions (Bosch et al., 2014). When viewing this practice through a feminist lens (Crotty, 1998), these internalized behaviors should be recognized as harmful because they can hinder women’s participation in agriculture and their ability to move into positions that allow them to achieve decision-making power. Consequently, I sought to investigate the hierarchies that have enabled masculine hegemonic structures, i.e., male dominance and power, to be sustained over time in agriculture within the two developing regions.
Statement of Purpose, Rationale, and Research Question

Although gender inequalities exist in all cultures (Bailey, 2016), Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa were chosen as the focal points for this study. I chose these regions because the discourse on gender in agriculture has historically depicted this issue as occurring uniformly across developing nations (Akter et al., 2020; Tarekegne & Dessie, 2020). However, little knowledge has existed about the underlying assumptions and implications of representing women in this way. As a result, I considered who might be responsible for this portrayal of women? Who benefitted from this representation? And, do consequences exist for this depiction of women in agricultural extension and global development? These questions illuminated the need to explore a more in-depth portrayal of women in agriculture by examining the contextual differences between the two regions.

This study aimed to critique how gender inequalities in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have marginalized women in agriculture. Through this critique, I also explored differences regarding women’s lack of power and its implications for agricultural extension programming and global development. One research question guided this inquiry: How are Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa similar yet unique concerning gender inequalities in the agricultural sector?

Methods and Procedures

This study was framed by using a feminist critique approach (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Feminist critiques are a form of philosophical research that allows scholars to analyze prevailing ideas while also troubling their underlying assumptions using a gendered lens. As a result, the intent is to promote critical thinking and debate about an issue rather than offer empirical truths. When using this approach, researchers recognize that women are not
marginalized equally across contexts. Instead, they question why gendered norms intersect with multiple inequalities such as class, disability, race, sexuality, and socioeconomic status (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). As a result, the intent is to uplift the marginalized voices of women by interrogating the sociohistorical structures that have impeded their agency.

To achieve this, I critiqued existing research and theory on women’s issues in agriculture for Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Then, I synthesized the product of this work into a narrative to demonstrate the contextual nature of gender inequalities in global agricultural development. I used three sources of data to fulfill this purpose: (a) books, (b) peer-refereed journal articles, and (c) reports from intergovernmental agencies and research centers. It is important to note that this investigation focused exclusively on 15 developing nations, seven from the region of Southeast Asia and eight from Sub-Saharan Africa. The countries chosen for analysis from the Southeast Asian region included: Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Meanwhile, Sub-Saharan Africa nations were Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The decision to include these countries as part of the review and synthesis stems from the availability of peer-refereed research on gender inequalities. For example, during the literature review, the 15 Sub-Saharan African nations had quality empirical data that had been published in academic journals.

After a systematic review of each data source, I synthesized the findings in a textual narrative (Popay et al., 2006). To begin this process, I divided the data into two groups that represented the regions under investigation to facilitate a systematic comparison of the study’s findings. Then, I engaged in multiple cycles of open coding to generate a holistic view of the phenomenon (Saldaña, 2021). Thereafter, I engaged in pattern coding to scrutinize relationships
among the open codes to reduce the data into categories (Saldaña, 2021). This allowed me to observe similarities and differences between the two regions and understand how the phenomenon manifested. Consequently, I examined the gender inequalities in Southeast Asia’s and Sub-Saharan Africa’s agricultural sectors while also offering a critique of such using the feminist lens.

**Gender Inequality in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa**

Through my analysis of the evidence on gender inequalities in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, I identified three primary issues across the two regions: (1) access to land ownership, (2) power in decision-making, and (3) male control of agricultural extension services. These gender inequalities demonstrate that masculine ideology and power are prevalent across Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, both regions actively perpetuate the caricature of women as the farmer’s wife. This misrepresentation downplays the critical functions performed by women in the agricultural industry by depicting them in a subservient, diminished role even though they carry out an overwhelming majority of the essential duties (Mogues et al., 2009). However, these issues do not tell the complete story of the marginalization of women. In this feminist critique, therefore, I sought to draw distinctions regarding how the three primary gender inequalities identified in this investigation were contextually situated in the agricultural industry for each region.

**Southeast Asia**

Although women in some countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, have been reported to be more empowered than other nations in the developing world, gender inequalities persist (Richardson & Roberts, 2020). It is critical to understand that women often hold legal rights to land and property in this region. However, this “legal access to resources does not
always produce control over their use" (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 2). In some areas of Southeast Asia, high levels of illiteracy result in women being unaware of their right to control resources and knowledge that they jointly own land with their husbands. In Cambodia, for example, although women have equal access to land, the patriarchal practices entrenched in society result in male land and asset ownership dominance and few opportunities to obtain agency (Nguyen et al., 2019). This trend has also been reported in other nations such as Myanmar and the Philippines (Akter et al., 2017).

Although gender inequalities regarding land ownership persist, women in Southeast Asia often report joint or sole decision-making power in agricultural production decisions (Colfer et al., 2015). Further, in Indonesia and the Philippines, women predominantly make household-based decisions and exhibit control over their earnings (Akter et al., 2016; Akter et al., 2017; IFAD, 2013). Meanwhile, major spending and credit-based decisions for agricultural production are typically made cooperatively between married couples (Colfer et al., 2015).

Despite these glimpses of agency, Nguyen et al. (2019) argued that women in this region remain undervalued for their economic contributions. As a result, they are forced into rudimentary jobs in agriculture. Additionally, women in Southeast Asia have fewer opportunities than their male counterparts for upward mobility in their careers (Nguyen et al., 2019). These issues are further compounded by technological advancements in agriculture that primarily target males, which often results in a deficit of knowledge-sharing behaviors (Squire, 2002; Rola-Rubzen et al., 2020). For example, new equipment for farming has been traditionally designed for the male physique (Kawarazuka et al., 2018; Rola-Rubzen et al., 2020). As a result, innovations in agriculture tend to be heavier and more cumbersome for women (Rola-Rubzen et al., 2020). Because of this availability deficit, women often lack basic knowledge about
emerging technologies (Kawarazuka et al., 2018). And, they have primarily been forced to gain new knowledge about agriculture from female peers and magazine publications (Bakar, 2011).

The suppression of women’s knowledge through the lack of access to education, professional development, and resources in Southeast Asia has deeply entrenched sociohistorical origins (Richardson & Roberts, 2020). Similarly, agricultural extension services, a form of educational outreach, have also been controlled by men (Mason & Smith, 2003). This form of gender inequality further marginalizes women in agriculture (Akter et al., 2020). To demonstrate, Akter et al. (2017) explained that women in Myanmar and Indonesia perceived a lack of access to extension services, despite having more direct contact with agents than men (Akter et al., 2017). Similarly, women in the Philippines have been reported to participate more consistently in agricultural-focused meetings than their male counterparts. Akter et al. (2017) also suggested that men may be more likely to listen and discuss the agricultural-related knowledge conveyed by their wives. Consequently, development efforts in this region should examine whether upholding masculine hegemonic structures as the status quo could be stifling progress for agriculture.

**Sub-Saharan Africa**

The gender equalities experienced by women in Sub-Saharan Africa have been documented more thoroughly than in other developing regions (Brown et al., 2017; Manfre et al., 2013; Wekesah et al., 2019). However, concerning trends endure (Roberts & Edwards, 2017). For instance, throughout the region, most women lack equal rights to own land and property (Bosch et al., 2014). Further, in Sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 70% of women claimed they cultivated their husband’s land (Bosch et al., 2014). Additionally, women’s essential duties and responsibilities in agriculture have been primarily controlled by males in their families (Davis,
2008; Ogunlela & Mukhtar, 2009). For instance, Mudukuti and Miller (2002) reported that women in Zimbabwe identified “permission by husband” and a “lack of access to credit” as two of their major barriers to their advancement in agriculture (p. 296). Meanwhile, some studies have shown that men regularly overrule decisions made by their wives when adopting agricultural innovations (Brown et al., 2017; Wekesah et al., 2019). In fact, Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2009) suggested that women only made from 1% to 2.5% of the agricultural-based decision in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Other issues concerning the roles women assume in agriculture inhibit progress in the region. For example, women in Sub-Saharan Africa are often not recognized for the labor they provide. When describing this phenomenon, Berkelaar (2017) explained that this gendered norm resulted in the “invisibility of women’s works” (p. 5). As a consequence, women continue to be viewed as secondary farm labor rather than intellectuals with knowledge and agency to make informed decisions (Paris & Truong, 2005).

Another patriarchal force that complicates agricultural development in Sub-Saharan Africa is the role of cultural taboos and norms that stifle women’s access to extension services. To illustrate, in many areas of the region, it is still believed that the head of household, which is often a male, is the only appropriate recipient of agricultural extension services. Many leaders of agricultural development efforts also mistakenly assume agricultural knowledge-sharing flows freely between the men and women of a household; however, such is often not the case (Fong & Bhushan, 1996; Manfre et al., 2013). This gender inequality has been reported in Ethiopia, where regardless of their involvement with agricultural activities, males reiterated that “women do not farm” (Mogues et al., 2009, p. 9). Therefore, women are often reduced to the role of only being a farmer’s wife (Nguyen et al., 2019; Rola-Rubzen et al., 2020). Because of this, women are
overlooked as potential students, and their farming contributions are depicted as help rather than an illectual agrarian (Rola-Rubzen et al., 2020).

Another contextual factor regulating opportunities for women in this region is that most extension agents are male (Akeredolu, 2008; Mogues et al., 2009). In some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, heavy restrictions about women interacting with males outside of their families remain. Although female extension agents exist, they focus primarily on providing women with education about household management and female reproductive issues rather than agriculture (Mogues et al., 2009). Additionally, cultural norms and restrictions often prevent women from speaking when they participate in educational opportunities for agriculture (Manfre et al., 2013). As a result, women have been effectively blocked from receiving access to agricultural extension services. Several other contextual-based factors have been reported regarding women’s lack of participation in extension. In particular, women in Sub-Saharan African do not participate because they (a) fear a violent response from men, (b) worry about expressing themselves in a public setting in which they lack power, (c) believe their views would be discarded, (d) lack agency regarding decision-making, and (e) time constraints (Mogues et al., 2019). As a result, women remain relegated to specific agricultural tasks because of deeply entrenched cultural norms on gender that work to devalue and minimize their roles in the agricultural industry (Akter et al., 2017; Mogues et al., 2009).

Conclusions

This study critiqued how gender inequalities in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have marginalized women in agriculture. As a result, I conclude that across the two regions, three dominant gender inequalities persist: (1) access to land ownership, (2) power in decision-making, and (3) male control of agricultural extension services. I also conclude that the gender
inequalities identified in this investigation were deeply contextual, and as a result, vary in how they are operationalized across regions. Such a finding has not been explored in the literature on gender inequalities and women empowerment in agriculture. As a result, it was critical to draw comparisons between the findings from each region to crystallize their similarities and differences. Table 1 presents the contextual differences between Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan African based on the gender inequalities identified in this investigation.

Table 1. A Comparison of Gender Inequalities in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Inequality</th>
<th>Southeast Asia</th>
<th>Sub-Saharan Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to Land Ownership</td>
<td>• Women have legal rights to land and property</td>
<td>• Most women lack legal rights to own land and property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Women possess little control over the use of their land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power in Decision-Making</td>
<td>• Women hold joint or sole decision-making power</td>
<td>• Women’s roles in agriculture have been largely controlled by males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Spending and credit-based decisions are made cooperatively</td>
<td>• Men regularly overrule decisions and do not share knowledge with women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Control of Extension Services</td>
<td>• Women lack access to extension, despite having more direct contact with agents</td>
<td>• Most extension agents are male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Women gain new knowledge about agriculture from female peers and magazine publications, rather than extension agents</td>
<td>• Cultural norms and restrictions often prevent women from speaking when, and if, they do participate in extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women are effectively blocked from receiving extension services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access to land ownership demonstrated that considerable variation existed between Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. As such, I conclude that women in Southeast Asia are likely to possess legal rights, specifically the ability to own land and property (Nguyen et al., 2019). Nevertheless, women in this region lack awareness about their land ownership status and often do not possess the power needed to control their resources (Akter et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019). In Sub-Saharan Africa, however, women cannot legally own land and have little
influence over the use of their family’s property (Bosch et al., 2014). As a result, I conclude that males primarily regulate women’s agency regarding land ownership and resource use in both regions. So far, this concept does not appear to have thoroughly explored in the literature.

The second gender inequality, power in decision-making, revealed other key differences between Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. As an illustration, women in Southeast Asia often reported exhibiting joint or sole decision-making power (Akter et al., 2013), and decisions involving household finances and management, women’s influence has been reported to be even more prominent in this region (Akter et al., 2017; Colfer et al., 2015). However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, women were less likely to be consulted about agricultural and farming-related decisions (Damisa & Yohanna, 2007; Ogunlela & Mukhtar, 2009). Consequently, I conclude that women in Southeast Asia have been more empowered to make agricultural decisions than those in Sub-Saharan Africa, a topic that does not appear to have been adequately studied in the broader literature on women’s issues.

I also conclude that sociocultural perceptions greatly influence the power women in agriculture exhibit in Southeast Asia. This notion materializes through the symbolic power associated with machinery and equipment usage. For example, in Southeast Asia, agricultural technology continues to be created for the male physique (Kawarazuka et al., 2018). Ultimately, this limits women’s access to agricultural innovations (Rola-Rubzen et al., 2020). Additionally, men in Southeast Asia are likely to associate the ability to use machines with greater decision-making power, as depicted in data from Vietnam (Kawarazuka et al., 2018; Rola-Rubzen et al., 2020). Therefore, I conclude that these sociocultural perceptions limit women in Southeast Asia’s access to education and professional development opportunities in agriculture, especially those designed to diffuse new agricultural technology. This concept aligns with the data reported
by Kawarazuka et al. (2018) and Rola-Rubzen (2020), which suggests that agricultural technology and innovations focus on male usage.

For the final gender inequality identified in this investigation, male control of extension services, I conclude that stark similarities and differences existed between Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, both regions promoted the caricature of the farmer’s wife to regulate women to gender-based tasks and roles in agriculture. As a consequence, in both regions, women are often overlooked and even purposefully excluded from agricultural extension programming (Rola-Rubzen et al., 2020). This finding supports the work reported by other researchers in agricultural and extension education (Richardson & Roberts, 2020; Roberts & Edwards, 2017), which indicated that agricultural tasks and responsibilities are often divided down the gender line.

**Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations**

Understanding how gender inequalities limit women’s opportunities to engage in the agricultural industry is critical to furthering global development (Akter et al., 2017; Harper et al., 2013; Sraboni et al., 2014). The current investigation demonstrated that women in Southeast Asia appear to be more empowered than their counterparts in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was critical to contextualize how these differences manifested to provide recommendations for better navigating gender inequalities in agriculture in the future. Consequently, this feminist critique generated critical implications for research and practice.

First, I recommend that a targeted agricultural extension approach be created, via the utilization of change theory and cultural influences, to empower women in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, women in Southeast Asia need more knowledge about their rights as property owners so that they can better mobilize resources to build capital and scale
their agricultural enterprises. I also recommend that a targeted recruitment effort be created to encourage females to become agricultural extension agents in Sub-Saharan Africa. By increasing the number of females in this profession, perhaps the cultural taboos and norms that discourage women’s interactions with male extension agents could be alleviated (Fong & Bhushan, 1996; Manfre et al., 2013). In both regions, agricultural extension professionals should also emphasize improving (a) networking opportunities with other women and extension agents and (b) information about technology and mechanization of domestic and household management duties. By introducing women to technological advancements that target domestic and household tasks, perhaps this could help minimize time constraints and encourage them to seek out and attend new professional development opportunities (Satyavathi et al., 2010).

I also recommend that educational programs and campaigns be developed to inform women about their land ownership status and rights. Women in Southeast Asia often reported joint decision-making with their spouses but, ultimately, lacked knowledge about the specifics of land ownership (Akter et al., 2017). Educating women about their land ownership rights is an important step in fostering economic empowerment. Economic empowerment has been linked to greater levels of gender equality (Duflo, 2012). Developing extension programming to inform women of their legal rights in land ownership creates a pathway to greater economic freedom, which has been positively linked to gender equality (Duflo, 2012). Another focus of extension programming should be teaching women both the importance of decision-making and how to increase their decision-making skills regarding agricultural decisions. Research has demonstrated that decision-making can strengthen a woman’s position within the household and is an essential aspect to their empowerment (Meier zu Selhausen, 2016; Sell and Minot, 2018).
Additional research should also be conducted to understand better the knowledge-sharing behaviors in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. By obtaining a better understanding of how knowledge diffuses in women’s social networks, agricultural extension agents in each region could market programs and opportunities in culturally appropriate ways. Further, additional knowledge of the social network patterns could also help improve the effectiveness of information delivery through personal and technology-based mediums. Finally, understanding how women utilize their social groups for information sourcing might also help disseminate agricultural knowledge to women in rural, agricultural communities in each region.

Because of women’s emphasis on the importance of social exchanges in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, I recommend that additional formal and informal networking opportunities be created through agricultural extension programming. Through the creation of such opportunities, extension agents could gain greater access to the women in these regions. In addition, supporting networking connections and helping to strengthen social ties within the community might lead to a greater sense of collective agency and the free exchange of information (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019). This action is especially critical because of women in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa tendency to seek out close personal connections to help traverse challenges in agriculture (Brown et al., 2017; Manfre et al., 2013; Wekesah et al., 2019). I also recommend extension agents receive additional preparation and professional development opportunities to better support local women’s groups while also strengthening existing local social networks. Findings from this investigation suggested this could be an important step to reaching women in agricultural communities. Finally, because of their increased access to information and communication technologies (Bakar, 2011; Seenuankaew et al., 2018), efforts
should be made to create online resources to reach women who use mobile and web-based resources to seek answers to agricultural questions.
CHAPTER 3
THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, MEDIA, AND POLICY:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS ON THAI NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF
WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Introduction and Review of Literature

Addressing gender inequalities and furthering women’s empowerment is crucial to global agricultural development. Previous research has found that reducing gender inequalities can help advance agriculture and rural communities (FAO, 2011b; Seymour, 2017; World Bank, 2012). Women empowerment efforts have also been shown to lead to greater economic freedom and reduce barriers for women, which has inspired sustainable economic growth at the community level (Anderson et al., 2021; Duflo, 2012; Gates, 2014; Kabeer & Natali, 2013; Klasen, 2018). Consequently, gendered issues have become closely intertwined with global development efforts (Seymour, 2017; Yaya et al., 2018). As an illustration, women’s empowerment efforts have been repeatedly ranked as a high priority on the United Nation’s (UN) policy agenda because of its potential to create transformative outcomes for global development (UN Women, 2018). As a result, the UN adopted its Sustainable Development Goals with an entire priority area dedicated to the empowerment of women (United Nations, 2017). Moreover, evidence has suggested that improving women’s welfare and reducing gender disparities can lead to better childhood nutrition, decreased childhood mortality, increased educational attainment, improved maternal health and mortality, and support better management of natural resources (Agarwala & Lynch, 2006; Fisher & Naidoo, 2016; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005; Mason, 2005; Osborn et al., 2015; Yaya et al., 2018; Yount et al., 2019).

Promoting gender equality in agriculture has also encouraged economic growth in developing nations (Ansari & Khan, 2018). Case in point, Alkire et al. (2013) argued that by addressing gender inequalities in agriculture, developing nations could “increas[e] agricultural
productivity, achiev[e] food security, and reduc[e] hunger” (p. 1), resulting in an increased focus for developing nations in providing more opportunities for women to gain technical knowledge and skills (Akter et al., 2017; UN Women, 2018). For instance, Ansari and Khan (2018) reported statistically significant and positive relationships existed among technical training for women, agricultural development, and national growth in Thailand.

Many rural areas in Thailand rely on agriculture as their primary source of income (Agard & Roberts, 2020). Because of this, agriculture and agricultural products continue to be a critical aspect of the country’s economy (Win, 2017). It should be noted that women in this region provide a critical contribution to agricultural labor and productivity (Nguyen et al., 2019). As such, the empowerment of women in agriculture has been vital to growth and development. For instance, existing research has shown that women’s empowerment in Thailand and Southeast Asia have progressed more than in other developing areas of the world, such as Sub-Saharan Africa (Akter et al., 2017; Richardson & Roberts, 2020). Despite this, significant impediments to gender equality remain for Thailand’s agricultural sector. On this point, Nguyen et al. (2019) advanced four barriers to Thailand’s women empowerment: (1) women being considered secondary farm labor, (2) lack of access to legal resources, (3) confinement to lower-level and less lucrative roles, and (4) failure to incorporate gender equality into agricultural policy.

One strategy used to raise the public’s consciousness about gendered issues in Thailand has been mass media (Dominick, 2002; Oosthuizen, 2012). Mass media can influence the public because it reaches a diverse range of populations as well as the frequent exposure that many individuals have to these sources of information (Hassanzadeh, 2018; Sharda, 2014). Newspapers, in particular, provide coverage of local and community events as well as reporting on global happenings. Therefore, they can function as gatekeepers for information for
communities, especially in rural spaces (Oosthuizen, 2012). In addition to basic information, newspapers also inform the public on issues that influence their worldviews (Oosthuizen, 2012). Consequently, newspapers can influence the public’s perceptions and promote stereotypes in society. However, this power can also change views and perceptions positively (Dominick, 2002; Oosthuizen, 2012; Simon & Hoyt, 2013).

Sharda (2014) argued that mass media’s influence was substantial enough to serve as a reference point upon which individuals base beliefs, opinions, and self-perceptions. For instance, because gender inequalities and stereotypes are predominantly social constructs that remain deeply entrenched in the public consciousness, the media can give voice to women who lack agency, power, and resources. And in turn, it inspires more empathy and understanding (Sharda, 2014). Hassanzadeh (2018) reported four primary ways in which the media can encourage social change concerning gender inequality: (1) featuring male change agents with records of positive influences on female lives, (2) condemnation of gender discrimination and disparities, (3) depicting women in leadership and key positions, and (4) reporting research that focuses on gender issues. Therefore, representing women in the media as “strong, independent, educated, and working in high-level positions” can shift societal perceptions of gendered roles and stereotypes (Hassanzadeh, 2018, p. 5).

The fourth Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) was created to be “most extensive research on gender bias and subsequent initiatives in the news media” from 2009 to 2010 (Sharda, 2014, p. 44). The project demonstrated that only a quarter of individuals represented in the news media were female. This was only a 7% increase in female representation in the 15-years since the GMMP published its initial report. To complicate this issue further, lead female news subjects were even less prevalent in media reports (Sharda, 2014). Nevertheless, global
strides have improved gender equality and women’s lives, despite being under-portrayed in the media (Ross & Carter, 2011). In fact, previous research has shown that men and women are still predominantly represented in ways that adhere to traditional gender roles (Coltrane & Adams, 1997; Davis, 2003; Ganahl et al., 2003; Reichert & Carpenter, 2004; Rouner et al., 2003; Simon & Hoyt, 2013). However, depicting men and women in such ways could further perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes and roles in society and influence government policy. Consequently, a need emerged to examine how gender, media, and policy have intersected in developing nations such as Thailand.

**Thailand 4.0**

In May 2016, the Thai government introduced a development initiative called Thailand 4.0. This initiative promoted sustainable agricultural, economic, and social development (Puncreobutr, 2017). The intent of Thailand 4.0 was to lead the country into an innovative and technologically advanced future (Puncreobutr, 2017). The policy emerged after several similar initiatives were successfully implemented in other Asian countries. Under the policy, each ministry, i.e., a department of the Thai government, created and implemented procedures to uphold the aims of the initiative. For example, Thailand’s Ministry of Agriculture introduced Agriculture 4.0, a policy focused on advancing new technology and smart innovations to the agricultural industry. As a result of the policy, new research and development funding was allocated to advance drones, precision agriculture, and other technological innovations for the industry (Bhandhubanyong & Sirirangsi, 2019). Ultimately, Thailand 4.0 marked a new development phase and increased focus on social issues such as the effects of policy on women in the agricultural industry. Because of the policy’s far-reaching implications, Thailand 4.0
served as an appropriate frame to bound my examination of the intersection of gender, media, and policy for women in agriculture.

**Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective**

For this investigation, I used the epistemological position of constructionism to understand and analyze the study’s findings (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism involves an individual’s view of their reality and their process of making meaning of the world. In particular, individuals who use this epistemological lens maintain their interactions in the social world shape how they construct knowledge and, ultimately, their unique worldview (Andrews, 2012; Schwandt, 2003). Therefore, this lens allowed me to examine how external inputs, such as media and news articles, shape how knowledge has been constructed regarding media coverage of women in agriculture. This study also drew upon a critical theory perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Critical theory allows researchers to understand how issues of power, such as gendered norms and traditions, influence culture, economics, and society. Therefore, using this lens allowed me to examine how power might have influenced representations of Thai women in agriculture. Using these two lenses, I was uniquely positioned to investigate how women have been portrayed in the media and whether power imbalances might have influenced this depiction.

**Statement of Purpose**

This study’s purpose was twofold: (1) determine to what extent Thailand’s newspaper coverage focused on topics related to women and the agricultural industry; and (2) describe how women in agriculture have been portrayed in newspaper coverage of Thailand 4.0 from 2016 to 2020.
Methodology

To investigate how women have been portrayed, I used a qualitative content analysis approach (Elo et al., 2014; Schreier, 2012). Content analyses provide a systematic approach to examine textual, visual, and other forms of qualitative data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Glenn et al., 2012; Oosthuizen, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). The approach also allows for quality inferences to be drawn from the qualitative sources analyzed (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 1980). Ultimately, content analysis are intended to “provide knowledge, new insights, and a representation of facts” (Krippendorff, 1980; Oosthuizen, 2012, p. 52). Content analyses have also been used as a quantitative research approach; however, its popularity in the qualitative paradigm has grown in recent decades (Saldaña, 2021). As a result, researchers have advanced it to help interpret meaning of documents and other sources of qualitative data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Murphrey et al., 2018). It is also important to note that content analyses have been used extensively in media studies (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Oosthuizen, 2012; Schreier, 2012).

Schreier (2012) advanced three defining characteristics of qualitative content analysis: (a) a reduction of large data sets, (b) conducted systematically, and (c) flexible. Further, qualitative content analyses can be conducted inductively or deductively. I used an inductive approach for this investigation, which was appropriate because little was known about the phenomenon (Oosthuizen, 2012). This approach allowed categories and themes to emerge from the data (Glenn et al., 2012). To accomplish this, I bounded the analysis by place, i.e., Thailand, and time, i.e., 2016 to April 2021.

Researcher Reflexivity

Before discussing the analytic approach used, it is important to address my background, relevant experiences, and interpretive lens. First, this study used a qualitative research approach.
As such, my interpretation of the data was likely influenced by my biases, experiences, and perceptions. Stake (1995) claimed this influence stemmed from the fact that qualitative researchers “examine meaning and redirect observation[s] to refine and substantiate those meanings” (p. 9). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that I am an American female graduate student with agricultural experience in Thailand. I have also conducted research both on and with Thai women in the agricultural industry. Therefore, my lived experiences influenced the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the data.

**Data Sources and Analysis**

For this investigation, I used newspaper articles as the primary source of data because they have been advanced as the most often reliable source of media content (Rosenstiel et al., 2011; Ruth & Rumble, 2016). Additionally, newspapers have shown to be “effective in promoting knowledge gain to rural populations” (Ruth & Rumble, 2016, p. 27). In this investigation, I analyzed newspapers articles from May 2016 to April 2021 using a qualitative content analysis approach. Both English and Thai-language newspapers circulated in Thailand were included in the study. To accomplish this, I used *Nexis Uni*, an online database, to collect online and in print newspaper articles in English. I used the primary search term “agriculture,” with “women OR woman” as the secondary search term. Additional parameters included: location of publication (Thailand), geography by document (Thailand), publication type (newspapers), and date parameters (2016 to 2021). In total, there were 8,105 matches for the primary search term, “agriculture,” and 352 matches that included both “agriculture” and “women OR woman.”

During my review, duplicate and irrelevant articles were not included for further analysis. Regarding Thai language newspapers, I analyzed newspaper articles from two representative
Thai newspapers. These included the *Thai Rath* and *Matichon Online*. I translated each page using Google® Page Translation. The primary search term used on each media source’s search engine was “farm,” which was used rather than “agriculture” because of a lack of results. *Thai Rath* yielded 131 agricultural articles, of which 53 depicted women. Meanwhile, *Matichon Online* yielded 55 agricultural-related articles, with 22 representing women. After narrowing the population from a combined 538 (English- and Thai-language newspaper articles using the search terms “agriculture” or “farm”), there were a total of 204 ($N = 204$) articles depicting women in agriculture.

After data collection, I analyzed each source using Saldaña’s (2021) coding process outlined in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Coding is a “research-generated construct” that helps researchers ascribe meaning to data, which can be later analyzed to determine patterns and categories (Saldaña, 2021, p. 4). The coding strategy employed in this study involved first and second-cycle coding. The first cycle of coding was an *elemental method* called concept coding (Saldaña, 2021). Concept coding has been used for labeling “big picture” ideas, and as a result, it allows the resulting codes to capture the meaning of the overarching topic of each newspaper article (Saldaña, 2021, p. 97). After completing the first round of coding, the initial codes were reviewed and adjusted, where necessary, to reflect better the fluid and cyclical nature of coding (Rogers, 2012). After finalizing the first cycle code list, I employed pattern coding to reduce the first cycle codes into categories (Saldaña, 2021). Finally, I used a thematic coding approach to reduce the categories identified in the second coding cycle and emerge the study’s themes (Saldaña, 2021).
Ensuring the Study’s Quality

Ensuring the quality of qualitative research is particularly critical. In this study, I embedded Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four quality standards into its design. These four standards include (1) credibility, (2) confirmability, (3) transferability, and (4) dependability. To achieve credibility, I used peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017; Spall, 1998). For example, I met with a peer to debrief emergent findings. We met multiple times throughout the research process to discuss and review the methodology, interpretation of codes, and appropriateness of themes and categories. Confirmability was ensured through extensive memo writing after every stage of the research project, including the preparation, data collection, analysis, and interpretation stages. Memo writing allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the data and the decisions made, as well as to reveal any potential biases. The third standard, transferability, was established by providing complete, rich descriptions of the study’s research methodology and analysis procedures. I accomplished the final standard, dependability, through the use of an inquiry audit that involved an examination of the research process and the findings by an external auditor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Through my analysis of the data, four themes emerged. The themes included: (1) economic policy implications for Thailand’s agricultural system; (2) human rights; (3) women entrepreneurship and leadership; and (4) agricultural development. The themes represented positive portrayals of women in the agricultural industry and representations of how they were situated after adopting the Thailand 4.0 policy.
Theme 1: Economic Policy Implications for Thailand’s Agricultural System

The first theme depicted the economic issues published on Thailand’s 4.0 policy. Among the articles, the general trend in this theme spoke to the negative economic impacts of the policy at the domestic and international levels. In particular, financial troubles and unemployment issues that impacted women were often featured. Another emergent concept was the role of economic problems that surfaced during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The pandemic was widely discussed as the reason for agricultural-related economic issues in the news regarding women’s economic empowerment (Banchongduang, 2021; Bangkok Post, 2021; Chongcharoen and Sihawong, 2021; Gomez and Talpur, 2021; Kuentak, 2021; Thairath Online, 2021).

Scattered among the general discussion of the pandemic were topics on agricultural issues such as an increase in food prices, lack of work opportunities, and fear of long-term personal debt for farmers and agricultural industry workers. In an article published by the Bangkok Post (2021), a single mother of two discussed how she was “heavily indebted” to the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives because of coronavirus lockdowns that occurred in Thailand (para. 2). Additionally, multiple articles reported on the shrinking of agricultural exports and agritourism, as well as a reduction in prices for agricultural goods (Chongcharoen & Sihawong, 2021; Thairath Online, 2021). In one example, in an article published by Chongcharoen and Sihawong (2021), a female farmer discussed how rambutan (a local fruit crop) prices dropped during the pandemic. Consequently, she incurred debt and was forced to reduce the number of farmworkers she employed to save her business. Tourism was also halted, which had far-reaching impacts on the agricultural industry (Thairath Online, 2021).

Another frequently mentioned topic that surfaced in the media’s coverage of Thailand 4.0 was women’s concerns about the repayment of loans and debt to the Bank for Agriculture and
Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC). Because Thailand had many women-owned agricultural businesses and farms, they were often impacted by economic downturns. In a discussion of such concerns, Chongcharoen and Sihawong (2020) chronicled a female farmer who explained, “We [women] have faced many troubles this year including severe drought and a drop in prices…we do not have money to repay the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives” (p. 18-19).

Another critical issue in newspaper publications was the role of Thailand 4.0’s domestic and international policies on women economically. Case in point, news coverage primarily focused on how international trade and policy affected the work of Thai women at the local level. Specifically, women’s unemployment issues and unsafe work conditions were featured as well as other work-based inequalities and were linked, ultimately, to trade and policy issues (Ghosh, 2020; Jagan, 2018; Sabharwal, 2020; Smith, 2017; Thairath Online, 2021). When highlighting women’s unemployment issues and unsafe work conditions, the discussion illuminated women’s financial contributions to household incomes and how unemployment rates in the agricultural industry have hampered these efforts (Jagan, 2018).

Domestic economic issues and their resulting implications for the country’s agricultural policy were also topics of interest. Regarding domestic concerns, topics included economic initiatives, committee formations, and the drafting of new agricultural policies to supplement Thailand 4.0 (The Nation Thailand, 2016b; Bangkok Post, 2020). For example, an article from the Bangkok Post (2020) addressed how economic policy changes impacted women working in Thailand’s agricultural industry:

Open market access in RCEP [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership] that drastically cuts tariffs of agriculture products will have terrible consequences for small-scale producers in developing countries. It is particularly detrimental for women in subsistence and small-scale farming’…Yet such deals can also lead to job losses, the closure of small businesses, diluted labor rights, and increased degradation of natural resources including forests and land. (para. 7-9)
Finally, of the newspaper articles analyzed, a critical concept was the role of economic empowerment efforts and their impacts on women. These undertakings were operationalized in the newspapers at the macro and micro levels. For example, on a macro-scale, economic empowerment included global women empowerment efforts, the need for greater engagement of women, and international organization events (Jitcharoenkul, 2017). In 2017, Jitcharoenkul called for greater engagement of women in agricultural and environmental services. He explained: “the sections are growing micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), enabling financial inclusion, supporting small farms, building human capital, greater engagement of women in services and promoting green growth” (Jitcharoenkul, 2017, p. 6). Conversely, domestic coverage primarily featured financial assistance, economic partnerships with corporations, and growth of small and medium enterprises (The Nation Thailand, 2016c; Pinijparakarn, 2016; Termariyabuit, 2018). For example, one article discussed empowering women in agriculture through partnerships with large corporations such as Coca-Cola by “boosting the economic performance of 600 Thai female sugarcane growers” (The Nation Thailand, 2016c, p. 4). Therefore, the concept of economic empowerment provided critical insight and commentary on economic issues and frequently featured the initiatives, policies, and voices that influenced women’s lived experiences under the Thailand 4.0 initiative.

**Theme 2: Human Rights**

The second theme, human rights, exposed how gender inequalities and marginalized populations, such as indigenous groups and migrants, were influenced by Thailand 4.0. Accordingly, two subthemes emerged: (1) gender inequalities and (2) indigenous and migrant worker rights.
Gender Inequalities

The first subtheme focused on the gender inequalities that emerged because of Thailand 4.0 on the global, national, and local levels. The newspaper media depicted this phenomenon using stories from women who articulated the realities of gender inequalities, barriers to better opportunities, and violence (Akhtar, 2017; Giri, 2019; Kuentak, 2021; Sukkumnoed, 2018). Additionally, several feature articles illuminated the importance of women to the agricultural sector and advanced discussion about persistent gender inequalities and the subjugated position of women in the agricultural industry (Clarke, 2016; Giri, 2019; Pisuthipan 2018). However, it is important to note that multiple articles touted the critical progress made in the country (Chan-o-cha, 2016; The Nation Thailand, 2016b; Sukphisit, 2016; Wiriyapong, 2018). As an illustration, some work featured the region’s progress regarding women’s issues despite persistent disparities in gender equality and pay (Akhtar, 2017).

Another gender inequality that surfaced after the implementation of the Thailand 4.0 policy was labor rights. On this point, Charoensuthipan (2019) described how Thai women had to work harder because agricultural companies more frequently hired their male counterparts. Other labor rights issues that were reported included human rights abuses by international companies and increased sexual harassment claims raised by women (Charoensuthipan, 2017; Kongrut, 2017; Laping, 2017). The newspaper media also provided exposés and issued warnings to women in agriculture to help bring awareness to these issues (Kongrut, 2017; Laping, 2017). As such, labor rights represented a primarily negative sentiment linked to Thailand 4.0.

Finally, multiple articles also featured the critical role of women in furthering the development of the agricultural sector while also calling for equal opportunities (Chan-o-cha, 2016; The Nation Thailand, 2016b). In fact, in one article, Prayut Chano-o-cha, the Prime
Minister of Thailand, penned an op-ed that stressed the importance of women having equal opportunities. Further, he suggested that Thailand “...should boost [the] education and the wellbeing of citizens to maximize potential...[including] sensitive groups such as juveniles, the elderly, women and migrants…” (The Nation Thailand, 2016b, para. 7). Other articles detailed proposed legislation that focused on promoting gender equality and women’s rights.

**Indigenous and Migrant Worker Rights**

Women were often the subject of articles focused on indigenous and migrant worker rights after the implementation of the Thailand 4.0 initiative. Case in point, reports on this phenomenon focused heavily on the importance of consulting indigenous populations when making agricultural decisions, the lack of migrant worker rights, and the poor attitudes and perceptions directed at female migrant workers (Duangmee, 2016; Meyer & Niratisayakul, 2020). It is critical to note that women were often the focus of these stories because of the importance of indigenous and migrant women to Thailand’s agricultural industry. For example, indigenous and migrant workers often exhibit a high level of local knowledge about the environmental factors that influence the growing conditions of local crops (Duangmee, 2016). Duangmee (2016) described how multiple efforts were established, such as creating a rice bank, to improve the lives of indigenous populations. On this point, Duangmee (2016) explained:

> The rice bank was a life-changing project…not only did it save the children from going hungry, but it also helped the villagers to stand on their own feet…We have enough rice, says one Lawa woman, smiling as she hands us glasses of throat-burning rice wine. (para. 7-9)

Another emergent concept was the newspaper media’s attention to women migrant workers’ rights, including the public’s perception of migrant workers and working conditions, after Thailand 4.0’s adoption. Because many migrant workers in Thailand were female (Bharathi et al., 2019; Graber Ladek, 2018; Khmer Times, 2017), a significant concern was addressing the
poor attitudes and perceptions directed toward women migrant workers. In particular, newspapers featured perceptions that Thai nationals held about women when viewed as secondary labor – a marginalized group historically paid a lower wage than males (Chia, 2017; Graber Ladek, 2017). It was, however, reported that Thailand had a more positive and progressive view of providing women migrants with equal pay, better opportunities, and citizenship compared to other Asian countries (The Nation Thailand, 2016a). The newspaper press also featured illegal migrant arrests and deportation (Khmer Times, 2017; Pakkawan, 2019). Despite this, the depiction of indigenous and migrant workers’ rights was positive and called for better conditions, especially for female agricultural workers.

**Theme 3: Women Entrepreneurship and Leadership**

Featuring women as entrepreneurs and leaders in high-level positions was a common theme in newspaper coverage of Thailand 4.0. The spectrum of coverage ranged from highlighting women farmers and small business owners to depicting Thai women serving in high-level leadership roles locally, regionally, and globally. Therefore, the portrayal of women in these roles was distinctly positive.

Accordingly, women-owned businesses were often showcased. Articles featured successful women-owned fisheries, organic farms, fruit farms, and floriculture businesses (Matichon Online, 2018a, 2018b; Thairath Online, 2017a, 2018b, 2020a, 2020f). Panyaarvudh (2016) described how women entrepreneurs helped usher in innovative ideas and designs that helped move the agricultural sector into the digital age. Reporting on women entrepreneurs also frequently mentioned how women in executive-level positions had increased by more than 10% in Thai corporations over the past decade – a trend that significantly exceeded other nations in Southeast Asia (Hendricks, 2018; Narula, 2016). Women have also been depicted as competitors...
at agricultural entrepreneurship competitions and in various keynote speaker roles for agricultural-based conventions (Karnkanatawe, 2019; Panyaarvudh, 2016; Thairath Online, 2019a). One article, in particular, discussed Thailand’s Women Entrepreneurs Startup Competition and featured a female winner that created “a device and smartphone application that helps fish and shrimp farmers monitor water quality” (Panyaarvudh, 2016, para. 1).

Women were often depicted as serving in official capacities for the Thailand 4.0 initiative in roles such as program delegates, spokeswomen, and advisers (Matichon Online, 2017, 2018b; Thairath Online, 2020e). Many women in newspaper articles on Thailand 4.0 were often considered global leaders. These included foreign dignitaries or Thai women serving in international positions such as the Consul-General of Shanghai (Thairath Online, 2017a, 2017b). A substantial number of newspapers also mentioned women in national or local leadership roles. These included women in key positions that were serving on various agricultural-related committees, departments in the Ministry of Agriculture, and divisions focused on land and farmer development (Thairath Online, 2018a, 2019b). Women leaders in those positions often served as keynote speakers at agricultural events and development board meetings (Thairath Online, 2017c). Females were also often mentioned as having consulting roles to assist in creating agricultural and nutrition policies. In fact, women were more likely to be featured in newspaper articles in these leadership roles and positions for the Thailand 4.0 initiative than males.

**Theme 4: Agricultural Development**

Agricultural and rural development represented the critical theme in the newspaper media analyzed. Two distinct subthemes emerged from the analysis of these topics: (1) agricultural development and (2) agricultural innovations and technology.
Agricultural Development

The first subtheme focused primarily on women’s roles in the development of Thailand’s agricultural sector. Newspaper articles reported on programs and initiatives designed to provide training and assistance across multiple sectors. These programs included professional development on agricultural practices and techniques, budgeting, fiscal responsibility, multi-cropping, and STEM integration (The Nation Thailand, 2016c; Treerutkuarkul, 2017). For example, one program focused on empowering women by teaching them “agricultural and handicraft skill development” (Yongcharoenchai, 2017, para. 7). Other newspaper media examined instances of government relief under the Thailand 4.0 initiative that focused on providing financial assistance and agricultural resources. However, education and professional development opportunities were often delivered.

Newspaper coverage also focused on agricultural development efforts that had more indirect benefits to women. For example, under the Thailand 4.0 initiative, new educational programs and legislation were designed to address harmful chemical exposure, food security, and malnutrition (Kadiresan, 2019; Mortensen & Resurreccion, 2019; Treerutkuarkul, 2021). Additionally, articles investigated local opposition to various industrial developments in traditional agricultural areas. Sutthavong (2017) reported how women in the fisheries industry would be negatively affected in Laem Sak, located in Krabi Province, if a coal-fired power station was built. He expanded: “most importantly, the [seafood-processing] shed gives employment and a steady income to the local women.” (Sutthavong, 2017, para. 29). Therefore, Thai communities appeared to consider the impacts that innovations could have on women in agriculture after implementing the Thailand 4.0 initiative.
Agricultural Innovations and Technology

Another critical concept that emerged from the analysis of newspaper articles was depictions of women using and developing agricultural innovations technologies. Topics reported included: (1) demonstrations and professional development on smart farming, (2) digital farming initiatives (3) examples of smart farming applications, and (4) women-owned smart farms (Matichon Online, 2019; Thairath Online, 2019b, 2020c, 2020d). In addition to depictions of women engaging in smart farming practices, various articles featured the successes of women innovators, creators, and entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector (e.g. Matichon Online, 2018c; Thairath Online, 2020b). Women were also represented as consumers of agricultural innovations and technologies. For example, female telecommunication experts were used by newspapers to demonstrate how women were assisting underserved populations by increasing information sharing approaches that could help address food security, productivity, and profitability (Pornwasin, 2019). As a consequence, the newspaper media appeared to depict women in agriculture as a way to encourage the continued development of Thailand’s agricultural industry.

Conclusions

This study examined the intersection of gender, media, and policy by examining newspaper coverage of Thailand 4.0 from 2016 to 2020. Through an analysis of the data, I identified four emergent themes: (1) economic policy implications for Thailand’s agricultural system, (2) human rights, (3) women entrepreneurship and leadership, and (4) agricultural development. As a result, I conclude that newspaper coverage of women in agriculture was diverse and conflicting – a finding not previously reported regarding Thai women in agriculture. To define the study’s findings further, a discussion of the conclusions derived from each theme follows.
The first theme illustrated how women often experience negative economic impacts when faced with changes in agricultural policy. I conclude that the newspaper media reported these negative repercussions in response to periods of an economic downturn that surfaced after the COVID-19 global pandemic, a findings that has not been explored in the literature on women’s issues in the region. Because of their position in a male-dominated society, women were particularly susceptible to changes in economic and agricultural policies as well as economic downturns. Previous research has suggested that women in this region have been secondary or unpaid labor (Nguyen et al., 2019). Because of this, newspaper coverage on negative economic impacts for women in the agricultural sector were likely under-portrayed. However, despite the discussion of negative impacts and likelihood of under-portrayal, the newspaper media provided glimpses of progress in the form of financial assistance, partnerships with corporations, and the establishment of new enterprises for women before the pandemic affected the region (Pinijparakarn, 2016; Termariyabuit, 2018). Consequently, I concluded that the global pandemic negatively affected progress made to economically empower Thai women in agriculture.

Nevertheless, a more positive perspective regarding the advancement of human rights emerged in the second theme. In particular, this theme described the advancement of global women empowerment and gender inequality issues and reported on progress to indigenous women and migrant workers. As a result, I concluded that, in some ways, the Thailand 4.0 initiative fostered critical progress for local Thai women and agricultural development in the region. This finding aligns with the work of Ansari and Khan (2018), who argued that Thailand 4.0 advanced gender rights and equality in the agricultural industry, especially concerning economic growth, which has historically been used as a benchmark for development.
The positive depiction of women in agriculture in Thailand’s newspapers was further illustrated in the final two themes. Such a representation of women is critical because newspapers have historically been used as a primary source of knowledge in Thai society. As a result, the depiction of women can play a prominent role in influencing societal perceptions and attitudes on gendered issues (Oosthuizen, 2012). Because knowledge is created through an interaction with one’s environment, positive portrayals in the media is particularly important. These positive portrayals of women will likely lead to them having an increase in positive self-perceptions, especially for women working in the agricultural sector. To this end, I conclude that newspaper coverage of since Thailand 4.0 depicted women positively by portraying them as entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders in the agricultural industry – a finding not previously explored. Because previous evidence has stressed the critical role of media on women's empowerment, this finding provided critical implications that could influence, shape, and potentially challenge deeply ingrained gender stereotypes (Simon & Hoyt, 2013; Sharda, 2014).

**Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations**

Thailand has historically been portrayed as a country whose women experience greater equality and empowerment (Mason & Smith, 2003; Akter et al., 2017). For example, Akter et al. (2017) found that Thai women often have greater economic freedom and control of their finances. In this investigation, however, the media coverage on women in agriculture after the implementation of the Thailand 4.0 initiative demonstrated critical points of contrast. As an illustration, some newspaper media has continued to feature women as engaging in traditional roles that have historically been relegated to women. Although depicting women in such roles was not intended to be harmful, continuing this reporting could perpetuate gender stereotypes and provide obstacles to further women’s empowerment efforts.
It is also important to note that in many of the articles, especially in the Thai language papers, women were featured in an incidental manner. For instance, in a large portion of the media coverage, women were represented using an illustrative photograph that appeared to be published to stimulate interest in the article. On this point, Sharda (2014) argued that women had been underrepresented as subjects in media portrayals in Asia. Instead, they have been often used as sexual objects. Consequently, I recommend that future research explore this phenomenon and provide implications for navigating this sexist behavior in the media focused on issues affecting the agricultural industry.

Although the underrepresentation of women in newspaper media persists, the representation of females as agricultural entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders could create a powerful and positive depiction for future generations. Despite this, the frequency of newspaper coverage on such topics was inadequate. Moving forward, I recommend that research examine ways to increase the positive depiction of women in such roles. Future work could also explore whether new sources, including print, radio, television, and web-based media, could be developed that more positively promote Thai women in agriculture.

Understanding how women in the agricultural industry have been portrayed in the newspaper media was critical to understanding gender equality and women empowerment efforts in Thailand. It is essential to note, however, that there were several limitations to this investigation. First, I was limited by a language barrier and relied on Google® Page Translation. Efforts were made to secure a native Thai speaker to assist with translations. However, because the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be an additional barrier, I could not find an individual who could commit to this process because of the additional responsibilities they endured during this period. Consequently, some of the translations could not have been accurate and may have
resulted in my misinterpretation. In the future, I recommend that follow-up studies consult Thai national or language speakers to understand better the narrative reported by Thai media. A final limitation was that during my analysis, some differences emerged concerning the media coverage of women between English and Thai language media. As such, I recommend that studies analyze differences between how each media source portrays women in agriculture.
CHAPTER 4
A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES AS AGRICULTURAL FACULTY IN THAILAND’S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Introduction and Review of Literature

Higher educational institutions have been shown to transform individuals and communities across the globe (Eboiyehi et al., 2016; Loots & Walker, 2015). For example, graduates who achieve a postsecondary degree can encourage economic growth, societal restructuring, and community cohesiveness (Lee, 2007). Further, a statically significant and positive relationship has been reported between baccalaureate degree completion and the development of a nation (Eboiyehi et al., 2016). As a result, the governments of developing economies have emphasized expanding access to higher education for their citizens in recent decades (Neubaur, 2019; Sakhiyya & Locke, 2019). This trend has been prevalent across Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand, where higher education has experienced extensive growth (Lee, 2007). This growth coincided with expanded access for the region’s disadvantaged and underrepresented groups (Morley, 2013).

Loot and Walker (2015) noted that critical progress had been achieved globally over the past two decades regarding access to higher education for underrepresented populations, particularly for women. In 2019, women constituted approximately 67% of primary school and 54% of secondary school educators across the globe (World Bank, 2020a). However, despite the increasing number of female educators, data has indicated that females in higher education represent only 43% of faculty (World Bank, 2020b). In Thailand, a higher percentage of females teach in primary and secondary schools, however, in higher education, women remain considerably underrepresented (World Bank 2020a, 2020c). Despite this, previous evidence on this phenomenon has illuminated that the “persistence of deeper-seated inequalities between the
genders in all spheres of higher education” remains despite the progress achieved globally (Loots & Walker, 2015, p. 361).

Historically, universities have been acknowledged as *highly gendered institutions* (Bird, 2011; Eboiyehi et al., 2016; Maranto & Griffin, 2011; Marchant & Wallace, 2013; Misra et al., 2012; Vu, 2018). Case in point, although a positive trend has existed regarding female’s ability to obtain faculty positions, women remain marginalized in STEM fields within higher education such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Christie et al., 2017; Cuthbert et al., 2019; Haeruddin, 2016; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020; Zaleniene et al., 2016). To complicate this further, previous evidence has demonstrated that higher education institutions’ gender distribution among faculty has reflected a pyramid structure, i.e., more males hold leadership positions while women have been regulated to lower-level positions (Carrington & Pratt, 2003; Strachan et al., 2011; Vu, 2018).

This trend appears to extend across developed and developing regions of the world (Haeruddin, 2016; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Vu, 2018). For example, women have not been viewed positively in leadership roles in academia. In fact, in Southeast Asia, a statistically significant and negative relationship has been reported between higher education administrators’ favorability and whether they identified as female (Mason & Smith, 2003; Morley, 2013; Sakhiyya & Locke, 2019). Mason and Smith (2003) noted that this issue was more prominent in developing countries, such as Thailand, where women in leadership roles have been rare.

On this point, Pimpa (2012) explained that this issue could be attributed to cultural norms and traditions in which women have been viewed as primary caretakers and are typically responsible for domestic tasks. As a result, “women are given fewer opportunities and underrepresented at work in many Asian countries” (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020, p. 3). By
assuming these caretaker and domestic roles, considerable burdens have been placed on women serving in more senior leadership and management roles in higher education (Cuthbert et al., 2019). As an illustration, in Thailand, barriers to women serving in higher-level administration positions in academia include: (1) a historically male academic culture, (2) a lack of confidence and disinclination to self-promote, (3) underrepresentation in decision-making bodies, (4) exclusion from the political aspects of academic appointments, and (5) a lack of women in agricultural faculty positions (Luke, 2001a; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011; Neubauer, 2019).

Despite identifying these barriers, research on gendered issues in higher educational institutions in developing nations have primarily focused on the participation rates of female students and their educational attainment (Francis et al., 2014; Phipps & Smith, 2012; Mama, 2006; Morley, 2006; Neale & Özkanli, 2010; Vaccaro, 2011). Consequently, Morley (2013) called for more attention to be placed on women faculty in Southeast Asia’s institutions of higher education, particularly in Thailand. A need emerged to gain a deeper understanding of how women in Thailand navigate their professional responsibilities as agricultural faculty despite pervasive gender inequalities in the country (Cuthbert et al., 2019; Haeruddin, 2016; Luke, 2001a; Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020; Murniati, 2012; Neubauer, 2019; Toyibah, 2017; Zseleczky et al., 2013).

**Philosophical Lens**

I examined women agriculture faculty’s experiences in Thailand through the lens of critical constructionism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). When using this lens, researchers position themselves “at the intersection of multiple epistemological and theoretical perspectives such as constructionism, social constructionism, and critical theory” (Richardson & Roberts, 2020, p. 10). Crotty (1998) advanced this approach to help social scientists analyze complex phenomena
deeply influenced by power, privilege, and control issues. To situate this study, a discussion of the key components of critical constructionism follows.

Social constructionism, an epistemological position, is ultimately concerned with how an individual views their reality and make meaning of the world around them (Crotty, 1998). This process involves external inputs and interactions that allow individuals to construct knowledge based on how they experience the social world (Andrews, 2012; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2003). In particular, social constructionism allowed me to examine how social interactions and culture influence the construction of knowledge among the participants, their experiences, and their perceptions of the barriers that might exist in higher education.

Critical constructionism also draws on critical theory to scrutinize the experiences of underrepresented and marginalized groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Critical theory is a theoretical perspective that focuses on critiquing society based on structures of power and privilege have been upheld over time (Crotty, 1998). Through the combination of these two lenses (see Figure 1), it allowed me to examine woman’s experiences more critically in higher education. It also illuminated how the participants’ social realities have shaped power imbalances that exist in agriculture, extension, and women empowerment (Crotty, 1998).

**Statement of Purpose**

This study aimed to examine the experiences of women agriculture faculty in Thailand’s higher education system. Specifically, this study focused on issues related to the barriers and gendered issues women encounter. Thailand’s higher education system was a compelling case because of traditional gender stereotypes reported despite the country’s position as a rapidly developing economy and modernized higher education system (Lee, 2007; World Bank, 2021). Two research questions guided this study: (1) What were participants’ experiences as
women faculty in a historically male-dominated field in a developing country? and (2) What barriers did women agriculture faculty experience in Thailand’s higher education system?

**Methodology**

This investigation used an instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995), which helps “provide insight into an issue” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 549). For that reason, this approach was appropriate for achieving an in-depth description of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995). In this study, the case was bounded by *place*, i.e., Thailand, and *participants’ occupation*, i.e., women agriculture faculty. Therefore, every participant in this study identified as female and a Thai national.

**Data Sources and Participants**

I used purposive sampling to select participants (Patton, 2002). To accomplish this, I identified women faculty from Thai universities with a Faculty of Agriculture, i.e., a College of Agriculture. After identifying individuals who met the study’s parameters, I recruited them through email. In total, four individuals agreed to participate in a virtual interview. After accepting the invitation, participants were then provided a detailed description of the study and a consent form.

The primary source of data for this investigation was in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted virtually using Zoom video conferencing software. In accordance with Creswell and Poth (2018), I developed a semi-structured interview protocol, which was approved by the LSU AgCenter IRB. The interview protocol included five major guiding questions that focused on (1) participants’ background and experiences, (2) view of women’s representation in the field, (3) perceptions of women serving in their position, (4) potential challenges and barriers experienced by the participant, and (5) the future of their field and the role that women will play. To
triangulate findings, I also collected photographs and written reflections submitted by the participants. The photographs represented how participants perceived women in agriculture and the ways in which they viewed their role in higher education.

**Data Analysis**

After collecting data, I analyzed each source using analytic coding procedures advanced by Saldaña (2021). Coding is an approach that provides structure to the analysis process and insight by illuminating the data’s underlying patterns. The use of coding helps qualitative researchers construct meaning from the data (Saldaña, 2021). To accomplish this, I used a two-cycle coding approach. The first cycle of coding involved two open coding techniques: (1) initial coding and (2) values coding (Saldaña, 2021). During this cycle, initial coding helped dismantle the data corpus into discrete and manageable parts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Saldaña, 2021). Initial coding has been referred to as *open coding* because of its open-ended approach to data analysis. The approach allowed me to consider provisional codes as the analytic process unfolded.

Following initial coding, I used values coding to identify and understand the participants’ values, beliefs, and attitudes on the phenomenon (Saldaña, 2021). Following the first coding cycle, I engaged in a second cycle of coding, which helped categorize the data and identify potential patterns and emergent themes. The second cycle coding technique used was pattern coding, which allowed me to reduce the codes from the first cycle into overarching themes (Saldaña, 2021). It should be mentioned that the data were analyzed using a critical constructionist lens (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As such, I sought to examine the mechanisms of power and related barriers influencing female academic staff in Thailand’s postsecondary agricultural programs.
Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

Stake (1995) discussed how researchers influence findings because their interpretation of underlying trends shapes emergent themes. As such, disclosure of my background and positionality in the study was essential. To begin, during data collection, I was a doctoral student in an agricultural and extension education program with experience traveling and conducting research in Thailand. While in Thailand, I was increasingly exposed to and observed the country’s agricultural practices and higher education institutions. Additionally, I researched Thai women’s experiences and perceptions of working in the agricultural industry in Thailand. This research was similarly conducted using semi-structured interviews with female agricultural workers in a variety of positions. I also found myself uniquely positioned in this study because of my gender. For that reason, the intersection of my experiences in Thailand and positionality shaped how I examined the data and interpreted the findings.

Ensuring Quality in Qualitative Methodology

To ensure the study imbued rigor, I embedded Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four standards of quality into the study design: (1) confirmability, (2) credibility, (3) dependability, and (4) transferability. By weaving these standards into the study, I established trustworthiness of the findings. I achieved confirmability through a combination of (a) the researcher’s reflexivity statement and positionality within the study and (b) memo writing during each stage in data analysis and later interpretation. Meanwhile, I upheld credibility through (a) data triangulation, (b) peer debriefing, and (c) prolonged engagement. Although I did not spend extensive time in the field because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, I interacted with and spoke to various individuals and developed rapport with the participants during data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The third standard, dependability was embedded in the study by discussing (a) the
researcher’s positionality and how their role shaped the research design and procedures and (b) an open discussion about its purpose. Finally, I upheld transferability by including detailed descriptions of the research methods, data collection, analysis procedures, and subsequent findings to uphold the fourth standard of quality.

**Limitations**

This study had several limitations. First, the perspectives expressed by the participants were based on their experiences. Therefore, the study’s findings were not generalizable to all women working in Thailand's higher education. Second, although the interviews were conducted in English, it is likely that a language and cultural barrier existed. Language is nuanced and often includes elements of vernacular, culture, and knowledge of place (Hendrix, 2001). Because English was the participants’ second language, it is possible that exact meanings, concepts, or words, could have been lost in translation. To help mitigate this issue, I spoke slowly, explained the questions, and clarified when needed.

**Findings**

By analyzing the experiences of four Thai women, who served as faculty in a postsecondary agricultural program, I gained an in-depth understanding of their experiences and perceptions of their gendered barriers. My analysis of the data revealed three themes that depict women’s perspectives on Thailand’s higher education: (1) gendered disparities, (2) barriers to success in academia, (3) perceptions of self and gender in agriculture and higher education.

My interpretation of the data helped contribute to the broader narrative of gendered issues in higher education, especially those in a traditionally male-dominated field such as agriculture. For the confidentiality of participants, their names and potential identifiers were removed. It
should also be noted that if a participant submitted a photograph of an individual’s face, it was blurred to uphold the privacy of the individuals depicted.

**Gendered Disparities**

The first theme explored women agriculture faculty’s experiences with societal gender inequalities. The emergence of this theme was likely because faculty in postsecondary agricultural programs have traditionally been expected to extend their work into local communities through extension programs in Thailand. Despite expressing positive self-perceptions, the women also voiced a number of traditional gender stereotypes. To this point, the participants articulated how males were more often promoted to leadership roles in higher education. Participant #2 stated: “[Thai] people accept more males than females.” She further explained: “I think for agriculture higher education, there were more males than females in the past, and now females have a [place] in this career...” Despite this, Participant #1 stated: “people [still] want to talk with males more than females [in higher education].” Participant #3 also discussed how in other areas of disciplines “like agricultural sales or engineering,” there was a greater preference to hire males rather than females. As a result, views that women were not qualified for positions in higher education remained deeply entrenched in society.

On the other hand, Participant #4 articulated how she had observed women become more accepted in roles as agricultural faculty. For example, she observed greater participation in agricultural extension activities led by women in recent years. Further, more female participants were engaging in extension programming sponsored by her university. She explained: “Before, it is always a male come to join a group...but now I can say that a lot of women come [to my extension programs].” Participant #2 echoed a similar sentiment when she discussed her work
with women’s groups and female cooperatives and how they “ask her, the expert, to teach them the [farming] techniques.”

Another emergent concept was the female agricultural faculty’s role in influencing women’s empowerment by encouraging greater decision-making power. Participant #1 explained that, traditionally, women in Asian cultures “do all the housework” and that “the males rarely help.” Despite this, she also explained that “[women’s] income is almost equal to males.” She further described how equal income among males and females had equated to more decision-making power:

We can see a lot more of the power...because women can make a lot of decisions...The main income has come from the male [in the past], so any decision is waiting for them, but now women also have their income. So the power is in their own hands. So for us as well in higher education, if we have our own income, any decision we make depends on what we want, not what they want.

The sentiment expressed by Participant #1 was impactful because it demonstrated that she had observed women’s empowerment increase through greater decision-making power in her career. In fact, all participants articulated that women often assumed the role of primary caretaker. However, the participants also described how advancements in technology had made it possible for women to pursue work outside of the home and contribute to household financial responsibilities. Despite their increased responsibilities and decision-making power, the expectation that women assume that primary caretaker role remained.

**Barriers to Success in Academia**

In the second theme, the women in this study expressed multiple barriers to their success as faculty. For example, because of expectations for women to fulfill feminine and domestic roles, they often received fewer work-related opportunities and experienced underrepresentation in their careers (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020). On this point, participants explained how Thai women were primarily concerned with ensuring they devoted adequate time to their families.
Because academic roles were often considered more flexible than other career fields, they perceived their careers promoted work-life balance. Nevertheless, Participant #2 discussed how placing more “emphasis on family” could also be viewed as a potential barrier to success for women faculty in Thailand because some administrators might view them as not prioritizing their work. Moreover, Participant #3 explained: “…the barrier is that I have to spare some time for taking care [of the family] and my work suffers.” Because the participants’ discussion of challenges in their careers often focused on balancing work and life, the cultural expectation for Thai women to remain the primary caretaker of their families emerged as a barrier.

The participants also explored deeper contours regarding the barriers introduced by other individuals to their careers. For example, Participant #2 described how her friends and family were concerned about her career as an academic in agriculture and that they agriculture as hard, physical labor. When discussing her choice to study agriculture, Participant #4 explained, “my family did not want me to study agriculture because they think it is quite hard work.” In Asia, women have often been viewed as physically weaker, and careers involving hard labor and physically demanding tasks have been viewed as undesirable (Richardson & Roberts, 2020). When describing this phenomenon, Participant #4 submitted a photograph of women in higher education engaged in physical labor to prepare their field for research trials. She explained that such depictions perpetuated a negative perception in Thai society and a barrier for women in higher education. As a result, this societal misperception appeared to cause job stress and served as a substantial career barrier for women in higher education.
Figure 1. Women in Higher Education Preparing Fields for Research Trails

*Note.* Participant #4 submitted this photograph to depict how women in agriculture were historically perceived as laborers rather than intellectuals.

Participants also articulated how career progression and upward movement was a barrier for women in higher education. For example, all participants noted that women had been excluded from “top” or high-level positions. Participant #3 noted that “males get promotion more than females” and “they prefer to select males.” Overall, the participants also reached a consensus that upper-level administration positions were still male-dominated. On this point, Participant #1 reported that there had only been “one female for the head department” at her university. Another participant shared a similar sentiment when she stated, “when it come [sic] to the highest rankings,” the university still prefers the position to be filled by males. However, in “lecturer [positions there] is a lot of female.” “The department head [is] a woman a lot of [time], but for the really high position, like being a Dean or president, is still men,” stated participant #3 when describing the gender composition of administrative positions at her university. Participant #1 even reported: “I think if I’m male in this position, maybe I can get promotion easier.” A few
of the participants also expressed the belief that the top-level positions remained out of reach. The concept that women were occupying lower-level positions in higher education while males dominated upper-level positions has been a trend reported in the higher education literature in both developing and developed countries (Baltodano et al., 2012; Fotaki, 2013; Haeruddin, 2016; Morley, 2013).

**Perceptions of Self and Gender in Agriculture and Higher Education**

Despite the perceived barriers to success experienced by women agriculture faculty, the participants in this investigation reported a distinctly positive perception of self and their abilities. For example, all participants reported that females were as capable as males in higher education. Moreover, Participant #2 stated: “females can do like a man do” and “we can do the same way as a male do.” Participant #1 maintained that “most females in this department...I mean, agronomy department females can do...can have [same] capability as a male.” The participants also reported that they had observed more women beginning to pursue agriculture as a career. For instance, Participant #3 submitted a photograph to demonstrate how women had become more prevalent in agricultural majors. Figure 2 depicted a classroom of students, most of whom were female, engaged in plant propagation. Of the sixteen individuals, only three are male. Despite this, participants noted that women remained less represented in higher-level positions in academia.
Beyond that, in multiple ways, the women of this study felt respected in their profession. Most of the women explained they were well regarded as lecturers and research scientists. “I think I get the respect from a student and from staff...we get respect from all,” said Participant #2. In Thailand, agriculture faculty were required to fulfill a multidimensional role that has historically included working with local farmers and the community through extension programming. When fulfilling this role, Participant #3 stated that she believed “[farmers] accept the mission of the woman” and that she has had “no problem with working with a group of farmers.” Similarly, Participant #1 submitted a photograph that showed their female faculty who had worked with farmers in a rural Thai community (see Figure 3). The majority of the individuals pictured were male. Participant #1’s submission of this photo showed her belief that farmers and other stakeholders respected them.
Figure 3. Depictions of Women Working with Farmers in their Communities

Note. Image submitted by Participant #1 to depict the impact of female agricultural faculty on rural Thai farmers.

**Conclusions**

This study explored the various ways in which women agriculture faculty positioned themselves in higher education by connecting their experiences and observations to prevalent gendered issues. Using a critical constructionist lens to analyze their experiences in agricultural higher education revealed each individual’s complex view of their unique experiences. Further, approaching the interpretation of the findings through a critical lens exposed the power imbalances in their profession. Through this analysis, three themes surfaced: (1) gendered disparities, (2) barriers to success in academia, (3) perceptions of self and gender in agriculture and higher education. The emergence of these concepts offered a multifaceted glimpse into the women’s lived experiences in their profession and their storied perspectives.

The first theme provided an in-depth look at gendered disparities in Thailand and how they could impact women faculty. Through my analysis of the data, I concluded that Thailand’s agricultural sector remained a male-dominated field. Such a finding provided critical
implications for women in higher education. For example, a combination of highly gendered institutions with a male-dominated agricultural industry appeared to provide significant barriers for the women faculty in this investigation – a finding that aligned with previous research (Bird, 2011; Eboiyehi et al., 2016; Maranto & Griffin, 2011; Marchant & Wallace, 2013; Misra et al., 2012; Vu, 2018). The study’s findings also suggested that women were slowly becoming more accepted in agricultural disciplines in higher education. I triangulated this notion through participant-submitted photographs that depicted an overwhelming number of female students engaged in agricultural coursework (see Figure 2). I conclude, therefore, that although women have achieved more representation in Thailand’s higher education, gender inequalities and barriers to women faculty’s success have remained.

The second theme illuminated the barriers to success that women agricultural faculty in Thailand have experienced. This finding suggested that societal expectations regarding women’s role in households presented a barrier to the success of participants in this investigation. For example, the women faculty discussed the importance of family and making career sacrifices to uphold their household responsibilities, consistent with Pimpa’s (2012) work that reported how, in many Asian countries, cultural norms and traditions had placed women as primary caretakers of family units. As a result, women have historically had fewer career opportunities (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020). The participants’ discussions of family responsibilities suggested that this cultural perception had remained. Another barrier to success was the lack of female representation in upper-level positions in Thailand’s higher education system, especially in agriculture. Although previous research had explored this phenomenon in academia more broadly (Luke, 2001a; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011; Neubauer, 2019), this has not been explicitly
reported for women in agricultural disciplines. I conclude, therefore, that significant barriers have existed for women agricultural faculty in Thailand.

The final theme suggested that the participants had positive self-perceptions about their gender. In particular, the women faculty expressed that women were as capable as their male counterparts. Additionally, the participants reported they were respected by their students and farmers in rural communities that they engaged with during extension programming. I concluded, therefore, that although women in Thailand have continued to experience gender inequalities and barriers to career success rooted in cultural perceptions, they have positive perceptions of their experiences in their career and their position within it – a finding not currently reflected in the broader literature.

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Morley (2013) reported that there had been an overall increase in women’s presence as students and faculty at higher education institutions across the globe. However, findings from this investigation complicated such a notion. For example, although the participants perceived the number of female students and women obtaining faculty positions in agricultural disciplines had increased, these positive trends did not extend to upper-level academic positions, such as department heads, deans, and university presidents. The increased presence of female students and faculty should be viewed as a positive indicator of change; however, I recommend that future research explore why women have not been allowed to ascend to upper-level administrative positions. I also recommend that Thai university administrators create leadership development programs for women faculty to learn ways to successfully navigate academic culture and obtain administrative positions that could allow them to enact positive change.
I also recommend a deeper examination of Thai women’s positive perceptions of self. For example, the participants in this investigation reported they felt respected and viewed positively by students and other stakeholders. Although such a finding indicated progress regarding gendered disparities, this could also lead to potential setbacks for women in the future. For example, Powell (2016) warned of the dangerous of championing meritocracy in society for women, when individuals are valued for their performance and experience rather than “other considerations such as equality, need, rights, or seniority” (Powell, 2016, p. 29). Previous work has suggested that removing considerations of gender has resulted in unintentional discrimination for women when applying for jobs, promotions, and research funding (Morley & Crossouard, 2015; Powell, 2016). Unintentional discrimination occurs when gender inequality issues are seemingly erased or deemed irrelevant because the culture of meritocracy, hiring or promoting based on performance, is dominant. As a result, if Thai women continue not to recognize the need to advocate for greater gender equality in higher education, it could stymie women’s progress in the future.

Another emergent finding involved the role of the family in creating additional challenges for women agricultural faculty. Evidence has suggested that women have traditionally been expected to fulfill a substantial familial role; as such, women in the Asia-Pacific region have found it challenging to assume leadership positions (Cuthbert et al., 2019; Neubauer, 2019). I recommend that additional research be conducted to examine how the family dynamics might serve as a barrier for women in academia. Perhaps faculty development opportunities could also be used to create a space by which women faculty could talk more openly about this issue and gain ideas about achieving a greater sense of work-life balance that allows them to pursue administrative roles moving forward.
It is also important to note that although women in this study held a positive view of themselves and their positionality in their profession, this does not mean that gender equality has been achieved in Thailand. In fact, if the gender inequalities identified in this investigation continue to be preserved in Thai society, progress on women’s rights could be hindered for future generations. Consequently, I recommend that research explore how to open women’s eyes to gender-based inequalities in Thailand. For example, perhaps cultural norms and traditions have been so profoundly ingrained regarding female’s position in society that women have been unable to recognize how their opportunities and voices have been regulated over time – a notion that warrants greater attention and focus.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on reducing gender inequalities and promoting women’s empowerment (Mandal, 2013). Because of this increased focus, effectively finding ways to address the issue has emerged as a critical concern. Research has shown that educational programming, such as agricultural extension programs, has been effective at fostering gender equality by cultivating women’s skills and technical knowledge (Akter et al., 2017; Lecoutere et al., 2019). Extension programming can increase women’s agricultural knowledge and more indirectly foster improved decision-making capacity, increased financial independence, and improved female health outcomes (Charman, 2008; Lecoutere et al., 2019; Ugbomeh, 2001). However, to date, agricultural extension programs for women have focused primarily on Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Subsequently, a gap in knowledge has existed for Southeast Asia regarding the use of agricultural extension programming for women’s empowerment (Akter et al., 2017; Quisumbing et al., 2014). Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the potential for regional variations. For this reason, this investigation sought to examine the realities of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the Southeast Asian agricultural industry with a primary focus on Thailand.

Summary

Chapter 2, *Troubling the Discourse on Global Agricultural Development: A Feminist Critique of Gender Inequalities in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa*, presented a comprehensive comparison of gender inequalities in the agricultural sector in two developing regions – Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. After synthesizing the available literature and interpreting the information using a feminist critique approach, I found that regional variations existed regarding gender inequalities and the experiences of women in agriculture. Across
regions, three gender inequalities emerged: (1) access to land ownership, (2) power in decision-making capacity, and (3) male control of extension services. The findings demonstrated the realities experienced by women in the agricultural sector are different in the two regions and that the level of empowerment experienced by women also varied considerably.

Women in Southeast Asia have been more likely to have an elevated perception of empowerment despite persistent gender inequalities. Further, in this region, women were more often involved in joint decision-making power and collaborative decisions regarding household finances. Southeast Asian women have also had more legal rights concerning land ownership. Despite this, women have been primarily unaware of their legal rights and often still lack access to extension services, leading them to seek alternative avenues, such as female opinions leaders, to acquire agricultural knowledge. Further, women’s agricultural-based decisions have been controlled by male family members, and cultural norms and traditions have limited interactions with predominantly male agricultural extension agents. This finding suggested that enough variation between the regions warranted regionally targeted agricultural extension efforts to empower women.

The comparison between the two regions also stoked critical discussion about an overarching theme of this three-article anthology – the misperception of women’s empowerment in Southeast Asia’s agricultural sector. Because of an elevated perception of gender equality, it appeared to have undermined women’s empowerment. As a result, extension programming designed to address gender inequalities and introduce possible solutions could result in an adverse reaction if individuals hold an elevated level of equality. Denial of gender equality issues could also result and further hamper progress for women’s empowerment in the region, a theme explored in other chapters of this investigation.
Chapter 3, *The Intersection of Gender, Media, and Policy: A Qualitative Analysis of Thai Newspaper Coverage of Women in Agriculture*, examined newspaper coverage regarding the gender inequalities that women engaged in agriculture have faced in Thailand. As a result, I found that newspaper coverage of women in agriculture to be both diverse and conflicting. The coverage focused on topics such as economic impacts and issues, human rights, and agricultural development. One theme showcased that women have often been portrayed in entrepreneurial and leadership roles in the agricultural sector. However, more often than not, newspaper coverage featured women only in an incidental manner, and women were primarily used in photographs as sexual objects to stimulate interest in a topic. This suggested that women in agriculture have been underrepresented positively in Thailand’s newspaper media.

The underrepresentation of women and the portrayal of women in entrepreneurial and leadership roles also spoke to the elevated perception of gender empowerment in Southeast Asia. Women in desirable agricultural roles have been advanced in the newspaper media; however, results from this investigation suggested that positive portrayal such was more difficult to achieve in reality. This appears to have contributed to Thailand’s positive perception of gender equality, despite a blatant underrepresentation of women in agriculture in the newspaper media resulting in gender-based disparities which have concealed and oppressed women in nuanced and complicated ways.

Chapter 4, *A Case Study of Women’s Experiences as Agricultural Faculty in Thailand’s Higher Education System*, provided further evidence that women in Thailand’s agricultural sector have a disproportionately high perception of their empowerment despite not having equal rights and representation. For example, women agricultural faculty in higher education reported primarily positive perceptions of self and gender equality in their careers. Further, they expressed
that women were as empowered in their careers as their male counterparts – despite barriers existing which prevented the advancement of women into leadership roles (Charman, 2008; Lecoutere et al., 2019; Ugomeh, 2001).

Although women holding positive self-perceptions should be viewed as progress to women’s rights, it could open the door to the deterioration to possibilities for women in the future, and consequently, has the potential to undermine gender equality efforts in Thailand’s agricultural sector. For instance, previous research has shown that more emphasis should be placed on “quality, rather than equality” regarding women’s empowerment (Morley & Crossouard, 2015, p. 8). Relying purely on performance and experience could remove gender from the equation and result in unintentional or hidden discrimination against underrepresented groups such as women. Removing gender from the equation, as a result of relying on meritocracy for hiring and promoting, has the potential to provide a false sense of equality and empowerment (Morley & Crossouard, 2015; Powell, 2016). Therefore, women’s positive self-perceptions could be exaggerated and eventually harm progress in Thailand’s agricultural industry.

Meta Conclusions and Recommendations

This investigation yielded two meta-conclusions that were supported by the three separate research articles. The first meta-conclusion was the potential for Southeast Asian women to possess an elevated sense of empowerment despite evidence suggesting that persistent gender inequalities remain. My research indicated that this sense of empowerment was likely an overly elevated perception. For example, I found that women in Southeast Asia remained primarily unaware of their legal land ownership rights and lacked access to extension services. Although women have been represented in Thailand’s media to some extent, there was an
underrepresentation of women portrayed in entrepreneurial and leadership roles. This finding was further substantiated by the experiences of women agriculture faculty in Thailand’s higher education system. For example, I found that women ultimately lacked representation in higher education's upper echelons and reported that it was difficult to be promoted to leadership roles. Despite being underrepresented, the women reported a disproportionately high self-perception and view of their position in their career.

As a result, I conclude that this misperception undermined women’s empowerment efforts in Southeast Asia. Although the results of this investigation indicated some positive progress in regard to gender disparities (Akter et al., 2017), it also suggested that women in Southeast Asia were somewhat more empowered than their counterparts in other developing regions. I conclude that this elevated perception of empowerment combined with the realities of the persistent gender inequalities could stymie further development in the region. The realities of gender equality and Southeast Asian women’s elevated sense of empowerment could also lead to a false sense of empowerment. This false perception could ultimately create a stalemate for future progress. For example, if women perceive no gender inequalities exist, they could be less likely to seek further gender-based progress. On this point, Powell (2016) explained that the idea of meritocracy, especially when used to address gender inequality, could do more harm than good (Powell, 2016).

The second major conclusion in this anthology was the important role of family, community, and culture in women’s empowerment in Southeast Asia’s agricultural system. The participants often discussed the importance of family and the community in shaping their careers. Findings from all three investigations suggested that women were required to make sacrifices in their careers because they were required to take on the primary caretaker role in their household.
Further, each study also illuminated that women were often required to prioritize their families and households when choosing a career path and making financial decisions.

In many Asian cultures, including Thailand, an emphasis has been placed on community and collectivism. As such, many decisions have historically been made with the consideration of family benefits and community impacts. Because of the focus, women have had fewer career opportunities (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020). Findings across the three studies suggested that this gender disparity remained an issue for women regarding career opportunities and growth in addition to general constraints on their time. Because of these sacrifices, I concluded that familial norms in the region served as a substantial barrier to women’s success. This finding was consistent with previous research that suggested that, in many Asian countries, cultural norms and traditions often lead to women assuming a caretaker role (Pimpa, 2012).

Overall, there were several issues that this investigation illuminated about gender equality and women’s experiences in the Southeast Asian agricultural sector. I conclude, therefore, that women in this region and Thailand, in particular, have an elevated perception of the realities of gender equality and women empowerment in agriculture. Although they possess greater rights and joint decision-making capacity than women in Sub-Saharan African, substantial barriers to women’s empowerment have persisted. As articulated above, women in Thailand were likely to be unaware of their land ownership rights, underrepresented in agricultural newspaper coverage, beholden to traditional cultural norms, and fall into the trap of meritocracy regarding gender inequalities perpetuated in Southeast Asian culture.

Because regional variations also existed, I recommend that culturally literate extension programs be created to further women’s empowerment in Southeast Asia. Each study suggested that sufficient evidence of regional variations existed to support the need for culturally literature
extension programs. Additionally, I maintain that the issue of meritocracy in Thailand’s agricultural sector has posed a significant problem to future growth. I suggest, therefore, that research examine women’s meritocracy concerning their empowerment in agriculture so that educational programs and policy changes can be established. Regarding recommendations for future research, language presented a significant barrier to reviewing newspaper coverage and interviewing participants. Therefore, I recommend that native Thai speakers conduct future investigations because this might allow for a more in-depth and robust understanding of the issues and themes. The study should also be replicated with a larger sample size and a broader representation of agricultural sub-fields.
APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

TO: Roberts, Richie
LSUAG | Dept | Agricultural and Extension
Education and Evaluation

FROM: Michael Keenan
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: 09-Feb-2021

RE: IRBAG-21-0021

TITLE: The Lived Experiences of Female Agricultural Faculty and Extension Workers in Thailand

SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial Application

Review Type: Exempt

Risk Factor: Minimal

Review Date: 09-Feb-2021

Status: Approved

Approval Date: 09-Feb-2021

Approval Expiration Date: 08-Feb-2024

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

Number of subjects approved: 10

LSU Proposal Number: By: Michael Keenan, Chair

Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*

2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents.*

Mike Keenan
209 Knapp Hall O 225-578-1708
Baton Rouge, LA 70803 F 225-578-4443
APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

Project Title: The Lived Experiences of Female Agricultural Faculty and Extension Workers in Thailand

Investigators: Morgan A. Richardson – LSU AEEE Doctoral Candidate; Richie Roberts – Assistant Professor, LSU

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of women within Thailand’s university and agricultural extension system and any perceived barriers that impact their roles within it.

Procedures: You will be asked to complete an interview. This interview will be completely virtual in nature and will utilize video conferencing software. The interview will also be recorded using a separate audio device to ensure that your responses are appropriately captured for later transcription. After the interview, we will transcribe your responses verbatim. Then, we will email you a copy of the transcript and ask you verify its accuracy and make any changes that may be necessary to accurately reflect your perspective.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. In no way will your answers affect you in your professional career as your privacy and anonymity will be ensured through removal of personal identifiers.

Benefits: Results from this research may be used to inform a path forward for growth for women in Thailand’s educational system and, potentially, education at the international level.

Confidentiality: The data will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in one researcher's office. The paper copies will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study. Only the researcher will have access to the information that is stored electronically and it will be destroyed five years from completion of the study.

The LSU AgCenter IRB has the authority to inspect records and data files to assure compliance with approved procedures.

Contacts: Please feel free to contact the researchers at Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge, LA 70803) if you have questions or concerns about this research project. For information on participants’ rights, contact Michael Keenan, PhD, LSU AgCenter IRB Chair, 209 Knapp Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, (225) 578-1708 or mkeenan@agcenter.lsu.edu
Performance Site: Virtual interviews conducted via video conferencing software.

Number of Subjects: 5-10

Subject Inclusion: Female faculty members and extension workers linked to agricultural colleges/departments within Thailand’s system of higher education.

Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published, your name and job title will not be attributed to your quotes. Privacy will be protected by removal of identifiers and anonymous numbers will be assigned to each participant post-interview. Any quotations will be attributed to the participant’s anonymously assigned number.

Signatures: The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. For injury or illness, call your physician, or the Student Health Center if you are an LSU student. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Michael Keenan, Institutional Review Board, 1 (225) 578-1708, mkeenan@agcenter.lsu.edu. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form. I understand that my actual name, position and personal identifiers will NOT be reported in the final publication of this research.

Signature: __________________________ Date: ________________

Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, may be used or distributed for future research.

Yes, I give permission: __________________________ Signature

No, I do not give permission: __________________________ Signature
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for participating in this study. There are no right or wrong answers, and you can choose to not answer or stop the interview at any time. During this interview, I will be asking you a series of questions about what it’s like being a female in your career. Your responses to these questions will be confidential due to potentially controversial nature of this research. Therefore, in the final report, any person identifiers will be removed, and your answers and quotes will be only attributed to an anonymously assigned numerical identifier (i.e. Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). It should also be noted that recordings will be taken via a separate audio recording device; the recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer. Once recordings are transcribed, all original audio will be deleted. I anticipate that the interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes.

Demographics of Participant

Name:
Age:
Region of Origin:
Current Occupation:
Involvement with Thailand’s agricultural sector:
Years Involved:

Major Guiding Questions:

1. Tell me about you, your position, and how you became interested in teaching/helping in the agricultural industry?

   Sub-questions (If necessary)
   - What caused you to become involved?
   - How long have you been involved?
   - What were your job duties and responsibilities?
   - What sorts of daily activities or tasks do you participate in?
   - What is your favorite part of your job?

2. From your perspective, how represented are women in your field of employment?

   Sub-questions (If necessary)
   - Has it changed over the years to include more women? Less?
   - What sorts of roles do women undertake in your field? Managerial? Advising roles? Department heads?

3. What is your perception of women serving in your position or in a position like yours?

   Sub-questions (If necessary)
4. **What sorts of challenges (or barriers) do you experience in your field of employment?**

*Sub-questions (If necessary)*

- How are you treated by your superiors? Students?
- Do you ever experience any sort of push back or disbelief that you are employed as an agricultural educator?
- Do you feel like you are respected in your role?
- What is your work-life balance like? Do you think your position as a female impacts that at all?
- Do you think your being a woman impacts any upward movement you feel you could have?
- Do you feel capable of performing all of your duties and/or tasks?
- Are there any roles or position unavailable to you?
- Are you comfortable performing your duties and tasks? Ever uncomfortable? What do you think influences that?

5. **Where do you see the future of your field of employment going? And what role do women play in this future?**

*Sub-questions (If necessary)*

- Changing organizational structure?
- More female leadership roles?
- More or less acceptance of your being female in the agricultural education field?

6. **What questions should I have asked about your role in the field of employment, but did not? Why?**

- How population of women in agriculture path/career in Thailand is the same or different to the past?

7. **Is there anything additional that you would like to add? Or anything you would like to change or amend about your answers to previous questions?**

Provide a photograph of how you perceive women in your field...one that shows/illustrates their role within your job
REFERENCES


Alkire, S., Meinzen-Dick, R., Peteman, A., Quisumbing, A., Seymour, G., & Vaz, A. (2013). The women’s empowerment in agriculture index. *World Development, 52*, 71-91. [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.06.00](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.06.00)


Maranto, C. L., & Griffin, A. E. (2011). The antecedents of a ‘chilly climate’ for women faculty in higher education. *Human relations, 64*(2), 139-159. [https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726710377932](https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726710377932)


Matichon Online. (2018b, October 11). DTAC joins hands with partners service launch "Farm Mani" farmer info app helps farmers to cultivate precisely. https://www.matichon.co.th/publicize/news_1173651


Murray, U., Gebremedhin, Z., Brychkova, G., & Spillane, C. (2016). Smallholder farmers and climate smart agriculture: Technology and labor-productivity constraints amongst women


[https://www.nationthailand.com/tech/30291413](https://www.nationthailand.com/tech/30291413)


[https://www.nationthailand.com/business/30287095](https://www.nationthailand.com/business/30287095)


[https://www.nationthailand.com/edandtech/30369597](https://www.nationthailand.com/edandtech/30369597)


95


Thairath Online. (2019a, March 26). OIE reveals the success of NSP in wireless communication, raising Thai horses, reducing the risk of disease by 70%. https://www.thairath.co.th/business/market/1529745


Thairath Online. (2020b, January 6). Ministry of agriculture aims to use technology for digital government raising production-price of crops. [Link]

Thairath Online. (2020c, March 28). Armed young agriculture through "CAT breeding good" pilot 7 schools across the country. [Link]

Thairath Online. (2020d, October 5). Young smart farmer. [Link]

Thairath Online. (2020e, November 21). Four educational institutions join hands to raise agriculture nawat Advise students to see the way of studying - cooking. [Link]

Thairath Online. (2020f, November 28). "Chalermchai" raises Mae Rim district to be a flower production village and agrotourism. [Link]

Thairath Online. (2021, February 1). Dusit Thani Hua Hin adapting to fight covid turn to rice planting Extending natural tourism. [Link]


Treerutkuarkul, A. (2021, February 8). Focus on food security. *Bangkok Post*. [Link]


Wilcox, C. S., Grutzmacher, S., Ramsing, R., Rockler, A., Balch, C., Safi, M., & Hanson, J. (2015). From the field: Empowering women to improve family food security in Afghanistan. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems, 30*(1). [https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742170514000209](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742170514000209)


VITA

Morgan Richardson Gilley is a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She received her Bachelor of Science in Natural Resource Ecology and Management from LSU in December of 2010. After graduation, she worked in the environmental disaster recovery field for several years before returning to school. She received her Master of Science in Agricultural and Extension Education in May 2018. She is a candidate to receive her Doctor of Philosophy in August 2021. She plans to seek a position in her field and hopes to continue her research on women empowerment and gender inequality within international agriculture.