

The Intersection of Gender, Media, And Policy: A Qualitative Analysis on Thai Newspaper Coverage of Women in Agriculture

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Abstract

Women empowerment and gender equality have been found to be statistically significant and positive predictors of global agricultural development. Therefore, reducing gender disparities can encourage economic progress and growth in developing nations. As such, determining effective ways to stimulate social progress and women's empowerment has emerged as a critical need. One strategy used to raise the public's consciousness about gendered issues in Thailand has been through mass media. In response, this study aimed to (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 since the introduction of Thailand 4.0's policy in 2016. Using a qualitative content analysis of Thailand's newspaper coverage of women in the agricultural sector, four themes emerged: (1) economic policy implications for Thailand's agricultural system; (2) human rights; (3) women entrepreneurship and leadership; and (4) agricultural development. Therefore, this study concluded that newspaper coverage of women in agriculture was diverse and conflicting – a finding not previously reported. The findings also revealed that women in agriculture have been underrepresented in newspaper publications historically. Moving forward, we provided critical implications for how future research, theory, and practice can depict women in agriculture more positively in the newspaper media.

Keywords: agricultural development; human rights; newspapers; policy; Thailand 4.0; women

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, 2011; 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 their 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 the management of natural resources better (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. 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 has 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 in 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 the mass media's influence was substantial enough to serve as a reference point upon which individuals base their beliefs, opinions, and self-perceptions. For instance, because gender inequalities and stereotypes have been 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 females' 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 have been 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). 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 in 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 affects 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 our examination of the intersection of gender, media, and policy for women in agriculture.

Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective

For this investigation, we 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 us 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 us to examine how power might have influenced representations of Thai women in agriculture. Previously, Richardson and Roberts (2020) used this approach to examine the positions that women assume in Thailand's agricultural industry. As a result, although Thai women consider themselves progressive, they still encountered deeply entrenched gendered biases. Therefore, using these two lenses, we were 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) examine 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, we 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, the purpose of content analysis is 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 the 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. We 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, we bounded the analysis by *place*, i.e., Thailand, and *time*, i.e., 2016 (when the policy was enacted) to April 2021.

Researcher Reflexivity

Before discussing the analytic approach used, it is important to address our background, relevant experiences, and interpretive lens. First, this study used a qualitative research approach. As such, our interpretation of the data was likely influenced by our 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 the lead researcher was a U. S. female graduate student with agricultural experience in Thailand. The other researchers were faculty at [State] University. We each have conducted research both on and with Thai women in the agricultural industry. Therefore, our lived experiences influenced the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the data.

Data Sources and Analysis

For this investigation, we 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, we analyzed newspaper articles from May 2016 (the enactment of the policy) 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, we used *Nexis Uni*, an online database, to collect online and in-print newspaper articles in English. We used the primary search terms “agriculture,” AND “Thailand 4.0,” with “women OR woman” as the secondary search term. Additional parameters included: (a) location of publication (Thailand), (b) geography by document (Thailand), (c) publication type (newspapers), and (d) date parameters (2016 to 2021). In total, there were 8,105 matches for the primary search terms, “agriculture,” AND “Thailand 4.0,” and 352 matches that included both “agriculture” AND “Thailand 4.0,” as well as “women OR woman.”

During our review, duplicate and irrelevant articles were not included for further analysis. Regarding Thai language newspapers, we analyzed newspaper articles from two representative Thai newspapers. These included the *Thai Rath* and *Matichon Online*. We 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, we 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, we employed pattern coding to reduce the first cycle codes into categories (Saldaña, 2021). Finally, we 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, we 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, we used peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017; Spall, 1998). For example, we met as a team 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 us 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. We 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 our 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, 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.

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" (pp. 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).

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 the 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 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).

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 life-changing...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 Laddek, 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).

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 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). Further, women were often portrayed 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.

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).

Agricultural Innovations and Technology

Another critical concept that emerged from the analysis of newspaper articles was depictions of women using and developing agricultural innovations and technologies. Topics reported included: (a) demonstrations and professional development on smart farming, (b) digital farming initiatives (c) examples of smart farming applications, and (d) 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 our analysis of the data, we 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, we conclude that newspaper coverage of women in agriculture was diverse and conflicting – a finding not previously reported regarding Thai women in agriculture.

The first theme illustrated how women often experience negative economic impacts when faced with changes in agricultural policy. We 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 finding 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, we 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, we 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 aligned 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 are 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, we 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 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, we recommend that future research explore this phenomenon and provide implications for navigating this sexist behavior in the media regarding 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, we 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. Perhaps Thai agriculturalist could create a media campaign highlight the work of 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. However, that there were several limitations to this investigation. First, we were 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, we 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 our misinterpretation. In the future, we 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 our analysis, some differences emerged concerning the media coverage of women between English and Thai language media. As such, we recommend that studies analyze the differences between how each media source portrays women in agriculture.

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