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**Modern Women and Traditional Gender Stereotypes: An Examination of the Roles Women Assume in Thailand's Agricultural System**

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**Abstract**

*Previous research has demonstrated that empowering women in developing nations has been shown to enhance agricultural productivity and rural development. Although women in Southeast Asia are often considered to be more empowered than in other parts of the world, in Thailand, women still experience persistent barriers to gender equality. In response, this case study examined the positionality of women in Thailand's agricultural sector by describing their underlying beliefs and values regarding their careers. As a result, three distinct themes emerged: (1) dichotomous gender roles, (2) the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, and (3) positive perceptions and beliefs in gender equality and women's abilities. The findings illuminated that despite having a distinctly positive perception of themselves and their abilities, women internalize prescribed gender stereotypes in the agricultural industry in Thailand. Such views appeared to impede the participants' sense of empowerment in the agricultural workforce. Moving forward, we recommend that extension professionals design programming to empower women in Thailand by tailoring professional development opportunities based on regional differences in regard to gendered customs, norms, and traditions. Further, additional research should be conducted to distill the specific topic areas that could be used to stir critical reflection and action among women in Thailand's agricultural sector.*

**Keywords:** agricultural development; gender equality; Thailand; women empowerment

### Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Gender equality and women empowerment are, arguably, two of the most critical factors emphasized in the global development literature, especially in regard to fostering economic and agricultural capacity for developing nations. As an illustration, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations (U.N.), includes seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of which focuses entirely on *gender equality* and the *empowerment of women* (U. N., n.d.). Beyond that, U. N. Women — a coalition of advocates representing over 100 countries, has also served as a platform to advance the equity of women across the world (U. N. Women, 2018). One central area of focus of this entity has been to foster more technical knowledge and skills for women (Akter et al., 2017; U. N. Women, 2018). As a result of such work, Ansari and Khan (2018) demonstrated that statistically significant and positive relationships existed among the capacity development of women in agriculture, growth to the agricultural sector, and national economic development. Further, the promotion of gender equality in agriculture was also found to help safeguard developing nations from failing to industrialize. Therefore, empowering women in agriculture “. . . plays an active role in economic development [of nations] . . .” (Ansari & Khan, 2018, p. 5).

Although women account for 43% of the global agricultural labor force (Akter et al., 2017; Doss, 2011), the statistic trends higher in eastern and Southeastern Asian countries, such as Thailand (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2011). As a consequence, the FAO (2011) has called (2011) for more examination into the gender disparity problem in the agricultural sector to better address issues regarding food security that threaten to intensify. A need emerged to describe the varying roles women assume in Thailand’s agricultural sector and how such could provide critical implications for extension programming.

### Review of Literature

A better understanding of Thailand’s agricultural development is essential to making sense of the roles that women assume. Despite the country’s current dependence on agriculture, Thailand has recently made critical developmental steps toward its goal of being considered a developed nation. Overcoming the persistent barriers to further women empowerment efforts remains critical, especially for extension programming. As such, the review of literature will feature evidence concerning: (a) agricultural development in Thailand, (b) gender equality in agriculture, and (c) women empowerment in extension.

### Agricultural Development in Thailand

In Thailand, it is often assumed that agricultural development and economic growth happened in a similar way to nations in Northeast Asia (Booth, 2002). However, Leturque and Wiggins (2011) argued that such occurred in a less egalitarian manner in Southeast Asia due to a skewed distribution of land and incomes, lower intensity of agricultural production labor, and a less pronounced link between growth in agricultural and non-agricultural income. Further, many rural areas lacked opportunities for off-farm employment during this period (Booth, 2002). Rural populations in the region still rely on the agricultural sector as their primary source of income.

Therefore, Thailand’s agricultural sector remains a critical aspect of the country’s economy, with a significant portion of its citizens relying on agricultural production to sustain their livelihoods (Agard & Roberts, 2020; Win, 2017). In fact, Thailand has over 50.4 million acres of farm and agricultural land, which is used to cultivate a variety of crops such as rice, rubber, sugarcane, and cassava (Nations Encyclopedia, 2019). In recent years, Thailand has been

ranked as a high to a mid-level developing country. It has also has begun to make significant strides in transitioning from a developing to a developed nation. For example, in recent decades, the country has experienced urban growth, increased agricultural exports, and a reduction in poverty – key indicators that Thailand is becoming more industrialized (Leturque & Wiggins, 2011). Despite this progress, more work is needed to promote gender equality and women empowerment in the country’s agricultural sector (Booth, 2010; The World Bank, 2019; Trading Economics, 2019).

### **Gender Equality in Agriculture**

Gender equality is essential to agricultural growth and rural development (FAO, 2011; Seymour, 2017). Perhaps one of the greatest strategies to promote gender equality in agriculture is to ensure women have the autonomy they need to seek and direct resources – a concept known as empowerment (Hoddinott & Haddad, 1995; Quisumbing & Maluccio, 2003; Seymour, 2017). Consequently, empowerment represents “the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability” (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019, p. 1). A fundamental way to empower women is by promoting agency. Agency has been described as “lifting the burden” for individuals who lack power in a given social system (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019, p. 17). In Thailand, as well as throughout Southeast Asia, women are often considered to be more empowered than their counterparts in other developing countries such as Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Mason & Smith, 2003). For instance, Akter et al. (2017) reported that women in this region have more agency to make decisions. They also often have relatively equal access to land and resources when they are work as a husband-wife team. As a consequence, women who work in the agricultural sector in Thailand are more likely to have control over household income (Akter et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, persistent barriers to gender equality still exist in rural areas of the country. As an illustration, four main barriers currently impede the empowerment of Thai women (Nguyen et al., 2019). First, women in Southeast Asia, despite their critical contributions to agriculture, are still regarded as secondary farm labor rather than principal earners like their male counterparts. Consequently, a power imbalance exists by which men act as the “de facto heads of households” (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 1). Second, assumed legal access to resources, such as materials, education, and credit-based loans, does not necessarily produce control over resource usage. Third, women are more likely to be confined to “lower levels of the value chain” (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 2). Thus, women are relegated to lower-level roles and less likely to hold more potentially lucrative jobs. For example, women in rural or agricultural areas often engage in activities such as crop production, animal tending, food preparation and processing, fuel collection, agricultural trade and marketing, as well as maintenance activities. Despite the nature of these roles, the Thai people do not traditionally view such as agricultural practices. The final barrier is that issues of gender equality and power imbalance are not incorporated into existing agricultural policy (Nguyen et al., 2019). Despite higher levels of women empowerment in agriculture, Thailand still has significant barriers that need to be addressed in regard to gender equality and empowerment through extension programming.

### **Women Empowerment in Extension**

Incorporating women empowerment into extension programming has been advanced as a practice that can have a positive impact on agricultural development (Lecoutere et al., 2019; Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019; Roberts & Edwards, 2017). In particular, Lecoutere et al. (2019)

demonstrated that agricultural extension efforts targeting women could improve: (1) agricultural knowledge, (2) decision-making, and (3) the adoption of positive agricultural practices. Further, Lecoutere et al. (2019) reported that when women provided information to other women, decision-making, and the adoption of recommended agricultural practices increased.

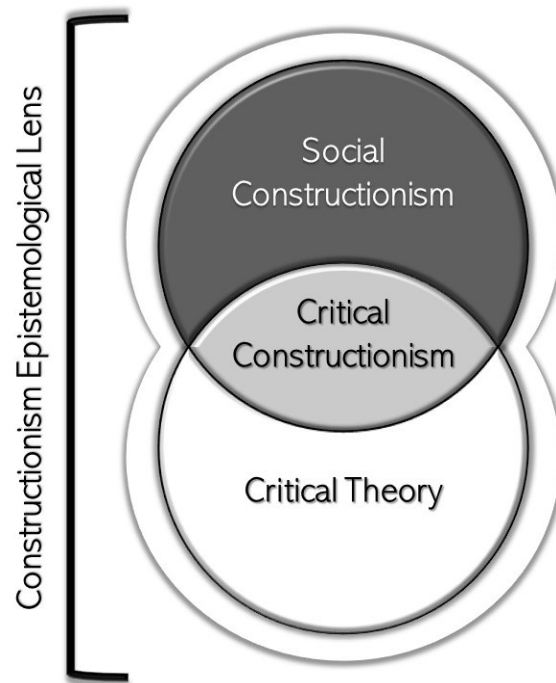
Accordingly, existing literature has demonstrated that the goal of women empowerment through extension can be achieved in a variety of ways (Lecoutere et al., 2019; Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019; Roberts & Edwards, 2017). However, more work is needed to understand how the roles women assume in the agricultural system in developing economies, especially in Thailand, may influence extension outcomes and related programming.

### **Epistemological Lens and Theoretical Perspective**

To investigate women's role in Thailand's agricultural system, we drew on the philosophical perspective of *critical constructionism* to make sense of the study's findings while also critiquing such using a critical lens (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Critical constructionism holds an interesting position in social sciences because it exists at the intersection of multiple epistemological and theoretical perspectives such as constructionism, social constructionism, and critical theory. The use of such an approach was advanced by Crotty (1998) to help deconstruct complex issues that are often *messy* and *tangled* in the social world. With that in mind, a discussion of each major component of critical constructionism follows. To begin, constructionism is an epistemological position in which individuals view knowledge as permeable and created through direct experience; this can be compared to the view of objectivists who view knowledge and truth as static and existing outside of the human experience (Andrews, 2012; Schwandt, 2003). Social constructionism is sometimes used interchangeably with constructionism; however, it should be considered a theoretical perspective, or a lens that grounds logic in regard to interpreting the phenomenon under investigation (Crotty, 1998). Through this lens, emphasis is placed on understanding how social interaction and culture shape the construction of knowledge. The final component of critical constructionism draws on another theoretical perspective, critical theory. Critical theory involves taking a critical look at issues that exist in a society with the intent to create change for individuals that lack power.

Therefore, critical constructionism combines the aforementioned philosophical lenses to examine how aspects of society and culture have upheld structures of power (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Through this understanding, critical constructionists offer a critique of such power imbalances to chart a new path forward (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Or, as Sampson (1987) explained, a critical constructionist takes constructionism a step further. They are not satisfied to assume that human experience is a social construct; instead, they examine the limitations placed on human experience by individuals who possess more power in a given context (Sampson, 1987). Figure 1 demonstrates how critical constructionism is situated philosophically.

As a result, critical constructionism was appropriate to investigate this phenomenon because it provided a layered glimpse into the societal and cultural forces that have historically shaped power dynamics for agriculture, gender equality, and women empowerment in Thailand. Further, the critical perspective was also used to facilitate the juxtaposition between western society's views on gender roles and those of Thai women.

**Figure 1***Illustration of Critical Constructionism's Situatedness in Philosophy***Statement of Purpose and Rationale of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was twofold: (1) examine the positionality of women in Thailand agriculture; and (2) describe Thai women's beliefs and values regarding such roles. Further, our overall aim of the study was to examine how women employed in Thailand's agricultural sector viewed their roles within a broader societal context.

**Methods**

To investigate the role that gender plays in Thailand's agricultural sector as well as the thoughts and feelings of the Thai women situated within it, we determined that an instrumental case study was the most appropriate method of inquiry (Stake, 1995). This approach allowed for a more in-depth examination of the various factors that influence a real-world context (Stake, 1995). In this study, we bounded the case by place (Thailand) and time (June 2019). For that reason, every individual in this study, whether interviewed, photographed, or observed, was Thai.

**Situating Ourselves in the Study – Researcher Reflexivity**

The interpretation of the data in a qualitative study is often greatly influenced by the researcher because they “examine[e] [the data's] meaning and redirect observation[s] to refine or substantiate those meanings” (Stake, 1995, p. 9). Therefore, providing information about our background is critical. To begin, the primary researcher was a graduate student who traveled across Thailand experiencing its agriculture firsthand over four weeks in June 2019, during which she interviewed and observed a variety of agricultural workers (Pigg et al., 2020). The second researcher is a faculty member at Louisiana State University and has experience with global education, specifically in Thailand. When combined, the researchers' past and current

experiences influenced their interpretation and presentation of the data. Further, the lead investigator found herself uniquely situated within the data due to her gender. As a result, she examined her experiences and the data through a critical lens. Consequently, these perspectives and the intersections of various contextual factors shaped our interpretation.

### **Data Sources and Participants**

To triangulate findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018), we employed the following data collection techniques: (a) face-to-face semi-structured interviews, (b) field photography, and (c) researcher observations and fieldnotes over four weeks in Thailand. A semi-structured interview protocol, as advanced out by Creswell and Poth (2018), was developed before travel; it included five major guiding questions. The interview protocol including items about: (1) women's presence in Thai agriculture, (2) women's roles in the agricultural sector, (3) the factors that impact women in Thai agriculture, (4) policies or movements directly involving women, and (5) personal opinions and feelings about the phenomenon.

A purposive sampling technique allowed us to select individuals (Miles et al., 2014) at varying levels — federal, regional, and local — of involvement and knowledge of women's role in Thailand's agricultural system. In total, five individuals were chosen for interviews. The participants had varied backgrounds within the agricultural sector. A background of participants using their pseudo-name is provided next. Our first participant was Lim; she was an extension agent for one of the Royal Development Study Centers. Our second interviewee, Vu, was a female park ranger at a large animal sanctuary. The third and fourth participants worked for one of the Royal Project Stations and focused on research and extension efforts that targeted the Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand. The fourth participant was a female farmer, Som, who also served as a crop research specialist. The last interviewee, Gan, the only male participant, worked as a guide at a wildlife refuge. It should also be noted that Som and Gan were members of Thailand's Hill Tribes, one from the Red Palaung and another from the Karen. Although members of these particular Hill Tribes could be considered ethnically Burmese, both participants were Thai citizens. Our second data point was field photographs. The photos were captioned to include the lead researcher's observations, thoughts, and experiences. Our third and final data point included the lead researcher's observations and fieldnotes.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study, we analyzed the data using the coding processes detailed by Saldaña (2013). Coding helps a researcher assign meaning to the data, which can be further analyzed for potential patterns and categorization (Saldaña, 2013). Our coding strategy involved a simultaneous coding process. Simultaneous coding allows for a single piece of information to have multiple codes (or types of codes) ascribed to it (Saldaña, 2013). We used this form of coding to allow for a more in-depth and robust analysis of the data. The first cycle of coding included three types: (1) descriptive coding, (2) concept coding, and (3) values coding. Descriptive coding was employed to provide a basic, initial meaning assigned to words or phrases from the data corpus (Saldaña, 2013). As such, we used the concept coding approach to capture broader ideas presented in the data (Saldaña, 2013). Then, we employed values coding to understand and better categorize the values, feelings, and beliefs expressed by the participants (Saldaña, 2013). After the first coding cycle, a second cycle was conducted to categorize the data further and identify any patterns that might arise through use of a critical constructionist lens. Accordingly, we used pattern coding to group the first cycle codes into overarching themes. It should be noted that interpreting the data

with a critical constructionist lens influenced our analysis of the data and the resulting themes because we intended to deconstruct structures of power that have limited opportunities for women in the agricultural sector (Crotty, 1998).

### **Ensuring Standards of Quality**

To ensure rigor in this study, we embedded Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) four standards of quality into this study: (1) credibility, (2) confirmability, (3) transferability, and (4) dependability. We achieved credibility by triangulating the data collection process by utilizing three separate data points and providing contextually rich and meaningful descriptions that situated the data. Confirmability was established through memo writing during the data analysis phase to document our decisions and potential biases that might influence the thematic outcomes. Transferability was ensured by providing thick, rich descriptions of the research methods employed by the researchers and any findings that came about through analysis. Finally, dependability was achieved by giving a description of the primary researcher's role in the study. Also, analyses of the data, and subsequent findings, have shown parallelism across the data sources used in this study.

### **Findings**

This investigation provided a glimpse into the roles that Thai women assumed in the agricultural sector. Three distinct themes emerged: (1) dichotomous gender roles, (2) the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, and (3) positive perceptions and beliefs in gender equality and women's abilities. The themes represent how Thai women have positioned themselves and interpret their roles in the agricultural industry, while also offering a counter-narrative concerning the role that gender stereotypes play in shaping the work of women in agriculture.

#### **Theme #1: Dichotomous Gender Roles**

Many women in Thailand's agricultural sector perform roles of a different nature than their male counterparts. In fact, all three data sources support the presence of dichotomous gender roles. Further, when probed during interview sessions about the roles of women in agriculture, participants often compared the difference between female and male roles in the industry. In particular, Lim explained that certain positions or tasks "are not suitable for the ladies." Consequently, physical labor is typically reserved for males. More than one participant expressed the opinion that women lacked the strength required to carry out the more strenuous tasks customarily undertaken by men. This viewpoint was supported by our observations of various agricultural related industries and environments across the country. As an example, the existence of dichotomous gender roles was apparent during a visit to an elephant sanctuary outside of Chiang Mai. Despite the founder being a woman and the refuge having a few female guides, all of the caretakers were men. Gan explained:

All of them are men...because, by nature, males are stronger. They are brave. Elephants are a big animal. If you aren't brave enough, it is not very easy to get close to the elephants. Might get scared...you have to be confident to be near elephants. In general, Thai women are...scared. (sic)

Despite being perceived as weaker and unsuitable for some types of work, however, women did not lack representation in Thailand's agricultural sector. In actuality, Jay – our third interviewee and extension public relations expert – asserted that Thai women could do "many different jobs" and have "role variety" available to them. In our field notes, we regularly noted

that women are more likely to work in non-labor intensive roles in which they perform tasks related to crop processing, marketing and selling, and scientific research. For example, Vu articulated how she has seen “more and more women” in research-based roles. However, she also mentioned that “very few women [are] going outside” and that it is rare to see females in labor-intensive roles. In support of the view that more women are entering research-based roles, a second individual explained, “... I’ve seen more women come up here [the Royal Projects] than men, and do their research [in] compar[ison] to the past, because 50 years ago...this area was dangerous...so more women are coming up.” Although the roles that women have assumed in the Thai agricultural industry have transformed in recent decades, they continue to uphold and perpetuate the stereotype that women are weaker than their male counterparts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

### **Theme #2: The Perpetuation of Gender Stereotypes**

The perpetuation of traditional gender stereotypes was one of the most common themes to emerge from our fieldnotes and photography. It was also prevalent as a general tone that served as an undercurrent to the views and opinions shared by participants in most of our conversations and interviews. For example, some of the more prominent topics involved the lack of women’s physical strength and the belief that outside labor negatively affected women, i.e., because as Lim reported, it is “so terrible for the lady.” Another prevalent theme captured in our jottings and fieldnotes was that many women were observed and photographed wearing hats, long sleeves, and full-length pants while working outdoors in sweltering and humid conditions. When probed on women’s choice of this attire, participants reported that such was grounded in their belief that women are delicate and desire paler skin. Our interviewee Lim stated, “the nature of the lady is they love beautiful” and want to maintain their pale skin. Further, through our observations, we noted that it was rare for a Thai woman to work outside without coverings.

Another emergent concept from our analysis of the data was the Hill Tribe women’s adherence to traditional dress. When asked about her traditional dress, Som explained that it was important for women to “make it themselves” to honor their culture and heritage. However, the Hill Tribe men were observed mostly wearing western clothing. In addition to the expectation that the Hill Tribe women wear traditional dress, they “usually take care of...the domestic work like cooking.” Therefore, women are often responsible for more than just agricultural work. According to Som, a woman of the Palaung people,

The women do a lot of domestic work, like washing, cooking...so there’s some additional jobs outside of farming. Like the clothes they use, the women have to make them. Like this [gestures to her traditional skirt] takes three days to make.

Additionally, Som explained that household work is not “divided equally” between males and females. As a consequence, not only are women responsible for their agricultural tasks, the women are also responsible for cooking, cleaning, child care, and other general domestic work. A woman that frequently works with Hill Tribe farmers, Jay, claimed, “both of them will work in the field...but at home, women still have more work to do for their family.”

### **Theme #3: Positive Perceptions and Beliefs in Gender Equality and Women’s Abilities**

Despite the continued presence of gendered roles and prominent gender stereotypes, the women of Thailand expressed a firm belief in *gender equality*. From our observations and interviews, women had no sense of being perceived as less valued than males. Further, there was both a feeling of partnership as well as one of pride in their abilities. Male and female



partnerships — often in the form of a married couple — and the ability for the two genders to work together was a distinct topic mentioned by more than one participant. For example, one individual spoke about how “all the time, the man and the lady work together.” And, as explored in previous themes of this report, agricultural fieldwork was often divided equally between men and women. In a wildlife sanctuary observed during data collection, the female park ranger discussed how there were not any advocacy organizations for women in her profession because “it’s already quite equal...everyone is paid equally.”

In addition to their belief in gender equality, participants had distinctly positive views of their abilities. In fact, each woman expressed belief in her self-abilities. There were several positive beliefs identified through data analysis. For example, they voiced their belief that women are better suited for business and public roles. Some explained that “they offer the face and talk with many people to make the products seem interesting,” and also that women “do the business responsibilities very well.” This assertion, however, was double-edged because she followed her statement with the opinion that women were successful with business responsibilities “because they are soft and friendly.” That statement, in particular, illuminated the Thai mentality that women are equal while still maintaining the belief that women should be delicate and feminine. In a similar vein, the participants also held the belief that women are more independent than their male counterparts. Further, there was a separate but related belief that women are more patient with “tedious” tasks, as described by Jay. She went on to express the opinion that “the men would rather do the work that takes a short time, rather than something tedious...that might take the whole day.” In Figure 2, we captured images that depict the phenomenon of women working at tasks that require more patience, such as seeding (see left image; Figure 2). In Figure 2, we observed gendered differences between the roles of males and females. The man quickly filled the seed trays with dirt, whereas the woman carefully seeded the trays. Further, we also observed women transplanting (see right image; Figure 2). Such beliefs appeared to serve as the justifications for the specific positions women held in the agricultural sector.

### Conclusions and Implications

This study examined the ways in which Thai women position themselves in the agricultural sector while also describing how such shaped their opportunities in the industry. As a result, this study’s findings produced three emergent themes: (1) dichotomous gender roles, (2) perpetuation of gender stereotypes, and (3) positive perceptions and beliefs in gender equality and women’s abilities. As such, we offered a layered glimpse into the experiences and positionality of Thai women in agriculture by demonstrating how they view themselves as *equal* to but *different* from their male counterparts.

The first two themes provided an in-depth look at gendered roles in Thailand’s agriculture sector and demonstrated a relatively traditional view of women’s societal role. As an illustration, the first theme, dichotomous gender roles, portrayed the gender disparities present in the agricultural workforce. For instance, our findings spoke to the ways in which women’s roles in agriculture often involve low-intensity tasks such as marketing, seeding, transplanting, weeding, among others (UNESCO Bangkok & Korean Women’s Development Institute, 2013). Conversely, men were more likely to be responsible for jobs involving heavy lifting and manual labor (UNESCO, 2015). Such a dichotomy in gendered roles coincided with previous research that has reported adherence to prescribed gender roles in Southeast Asia (Akter et al., 2017). In particular, the findings provided insight into the influence of Asian lifestyle and beauty standards

– a notion Kong (2016) explained reflected the idea that Asian women should be soft and delicate with porcelain skin as well as gentle in personality. The current study, therefore, provided evidence that the perpetuation of gender stereotypes existed in Thailand’s agricultural system. Perhaps these views are a product of sociohistorical practices that functioned to uphold traditional gender disparities (Desautels et al., 1998; Steinberg, 2014). To this point, previous work on women in agriculture has demonstrated that gendered challenges exist in Latin America (Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019) as well as Africa (Roberts & Edwards, 2017). However, in Thailand, documentation of such issues has been insufficient.

## Figure 2

### *Two Scenes Depicting Women at Work in Thailand’s Agricultural System*



*The male’s role in seeding is different from his female counterpart. For instance, he is filling trays with dirt – a task requiring less precision than seeding. There are also differences in clothing between the two.*



*A common job for Thai women in agriculture is to transplant orchids for sale on the wholesale market. Based on the data collected in this study, such a task is rarely completed by a man because they perceive it as tedious and requires too much time.*

The last emergent theme deepened our understanding of how women perceived their roles in agriculture. For instance, the theme somewhat departed from the dominant narrative on gendered roles explored previously in this investigation. Instead, the theme revealed how the women interviewed held a distinctly positive perception of their abilities and positionality in the agricultural workforce. For instance, the participants viewed themselves as a valuable and critical part of the agricultural workforce. This notion of teamwork and the emphasis placed on the concept is likely grounded in a sense of collectivism (Pimpa, 2012). According to Hofstede (1984), Thailand has historically demonstrated higher levels of collectivism as a society, which often manifests in its people when they place importance on the commitment to groups such as “... family, extended family, or extended relationships” (Pimpa, 2012, p. 36). The sense of collectivism, therefore, shaped how participants placed priority on the larger groups’ needs.

The women interviewed also expressed a variety of positive beliefs about themselves and their ability to be successful in an agricultural-related career. Therefore, we conclude that women were viewed in Thai society as (a) better suited for business and public roles, (b) independent, (c) patient with *tedious* work, and (d) easier to train for agricultural careers. In many instances, these

beliefs were expressed multiple times in various geographic locations throughout Thailand. The numerous positive beliefs identified, therefore, demonstrated that Thai women do not consider themselves lesser than their male counterparts. Instead, the participants indicated they believed women served in equally important roles as men (Satyavathi et al., 2010). Thus, the emergent themes from this investigation provided insight into a culture – Thailand’s agricultural industry – that is increasingly progressive but remains traditional in many respects.

In some ways, therefore, the findings aligned with previous research that suggested that women in Southeast Asia are more empowered than those in other developing countries (Mason & Smith, 2003; Akter et al., 2017). And, that Thai women work with men as well as within a family unit to gain more decision-making power and control over their household income (Akter et al., 2017). On the other hand, our findings also illuminated that women continue to internalize the traditional gender stereotypes in the agriculture – a concept that has the potential to impede women’s efforts and desire to seek promotions and higher status jobs in the agricultural industry (Siengthai & Leelakulthanit, 1993).

### **Applications, Discussion, and Recommendations**

Understanding how Thai women position themselves in the agricultural sector and their self-perceptions regarding their role served as a critical foundation to initiate efforts to create positive change and further women empowerment efforts in the region. Because empowerment efforts in Southeast Asia appear to be more advanced than those in other regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, we recommend that extension programming be designed to empower women in Thailand to take into account regional differences regarding the gendered customs and traditions during the initial planning phases (Akter et al., 2017). For example, because women in Thailand articulated a positive self-perception of their beliefs and abilities in agriculture, traditional efforts to empower women may meet resistance due to the perceived gender equity and internalized gender stereotypes held by female agriculturalists. As such, we recommend that additional research investigate which topic areas on women empowerment could stir critical reflection and action among women in Thailand’s agricultural sector.

We also recommend that a targeted extension and educational campaign be designed to introduce women to (a) potential career opportunities in the agricultural industry, (b) networking opportunities with other women in their area, (c) new technological advancements, and (d) technical and economic education. Introducing Thai women to new and diverse career opportunities in the agricultural industry might stoke a greater sense of independence and agency (Roberts & Edwards, 2017). Additionally, encouraging and facilitating networking opportunities with other women in the agricultural industry might lead to an exchange of ideas as well as collaborative opportunities that could be used to foster a greater sense of collective agency (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019).

Our findings also provided evidence that women are responsible for agricultural as well as tasks that are more domestic in nature. Therefore, we recommend that extension agents introduce women to technological advancements that could help reduce their time and labor investments in such duties (Satyavathi et al., 2010). Such changes could help pave the way for increased gender equality and a “transformation of gender relations” in Thailand (Huyer, 2016, p. 112). In addition to introducing women to more technological advancements, they should also be exposed to greater educational and professional development opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills while also facilitating greater decision-making power in the agricultural industry (Paris et al., 2009). Finally, we recommend that sustained extension programming be

designed to improve Thai agriculturalists' understanding of how upholding traditional gendered stereotypes in the sector creates limitations for the industry and may stifle progress.

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