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Conceptual Framework

THIS BOOK SEEKS TO explore whether, and to what extent, a relationship existed between religion and education for females in Thailand during the early Modernization Period. It examines Thai educational policies and enrollment rates in schools from 1889 to 1931, and the Buddhist and Christian values that prevailed in Thailand during this period. Feminist theory provides the underlying conceptual framework to examine this research, providing a means to investigate the relationship between religion and female education, taking into account political, economic, and socio-cultural factors.

FEMINIST THEORY

Feminist theory explores concepts such as gender inequality and oppression. It questions the perpetuation of women's subordination to men and posits possible solutions to empower women. Since feminist theories of the causes of gender inequity and strategies to improve the livelihood of women can vary widely, this section of the current study provides a brief overview of some of the dominant political, economic, and socio-cultural perspectives current in feminist thought. In addition, it discusses the usefulness of these approaches to understanding the issue of female access to education.

Feminist theory examines the effect of patriarchal hegemony and its subordination of women. Patriarchal hegemony is based on the belief that males possess personal social, cultural, economic, and political abilities and power that are superior to females.¹ When the state embraces

1. Chung, "Women's Unequal Access," 487.

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a patriarchal hegemonic position, one of its roles is to implement the continuation of gender subordination. In this political and cultural configuration of stage organization, systems of the state, such as the law enforcement, military, media, and the legal system, enact practices in which men oppress and exploit women.² According to this theory, patriarchal hegemonic states confine girls to traditional gender roles and determine the future paths available to them.³ Feminist theorists Sandra Acker, Nelly Stromquist, Gail Kelly, Carolyn Elliot, and others posit that patriarchal ideologies have viewed women as inherently inferior, equipped merely to function as homemakers, mothers, or other career roles that require minimal skills.⁴ Many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have clear-cut, gender-related differences in occupational availability. In these countries, a higher percentage of men are administrators and managers, while a higher percentage of women fall into the “other professional, technical and related worker” category, which often includes jobs in the informal sector.⁵ In 1995, only 38 percent of women were employed in the formal sector compared with 85 percent of men in Chile. Thus, the majority of Chilean women work in the informal sector and areas with low productivity, receiving low wages and working long hours without contract or legal protection.⁶ Similarly, in South Korea, although the number of women workers increased because of export industrialization in South Korea in the 1960s–1970s, most jobs for women in the 1990s were in textiles, electronics, and tourism, requiring learning simple skills, with slim chances for promotion.⁷

Some scholars have considered religion as hegemonic state, viewing it as a powerful patriarchal institution that has oppressed women throughout the ages.⁸ Examining the effects of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism,

2. Stromquist, “Women and Illiteracy,” 95–111; Walby, “Theorizing Patriarchy,” 213–34; Chung, “Women’s Unequal Access,” 488.

3. Acker, “Feminist Theory,” 423–24.

4. *Ibid.*, 423–25; Stromquist, “Romancing the State,” 431, 436–38; Kelly and Elliot, “Orientation toward the Study,” 3–4.

5. Mickelson, Nkomo, and Smith, “Education, Ethnicity, Gender,” 28; Zveglic and Rodgers, “Occupational Segregation,” 850–75; Campion and Shrum, “Gender and Science,” 459–85; Brown, Pagan, and Rodriguez, “Occupational Attainment,” 123–35; Meyer, “Economic Globalization,” 351–83.

6. Bosch, “Popular Education,” 95–111.

7. Chung, “Women’s Unequal Access,” 360–65.

8. Nussbaum, “Role of Religion,” 167–240; Schilling, “Social Space,” 30; Stromquist, “Romancing the State,” 429; King, “World Religions,” 36–37.

Islam, and Western Christianity on education for women, comparativist Ursula King argues that women's exclusion from formal education relates to their access to the sacred scriptures of their religion.⁹ Stromquist asserts that resurgence of religious fundamentalism in West Africa deter the region from providing women with equal rights and access to education.¹⁰ In Indonesia, Gavin Jones has observed that Muslim females received less schooling than their Christian counterparts according to the country census data in 1930 and 1971.¹¹ Lynda Malik's analysis of gender stratification in higher education in Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey reveals that the degree of Islamic fundamentalist policies determine the degree of gender gap in higher education in those countries.¹² In Nepal, where high-caste Hindus have been politically dominant, socially conservative attitudes towards women continue to exist. Examining the educational experiences of Nepalese children who were born from 1965 to 1991, Sharon Stash and Emily Hannum reported that gender disparity in female education in Nepal remained relatively unchanged since 1951 despite the policy to expand public expansion initiated in that year.¹³ Importantly, the Hindu-based Nepalese government applies strict standards governing women's activities and their interaction with men, including limiting access to education.¹⁴ Thus, in many nations throughout the world, states approve and enforce the religious structures and precepts that result in limitations on education for girls.

Despite the sexual division of labor, the control of women's sexuality across social classes, and the limited number of occupations available to women in many patriarchal societies, some feminist theorists have questioned whether education has played a role in subordinating women.¹⁵ Comparativist Nelly Stromquist noted educational challenges for girls including: low female representation in science and technology, limited access to public education for females in industrializing countries, sexual stereotypes in school textbooks, and teachers' preference for boys over

9. King, "World Religions," 36.

10. Stromquist, "Romancing the State," 423-54.

11. Jones, "Religion and Education," 41-51.

12. Malik, "Social and Cultural Determinants," 181-83, 190.

13. Stash and Hannum, "Who Goes to School?," 354-78.

14. *Ibid.*, 376.

15. Stromquist, "Women and Illiteracy," 107-11; Stromquist, "Gender Delusions," 335-37; Chung, "Women's Unequal Access," 351-53; Davison and Kanyuka, "Girls' Participation," 375-400.

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girls in classroom settings.¹⁶ Vandra Masemann's study of a Girl's Secondary School in Ghana in the 1970s revealed "the hidden curriculum" of the institution offering courses to train West African girls to become wives and mothers despite the students' desires to seek professional careers outside the home.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the majority of feminist theorists view education as a positive tool to empower females. Radical and socialist feminist proponents, for example, believe that a demand of education to serve the needs of women is important and would best be created by grassroots organizations, not the government.¹⁸ At the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, particular emphasis was placed on female education to improve their value in the economic and social development process.¹⁹

According to data from the 1994 UNESCO *Statistical Yearbook*, two hundred of the three hundred million children who did not have access to primary or secondary education were females.²⁰ By focusing on gender inequity, feminist theory emphasizes the positive effects of equal access to education and empowering women. Comparativist George Psacharopoulos's 1985 cross-country report of over sixty nation-states' rates of return in education revealed that expansion of schools benefits female education and promotes an increase in women's participation in labor.²¹ In addition, Gail Kelly and Carolyn Elliot's study of female education in the developing countries reported that increasing education for women resulted in fewer children per family, less infant mortality, marriage at a later age, healthier children, as well as better-reared and educated children.²² Lastly, feminist

16. Stromquist, "Romancing the State," 440–43.

17. Masemann, "Hidden Curriculum," 479–94.

18. Stromquist, "Gender Inequality in Education," 137–53. Stromquist examines various perspectives on feminism. Radical feminists assert that women's subordination originates from power relations based on sexual differences. Although education is essential in empowering women, the state's reliance on women for biological reproductive tasks requires that women only attain minimal levels of schooling. Socialist feminist theorists argue that family patriarchy and economic capitalism reinforce women's subordination. Both groups agree that school is essential for females; however the curriculum needs to be changed to alter the gender roles of women as inexpensive labor and domestic help.

19. UNESCO, "World Declaration"; Rose and Al-Samarrai, "Household Constraints," 36.

20. UNESCO, *Statistical Yearbook*.

21. Psacharopoulos, "Returns to Education," 583–604.

22. Kelly and Elliot, "Orientation toward the Study," 1–7; Wolfe and Behman,

studies of female education by theorists such as Stromquist, in her studies in Latin America in the 1990s and Roslyn Mickelson, Mokubung Nkomo, and Stephen Smith in their overview of women in South Africa and Israel in the 1980s have suggested that women with higher levels of education have increased levels of participation in the labor force and have achieved relatively higher incomes.²³

This study examines how Buddhism and Christian groups influenced the demand and provision of female education in Thailand. Buddhism arrived to Thailand as early as the third century BC, but did not become the national religion until the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng (1279–1298).²⁴ From the thirteenth century onward, education occurred in temples where only boys learned the basics of Buddhist education, since the Buddhist perspective prohibited females from receiving education from the monks. Although Western education developed in Thailand during the seventeenth century when French Roman Catholic missionaries established schools, Thai females still did not have access to nonformal education until the advent of Protestant missionaries in the early nineteenth century.²⁵ This study applies the feminist framework to assess whether the values, traditions, and institutions of Buddhism and Christianity impacted the availability of educational access for Thai females during the early Modernization Period. Utilizing the feminist theory helps to assess whether the two religions were patriarchal hegemonic states that hindered females from receiving education or institutions that promoted schooling for them as means for empowerment.

SUMMARY

To examine the role of religion and gender in Thai education, this study employs a perspective derived from feminist theory, emphasizing the ways the political and social factors have affected female access to education. Feminist theory recognizes the duality of education, that is, that limited education can be an instrument to coerce and subordinate women into

“Who Is Schooled?” 231–45; Schultz, *Return to Women’s Education*; Mickelson et al., “Education, Ethnicity, Gender,” 5; Cochrane, *Fertility and Education*.

23. Mickelson et al., “Education, Ethnicity, Gender,” 5; Kelly and Elliot, “Orientation toward the Study,” 1–7; Stromquist, “Women and Illiteracy,” 108–11.

24. Watson, *Educational Development in Thailand*, 24; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Sukhothai Period.”

25. Watson, *Educational Development in Thailand*, 1.

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the hegemonic state system or a tool to empower women to increase their knowledge and skills. In chapters 4 through 7, this study researches the role that Buddhist and Christian values have had on Thai educational policy regarding female inclusion, examining female enrollment rates in Thai schools during the early Modernization Period (1889–1931). The feminist framework forms the foundation for the analysis of the impact of religious influences on Thai female education during the early Modernization Period.

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