

Women Leaders in the Thai Education: Career Paths and the Glass Ceiling

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This paper presents an overview of the status of female leaders in education in Thailand at the ministry and higher education levels. While the representation of women in the highest levels of educational leadership is gradually increasing, their numbers are still far too small compared to that of men. Using qualitative research, the paper investigates the paths to career success of several prominent women leaders at both levels of education. Women who want to become leaders in education may benefit from an analysis of their experiences and career paths. The root cause of the glass ceiling which prevents Thai women from attaining leadership positions are identified, and recommendations are made to overcome these barriers. This paper asserts that it is necessary for the Thai government and educational institutions to provide equal opportunity to women when it comes to the recruitment of educational leaders if they are to maximize the use of Thailand's human resources. The paper also offers recommendations for female individuals, who aspire for leadership positions, on how to achieve their career goals.

Keywords: women leaders, glass ceiling, career paths, Thai education

Since the 1970s, Thailand's economy has transformed from a rural agricultural base to an urban industrial base (Asian Development Bank, 1998). The emergent economy created job opportunities for women to work in less traditional occupations. As of January 2013, Thai women make up 46% of the entire labor force (National Statistics Office of Thailand, 2013a). They, however, are paid considerably less than men are for a comparable job, despite legislation requiring equal pay. On average, women in Thailand receive only around 60% of the salary paid to men (United Nation Development Program, 2006).

According to the Office of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education (2008), women are better represented than men in terms of education. Overall female students were slightly more than the males, with a total participation rate of 50.32%. Unfortunately their impressive representation does not continue when it comes to leadership roles.

In politics, women are underrepresented. Women make up 51.10% of Thailand's population (National Statistic Office of Thailand, 2013b), yet they only accounted for 16% of the House of Representatives or 80 out of 499 seats in the 2011 general election (Parliament of Thailand, 2013). In public administration, similar conditions hold true in the civil service administration's top posts. Even though women constituted over 61% of the public body in 2008, they made up only 24.54% of senior executives at level 9, and their representation dropped even more severely when it comes to the highest positions at level 11, where approximately 9% or three out of 29 top executives were women (Office of Civil Service Commission, 2008).

In educational settings at both lower and higher levels, women confront similar, if not worse, scenarios. In 2006, women teachers significantly outnumbered their male counterparts, making up almost 66% of the entire teacher body. At the top positions, however the proportion of women was much less; of the 31,323 school principals,

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only 7.36 % were women. The figures clearly show that women were severely underrepresented in schools' top positions (Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, 2008).

In higher education, 52.51% of 33,690 full-time faculty in 2009 were women, including 53.06% of instructors, 53.65% of assistant professors, and 49.76% of associate professors, but only about 32% of full professors (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2009). For the universities' top posts, the current figure illustrates that only 16% of public university presidents are women, 3 out of 16 presidents, while the 14 autonomous university presidents are all men. For Rajaphat Universities, female presidents make up 13% or 6 out of 46 presidents (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2013).

It is asserted that although Thai women have made strong progress in education and employment, the latter may offer unequal pay, and they continue to lag far behind men in promotions to decision-making positions in all areas: politics, public civil service, and education. The statistical evidence seems to indicate that a glass ceiling does exist in the Thai context. This study however focuses only on the educational setting.

A large number of research investigations (Bass, 1998; Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996; Bowles, 2012; Coleman, 2007; Moreau, Osgood & Halsall, 2007; Rosener, 1990; Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012) revealed that the glass ceiling not only blocks opportunities for women to advance, but also prevents institutions from making the best use of their leadership potential. The above research findings consistently disclosed that women nowadays are at least as effective as men as leaders, if not more so, in both the business and academic arenas. It is therefore the time for the glass ceiling to be shattered for the good of women as well as for institutions per se. Many explanations have been given in these research articles as to why the glass ceiling exists. A number of ways to overcome the glass ceiling have also been suggested. The explanations and suggestions presented to highlight the significance of this present study.

Significance of the study

The Merriam Webster Online Dictionary (2012) defined the glass ceiling as "an intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper-level positions." This provides women a clear view of what they will never achieve because of their sex. Bowles (2012), Frust and Reeves (2008), Coleman (2007) added that a major obstacle for women who strive to achieve a decision-making position is the presence of constraints imposed upon them, not only by society and their family, but also by women themselves. Crampton and Mishra (1999) referred to some of these constraints as myths, preconceived ideas, or unsupported notions. For example, women are perceived both by others and by themselves as lacking: access to power, bottom-line experience, mentors, career plans, confidence in applying for promotion, high expectations, separation from personal relationships, and interpersonal communication skills that influence men (Coleman, 2007). Likewise, the image of women as being dependent, passive, fragile, non-aggressive, inner-oriented, empathetic, sensitive, subjective, and intuitive (Yukongdi, 2005; Crampton & Mishra, 1999) is still prevalent within workplaces. Above all, administration is still perceived as a male role (Furst & Reeves, 2008).

References that have investigated why there are few women in administrative positions in both academic and business sectors include Bowles (2012), Schueller-Weidekamm and Kautzky-Willer (2012), Byrd (2009), Coleman (2007), Goodson and Dudley (2000), and Martin (2000). These studies demonstrated the root cause of the glass ceiling for women included poor career planning, work-life balance burden, legacy of male domination, and lack of access to mentoring. In the meantime, these research findings have also advocated a variety of programs that organizations should implement in order to provide women the opportunity to integrate leadership roles with their personal life. A few examples of these programs include flexible working arrangements, mentoring, networking, leadership training, childcare, and affirmative action programs.

Methodology

The Participants

The researcher selected and personally invited 5 women leaders from the ministry of education and public universities located in Bangkok, who she believed to be well recognized and respected by their peers and others, to participate in the study. All of the leaders accepted the invitation. In order to maintain anonymity, the participants' names used in this study are pseudonyms. Brief profiles of the participants are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Brief Profiles of the Participants

Name	Age	Education	Current Professional positions
Ministry of Education			
Queen	62	Ph.D. (Exercise Physiology) USA	Member, Thailand Merit System Protection Board (Former Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education)
Higher Education			
River	63	Ph.D. (Genetics) USA	Member, Higher Education Commission Board (Former University President)
Nisa	59	Ph.D. (Sociology) USA	Vice President for Academic Affairs
Chana	53	Ph.D.(Pharmacy) Thailand	Vice President for Planning and Development
Panin	54	Ph.D. (Philosophy) USA	Dean of Graduate School

Data Collection and Analysis

An in-depth interview inquiry was employed and a semi-structured interview technique was utilized to allow new and probing questions to be brought up at the time the interview took place (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). An initial interview protocol was drafted based on the conceptual framework's literature to extract the perceived barriers that the women confronted on their way to leadership positions, as well as information about their paths to career success. The two to three hour in-depth interviews took place at each

participant's workplace. The interviews were recorded on MP3 recorder. The researcher also took notes during the interview. A one to three hour onsite observation took place before the interview conversations were conducted to obtain background information useful for the interviews. To analyze the data, all MP3 interviews were transcribed in full. Then, the interview transcripts were proofread and compared with the audio for accuracy. The researcher made follow-up telephone interview calls with some participants to ensure the validity of the data. Next, each transcript was categorized into specific sections. The researcher finally analyzed each specific section and identified key statements and the emerging themes.

Research Findings and Discussion

The research findings are arranged in two main sections- information about the participants or the "women in the study" and the emerging themes.

The Women of the Study

Queen: The first participant was named Queen, as she aimed to become "second to none" in her chosen career; and she did. She says:

"I decided to pursue my studies in Physical Education because it wasn't a popular discipline. Those who were smart would go to popular areas like medicine, engineering, business administration, and the like. My teacher asked whether I wanted to be 'a dog's head or a lion's tail.' If I joined the majority, at best, I could only become a lion's tail, and I would rather like to become a dog's head."

Queen is now a member of Thailand Merit System Protection Board and was a permanent secretary of the Ministry of Education, the highest level in the Thai bureaucracy. She served as a member of several important boards including the Thailand Election commission, the Civil Service Commission, and the Sports Authority of Thailand. Shortly after her retirement from the top post, she wrote two popular books entitled "when a woman wants to become the big boss" and "12 strategies for Civil servants: How to climb to the top" to assist women who want to be a successful leader.

Queen earned her first degree in Physical Education, with first class honors, at a university in Thailand. She then received a scholarship from the Thai government to pursue an advanced degree overseas. Queen earned her master's and doctoral degrees in Exercise Physiology. She met and married her husband who was also a Thai doctoral student at the same US University. They returned home and later had two children.

Unlike other women, in her 30s, Queen had been promoted to middle-level administration in various offices within the Ministry of Education. In her forties she was promoted to senior level, yet she remained at this level for quite a long period of time. However, she eventually ascended to the highest level position, becoming what Queen had always wanted when she was 58 years old, only 2 years prior to her retirement.

River: is the second participant. She is named River because she is like the flow of fresh water spreading happiness and prosperity along the banks of the river. For River:

Attaining the goal of the university is imperative, but if it divides people into conflicting groups, I would not want to achieve that goal. My ultimate ambition is that people are united and happy.

River is now president of the Science Society of Thailand. She has also served as a member on several important boards such as the Commission on Higher Education and the National Research Council. Prior to becoming a university president, River had several administrative positions ranging from department chair, deputy dean, dean, and vice president for academic affairs. At the age of 52, River became the first female president at the same university and held the positions for 6 years. In addition to her university responsibilities, River engaged in several social projects. As a result she was conferred the title of 'KhunYing' (a royal title) by His Majesty the King of Thailand. Like Queen, River received a scholarship from the government to pursue her bachelor and master degrees in the US. She met and married her husband who was also a Thai doctoral student there and later became a politician. River returned home and worked before going back to the United States again for her Ph.D. in genetics. During that period, her husband took care of their three children at home.

Nisa: the third participant, is the Vice President for Academic Affairs at a university where she has been working since she returned from her study overseas. Nisa earned her first and second degrees in Anthropology and Sociology in her home country. She met her husband when she was an undergraduate student. They married and had a long distance relationship when Nisa went to the US to pursue her doctorate in Sociology under a Thai government scholarship. She and her husband do not have any children. Shortly after graduation, Nisa began her academic career at a university where she is now the Vice President. Prior to her current post, Nisa served as deputy dean and dean respectively. She was well-known, internationally, for her research capabilities in the area of Social Sciences.

Chana: is the fourth participant. She is the Vice President for Research and Development. Chana earned her bachelor's, master's degrees and Ph.D. in Pharmacy in Thailand. She married a dean of pharmacy who later became a university president at another university. Chana and her husband do not have any children. Her first administrative post was deputy dean at a medical school before becoming the first dean of a newly established school of Pharmacy at the same university. Before her deanship ended, she was promoted to the position of Vice President for Planning and Development. After 6 years in the latter position, Chana moved to another university where she is now vice president for Research and Development. Chana believes in mentoring. She says:

"Becoming an administrator for me just happened naturally. I was mentored by several former female supervisors through "on the job training and shadowing." So when an opportunity arrived I was confident enough to just jump in."

Panin: the fifth participant, is Dean of a Graduate school. Panin earned her bachelor degree in English Studies. Panin accompanied her husband, who was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship, to the US where they both studied for advanced degrees. They returned home with their Ph.Ds and worked at the same university. A few years later, her husband became the Vice President for International Relations before leaving for private enterprise. Panin's administrative career began as department chair after her husband left the University, and their two children had grown up. After chairing the department for 2 consecutive terms she was promoted to deputy dean of the graduate school. Her next immediate level was dean of

the same school, the position she still occupies today. As far as she is concerned the mother's role takes priority and she has always put her children first. She says:

"I would rather spend time with my kids after school than work overtime on administrative jobs day and night – it is too much of a trade off. I love my kids more than my career advancement. Now that my kids have grown up and do not demand a lot of attention, my husband also supports my career aspirations and that is why I decided to take on administrative responsibilities."

The Emerging Themes

The emerging themes from the qualitative data are discussed in the following section.

The Women's Paths to Career Success. The paths to career success among the participants found in this study were quite similar. However, there was an exception in the case of Queen who achieved success in her career in the Ministry of Education as opposed to in a university. This study therefore divides educational settings into two categories including the Ministry and higher education levels. The women's paths to career success including education, years of experiences in their previous administrative roles, and age are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Education: All of the participants indicated that having the highest degree is a necessity and an overseas Ph.D. is particularly valuable. Queen addresses the benefits gained from her education in the US:

"Education is what I call "a passport to success." You must possess the required knowledge, so you need to study in the areas related to what you plan to do.... Studying in the US helped as I learned something different from what most of my colleagues did, and I improved my English competency. Moreover, I built relationships and networks that could provide assistance or collaboration when needed."

When River went back to the US again to do her Ph.D., she had to leave her children at home. She expresses:

"It was very difficult to leave my three kids behind, yet I knew that my husband and parents would take good care of them. If I wanted to work in a higher education institute, a Ph.D. was mandatory; otherwise I wouldn't have left my family."

Chana chose to pursue her doctorate at home because *"my husband didn't want us to stay apart for a long period of time."* Yet she took on short term study visits to several institutions and universities overseas afterwards. This shows that Thai women academic executives valued the importance of having the highest qualifications and gaining experience overseas.

Experiences in Past Administrative Positions: In the ministry setting, at the age of 58, Queen ascended to the highest post, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, after working in a variety of positions. She was offered her first administrative job just about a year after she started working. Queen elaborated:

“When I first began my career at the Physical Education Department, I was the only ‘doctor’ there besides the Director-General. Right from the beginning, I initiated and launched a few projects which impressed the Director-General. One Friday he asked if I was ready to take an administrative job and he wanted an answer the coming Monday at 8 am. That’s how I got into my first administrative job.”

It took Queen only one and a half years to move up to the next level. At the age of only 39, Queen ascended to the first senior level. She was then transferred horizontally to take the role of several executive positions. Although Queen successfully began her managerial career early and advanced through the ranks quite rapidly, her career paused at level 10 for many years. Nonetheless, more than 25 years of experience in a wide variety of executive positions had made Queen more than ready for the top echelon.

It never bothered me moving from one job to another, time and again. Knowledge and experience were embedded in me from those jobs and responsibilities. If you dare to offer yourself for the top post, you’d better make sure that you’re well-rounded and competent enough.

In the higher educational setting, there was a clear predominant profile found among the women leaders. Each women leader gradually ascended through the academic levels of authority. Before advancing to the deanship, Panin gained experience in at least two other lower levels of administration, department chair and deputy dean. Nisa and Chana progressed to the post of vice president after their deputy- and deanships. Likewise, River became the first female president at the university after her vice presidency in academic affairs.

Age: Queen ascended to senior level considerably faster compared to the other women in higher education. It was not surprising as Queen had planned her career thoroughly and never waited for “an orange to just simply fall and land at my feet.” She always created opportunities and paved her own way, starting from when she chose to become “the dog’s head rather than the lion’s tail.” She had to cope with home responsibilities, just as other Thai wives and mothers did, and was largely responsible for raising her two children. However, her husband contributed to their upbringing whenever needed. They also hired housekeepers for other domestic duties. To accelerate her career advancement, Queen introduced herself to the public through several means. She explained:

“If you want to succeed to the top jobs, you can’t wait for luck to come to you. Also, being successful in your workplace is not enough... so I used my writing skills to go out to the public and differentiate myself from others. Within a couple of years I had written quite a few texts and manuals relating to health promotion. I also became a columnist for a daily newspaper as well as a radio announcer.”

In the higher education setting, most of the women rose to their executive posts when they were in their late 40s or early 50s. President River and Panin indicated the delay was caused by the women themselves. For them, bearing and raising children were their top priorities. River said.

“In general women place family matters at the top of their list unless they are single. So being a successful working woman is the second priority, not the first. In a two-career family, the wife normally makes sacrifices to support the career advancement of her husband. A woman like me is also keen on taking care of the kids herself. It’s the relationship between

mothers and kids... it's a kind of passion for women ...like the instinct of females in the animal kingdom. Women bond a lot more closely with kids than men do."

The pace of advancement of the two others who were married but without children was also slow. Even though they did not have family commitments, none of them had previously thought about becoming a leader. Chana claimed she only planned for an academic career. Her administrative roles "just happened". For Nisa, she stated:

"being in an administrative position never once came into my head. I even thought, "why bother" Not until I was treated unfairly by a male dean... the power wielder, did the thought occur to me. At that time, I was chairing a doctoral curriculum in education development. For some reason, he didn't like me and wanted to get rid of me. He claimed my major wasn't in education so I couldn't be the chair; yet I had been conducting a number of research projects in this area for our nation, not just small scale research studies. He approached a few people to replace me but nobody accepted because they knew me. So I started to realize that "power" was essential and could be most beneficial if exercised in a sincere manner."

The Root Cause of Women's Glass Ceiling

The review of literature in the earlier section revealed a wide variety of causes of the glass ceiling in the western world which prevent women from ascending to the top echelons. In Thailand, evidence in the current study indicated that women are also confronted by the glass ceiling. Regardless of cultural differences, most of the barriers Thai women educational administrators faced are not much different than those confronting western women. Causes of the glass ceiling in the Thai educational settings found in this study include: Thai Culture, Poor Career Planning, Work-life Balance Burden, the Legacy of Male Domination, and a Lack of Access to Mentoring.

Thai Culture: Women's Choices of Success. Literature regarding Thai women in management consistently revealed that Thai women's career advancement has been blocked by a series of cultural barriers (UNDP, 2006; Siengthai & Leelakulthanit, 1993). Traditionally, boys and girls were expected to slot into traditional gender roles immediately after their birth. When a son was born, some parents often anticipated that the son "will grow up to be strong and capable, whereas for a girl they are more likely to anticipate that she will be beautiful and a responsible home maker" (UNDP, 2006). Some of these ideas reflect public attitudes towards women seen in movies, for example, who have repeatedly been stereotyped as "weak, indecisive, emotionally dependent and somehow less productive than men" (UNDP, 2006).

Thai culture can also be understood from an old Thai Saying that says: "Men, as those who lead, are like the forelegs of an elephant, while women, as those who follow, are the hind legs." Men focus on career success, knowledge seeking, and freedom, whereas women emphasize love, family, and are dependent on their husbands. While men are supposed to bring honor and fame to the family, women are expected to support families economically (Siengthai & Leelakulthanit, 1993). Thus, Thai women have been placed into a workforce which manifests the prevailing social attitude that they are inferior to men.

Unlike the majority of Thai women, the women in this study were given opportunities by their families to study and to work as they wished. From another perspective, Thai culture

inculcates women to believe that they can be successful without having to be in administration. As mentioned earlier, River and Panin valued their roles as a mother over that as a leader, therefore, both of them were not interested in ascending to administrative posts until their children had grown up. Nisa stated the choices women have regarding success in her own words:

In our society, women have choices to become successful. We can be praised for our academic achievement, admired for being a good mother, or even for our family's well being as a whole. We are not pressured by society's expectations to become a leader in the workplace. Because of this perception, many capable women are denied career progress opportunities. It is different for men; the only way to be successful is through their managerial advancement. That's why men would do anything to just get into management. ...If we want to see more women in administration, women's perceptions of what constitutes "success" have to change; otherwise it will be extremely difficult to make any improvement.

Poor Career Planning. Thai cultural barriers have directly contributed to women's poor career planning. Only one of five participants, Queen, claimed that she had her career planned well beforehand. After being at the second highest level for quite a few years, she realized that her combined past experience in various administrative jobs was not enough. There were some other influential factors that a woman who wanted to break through the glass ceiling needed to be aware of. Queen explained further:

"It is vital that you state publicly what you want and what you can offer. You also have to build trust and make those who are in power believe that you are reliable and honest with them. This is politics in the workplace. Many Thai women don't like or don't know how to play politics and are thus prevented from rising to top posts."

In contrast to Queen, River became president of the university without consciously pursuing the position. She stated:

"I had never thought of becoming number one so I did not have a career plan. When the opportunity came I was even a little reluctant. But because I was awarded scholarships throughout my university studies overseas, I felt obliged to repay this assistance many times over, and that helped me to make this vital decision. My experiences in several positions also made me confident that I could carry out the duties well and make a difference..."

Work-life Balance Burden. As in other countries world-wide, the struggle to reconcile home and work is still largely a woman's responsibility. The UNDP's report on Thai Women's Right to Political Voice (2006) maintained that until today "a female's only true destiny is presumed to be marriage and motherhood rather than independence and a career," while unmarried women on the other hand are expected to take care of their elderly parents. Due to economic constraints, most women are forced to work and thus have both domestic and economic responsibilities. Bearing and raising children, caring for elderly parents, and maintaining a marriage and a home are demanding activities that are always in conflict with career demands (Siengthai & Leelakulthanit, 1993). It is therefore not surprising that women are underrepresented in management positions.

Most of the women in this study clearly conformed to the social norms. They prioritized domestic responsibilities before their own career advancement. Thus, women participants came into leadership positions quite late. For Chana, even though she knew for a

fact that studying overseas was essential, she agreed to study in Thailand because her husband "didn't want us to stay apart." However, Queen was unusually lucky as her husband was exceptionally supportive and willing to give a hand whenever needed. This could explain why Queen reached a higher position than the other participants.

Legacy of Male Domination. The UNDP's report on Thai Women's Voice claimed that because most senior executives are men, they undeniably dominate personnel committees and "tend to bypass women candidates to reproduce the structure with which they are familiar, a structure in which men retain the power" (UNDP, 2006). In higher education, President River asserted that women take time to perform the jobs but their male peers spend time on social activities with their male bosses. When it comes to promotions, the men almost always get the jobs even if they are less qualified compared to other female candidates. Being a female president herself, River appointed both males and females equally in her executive team, whereas most of her male counterparts promoted a larger number of males to their teams. This experience supported the notion that people prefer to appoint candidates who are like them, particularly if they are from within their own social network – a network that can also offer them advantages in pursuing their own ambitions (UNDP, 2006). This phenomenon explains how most of the male candidates obtained their job promotions, and at the same time, maintains the status quo of male domination.

For Panin, this status quo of male domination prevents academic institutions from making the best use of their human resources in leadership roles. She stated:

"One of the main factors that keep women from striving for leadership positions is the lack-of-merit recruitment system. If the recruitment committee adopted a merit system and played the game fairly, we would see more capable women in management. Many talented women don't play politics, particularly dirty ones. They won't compromise their integrity to get into the top jobs. If we want to encourage women to be interested in taking executive assignments, the recruitment system needs to be altered from a male-preference based system to a merit based system."

Lack of Access to Mentoring. While having a mentor and the opportunity to network with people in power is the key to success in the business world, Thai women administrators report having little access to mentors (Cheaupalakit, 2002). Therefore, women administrators must often operate without being privy to the organization's history and politics and without instruction in how to influence key decision-makers. In the current study, only one out of five participants, Chana, indicated that she has been mentored through on the job training and job shadowing and that it helped her to make decisions easily and to just "jump into" leadership positions when the opportunities arose. She further explained:

"It is crucial to have someone to turn to, particularly when you have to solve a problem. For some problems, you really can't ask your staff or colleagues as they would probably lose confidence in you. It is just like having a recipe in a cook book, whenever you want to produce something that is new for you, you don't have to waste time through trial and error. Mentors help you to grow and prosper a lot faster."

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although it is quite difficult for women to break through the glass ceiling, an increasing number of women are doing so. What is more important is that women seeking to penetrate into a decision-making position in an organization need to recognize that the ascent of previous successful women into leadership positions did not happen by accident. This current study demonstrated career paths to success of the women leaders as well as several barriers they faced including poor career planning, work-life balance burden, legacy of male domination, and lack of access to mentoring.

Recommendations

To overcome the glass ceiling in educational settings this study recommends that all parties, including the Thai government, educational institutions and women themselves have to become involved. It is impossible for one party to move ahead and achieve success. The following are some recommendations for each of the three concerned parties.

Government Policy on Gender. According to the UNDP (2006) Thailand first began to address social issues and recognize women as a target group, along with children and youth in the Fourth Plan (1977-81). The National Commission on Women's Affairs then addressed a series of Women's Development Plans in the Fifth Plan in 1982. The Women's Development Plan for 2002-06 highlighted five strategic areas and goals including strengthening women's development potential, increasing women's participation in decision making, promoting equality and social protection, developing media to support women's development, and strengthening women's organizations and networks. Unfortunately, it is apparent that the government has failed to implement many of its policies, and as a result its targets have not yet been reached.

Women participants proclaimed that the government should be more serious about implementing its own policies. River believes the Thai government needs to put in much more effort in order to shift social attitudes about women, both in society and among women themselves, in order to overcome the gender issue. River concluded succinctly:

“Women are still perceived as being beautiful. Their bodies are used to advertise commercial merchandise. The government is required to mandate a policy prohibiting the use of female bodies, at least in public media. Women's perceptions about themselves need to be changed so they won't be subject to the pitfalls of consumerism. Women need to be independent, brave and willing to stand on their own feet. One thing that would help would be if the government encouraged the media to provide better examples of women than those in soap operas, where women are almost always inferior to men. Above all, the government needs to educate society as a whole to eliminate discrimination against women.”

Educational Institutions' Policies. To eliminate existing inequalities and to provide equal opportunities for women in an educational setting, schools and universities should first implement a recruitment system based on merit to ensure that women and men possess equal opportunities when it comes to recruiting people for the top posts. This in turn will also maximize the opportunity for an academic institution to make the best use of its potential candidates. Next, some of the following essential programs should also be implemented: Leadership Training, Mentoring, and Portrayal of Role Models illustrating the paths of successful women leaders. Providing after-school childcare will also give parental women an

opportunity to enter their administrative career sooner as women can spend the time required for advanced posts. In contrast to literature written in the Western context, the women in this study did not support an affirmative action program. As Panin put it:

"Women would neither be confident nor proud if they were to be promoted because of a quota giving them the position. It would be even worse for those who actually ascend to leadership roles based on their potential, but who may be seen by others as privileged leaders."

Suggestions for Individuals. Women themselves also need to overcome the barriers mentioned previously. The following proposals, suggested by the experiences of the women participants, are skills or tactics women need to develop if they want to survive in the workplace. Firstly, women leaders have to ensure themselves that they have the strength, skills and experience with regard to know-how, how to fight and be able to make tough decisions when they attempt to enter a decision-making position. Secondly, women need to recognize the fact that competition does exist, and thus they must plan their careers from the beginning. To gain enough relevant experience before hand, women aspiring to achieve the top jobs need to gain experience in other middle management positions as early as possible in their career. They cannot expect to jump immediately from a faculty member to dean or vice president. Thirdly, women need to develop self-confidence and tenacity at an early age. For River: *"Girls school provided me opportunities to lead. If it wasn't for this type of school, boys would always take all the leadership roles."* Next, women need to develop a mentoring relationship with someone within the workplace who can help them understand the signs of influence and gain access to those in power. Lastly, women should also join organizations outside of their own institution and establish a network of contacts outside their field. As Queen said, *"This type of networking may help women to develop business connections and bring business to their organization in the future."*

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