Paradigm Shift in Gender Equality Development Policy in Thailand: Parity versus Differences

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the recent paradigm shift in Thailand's gender equality development policy, moving from a focus on parity (equal treatment) to recognizing and addressing gender differences. Despite significant progress in women's development through policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality and empowerment, gender inequality and discrimination remain significant issues in Thailand. The study employs Michel Foucault's discourse analysis (1970, 1972, 1991) and Luce Irigaray's critical thoughts on gender differences in neoliberal capitalism (1985, 1995) to analyze the construction of "women" in Thailand's recent National Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027). The findings suggest that the policy's focus on gender equality and women's empowerment is a gender-blind practice that fails to consider the different roles and diverse needs of women. Consequently, the national plan maintains the status quo and does not necessarily transform the unequal structure of gender relations in Thailand. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for a more nuanced approach to gender equality policy that recognizes and addresses the complex intersections of gender with other forms of social differentiation.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment, National Action Plans, Paradigm Shift

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การปรับเปลี่ยนกระบวนทัศน์นโยบายการพัฒนาความเท่าเทียม
ทางเพศในประเทศไทย: ความเท่าเทียม vs. ความแตกต่าง

จเร สิงหโกวินท์*

บทคัดย่อ

　　บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการเปลี่ยนแปลงกระบวนทัศน์ในนโยบายการพัฒนา
ความเท่าเทียมทางเพศของประเทศไทย จากการมุ่งเน้นความเท่าเทียม (การปฏิบัติที่เท่าเทียมกัน)
ไปสู่การตระหนักและจัดการกับความแตกต่างทางเพศ แม้จะมีความก้าวหน้าอย่างมีนัยสำคัญในการ
พัฒนาสตรีผ่านนโยบายและโครงการที่มุ่งส่งเสริมความเสมอภาคทางเพศและการเสริมพลัง
ความไม่เท่าเทียมทางเพศและการเลือกปฏิบัติยังคงเป็นปัญหาสำคัญในประเทศไทย การศึกษานี้
ใช้การวิเคราะห์วาทกรรมของ Michel Foucault (1970, 1972, 1991) และแนวคิดเชิงวิพากษ์ของ
Luce Irrigaray เกี่ยวกับความแตกต่างทางเพศในระบบทุนนิยมเสรีนิยมใหม่ (1985, 1995)
เพื่อวิเคราะห์การสร้างความหมายของ "ผู้หญิง" ในแผนปฏิบัติการระดับชาติว่าด้วยการพัฒนาสตรี
(พ.ศ. 2566-2570) ของประเทศไทย ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่าการมุ่งเน้นความเสมอภาคทางเพศและ
การเสริมพลังสตรีในนโยบายเป็นแนวปฏิบัติที่ไม่คำนึงถึงความแตกต่างทางเพศ ซึ่งไม่ได้พิจารณา
ถึงบทบาทที่แตกต่างกันและความต้องการที่หลากหลายของผู้หญิง ส่งผลให้แผนระดับชาติยังคงรักษา
สถานะเดิมและไม่ได้เปลี่ยนแปลงโครงสร้างความสัมพันธ์ทางเพศที่ไม่เท่าเทียมในประเทศไทย
อย่างแท้จริง บทความนี้สรุปด้วยการเน้นย้ำถึงความจำเป็นในการใช้แนวทางที่ละเอียดอ่อนมากขึ้น
ต่อนโยบายความเสมอภาคทางเพศ ซึ่งตระหนักและจัดการกับความซับซ้อนของการตัดกันระหว่าง
เพศสภาพกับรูปแบบอื่น ๆ ของความแตกต่างทางสังคม

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Introduction

Gender equality policies and initiatives play a critical role in shaping societal norms and promoting inclusivity (UN Women, 2015, p. 19). Over the years, governments and international organizations have been striving to address gender disparities and promote equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their gender. The Thai government has recognized the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as key drivers of sustainable development (Government of Thailand, 2020, p. 3). Thailand's national women development policy framework has been instrumental in uplifting the quality of life for women throughout the country. The policy framework encompasses a wide range of initiatives aimed at addressing various aspects of women's lives, including education, healthcare, employment, and political participation (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2020a, p. 7). These initiatives focus on promoting equal opportunities, eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence, and enhancing women's access to resources and decision-making processes (Sopchokchai et al., 2017, p. 60). Through the implementation of targeted programs and legislative reforms, Sasiwimon Warunsiri Paweenawat, World Bank consultant, (2021, p. 1) notes that Thailand has made significant progress in narrowing gender gaps and improving the overall well-being of women.

Thailand's pursuit of gender equality has undergone a paradigm shift, marked by a transition from a focus on parity or equal treatment to recognizing and addressing gender differences. (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, 2022b, p. 7). This shift reflects an evolving understanding of the complex nature of gender issues and the need for nuanced approaches that go beyond a numerical representation (UN Women, 2022, p. 11). This entails understanding that equal treatment does not always result in true equality and instead requires an approach that acknowledges and addresses the distinct experiences and obstacles faced by women and other gender groups. A paradigm shift in women's equality, thus, refers to a fundamental change in the way society perceives and approaches gender equality. It involves a shift away from traditional,

binary notions of gender roles and towards a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of gender identity and expression. This shift means a change in awareness, belief, communication, and design, and is characterized by a move towards more constructive attitudes and approaches to gender equality. Argued by Tiffani Betts Razavi, (2023, p. 17), a paradigm shift is necessary to achieve the ambitious and comprehensive targets set by the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) and to secure a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

The paradigm shift occurs at various stages of the policy process, from agenda-setting and policy formulation to implementation and evaluation. At the agenda-setting stage, the shift is evident in the recognition of gender equality as a critical issue requiring urgent attention and action, and the inclusion of diverse voices and experiences in policy debates (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development & Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, 2022, p. 1). During policy formulation, the shift manifests in the development of policies that are informed by a nuanced understanding of the intersectional nature of gender inequality and that address the root causes of gender disparities (Hankivsky, 2012, p. 8). In terms of policy implementation, the paradigm shift is reflected in the adoption of gender-transformative approaches that actively challenge and seek to transform unequal gender relations, and in the implementation of policies that are sensitive to the diverse needs and experiences of different gender groups (MacArthur et al., 2022, p. 2). Finally, at the evaluation stage, the shift is evident in the use of gender-sensitive indicators and metrics to assess the effectiveness and impact of policies in promoting gender equality and social justice (Hochfeld & Bassadien, 2007, p. 218).

Despite a significant shift in Thailand's women's development policy, focusing on recognizing and addressing gender differences, persistent gender inequality, gender-based violence, and discrimination continue to be influenced by societal binary and heteronormative gender ideology. This study, which analyzes the portrayal of "women" in Thailand's recent national action plan for women's development using Michel Foucault's discourse analysis (1970, 1972/1971, 1991) and Luce Irigaray's

critical perspectives on gender differences within a neoliberal capitalist context (1985/1974, 1995), contends that the policy's emphasis on gender equality and empowerment overlooks the varying roles and diverse needs of women. This deeply embeded perspective, along with the inadvertent reinforcement of existing norms by the recent national plan, continues to affect various social aspects and overshadows the potential positive impacts of policy changes. Achieving true gender equality in Thailand may thus require a more profound transformation that not only challenges entrenched norms but also recognizes the complex and multifaceted nature of gender relations.

Literature Review

Thailand's Path toward Gender Equality

Thailand has demonstrated admirable advancements in women's development over the years, due in large part to the adoption of various international and regional instruments. These instruments include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and key instruments on women's rights under the ASEAN framework, such as the Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children, the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Elimination of Violence against Women (ASEAN RPA on EVAW), the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals, and the Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN (Government of Thailand, 2020, p. 2). Thailand's adoption of these instruments has helped to promote gender equality and women's empowerment by providing a framework for actions and setting standards for progress. For example, the Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558 (2015) was enacted in response to Thailand's obligations under CEDAW, protecting not only women but also LGBTQ+ persons from discrimination. The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Elimination of Violence against Women (ASEAN RPA on EVAW) has guided Thailand's efforts to prevent and respond to violence against

women. Other legislative achievements towards gender equality during 2014-2019 include the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2560 (2017), which guarantees equality and prohibits gender discrimination. The Thai government also proposed that local administrative councils have no less than one-third members as women to promote women's participation in politics and decision-making. Overall, the adoption of these policies and key ASEAN framework instruments like the Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children has helped promote gender equality and women's empowerment by providing a roadmap for progress and setting standards for action. (The Government of Thailand, 2020, p. 2, 9).

Thailand's recent commitment to gender equality is demonstrated by the launch of the national action plan for women's development (2023-2027), a far-reaching effort encompassing issues like women's health, education, economic empowerment, and gender equality. The current national action plan for women's development involved a collaboration between Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA). The action plan on women's development in Thailand aims to foster awareness and understanding of gender equality, ensuring that women and girls are treated fairly, protected from violence, given opportunities for self-development, and have equal roles in leadership, with a focus on transforming societal attitudes and beliefs to elevate women's status.(Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development & Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, 2022, p. 1).

Despite progress, gender inequality and discrimination continue to be hindrances that require constant attention in Thailand. According to the country's Department of Disease Control, the Injury Surveillance System reported 8,577 cases of women injured from abuse per year from 2019 to 2021 in 51 hospitals across Thailand (Department of Disease Control, 2022). Meanwhile, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (2022) noted that at least 7 women are found to be sexually or physically abused daily, according to media reports. This leads

to up to 30,000 women being treated and reporting grievances annually, with contributing factors identified as alcohol, drugs, media influence, family background, and societal environment. The Women and Men Progressive Movement Foundation, a Thailand-based non-governmental organization, suggested that the 20 percent rise in reported cases of gender-based violence during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown was a result of stressors such as confinement and economic insecurity (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2021).

Gender Equality Development Models: Parity vs. Differences

The global discourse on gender equality is marked by contentious debates and diverse theoretical models. Chief among these models are two primary approaches: 'Parity' and 'Differences'. The former emphasizes the equal treatment and rights of all genders, while the latter acknowledges and values the unique experiences and needs of different genders (Walby, 2005, p. 321-322; Bacchi & Eveline, 2009, p. 2). These perspectives often inform and shape the gender equality development policies (Balducci, 2023, p. 13). This paper explores the significant paradigm shift in Thailand's approach to gender equality development, charting the transition from a focus on parity to an embrace of differences and diversity.

The Parity Model

The Parity Model, also known as the Equality or Sameness Model, has its roots in the feminist movement and academic thought, and it primarily advocates for equality between men and women in every sphere of life. The basis of this model is the idea that women should have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as men (Walby, 2005, p. 326). Historically, the development of the parity model can be traced back to the Enlightenment era in the 18th century, where the concept of universal human rights started gaining ground. Women's rights advocates like Mary Wollstonecraft in her seminal work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), argued for the inclusion of women within this discourse of universal rights, advocating for the same social, political and economic rights as men (cited in Ferguson, 1999, p. 443). Wollstonecraft's ideas had a significant influence on later feminist movements

and thinkers, such as the suffragettes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The focus of the parity model until the early 20th centuries was largely on suffrage. Feminist activists, such as Emmeline Pankhurst, Annie Kennie, Christabel Pankhurst fought for women's right to vote, basing their arguments on the concept of equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of their gender. This wave of feminism led to the adoption of women's suffrage in many countries around the world (Ramirez, Soysal, & Shanahan, 1997, p. 737).

In the mid-20th century, the parity model continued to evolve with the second wave of feminism. During this period, feminist scholars, such as Betty Friedan (2013/1963), Simone de Beauvoir (2011/1949), who pushed for the dismantling of institutionalized sexism, arguing that women should have the same opportunities as men in employment and education (cited in Mohajan, 2022, p. 17). The landmark Civil Rights Act in the United States (1964), which prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, was a testament to the success of these efforts (Couch, Hersch & Shinall 2015 p. 448). The parity model was further reinforced in the 1970s and 1980s by the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) movement in the United States and similar movements in other parts of the world. The core of these movements was the demand for constitutional or legislative reforms to ensure gender parity.

In recent decades, this model has been increasingly questioned and complemented by other approaches. While the parity model undeniably played a critical role in advancing women's rights and opportunities, it has also been criticized for assuming that equality means sameness. Critics argue that it often neglects the diversity and intersectionality among women, and fails to address the systemic barriers rooted in these differences. Emphasizing the need to go beyond mere statistics for gender parity and examine the deeper societal norms and identities shaping daily realities, Aisa Manlosa from Leuphana University of Lüneburg and Denise Margaret Matias from the German Development Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik or DIE) suggest that gender parity indicators can identify problem areas needing attention but caution that this mindset, while promoting workplace

equality through equal representation in areas like income and education, must be distinguished from true gender equality, requiring a more comprehensive shift in societal norms and identities (2018).

Despite these critiques, the parity model remains an influential framework in the discourse on gender equality. Its principles continue to inform policies and legislation in many societies, reflecting an ongoing commitment to the ideals of equal rights and opportunities. Tiffani Betts Razavi's paper, *Parity, Paradigms, and Possibilities: A Constructive Approach to Advancing Women's Equality*, explores the concept of paradigm shift toward gender equality, arguing that the current dominant parity model has limitations. Razavi suggests a move towards more nuanced and inclusive understanding characterized by constructive attitudes, a focus on process, and a dynamic model allowing for various combinations, specialization, innovation, and synergies, with the abundance of questions in the literature about difference and sameness, women's identity and role, and the value of diversity and fairness in resource distribution, indicative of this shift (2023, p. 6).

The Differences Model

The Differences Model, also known as the Equity or Difference Approach, emerged in the latter part of the 20th century as an essential framework in gender studies, feminist theory, and policy-making. Diverging from the Parity Model's emphasis on sameness, it underscores the need to recognize and accommodate the biological, social, and cultural differences between genders, arguing that true equality can be achieved by acknowledging these distinctions and allocating resources accordingly (Cain, 1990, pp. 834, 836; Fraser, 2013, pp. 115, 192).

The origin of the Differences Model is deeply rooted in the critique of "equality feminism," the dominant ideology during the second wave of feminism in the mid to late 20th century, closely associated with the Parity Model (Vantin, 2021, p. 2). This model stressed the similarities between men and women, promoting equal rights and opportunities. However, the 1980s saw growing discontent with this "sameness" concept, a sentiment articulated by feminist scholars, such as Carol Gilligan (2003/1982, pp. 16-17). In her book, *In a Different Voice. Psychological Theory and*

Women's Development, Gilligan emphasized that women's moral orientation, often seen as a weakness, is also a strength. She argued that "women's deference" is rooted not only in social subordination but also in a profound concern for relationships and responsibilities, an awareness of others' needs, and a willingness to include multiple viewpoints. This reflection prompted the development of "difference feminism," leading to the Differences Model, which underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing gender differences rather than treating them as identical.

This perspective grew prominent with the rise of third-wave feminism and postmodern feminist theory during the 1990s and 2000s, leading to the development of the concept of intersectionality. This concept highlighted how different aspects of identity, including gender, race, class, and sexuality, intersect to shape individual experiences, significantly contributing to the Differences Model. It encouraged policies that recognize and address the unique needs of diverse groups of women. Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 paper, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, played a crucial role in this understanding. She focused on how concentrating on the most privileged group members can sideline those burdened by multiple forms of discrimination, making the argument for a more nuanced view of oppression. Her work provided a way to describe both the simultaneous occurrence of various oppressions and the complexity of identity, emphasizing the intersection of differences in shaping women's experiences of oppression (p. 140).

The Differences Model has influenced a variety of gender-responsive strategies in policy-making. For example, in development policy, this approach encouraged the design of programs that consider the specific needs and realities of women, instead of treating them as a homogenous group (Hervías Parejo & Radulović, 2023, p. 412). While the Differences Model has been instrumental in highlighting diversity and promoting equity, it is not without criticism. Differences feminism has been criticized for risking essentialism in its view of traditional femininity and masculinity, reinforcing conventional stereotypes, and overlooking the fact that women and men across various classes and cultures have diverse perspectives and values (Narayan, 1998, p. 104, Naldini, 2011, p. 3). However, despite these challenges, the Differences

Model continues to shape academic discourse and policy-making in the realm of gender equality, emphasizing the need to recognize, respect, and respond to differences (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2021, September 27, p. 34).

Irigaray and The Emphasis of Differences

Luce Irigaray, a feminist, philosopher and linguist, has played a pivotal role in shaping contemporary discourse on gender and sexuality (Whitford, 1991, p. 3). Her theories explore psychoanalysis, philosophy, and linguistics to unravel and critically examine the ingrained androcentrism and phallocentrism in Western thought. Her works offer essential insights with broader implications for the development of gender policy.

Irigaray's theoretical framework centers on the concept of "sexual difference," emphasizing the necessity of recognizing and celebrating the intrinsic distinctions between men and women (Irigaray, 1985/1974, p.68). She challenges the way Western philosophy and psychoanalytic theory have constructed women as the "Other" relative to men, thus denying women their own unique identity. Her proposal involves the acknowledgment of two discrete and equal genders, each possessing its own singular identity and ways of interacting with the world.

In the context of gender policy development, Irigaray's notions can be considered an extension of the "Differences Model" (Poe, 2011, p. 126), accentuating the need for acknowledgment and respect of gender differences in policy crafting and execution. Her claim of distinct gender identities opposes the universalist view frequently found in policy-making, thereby underscoring the importance of policies that attend to the particular needs and experiences of both women and men.

Irigaray's influence is observable in policies targeting gender-specific needs and experiences. For instance, her stress on the separate identities and experiences of women has facilitated the crafting of policies and programs that particularly address matters such as maternal health, violence against women, and women's economic empowerment (Moi, 1999, p. 9). However, the application of Irigaray's theories to policy development is not without criticism. A significant critique is

that her focus on binary gender differences might be exclusionary, potentially marginalizing individuals who do not conform to the traditional gender binary, like transgender and non-binary individuals (Butler, 1999/1990, p. 30). This could lead to the inadvertent reinforcement of detrimental gender binaries and stereotypes. Moreover, Irigaray's stress on the distinct identities and experiences of men and women falls short of addressing the intersections of gender with other identity aspects like race, class, and sexuality. Critics contend that a genuinely inclusive gender policy must recognize and respond to these intersections to appropriately meet the varied needs and experiences of all individuals (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 144).

In conclusion, Luce Irigaray's concept of sexual difference has furnished invaluable insights into the recognition of distinct gender identities and experiences. Yet, its utilization in policy-making necessitates careful consideration to prevent the reinforcement of harmful binaries or oversight of intersectionality. The task for policymakers is to employ these insights to foster more inclusive and efficacious gender policies (Connell, 2009, p. 40).

Policy Evolution in Thailand

Thailand's shift towards the parity model, advocating equal rights for men and women, began with legal and policy frameworks in the latter half of the 20th century. This change was epitomized in 1932 when the transition from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy led to the country's inaugural constitution, promising equal rights for all citizens regardless of sex, and marking a significant milestone toward gender equality (Paweenawat, 2021, p. iv). The progression emphasized a legislative framework aiming to grant women identical opportunities across various domains of life (Government of Thailand, 2020, p. 2). Although well-intentioned, this approach met with criticism for neglecting intrinsic gender differences and failing to consider the country's socio-cultural diversity (Buranajaroenkij, 2017, p. 7). Subsequent constitution revisions consistently embraced this gender equality principle.

In the field of education, the National Education Act of 1999 stressed gender

parity, mandating identical rights and opportunities for all in education (Kantavong, Nethanomsak, & Luang-ungkool 2012, p. 1045). Within the labor market, the Labor Protection Act (2001) and the Gender Equality Act (2015) were also tailored to bolster equal opportunities, expressly forbidding gender-based discrimination (Paweenawat, 2021, p. 6-7). Furthermore, the Thai government launched the Women Development Plan under the National Economic and Social Development Plan to augment women's financial and social status. For example, the Thai Women's Empowerment Plan (2002-2006) aspired to elevate women's role in decision-making and bolster their economic autonomy (United Nations Development Programme, 2006, p. 11).

Despite concerted efforts toward gender equality, many parity-based initiatives, including the Gender Equality Act (2015), have faced substantial scrutiny. Sawitri Suksri's research (2021, p. x) reveals that even with the act's significant intentions, empirical evidence and stakeholder feedback suggest limited progress since its introduction in 2015. This sentiment is echoed by Wasi (2021, p. 2), who critiques these policies for overlooking the unique challenges faced by rural women and ethnic minorities, thereby neglecting to address systemic and cultural barriers impeding true gender equality.

The emphasis on homogeneity was also challenged, as critics maintained that sameness may not necessarily translate into real equality (Gopal, 2004, p. 69). A burgeoning awareness developed, recognizing the need for a more sophisticated approach—one that recognizes and responds to the differences and diversity among women—to truly attain gender equality in Thailand. This critical insight gradually catalyzed a transformation in Thailand's gender policy strategy, steering it from the "parity" model to a differences model, which focuses on acknowledging and addressing diverse needs and challenges among women (Buranajaroenkij, 2017, p. 11).

Methodology

This study employs Irigaray's concepts and Foucauldian discourse analysis to examine the representation of women in Thailand's recent national action plan

for women's development. Irigaray's framework focuses on the critique of phallocentrism and the exploration of sexual difference, while Foucauldian discourse analysis offers a methodological approach to understanding how knowledge and power are constructed and maintained through language and social practices.

Foucault's discourse analysis offers a multifaceted framework for analyzing the construction of "woman" in gender equality policy. By unpacking power structures, deconstructing gender binaries, offering historical context, examining institutional influence, and empowering marginalized perspectives, Foucault's approach provides a nuanced and critical tool for understanding the complex ways in which policies both shape and reflect the societal construction of "woman" (Foucault, 1980).

Unpacking Power Structures

Foucault's discourse analysis helps to identify how power is exercised within language and how it shapes the construction of "woman" in gender equality policy. This approach reveals how policies define and position women, often in ways that may reinforce traditional gender roles or inequalities (Butler, 1999/1990). Understanding power relations within gender discourse enables a critical examination of how policy both reflects and shapes societal attitudes towards women (Scott, 1988).

Deconstructing Gender Binaries

Foucault's deconstruction of binary oppositions is insightful for analyzing the unintended consequences of gender equality policies, particularly how they might inadvertently reinforce binary conceptions of gender. Within such policies, women are frequently defined in contrast to men, echoing the binary structures (Foucault, 1978). This perspective permits a nuanced exploration of how policies simultaneously contest and reaffirm gender stereotypes. This nuanced view aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's critiques, as she dissected societal frameworks and

the social construction of "woman" (Beauvoir, 2011/1949).

Historical and Contextual Analysis

Foucault's emphasis on historical analysis is crucial for understanding the construction of "woman" in gender equality policy within its historical context (Foucault, 1972/1971). It facilitates tracing the evolving definitions and representations of women in policies, linking current discourses to historical beliefs and practices. Lois McNay's work suggests that Foucault's insights into power can illuminate gendered mechanisms in public policy, enabling an understanding of how policies reflect and respond to shifting societal norms and attitudes towards women (McNay, 1992).

Institutional Influence on Gender Construction

Foucault's focus on institutional influence provides insights into how different institutions shape the construction of "woman" in gender equality policy. Analyzing the role of government, legal frameworks, and other institutions reveals how they contribute to defining and positioning women within the social structure, often in ways that can either challenge or perpetuate gender inequalities (Connell, 2009).

Empowering Marginalized Perspectives

Foucault's discourse analysis brings to the center the voices and perspectives of marginalized individuals, including women (Foucault, 1980). It highlights how gender equality policies may both include and exclude different groups of women, reflecting broader societal biases and assumptions (Crenshaw, 1991). This focus on marginalized voices can contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive analysis of gender equality policies.

Integrating Irigaray's Concepts and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

This research explores the potential synergy between Luce Irigaray's concepts and Michel Foucault's discourse analysis in examining gender and power relations, particularly in the context of Thailand's gender equality policy. Foucault's

methodology reveals underlying power structures shaping social reality through analyses of institutions, practices, and discourses. Irigaray, conversely, challenges these structures by exposing gender biases in traditional philosophical and psychoanalytic discourses. Despite their differences, both approaches critically examine how language and discourse construct and maintain power relations, emphasizing the need to challenge dominant discourses perpetuating gender inequality (Whitford, 1991).

In analyzing Thailand's gender equality policy, Irigaray's framework helps examine how policy discourse constructs and represents the feminine, assessing its challenge to masculine norms. Her concept of mimesis, involving strategic reappropriation of masculine discourse, could analyze attempts to revalue the feminine (Xu, 1995). Simultaneously, Foucault's discourse analysis can contextualize the policy within broader historical and institutional frameworks, examining how it shapes and is shaped by existing power relations. His concept of governmentality could analyze how the policy discourse constructs and governs gendered subjects (Binkley, 2009).

Combining these approaches offers a more comprehensive understanding of the paradigm shift in Thailand's gender equality policy. This integration can identify how the policy challenges or reinforces dominant gender norms and power relations, assessing its potential to promote genuine gender equality and social transformation. The synergy between these frameworks can contribute to developing more effective gender equality policies in Thailand. By incorporating insights from both Irigaray and Foucault, policymakers can design policies that not only challenge dominant gender discourses but also create new spaces for feminine affirmation and empowerment. In conclusion, while distinct, Irigaray's framework and Foucault's discourse analysis offer valuable complementary perspectives for

analyzing and developing transformative gender equality policies in Thailand and beyond.

Findings

Analytical Framework: Parity vs. Differences Approach

Thailand's approach to gender equality policy has undergone a significant paradigm shift, moving from a 'parity' model to a 'differences' model. This shift forms the core of the analytical framework. The parity model focuses on achieving equal representation, treats women as a homogeneous group, and aims for uniform solutions. In contrast, the differences model recognizes diverse needs and experiences, acknowledges intersectionality, and tailors solutions to specific groups. This framework allows us to analyze the evolution and implications of Thailand's gender equality policies.

The Paradigm Shift

Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Plans have evolved in their approach to women's development over the years. The ninth national development plan (2002-2006) exemplified the parity model, focusing primarily on increasing women's participation in decision-making roles and economic empowerment. However, this approach fell short in addressing the complex realities of gender inequality in Thailand.

The shift towards the differences model became evident in the eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016). This plan acknowledged the distinct needs, roles, and challenges faced by women across varied socio-economic strata, particularly rural and ethnic minority women. The twelfth plan (2017-2021) further solidified this shift by adopting an intersectional approach, recognizing how overlapping identities influence discrimination and opportunity. This paradigm shift represents a fundamental change in how gender issues are conceptualized and addressed in policy, moving beyond narrow parity goals to

recognize the complex, multi-dimensional nature of gender inequality (Razavi, 2023, p. 6).

Case Study: National Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027)

To illustrate the implications of this paradigm shift, Thailand's Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027) is analyzed as a case study. This action plan exemplifies the differences approach through six key principles: women's human capital development, eradication of violence against women, promotion of women in governance and leadership, reshaping societal perspectives through public communication, enhancement of administrative tools for gender equality, and development of core competencies in national women's development agencies.

These principles demonstrate how the differences model translates into policy design. The plan includes targeted interventions, such as specific measures for different groups like economic empowerment initiatives for rural women (Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development et al., 2022). It adopts an intersectional approach, addressing multiple dimensions of inequality and recognizing how gender intersects with other factors like ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic status. Furthermore, the plan implements gender mainstreaming, integrating gender perspectives across all policy areas (Mendoza, 2024).

The paradigm shift toward the differences model has significant implications for policy effectiveness and inclusivity. By recognizing diverse needs, policies can more effectively address specific barriers faced by different groups of women (Jongwilaiwan & Thompson, 2011). The consideration of intersectionality allows for more inclusive policies that address the needs of marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals and women with disabilities (Unterhalter et al, 2020). Additionally, gender mainstreaming has the potential to lead to more comprehensive and sustainable changes across all policy areas.

While the paradigm shift offers many benefits, it also presents challenges. The effectiveness of these policies will depend on factors such as resource availability, institutional capacity, and political will. Linguistic and conceptual barriers persist, as the

construction of gender in policy language may still reinforce binary concepts, potentially limiting full inclusivity. Moreover, there is a need to balance targeted interventions with overarching principles of gender equality, highlighting the complexity of implementing the differences model in practice.

The paradigm shift in Thailand's gender equality policy, from a parity model to a differences model, represents a significant step towards more effective and inclusive policies. This shift, as exemplified by the National Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027), has the potential to address the complex and multi-faceted nature of gender inequality more comprehensively. By recognizing diverse needs, addressing intersectional inequalities, promoting participation and inclusion, and mainstreaming gender in all policy areas, Thailand's new approach to gender equality policies has the potential to promote greater social justice and equity. However, the success of this approach will depend on effective implementation, ongoing evaluation, and a commitment to addressing the challenges identified.

This analysis demonstrates how the paradigm shift affects policy design and implementation in Thailand, offering insights that may be valuable for other contexts grappling with similar challenges in advancing gender equality.

Revisiting Irigaray's Lens: Progress and Persistent Challenges

While the paradigm shift toward the differences model represents significant progress, Irigaray's critique of gender construction in policy remains relevant. The National Action Plan's recognition of diverse needs and intersectionality aligns with Irigaray's call to move beyond viewing women as "the Other" in relation to men. However, challenges persist in fully embodying Irigaray's vision.

The plan's emphasis on tailored solutions for specific groups of women acknowledges the diversity of women's experiences, a key aspect of Irigaray's philosophy. Yet, the linguistic framing of gender equality in the policy as "equality between genders" still reinforces a binary opposition that Irigaray critiques. This highlights the ongoing tension between progressing toward more inclusive policies and the deep-rooted linguistic and conceptual frameworks that shape the

understanding of gender. Moreover, while the plan addresses intersectionality, it may not fully capture the fluid and non-binary nature of gender that Irigaray's work points towards. The challenge lies in translating the theoretical recognition of gender complexity into practical policy measures that truly represent and protect all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

The National Action Plan's approach to gender mainstreaming and reshaping societal perspectives through public communication offers potential avenues for addressing these lingering issues. While these policies aim for greater inclusivity by acknowledging the complex and intersectional dimensions of women and marginalized communities, they have notable gaps in a key area. They do not adequately represent or account for non-normative gender and sexual identities and characteristics. As a result, there is a latent risk of inadvertently perpetuating heteronormative ideologies and essentializing the gender binary, which can be limiting and exclusionary.

In essence, by continuously emphasizing the traditional gender binary and presenting women as "the Other", these policies exclude non-normative women and other marginalized groups. Such exclusions reinforce existing prejudices and can impede the very progress the policies aim to promote. It is crucial for a comprehensive gender policy to recognize and address these nuances, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression, are truly represented and protected. Fully realizing Irigaray's vision of moving beyond gender as a binary construct remains an ongoing challenge in policy development and implementation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The paradigm shift in Thailand's gender equality policy, transitioning from a 'parity' to a 'differences' approach, represents a significant advancement in addressing unequal gender relations. This shift, as exemplified by the National Action Plan for Women Development (2023-2027), has the potential to transform the landscape of gender equality in Thailand by recognizing the diverse needs and

experiences of different groups of women, addressing intersectional inequalities, and promoting inclusive participation. The significance of this paradigm shift lies in its potential to address the complex, multi-dimensional nature of gender inequality, challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, promote a more equitable and inclusive society, and respond more effectively to the specific needs of marginalized groups. However, to fully realize the transformative potential of this paradigm shift, further refinement and effective implementation of gender equality policies are crucial. Based on this analysis, the following recommendations address these crucial implementation needs. These include strengthening institutional capacity and resources, promoting greater coordination and collaboration between government agencies and civil society actors, engaging men and boys in challenging traditional gender norms, strengthening data and evidence for policy-making, promoting accountability and transparency in the policy process, and addressing cultural beliefs and practices that may impede progress.

The path toward gender equality in Thailand remains a work in progress. The nation's approach now combines carefully designed policies that address the complex issues of gender disparities with efforts to promote a broad shift in cultural attitudes and practices. The paradigm shift towards a 'differences' approach provides a strong foundation for this dual-faceted strategy. By implementing these recommendations and continuously refining its approach based on emerging insights and challenges, Thailand can further strengthen its gender equality policies and accelerate the transformation of unequal gender relations.

While challenges remain, this paradigm shift represents a significant step toward creating a more inclusive, equitable, and just society for all genders in Thailand. The success of this approach will depend on continued commitment, effective implementation, and ongoing evaluation to ensure that policies truly meet the diverse needs of all women and marginalized groups in Thai society. As Thailand continues to refine and implement its gender equality policies, it has the potential

to serve as a model for other countries grappling with similar challenges in advancing gender equality.

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