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Images of Thai Women in Thai Travel Magazines

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Abstract

This research on the portrayal of women in Thai travel narratives aims to analyze the structure and components of these narratives and examines the language strategies used to present the images of Thai women within the context of travel magazines by combining textual analysis with visual methodology. Altogether 313 narratives from 48 issues of *Vacationist*, *Travel around the World*, *Neekrung* and *Osotho* magazines published between June 2018 and May 2019 were collected. The study reveals that the meanings of travel and the images of Thai women in the travel magazines through the use of language strategies are formed in a positive way. Solo female travelers are depicted as adventurers, nature lovers and soul searchers. These images indicate individuality and financial independence. On the other hand, female travelers with companions are displayed in association with their roles as wives, mothers and daughters.

Keywords

images – Thai women – Thai travel magazines

1 Introduction

The purpose to promote Thailand as the most woman-friendly travel destination or the “Women’s Journey Thailand 2018” campaign by the Tourism Authority of Thailand is in line with the concept of womenomics in the sense

that women are more likely to have purchasing power and to be the primary decision-makers for travelling since in more than 80 percent of the global household population, women are the decision-makers regarding global household spending and travelling expenses (Harvard Business Review 2016). This is consistent with the fact that, in 2020, the total population of Thailand was estimated at approximately 69.31 million inhabitants¹ with a projected 1.5 million more females than males. Moreover, the research entitled “Women’s lives in Thai Society in 2020” conducted by the Office of Knowledge Management and Development in Thailand shows that 80.43 percent of women will be self-financing in 2020. Additionally, according to Savvy Auntie’s research (2012), “PANKS” or “Professional Aunts No Kids” – younger women with high disposable income, compared with other groups of women – are more likely to travel alone since they are childless and have freedom to travel. PANKS tend to have a higher rate of full-time employment. The average age of PANKS is approximately 36 years so they tend to have a network of companions and colleagues with growing families (SavvyAuntie 2018). Therefore, the women, and PANKS in particular, can be considered as significant and potential travel markets in Thai society.

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, leisure travel, as claimed by Harris and Wilson (2007, 235), was “exceptionally privileged for men and upper-class women.” However, travelling alone as a woman, according to Khoo-Lattimore and Wilson (2017, 2), was socially unacceptable since the notion of travelling was perceived as “a primarily masculine venture.” Moreover, solo female travelers, as cited by Craik (1997, 119), were considered unacceptable by society since “the traditional tourist can be said to be normatively male, seeking pleasures associated with aggrandisement, greatness, uniqueness, exploration and intrepidity” (Craik 1997, 131). Travelling was believed to be a male activity and to signify gender inequality. These claims, however, are inconsistent with the fact that 75 percent of women planned to travel alone in 2017.² Furthermore, the rise of single women was in the vicinity of 5.6 million individuals by 2019. This implies that the social values of solo female travelers have changed over time.

Travel magazines in conformity with Capella and Greco’s (1987, 149) and Andereck and Caldwell’s (1993, 171) discussions are “important” information sources. This is in accordance with Andereck’s (2016, 3) analysis that travel magazines are significant and powerful tourism information sources for travelers since they have effects on making choices regarding travel destinations. In line with Andereck (2016, 3), Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998, 551) point out that

1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/331889/total-population-of-thailand/.23/9/2018>.

2 <https://www.thairath.co.th/content/602819.23/9/2018>.

information search plays an important role in relation to individuals' destinations since marketing-oriented information not only includes knowledge but also proposes visual imagery and aesthetic perceptions of real places. Therefore, the contents presented in travel magazines can produce marketing-oriented information aimed at readers who love to travel in particular.

Investigating these narratives in the travel columns allows for understanding of how women's travel is constructed in Thai travel magazines. Only women are the focus of this study – men are not included. The purpose of the study is to interpret the cultural meanings intrinsic in the idea of women's travels in Thai society since women in Europe when compared to men, as claimed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2016, 5), are more likely to be "victims of sexual exploitation and sexual harassment in tourism." The question then arises whether this is also the case in the portrayal of Thai women in Thai travel magazines and if it is, what is the kind of depiction regarding women and travelling? The research into the portrayal of women in Thai travel magazines, accordingly, may contribute to a comprehension of how the magazines impact travel styles for women. Additionally, it may establish positive interpretations of women's travel and enhance social awareness of gender equality in tourism.

Travel magazines in the context of Thai culture do not divide their contents into readers' sexes. There is, for example, no particular travel magazine presenting its contents in an attempt to influence the readers in specific groups, such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people in Thai society in 2018. This implies the basic concept of travelling in relation to biological sex in Thai society. The two research questions are: 1. How is women's travel constructed in the travel columns in Thai travel magazines? and 2. What are the depictions of Thai women in Thai travel magazines? These two research questions are accompanied by two assumptions, as follows: 1. Women's travels in the travel columns are represented through language strategies and visual images and 2. Thai women in Thai travel magazines are depicted in a positive way. The analysis of the portrayals of women in travel contexts in Thai travel magazines has not been investigated to any great extent. Therefore, the study of the images of Thai women in Thai travel magazines in Thailand will provide a better understanding of women's images and of Thai female travelers in the context of tourism.

2 Theoretical Frameworks and Analytical Approaches

In this study, two interdisciplinary theoretical areas – women's studies and tourism studies – were applied in order to analyze the portrayal of women

and the concept of travelling in the magazines. Feminist approaches based on an understanding of gender can be used to examine the construction of women's travel notions since feminist empiricism, standpoint feminism and post-structural feminism, according to Swain (1995, 247), "have served to shape our multiple understandings of the relationships between gender and tourism." Gender in tourism, in this study, is perceived as the social construction of the travel experience of Thai female travelers, which is the result of textual and visual discourses. In order to explore contemporary concepts of women's travel in Thai travel magazines, I focus on what is valued about travelling and how female travelers might be portrayed in the magazines.

The theoretical frameworks and analytical approaches applied are those of content analysis, discourse analysis and visual methodology. Content analysis was employed in order to analyze the concept of "travelling" through the occurrence of images that signify "women," followed by the clarification of the underlying texts. This is in association with the approach of applying thematic analysis to classify the narratives under meta-themes derived from the principle titles and data engaged such as outbound and domestic tourism. Next, discourse analysis was applied in order to examine the vocabulary used through linguistic strategies such as metaphors and personification to reveal the notions of travelling and womanhood in context. The meanings of the representational and nonrepresentational images in Thai travel magazines would be interpreted through visible and unseeable things by the use of visual methodology. This theoretical framework was thus engaged to analyzing the photos presented as part of the narratives, especially the photos of solo female travelers and female travelers with companions.

3 Data and Scope of the Study

In this research greater focus is placed upon the depictions of Thai woman in Thai travel magazines from a gender perspective by taking into account the impact of cultural expectations of women's travel in Thai society. The data employed in this study was drawn from travel columns in four Thai travel magazines covering: 1. *Osotho*, 2. *Vacationist*, 3. *Neekrung*, and 4. *Travel around the World*. Forty-eight issues of these magazines during the period from June 2018 to May 2019 are the primary source for the data collection.

Altogether twenty-five travel columns were gathered, with three hundred and thirteen narratives in total. Two main criteria were used for the data collection. First, travel narratives are described by both columnists and interviewees based upon themes. This is evidenced by the columnist's name appearing

in the column: “Land of Smiles, Story and Photo by Orawan”³ (Orawan 2018, 74) and “Follow Me, Story and Photo by Kanjana Hongthong” (Hongthong 2018, 52). The contribution from the columnist to the narrative is demonstrated by the columnist’s name at the beginning of the page before the interviewee’s name. However, editors’ talks, advertisements and other columns such as travel news, food and dining columns, and so on in the magazines are not included in the analysis. Second, only travel narratives narrated by both female notables and ordinary women were investigated since the language strategies employed by these females can disclose selective ideas and images of women displayed in the narratives. In regard to their contents, these travel columns thus apparently convey messages to female readers.

4 Literature Review

The literature related to the present study can be discussed according to two groups, namely, studies of Thai travel magazines and studies on gender and tourism. First, most studies on Thai travel magazines used content analysis. The studies in relation to the content analysis in Thai travel magazines are for example from Saisamut and Chartprasert (2014) and Sooksai (2008). Saisamut (2014, 35) studied “the presentation of sustainable tourism content in travel magazines” by investigating how travel magazines present content related to sustainable tourism in *Osotho*, *Nature Explorer* and *Neekrung* magazines. The approach of content analysis and the theory of planned behavior were used. The findings reveal that the magazines tend to present their contents by focusing on sustainable tourism in order to fulfill the satisfaction of readers. The ways of how content presented are affected by both internal factors such as sponsorship, writers’ expertise, photographers’ skills and external factors including social trends, tourism campaigns of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and readers’ preference. However, in an era of rapidly changing digital technologies, to what extent is this still the case in presenting contents in Thai travel magazines? Sooksai (2008, 4–5) analyzed the patterns, characteristics and linguistic strategies of the language used in foreign travel feature writing in Thai travel magazines, including *Traveling around the World*, *Traveler’s Companion*, *Travel Guide* and *Anywhere* magazines. It was found that images and texts are significant elements in Thai travel magazines. Images aim to draw the reader’s attention and create an impression. Additionally, these images help readers

3 Orawan is a Thai female name.

improve their understanding in relation to information and knowledge presented in the magazines. Texts, on the other hand, are used to explain facts, emotions, feelings, experiences and the opinions of the columnists. There are various types of linguistic strategies applied in the magazines such as description, comparison, rhetorical questions, colloquial expressions and the use of foreign languages. These studies have focused on a content analysis of travel narratives in Thai travel magazines. Nonetheless, there is a lack of research on images of women in Thai travel magazines.

Next, studies focusing on gender and tourism cover various research topics in both Western and Asian countries. The literature on gender and tourism that directly links to the present study on the representation of women in the context of tourism includes Western women's travel experience (Bowen 2005, 119; Swain 1995, 247), gender difference in travel behavioral patterns (Huang 2006, 64; Kim, Lee, and Chung 2013, 377), Asian female travelers (Asbollah et al. 2013, 667; Chan 2007, 20; Yang et al. 2016, 1008) and the influence of Asian gender norms and cultural identities on female travel behavior (Asbollah et al. 2013, 667; Teo and Leong 2006, 124–125; Zhang and Hitchcock 2014, 315).

When it comes to discussing the study of gender and tourism in Thailand, gender inequality is a primary focus. Truppa and Sunanta (2017, 76) employ an ethnographic approach to investigate gendered practices in urban ethnic tourism in Thailand. The findings reveal that urban ethnic tourism elevates gender asymmetry in the division of labor but heightens gender inequality. One question one might want to ask is to what extent is this still the case in the discourse of tourism in Thai travel magazines and if it is, what is the type of gender inequality? Bernstein and Shih (2014, 430) use an ethnographic approach to interrogate the reality of the “realities of the global trade in humans” in order to reveal global panics around sexuality and sex work and the politics of tourism and development in Thailand. Finally, O'Malley (1988, 99) investigates sex tourism and women's status in Thailand. It has been found that the entry of migrants into prostitution involves their roles as breadwinners, the lack of job opportunities, sexist ideology and budget-conscious tourists. This leads to the question of how women's status is relevant to tourism in the context of Thai travel magazines?

After reviewing the above related pieces of research, it can be seen that there have been no studies carried out in relation to the images of Thai women in Thai travel magazines adopting the content analysis, discourse analysis and visual methodology approaches – most of them have investigated Thai travel magazines in association with content analysis. Additionally, there exist only a few studies on Asian female travelers. However, most of these works are from the Western perspective and none of them has analyzed the depiction of Thai

female travelers. Therefore, the issue of the portrayal of Thai women in Thai travel magazines will help to extend the understanding of the contemporary travel practices of Thai female travelers.

5 Ideas around Women's Travel in Thai Travel Magazines

The focal point in this section is the ideas around women's travels that are displayed in travel columns in Thai travel magazines. The travel narratives in Thai travel magazines in my sample consist of three parts: introduction, body and ending. The introduction in the first section usually begins with photos of the destination, followed by the headings or the story titles of the narratives, which also contain a few related sentences that provide a brief explanation of the landing place. The story titles normally appear in the largest colorful letters compared with the letters in other sections in order to draw the reader's attention.

In addition to the photos of the journey in the introduction, *Neekrung*, *Osotho*, *Travel around the World* and *Vacationist* illustrate certain major types of tourism: outbound and domestic tourism. The outbound tourism in the magazines in this study refers to Thai residents travelling outside Thailand to a different country, whereas the domestic tourism points to Thai women taking trips in Thailand. The story titles in relation to both outbound and domestic tourism are formed on the basis of the purpose of the travel; namely, leisure travel. Leisure travel includes travel for holidays, historical and cultural events, adventure and recreation.

Travelling abroad in Thai travel magazines is constructed in terms of the connection between oneself and the world, as shown in the titles of the travel columns: "The World as I See It" and "World Traveler" in *Travel around the World*. These titles imply that travelling abroad allows readers to have opportunities to see the world as travelers. Travel narratives in Thai travel magazines, in this sense, are consistent with Johnson's (2010, 508) conception of travel narratives in terms of their potentiality to "tell more about the author's and their point of view than the place visited." More specifically, in "The World as I See It" column, the female traveler performs as a "key actor" and an "opinion former" (Bridges 2002, 67) who produces representations of places through her own perspective. The story titles in connection with outbound tourism are generally displayed by a group of countries that are expensive to live in with higher costs of living than Thailand, indicating women's prominent lives as illustrated in the following examples: "10 Checklists in Iceland...Something

else to See, not just the Northern Lights” (T. 2019, 82–83) and “Romantic Cities in Europe” (A tale from the suitcase 2018, 36).

By way of illustration, *Travel around the World* and *Vacationist* include specific travel columns regarding domestic tourism in Thailand. For instance, “How are You Thailand?” and “Land of Smiles” respectively. The story titles which indicate domestic tourism in Thailand are normally short, only one to two sentences in length. Provinces and cities are usually mentioned in the story titles, for example, “Welcome New Year @Coffee City, Phahee, Chiang Rai Province” (Saithongin 2019, 9). The main titles in the introduction section indicating the outbound and domestic tourism are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that there were three hundred and thirteen narratives in total in the present sample. There were one hundred and thirty-six and one hundred and seventy-seven story titles concentrating on outbound tourism and domestic tourism respectively. The story titles associated with domestic tourism in the introduction were most commonly found in the magazines, equaling 56.54 percent. However, there were only one hundred and thirty-six out of three hundred and thirty-three story titles or 43.45 percent related to outbound tourism. In *Neekrung*, there was no story title connected with outbound tourism while there was only one such title in *Osotho* presenting outbound tourism; namely, “Stay Over in Ranong – Explore the Myanmar Sea” (Buahapakdee 2019, 68). The titles relating to domestic tourism were thus more common in the travel magazines in the present sample. This signifies that domestic tourism is constructed as more common than outbound tourism.

TABLE 1 The types of tourism covered in the story titles in Thai travel magazines: *Neekrung*, *Osotho*, *Travel around the World* and *Vacationist*.

Types of Tourism in the Story Titles	Magazines Titles				Numbers of Narratives
	Neekrung	Osotho	Travel around the World	Vacationist	
Outbound tourism	-	1	67	68	136
Domestic tourism	85	70	7	15	177
Total	85	71	74	83	313

When the narrative is associated with a woman and outbound tourism, the columnist always provides the woman's positive attributes and personal details, such as her name and occupation in order to introduce her. An explicit example is the following: "Everyone has a different type of travel styles. A *skillful* (and *strong*) woman like Ms. Navinee Hengnalane, a *general manager* of BuyNow Company Limited and a solo traveler, has got interesting experiences while travelling to share" (Team 2018, 70). The texts in the introductory section describe a woman in a positive way, with pleasant character traits in terms of her abilities. This was made evident by the occupation of general manager.

The next component in the narratives is the body, which is the longest section compared with the introduction and ending in the travel column. The overall content of a given narrative is arranged by combining the columnist's topics, the interviewee's explanations related to the topics and the photos. There are approximately four to seven points in each narrative and each story is approximately three to fifteen pages in length depending on the magazine issue. The columnist's topics in the body are relevant to the story title. For instance, in the narrative of "Solo Travelling, when a Heart is Calling for Travel" (Team 2018, 70), the columnist's topics are divided into six points starting from 1. "Difference is Beautiful", 2. "Solo Traveler", 3. "Good Friend was Once a Stranger", 4. "Being Conscious", 5. "Self-dive in Iceland", and 6. "Proud to be Thai" (Team 2018, 71–72). The narrative has been formed according to a particular theme instead of questions and answers. In this way, the columnist sets a particular idea of the woman's travel by choosing positive words, which make readers feel good about the woman. The solo female traveler, as illustrated in the previous example, is linked to uniqueness ("Difference is Beautiful"), friendship ("Good Friend was Once a Stranger"), consciousness ("Being Conscious"), independence ("Self-dive in Iceland") and pride ("Proud to be Thai"). On the one hand, all of these positive words used to describe this woman signify that being a solo female traveler is desirable. On the other hand, another implication is that the woman travelling alone is extraordinary and that makes her unique and different from other women.

It is noticeable that what outbound and domestic tourism have in common is the concept of women's travel. Linguistic strategies such as metaphors and personification are used to convey the idea of women's travel. There were two prominent metaphorical concepts appearing in the magazines I analyzed. Firstly, the magazines presented "TRAVEL IS A BOOK" as a conceptual metaphor. This was evidenced by metaphorical expressions in the narratives. For instance, "Travelling is like *opening a new book. Every book has its own story.*

For Taiwan, Rat⁴ feels like *reading that book in detail*. Sometimes, *the writer may make a few changes on the previous page*. Then, we have to *re-read it*" (Intharasuwan 2019, 96) and "All of the books in the world, *the best stories are found between the pages of a passport*" (Team 2018, 35). The "TRAVEL IS A BOOK" metaphor, in this case, might be structured by thinking of travel experiences tied to the contents of the book, in which the woman can consider herself to be either a writer or a reader. However, the magazine stimulates one such instantiation (the "BOOK") by suggesting consideration of the significance of the writer instead of the reader, as shown in the following text: "Somebody said that reading ten books was not worth travelling. This is true because travelling makes you feel real" (Chompunoot 2018, 47). This metaphor suggests the positive aspect of women's travel by linking it to real-life experiences that may not happen to everyone – only the female travelers in the magazines.

Moreover, the optimistic viewpoint of women's travel was reinforced by the metaphorical concept "TRAVEL IS MONEY" expressed in the magazines. The expressions listed (*investment*, *cost* and *profit*) in the following examples refer particularly to money: "Travelling is an *investment*. It is the *cost* of time and money so choose what we like most" (Preedaphol 2019, 98) and "To travel is to open the new world. It is the *profit* of life" (Team 2018, 62). This metaphorical concept signifies that travelling is valuable. However, it might be restricted to just a group of people who can afford to pay, not for everyone, since the way that the concept of travelling is portrayed in the magazines is typically in relation to money and time – the longer you stay, the more you pay. Nevertheless, this is not the case for the women displayed in the magazines since they can afford to travel around the world.

The use of personification in the narratives is applied to make the point that travelling is pleasurable. Personification, according to Lakoff and Johnsen (2003, 32), "allows us to comprehend a wide variety of experiences with non-human entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics and activities." This is consistent with Leigh's (1994, 19) explanation that personification is the act of "ascribing inanimate objects or abstractions with human qualities or abilities." Therefore, personification enables us to understand women's travels in the magazines. Explicit examples are: "Travelling *unlocks vision, helps me see* the wider world, the beauty of nature and different cultures" (Team 2018, 132).

The last component of the narratives is the ending. There were four types of endings of the travel narratives in the present sample: 1. tips and guidance; 2. advertising a woman's business; 3. rhetorical questions; and 4. special thanks.

4 A Thai nickname for women.

Tips and suggestions are provided at the bottom of the page with particular bold headings, such as “What You Need to Know!” and “A Traveler’s Handbook,” in order to provide additional information related to the trip. The main purpose of tips and guidance is not only to give general information to readers but also to help them prepare themselves before travelling. An illustrative example is: “Cebu Tips: Direct Flight BKK-CEB – this trip is easier because there is not a connecting flight. Philippines Airlines has direct flights from Bangkok to Cebu, landing at Mactan Cebu International Airport. It takes only 3 hours” (Chaimayo 2018, 88).

Occasionally, the stories end with advertising in the form of contact details and websites relevant to the women’s businesses. Advertising women’s work, such as executive managing directors and general managers working at famous travel companies, underlines women’s competence. Additionally, ending the narrative in this way highlights the person’s ability in the sense that working as an executive managing director is a high-status occupation that requires specialized skills. It contains the contact details of the company for the purpose of promoting the woman’s business. Thus, this ending promotes the woman’s competence by advertising her work and occupation.

Next, the use of rhetorical questions at the endings in the magazines is used in order to encourage readers to travel. Readers are persuaded to imitate the woman’s choices of travel destination as shown in the following example: “What about You? Would You Like to Know Cebu?” (Chaimayo 2018, 88). This woman’s option was to be an example for readers to follow since readers have to choose a place as the columnist did. This reveals the concept of travelling in the sense that lesser-known travel destinations are worth visiting. Lastly, special thanks to travel companies or sponsors are usually displayed at the end of a story, with companies’ logos and contact details. Ideas around women’s travel, in this sense, are connected to consumerist values as a viable marketing opportunity. Readers are thus persuaded to use the travel service from the same company that the woman chose. More specifically, readers are inspired to learn from the story of other women’s experiences.

6 Portrayals of Thai Women in Thai Travel Magazines: Solo Female Travelers

The concept of solo female travelers in the magazines is linked to independence and individuality instead of loneliness or having no choice. According to Pereira and Silva (2018, 101), solo female travelers are motivated by “experience,” “involvement” and “acquired competences.” Although women may have

different reasons for travelling alone, studies show that there are common motivations that lead women to be solo travelers, such as “challenge and overcoming” (Bond 1997; Chiang and Jongaratnam 2006, 61; Wilson and Little 2005, 168; McNamara and Prideaux 2010, 254), “escape routine” (Crompton 1979, 416; Bond 1997), “new life perspectives” (Chiang and Jongaratnam 2006, 64; Wilson and Little 2005, 168; McNamara and Prideaux 2010, 254), and “gaining new experiences” (Crompton 1979, 419; Bond 1997). These motivations are also the key points for the solo female travelers in Thai travel magazines analyzed in the current study.

More specifically, the notions of challenge and overcoming portrayed in the magazines are significant motivations associated with solo female travelers. These motivations help these women step outside their comfort zone and improve their sense of individuality, as can be seen in the following examples: “Rat cannot speak Chinese and likes to be alone. Travelling alone in Taiwan is not that hard” (Intharasuwan 2019, 94) and “The first time I travelled alone, I was very afraid because I was very young at that time. However, when I did that, it made me feel more confident” (*Travel around the World*, September 2018, p.71).

The solo female travelers in Thai travel magazines were displayed as skillful and strong. This was evident in the following examples: “*I Roam Alone* is the webpage of a woman who travels alone around the world. Five to six years ago, it was very unusual for women to travel alone” (Preedaphol 2019, 98) and “We have different styles of travelling. Khun Navinee Hengnalane, a proficient (and strong) woman and a general manager of BuyNow Company Limited, normally travels alone” (Team 2018, 70).

The magazines connect the concept of solo female travelers to male dominance or “the unequal power relations between men as a group and women as a group” (Sanday 2001, 9143) in the sense that travelling alone is regarded as a man’s activity. This is obvious in the following example: “Do not think that only guys can travel alone; keep in mind that a woman can do it as well” (Preedaphol 2019, 98). Thus, solo travelling, in this way, not only helps women to get out of their comfort zone but also equalizes the power relations between men and women.

Another motivation that leads women to travel alone is to “escape routine” (Crompton 1979, 416; Bond 1997). On the one hand, the escape from daily routine reinforces the traditional gender roles of women in the domestic sphere. On the other hand, an implication of this motivation is that the woman’s place is no longer restricted to the domestic sphere. The solo female travelers motivated by the escape from routine in the magazines are displayed as escapists, who are trying to escape the boredom and tedium caused by their work and

daily routine. Thus, they decide to travel in order to get rid of tediousness and to refresh their lives. Obvious examples include: “The same routines are done repeatedly. This is reducing our mind-body energy” (Oaumcharoen 2018, 37) and “When my body is tired, I will go travelling” (Jumpakaew 2019, 67).

Occasionally, the women in the magazines are displayed as nature lovers when they want to escape daily routines. These women are enchanted by nature, and therefore they spend their holidays in a natural environment, such as jungles, beaches, and mountains. This is evident in the following examples: “With a 360-degree-view and fresh air, this is a beautiful morning to me” (Orawan 2019, 39) and “When winter comes, green mountains, green grass, and pine trees will be covered by snow. This is a wonderful wintertime” (A tale from the suitcase 2019, 52).

The next motivation for the solo female travelers that appeared in the magazines was to find new life perspectives. Travel, in this sense, is regarded as a way of discovering the meaning of life or valuable knowledge rather than relaxation. The solo female travelers that moved towards searching for new life perspectives are presented as soul searchers, who are portrayed as being different from escapists in the sense that they travel in order to find the meaning of life. Travel, in this way, is regarded as the means to discover meaningful lessons for their lives rather than a way of escaping from boredom, as illustrated in the following: “To go travelling is not just to see mountains or different landscapes. It is to know cultures and to see different lifestyles and folk wisdom. These are all the basic steps for understanding other people” (Thongaram 2018, 94) and “I used to think that it would be great if I could fly. But flying like I thought did not aim to arrive at the destination country, but to remember the beautiful scenery along the journey as a once-in-a-lifetime gift experience” (Buntuchai 2018, 27).

Women are motivated by gaining new experiences (Crompton 1979, 419; Bond 1997) and displayed as explorers and adventurers. Solo female travelers go outside their comfort zone in order to seek new sensorial experiences. They do adventurous activities and explore unseen places. The concept of solo female travelers is connected to novelty, as displayed in the following: “Actually, adventurous travelling gives you happiness and relaxation. It makes you have some fun and be excited about new experiences. Just try it!” (Nuilek 2018, 74). The adventurous activities portrayed the magazines are thus associated with courage and new experiences. This was evident in the narratives that were characterized as follows: “Ziplining is a popular adventure activity that anyone with courage, regardless of age or sex, can enjoy” (Buntuchai 2018, 31) and “It is suitable for doing outdoor activities like flying balloons as I am flying up into the skies right now” (Orawan 2019, 40). These adventurer experiences

normally come with risk. The risk, as stated by Johnson (2010, 507), “differentiates the adventurer from the tourist.” In this regard, women travelling alone were not portrayed as just ordinary tourists but adventurers. Furthermore, the images of women engaged in adventurous activities were usually presented with smiles, as shown in Image 1 and 2. These photos thus reinforce the positive images of women in terms of their strength and bravery.

As with the motivation for acquiring new experiences, solo female travelers are usually presented as engaged in luxurious experiences or as luxury travelers. Although luxury may not be the first priority in their lives, the solo female travelers in the magazines choose luxurious ways to travel because they would like to gain once-in-a-lifetime experiences from 5-star hotels, classy restaurants and expensive transportation. Explicit examples included: “Travelling on the Glacier Express, Switzerland’s most scenic train journeys will make an unforgettable impression” (Team 2018, 139) and “Hotels are all great. It is just a small island but there are a lot of luxury hotels to stay” (Team 2018, 143). By depicting women as luxury travelers instead of backpackers, the magazines signify the notion of individuality – that solo travelling is not considered as



IMAGE 1 A woman smiling while riding a zipline.
(KUNBUA 2018, 30)



IMAGE 2 A woman smiling while paragliding.
(A TALE FROM THE SUITCASE 2019, 56)

common for ordinary Thai women since the women travelling alone depicted in the magazines are associated with experience and luxury. Moreover, travelling in luxury is a goal-directed activity that not everyone can afford. This thus signifies the individuality of women and their financial independence.

However, the magazines reinforce conventional femininity in the sense that women's travels are fulfilled by love and romance. When the women are presented as solo travelers in the public sphere, the narratives link their desire to love and heterosexual relationships, as illustrated in the following examples: "I was waiting to see the sunset near Ferrovia harbor. It was really beautiful and made me think deeply about someone. I was thinking to myself that Venice was too romantic to be here alone" (A tale from the suitcase 2018, 47) and "For me, the romance of Paris is not just the beauty of buildings and views but the lifestyles of French people. When you walk along every street in town, you will often see lovers do activities together" (A tale from the suitcase 2018, 38). To put it another way, the magazines signify the idea of solo travelling in the sense that it cannot fulfill women's lives, although it is a means for women to gain new experiences. This notion is reinforced by the concept of female travelers travelling with companions, as will be discussed in the next section.

7 Portrayals of Thai Women in Thai Travel Magazines: Female Travelers with Companions

When the women are displayed as female travelers with companions, the magazines link them to tour companies. On the one hand, this is a way of

promoting the tour companies. On the other hand, the magazines can be regarded as the primary source of information for women to choose their own styles of travelling. Obvious examples are as follows: “Although going to Japan is easier than before, it will be a lot easier if you travel with reliable tour companies” (Sukornsep 2018, 38) and “Next time we will definitely not miss going to travel with Go Easy Holiday Company” (A tale from the suitcase 2018, 50).

Moreover, the concept of travelling with companions is connected to tour guides, as evidenced by the following examples: “A captain was waving his hands and calling us to take a look inside the balloon. It was such a great experience when we stepped inside that big balloon” (Orawan 2019, 39) and “Learning while walking on a natural route guided by the leader of hill tribe is one of our impressive experiences” (Orawan 2019, 44). Obtaining new experiences, in this sense, comes from others, especially male tour guides. Women thus were considered as followers, while tour guides are regarded as leaders who provide these women with new experiences.

Typically, the companions of female travelers are their friends and families. When women travel with their friends, they normally do activities together during their trips in order to gain new experiences. The women in the magazines have new experiences for example by exploring new cultures; these women and their friends are portrayed as cultural tourists visiting places that are relevant to their interests in Thailand and abroad. Occasionally, women as cultural tourists are depicted in national or folk costumes. On the one hand, wearing these costumes is connected with cultural traditions, heritage, and pride, and on the other hand, these women are considered to be cultural representatives.

Another example of female travelers with companions acquiring new experiences is associated with eating practices and cultural knowledge in terms of local food and intercultural contact with local people. This type of female traveler explores different cultures through cuisine and delicious food regardless of the destination. This idea is supported by the texts and pictures used in the narratives: “We all agree that Ko Ket is an ultimate place for eating and travelling. No one should miss it” (Oaumcharoen 2018, 35) and “Ko Koet, a land of fertility, has plenty of food. The Chao Phraya River is large. There are lots of shrimp, which are sweeter than the shrimps from other sources. Moreover, the community offers a variety of local menus” (Oaumcharoen 2018, 35).

When it comes to discussing women travelling with their families, the magazines displayed the women by linking them to cultural knowledge and traditional roles as housewives, mothers and daughters. These roles conform to the conventional idea of old-fashioned gender images since all of these roles

in the Thai culture, apart from being a daughter, begin after getting married. The magazines reinforce the roles of women as housewives by pointing out traditional gender roles of women in the domestic sphere: “Normally, the *So O* housewives weave with a backstrap loom at home” (Buahapakdee 2018, 66) and “All Hmong women must know how to do needlework. If the women cannot sew, they will not be chosen by Hmong men to get married” (Saithongin 2018, 15). A strong sense that the travel magazines domesticate women and support male dominance is illustrated by the construction of womanhood in a hierarchy and the idea of what roles are suitable for women and men in family units.

Another convention of femininity depicted in the magazines in the present sample is the notion that women’s lives are fulfilled by being mothers. The construction of women as mothers is connected with travelling in the sense that the women should have their children travel with them instead of leaving them at home regardless of their ages. Motherhood here is consistent with liberal feminists’ views in the sense that it does not exclude women from public life. However, the notion of motherhood in the magazines investigated is constructed as the fulfillment of a woman and of a woman’s devotion to mothering, while travelling is the right decision since it brings happiness to her family. This is evidenced by the fact that the portrayals of all women travelling with their families are always presented with smiles on their faces. By representing women as mothers, the traditional belief of gender norms is also emphasized. To be more specific, women are expected to be in heterosexual relationships and to give birth to a child after marriage.

Another role of women portrayed in the narrative is that of daughter. The construction of women as daughters in the magazines in the sample is connected with having gratitude towards their parents in the sense that their parents went on trips with them when they were young. Moreover, these women do not want their parents to feel lonely. Furthermore, this can strengthen the bond of their relationships, as evidenced by the following examples: “Baanprajan is in our area. The beginning point of this place is my desire to make my parents feel accompanied” (Kanchong 2018, 31) and “I remembered that when I was young, my mother took me to Italy. It has been over for the last few decades and my mother is almost 80 years old now. I told my mom that we should go back to Italy before she can no longer walk. I will try not to wander aimlessly” (Phanit 2018, 91). Having gratitude regarding their parents’ kindness, as previously discussed, is depicted as essential for daughters because it conveys not only the idea of being a good daughter but also the type of travelling that they will choose to suit their parents’ preference and convenience. It is

prominent that in the magazines in the present sample only daughters are responsible for accompanying parents on their travels. The magazines, in this way, reinforce the conventional idea of childcare – that women, not men, are expected to be responsible for it.

To put it briefly, the female travelers with companions portrayed in the magazines normally travel with Thai tour companies and friends and families for their pleasure and experience and they are displayed in relation to conventional social norms for women in terms of their roles as wives, mothers and daughters – their travel expressed in the magazines is driven by the motivation to gain experience from the offerings of the destination.

8 Conclusion

The study of the images of Thai women in Thai travel magazines was investigated in order to answer primary research questions about how women and their experiences of travelling are depicted in Thai travel magazines. The analysis of women's travels in travel columns in the magazines I examined in terms of their components, storylines, language strategies and images indicates that Thai women in Thai travel magazines are depicted in positive ways, as solo travelers and as travelers with companions. There were three main types of solo female traveler displayed in the magazines: adventurers, nature lovers and soul searchers. The female travelers with their companions, on the contrary, were linked to tour companies, friends, and families.

Women travelling alone were associated with the various motivations of escape and exploration; challenges and sensualism; and overcoming and learning. Travelling, in this way, is consistent with the notion of tourism, as Craik (1997, 118) mentioned, in terms of “escape, hedonism and exploration.” The culture of the solo female traveler has shifted to reflect the changing identification of the woman's sphere since, according to Khoo-Lattimore and Wilson (2017, 2), “a woman travelling alone in the past was socially unacceptable.” Moreover, the idea of travel was directly considered as “a primarily masculine venture” (Khoo-Lattimore and Wilson 2017, 2). The magazines investigated, therefore, display the positive attributes of solo female travelers by linking them to cultural knowledge, pleasure and experience in the public sphere. As regards the depiction of women in the public sphere, the solo female travelers are portrayed as luxury travelers associated with luxury travel. This indicates that women are constructed as economically independent and that they do not rely on men financially. Therefore, women travelling alone, for pleasure,

might be empowering in the sense that they have disposable income and a level of independence that women in colonial times did not have.

Although the phenomenon of the solo female tourist is being promoted and even glamorized in such a way, when it comes to discussing women travelling with their friends and families, the narratives present conventional femininity as formerly analyzed. The roles of women as wives, mothers and daughters are highly conventional and are related to domesticity. All of the roles, apart from being a daughter, highlight the woman's status in connection with men since the roles will be given to the woman after marriage. Moreover, the concept of travelling related to the role of a woman as a daughter is regarded as a means to express the daughter's gratitude to her parents. Travelling, in this sense, is not just a quest for the woman's own happiness or the search for a meaningful life; rather, it is considered as the advantage and comfort of family at the same time. The magazines, therefore, emphasize the ideas of gender norms by creating the concept of the woman's sacrifice. Thai travel magazines in the present sample thus frame particular views of women in relation to travel for the reader.

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