

TOWARDS A NEW THEORY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CULTURE AND GENDER: A GROUNDED STUDY OF THAILAND'S MOST SUCCESSFUL FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the phenomenon of Thailand's female entrepreneurship and accounts for some of the cultural drivers in the ways in which Thai women operate to be the leading country in the world for female entrepreneurship in terms of entrepreneurial activity. Based on interviews, media reporting, events attendance, and presentations collected during the annual conference for Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World (LWEW) in Bangkok, Thailand. We report the ways in which leading Thai female entrepreneurs and male senior government officials explain the role of culture in legitimatising entrepreneurial activity. We develop a picture of female entrepreneurship is harmonious with Thai cultural and religious models of appropriate female behaviour and so provides some insights into the cultural reasons for prevalence of female entrepreneurial activity.

INTRODUCTION

For many readers from Western cultures, the word *entrepreneur* conjures images of hard-nosed, individualistic, competitive, risk-taking business people who sacrifice everything for success. This perception is also usually aligned with a male gendered expectation of entrepreneurial behaviour. Therefore, the finding that Thai women have the highest rate of participation in entrepreneurial activity across 35 countries and five continents (Minnitti, Arenius, and Langowitz, 2005) was quite surprising. The primarily US-and Euro-centric cultural model of entrepreneurs outlined above does not sit easily with many of the cultural patterns of Asian countries, and poses questions about how and why a person would become an entrepreneur if taking on such an identity challenges the very 'software of the mind' (Hofstede, 1991) that shapes behaviour and cultural response. This research also poses the question of why a woman, potentially doubly 'disadvantaged', both culturally and in terms of gender, might take up such a challenging business life. The paper therefore asks the question: what cultural factors have contributed to Thai women having the highest rates of participation in entrepreneurship when measured against worldwide standards?

Using data from a case study of a group of leading Thai women entrepreneurs, this paper explores how culture shapes mental models and the ways in which gender images of entrepreneurs play into and are the result of cultural and gender stereotypes through the narratives and metaphors used to articulate 'being a Thai women entrepreneur'. The paper begins by reviewing data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor on the prevalence of entrepreneurial activity in Thailand and 34 other countries. The paper then provides a comparison of US, Australian and Thai cultural dimensions, using Hofstede's (1991) framework. Next, we build on key understandings of entrepreneurship research and a cultural model of entrepreneurship derived from a study of the metaphors used by US entrepreneurs to describe how they view their work by exploring their life-and-business narratives. These metaphors are then used, by way of comparison, to provide an analysis of the Thai context in which entrepreneurial activity is so prevalent. A case study of life-and-business narratives from six leading

Thai women entrepreneurs provides some understanding of Thai female entrepreneurial activity and how culture and gender shape their practices.

Background to the case study development

In March 2006, the Star Group's Tenth Annual Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World (LWEW) Conference was held in Bangkok, Thailand. The annual conference brings together leading women entrepreneurs, and each selects new honorees. There are now approximately 315 LWEWs across the globe. While the criteria for annual turnover is differentiated by whether the business is in a developing or developed country, the criteria applies equally in terms of the significance of contribution to charitable work achieved by the nominee. By collecting data from multiple sources, this exploratory case study probes the ways in which successful female entrepreneurs explain their attitudes and motivations for behaviour.

We gathered data from informal interviews; participant observation of the celebratory, networking, and education events, speeches by senior government figures, participation in and participant observation of international panel discussions devised for potential and current Thai entrepreneurs, and Thai national and international media coverage of the individuals and events.

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: A GLOBAL PICTURE

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor study of entrepreneurs identified the emerging patterns of participation of women (Minniti, Allen, & Langowitz, 2005), reporting considerable variation of participation by gender and by country (See Table 1).

Table 1. Prevalence Rates of Entrepreneurial Activity Across Countries by Gender 2005

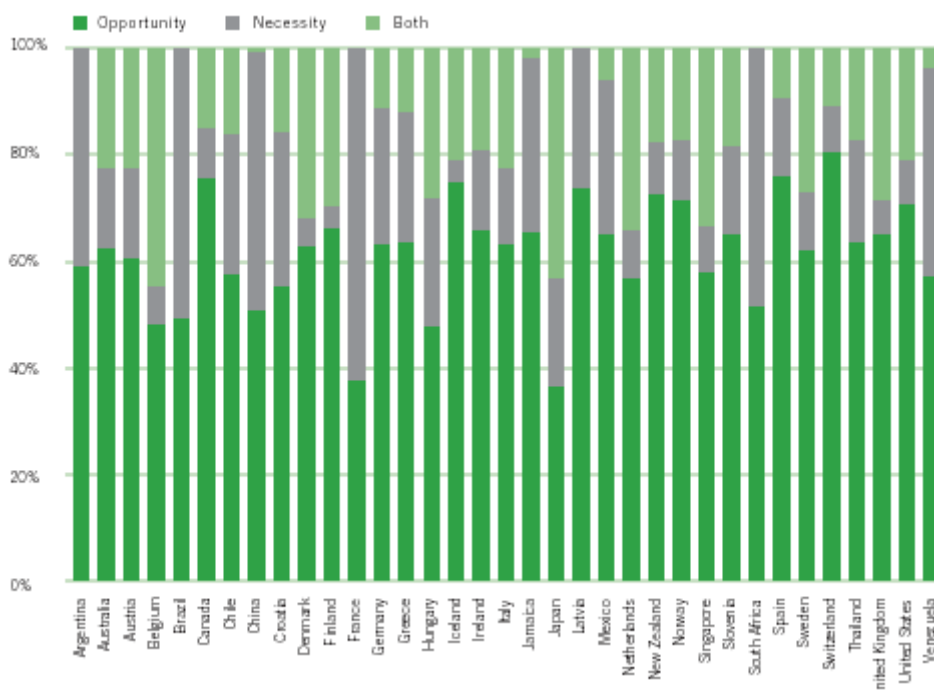
	Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (Nascent + New)		Established Business Owners		Overall Business Owners (Nascent + New + Established)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Argentina	14.82%	7.39%	8.38%	1.58%	23.21%	8.97%
Australia	11.62%	7.55%	12.08%	7.09%	23.70%	14.65%
Austria	9.68%	3.66%	5.10%	2.58%	14.78%	6.23%
Belgium	1.39%	2.42%	7.23%	4.03%	8.62%	6.46%
Brazil	15.24%	10.83%	13.33%	7.00%	28.58%	17.84%
Canada	14.21%	5.56%	9.72%	5.09%	23.93%	10.65%
Chile	14.17%	8.21%	4.82%	2.76%	18.98%	10.97%
China	11.82%	11.60%	16.06%	10.27%	27.88%	21.87%
Croatia	5.43%	2.58%	4.74%	2.61%	10.17%	5.19%
Denmark	5.08%	3.09%	6.56%	2.12%	11.64%	5.21%
Finland	7.17%	4.41%	12.43%	4.73%	19.59%	9.14%
France	6.40%	3.33%	2.76%	1.79%	9.16%	5.11%
Germany	8.67%	3.82%	5.99%	2.35%	14.66%	6.18%
Greece	7.40%	3.37%	11.36%	9.63%	18.76%	13.00%
Hungary	6.58%	2.39%	2.08%	1.95%	8.66%	4.34%
Iceland	13.11%	6.40%	9.05%	5.48%	22.16%	11.88%
Ireland	9.56%	5.48%	12.26%	3.88%	21.81%	9.35%
Italy	6.90%	3.70%	9.17%	3.64%	16.07%	7.34%
Jamaica	21.65%	15.69%	9.57%	9.49%	31.22%	25.18%
Japan	3.20%	1.20%	7.67%	3.11%	10.87%	4.31%
Latvia	7.28%	5.02%	6.57%	3.60%	13.85%	8.62%
Mexico	5.88%	4.55%	3.11%	0.77%	8.99%	5.32%
Netherlands	3.20%	2.11%	7.35%	3.94%	10.55%	6.05%
New Zealand	15.73%	13.75%	13.83%	8.03%	29.56%	21.77%
Norway	5.52%	4.47%	10.10%	4.38%	15.62%	8.85%
Singapore	8.47%	5.04%	7.49%	2.15%	15.95%	7.19%
Slovinia	9.78%	2.92%	8.74%	3.78%	18.52%	6.70%
South Africa	13.91%	4.49%	1.63%	1.00%	15.54%	5.49%
Spain	6.92%	4.15%	8.75%	6.68%	15.67%	10.83%
Sweden	5.79%	2.99%	8.68%	3.91%	14.48%	6.90%
Switzerland	7.38%	4.89%	11.86%	7.59%	19.24%	12.47%
Thailand	18.37%	19.33%	15.09%	13.15%	33.46%	32.49%
United Kingdom	6.17%	3.74%	8.06%	2.08%	14.24%	5.82%
United States	14.15%	9.65%	6.01%	3.35%	20.15%	13.00%
Venezuela	22.20%	23.86%	10.93%	6.25%	33.13%	30.12%

Source: *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2005 Report on women and entrepreneurship*, p.11. (www.gemconsortium.org)

The 35 countries were divided into two broad categories by GDP per capita. The high-income countries include the G7/8 countries, most of the EU member states and Australia and New Zealand. The remaining 22 countries listed below were categorised as middle-income. In broad terms, middle income countries had significantly higher entrepreneurial activity than high income countries. Perhaps, surprisingly, among this list of 35 countries, Thailand has the highest rate of entrepreneurial activity both in Early Stage and Established Business Owner participation. For example, in the United States, the mythic home of the entrepreneur, the study reported a 20% overall entrepreneurial activity prevalence for men and 13% for women. By contrast, in Thailand, men had a 33.5% overall entrepreneurial activity prevalence rate and women had a rate of 32.5%. This almost equally high level of participation by women and men is unmatched by any other country in the study. It is also interesting to note that female early stage entrepreneurial activity exceeds male activity only in Thailand, Belgium, and Venezuela, while, overall, in no country in the study is the female rate higher than the male in the rate of established business ownership. This suggests that gender differences are a universal issue.

The reasons for initiating entrepreneurial activity are also useful in understanding practice. Female entrepreneurs in Thailand identified 62% of their practice as opportunity rather than necessity driven. This is a relatively high percentage for a country in the middle income cluster where typically results for necessity driven entrepreneurship are higher than in the high income country cluster and suggests that entrepreneurship activities have some cultural support when even say when compared with other Asian countries such as Singapore (58% opportunity) and Japan (38%).

Table 2 Women's entrepreneurial motivation by country 2005



Source: *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 2005 Report on women and entrepreneurship*, p.14 (www.gemconsortium.org)

This data about Thailand, when compared with other countries such as the USA and Australia, raises some interesting questions about the role of culture and gender in the formation of such an active site of entrepreneurship in Thailand.

- What cultural and economic values shape this propensity to entrepreneurial activity?
- How does this affect female propensity to engage in entrepreneurial activity?

CULTURAL PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION AND WORK VALUES

A good starting point for this analysis is a comparison of the cultural values of the United States (as a representative of both the mythic entrepreneurs and of a high income country comparison) Australia (as a small but strong performer), and Thailand (as a middle income country and the focus of the analysis). Hofstede's analyses of cultural dimensions, while disputed by some researchers (Bond, 2002; Tayeb, 1996), are generally viewed as a useful litmus test of comparative cultural patterns of engagement. Thailand, the United States, and Australia are compared below on the five cultural dimensions assessed by Hofstede (2001): Power distance (PDI), Individualism (IDV), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Masculinity (MAS), and Long Term Orientation (LTO).

Hofstede describes Thailand as a high Power Distance culture, at 64 on a 100 point scale, compared with the USA's 40 and Australia's 36, explaining that the former is indicative of the high level of inequality of power and wealth in Thailand and the acceptance of these differences, based on valuing the traditions of their cultural heritage (www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_thailand.shtml). This is complemented by a low Individualism score of 20, indicating that Thailand has a strong collectivist culture, valuing member-groups, family, and extended family and extended relationships. This leads to strong loyalty and responsibility for others. This compares with the USA's 91 and Australia's 90 on the 100 point scale.

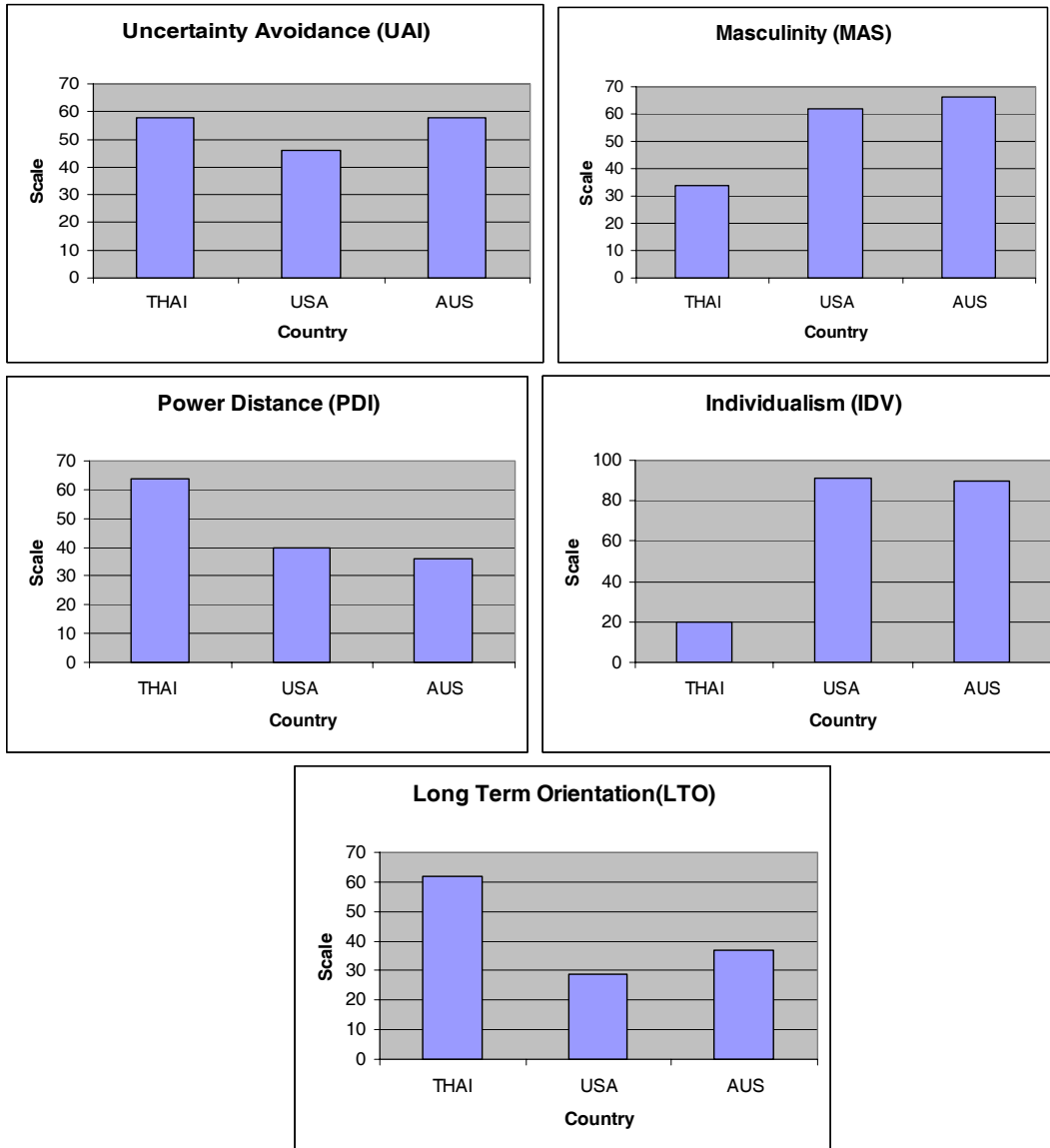
Thailand also has a high Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) score of 64, which indicates a low level of tolerance for uncertainty and risk. As a result of this aversion to risk, high UAI countries usually introduce regulation and policies to support growth. While the Asian average is 58, the USA scores 46 and Australia scores 58 on that dimension.

Thailand has the lowest ranking on Masculinity among Asian countries, at 34 compared to the Asian average of 53. The USA, by contrast, ranks at 62, with Australia at 66 on the 100 point scale. This dimension measures the ways in which control, power and achievement are modelled on a masculine model. The Thai score reflects a cultural propensity to be less assertive and less competitive than higher scoring cultures such as the USA and Australia, and more harmonious in style (Rojjanaprayon, Chiempratha, & Kanchankul, 2004), and to place more importance on improving the intrinsic aspects of the quality of life such as service to others, with a nurturing role for both men and women.

Hofstede developed the Long Term Orientation dimension after reflecting on the religious values of cultures. As a population, Thailand is 95% Buddhist, with its emphasis on leading a moral life, being self aware, and developing understanding and scores 62 on Long Term Orientation. This contrasts strongly with the USA's score of 29, and Australia's 37. The significance of this value can be encapsulated by the understanding of the four noble Truths of Buddhism, with the fourth truth (marga) that the Eightfold Path entails "right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right Samadhi (concentration)" (Chaung, 2004, p. 42). Buddhism also has a goal of nirvana, with the cycle of life towards nirvana being affected by achieving the Eightfold Path and karma affecting future stages of the cycle of life (Chaung, 2004). The charts below provide an overview of the five dimensions, comparing Thailand with the USA and Australia.

Thailand's cultural dimensions: Source: *Hofstede, itim international, 2006*(www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede).

Table 3-7: Thailand, USA and Australia Cultural Dimensions



Source: Hofstede, *itim international*, 2006 (www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede)

This overview of cultural patterns provides a useful lens to help make sense of the narratives of life and business that six leading entrepreneurs tell to make sense of what they do. By understanding their stories, explanations, and the sorts of metaphors they use, and how this differs across cultures, some light is shed on why Thailand leads the world in terms of entrepreneurial activity.

Sex roles, stereotypes and culture

Historically, men and women have assumed different roles in society. There has been a tendency to stereotype the genders, with descriptors like dominance, autonomy and aggression broadly applied across cultures to men and affiliation, nurturance and deference being associated with women across cultures (Williams & Best, 1990). Research on the link between gender and culture has suggested there are differences in their motivations, inclinations, and intentions to start a business, and that social factors such as social learning, sexual stereotypes, past experiences, and role-modelling may be culture-dependent (Mueller, 2004). One recent study on attitudes and motivations of teens and across ethnic identity in the USA (Wilson, Marlino and Kickul, 2004) found that girls were motivated by social and relational factors and boys more by autonomy. It can be concluded that while, intuitively, women and men are operating in more and more similar ways, gender stereotyping and socialisation still play a significant part in determining behaviour. Research on women entrepreneurs and work-family role conflicts also suggests that women have particular challenges when attempting to seek entrepreneurial success (Noor, 2004; Welter, 2004) and the negative results of this conflict on women

(Ashforth, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Work-management strategies to handle work-family responsibilities are critical to entrepreneurial success for women, particularly in relation to high growth businesses (Shelton, 2006).

UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURS

Many studies have been conducted about entrepreneurs, particularly in the US and Europe. The characteristics that have been identified widely as dimensions of entrepreneurial behaviour include: innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy (Dodd, 2002). Various studies (Reynolds, Storey, & Westhead, 1994; McGrath, MacMillan, & Scheinberg, 1992; Thomas & Mueller, 2001; Mueller, 2004) have explored the relationship between values, culture, and entrepreneurship and have concluded that culture matters in shaping entrepreneurial values and attitudes. For example, innovativeness is an important aspect of entrepreneurship. Innovativeness has some culturally specific roots that Shane (1993) found to be associated with national cultural values such as Uncertainty Avoidance, low Power Distance, and Individualism while Davidsson and Wiklund (1997) found regional differences played a part in their Swedish study.

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor has monitored entrepreneurial activity since 1999, collecting data on factors influencing perceptions about entrepreneurial environments at an individual level to gain an understanding of 'individual mindset'. GEM report a consistent finding that there are differences for male and female entrepreneurial activity. For example, fewer women than men reported that they had role models and support networks, including knowing other entrepreneurs. The data also shows that fear of failure is highly correlated to motivation to engage in entrepreneurial activity, although this may be, to some extent, mitigated by country context. According to the researchers, across the global survey, 'more than one-third of women engaged in no business activity expressed fear of failure' (2005, p. 25). Furthermore, in general terms, women in middle-income countries expressed a significantly higher fear of failure than men.

Another set of insights is generated by studying the life histories of entrepreneurs and the sorts of language they use to describe their life-and-business world. McCourt (1997) suggests that 'metaphors provide insights into how their users, or coiners, perceive their own reality' and 'can generate insights into how things are' (p. 513) while Hill and Levenhagen (1995) argue that entrepreneurs make sense of their experiences, perceptions and plans through a language articulation phase. Following a qualitative study of entrepreneurs' explanations of their motivations, Dodd (2002) identified seven families of metaphors that emerged from her study of US entrepreneurs. They found common ground with an earlier study by Koiranen (1995) on northern European entrepreneurs which emphasised creativity, action, sporting and military metaphors.

The metaphors identified by Dodd (2002) are:

- Journey (Pioneering, Venturing)
- Progress, overcoming obstacles
- Race (Competition, success for its own sake)
- Competitiveness
- War (aggression, patriarchy)
- Attacking the 'given'
- Iconoclasm (creative, destruction)
- Excitement
- Passion (the most dominant metaphor expressing the relationship between entrepreneur and business – as one of romance, love, passion)
- Fierce, commitment, joy
- Parenting (nurturing, protecting, life-path, responsibility, patriarchy)
- Step-by-step-development, overcoming problems
- Building (getting first steps right)

From studies of entrepreneurs, some broad observations can be made. The metaphors described by Dodd (2002) and Koiranen (1995) reinforce a particular dominant image of the Western entrepreneur as a competitive, individualistic, innovative, disruptive, risk-taking person who enjoys ambiguity. These traits are generally associated with masculinity. Despite considerable research seeking some confirmation of the impact of gender stereotyping causing women to feel a mismatch between being an

entrepreneur and being a woman, little evidence has emerged in US studies (Fagenson & Marcus, 1991). The evidence suggests that there is little difference, in terms of traits, between successful men and women entrepreneurs. However, both men and women assigned more weight to the masculine attributes of the entrepreneur (Fagenson & Marcus, 1991). Additionally, role models, self-assurance and marriage were positively related to supply of female entrepreneurs in the US (Schiller & Crewson, 1997).

This brief description of the cultural patterns, both of the sort of broad cultural brush stroke provided by Hofstede and entrepreneurship trait researchers and the more specific cultural images captured by Dodd (2002) and Koiranen (1995), provide a context for reporting the data from interviews and media coverage of six leading Thai entrepreneurs, participant observation, and speeches from the events at the Tenth Annual Conference of the LWEW in Bangkok.

WORK AND LIFE NARRATIVES FROM THAILAND

In their narratives, the LWEW women discussed the values, attitudes and world view held in their culture, as it applied to their entrepreneurial activity. During the course of the six day event, with the recent announcement of the GEM (2005) report, coinciding with International Women's Day, that Thailand was leading the world in the prevalence of entrepreneurial women and because this was the first trip for many LWEW women to Thailand, the high prevalence of Thai women entrepreneurs was addressed both formally during speeches and informally in conversations.

The right path and a rightful place

In his opening speech to a national forum attended by representatives of all the regions of Thailand and with a panel of LWEWs, the Minister of Social Development and Human Security, H.E. Wattana Muangsuk, reminded participants of the central role of Buddhism in how Thai society sees women and their contributions. He claimed: 'We value women' and 'women are the heroines of our country'. These sentiments and words recurred throughout the conference. Male partners of various Thai Leading Women, during their speeches, repeated this narrative of women as significant partners and, because of Buddhism, rightfully valued.

Role modelling and celebrating women as heroines was emphasised by drawing on the traditional and long culture of Thailand, formerly Siam. The centrepiece of the opening gala event for 600 leading business and government people was held at Wat Chaiwatthanaram, a monastery and temple built in 1630 in honour of the mother of the then King Prasat Thong. The event featured an historical journey to ancient times in the kingdom of Siam with a cast of 200 enacting the story of a former queen of Thailand who fought and died by the side of her king and husband, ultimately saving he and the kingdom by fighting the Burmese king who, with his army, was advancing on the kingdom. This metaphor of the women as heroines who simultaneously can demonstrate their metal (in this case as a sword-fighting warrior) as well as show honour, obedience, love, and respect was an important motif of the event.

Another recurring theme amongst the Thai Leading Women focussed around the perfecting of behaviour:

'To me, to be successful means being a perfect mother, perfect wife, perfect daughter, perfect sister, perfect boss and perfect social contributor' (LWEW 1).

And

'To be No.1 in all fields' [with reference to family, employees etc] (LWEW 2).

These words mirror the qualities of the Fourth Noble Truth of Buddhism: "right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right Samadhi (concentration)", referred to earlier. This strong Long Term Orientation of Thais and its application to entrepreneurial behaviour is captured by one entrepreneur who put it this way: My approach is 'to be more like a bell than a drum' because, as she explains, the drum makes a loud short sound while the softer bell has a lasting ring (LWEW 2).

Knowing one's place

Thailand is relatively high on the Power Distance scale when compared with many Western countries. This is very evident in the dispersion of wealth throughout Thailand but most visible in the relationship of the King and his subjects. The love of the King, Queen and royal family was fondly and frequently expressed at the conference, both formally and informally, and by the Leading Women, government officials and Thai nationals connected with organising the event. Photographs of the 'father' of Thailand, King Bhumibol Adulyadej are in homes and public places. The most conspicuous evidence of the acceptance of high levels of inequality of power and wealth in Thailand and the paternal relationship of subject to king is the existence of a vast training and education centre which supports improving agricultural practices, and also brings villagers from all over Thailand to Bangkok to be trained in crafts and then, in their turn, to set up entrepreneurial opportunities for their villages. These two projects are known as the King's Royal Chitralada Agricultural Projects (for enhancing agricultural practices) and the Queen's Project for Supplementary Occupational and Related Techniques – the SUPPORT Foundation and are built in the grounds of Chitralada Palace, the King's and Queen's official residence.

As suggested earlier, high UAI typically countries introduce regulation and policies to support growth (Hofstede, 2001). Thailand, with its high Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) score of 64, indicating a low level of intolerance to risk, has responded with a wide range of structural supports and interventions. This formal approach to development, described above, is one example of this support that was initiated by King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The data on the extensive participation in entrepreneurship of Thais, whether motivated by necessity or opportunity, seek entrepreneurial opportunities. This serves to illustrate how, despite a high Uncertainty Avoidance score, Thais are willing to participate and that there are mechanisms in place to encourage entrepreneurial behaviour. The need for risk-taking behaviour, so characteristic in analysis of US and European entrepreneurs, is reduced by the various mechanisms to support entrepreneurial activity in Thailand. This works in tandem with considerable success through support policies, including the Board of Investment (BOI). The Board helps SME's through financing and advising. In addition, they have set up 44 industrial estates in 18 provinces (Somjai, 2000). It is also relevant to mention here that in the economic climate of this middle income country cluster, opportunity recognition results in 62% of entrepreneurial activity in Thailand, according to the GEM (2005) study.

However, one of the Thai entrepreneurs commented that the meaning of failure and risk for women was quite specific in Thailand. Because the men's job was central to income and the women's supplementary (as the Queen's Project above signified by its title), the repercussions for a woman's failure were not seen as very serious from an identity perspective. She suggested:

'It is just seen as a hobby, so there is not so much fear about failure. If it works, it is good and seen as extra income. If not, it can be quickly forgotten (LWEW 3).

Taking responsibility for others

The two cultural dimensions of collectivism and masculinity intersect in the focus on taking responsibility for others. All six women interviewed were emphatic about their roles as wife, mother and carer of their employees and about their roles in developing harmony at all levels.

One powerful metaphor that was expressed in speeches, conversations and media interviews focuses on the relationship between the genders in Thailand, but also the criticality and contribution of women. This partner model, reflective of a low 'masculine' culture, in Hofstede's terms, suggests that women are valued for their contribution, and may explain some of the 'opportunity' entrepreneurship and reduced fear of failure, when a need for a sense of competitiveness is removed from the marriage relationship. The authority relationship is accepted.

'Marriage is like an elephant with the husband as the front legs that choose the direction and the wife as the back legs that provide support' (LWEW 2).

Another entrepreneur put it this way:

'Thai women are fortunate. We have enjoyed equality with men, have played roles in the family and society, and there are no social taboos against women working outside the home or having a public role, even after marriage' (LWEW 4).

However, clarity about prioritisation of children and marriage was clearly articulated:

'If I had ten minutes between meetings, I'd go home' (LWEW 2).

The high collectivist and low masculine dimensions were reinforced by numerous comments about responsibility for both managing a company and for staff. For example, one entrepreneur frequently referred to her father's wisdom about how to approach issues of staff:
'when you drink water, think of the source whence it comes' (LWEW 1).

When explaining her attitude to management, she suggested that 'everything in Thailand is family owned... I think any company can be run by a founding family plus another family – the staff and management. To me this is still a kind of family even if management is not related by blood. I regard them as my family... So the atmosphere of management meetings has always been a family affair – an amicable affair.' (LWEW 1).

The sense of not only company responsibility but also social responsibility was captured in various ways:

'[I've] proven that the work we've done benefits the people and the community – that [I'm] not just a business person looking for profits' and ' You have got to get people's hearts to work with you. I look after not just the person but the family too (LWEW 2).

And

'I look after not only not only my employees but their family too – their uncles and mother ...' (LWEW 5).

And

'I tell my staff that each of us is a like brick in a building. Each brick is an important part of the organisation – no matter whether you are a driver, a secretary or the chairperson (LWEW 6).

The narratives of responsibility, connection and caring were strongly and repeatedly asserted by all six women, as a *raison d'être*. By entwining such a rationale, they repeatedly shifted the focus from the individual to the collective. This particular characteristic description of their entrepreneurial activity allowed them to fulfill the various cultural and gender expectations successfully and consequently create a sense of harmony rather than disruption through their entrepreneurial work. In this way, even when starting new businesses, they continued the 'nurturance' of the company and the society.

CONCLUSION

This examination of Thai entrepreneurship triangulated data from large empirical global studies and the life-and-business narratives of entrepreneurs generally and of leading Thai women specifically. The intention of the analysis was not to make claims and draw predictive conclusions about entrepreneurship in Thailand, but rather to explore the narratives of leaders in entrepreneurship who have broad media coverage and who articulate 'being an entrepreneur' in Thailand. The data about the issues that make Thailand a special case of successful female entrepreneurial participation demonstrates the alignment of those narratives and metaphors with the cultural features identified by Hofstede. The high scores on collectivism on the Individualism/Collectivism continuum and Power Distance are reflected in the sense of responsibility that these female entrepreneurs advocate, in terms of their staff, and the extensive social obligations they feel. This contrasts strongly with the highly individualistic stereotypes of Western entrepreneurs in countries like the USA and Australia, with scores of 91 and 90 respectively compared with Thailand's score of 20.

Equally, the low score of Thailand on the Masculinity dimension and the Long Term Orientation score makes sense when these entrepreneurial women articulate their attitude to business and the style of practices and the constraints on it. On one hand, the low Masculinity score on the Index frees the women from feeling the requirement to be as aggressive and competitive as their Western counterparts. The elephant metaphor for marriage, as a way to explain the role and power relations of women with both their husbands and society, is usefully deployed to allow the women to manage the all important familial responsibilities without the need for the competitive strains that successful entrepreneurship may bring in Western cultures.

On the other hand, the risk-taking issues nominated as so prevalent in entrepreneurship research in Western cultures seem to be narrated in a way that minimises the need for fear of failure, and potentially creates a unique window for aspiring Thai women entrepreneurs that is different in texture from the 'risk' phenomena elsewhere in countries such as the USA and Australia.

Finally, low scores on the Masculinity dimension seem to de-emphasise the 'disruptive' qualities emphasised as metaphors of US and northern European entrepreneurs and instead emphasise 'family', 'building', 'creation' and 'connection' metaphors, underlining harmonious relationships. This links with pan-cultural gender associations of nurturance and family and allows these women to articulate entrepreneurially focussed narratives of family, motherhood and nurturance which confirm rather than challenge their gender identity.

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APPENDIX

List of Leading Entrepreneurial Women of the World (LWEW) case participants: Thailand

- Khunying Natthika Angobolkul – Chief Executive Eastern Sugar
Puying Chanat Piyauoi – Chairperson, the Dusit Group (including Dusit Thani & Royal Princess Hotels)
Patara Silo-On Chairwoman Patara International Thai Restaurant Group
Supapan Pichaironarongsongkram – Chairperson, Chao Phraya Express Boat Co. Kobkarn Wattanavekin – Chairwoman, Toshiba, Thailand
Khunying Phorthip Nariongdej – previous Chairperson of Siam Yamaha and founded KPN Group (including transport and music)