

ชื่อ

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ชื่อเรื่อง

The Stereotypical Representation of Femininity in
Thai Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on newspaper reports relating to Khunying Sudarat Keyuraphan, former the Minister of Agriculture and Agriculture Cooperatives of Thailand. News reports referring to Sudarat in the two largest-circulated local newspapers in Thailand were analyzed to highlight the images that Thai newspapers create for Sudarat, and how Sudarat responds to such image creation.

The main objective of this study is to explore the process of image construction of the Thai vernacular press through my case study of Sudarat Keyuraphan and also to explore her response to such media stereotyping. I do this by initially taking up:

1. The political life of Sudarat Keyuraphan in the specific period from 1992 – 2000
2. Illustration of how vernacular newspaper covered the political life of Sudarat Keyuraphan
3. Exploration of the ideological construction behind the texts appearing in the vernacular press.
4. Analysis on how newspaper editors' perceptions, gender biases and the pervading politics in the print media influence the process of news making and the coverage of Thai women politicians' political campaign in the two newspapers.
5. Investigation on how Sudarat Keyuraphan used the process of 'images construction' by the vernacular media to her advantage and the limitations of her strategy.

In this study, 421 news articles about Sudarat in Thai Rath (TR) and Matichon (MTC) newspapers during 1992-2000 were collected. This covers the period from her political debut up to the time she contested for Bangkok

governorship. The contents range from typical news reporting to cartoon images. These were used to present the representation of Sudarat in newspapers.

Twenty-five items were collected from her campaign materials, and Sudarat herself was interviewed to obtain her view of the news reporting. To understand better the perspective of news producers, in-depth interviews were conducted with the chief reporter of TR (a man), and three editors of TMC (male executive editor, political section editor, and a female women's section editor).

The analysis shows how newspapers strengthen a stereotypical female image for politicians, and how they 'punish' those who do not conform to their norms. Sudarat won acceptance from the media by strongly stressing her femininity, but was not able to build a new image for herself, eventually becoming a victim of her feminine image.

Sudarat came into politics as a media favourite because of her good looks. She later faced with a representational dilemma when she was subsequently punished by the media for her deviant behaviour. However, she creatively responded to that dilemma yet found herself on the losing end. Sudarat resignified herself and changed her representational strategy in the subsequent election by over-emphasizing her femininity; by underlining her roles as a mother and a dedicated wife, and conforming to tradition rather than challenging it. She asked for sympathy and pity for a small woman fighting against large parties, using consistently the strategy of a less powerful/feminine versus a more powerful/masculine. This resignification of the familiar image, inserted gender politics into the representational strategies being used by newspapers. Thus Ms. Sudarat was able to include an implicitly critical component while simultaneously seeking support and identification from the female readership and audience.

However, such feminine tactics were not considered suitable by her campaign team in the fight for the Bangkok governorship. If she deployed femininity she was pitted against other more unassailably feminine candidates. If she opted for masculinity, her male competitors could challenge her femininity. Eventually, she took a blended strategy, of feminine and masculine traits. While obviously this was one alternative, but in the end, she could not sustain balancing the two traits and reverted back to her feminine image. This put her in contest with

other female candidates, and lead to her defeat in election. In sum her representational dilemma was nearly insurmountable. Women politicians need to fight against as well as conform to stereotyped images of woman to win recognition as politicians.
