

Representation of Southeast Asian women in the AI era

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Nowadays, information seeking has evolved with the existence of AI-powered platforms. One example is ChatGPT. This provides users with a faster, convenient, and conversational synthesis of answers to queries. Considering ChatGPT's unique features, this study explores how ChatGPT's information portrays a specific group of people. In particular, the main interest was the representation of Southeast Asian women. Much research has investigated representations of these women in the media; however, there is limited information on how these women were portrayed in any AI platforms like ChatGPT. With this, the study utilized actual data gathered from the conversation with ChatGPT and was analyzed using qualitative inductive content analysis. The results revealed the equivocal nature of ChatGPT-4o. The findings also showed both traditional and modern femininity characterization of Southeast Asian women, how religion affects the cultural and societal system, and the struggles of women in the region. Thus, emphasizing a continued women's empowerment towards an equal and just society.

Keywords: Southeast Asia, women, content analysis, AI, ChatGPT

Globalized and industrialized society brings forth new technological innovations to serve humankind. One of the recent developments was the so-called birth of artificial intelligence (AI). This artificial intelligence is believed to be helpful in many aspects. Some studies indicate that their uses can be beneficial in increasing work efficiency and productivity (Kukkala, 2025), in reducing human error (Sierra et al., 2025), in assisting humans in doing their jobs (Xiao et al., 2025), and in seeking information (Link & Beckmann, 2025). One of the most popular AI-powered platforms is ChatGPT, a type of Large Language Model (LLM), which was trained to analyze massive amounts of data to answer human queries on a specific subject (Introducing ChatGPT, 2024). ChatGPT is believed to hold human-like conversations. ChatGPT was described as an efficient tool for getting quick and detailed answers to questions (Hahn et al., 2025). The capability of AI systems to mine and analyze massive text information using algorithms participates in the co-construction of social knowledge (Kousa, 2025) and societal sustainability (Al-Emran et al., 2025).

With ChatGPT's feature of knowledge-sharing (Zhong & Wang, 2025), it is justifiable to explore how ChatGPT encodes, presents information, and shapes knowledge about a specific group of people. In the past years, much research has investigated, for instance, representations of women in the media. However, there is limited knowledge about how AI, such as ChatGPT, portrays a specific group of women. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to analyze how ChatGPT shaped the portrayal of

women in a specific society. Particularly, the focus of the investigation was on Southeast Asian women. The portrayals of these women in other influential platforms, like ChatGPT, could shed light on AI systems' perceptions and assumptions about these women, which could promote gender awareness and knowledge in Asian society and beyond. Thus, the research question for this exploratory study is, *"How does ChatGPT portray and compare Southeast Asian women?"*

Theoretical Background

In Southeast Asia, gender disparities and discrimination continued to affect women. The intersection of religious and cultural practices and inconsistent legal reforms in the region contribute to the exclusion and marginalisation of these women (Ahmad et al., 2024; Fonte & Huang, 2026). There is greater inequality between women and men in terms of right for decent work and issues of power (Nair, 2022). In some countries like Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, there is a mismatch between the desire for an egalitarian society and the actual behavior of people towards gender equality (Jiang et al., 2023). Women are still entangled between their professional work, family duties, and traditional practices.

In terms of media representation, women, for instance, in the Philippines, are stereotypically represented as homemakers in marketing advertisements with the association of home settings, and home and beauty care products (Prieler & Centeno, 2025). There were more women in home advertise-

ments and men in the workplace advertisements. In Indonesian films, women are stereotypically portrayed as dependent on men, which reinforces the patriarchal culture in the society (Budiana, 2024). In Thai and Vietnamese films, women are portrayed as weak, depicting male dominance (Ruangnapaku et al., 2018; Thi Minh, 2024). This type of media portrayal mirrors traditional femininity. This means that women are viewed based on their nurturing appearance (Schmeichel et al., 2020), their household prowess (Davis et al., 2018), and their social status as being subordinates to men (Adeney-Risakotta, 2016). This is against the backdrop of modern femininity as emphasized by other researchers (Daraz et al., 2025) wherein it rejects traditional gender roles. Women from modern femininity viewpoints are perceived as independent, empowered, and equal to men (Hirji, 2021).

With recent technological advancements, gender issues and stereotypes are not only prevalent in media and films. These issues also exist in some artificial intelligence (AI) platforms. In the study by García-Ull & Francisco-José (2023), AI-generated images of women showed full stereotypes of women compared to men. Whilst the bibliometric analysis by Pop et al. (2025) reflects AI bias, and gender and societal biases. Their findings call for the attention of academicians, technologists, and policy makers to address these biases. This also connects with other studies on how AI systems reinforced cross-lingual and political biases (Urman & Makhortykh, 2023). The AI systems' biases informed that AI-knowledge could also be subjective (Gayones et al., 2025).

As AI use is the future and it is inevitable, it is significant to explore and examine how a certain AI system portrays women in a specific society, like in the Southeast Asian region. Southeast Asian women are positioned in the literature, media, and films in a more traditional way. Investigating the portrayals in AI-powered platforms, for instance, could illustrate how AI tackles a sensitive societal issue and exhibits moral judgment (Ta et al., 2025).

Methods

Data collection

The data for this study were collected through chatting with the Large Language Model (LLM) ChatGPT. I chose ChatGPT over other LLMs because of its prominence around the world and its free version offer, making it more accessible to anyone with an internet connection. I used the ChatGPT-4o free version. The reason for choosing this is that I acknowledged the fact that not everyone in any part of the world could have access to the paid version. The free version allows free access to a large portion of the population across the globe. During my conversation with ChatGPT, I threw the following prompts in the chat: (1) Describe Southeast Asian women. (2) Compare Southeast Asian women. The prompts were out of the researcher's curiosity about how an LLM like ChatGPT would treat the prompt as a real question that needed to be answered. After the second prompt, I noticed that ChatGPT's answer doubled entered Vietnam, missed Brunei Darussalam, but added Timor-Leste in the country list column. By the time of this study, Timor-Leste was not yet an official member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) but was aiming to be part of ASEAN (ASEAN, n.d.). Because of this situation, I changed my approach. I refined my question and asked ChatGPT to describe the Southeast Asian women and used the prompt "Describe (country) women", from each of the ASEAN official member countries. I excluded Timor-Leste and added Brunei Darussalam instead.

After gathering the description of these women from each of the specific countries, I sent ChatGPT the prompt "Create a full comparative profile of Southeast Asian women." The comparative profile from ChatGPT generated a correct country list entry. As the entries from ChatGPT did not show mistakes, unlike in the first try, the prompts were no longer repeated. This is exploratory research, and I intended to examine the first answers from

ChatGPT, as this is what most users get when they seek information from ChatGPT. Then, all the chat conversation with ChatGPT was then copied and saved in Microsoft Word for analysis.

Data analysis

In analysing the data, I utilized inductive manifest content analysis by Bengtsson (2016). I chose this type of method because I aimed to get as close as possible to what ChatGPT said about Southeast Asian women. To give an overview of the process, first, I identified the statements that describe Southeast Asian women and applied a color-coding scheme. In coding, I chose the inductive method to find out what emerged in ChatGPT's information without my intervention. I repeatedly examined the color codes to ensure the stability and reliability of the results. Second, I revisited and checked the data to see whether the content aligned with the purpose and the research question. After that, the original text was re-read. Then, I identified which parts of the text had to be included and excluded for further analysis. The third is categorization, where I condensed the statements into fewer words without losing the meaning of the content of the message and grouped similar patterns. From these processes, I then identified the categories, which I further reduced to form themes. The last and fourth stage is compilation, where I immersed myself again in the data and went back as close as possible to the original wordings of ChatGPT to extract the meaning of what exactly was said. This is for me to stay closer to the original utterance of ChatGPT and the meaning of what has been said in the texts. After immersion, I related the findings to the related literature to find out whether the data connects with previous studies or provides new insights into culture and identity.

Reflexivity

I, the researcher of this study, came from Southeast Asia. I acknowledged that I may have my own bias about the topic. Though being a Southeast Asian

myself gives me first-hand knowledge about the region, it is still important to exercise reflection in research. Reflection in conducting research helped researchers maintain the balance between their own perceptions and the meanings that emerged from the research data (Darawsheh, 2014). I also let trusted colleagues, of foreign background, help me read the data and gave their open interpretations about the data to confirm the appropriateness of my judgment and stay as neutral as possible.

Results and Discussion

Characterization of Southeast Asian women

In the first prompt, "Describe (country) women", that was being applied to each of the ASEAN official member countries, I deployed an inductive content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016) on ChatGPT's description of Southeast Asian women. The findings revealed five distinctive themes. These themes reflect both the positive and negative characterization of these women. The following subsections explain each of these characterizations.

Feminine

Southeast Asian women are described as simple, gentle, modest, graceful, polite, humble, caring, and possessing a nurturing attitude. They have soft emotional virtues and moral virtues, making them an ideal partner. They are the caretaker and the emotional core in the household, but not the decision-maker. Women are expected to be soft, submissive, and be in-charge of domestic affairs. These traits are attributed to the influence of religion in society. In Southeast Asia, despite religious belonging, religion nurtures and hones women's traits, positive values, and morality. Religion influences and dictates societal norms (Buckley, 2019; Voigt, 2024). This faith-based culture contributes to how women are viewed and present themselves in the community (Hefner, 2010). This describes the traditional and cultural femininity where women are expected to exercise the ideals of the society

(Quach, 2008). This description, however, revealed the patriarchal form of hierarchy where women are seen as subordinates to men. This showcased the machismo characteristics of men in society. Thus, this feminine characterization of ChatGPT-4o emphasized the domination of man over a woman.

Family-oriented

In Southeast Asia, it is undoubtedly that family is central and given much importance in the society (Whipple et al., 2015). According to ChatGPT-4o, in the family, women are expected to become dutiful daughters to their parents and responsible wives to their husbands. Women are expected to take care of the children, the elders, and the home. Women become multi-taskers. Women handle the family affairs, finances, and domestic decision-making, and work at the same time to contribute to the family's finances. This makes Southeast Asian women ideal daughters and wives. The portrayal of family-oriented attitude in serving the family unconditionally is undeniably a good trait; however, in realistic view, this could wear out women when doing the household duties alone. This is another clear example of traditional gendered roles in the family.

On the other hand, this portrayal could raise questions about women's wellbeing and rights. Also, this kind of representation is contrary to Western counterparts found in the literature, where there are mostly no definite gender roles, and women are treated as equals to men. Both men and women are responsible for taking care of children, the finances, and the home (Cineli, 2020). Women are not expected to do all the household chores and child-rearing, but are seen as a shared responsibility (Jallinoja, 1995).

Weak

In most of the patriarchal Southeast Asian societies, as portrayed by ChatGPT-4o, women are perceived as weak, while men are viewed as strong. Men, as the head of the family, left women to be weak and voiceless. This leads to domestic violence against

women and gendered expectations where women must prioritise their families over their professional careers. This hindered women's personal freedom and independence. In some cases, younger women exercising filial piety have no choice in marriage. They are arranged to marry at an early age. ChatGPT-4o emphasized the system that is socially constructed by religion and how women live in society. This connects with previous study on how religion can be seen as a driver for society's ethics and morality, but at the same time, a source of inequalities (Adeney-Risakotta, 2016). The ChatGPT-4o's portrayal implies that, in a society like this, women's empowerment is necessary to achieve gender equality and for women to be more confident about themselves and their capabilities. An equitable society or home could be achieved when men acknowledge women's equality and women believe that they can be equal to men.

Educated and independent

With globalization and modernization, most Southeast Asian women, according to ChatGPT-4o, have become more literate. Women have a higher literacy rate than men. Women, mostly from the highly urbanized areas, utilized their education to become strong, independent women. It is becoming a modern trend to portray oneself as an agent of change while maintaining tradition. These women utilized social media to redefine beauty and women's roles. This portrayal on the redefinition of women in the society relates to the past study on how social media platform encourages women to have a voice and be heard (Williams & Kamaludeen, 2017). Women using social media advocate for women's empowerment and independence. They express change through fashion and styles with a mix of traditional attire and modern styles. They seek leadership in business corporations and are aware of the political structure. They appear to have stronger, more active, and more empowered personalities than the rural educated women. Many of them engage in social reform and humanitarian work. Also, the

younger generations of women preferred to delay marriage and choose careers. Despite this woman's power, these women embody a balance between family and global modernity. The family-work life balance and modernity portrayals reflects the previous study on how modern Southeast Asian women still value their families and pay respect to elders (Azalanshah Md Syed et al., 2015). The ChatGPT-4o portrayal, of course, could not be generalized about urban women; it should be acknowledged that there could be some rural educated women who also exhibit the same trends as women from the urban areas. With the presence of social media, any woman from any area could have access to freely express themselves and advocate for their rights.

Underrepresented

Even though ChatGPT-4o's portrayal of some Southeast Asian women exhibits modern traits, women in some communities are also portrayed having struggles with gender-based leadership. This remains a major concern. Women are underrepresented in business, corporate roles, and political leadership. Aside from that, a gender wage gap also exists. ChatGPT-4o portrayals also echoed the concerns in previous research. Past study revealed how women carried no voice in the organizations, and that there was a struggle for acknowledging women in the business leadership roles, or leadership roles in general (Azizuddin & Shamsuzzoha, 2024). These portrayals implied the need for society's policy reforms, support for continuing education and competence development for women, and for continued women's empowerment and participation. ChatGPT-4o's portrayals further suggest a need for support from the government and other stakeholders. However, the question is how this can happen when the society's structure and systems, and the people behind governance, support a patriarchal form of leadership. This could then mean that women may possibly rely on some private business entities that encourage gender equality and societal equity. This means that resolving gender

equality issues in the public sphere may take a slow transition and that it may take some time to achieve.

Comparison of Southeast Asian women

In the second prompt, "Create a full comparative profile of Southeast Asian women.", ChatGPT-4o generated a tabular comparison among these women as shown in Table 1. This highlights the key similarities and differences in culture and religion, literacy status, their social roles and expectations, and the current trends and challenges that these women are facing in society. As ChatGPT-4o gave an automatic categorization and synthesis about these women, there was no need for me to carry out a full-blown inductive content analysis; rather, I addressed my analysis and interpretation on the comparison based on the patterns that resemble or differ from other media representations of Southeast Asian women found in the literature. The reason for this is to have a better understanding of how AI-generated information from ChatGPT-4o shaped and reinforced social categorization and to have a clearer picture of the role of AI in the modern information-seeking era.

Figure 1 Comparative profile of Southeast Asian women according to ChatGPT-4o

Country	Predo- minant Religion Influence	Cultural Traits and Values	Educa- tion and Empower- ment	Economics and Social Roles	Family and Gender Expec- tations	Modern Trends/ Challenges
Indonesia	Islam (majority), Hinduism in Bali, Christianity, indigenous beliefs	Highly diverse (Javanese, Balinese, Minangkabau, Dayak); modesty, respect, communal harmony; matrilineal groups (Minangkabau)	High literacy; increasing higher education; visible in business & politics	Agriculture, trade, entrepreneurship, urban professions; women manage household finances	Family-centered; dual roles as caretakers and income contributors; marriage valued	Balancing modern careers with religious/cultural expectations; rural access to education; regional disparities
Malaysia	Islam (official), Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity	Multiethnic (Malay, Chinese, Indian, indigenous); modesty, family loyalty, respect for elders	High literacy; strong university enrollment; careers in education, healthcare, administration	Business, civil service, entrepreneurship; rural women in agriculture	Family-oriented; balancing modern careers and domestic duties	Gender gaps in leadership; religious conservatism; urban-rural inequality
Philippines	Christianity (predominantly Catholic)	Western-influenced; family-centered; resilient and adaptable	Very high literacy; women in politics, education, healthcare	Careers in government, healthcare, education, BPO; global diaspora as OFWs	Family is central; women are primary caregivers and household managers	Labor migration, gender wage gaps, reproductive rights debates; strong female leadership presence
Thailand	Buddhism, Confucianism	Duty, resilience, filial piety; balance of traditional and modern values	High literacy and university enrollment; active in workforce	Agriculture, trade, education, services; women manage household finances	Family and filial obligations; strong maternal influence	Work-family balance pressures; limited leadership in senior positions
Vietnam	Buddhism, Confucianism	Duty, resilience, filial piety; balance of traditional and modern values	High literacy and university enrollment; active in workforce	Agriculture, trade, education, services; women manage household finances	Family and filial obligations; strong maternal influence	Work-family balance pressures; limited leadership in senior positions

Country	Predominant Religion Influence	Cultural Traits and Values	Education and Empowerment	Economics and Social Roles	Family and Gender Expectations	Modern Trends/ Challenges
Myanmar (Burma)	Buddhism	Respectful, modest, and family-oriented; women historically influential in commerce	Improving literacy and higher education; urban women more empowered	Agriculture, trade, textiles; informal markets dominated by women	Caretakers, moral anchors of family; obedience and harmony emphasized	Political instability, gender-based violence, ethnic conflict; rural access to education limited
Cambodia	Buddhism	Graceful, gentle, family-centered; influenced by Chbab Srey (traditional code)	Literacy improving; women active in education, NGOs, health	Agriculture, garment industry, small businesses	Women as moral and economic backbone; marriage valued; domestic harmony	Domestic violence, rural poverty, gender inequality; rebuilding after historical trauma
Laos	Buddhism	Modesty, harmony, patience; family and community oriented	Literacy rising; growing female participation in education and trade	Agriculture, silk weaving, small business	Caregivers and household managers; dual roles in family economy	Rural-urban gaps; early marriage in some areas; limited leadership roles
Singapore	Multicultural (Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Hindu)	Cosmopolitan; independent, career-oriented, meritocratic	Extremely high literacy; strong university and STEM participation	Corporate, public service, entrepreneurship; globally connected workforce	Family-oriented but delayed marriage; balancing career and domestic responsibilities	Work-life balance; gender gaps in top leadership; societal expectations on appearance and family roles

Based on Table 1, the comparison of ChatGPT-4o suggests that representation of women carries both the traditional femininity and modern femininity components. ChatGPT-4o's traditional femininity descriptions carry both advantages and harmful stereotypes among Southeast Asian women. The advantages would be viewing Southeast Asian women as ideal partners. This representation also connects with previous studies on how Southeast Asian women are viewed in the media as filial (Gray, 2018), traditional housewives and caring mothers (Corea, 2013). On the harmful side, the traditional characteristics and values of women, and the submissive and weak portrayals may overlook some of

the Southeast Asian women's agency, self-expression, and strong characteristics. This may pose risks of generalizations and negative stereotyping of Southeast Asian women.

On the other hand, the modern femininity traits indicate that in the globalized and industrialized world, women are becoming educated and changing and redefining themselves in society. These portrayals indicate that not all women in the Southeast Asian society are passive, weak, and voiceless. These women may be leaning towards modernity and independence; however, they still maintain tradition, value their families, and do not totally forget their cultural identity and heritage. These make

these women a voice for change and at the same time an agent for cultural preservation. These portrayals from ChatGPT-4o, however, mirror the previous study by Jiang et al. (2025), where many professional Southeast Asian women juggle between gender balance, well-being, and household duties. On one side, despite global modernity, there is still an existence of power and leadership struggle in both the business world and politics. The women's strength in leadership is not yet fully recognized. ChatGPT-4o's portrayal also reflects the past study on how women were considered disadvantaged group in leadership (Choi, 2019).

Overall, ChatGPT-4o's presentation of both the traditional and modern traits revealed the opposing representations of women. ChatGPT-4o reinforced stereotypes but at the same time presents some progressive elements. ChatGPT-4o tried to behave neutral while displaying clear signs of harmful stereotypes. The behavior of ChatGPT-4o in showcasing these kinds of representations connect with the previous study by Ta et al. (2025) on how ChatGPT tried to avoid responsibilities for moral judgments. In connection to this type of ChatGPT-4o's behavior, it is also important to reflect on the human agency of this socio-technical system. The way ChatGPT was trained and designed by software programmers may influence how these portrayals are presented in the collected data. Some past studies emphasised the AI system's subjectivity in the circulation of knowledge (D'Amato, 2025) and implicit gender bias (Wu et al., 2024). Thus, recommending for more algorithmic fairness and gender-aware AI governance (Voutyrakou & Skordoulis, 2025), and the continued need for further human expertise for the development of the AI tool towards fair information seeking (Chang & Nordling, 2025).

Practical implication

The knowledge from this study could be useful for educators and school administrators in educating digital literacy and in mitigating the role of artificial intelligence in both information seeking and educa-

tion. It is important to raise awareness among students about the pros and cons of using AI and how information from AI should be treated. Aside from institutions, this study could also be beneficial for Southeast Asian women themselves. The findings provide awareness of the current view of Southeast Asian women in ChatGPT, which may pose risks for harmful biases, stereotypes, and societal prejudices against women. Thus, this study encourages every Southeast Asian woman to speak for themselves and promote change themselves.

Limitations and Future Directions

Though this study presented an innovative way of conducting research, specifically in collecting the data from an AI-powered platform, which can be perceived as a new way of drawing up conclusions in the representation of women in a specific media, this study also has limitations. The data is limited to the data gathered from the conversation with AI, specifically ChatGPT-4o. The generated data is narrow and highly dependent on the accuracy of the AI's answer to the specific question or prompts in the chat. This means that readers from this study must exercise caution in the interpretation of the findings and should not be taken as the basis for generalization of Southeast Asian women. Future research could also expand this study by collecting data from other prominent AI platforms, for instance, DeepSeek and Gemini, to be able to conduct a comparative analysis of data. Future research could also explore other methodologies in examining portrayals of Southeast Asian women. These methodologies could be, for instance, netnography and discourse analysis.

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