

# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN ASIA

Obstacles and Challenges

Edited by Kazuki Iwanaga



WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION  
AND REPRESENTATION IN ASIA

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN ASIA

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*Women and Politics in Thailand*

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*Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia*

*Obstacles and Challenges*

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# Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia

## *Obstacles and Challenges*

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACWF	All-China Women's Federation
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AL	Awami League
AMEND	Alliance of Migrant Workers and Advocates to Amend RA 8042
ARMM	Autonomous Region of Muslims Mindanao
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
AWARE	Alliance of Women for Action towards Reconciliation
AWIT	Association of Women in Theology
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women's Lawyer Association
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
CAR	Cordillera Administrative Region
CCP	Communist Party of China
CEDAW	Convention Against the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CLD	Center for Legislative Development
COMELEC	Commission on Elections
CORIS	Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Online Research and Information System
CP	Communist Party

CPK	Cambodia's Communist Party
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CWR	Center for Women's Resources
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
DP	Democratic Party
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
DVD	Digital Video Disc
EDSA	Epifanio de los Santos Avenue
EO	Executive Order
EPZ	Export Processing Zones
EU	European Union
FHI	Freedom House Index
PFP	People First Party
FPTP	First past the post
FUNCINPEC	National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia
GABRIELA	General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Equality, Leadership and Action
GAD	Gender and Development
GB	Great Britain
GDI	Gender Development Index
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GLAD	Gretchen's Ladies Auxiliary for Danding
GLOW	Gloria's League of Women
GOBD	Government of Bangladesh
GRDI	Gender Related Development Index
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund

*Abbreviations and Acronyms*

IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
JCP	Japanese Communist Party
JI	Jamat-e-Islami
JVP	People's Liberation Front
KMT	Kuomintang
KWDI	Korean Women's Development Institute
KWVC	Khmer Women's Voice Center
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
LICHADO	The Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party
MILF	Moro Islamic Front
MMDA	Metro Manila Development Authority
MP	Member of Parliament
NCRFW	National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NIAS	Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
NP	New Party
NPA	New People's Army
NPC	National People's Congress
NSCB	National Statistical Coordination Board
OAWISS	Institute of East Asian Studies
OWL	Osmena's Women's League
PDIP	Party of Democratic Struggle
PPGD	Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development
PPP	Pakistan's People Party
PPRC	Power and Participation Research Centre
PR	Proportional Representation
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
ROC	Republic of China
SDP	Social Democratic Party

SHD	Sustainable Human Development
SIDA	Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SNTV	Single non-transferable vote
SPAN	Solidarity Philippine and Australia Network
SRP	Sam Rainsy Party
TAO	Tambon Administrative Organizations
UK	United Kingdom
UMNO	United Malays National Organization
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNP	United National Party
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
UP	Union Parishad
US	United States
WID	Women in Development
WMC	Women's Association of Cambodia
WMC	Women's Media Center of Cambodia
WOMEN	Women in Media Now

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## PREFACE

This volume is the offspring of an international conference entitled ‘Women and Politics in Asia’ which was held in June 2003 at Halmstad University in Sweden. The conference was remarkable for bringing together many leading scholars and practitioners committed to this topic from various parts of the world. The Conference was coordinated by four Scandinavian institutions: Halmstad University, Lund University, the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) and the Institute of Asian Studies at Göteborg University. The contributors to this book are scholars who either live and work in Asia or have spent long periods in Asia doing research. The papers were carefully screened in order to suit the topic’s – *women’s political participation and representation in Asia* – before being selected for the volume. Since the time of the conference, authors have revised and expanded their papers several times and updated their essays in order to reflect recent developments. Additional essays were eventually recruited in the later stages of the book project in order to complement the gaps and were also reviewed and edited and brought up to date.

As is the case with many international projects involving the collaboration and cooperation of members from different countries, this book project has taken several years to complete. The authors have shown patience and graciousness in the face of delays and repeated requests for revisions. Of course, a book project of this magnitude would not be possible without the contributions of a number of individuals and organizations. I am particularly grateful for the financial support of the conference that laid the foundation for this volume and would like to express my gratitude to the Swedish Research Council, the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, the Swedish Institute, the Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation (SIDA), NIAS – the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies at Lund University, and Halmstad University for their generous contributions. I have also been fortunate enough to enjoy research assistance from the talented April Vuorjärvi and Matilde Johansson. I thank them for not only proofreading

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Kazuki Iwanaga

## INTRODUCTION

### WOMEN AND POLITICS IN ASIA: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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*Kazuki Iwanaga*

As in other regions of the world, Asian women in politics represent somewhat of a paradox. While constituting approximately half the population, women hold only a fraction of both appointive and elective political offices within various levels of government. Women as a group have consolidated enormous voting power in recent years, but have been simultaneously disenfranchised with regard to political representation. This begs the question of why women are grossly under-represented at all levels of government in Asia in an era when democracy as a system of government has been spreading worldwide. This volume is an attempt to provide a range of possible answers to this question from a number of competing perspectives. It seeks to unravel some of the major issues confronting scholars and political leaders alike in Asia at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It also explores the various aspects of continuity and change in women's political participation and representation in Asia.

Asia is a vast and diverse region covering dozens of countries and a multitude of societies, political systems and varying stages of democracy and socioeconomic development. For the purposes of this volume, the term 'Asia' stands for what is commonly known as East Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia. Women in Asia received the right to vote and stand for election much later than women of industrial democracies. Only three Asian countries had enacted female suffrage before the start of World War II, when most European countries and the United States had enfranchised women in the years soon after the First World War. Sri Lanka was the first nation in Asia to allow women to vote in 1931, followed by Thailand in 1932 and Myanmar in 1935. Despite some progress, women's political representation continues to lag behind in most of Asia. Even in the most affluent Asian societies (e.g., Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and

Malaysia) where women have been remarkably successful in higher educational institutions and professional occupations, there has only been slow, incremental progress for women in politics. By contrast, the proportion of women in parliaments in some poorer nations in Asia, such as Vietnam, Laos, Pakistan, China, and the Philippines, is much higher. This may be due to the use of various affirmative action policies that promote women's parliamentary representation, in such forms as the quota or reserved seat system, ideological commitments to gender equality, or the promotion of a more egalitarian political culture.

Although a tiny elite of highly educated women in Asia have achieved the highest positions in governments, the majority of women by contrast have been typically marginalized from participating in mainstream politics. The glass ceiling appears to remain intact for the vast majority of Asian women in politics despite the fact that Asia as a whole has been undergoing a period of rapid socioeconomic changes and political restructuring over the past two decades. Years of rapid socioeconomic developments in Asia have not fundamentally changed the political situation of women in many Asian societies and many obstacles continue to prevent women from entering public office. A number of factors, including religious and other cultural variables, impose limits on women in Asia and determine the amount of political opportunities available to them. This volume reveals that the political status of women in Asia is anything but uniform and that women's opportunities vary considerably from country to country. It is additionally the case that some countries have advanced faster than others in terms of women's political representation. Factors accounting for variations in women's representation in long-established democracies of Western Europe and the United States have long been examined and understood while such articulations of women's political representation in developing countries have been somewhat neglected. Research in this field remains at this time inconclusive, although the authors in this volume employ a variety of approaches, each with a different focus of analysis, that suggest several possibilities. One explanation lies in the political culture of individual countries. Another acknowledges that it is exceptionally difficult for women to break into public office due to their lower socioeconomic, occupational, and educational position in society in addition to the heavy burden of family responsibilities and lack of child care.

Although the number of women holding office at various levels of government has increased incrementally since the very low rates of female participation in the 1960s, Asia has experienced among the slowest rates of growth in women's representation of all the world regions. The overall percentage of women members of parliament in 2005 in Asia is just slightly above that of 1995 –

between 1995 and 2005, the proportion of female members of parliament in the world increased from 13.8 per cent to 15.7 per cent. If this incremental trend persists, it will most probably take a few more decades before women in many Asian societies reach the levels of representation recorded in Northern Europe. As the Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union stated: '(...) we will have to wait until 2025 for women's overall representation in parliament to reach the critical mass of 30 per cent and until 2040 to achieve gender parity' (cited in Inter-Parliamentary Union, Press Release 2005).

One of the most important questions for Asian countries is whether women should be empowered by adopting the so-called incremental track model as described in Dahlerup's chapter in this book. The incremental track model is a gradualist approach in attaining gender equality in political representation which is frequently used in the Nordic countries and many established democracies of the West. One may alternatively adopt the fast track model, which enlists various forms of gender quotas to foster the empowerment of women. In another work, Dahlerup argued that the Nordic experience should not serve as a model for increasing women's political representation since it took 80 years to progress from having no women in parliament to the number of women that are represented today, and as she urgently points out '(...) the women of the world are not willing to wait that long' (Dahlerup 2002: 10).

The literature on politics and women suggests at least two major perspectives on political representation, namely, the descriptive and substantive perspectives. According to the descriptive perspective, electing more women serves a symbolic purpose of gender equality and, moreover, a greater legitimacy is rendered to the political system. By far, most parliaments in the world draw disproportionately from the male population of societies, which reflects nowhere near all the electorate. The descriptive approach argues for increasing women's representation in legislative bodies so that it better reflects their proportion in society. An overwhelming body of existing studies on women and politics primarily deals with the descriptive and numerical representation of women in politics in established democracies of the West. Research done over the last three decades has given us a wealth of information about women's representation, offering various models of women's representation in legislative bodies. Does this mean that theories developed in the West can assist us in understanding the various obstacles facing women in the developing world? Both the causes of under-representation and the variations in representation of women are numerous and complex. Hence, the complexity of this phenomenon makes it particularly difficult, if not impossible, to provide a comprehensive account of all the factors underlying women's under-

representation. One researcher argues that '(...) [in] the developing world, none of the variables found significant among established democracies, nor several other plausible variables, are found to have a consistent effect' (Matland, 2002: 6). It appears that in order to have an overall effect on women's representation, a country must attain a certain level of socioeconomic and political development if the factors that facilitate women's entry into political life in Western countries are to have an effect in lesser-developed countries. As Matland (2002: 6) argues:

A country's level of development appears to be one of the most important features of society bearing upon levels of women's representation in national legislative assemblies. Development leads to a weakening of traditional values, increased urbanization, greater education and labour force participation for women and attitudinal changes in perceptions regarding the appropriate role for women – all factors that increase women's political resources and decrease existing barriers to political activity.

In recent years, a number of studies on women and politics have begun to prioritize the substantive representation of women, adding to the scholarly literature of the field (Norris and Lovenduski 1995, Norris 1996). The substantive perspective argues that a growth of women's representation in parliament would make a substantive difference due to the fact that women and men carry different experiences and priorities when considering political issues. It is considered important to incorporate women's interests and perspectives since they may espouse political issues that are either marginalized or excluded in legislative bodies that are dominated by men. As the numbers of women in elective office increase, so does the anticipation that these increases will imply important policy ramifications. One key question is whether women's increased presence in national legislatures would result in improved representation of women's interests and policy areas which are of direct concern to women. It is often assumed that having more women in elected office produces more women-friendly policies. When the number of women elected to legislature rises beyond token levels, it is expected that women politicians will generally place more emphasis on 'women's issues'.

It is crucial to investigate whether female legislators act as agents of change within the national legislatures they serve and if the increased presence of women has transformed the legislative agenda due to female legislators paying greater attention to women's interest areas than their male colleagues. Research in this area, however, has been done almost exclusively in advanced industrialized democracies with little, if any, attention paid towards Asia. Norris and Lovenduski argue that when the proportion of women elected to national assemblies increases

beyond a certain threshold, the consequence will be a feminized transformation of politics, or in their words, '(...) a transformation in the institutional culture, political discourse, and policy agenda' (2001: 3).

In contrast to the proliferation of studies examining women and politics in advanced industrialized democracies, there has been relatively little written specifically about women's empowerment and political representation in less developed countries in both descriptive and substantive terms. Generally speaking, the scarcity of women in national parliaments in the world makes it difficult to assess the policy impact of electing women. It is even more difficult to assess the impact of women's presence in politics on the political systems in Asia because of the small number of women legislators. Consequently, empirical studies on this subject matter are rare. Researchers argue that it is not until women move from being a small minority to a large one in legislative assemblies that women can make a real difference (Kanter, 1977; Dahlerup, 1988; Thomas, 1994). As long as female legislators continue to be reduced to mere tokens in male-dominated politics unaccustomed to women's presence, it may be progressively difficult for women to have any distinctive or gendered impact on legislation.

The numerical presence of women presumes that women legislators will produce political perspectives and issues that are poorly represented. The presumption of female legislators acting on the behalf of women, or representing women's interests, forms an essential part of arguments in favor of the equal presence of women and men in political bodies, and the legislature in particular. The substantive representation of women's interests implies that female politicians have a gendered awareness that influences them to act accordingly in specific ways. Can we assume that women politicians have a shared experience and perspective that unites them based on their gender? There are various differences among women politicians that may be found according to ideological, ethnic, religious, economic, social, and other differences. There are women politicians who deny gender as a factor in shaping their priorities in policy issues and instead point to other important factors such as party policy and party discipline that have more influence on their political decision-making. In addition, there are male politicians who also advance women's interests and form alliances with women politicians in order to promote the interests of women. In order to understand the question of whether women do represent women's interests, it is important not to neglect the understanding that women politicians represent various differences among women although they share the same gender.

This volume reflects at minimum these two perspectives in regard to women's political representation. The three chapters written by Lichun Chiang on Taiwan,



Kazuki Iwanaga on Thailand, and Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza on the Philippines focus wholly or partly on the impact women have on public policy and the various contexts in which women shape and influence politics. These chapters seem to suggest that, although there is some evidence of gender differences, the impact of women politicians may be less evident in the Asian settings than in the Nordic countries and state legislatures in the United States and varies across political environments. The remainder of the book focuses primarily on women's empowerment and political representation from a descriptive perspective.

### WHY ARE THERE SO FEW WOMEN POLITICIANS IN ASIA?

Women who attempt to enter the political arena face considerable hurdles and the dearth of women in elected offices has been due to many factors. Extensive studies on this subject, conducted mainly in Western Europe and North America, point to the major obstacles facing women who desire to become politically engaged, which include the lack of 'women-friendly' electoral systems, a lack of active women's organizations and female role models, a general lack of gender consciousness of gate keepers, especially within the political parties, and finally, women's unwillingness to run for elective office. Although women in many societies may face similar obstacles, what is markedly different in Asia is the cultural context within which women can become politically active. The studies in this volume seem to indicate that the lack of a political culture supportive of women's political involvement is strongly manifest in many societies in Asia.

### THE CONCEPT OF FACILITATORS

In an attempt to grasp the features of women's empowerment and legislative representation, the remaining part of this introductory chapter maps out a framework of various factors that influence women's representation in national parliaments. A useful starting point for addressing the paucity of women politicians is to analyze factors that positively influence women's participation and representation in politics by using the concept of *facilitator* (Iwanaga 1998). Facilitators refer to particular conditions and policies that facilitate women's empowerment. The assumption is that in the absence of facilitators the progress of women's advancement in politics will not take place or be slow, uneven or incremental at best. Facilitators can remove or reduce barriers that hinder women's political participation. They can broadly be grouped into three major categories: *institutional*, *contextual* and *individually oriented facilitators*.

### ***Institutional Facilitators***

These concern the political structure of opportunities available to women and are dependent on the type of political and electoral system, the nature of the legal system, the role of the state, and the level of party competition in addition to other factors such as incumbency, turnover, and campaign finance. Correspondingly, *institutional facilitators* can be subdivided further into *legal*, *electoral*, and *political facilitators*.

### ***Contextual Facilitators***

These refer to the broader context of the socioeconomic and cultural structure in which women's participation and recruitment takes place and considers additionally the influences from the external environment that facilitate women's participation in politics. *Contextual facilitators* in turn can be subdivided into three categories: *international*, *socioeconomic*, and *cultural*. Both institutional and contextual facilitators influence the structures of opportunities for female participation in political life.

### ***Individually Oriented Facilitators***

These have to do with the supply of potential candidates willing to run for elected office. Relevant here are the resources that various kinds of candidates bring to the recruitment process as well as the motivations of the aspirants. Such resources often include financial assets, educational qualifications, political and organizational connections, and party experience. Aspirants can be inspired by a sense of civic duty, i.e., some opt to run for office because they want to help the constituency or society. Individual motivations can also be influenced by family traditions and one's political and career ambitions. Individual motivations can lastly be influenced by institutional and contextual settings (Norris 1997).

Obviously, some facilitators are more important than others for advancing the status of women in politics. Wilma Rule (1994: 16), for example, argues that the electoral system is 'the single most important predictor of women's recruitment to parliament', which accounts for nearly 30 per cent of the variation in women's electability. 60 per cent is attributable to political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors (Rule 1994: 16). Moreover, she claims that 'favorable societal conditions will not substitute for unfavorable electoral systems relative to women reaching their optimum representation in parliament (...) [but] unfavorable contextual conditions can be overcome to a great extent by favorable electoral systems' (ibid.: 16). Some researchers argue that cultural factors such as socialization and the dominant political culture in which politics is conducted are primarily

responsible for women's (non) entry into elected office (Norris and Inglehart 2000, 2003). According to this school of thought, men and women are socialized to play different roles in society, with men in public life and women in the domestic sphere.

### *Legal Facilitators*

These are concerned with the rules and regulations of a political system that are conducive to women's entry into the political arena. In many developing countries, the legal rights of women have been quite restricted until recently and for many women their rights remain somewhat limited even today. In most countries, gender equality in various fields is guaranteed by the constitution and laws. For other countries, laws concerning equal rights and women's concerns have facilitated the improvement of women's political position. Reforms have been designed to increase opportunities for women in political representation and in the labor market and educational institutions, as well as to end sex discrimination. But in many cases, the gender equality of participation in public life is more an ideal than a reality and there lingers a gap between the recognition of formal rights and actual practice.

Recruitment of individuals into elective office is a legal mechanism in most countries which filters those who are eligible to stand for elections. Legal eligibility is one of the basic democratic rights such as the right to vote and the right to stand for election. Legal requirements for eligibility for candidates may include nationality, age, residence, education, and holding public office. After the enfranchisement of women, such formal requirements have appeared not to present barriers to women desiring to run for office in most political systems, and therefore do not seem to work to the disadvantage of women relative to men (Norris, 1996). How do the formal rules of eligibility affect women in Asian countries? The legal eligibility requirements are often the same for men and women, and therefore do not explain the paucity of women politicians and leaders. The informal rules and norms, on the other hand, may present severe obstacles, given the lamentable social and economic position of women in many countries in Asia. Political, electoral, socioeconomic, cultural, and other factors may limit the nature and extent of women's political engagement, constitutional safeguards and legal gains notwithstanding.

### *Electoral Facilitators*

These concern the role of electoral systems in facilitating women's legislative recruitment. They include the types and rules of electoral systems as well as the

district magnitude, i.e., the number of seats to be filled in a district at an election. Does the electoral system have an impact on the structure of opportunities for women's representation? In much of the women and politics literature, women are more likely to be elected in proportional representation (PR) systems than in single-member majoritarian systems. However, the relationship between the type of electoral system and female representation is not automatic. Proportional representation is not sufficient by itself to ensure a higher proportion of women to be elected. A number of countries using the PR system have smaller percentages of women legislators than those countries which have a single-member majoritarian system. Some majoritarian systems, such as Canada and Australia, have produced more women parliamentarians than PR systems in Belgium, Israel and Malta. Moreover, open-list PR systems, where voters are able to alter the ordered party list through their votes, appear to be more women-friendly than closed-list systems where voters are unable to make such a preference (Shugart, 1994; Reynolds, 1999). Although the electoral system by itself does not guarantee women's representation, it recurrently functions as a facilitator for the entry of women into elected office. Interestingly, some scholars argue that PR systems do not have an immediate effect on women's representation in less-developed countries (Reynolds, 1999; Matland, 2002). It is contended that women in less-developed countries are not sufficiently well organized to take advantage of certain electoral systems: 'If the forces interested in women's representation are not effectively organized, then the electoral system is expected to have only limited effect' (Matland, 2002: 10). In European democracies, the difference in women's representation in parliaments between the proportional systems and majoritarian systems was relatively small until the 1970s, but the difference has subsequently widened (Matland, 2002: 10). In mixed systems that combine proportional and majoritarian elements, as found in elections to the House of Representatives in the Japanese Diet and the German Bundestag, we discover that a higher proportion of women get elected via party lists rather than through single member districts.

### *Political Facilitators*

These refer to the level of democratization and the commitment of the state and political parties to the advancement of women in political life. The literature on women's political participation presents inconclusive and inconsistent findings on the role of democracy in facilitating women's political representation. One cross-national study found that the level of democratization had no significant impact on the numbers of women in parliaments: 'Democracy in itself is not necessarily

a precursor to the presence of substantial numbers of women in political life' (Reynolds, 1999). Karvonen and Selle (1995) have stressed the role of the state in the enhancement of women's political position in the Nordic countries. In the Nordic countries, the state has facilitated the political mobilization of women by enacting and implementing a continuous flow of reforms, first with social and family policies and then with gender-equality legislation enacted in recent decades. Political facilitators also include the promotion of women by political parties, the introduction of mandatory gender quotas, and the existence of party competition.

One way of increasing women's presence in politics is through the use of quotas such as constitutional, electoral or political party quotas that ensure women's access to decision-making institutions. There is a consensus among scholars that gender-based quotas can have a positive and great impact on the number of women represented. Quota systems have been viewed as one of the most effective and expeditious affirmative action policies in increasing women's participation and representation in both elective and appointive positions in public office. Unfavorable socioeconomic and cultural conditions are overcome to a great extent by quotas of various kinds. The increase in the numbers of women in political decision-making positions may result in raising women's agendas to a higher priority level. One can anticipate that the political agenda will broaden and include issues previously ignored by male-dominated policymaking bodies when ample women are in public office. An increasing number of countries have adopted various types of quota systems to increase women's representation on various grounds. As Dahlerup mentions in her chapter, about 40 countries in the world have already introduced some form of gender quota or reserved seat system. If this trend continues, the makeup of both local offices and national legislatures will undoubtedly change significantly with a great impact on leadership and approaches to political problems. In Rwanda women experienced tremendous progress thanks to the introduction of gender quotas, which increased women's parliamentary representation by 23.1 percentage points up to a staggering 48.8 per cent, surpassing Sweden as the previous world record holder. Another good example is the case of South Africa, where quotas were enlisted during the first democratic election in 1994, producing a quantitative growth to about 30 per cent. South Korea also witnessed a leap in women's representation from 5.9 to 13 per cent in just one election when the Political Party Law was reformed in 2004 to incorporate a quota for women.

During the last decade, an increasing number of Asian countries have jumped on the bandwagon of the worldwide 'quota fever' and have also introduced and implemented various forms of quotas to empower women. Some Asian countries

have even provided the earliest examples of quotas in the world with Pakistan imposing quotas in the 1950s and Bangladesh in the 1970s. Furthermore, different types of quotas have been applied to public office at various levels of government in the following countries in Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan. Generally speaking, Asian countries have preferred to have their quota provisions legislated, rather than expecting political parties to implement their own informal party quotas, as is done in Western Europe and some countries from the African continent (Ballington and Bylesjö 2002). It should not mean that the introduction of quotas for women always brings about positive results, as the case of Bangladesh illustrates. As one analyst remarked on the experience of Bangladesh: 'Instead of contributing to women's political agency and autonomy, it accentuated their dependence in politics and reinforced their marginality' (Chowdhury 2002). In respect to the Asian region, it is too soon to make a definite statement as to whether the recent introduction of quotas will produce an actual, qualitative empowerment of women or if it is mere window-dressing.

Some scholars argue that the nature of party competition within the parliament affects the number of women in elected office. Norris, for example, claims that increased party competition, with multiple parties competing for the national legislature combined with the growth of new parties, may provide increased opportunities for women to run for office as well as getting elected (Norris, 1993). Nevertheless, some scholars have reservations about this argument. Reynold's worldwide comparative study demonstrates that systems with legislative assemblies dominated by a few strong parties tend to have a higher proportion of women elected than multi-party systems with a large number of parties, which ensures only a few seats to women candidates of each party (Reynolds, 1999). In other words, 'high party fragmentation may well increase the number of women nominated as candidates, but to actually win seats the fragmentation needs to be lower' (Reynolds, 1999: 553).

### *Cultural Facilitators*

These are related to socialization, i.e. attitudes and expectations concerning the appropriate division of sex roles in the dominant culture in which politics is operated. Cross-national comparisons of the relationship between political culture and women's political representation have been an important research focus in recent years. Some scholars, for instance, emphasize the significance that political culture plays in shaping attitudes toward women as political leaders. It has been suggested that whether attitudes toward women's political leadership are egalitarian

or traditional will consequently affect the willingness of women to come forward as candidates for elective office, and additionally affect the criteria used by those who determine whether women are selected, which ultimately may influence the proportion of women in legislative assemblies (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Nordic countries have a gender-egalitarian political culture which is particularly conducive to women's participation in politics. According to comparative survey data from more than 70 societies representing more than 80 per cent of the world's population, Inglehart and Norris (2003) found that statistically a significant relationship existed between public attitudes toward women's political leadership and the proportion of women in parliament. They also found that societies with egalitarian political cultures were more likely to have a higher proportion of women in parliament. Their conclusion was that 'traditional attitudes toward gender equality remain a major obstacle to the election of women to parliament' (2003: 162). Much of available evidence tends to suggest that many traditional cultures in Asia are not conducive to women's entry into the political arena.

Although cultural barriers to women's advancement have often been said to be significant, it has nevertheless been difficult to test the relationship between culture and women's participation and representation in politics. Cross-national empirical evidence has been scarce until quite recently and there is little agreement among scholars on how the relationship may be measured and tested, or of its actual effect on women's advancement. The political culture of a country has been said to have an effect on what Norris and Lovenduski (1995) call the supply-side of the legislative recruitment process, i.e. whether women are prepared to run for office. Additionally affected is the demand side of the process, i.e., the attitudes of gatekeepers and voters regarding the suitability of candidates for elected office. If few women want to become candidates, then women will be scarcely represented in elected office. But even if women seek office, gatekeepers may not endorse them. One of the most important cultural factors offered to explain women's under-representation in politics is the role of sex-role socialization. According to theories of socialization, women and men are socialized to accept the assignment of different kinds of gender roles in life. Women's domestic roles are viewed as incompatible with the toughness and assertiveness that politics and political leadership require. These stereotypical attitudes influence whether women are prepared to run for elected office and frequently shape the criteria utilized by gatekeepers for evaluating potential candidates for office.

It should be noted here that traditional attitudes toward women's political leadership have changed and continue to change as a result of societal modernization. This is particularly true of post-industrial societies, where the younger generation

is far more egalitarian than the older generation. However, in developing societies, the younger generation is equally traditional in their attitudes toward women in public office as their parents and grandparents are, displaying only a slight shift toward less traditional attitudes than the older generation (Inglehart and Norris, 2003. 143–144).

It is perhaps more common in Asian societies than in Western societies to see women and politics constructed as each other's antithesis. In the political culture of individual states in Asia, politics is defined as a male realm and viewed as an arena of dishonesty in which politicians do not shy away from bribery, corruption, or even violence. Women as a whole are represented as symbols of innocence and moral superiority and have been stereotypically viewed as either more moral than men or ruled by emotion rather than reason, thereby not being suitable to participate in the public and political domains. Since women are viewed as more moral, they are deemed unfit for the 'dirty' world of politics, and they are additionally seen as being governed primarily by their emotions, deeming them unfit as political leaders. These particular stereotypes have contributed to the marginalization of women in politics and the acceptance of politics as an unusual place for women. This supposed antithesis between women and politics has a powerful influence on people's attitudes and on women themselves in coming forward as candidates. At the same time, a growing number of women's movements and organizations in Asia advocate women's participation in politics due to their cleansing influence on politics.

Given that religion is an important source of value orientations, it can have a powerful impact on political culture and subsequently on women's political participation and representation. In fact, it has long been assumed that religion plays an important role in influencing attitudes and practices regarding sex roles and gender inequality in the private and public spheres. A recent cross-national study by Inglehart and Norris, drawing on evidence from the World Values Surveys/European Values Surveys for 1995–2001, found that attitudes toward women as political leaders varied depending on different religions. Islam was found to be a specifically significant barrier to the rising tide of gender equality, including women's political participation and representation (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). Moreover, by using multiple indicators of religiosity, they found significant contrasts in the strength of religiosity among countries in the world. According to their study, Asian societies such as the Philippines, Bangladesh, and India are among the most religious, while China, South Korea, Vietnam, and Japan emerge as the most secular, with Taiwan falling somewhere in between these two categories (Inglehart and Norris, 2003: 54). Reynolds hypothesized



that the proportion of women elected to office is lower in societies where the dominant religion is hostile to the advancement of women in the public sphere. This hypothesis was confirmed in his study of women in politics in 180 countries. Reynolds came to the conclusion that women's political representation was higher in Christian countries than in non-Christian states (Islamic, Hindu, Confucian, Buddhist and Judaic countries) (1999).

### *International Facilitators*

These are inputs from the external environment that enter into a political system, contributing to women's engagement in politics. Governments constantly respond to new conditions and opportunities provided by the external environment. They often change their gender policies in order to cope with international influences. The women's movement and organizations that have emerged across the globe since the 1970s were to a great extent a response to the changes in the international environment. The UN Decade for Women (1976–85), for example, stimulated the establishment of many women's organizations and networks worldwide. This in turn helped stimulate women's political participation. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 rendered it possible for women's organizations to focus on strategies that substantially increased female representation in decision-making positions. The Beijing Platform's call for affirmative action measures, including the imposition of statutory quotas to address gender inequality has triggered the move by states to establish quotas for women in politics. Another source of international facilitators is represented by various international women's organizations such as the South Asian Network for Political Empowerment of Women and the Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics. These organizations have focused on the issue of women in public decision-making and have promoted actions to bring more women into legislative bodies.

### *Socioeconomic Facilitators*

These refer to social and economic conditions that create opportunities for women's active involvement in politics. Scholars point to the relationship between women's representation in legislative assemblies on the one hand and the proportion of women's participation in the labour force outside the home and the proportion of women college graduates on the other. One important dimension of socioeconomic facilitators is whether the eligibility pool for elective office is limited for women. Women most often have a lower socioeconomic status than men, and thus their occupational backgrounds are frequently not as well-suited

for political careers as those of men. Women are scarcely present in professional, administrative, and managerial jobs. Considering that the professional and occupational status of women has a significant impact on recruitment pools for elected office, women's lower socioeconomic, educational, and occupational position consequently inhibits their political participation and representation. In developing societies, women are severely limited in the eligibility pool from which political elites are drawn. Thus is formed one of the causes of under-representation of women in politics. Reynolds' study of 180 countries shows that levels of women's socioeconomic development, as measured by the United Nations Development Program's Gender Related Development Index (GRDI), are positively related to the numbers of female parliamentarians (1999). However, it should be pointed out that levels of socioeconomic development are not necessary conditions for women's electoral success (Inglehart and Norris, 2003: 131).

Matland (1998) discovered in his comparative study on women's political representation in developed and developing countries that none of the variables found significant among established democracies (e.g., electoral systems, women's participation in the labour force, women's cultural position in society and the country's level of development) had a statistically significant and consistent effect on women's political representation in less developed countries. His study seems to indicate that a minimum level of socioeconomic development is needed in order to establish conditions favourable to women-friendly electoral systems and women's participation in the labour force, which are often prerequisites for a growth in women's political representation. Factors that contribute to women's representation in developed countries are unlikely to have much impact on the representation of women in developing countries when below a minimum threshold (Matland, 1998). It is anticipated that women's opportunities increase in societies where women's movements or organizations that are committed to women's representation are effectively organized and active. In contrast to many other facilitators, women's organizations provide facilitating conditions for women's empowerment from below, providing women with the skills, confidence and experience necessary for political activism in addition to an availability of resources that may be used to aid election campaigns.

### *Individually Oriented Facilitators or 'Supply-side' Facilitators*

These concern factors that encourage women to run for office in the legislative recruitment process. If few women aspire to run for office because they lack ambition, self-esteem, financial resources or political experience, then it should come as no surprise that women are scarcely represented in politics. Many women

are restricted psychologically when they confront the border between the private and the public domain since they have been socialized by society to perceive their role according to gender norms. The stress involved in challenging cultural and societal norms often enough discourages women from entering the political arena and running for public office. Women's restricted role in the private domain has prevented them from participating in the public arena on the same terms as men, which hinders women from obtaining valuable experiences that are frequently required for a political career. Lengthy political experience in participation at various levels in a party and in local politics and organizations is often required in order to gain approval as a candidate for local and national assemblies. Women do generally not have the necessary political network, political know-how, time or backing from home in order to devote themselves to political footwork. Poor self-esteem and lack of experience in public appearances are also mentioned as reasons why women do not want to run for office (Lovenduski and Norris 1993: 128; Kelber 1994: 48ff).

As for other individual-related factors, economic resources can play a determining role, especially in countries with majority elections, where candidates are expected to create a profile for voters and have their own election organization. Election campaigns in countries with party elections, on the other hand, are often financed by the political parties and by state party support, which means that both women and men can enter elections without needing significant financial resources to run for office.

A 'normal increase' in female representation in national and local legislatures that is characterized by a low presence of the different facilitators (i.e., a change in the electoral system that is not accompanied by other facilitating policies, such as a party's recruitment of women candidates) can be distinguished from an overall radical change in women's representation, which is typified by a high presence of facilitators. Normal transitions usually reflect natural or passive adjustments to changing conditions that are inevitable considering overall changes in a society. Women's representation in legislature tends to increase more quickly when there is an interdependence and relationship between the various types of facilitators than in cases of a low presence of facilitators. A drastic increase in the numbers of women running for public office and getting elected usually involves the conscious linking of different facilitators. One of the most effective and fast ways of facilitating higher levels of female representation appears to be the use of gender quotas, as previously mentioned.

A very high interdependence between facilitators has resulted in the exceptionally high rates of women's representation in Scandinavian legislatures

and cabinets. The rapid growth of women's political participation in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland occurred between 1970 and the first parliamentary elections of the 1990s, when various facilitators helped to reinforce one another to expedite the pace of women's advancement in politics. The governments in these countries have made considerable efforts over the past several decades to overcome barriers to female participation by reinforcing these facilitators. In the words of Karvonen and Selle (1995: 10): '(...) the increased women's representation in politics are to a decisive extent a result of conscious policies'. The Nordic countries seem to be exceptional. Many other polities have failed in their endeavours to increase the political mobilization of women.

Identifying facilitators may shed some light on why women's political representation has progressed faster in some Asian countries than in others. The relative importance of various facilitators can vary from country to country since some facilitators may be more crucial than others. By studying the presence or absence of various facilitators and the relationship between them, one can understand more clearly the processes by which women's representation in political life has increased or remained stagnant.

## OVERVIEW OF THE REMAINING CHAPTERS

In this introductory chapter I have focused on the concept of facilitators in an attempt to grasp certain important aspects of the influences on women's participation and representation in politics in a comparative perspective. The remaining chapters in this volume are less general and more specific. Unravelling the reasons behind the paucity of women politicians is a major focus of several chapters. Various chapters point to similar obstacles facing women who want to become politically involved: the need for electoral systems that advance women's opportunities for election; gender consciousness of political parties; the existence of role models; and especially, women's willingness to run for public office. In many parts of Asia, prejudices and traditional cultural values limit women's participation in the political system.

Although the authors focus on women's political participation and representation, each has portrayed the problem in his or her country differently. The chapters are based on original research employing different approaches and methodologies, and offer varying interpretations of women's empowerment and women's representation.

In Chapter 2, Andrea Fleschenberg examines one of the striking features of women and politics in Asia, namely, the ability of a small elite of highly educated,

upper-class Asian women to obtain the highest political positions of the country, a record that is unmatched by other parts of the world. Despite having women leaders at the top, the glass ceiling remains very real for most Asian women in politics. This phenomenon is interesting when one takes into account the lamentable position of women in the Asian society as a whole. What kind of politicians are these women – roaring tigresses or tame kittens? Fleschenberg examines Asia's women leaders in the context of gender, leadership, development, and political participation. For her analysis, Fleschenberg has selected Asian countries where women have been able to achieve the positions of president, prime minister, or main opposition leader: Bangladesh, Burma, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

In Chapter 3, Jude Howell looks at the various obstacles that contribute to women's under-representation in politics in China. She begins with an overview of the nature and extent of women's political participation in China. She then presents several key challenges facing women by highlighting the social processes and political culture as well as institutional and structural barriers to women's representation. Finally, some of the opportunities for promoting women's political participation are analyzed. She is quite optimistic about the potential growth of women's political participation because there is not only an increasing awareness of the gender gap in political representation at all levels of party/government hierarchies, but primarily because the opportunities for influencing the political process in China are greater than ever before.

In Chapter 4, Lichun Chiang discusses women legislators as agents of change in Taiwan. The notion of politics as a male realm is being challenged by the increasing presence of female politicians in parliamentary politics. She demonstrates how women bring new perspectives that can influence public policy because of women's special life experiences, and how consequently electing more women can lead to the changed substance of politics by virtue of the input of different perspectives on policy proposals. She provides evidence regarding the nature of the differences between female and male legislators. Her study shows that female legislators clearly show their policy preferences as different from male lawmakers so that, as a consequence, women's presence in the Taiwanese Congress has had an impact on the legislative agenda. She argues that women serving in the national assembly have distinct policy priorities, particularly in the area of women's issues. She has found that in comparison to men female legislators show a greater commitment to the pursuit of feminist initiatives and legislation incorporating issues of traditional concern to women, including welfare, health, and education.

In Chapter 5, Kazuki Iwanaga examines women's political representation in Thailand in both descriptive and substantive terms. The impact of women on legislation in the Thai parliament is examined in order to determine the extent to which female legislators work in areas that are traditionally considered of interest to women. He attempts to determine whether the token presence of women in the male-dominated parliament has had any gender-related impact on legislation. He then focuses on various factors that influence the parliamentary representation of women in Thailand by examining the recruitment process of eligibility, selection, and election.

In Chapter 6, Won-Hong Kim considers the recent achievement in South Korea in improving the political participation of women at various levels of government and the future challenges that lie ahead in the expansion of female representation. Until quite recently, the proportion of female legislators in the National Assembly were a mere 2.5 per cent on average. South Korea introduced a 'fast track' model for achieving gender equality in the electoral process of 2004, resulting in a historic accomplishment of more than doubling the number of women in the parliament. He concludes by suggesting various measures that could facilitate higher levels of women's representation at the national and local levels in the future.

In Chapter 7, Trudy Jacobsen argues that there is a disparity between the official policies of post-revolutionary governments aiming at increasing gender equity and their implementation. Although Cambodian women have played a central role in the process of reconstruction and reconciliation since the end of the Khmer Rouge period, women have been marginalized in the political sphere. In general, overhauling a nation's pattern of policies and conditions is much easier said than done. Despite the commitments of governments to enhancing the position of women in Asian societies, the results have often been meagre. She argues that Cambodia presents an example of such countries that were fully committed to the policy of gender equality at the rhetorical level, but achieved only marginal success in achieving this reality.

In Chapter 8, Kazuki Iwanaga draws on some of the research findings in the gender and politics literature in Europe and North America and applies several plausible factors in explaining women's political under-representation at the national level in Japan. Such factors include the type of electoral system, district magnitude, party magnitude, party competition, legislative turnover, incumbency, costs of electoral campaigns, political culture, and socioeconomic variables. He argues that the Japanese case supports some of the common explanations outlining the most important factors that facilitate growth in the

representation of women. He concludes that, in order to bring about a significant change in the number of women legislators in a male-dominated political system like Japan's, such measures as the active recruitment of women candidates and the introduction of quotas should be adopted.

In Chapter 9, Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza examines women's political participation in the Philippines, both in the spheres of formal and informal power and within the framework of the country's experience of democracy. She also addresses the impact of female legislators on legislative priorities. She argues that women legislators have not been able to act as agents of change in the bicameral legislature. She maintains that more women in politics do not automatically translate into more laws for women since the legislative performance of law-makers is dependent on the framework of their party affiliation. Instead, various women's groups have served as the driving force behind the proposal and passage into law of women-related bills. She even finds that in spite of a relative increase of women in power, there has not been a substantive increase in the number of women-related laws. There has, as a result, been a decline in enacting women-friendly laws despite the relative increase in women legislators.

In Chapter 10, Anula Attanayake investigates women's political participation in Sri Lanka within the country's historical context and the broader context of South Asia. In spite of a few women leaders at the top, progress has been slow in including women in political decision-making roles in Sri Lanka. She argues that the role of kinship ties and 'dynastic' political affiliation is one of the most important factors of electoral politics in Sri Lanka, and perhaps in the rest of South Asia. She claims that women have been able to get elected to the parliament because of family backgrounds or support from male relatives.

In Chapter 11, Kamal Uddin Ahmed discusses women's political participation and representation at both the national and local levels of government in Bangladesh. He explores reasons for the extremely low level of women's representation in politics and is interested in finding out whether theories developed in Western liberal democratic states can explain the nature of women's political representation in Bangladesh. He concludes that there are numerous obstacles to increasing the number of women politicians in local level politics and in the national parliament of Bangladesh and projects that women's political representation will remain insignificant in the near future.

In Chapter 12, Drude Dahlerup argues that the recent global trend of introducing electoral gender quotas for the purpose of increasing women's political representation renders it necessary to re-examine our understanding of the concept of empowerment. She also argues that the problems in distinguishing

between empowerment as a process and as a result derive from the very idea of 'empowerment'. For her, empowerment implies the capacity of citizens to participate effectively in political decision-making. Although the imposition of quotas can lead to a quantitative jump in the numbers of women represented, the question as to whether quotas lead to the *actual* empowerment of women (a qualitative change) needs further research. She makes the distinction between the fast track and the incremental track models to women's equal representation. She also discusses empowerment from below versus from above.

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## Chapter 2

# ASIA'S WOMEN POLITICIANS AT THE TOP: ROARING TIGRESSES OR TAME KITTENS?

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Under what circumstances and socio-political contexts do Asian women reach top political positions? Furthermore, why is this feature strikingly more frequent in Asia than in other areas of the world, in spite of the region being characterized by patriarchal, paternalistic socio-cultural and political structures? This chapter analyses this phenomenon and its impact on and relationship with the complex context of gender, leadership, development, and political participation. A gender-specific quantitative overview will be provided for Asian countries where women have risen to top political office, including a brief description of their way to power and a classification of their leadership status. Further, one also needs to reflect on the whole socio-political context and consider women's political representation and participation in their respective countries as well as evaluate, when possible, the recent election results from Asia's Super Election Year of 2004 in which many top female politicians ran in competitive elections. For our case studies, we chose only Asian countries where women have achieved the position of prime minister, president (classified as 'female governance'), or main opposition leader (classified under the general heading of 'female political leadership') since independence in the last half of the twentieth century: Bangladesh, Burma, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

## OVERVIEW

It is remarkable how many governments or opposition movements in Northeast, Southeast and South Asia have been led or continue to be led by women. The phenomenon of female politicians is particularly predominant in South Asian

countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka where women have held posts as prime minister or president several times or are the second one in line. The most well known top female politicians in Asia that are still alive today are: Sheikh Hasina Wajed and Begum Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh, Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma, Sonia Gandhi in India, Megawati Sukarnoputri in Indonesia, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail in Malaysia, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Corazon C. Aquino and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo from the Philippines, and Chandrika Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka. All these women have their democratic legitimization in common since each of them has been confirmed in her formal or informal position through elections, which is quite an outstanding act for this region. Further, all these women have gained their current position as presidents, prime ministers, or opposition leaders as a result of descent from influential families – a rather typical phenomenon in Asian politics. They are all daughters or widows of former government or opposition leaders, and they therefore share a dynastic descent, having gained their political position in a hereditary-like manner (Derichs and Thompson, 2004).

At the moment, three women are leading their respective countries and governing in South and Southeast Asia: Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the Philippines, and Chandrika Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka. After the surprising landslide victory of the Indian National Congress Party in the parliamentary elections of May 2004, Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv, was close to becoming the prime minister of the world's biggest democracy. However, in response to threats, boycotts and xenophobic accusations from the Hindu-fundamentalist opposition regarding her foreign origin and dynastic background, she refused to take office. This refusal brought her a second victory – a moral one – which boosted her reputation, and in less than half a year she was considered to be one of India's kingmakers. Similarly, top female politicians in Asia are to be found at the forefront of political opposition in several countries. Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the elections in Burma in 1990, is the overall accepted leader of the democratic movement in Burma despite her continuous house arrest. Wan Azizah Wan Ismail fought for the liberation of her formerly jailed husband, Anwar Ibrahim, and has headed the parliamentary opposition party, Barisan Alternatif, in Malaysia since the late 1990s. Benazir Bhutto served twice as Pakistan's Prime Minister and heads one of the main opposition parties, Pakistan People's Party, despite her self-imposed exile and her disqualification from political office by the Musharraf regime. Sheikh Hasina Wajed, current opposition leader for a second time in

Bangladesh, has now fought for more than one and a half decades with her fierce rival, Khaleda Zia, over the country's top office.

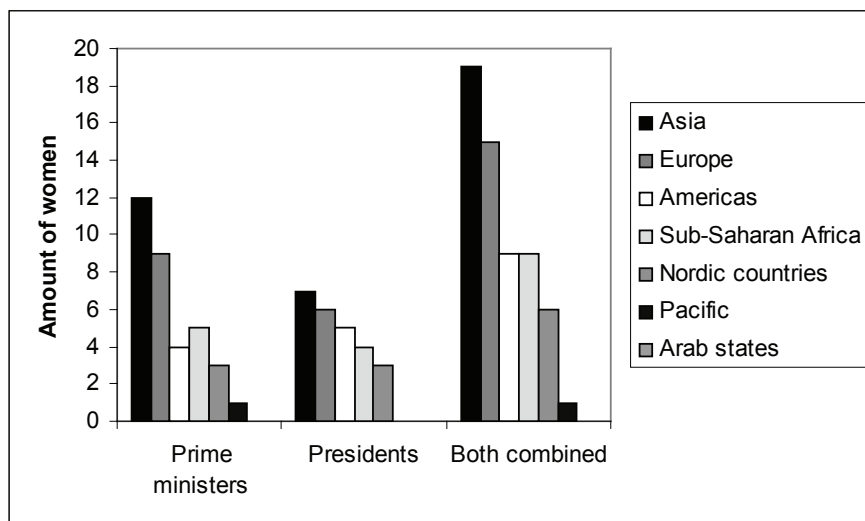
From another perspective, however, the political and socio-cultural context tells a different story. As the following section will show, there are huge differences between these countries in terms of economic development, culture, religion, and political systems. We find female leaders in countries that are predominantly Buddhist (Burma, Sri Lanka), Hindu (India), Christian (Philippines), as well as Islamic (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan). In fact, every Islamic country in the region, except Brunei, has produced a female leader. Even in post-Taliban Afghanistan women are reconquering the political space as voters or candidates with Massuda Jalal, last year's presidential candidate, being so far the most prominent one. According to gender-related socio-political indicators such as the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), these societies are considered patriarchal and paternalistic in terms of both their gender ideology and political record. The GDI for Asian countries ranges between 0.47 and 0.78, with industrialized nations averaging 0.9, and the GEM ranges even lower from 0.21 to 0.54 with the European average at 0.65.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the proportion of women in other political institutions and organisations such as parliaments or parties is comparatively low. Women hold 15.2 per cent of parliamentary mandates in Asian countries compared to 18.7 per cent in European and 18.5 per cent in American countries.<sup>2</sup>

## SOCIO-POLITICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF TOP FEMALE ASIAN POLITICIANS

Female prime ministers, presidents, or opposition leaders have been successful in socio-political contexts which generally have been characterised as traditional and non-egalitarian (and even misogynist) regarding attitudes towards women in politics. As the recent World Values Survey (1995–2001) indicates, countries such as Pakistan ranked 44 out of the 62 countries evaluated; Bangladesh, 43; and the Philippines, 40. Thus, these nations ranged at the lower end of the spectrum concerning the acceptance of female political leadership (Inglehart and Norris, 2003: 137). Even India, where Sonia Gandhi recently secured her party a landslide victory and was touted as the future prime minister, came in at 26, and according to the survey it has a rather mediocre acceptance of women top politicians (ibid.). Inglehart and Norris explain this phenomenon of persistent traditional gender-ideology with reference to a strong correlation between rational moral and ethnical values and more gender-related egalitarian attitudes

on the one hand, and a strong relationship between attitudes towards female political leadership and the proportion of women elected to the lower house of the national parliament, on the other hand (Inglehart and Norris, 2003: 136–138, 178). Nevertheless, these misogynist political cultures are paradoxically linked to a worldwide dominance of Asian women prime ministers, presidents, and opposition leaders during the last few decades.

**Figure 2.1: Women presidents and prime ministers by region (1945–2004)**



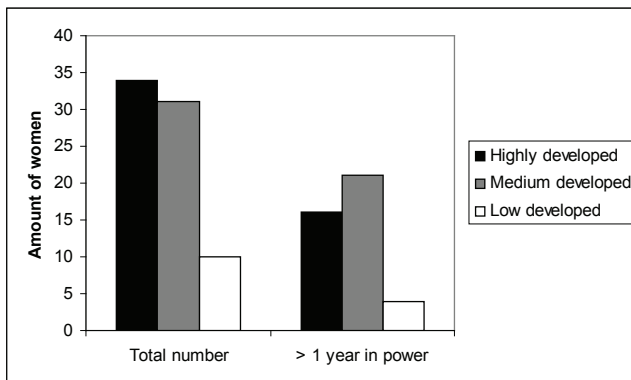
Source. Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership. Martin K.I. Christensen. Online resource. (Graphic and calculations by the author).

Given this seemingly paradoxical phenomenon, what explanations have been given for this in recent gender and Asia related literature? Furthermore, are there specific characteristics at the level of socio-political structures as well as on the level of individual traits (biographical background), which can be identified? In a cross-country comparison, the political systems with female political leadership range from parliamentary democracies (Bangladesh and India) and semi-presidential systems (Indonesia, Philippines, and Sri Lanka) to autocratic military (Burma and Pakistan) and hegemonic one-party regimes (Malaysia) with no clear sub-regional pattern emerging. The same is true concerning religious orientation, which spans all major world religions – although, interestingly, countries with Islam as the state religion or with a significant Muslim minority predominate. Female governance is predominantly found in countries with a medium level of development (with the exception of Pakistan which has low human development

and Bangladesh which is balancing on the threshold), corresponding to what appears to be a common worldwide pattern.

According to the Freedom House Index, the democratisation record of the countries under review during the 1990s is a mixed one, a period when the majority of women leaders achieved top political office (Merkel, 2003: 99–111). For various reasons, only democratic India and the military regime of Burma remained stable in their rankings (*cf.* Merkel, 2003: 85). At least from a preliminary comparative analysis of the relevant indicators, one can safely say that none of the countries being analysed deteriorated in its democratic record as a direct consequence of female governance. On the contrary, the two countries with a declining record suffered direct interventions by a male-led military, as is the case of Pakistan, or by a purge within a male-led regime elite, as is the case of Malaysia (Anwar Ibrahim). Overall, three-quarters of the South and Southeast Asian countries with former or current female governance are classified as electoral democracies with mainly a hybrid character (Merkel, 2003: 98–99).

**Figure 2.2: Women presidents and prime ministers by development level (1945–2004)**



Source: Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership. Online resource. (Graphics by the author).

Under the rule of Chandrika Kumaratunga (whose mother, Sirimavo Bandaranaike served as prime minister of Sri Lanka until her death in 2000), Sri Lanka, considered a 'defective democracy' due partly to the Tamil conflict which Kumaratunga vowed to resolve, increased its ranking by about one digit towards a more free and democratic society (*cf.* Merkel, 2003: 85, 87, 89). In the case of the Philippines, the same positive trend crystallized under, among others, the leadership of Corazon Aquino (1986–1992) and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (as vice-president from 1998 to 2001, and as president since then), as the

**Table 2.1: Socio-political data of countries with female political leadership (as of 2004)**

	Religion	Polity	FHI <sup>a</sup> : Political Rights
Bangladesh	(State religion: Islam) Muslim (83%), Hindu (16%)	Parliamentary democracy	4
India	Hindu (81%), Muslim (12%), Christian (2%)	Parliamentary democracy	2
Indonesia	Muslim (88%), Protestant (5%), Roman Catholic (3%)	Parliamentary democracy (military influenced)	3
Malaysia	(state religion: Islam) Muslim, Buddhist, Daoism, Hindu	Dominant party	4
Burma	Buddhist (89%), Christian (4%)	Military	7
Pakistan	(State religion: Islam) Sunni Muslim (77%), Shiite Muslim (20%), Christian, Hindu	Military	6
Philippines	Roman Catholic (83%), Protestant (9%), Muslim (5%), Buddhist	Presidential-parliamentary democracy (insurgencies)	2
Sri Lanka	Buddhist (70%), Hindu (15%), Christian (8%), Muslim (7%)	Presidential-parliamentary democracy	3

<sup>a</sup> FHI – Freedom House Index. Political and civil rights: 1=most free, 7=least free. Status: F=Free, PF=Partly free, NF=Not free. \*\* HDI – Human Development Index. Value: 0–1, 1=goalpost for maximum value. *Sources:* Auswärtiges Amt. Länder A-Z. Germany Federal Foreign Office. Online resource. Freedom House. Advanced Search. Online resource. ‘Country Overview’. Quota Project – Global Database for Quotas of Women, IDEA. Online resource. Human Development Report, ‘Cultural Diversity in Today’s Diverse World’. UNDP. Online resource. Transparency International. The Global Coalition Against Corruption. (Graphic by Svenja Bolten.)

country developed from a ‘sultanistic regime’ in the 1980s towards a ‘defective democracy’ that is now on the threshold to ‘polyarchy’ (*cf.* Merkel, 2003: 85). In Indonesia, the end of the Suharto regime during the Asia crisis of 1998 was followed by a slow, complex, and contradictory democratization process, bringing the country from the threshold of an autocratic regime (classified as a mixed type of militaristic-sultanistic polity) to the same ranking as Sri Lanka and Nepal, and close to the status of the Philippines and Taiwan at the beginning of the 1990s (*cf.* Merkel, 2003: 85). Second to Indonesia, with Islam as the state religion, Bangladesh performed the biggest jump towards democratization in the 1990s, transforming from a military regime into a ‘defective democracy’ under a constant female premiership since its dictator’s overthrow in 1990–1991 (*ibid.*). Consequently, a positive trend towards democraticization has developed in four of the eight Asian countries under review, although a more in-depth analysis

FHI: Civil Rights	FHI: Status	Electoral System	HDI**: Rank of 177 countries	HDI: value 2002	Corruption Perceptions Index 2004
4	PF	FPTP	138	0.509	1.5
3	F	FPTP	127	0.595	—
4	PF	List PR	111	0.692	2.0
4	PF	FPTP	59	0.793	5.0
7	NF	FPTP	132	0.551	1.7
5	NF	FPTP	142	0.497	2.1
3	F	Paralell- FPTP	83	0.753	2.6
2	PF	List PR	96	0.740	3.5

is needed to determine the extent to which these women politicians can claim responsibility for this recent positive trend.

The same question applies to the two countries with a negative record. Pakistan deteriorated from 'partly free' to bordering on 'not free' (Merkel, 2003: 85), mainly because of failed democratic governance by Benazir Bhutto (1988–1990, 1993–1996) and Nawaz Sharif (1990–1993, 1997–1999), as well as the military coup and military regime under Pervez Musharraf since 1999. The successful autocratic regime in Malaysia, classified as a 'partly free' semi-authoritarian country, was shaken up during the Asian crisis in 1997–1998, but unlike Indonesia, Malaysia managed to re-stabilize its political regime after purging former vice-premier Anwar Ibrahim for alleged corruption and homosexuality (Merkel, 2003: 85, 89). The resulting 'reformasi' movement that was led by Anwar Ibrahim's wife, Wan Azizah, was rather short-lived and limited in its democratization efforts and could thus hardly challenge the leadership of the hegemonic party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), under Prime Minister Mahathir and the current Prime Minister Badawi (see following section).



**Table 2.2: Gender-related data of countries with female political leadership (as of 2004)**

	GDI*: Rank (total 144)	GDI*: Value	GDM**: Rank (total 88)	GDM**: Value	Women elected in lower house	Female suffrage (active/ passive)
<i>Bangladesh</i>	110	0.499	76	0.218	Elections 2001: 6 of 300 (2,0%). Ministerial level 9,5%	1972
<i>Burma</i>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1935/ 1946
<i>India</i>	103	0.572	n.a.	n.a.	Elections 2004: 45 of 545 (8,3%). Ministerial level 10,1%	1950
<i>Indonesia</i>	90	0.685	n.a.	n.a.	Elections 2004: 65 of 550 (11,8%). Ministerial level 5,9%	1945
<i>Malaysia</i>	52	0.786	44	0.519	Elections 2004: 20 of 219 (9,1%).	1957
<i>Pakistan</i>	120	0.471	64	0.416	Elections 2002: 72 of 342 (21,1%).	1947
<i>Philippines</i>	66	0.751	37	0.542	Elections 2004: 36 of 236 (15,3%).	1937
<i>Sri Lanka</i>	73	0.738	74	0.276	Elections 2004: 11 of 225 (4,9%).	1931

\* GDI: Gender-related Development Index: Measures . \*\* GDM: Gender Development Measures.

Sources: Human Development Report, 'Cultural Diversity in Today's Diverse World'. UNDP. Online resource. 'Country Overview'. Quota Project – Global Database for Quotas of Women, IDEA – International IDEA. Online resource. Women in National Parliaments – World Classification. IPU – Inter-Parliamentary Union. Online resource. (Graphic by Svenja Bolten).

The dominant tenor of the gender-related leadership literature focuses on the concept of socially constructed gender barriers (such as stereotypes and available resources) within a particularly gendered environment in which women politicians need to prove themselves (Fleschenberg, 2004a: 16–21). A comparative analysis of such phenomena requires the processing and analysing of gender-related data provided by the Human Development Index (see table 2.2).

As the results of the world values study by Inglehart and Norris indicate, those Asian countries with long-standing experience in female governance show poor ratings in terms of favourable gender composition of the socio-political environment. Of the 144 countries, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are within the bottom third when it comes to equal development options (GDI) as well as empowerment opportunities for women (GEM). Although all of these countries, including Sri Lanka, have improved their GDI and GEM rankings, in real terms

they lag significantly behind other countries that have lacked female governance or political leadership. The paradoxes and anomalies linked to this phenomenon are visible in two countries, which partly escape the pattern: Malaysia, the country without female governance and the Philippines, a country with its second female president. Another common trend among these countries is that women achieved active and passive voting rights following the decolonization and independence that occurred shortly before or after the Second World War.

Given the structural circumstances through which Asian women leaders face a rather disadvantageous socio-political context – including a predominantly misogynist gender ideology in terms of political agency – we consequently need to analyse the individual traits of Asian female political leaders, especially regarding any shared, common factors in their political biographies.

All the women politicians under review here show some strikingly similar patterns regarding their political and social biographies. Their educational career is similar to other top politicians worldwide, but quite outstanding for the level of human development of their own countries, where only a tiny minority are able to attend secondary or tertiary education. Politically socialized in prominent families, they circulated in influential national and international socio-political networks, followed by a tertiary education at renowned national universities or – even more often – at international elite universities such as Harvard, Georgetown, Oxford, Cambridge or the Sorbonne (six out of the ten women politicians attended such institutions). Apart from dynastic descent and high socioeconomic status, another common pattern is the lack of or low level of political experience (eight out of the ten women politicians). Only Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Chandrika Kumaratunga possess prior experience in formal political offices. The other female political leaders gathered experience only within the field of unconventional politics, mostly as leaders of opposition movements. This is partly due to the motivation behind their entrance into political life. As Derichs and Thompson point out, all of them performed the role of a political victim at the beginning of their political career, which apart from Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Chandrika Kumaratunga, created their window of opportunity to enter political life:

The homicide, detention or imprisonment of a political leader stemming from a famous dynasty generates a very strong 'victimisation sentiment' which can be used by the daughters and widows of such politicians in order to mobilise their political followers. For Corazon Aquino (Philippines) and Wan Azizah (Malaysia) the victimisation sentiment became their political capital. Even when political 'martyrdom' did not serve as a primary mobilisation tool, the injustice

**Table 2.3: Biographical data of Asia's female political leaders**

	<i>Aung San Suu Kyi</i> (1945)	<i>Benazir Bhutto</i> (1953)	<i>Corazon Aquino</i> (1933)	<i>Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo</i> (1947)	<i>Hasina Wajed</i> (1947)
Educational level <sup>a</sup>	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Social status <sup>b</sup>	High	High	High	High	High
Political experience <sup>c</sup>	None	Low (NC)	None	High (C)	Medium (NC)
Leadership positions/terms <sup>d</sup>	<i>Unpositional</i> Opposition leader since 1988, won elections in 1990	<i>Positional</i> _PM 1988-90, Parliam. Opposition Leader 90-93, PM 1993-96, Party leader now _un/positional	<i>Positional</i> President 1986-92	<i>Positional</i> Senator 1992-98, Vice Pres. 1998-2000, President 2001-04, President 2004	<i>Positional</i> PM 1996-2001, Parliam. Opposition leader 2001-, Party leader
Leadership type <sup>e</sup>	Transform. since 1988	Transform. until 1989, 1990-1996 Transact.	Transform	Transact.	1980s: transform., thereafter transact.

<sup>a</sup> low: high school degree; medium: college or university degree (B.A., M.A.); high: PhD, MBA or higher, education abroad (foreign elite universities)

<sup>b</sup> middle: lower-upper middle class; high: socioeconomic elite background (wealthy, influential family), stemming from a political dynasty, through birth or marriage, where at least one of the family members held a high political office before

<sup>c</sup> Modifying Jalalzai's criteria (2004: 94, 99) of political experience before entering the current position, both conventional (C) and non-conventional (NC) political experience is classified into the following: (1) none, (2) low: political office held on local or provincial level or other non-conventional political activities, (3) medium: experience in national legislatures (lower / upper house) for at least one term, (4) high: experience in government cabinet or as head of state/government for at least one term.

<sup>d</sup> positional: officially appointed or elected into a conventional political office within the ruling political regime such as member of parliament or government, prime minister or president; unpositional: appointed or elected into an unconventional political office outside the ruling political regime, e.g. leader of opposition movement; un/positional: mixed type of political position (e.g. informal post as opposition leader in exile, informal kingmaker or mixture between parliamentarian and leader of opposition movement, etc).

suffered by the male predecessors could be returned to at a later time in order to campaign for support for the descendants or the surviving dependants. Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan) is an example, and Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma, too, although she is a victim of the regime herself. Some of the women are 'politicians by chance' such as Aung San Suu Kyi, others had to be strongly persuaded to become political leaders; they had no experience at all in performing a leadership role. Inexperience, though, can be used to appeal to certain sentiments as well. In this regard, some of these women used their 'housewife image' to appeal to certain feelings and perceptions, oftentimes combined with elements of motherhood and the image of a caring, morally integrative person. This image fits the need

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<i>Khaleda Zia (1945)</i>	<i>Megawati Sukarnoputri (1947)</i>	<i>Sonia Gandhi (1947)</i>	<i>Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (1952)</i>	<i>Chandrika Kumaratunga (1945)</i>
Low	Low	Medium	High	Medium
Medium	High	High (init. medium)	High	High
Low (NC)	Low (NC)	None	None	Low-medium (NC/C)
<i>Positional</i> PM 1991-96, PM 2001-, Party leader	<i>Positional</i> Vice Pres. 1999-01, President 2001-04, Party leader	<i>Positional</i> Parliam. Opposition leader 1999-04, Party leader, now un/positional	<i>Un/positional</i> Member of Parliament 1999-04,04-, Opp. leader since 1999, Party leader	<i>Positional</i> Chief Minister 1993–94, PM 1994, President 1994–99, Pres. 1999–, Party leader
1980s; transform., thereafter transact	Transact.	Transact.	Transact. as her husband's proxy	Mixture of both types

‘Blondel distinguishes between transformational and transactional leaders. Transforming leadership is defined as “having a vision of society, sets about doing something to implement that vision” and transactional leadership is defined as “merely operative trade-offs or exchange one advantage for another” (Blondel, 1987: 20).

*Sources:* ‘Dynasties and Female Political Leaders in Asia’. University Duisburg-Essen Institute for Political Science and Institute for East-Asia Area Studies: Online resource. BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation: Online resource. Jalalzai, Farida (2004) ‘Women Political Leaders. Past and Present’. In *Women & Politics*. (Own graphic).

to struggle against a regime that is perceived as unjust, cruel, dictatorial and morally corrupt (Derichs and Thompson, 2003: 31–32).

The majority of the women who rose to prominence under circumstances of political turmoil and/or transition presented themselves and campaigned as transitional agents with a political agenda for remodelling the respective political regime (or a significant policy), thus most of them can be classified as ‘transformational leaders’ in the early stage of their political career. Some prime examples are Benazir Bhutto, Aung San Suu Kyi, Wan Azizah, Khaleda Zia, Hasina Wajed, Cory Aquino, Chandrika Kumaratunga and Megawati Sukarnoputri. This is a characteristic pattern that is also found in Latin America, Europe, and Africa. Once in formal office as prime minister or president, the

majority of the women developed into a rather transactional leader, as was the case with Benazir Bhutto, Hasina Wajed, Khaleda Zia, and Chandrika Kumaratunga. There are different reasons for this kind of phenomenon which need further extensive study (*cf.* Thompson and Derichs, 2005), but so far some main factors to consider may include the complex democratisation context, the dynastic background, the dominance of clientelistic politics, and the lack of political experience before entering office, as well as the socioeconomic constraints experienced in post-dictatorial Third World countries. The last remaining transformational leader is Aung San Suu Kyi who has, so far, not held any formal political office due to her continued house arrest and the political context in which she operates. Nevertheless, nearly all of them have outstanding political careers with seven out of ten achieving top political office as head of state or government as well as a leader of a major political party. After moving beyond non-institutional leadership positions such as heading an opposition movement in the early stage of their career, eight out of ten held or currently hold positional leadership functions in the field of conventional politics such as head of government/state, parliamentary opposition leader or member of parliament, thus successfully integrating themselves into conventional politics and turning into career politicians despite their perceived deficits and problems in terms of performance (e.g. Benazir Bhutto, Hasina Wajed, Megawati Sukarnoputri, Sonia Gandhi, and Wan Azizah).

Several authors, such as Katzenstein, Jahan, Richter, and Reid have commented on the frequency of female political leadership in Asia, but up until now a systematic scientific study remains a desideratum, as the research to date focuses mainly on the biographical factors for leadership recruitment but fails to actually analyse Asia's female political leadership (Fleschenberg, 2004a). Mary F. Katzenstein identifies two broad sets of factors for female political leadership regardless of the country concerned: (a) social conditions (class structure, religious and cultural life) and (b) political institutions (political succession procedures, nature of party structure, whether pro or contra female leadership) (Katzenstein, 1989: 292). For instance, regarding India she judges that political factors are predominantly causing the frequency of female leaders, namely the 'importance of individual political parties in selecting women as candidates for office', referring naturally to the Congress Party (Katzenstein, 1989: 296). Such decisions are fostered by kinship ties in the case of succession problems in developing countries, thus 'promoting opportunities for women to move into positions of leadership' (Katzenstein, 1989: 297). But this does not generally lead to higher female political participation or a gender-enhancing leadership agenda, on the contrary:

If Indira Gandhi and other prominent women have placed India into an atypical category for the study of women *in* politics, an analysis of the impact of politics *on* women brings the study back to a prototypical case of legislative ineffectiveness. In the face of economic constraints and rigidity of traditional custom and attitude, the limits of political reformism are all too clearly revealed (Katzenstein, 1989: 301).

A decade later, Rounaq Jahan (1987) as well as Linda K. Richter (1990, 1991) take a broader, deductive approach on the phenomenon of Asia's frequent female leadership, but still remain limited to an elementary level in their analysis of leadership selection. Jahan evaluates primarily India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and distinguishes between two types of female leaders: (a) women leaders as head of women's organisations or women sections of mass political organisations, and (b) populist leaders as head of government or mass political organisation (Jahan, 1987: 849–850). South Asian female leaders share one common factor:

... they were all politicised within their family environment, and gained entry into leadership through family connections. They all fall into the category of leaders whose assumption of power was 'mediated' by a male relative, as opposed to those whose careers were shaped from the beginning by their own choices, attributes and efforts, grounded in a strong sense of their own political efficacy (Jahan, 1987: 850).

These women only managed to achieve top political offices due to one or more of the three following factors: (a) the need of male party leaders 'to fill the vacuum created when a charismatic leader was suddenly removed before having had time to groom a well-defined political successor' (Jahan, 1987: 851), (b) due to their integration potential (often based on relative political inexperience) to reconcile internal party differences, and (c) due to their strong referent power as family members of deceased leaders. In an 'environment of amoral politics', these women are perceived as a moral alternative combined with personal trust and popularity by the people (Jahan, 1987: 852). Furthermore, this context is fostered by a low level of the institutionalisation of political succession in their respective countries, which facilitates the inheritance of leadership: 'All the charismatic leaders (except Nehru) operated their systems more as forms of personal rule, bypassing institutional relationships' (Jahan, 1987: 854–855). Nevertheless, this leadership succession does not hamper political emancipation on the part of the chosen female leader since '... after achieving leadership, these women emerge in their own right, and demonstrated considerable skill and resources in staying

in power' (Jahan, 1987: 857). But Jahan fails to undertake any sort of follow-up analysis on how dynastic inheritance of leadership affects the female politicians in their power holding.

Linda K. Richter's approach evaluates Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Burma, Bangladesh, as well as Thailand and Vietnam. She identifies key variables for the rise of women to political leadership roles: an ideology of patriarchy, family ties, martyrdom, social class, female lifestyles, historical context, prison experiences, and electoral arrangements as well as the perpetuation of the public-private sphere and its concept of female purity and family honour (Richter, 1991: 525–526). She also emphasises dynastic descent as a major permeability factor for women to break the political glass ceiling. First, '(...) women are accepted as behaving appropriately in politics when they are perceived as filling a political void created by the death or imprisonment of a male family member'. Second, their '(...) proximity to established male power' allows them a side entrance into a high level of the political hierarchy which is, third, promoted by their social class and elite status (Richter, 1991: 526–528). In the case of South Asia's female leaders, social class plus family seem to be more salient, or better, they allow women to trump gender in competition for political leadership (Richter, 1991: 538). This being the case, Richter wrongly assumes that these distinctive and exceptional leadership routes 'scarcely portend greater general female political power' and opportunities for female leadership (Richter, 1991: 541). In the 1990s alone, more than 11 women assumed non-positional as well as positional top leadership responsibilities in Asia, some of them for a second or third time.

Most recent literature approaches the phenomenon of Asia's female leaders from a historical perspective. Anthony Reid explains this by linking the dynastic factor and the concept of extended kinship to the situational context of the predominant positive collective memory of female leadership ('feminization of monarchy' from the 14th to the 17th century) in several post-colonial societies across the South and Southeast Asian region (Reid, 2003: 30–35). Such a context enables primarily female descendants and other familiars to the (assassinated) independence or pro-democracy leader to inherit 'the charisma of the deceased' including status, property, and political legitimacy (Reid, 2003: 31, 34). This legacy carried through the collective memory of the people in Asian nations is a valuable asset for female political leaders to which they can refer in their symbolic imagery and explicit public remarks. Whether this historical asset really determines the electorate's or the political establishment's recruitment and selection remains questionable. Certainly, it is good capital for campaigning, but it is undoubtedly an indecisive factor in promoting one's leadership claim

in a particular political context, especially one that is undergoing democratic transition or political change, where most of these first female claims to leadership were able to emerge.

At the centre of all reviewed explanations lies the appendage syndrome:

Very few outstanding women in history have achieved or been granted their place without the benefit of some kind of male-derived privilege, generally that of descent, whatever glorious destiny has ensued. This is certainly true of the Warrior Queens, up to the second half of the twentieth century. Understandably, most Warrior Queens have underlined their claims as honorary males by emphasizing such connections (Fraser, 1988: 332).

This explains only in part why women were chosen, but not why (i.e. political context, supportive system, etc.) and how (i.e. leadership style, political skills, political agenda, etc.) they have been successful career politicians (Thompson and Derichs, 2005).

It remains unclear in all the reviewed literature whether the dynastic factor affects in any way the respective leadership styles, performance and agenda setting of the female heirs once in power. By narrowing down the examination to the female leaders' pathway to power, one overlooks the emancipation process undertaken throughout their political career, which is not a one-dimensional, static concept. Furthermore, this focus serves as a kind of pan-cultural self-fulfilling prophecy of one's own traditional gender stereotypes. For instance, the assumption that political leaders are all males may invoke surprise when a female leader is elected as well as raise questions about which men they achieved entry into the male domain of political leadership. The majority of these women quickly became leaders in their own right as career politicians who exercised power like their male counterparts without any help from the one who bequeathed them their leadership. This becomes especially crucial as the majority of Asia's roaring tigresses have been in positional office or non-positional leadership for an extended period. Such examples include Aung San Suu Kyi as the unquestioned national opposition leader of Burma since 1988 despite continued house arrest, a public ban, and strong intimidation of her and her followers. The second non-positional opposition leader, Malaysia's Wan Azizah, serves as the widely accepted head of the national *reformasi* movement since 1998. Benazir Bhutto governed her country twice, and although she never managed to finish her terms, she was elected as a life-long leader of the Pakistan's People Party (PPP) and continues to play a significant role in Pakistani politics. Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo both finished their terms as president successfully,



with Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo just having been sworn in for her second term. Besides Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who governed their countries for nearly two decades, their second-generation substitutes, Sonia Gandhi and Chandrika Kumaratunga, are also long-term leaders in their own right. Sonia Gandhi has headed her party since the early 1990s and has recently assured her party a landslide victory in addition to paving the way for a third generation of Nehru-Gandhi-dynastic politicians that include her own children. Chandrika Kumaratunga was the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, 1994–2005. Bangladesh, like Sri Lanka, is a country of predominantly female political leadership with Hasina Wajed and Khaleda Zia continuously handing over the premiership to one another for more than a decade.

What other specific characteristics can be identified? Analysing their political biographies, a common structural pattern for the emergence of most of Asia's female leaders crystallises. This consists of, first, a political and social climate ripe for significant political change and a political regime under pressure for democratic transition. The second prerequisite for penetrating the political glass ceiling is a simple, basic democratic tool: elections as an entrance card for top political office. But these two characteristics alone still do not explain women's political leadership in Asia, given the fact that the structural gender composition of their national environments remains patriarchal, paternalistic, and unreceptive to gender equality in terms of options and empowerment.

When examining the structural level of the political glass ceiling (and its penetrability), we first need to take into account that cultural barriers may work in both directions for women – both as obstacles as well as helpful instruments. This becomes evident if one considers the culturally different implications imposed by status beliefs as defined by Ridgeway. If status beliefs are 'shared cultural schemas about the status position in society of groups such as those based on gender, race, ethnicity or education', the public evaluation of female politicians and their claim on leadership might depend to a high extent on their perceived status background (and thus level of social hierarchy) and not primarily on their gender (Ridgeway, 2001: 637). This is especially true in Asian countries where factors like being the offspring of a politically influential or reputed family, having tertiary education (e.g. influential alumni networks, titles acquired abroad, etc.), and coming from the high societal strata in terms of economic resources could impede negative gender perceptions and attitudes towards female leaders. This hierarchal societal status endows some women with certain (entrance) rights and certain forms of agency. Therefore, the supportive resource system (social, human, and economic capital) of a woman politician

becomes of crucial significance for the probability of her leadership and success. Moreover, it '(...) appears that societies that provide more favourable conditions for women's private and professional lives, including facilitating progress into the lower and middle levels of management, do not seem to disproportionately favour their success in assuming the highest levels of societal leadership' (Adler, 1996: 155). Such an interpretation partly reverses the general thesis of the status theory's claim that it is '(...) the status element of gender stereotypes that causes such stereotypes to act as distinctively powerful barriers to women's achievement of positions of authority, leadership, and power', while not contradicting the thesis that '(...) even wealthy, powerful women are disadvantaged by gender status beliefs compared to their wealthy, powerful male peers' (Ridgeway, 2001: 638). Thus, it may help us to understand that this process may be working in two directions, depending on other factors of the given political context such as the political climate, available pool of eligible candidates, political skills of the female candidate, and/or the selection procedures of leaders and elites.

Women politicians like Benazir Bhutto, Aung San Suu Kyi, Cory Aquino, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Tanaka Makiko, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and Indira Gandhi all descend from the national political and societal elite (political dynastic descent, wealthy background, and university education often at [inter] national elite universities), thus gaining a high societal status that results in publicly attributed competence and legitimacy to lead. As a consequence, their background marginalises, to a certain extent, their political skills, their gender, as well as the trespassing of socially accepted roles and behaviours at the time of leadership selection. Furthermore, elite women in South and Southeast Asian countries are allotted a different set of acceptable behaviours and available space for agency from their female peers from other strata of society. The status factor, however, is only one among several to account for the frequency of female political top leaders in Asia.

In the light of the preceding discussion, one may ask whether Asia's women at the top are roaring tigresses or tame kittens. Given the socio-political context, their biographical background, and in particular, their opposition record and their political careers with many lasting already for more than a decade, one has to give credit to these women politicians for opening up the political space for women, whether intentionally or not, and being assertive in a traditionally male-dominated and male-oriented sphere. Furthermore, it will be shown in the following section that the electoral performance of Asian female leaders qualifies as rule-abiding, supporting the idea that democracy remains the only game in town.

## BETWEEN REPRESENTATION AND EMPOWERMENT I

### *Electoral Performance of Women Politicians*

What is then the electoral record of Asia's female political leaders – in government and in opposition? All of Asia's top female political leaders – be they in positional (presidency and premiership) or non-positional (opposition parties and movements) offices – were and are democratically legitimated either through (a) popular vote cast by election ballots (e.g. Corazon Aquino, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Benazir Bhutto, Indira Ghandi, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Megawati Sukarnoputri, Aung San Suu Kyi, Hasina Wajed, and Khaleda Zia), (b) referendum (e.g. Corazon Aquino), and/or (c) popular mass mobilisation and support (e.g. Benazir Bhutto and Wan Azizah). Moreover, women leaders in Bangladesh, Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the Philippines were highly involved in the democratic changes of their countries or are otherwise still engaged in fighting autocratic regimes, hence these women were and are crucial transition agents.<sup>3</sup>

In five of the eight Asian countries with female political (un)positional leadership, elections for national parliament or head of state/government were held during Asia's 'super election' year of 2004, during which elections took place in nine countries – Afghanistan, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, South Korea, and Taiwan. This election year was characterised by the dominance of top female politicians either as opposition leaders or as prime minister or president, some on their way to a second term in office in six out of nine countries. As already pointed out, all of the Asian female political leaders in government and from the opposition share democratic legitimacy achieved through elections, with some of them having a successful record of electoral performance, as in the case of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (Philippines) and Chandrika Kumaratunga (Sri Lanka), who were both re-elected and had previously won elections for different political offices such as senator, vice-president or prime minister in former years. In the case of the Philippines, the electoral victory of Arroyo was marred by violent incidents and accusations of electoral fraud and which eventually led to an (unsuccessful) impeachment attempt, accompanied by public demonstrations, against Arroyo in late 2005. Her democratic credentials were further weakened when she called a weeklong state of emergency in February 2006 with the claim of an imminent *coup d'état* by military officials and civilian opposition members (New York Times, 3 April 2006). This kind of behavior is as much true for Chandrika Kumaratunga, who also declared a state of emergency over a dispute with the then Prime Minister

Wickramasinghe over negotiation strategies *vis-à-vis* the Tamil Tigers, dissolved the parliament, but subsequently initiated fresh parliamentary elections which her party subsequently won (BBC News, 19 November 2005).

The female opposition leaders also have an outstanding electoral performance, with none of them ever having had to run more than twice before winning the desired political office (e.g. Sonia Gandhi, Wan Azizah, and Megawati Sukarnoputri), and being re-elected after defeat (e.g. Benazir Bhutto and Sheikh Hasina).

What do recent election results indicate in terms of female political representation and participation, in countries with female political leadership, be it positional (government) or unpositional (opposition)? An apparent feature is the gap between successful female politicians achieving the highest political offices, on the one hand, and the general female under-representation in parliamentary and ministerial posts at lower political levels, on the other, as the following tables show.

Only one of the five countries overcame the regional average of female representation at 15.2 per cent, with four other countries performing far worse. One would anticipate a trickle-down effect from the presence of female prime ministers and presidents to open up the political space for women generally and encourage more of them to contest elections. Instead, it seems to be the case that in countries with a long-standing tradition of more than a decade with female political leadership, such as India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, the gender-related democracy deficit deepens (see table 2.5, p. 43). Interestingly, both countries which seem partly to escape the pattern – the Philippines and Pakistan – have a quota system in place ensuring an equality in the outcomes between men and women. In the case of the Philippines, the provision is not specifically designed to serve as a gender-specific quota, but intends to ensure the representation of so-called ‘marginalised groups’ of which women are considered to be part, while in Pakistan we find women-only reserved seats on different tiers of legislatures. This is not the result of a pro-feminist agenda of a woman prime minister or president, but instead the work of male-led governments.

Furthermore, six out of the eight countries under review follow a majority voting system, which is generally known for disfavours women politicians’ chances of equal electoral representation. But even in countries with proportional voting systems, like Indonesia and Sri Lanka, the gender-related democracy deficit of female political under-representation still persists.

**Table 2.4: Electoral performance of top Asian women politicians (in 2004)**

	Woman Politician	Position and Party	Election Result
India	Sonia Gandhi	Prime Minister in national parliamentary elections (second time) with Indian National Congress Party – a post she later declines, opting instead to install her own favourite	<b>Electoral victory:</b> 220 seats out of 541 (1999: 154 seats) compared to 185 of main rival party (1999: 280)
Indonesia	Megawati Sukarnoputri	National parliamentary elections (second time) with Party of Democratic Struggle (PDIP)	<b>Electoral loss:</b> 18,53% of votes (1999: 33,7%) compared to 21,58% of strongest party Golkar (1999: 22,5%)
Indonesia	Megawati Sukarnoputri	President in first direct elections (second time) with Party of Democratic Struggle	<b>Electoral defeat:</b> 39% of votes compared to 61% of rival S. B. Yudhoyono
Malaysia	Wan Azizah	Opposition leader in national parliamentary elections with National Justice Party (within Barisan Alternatif). She currently serves her second term in parliament (1999–2004, 2004–).	<b>Electoral loss:</b> 21 out of 219 seats (33,6% of votes, 1999: 43,5%, 45 seats) for Barisan Alternatif, including one for herself and her own party (1999: 5 seats)
Philippines	Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo	President in direct elections (first time after being Vice-President from 1998–2000 and acting president from 2001–2004 after the impeachment of elected president Estrada), K4-Koalition	<b>Electoral victory:</b> 39,12% of votes compared to 35,72% of rival Ferdinand Poe Jr.
Sri Lanka	Chandrika Kumaratunga	National parliamentary elections - after her own preliminary presidential dissolution - where she acted as front runner for her Freedom Party (within United People's Freedom Alliance). She serves her second term as president (1994–1999, 1999–).	<b>Electoral victory:</b> 105 out of 225 seats (46% of votes, 2001: 93 seats) compared to 82 of rival United National Party (38% of votes, 2001: 109 seats)

*Sources:* Fleschenberg (2004b) 'Asia's Roaring Tigresses – Frauen an die Macht im Superwahljahr 2004?'. Houben and Daun (2004) 'Wahlen in Indonesien – Ergebnisse und Aussichten'. BBC News, Asia-Pacific (5 May 2004) 'Indonesia poll results announced'. The Economist, 7 April 2004, 23 September 2004. (Own graphic).

**Table 2.5: Female political representation in countries with elections (in 2004)**

	Year	Parliament			Year	Senate		
		Seats	Women	% women		Seats	Women	% women
India	04/2004	541	45	8.3%	11/2002	242	25	10.3%
Indonesia	04/2004	550	61	11.1%	–	–	–	–
Malaysia	03/2004	219	20	9.1%	2003	70	18	25.7%
Philippines	05/2004	220	36	16.4%	05/2001	24	3	12.5%
Sri Lanka	04/2004	225	11	4.9%	–	–	–	–

*Source:* IPU – Inter-parliamentary Union, The international organization of Parliaments of sovereign States. Online resource. (Own graphic).

The common characteristic of the three countries with double digit representation – Pakistan, Philippines, and Indonesia – lies with quota regulation, a frequent electoral tool to annul the gender-related democracy deficit in the political arena. Since February 2003 the new Indonesian election system of proportional representation specifies a compulsory quota of 30 per cent of women on party lists. In theory, every party has to ensure that in each election district this quota is fulfilled on its candidacy lists, but this tool does not necessarily ensure an increased representation of women since party officials might simply add the 30 per cent of female candidates to the bottom of the list instead of introducing a more enhanced system of cross nomination.<sup>4</sup> The Philippine Party list-Law of 1995, for instance, only stipulates that women should be ‘considered’ on partisan candidacy lists. Moreover, 20 per cent of all seats in the parliament should be given to representatives of marginalised groups, including women – who are considered belonging to a marginalised group.<sup>5</sup> Pakistan, in turn, has the strongest quota regulation, as it provides reserved seats for women in local and national parliament as well as in the senate, according to a law issued in 2002 by the military-led regime of Musharraf. The seats are allocated proportionally to women according to the political parties’ election performance. The majority of women elected via reserved seats to South Asian parliaments (and the same is true for Southeast Asia) share some common characteristics: they belong to the elite, middle, and upper middle classes, come from educated families, and already from the first legislatorial period ‘tend to become mere figureheads with no real bargaining power’ (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 138).

**Table 2.6: Female political representation according to ranking of Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**

	IPU		Parliament			Senate			
	Rank <sup>b</sup>	Year	Seats	Women	% Women	Year	Seats	Women	% Women
Burma <sup>a</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pakistan	29	2002	342	74	21.6	2003	100	18	18.0
Philippines	55	2004	236	36	15.3	2004	24	4	16.7
Indonesia	71	2004	550	65	11.8	—	—	—	—
Malaysia	86	2004	219	20	9.1	2003	70	18	25.7
India	90	2004	545	45	8.3	2004	242	28	11.6
Sri Lanka	106	2004	225	11	4.9	—	—	—	—
Bangladesh	118	2001	300	6	2.0	—	—	—	—

Quota regulation applies in parliamentary elections (national level)

<sup>a</sup> currently no parliament due to military-led autocratic regime

<sup>b</sup> out of 121 countries with parliaments

Sources: IPU – Inter-Parliamentary Union, The international organization of Parliaments of sovereign States. Quota Project – Global Database for Quotas of Women, IDEA – International IDEA: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm University. Online resource. (Own graphic).

One can therefore conclude that there is no substantial trickle-down effect generated by top female political leadership and decision-making from the upper echelons of party and government down to the lower levels of political life and decision-making. This must be blamed partly on the female politicians themselves who often enough came to power with the support of women's organisations and lobby groups, as well as on the lack of adequate positive measures such as quota systems on party lists or parliamentary seats.

## BETWEEN REPRESENTATION AND EMPOWERMENT II

### *General Patterns of Female Political Participation in Asia*

The outlined dichotomy between successful female governance and a marginalised majority of political active women becomes particularly evident in the area of political participation. What general picture can we draw then of political participation in government 'parliament' (of non-conventional participation, e.g. in social movements, non-governmental organisations, and grass-roots organisations); and of participation in opposition movements at Asia's lower levels of political life?

Given the worldwide diversity of political and sociocultural systems, '(...) it is now very well documented that men and women participate differently in

all forms of formal politics in both the First and Third World, whether getting issues on the political agendas, or in policy making and implementation' (Waylen, 1996: 10). On the other hand, authors like Ilse Lenz underline the difference between European and (East) Asian political participation as due to the public-private dichotomy that underlies socio-cultural organisation, which leads to Asian women being selectively integrated *as women* into politics (as an extension of semi-official gender roles into the public realm of politics), while men are integrated *as politicians*. Consequently, women politicians become constrained by problematic gender stereotypes that further limit their potential and agency to rather subordinate positions (Lenz, 1997: 93–94).

In mainstream politics, Asian women participate rather equally in elections by attending public meetings and rallies, being members of elective bodies and political mass organisations, and engaging in political struggles and movements (e.g. independence and/or pro-democracy movements as found in India, Pakistan, Burma, Malaysia, and Indonesia). As Rounaq Jahan indicates, they '(...) participate in great numbers and often assume leadership during crisis periods, but the rate and the level of participation often falls during normal times' (Jahan, 1987: 862). Although they show an equal rate of participation, this does not tell us anything about the significance and character of their political activity (Jahan, 1987: 858). Jahan draws quite a negative picture of the impact of female political agency in Asia, recognizing that women operate mostly in supportive roles as '(...) unrecognised foot-soldiers than as leaders' (Jahan, 1987: 863). Additionally, women are less active in formal than in informal structures:

Since women rarely fall into the category of local influentials (...), they are left out of the mainstream process of organisation building. Women tend to be active in social reform movements, in community organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but in political organisations and social reform movements have generally kept apart. Only in periods when the two are linked (...) do women participate in large numbers in the mainstream (Jahan, 1987: 864).

Mobilizing women 'on an *ad hoc* basis to support specific cases and issues', and letting them lose out as soon as the routine political game of power distribution starts seems to be a worldwide phenomenon (*cf.* Jahan 1987: 862, Kelly et.al. 2001: 12).

What does reality and its figures tell us about the state of Asian female political participation in the various spheres of political life? With the exception of Japan and the Philippines, no woman Speaker ever presided over an Asian



national parliament or was assigned an influential government post such as minister of finance, economics, defence, or foreign affairs. Even in South Asia, where we can look back on four decades of female political leadership, no '(...) South Asian woman has yet held a Ministry of Foreign Affairs or a Ministry of Finance portfolio' (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 141). In national governments, women constitute only a small minority of cabinet members or ministers, although reliable figures are scarce and can only be indicated for differing years.<sup>6</sup> According to Human Development Reports of the United Nations and its regional agencies, in Bangladesh women held 8.8 per cent of cabinet posts in 1999, in Indonesia 5.9 per cent in 2001, and in India and Malaysia 10 per cent in 2003 (*ibid.*; Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 140), but in Pakistan, despite the male-dominated military regime, women still hold 11 cabinet posts.<sup>7</sup> In South Asia, women represent on average only 9 per cent of the cabinet members; 6 per cent of positions in the judiciary; 9 per cent of civil servants; and 20 per cent of members of local government as of 1999 (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 136). When it comes to participation in parliamentary committees, the representation of female members is negligible (e.g. Sri Lanka with less than 1 per cent) – except for India '(...) where it is mandatory to include every Member of Parliament in committee work' (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 159). But, on a worldwide scale, there have always been progress and setbacks in the parliamentary participation of women. Regardless of the level of development and progress, an overall positive trend towards higher rates does prevail in 103 out of 177 national parliaments in the 1990s (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000). As the table below demonstrates, since independence all of the countries under review (except Pakistan between 1990–2002) increased the share of female political representation in real figures and in significant proportions despite a stagnating regional average.

Progress was achieved in Asian countries with various development levels such as Malaysia (+2.6 per cent), the Philippines (+2.5 per cent), Japan (+2.3 per cent), South Korea (+1.7 per cent), and India (+0.9 per cent). The forty countries in which setbacks occurred also range from developing countries like Sri Lanka (-0.4 per cent), Bangladesh (-1.5 per cent), Indonesia (-4.2 per cent), to highly industrialised nations such as Norway (-3.0 per cent), Liechtenstein (-4.0 per cent), Luxembourg (-3.3 per cent), Italy (-4.0 per cent) and in fairly industrialised countries such as the new EU-members Slovenia (-4.4 per cent) and Hungary (-3.1 per cent), among others (*cf.* Inter-Parliamentary Union 2000: 15–18).

**Table 2.7: Parliamentary gender ratio in Asia 1975 and 1998 (% of women)**

	Lower/Single House		Upper House/Senate		Rank 1975	Rank 1998
	1975	1998	1975	1998	1975	1998
Bangladesh	4.8% (15)	9.1% (30)	—	—	10	7
Burma	—	—	—	—	—	—
India	4.1% (21)	8.1% (44)	7.0% (17)	8.6% (19)	11	8
Indonesia	7.2% (33)	11.4% (54)	—	—	7	6
Malaysia	3.2% (5)	7.8% (15)	3.3% (2)	17.4% (12)	13	10
Pakistan	4.1% (6)	2.3% (5)	2.2% (1)	1.1% (1)	11	21
Philippines	2.8% (3)	12.4% (27)	12.5% (1)	17.4% (4)	14	5
Sri Lanka	3.8% (6)	5.3% (12)	—	—	12	15
Asia (average)	14.3%	14.1%	6.2%	10.0%	—	—

*Source:* IPU – Inter-Parliamentary Union, The international organization of Parliaments of sovereign States. Online resource. (Own graphic).

The outlined gender-specific dichotomy does not change when it comes to female political participation in the party systems of the countries mentioned. Although we can find prominent female politicians leading parties in all South and Southeast Asian countries, female party members have hardly any say when it comes to influencing party policies, initiating agenda issues, or participating in top level decision-making processes. Bangladesh is exemplary for the region since only 5.1 per cent of executive council posts are held by women (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 145). The situation worsens when one looks at Pakistan, where less than 5 per cent of all political party members are women and the numbers of female decision-makers are even more negligible. In the Pakistan People's Party, led by Benazir Bhutto, in 1999 only 3 out of 21 members of the central executive committees were women and in the Muslim League-Nawaz Group only 5 out of 47 (*ibid.*). The same trend prevailed in South Asian electoral politics during the 1990s, when, throughout the elections taking place, an average 6.53 per cent of candidates were female in India, 3.9 per cent in Sri Lanka, 1.69 per cent in Bangladesh, and 1.71 per cent in Pakistan (changed with the introduction of a quota system in the 2002 elections) (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 147).

One can conclude that even if women (...) hold the top positions in major political parties of the region (...) these powerful positions have not translated into positive outcomes for the majority of Asian women' (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 147). It seems that women are more successful in the economic sector in Asia, irrespective of female political success stories. What explanations can be found for this pattern of female political agency? There are two major sociocultural reasons used to explain this phenomenon. First, politics due to its public nature is perceived as a male domain, hence limiting culturally acceptable forms of female

agency (lack of mobility, interaction with male counterparts) and participation options. So, parties may be reluctant to choose a female candidate due to the perceived gender bias of the electorate, thereby impairing a woman's potential as a 'winning candidate' and complicating necessary financial (party) support in running for election (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 147–148). Secondly, as Mahbub ul Haq tells us:

(...) decision-making has traditionally been regarded as a male domain in South Asia. Often using customs and traditions as a tool, women have been sidelined from most decision-making processes. While the past few decades have witnessed an improvement in the status of women, especially for the urban middle class women who have a degree of freedom in making decisions, for the majority of South Asian women such freedom remains an elusive dream. This lack of liberty is a tradition that is rooted in the home and the community, where male members maintain strict control over decision-making and follows through the highest levels of national legislatures and parliaments (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 136, 140 and Lenz, 1997: 79–80).

In gender and Asia related literature, this sociocultural and political context specific to South and Southeast Asia is furthermore perceived as resulting in severe constraints for female political agency and leadership which restricts women from establishing protégé-patron relationships outside of family circles or kinship-related networks. Due to a widespread, dominant, and male-related concept of 'honour', women and their bodies' 'integrity' are transformed into essential bearers of cultural identity and sociocultural boundary markers (Waylen, 1996: 15). A potential political sacrifice such as imprisonment, possible abuse, and other threats to a woman's physical integrity lead to the notion that political agency is an inappropriate public field of female activity. Nevertheless, '(...) for a woman, a well-known family background works as a relative safeguard against sexual harassment during imprisonment' (Jahan, 1987: 854). Therefore, it '(...) is worth remembering that the vast majority of women political activists who achieved national fame (...) came from rich, established families' (ibid.: 854). In South Asia, where the phenomenon of frequent female political leadership is particularly predominant for women with dynastic decent, options remain quite restricted for the rest of the female population's agency as '(...) the norms of purdah (...) are widely prevalent amongst all communities and classes in South Asia, making it difficult for women to seek two critical routes to leadership' (ibid.: 853).

## ASIA'S TOP WOMEN POLITICIANS – ROARING TIGRESSES OR TAME KITTENS?

As the foregoing analysis of socio-political and biographical characteristics indicates, Asia's women politicians at the top are rather a deviant case of the overall female political participation in the region. These women reached top political office in socio-political contexts that are generally characterised as traditional and non-egalitarian (and even misogynist) regarding attitudes towards women in politics. Interestingly, all of these women have in common their democratic legitimation, rather exceptional for their political systems, but at the same time all of them have gained their current position because of their descent from influential families, a typical phenomenon found in Asian politics. Furthermore, all the women politicians under review show some strikingly similar patterns regarding their political and social biographies: descent from the national political and societal elite (political dynasty, wealthy background, and university education, often at international elite universities), a high societal status that results in publicly attributed competence and legitimacy to lead, as well as a set of acceptable behaviours and available space for agency separate from their female counterparts in other strata of society.

But what kind of politicians are these women – roaring tigresses or tame kittens? As shown, the majority of them have been in positional office or non-positional leadership for an extended period and quickly became leaders in their own right – career politicians who exercised power like their male counterparts without any help from the one who bequeathed their leadership to them. Their electoral performance has been qualified as rule-abiding, thus supporting democracy. More importantly, most have a successful record in terms of the minimal number of electoral attempts before achieving political office, including successful re-election for a second term. But the burning question remains for scholars studying female leadership in politics – do women politicians make a difference for other women? In this regard, the female political leaders under review act more like tame kittens within a male-dominated political establishment that is pervaded by a patriarchal socio-cultural context. No substantial trickle-down effect is produced through female political leadership or decision-making from the upper echelons of power down to the lower levels of political life or decision-making. This must be blamed partly on the female politicians themselves who often came into power with the support of women's organisations and lobby groups, and partly on the lack of adequate positive measures such as quota systems on party lists or parliamentary seats.

Unfortunately, this article has been unable to deliver an in-depth analysis of the female-unfriendly political agenda-setting and behaviour to date, due to space and time constraints. Nevertheless, some considerations should be allowed when analysing the apparently gender-neutral or gender-blind political agendas of elite female politicians in Asia (Fleschenberg, 2004a: 14). First, female leaders often simply lack a supportive system and structure to enhance an alternative leadership style and political agenda. Second, like male politicians, they too are bound by party ideology and programme, as well as by the need to build up and secure their power base in the government, parliament, and state bureaucracy. Given these facts, it becomes evident that an analysis of female political leadership performance needs to shift in perspective and paradigm. Before evaluating a female politician's performance and her political agenda, we need to look first at the political system: How are the power constellations defined and what does this imply for political decision-making? How is the supportive system of the female political leader structured and who are the main actors behind her and her government? What are her structural and personal constraints (e.g. power distribution, party ideology, national budget, etc.) and what were the political bargains she undertook in order to achieve her leadership position (e.g. compromises on certain political issues)? Finally, one has to ask when evaluating the performance of female leaders to what extent do these structural and personal constraints of a female political leader in the given political system context shape and limit her political agency and room for decision-making? Or, what policies can be successfully implemented in the given political system and are likely to be accepted and supported by the dominant political culture and its opinion leaders? What policies cannot be followed up, but are nevertheless a publically avowed part of the female leaders' agenda (symbolic significance)? For instance, Asian female leaders may instead engage in 'subversive' informal or 'soft politics' as was the case of Benazir Bhutto, who during her two premierships remained highly accessible to women rights groups and 'asked' police personnel not to enhance the infamous misogynist *hudoon ordinances*, since she lacked the necessary parliamentary majority and public support to change the relevant constitutional codification. However, several of Asia's women politicians at the top are roaring tigresses in terms of electoral and governmental record, but tame kittens in terms of pro-women agenda-setting.

Obviously, such an approach should not legitimise female politicians' negligence in enhancing female political representation and participation, when and where possible and desirable. It rather hints at the enduring research *desideratum* of systematic in-depth and contextualized analyses of Asia's women

executives and female political leadership to answer two major questions of gender studies as well as political science: Why are there so few women in politics? Do women make a difference (and under which circumstances)?

## NOTES

- 1 HDR – Indicators (Alphabetically). Human Development Reports, United Nations Development Programme. Online resource.
- 2 Women in Parliaments – World and Regional Averages. Inter-Parliamentary Union. Online resource.
- 3 For further analysis see: Kelly et.al. 2001.
- 4 'Country Overview'. Quota Project – Global Database for Quotas of Women, IDEA – International IDEA: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm. Online resource.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 UNDP – United Nations Development Programme, 'Female Employment in Industry (as % of female labour force)'. Online resource.
- 7 There is no total number given. The previous figure is 3 out of 26 or 10,34 per cent in 1999 (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 140).

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### *Chapter 3*

## GENDER AND RURAL GOVERNANCE IN CHINA

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*Jude Howell*

Compared to many other Asian countries China has performed relatively well in getting women into politics. In 2004 women in China accounted for 20.2 per cent of all National People's Congress delegates, the nearest equivalent of a parliamentary institution, well above the world average of 15.4 per cent and the Asian average of 15.2 per cent (Women in Parliaments – World and Regional Averages. Inter-Parliamentary Union. Online resource). Though the numerical representation of women in the National People's Congress is above the world average, China is still not amongst that impressive league of countries such as Norway, South Africa or Sweden, which boast over one third of women in parliament. Given the dominance of the Chinese Communist Party and its emancipatory ideology and rhetoric, one might have expected better.

Moreover, unlike India with Indira Gandhi, Sri Lanka with Mrs Bandaranaike, or Britain with Margaret Thatcher, China has never had a woman at its helm. There is not a single woman in the Politburo Standing Committee elected at the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2002. In the five decades of Communist rule only four women have ever made it into the Politburo, the current representative being Madame Wu Yi. At all levels of the Party/government hierarchies and in the key village political institutions, women are numerically under-represented and are rarely to be found in the top positions of authority. Where women are to be found in leadership positions, they tend not only to deputise for men but also to be given charge of tasks deemed appropriate for their gender, and which are less valued in status terms.

The issue of under-representation of women in politics has come increasingly to the fore in the reform period. As the number of women in Party and govern-

ment positions began to decline both in absolute and proportional terms during the 1980s, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), the main Party organ charged with promoting women's interests, has begun to arrest this decline by raising this issue as problematic, monitoring the situation and proposing minimal levels of female participation. Whilst the Indian government pushed ahead in the early 1990s with legislative change to ensure that women occupy at least one third of positions on village committees, it is only since the millennium, however, that concerned officials in the Party/state have begun to press in a more concerted fashion for the introduction of regulatory and legislative changes to increase women's participation in politics.

This chapter sets out to explore the constraints underpinning women's numerical under-representation in politics. It begins by outlining the extent and nature of women's political participation in China at all levels of the Party/government hierarchies. It then examines some of the key challenges facing women, focusing in particular on social processes, institutional obstacles, structural barriers and political culture. In the final section it reflects upon the opportunities for enhancing both the quantity and quality of women's political participation.

## THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CHINA

Compared to many countries China fares relatively well in terms of the participation of women in parliamentary bodies. As of June 2004, women made up 20.2 per cent of all delegates to the National People's Congress (NPC), China's equivalent of a parliamentary body, ranking 37<sup>th</sup> out of a total of 136 countries (IPU – Inter-Parliamentary Union, The international organization of Parliaments of sovereign States. Online resource). Though this suggests a rather sanguine picture, it masks several features of women's participation in Party/government<sup>1</sup> bodies that paint a more complex landscape. First, not only are women under-represented in Party/government institutions at all levels, but the numerical representation of women has declined over the past two decades. Second, when women do make it into leadership positions, they usually occupy the deputy-positions. Third, women are usually assigned 'soft' portfolios such as education or health, or portfolios that reflect their gender, such as family planning and women's work.

### *I*

Women are numerically under-represented at all levels of the Party/government hierarchy. At the national level there has not been a single woman in the Chinese

Politburo Standing Committee since the late 1980s and there is only one woman, namely Mme Wu Qi, in the Politburo, out of a total of 24 members (China.org.cn – China's Official Gateway to News & Information. Online resource). In the history of post-Liberation China there has never been a female General Party Secretary. Of the 198 Central Committee members elected at the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2002, only 5 were women, accounting for a mere 2.5 per cent (Du, 2004). Amongst the alternate members of the central committee in 2003, women made up only 13.9 per cent, with a total of 22 out of 158 members. Though women form 20.2 per cent of NPC delegates, there are only 2 female vice-chairs out of a total of 15 on the NPC Standing Committee, that is 13 per cent, and only 21 female delegates out of 160, again 13 per cent, on the NPC Standing Committee (China.org.cn – China's Official Gateway to News & Information. Online resource). A similar pattern emerges in relation to other key organs. For example, women account for only two out of 24 vice-chairs on the 10<sup>th</sup> Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee, a mere 8 per cent, only one out of five State Councillors, and one out of four vice-premiers (ibid.). Similarly, women account for only 14 per cent of members of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, that is 14 out of a total of 121 members, and there are no women in leading positions on this Commission.

This pattern of under-representation is repeated at the provincial, county, and township levels as well as in the village committees and village Party branches<sup>2</sup>. In Ning Xiang county government in Hunan province, for example, as of 2003, there were only two female town and township governors out of a total of 35, making a mere 6 per cent. Though there is a paucity of sex-disaggregated data in relation to village elections, available evidence suggests that women nationwide make up only 16 per cent of village committee members, with considerable variation across provinces and counties (Fan, 2003). In Hunan province, for example, most villages had a female representative on the village committee, though there was rarely more than one woman. For example, in one town in Hunan province, only two out of 38 village committees had more than one woman on the committee.

As well as the numerical under-representation of women in Party/government organs at all levels, there has also been a decline in numerical representation over the past two decades. The last woman to serve in the Politburo Standing Committee was Jiang Qing, Mao's second wife, during the height of the Cultural Revolution. The number of women delegates in the 10<sup>th</sup> NPC of 2003 fell by 1.5 per cent compared to the previous congress. Moreover it has never regained its level of 22.6 per cent at the 4<sup>th</sup> NPC in 1975; nor has it recouped the 25 per

cent female representation on the NPC Standing Committee at that time (Ding, 2000). At village level, the widespread introduction of village elections following the promulgation of the 1988 Village Organic Law led to a reduction in the numbers of women on village committees. In Shandong province, for example, after the introduction of direct elections to village committees in 1999, only 62 per cent of villages had a woman in their leading organs<sup>3</sup>.

All this may be compared to earlier periods of post-Liberation Chinese history<sup>4</sup>. In the 1950s women were propelled into positions of leadership in the new agricultural cooperatives and other political institutions, not least because women were needed to do 'women's work', that is, family planning, organising women for production and social reform. In the Cultural Revolution period (1966 – 1976), when mass campaigns and feverish ideological struggle dragged women into the depths of politics, women's presence and participation in political institutions and activities became more prominent. Jiang Qing, Mao's second wife, was one of the first two women to become a member of the Politburo at the 1969 Party Congress and pushed resolutely for accelerating women's participation in production and politics. The new revolutionary committees of that era opened up opportunities for women's political involvement. In the early 1970s the central authorities launched a campaign to train women for leadership. However, with the introduction of market reforms, subsequent agricultural decollectivisation and the decline in importance of ideology, female political representation began to decline over the 1980s and 1990s. For example, only 13 per cent of the NPCs' Standing Committee members in 2004 were women, half the amount in the 1975 Congress. Similarly during the Cultural Revolution, almost half of all township and town directors and deputy directors were women. By the mid-1980s this fell abysmally to only 10 per cent in some townships in China.

## *II*

Apart from the numerical under-representation of women in Party and government organs, women tend to be assigned 'deputy' rather than top leading positions, a pattern that recurs at all levels of the Party/government hierarchy. Women are thus to be found as deputy governors, deputy mayors, deputy Party secretaries, deputy village committee chairs but rarely as provincial, county or township governors, mayors or Party secretaries. Similarly, at national level there are female vice-Premiers but no female Premier, female NPC vice-chairs but no female Chair. It was only in 1983 that China had its first female provincial governor, namely, Gu Xiulian in Jiangsu province, and in 1985 its first female provincial Party secretary, namely, Wang Shaofen in Jiangxi province. At township and

county levels men tend to occupy most of the top positions. For example, in the capital city of Hunan province, women accounted for one out of six mayors (17 per cent), one out of thirteen Party committee members (8 per cent), 68 out of 400 People's Congress delegates (17 per cent), one out of 9 People's Congress Standing Committee members (11 per cent) and three out of 10 People's Political Consultative Conference members (30 per cent). In one township under this county, there was not a single female member of the township leadership team and not a single female Party secretary. Of China's 6,000 mayors in all cities and counties, women account for only 500, that is less than 10 per cent, and most of these women are deputy mayors. The furthest women rise in Party/government structures is as deputy leaders.

At village level, too, women rarely serve as party secretaries or village heads. Available data suggest that only one per cent of village heads are female (Fan 2003). In the 14 villages within one town we visited in Hunan province, not a single woman was head of the village committee and there was only one female village Party secretary. This town in turn fell under the administrative authority of a larger city, which had jurisdiction over 771 villages. In these 771 villages, there were only 5 female village committee chairs, accounting for 0.78 per cent of the total.

### *III*

Women at all levels of government and within village committees tend to be assigned portfolios that are considered 'soft', such as education and health, or that are perceived as directly relevant to their gender, such as women's work and family planning. Such portfolios are viewed as less demanding, less important and therefore less prestigious and powerful. Female veterans of the Long March such as Cai Chang, Kang Keqing and Deng Ying Chao were assigned work after liberation in 1949 with women and children, rather than in defence, trade, or transport. A female village committee member typically is assigned responsibilities for family planning, women's work and mediation. According to the Party secretary in a village in Ning Xiang county, Hunan, there had only ever been one woman on the village committee since elections were first held in 1987 and that woman was always the head of the women's committee, with responsibility for women's work, family planning and improving women's economic status.

However, this is not necessarily because women choose only to take on such portfolios. Our interviews with women village committee members and heads of women's committees revealed that such positions are allocated, rather than

voluntarily selected. For example, when asked why she had taken on family planning work, the head of the women's committee in one village in Feng Huang County, Hunan province replied that '(...) gongzuo xuyao, zheyang fenpei, zheyang gan' [as the work requires, in this way it is allocated, and so do your work], underlining the top down nature of task assignment. She also revealed that had her family not been so poor, ideally she would have become a teacher.

By always being assigned responsibility for women's work and family planning to the exclusion of other portfolios, women are thereby constructed as only capable of dealing with issues that are deemed intrinsic to their gender. Broader responsibilities such as economic development or infrastructural work that affects both men and women are in turn viewed as beyond the scope of women's capabilities. In addition the skills that women have acquired through their situational experiences are not valued as important attributes for leadership. For example, even though women are often seen as better at resolving disputes and problems (a view that recurred throughout our interviews with both leaders and villagers) they still are not promoted to positions of leadership where skills of negotiation, mediation, and persuasion are crucial. Not only are women's skills in mediation not accorded the value they deserve, but their efforts in implementing policies such as family planning, which often encounter deep resistance in villages, are also not properly credited as experiences and skills which make for good leadership.

However, once elected as village heads, the women we interviewed demonstrated clearly that they could undertake tasks much broader than the typically prescribed roles of family planning and women's work. For example, one female village head described to us how she organised the construction of a road connecting the village to the main road, arranged the development of 600 mu of orange groves, and secured the repair of the irrigation system. These processes required not only planning and organisational skills, but also considerable liaising with township and county officials.

In brief, women are numerically under-represented at all levels of the Party/government hierarchies as well as in village political institutions, and rarely make it into the upper echelons of power and authority. They are often assigned tasks which are associated with their gender and valued as less demanding and important. In the next section we consider the challenges that women face in getting into positions of power and authority.

## CHALLENGES TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Though women have made important headway into political and administrative positions, it is nevertheless curious that they have not made greater advances given the official rhetoric about the significance of women's equality. Increasing women's numerical participation in politics, let alone the way they engage in and with power and authority, poses challenges on several fronts. These include not least the pressures of social norms and practices, institutional barriers, structural constraints, and the culture of politics.

Social beliefs, practices and processes of socialisation tend to reinforce gendered stereotypes, which position the biological sexes of male and female into distinct roles in society. Despite government intervention to promote notions of equality between men and women, deep-seated social beliefs about the inferiority of women and their 'proper place' in the home work against women taking a more active role in public life. These beliefs about the inferiority of women are shared both by men and women, and become reflected in women's sense of self-worth and self-confidence and in turn men's belief in their own innate superiority. The All-China Women's Federation has run numerous campaigns aimed at raising women's self-confidence and consciousness, such as the 'sizi yundong' [Four Selves] campaign<sup>5</sup>. However social beliefs about the appropriate division of labour between men and women in the economy and within the household as well as the actual and desirable attributes of male and female genders continue to prevail and can affect negatively the prospects of women getting into positions of authority, whether by election or not, and their chances of promotion.

These ideas about women surface in the ways both male and female officials as well as rural women describe themselves and the differences between men and women. Common notions are that women are 'of lower quality' than men, 'less competitive' than men, 'unable to think broadly', 'passive' and most pertinently not interested in public issues as their lives and consciousness revolve around their families. These attitudes towards women on the one hand appear as facts, and on the other hand as explanations for women's under-representation in governing bodies in rural areas. Field research in Hunan province in 2003 revealed how township and county female cadres as well as female village committee members and leaders themselves internalise and reproduce such views about women. For example, the vice-President of a city Women's Federation in Hunan province attributed women's low political participation to their 'low quality' as seen in, 'Women village cadres play a minor role. It is very difficult for women to become Party secretaries. They don't have enough ability. Their quality is lower than that of men's – that is their educational level, their general knowledge.'



Insofar as these attitudes are held by male officials, who occupy most positions of authority in the Party/government hierarchies, they constitute an effective impediment to women's positioning in public life and their opportunities for advancement. As the head of a county organisational bureau in Hunan province explained, male leaders commonly make statements such as 'nu ganbu neng gan shenme?' [what can female cadres do?]. The importance that the local Party secretary, whether at village, township or county level, attaches to the promotion of women, can have a significant influence on whether women can enter into higher decision-making positions.

Women leaders at local levels are well aware of the discrimination they face from male colleagues and the uneven playing field within which they operate, due not least to the gendered division of household labour. As a female village head in Luo Xi township, Guzhang county, Hunan province explained: 'On the whole men don't trust women and despise women. Some men are not very civilised and say women ... even if they improve their abilities, they still discriminate against women. If you haven't had the experience of being in contact with them, you can't believe they could despise you – many people see women as less capable than men. They need practice to show women can do as well as men. This is a difficulty in my work. Many women are capable. Also there are things men can't do. Men will say "but you're not a man"'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly within local government women face similar attitudinal prejudices from male colleagues. In the words of a female deputy Party secretary in Luoxi township, Guzhang county in Hunan province: 'Society doesn't understand women. It's very difficult for women to get promoted in the township. There are few positions and it is very competitive. If you have the opportunity, then maybe you can get promoted. Men don't face the same issues. The husbands feel it's unbalanced.'<sup>8</sup>

The latter point about the attitude of husbands to their wives taking up higher-level positions in Party/government organs can be crucial as to whether women decide to enter politics. Without the support of their husband, women find it difficult to take up positions of responsibility in local government or stand as candidates for village election. Social norms about appropriate male-female interactions can also restrain women from standing for village positions. Some women fear that that villagers will gossip if they are seen interacting with men to whom they are not related. Thus, social norms about appropriate gender roles within the household, economy and public life and gendered attitudes towards women's capabilities constitute a formidable challenge to increasing women's political participation.

On the institutional front women face a range of barriers, such as the 'ceiling effect' of quotas, importance of Party membership, male bias in election procedures, the lack of clear selection criteria in village elections, institutional discrimination expressed in salaries and pensions and gendered differences in career trajectories. As initial pilots with village elections revealed a potential problem of women not gaining seats on the village committee, the central government inserted Article 9 into the temporary (1988) and then permanent (1998) Village Organic Law, requiring an 'appropriate proportion' of women on village committees. In 1999 the Ministry of Civil Affairs also circulated a regulation entitled 'Suggestions for the Guarantee of a Proper Portion Among Members of Village Committees'. However, the vagueness of this wording rendered its implementation difficult, as there was no pressure on county and township governments to interpret this as requiring female representatives on all village committees. In response more progressive provincial governments such as Shandong and Hunan provinces introduced local regulations in 2002, which interpreted this wording to mean 'at least one woman'. In Hunan province the provincial civil affairs bureau requires supplementary elections to be held in villages if no women candidates are nominated in the first round of nominations.

These new local regulations have increased the pressure on lower levels of government and village election committees to ensure that female candidates are put forward for election and that villagers are made aware of the importance of having female leaders on the village committee. However, they have also had unintended consequences, which reflect both the dominance of gendered social norms and the top-down nature of governance more generally in China. The wording of 'at least one woman' has had the effect of producing a ceiling upon women's representation, so that the minimum of one woman has become a maximum. If the minimum quota is achieved, then local cadres become satisfied that they have achieved their objectives. As a result though a majority of villages have at least one woman on their committees, very few villages have more than one woman on the village committee. In a township in Xiangxi prefecture, Hunan province, for example, only one out of ten villages has more than one woman on the village committee. Thus though state intervention in the form of a regulatory minimum requirement has altered the outcomes of competitive elections to favour women's participation, it also cannot resist the predominance of gendered norms and values which assign women to the inner confines of the home and make the public sphere of decision-making pertain to men.

So as to ensure that female candidates are available to be selected for leadership positions, some provincial Women's Federations, such as in Hunan and Shandong

provinces, have looked to the heads of village women's committees to take on such positions and have provided training to support them. Furthermore, in 2002 the local Women's Federations in Hunan province and in Qianxi County, Hebei province, experimented with competitive elections for the position of head of village women's committees, both to encourage enthusiasm for taking up these positions and to recruit younger and more dynamic women. Though this has increased the representation of women in village committees, the nominal one woman on the committee is then nearly always the head of the women's committee. Moreover there is the risk that this method ends up closing the possibilities for other women in the village, with different backgrounds to the heads of village women's committees, to stand for election. The tendency to concentrate posts in villages amongst a small group of people, for leaders to take on multiple positions, and for women to be allocated tasks perceived as directly concerned to their needs as a gender mean that there are relatively fewer entry-points for women into governing positions. In villages one woman often doubles as the person responsible for women's work and also for family planning.

Encouraging the heads of women's committees and family planning cadres to stand for village elections also has the effect of reinforcing the social belief that women can only take up leadership positions if these are directly related to women's issues. As political actors, women can therefore only play the role of representatives of their gender, which is treated in any case as a homogeneous whole, and not the role of representatives of ideological or other positions. Furthermore, without a clear strategy for moving beyond the limit of 'at least one woman', quotas are likely to remain in practice a ceiling.

A second key institutional barrier relates to Party membership, which is usually essential for promotion up the Party/government line. Provincial, county and township governors, deputy governors, Party secretaries and deputy Party secretaries are required to be Party members, thereby ensuring that government falls under the leadership of the Party. Yet women are considerably under-represented in the Party at all levels. At the higher echelons only five out of 198 members on the Central Committee of the Chinese Community Party are women, a mere 2.5 per cent, whilst no women have been represented on the Politburo Standing Committee since the late 1980s. In Changsha City, the capital of Hunan province, there is only one woman on the Party Committee, made up of 13 members altogether. At county, township and village levels there is a similar pattern of low female membership and under-representation in leadership positions of the Party. In Ning Xiang County, Hunan province, for example, there are only 5,850 female Party members out of a total of 58,625,

constituting just 10 per cent. Similarly in the villages under a township in Liuyang City, Hunan province, only one out of 14 village Party secretaries is a woman. Moreover women are under-represented in recruitment drives to the Party and amongst the younger membership. In some provinces such as Hunan and Shandong, efforts are being made to recruit more women into the Party and ensure a better gender balance. For example, Liuyang City government, Hunan province, issued a document in 2002 requiring that women make up 20 per cent of Party representatives in the city and its surrounding rural areas. Furthermore, in 1998 it listed four priorities for new Party membership, one of which was the recruitment of women<sup>9</sup>. However without a clear strategy of how to implement such a regulation and how to advance it beyond 20 per cent, there is unlikely to be any significant change in the near future. Unclear selection criteria as well as the attitudes of Party branch leaders affect women's prospects for recruitment into the Party. Even where there are female Party members, they may not be assigned responsibilities that would allow them to demonstrate their capabilities and so move up the ladder.

This brings us on to the third main institutional obstacle, namely, male bias in election procedures. This is manifest not only in the structure of the village election committee but also in the procedures for nominating candidates to village elections.

The village election committee at township and village levels is under the leadership of the Party. Given that women are under-represented in the Party, the predominance of Party members in these committees as well as the social importance of gendered networks, means that women will be numerically under-represented in these committees, introducing thereby a gender bias into the dynamics of the organisation. Furthermore, other organisations within the village that have a role in the election process are also likely to be male-dominated, village groups and households.

Due to the variability in nomination and selection methods across villages in China, there is considerable scope for gendered processes to intervene<sup>10</sup>. For example, in some villages it is the heads of households that nominate candidates initially, whilst in other villages it is the heads and representatives of the village groups. In both instances, it is usually men that are heads of households and heads of village groups. In the second round when the large number of candidates is whittled down to two more than the number of vacant positions, the village election committee, village group heads and representatives, all of which are populated mainly by men, decide on which candidates should go forward to the final round.

The possibility for social prejudices and norms about appropriate gender roles to intervene in electoral, selection and recruitment processes to Party and government organs at all levels is further aided by the lack of clear selection criteria. Vague notions such as 'ready to serve the masses', 'putting energy into the work', 'ability to lead the masses', and 'should love doing things' are too general to serve as useful indicators of leadership ability, whilst the emphasis on youth in the past decade can work against women whose life patterns are more profoundly interrupted by child-rearing and child-care.

Lower salaries and pension entitlements for female cadres as well as lower ranking in the administrative hierarchy point to deep-rooted institutional sex discrimination. Compared with other positions on the village committee, Party positions and family planning, women assigned responsibility for women's work in villages receive lower salaries and pension entitlements. Given that the other positions such as village committee chair, the other village committee member, and Party secretary are usually occupied by men, then women by virtue of the positions they hold turn out to be unfavourably treated.<sup>11</sup> Women carrying out women's work at village level receive little, if any remuneration. To illustrate, in one village in San Gong Qiao township, Feng Huang County, Hunan province, the head of the women's committee receives less than all other village committee members, with the justification that unlike the Party secretary, village head, accountant and family planning person and secretary, she is not a 'zhu ganbu' [main cadre].

Though family planning cadres generally receive better remuneration than women engaged in women's work in villages, both receive less favourable treatment with regard to pensions than their male counterparts. Whilst key people in the village committee and Party branch, such as the village head, Party secretary, and accountant, are entitled to a pension after twenty years of service, no such entitlement is available to family planning cadres or the heads of women's committees. The undervaluing of the work of women's cadres is reflected also in their ranking. In order to raise the profile of women cadres in villages, Hunan provincial government issued a circular in March 2002, reaffirming the 1989 policy requirement that grassroots women cadres should have the status of section-level cadres after eight years of work experience and three years of assessment. In practice, however, this policy has not been comprehensively implemented, both because of institutional failure to treat this with urgency and a perceived lack of pressure from higher levels of the ACWF.

The final institutional barrier relates to the gendered pattern of career trajectories. Men and women follow different trajectories within Party/government

organs as well in village governing bodies, which leads to less favourable outcomes for women in terms of promotion. First, as there are fewer women than men in leadership positions at village levels, women tend to be assigned responsibility for women's work and/or family planning. At the same time where women do achieve positions of authority, then this is often because it is deemed necessary to have a woman to carry out women's work and family planning. By being confined to women's work and/or family planning, women do not develop other skills and experience which are more highly valued and considered important for top leadership positions. Second, at township and county levels women cadres will also be assigned responsibilities related to women's work or be placed directly in the local Women's Federation. As the status of the Women's Federation is lower than other Party/government organs and other mass organisations, such a placement can hold women back in their career development, whilst men are able to move more directly up the civil service and Party ladder. Third, as women bear children in their late twenties and take prime responsibility for the care of children, women are disadvantaged in terms of promotion. When their children mature into adulthood, women are also approaching retirement age. As retirement is five years earlier for women than for men, at age 55 rather than 60, women again miss out on promotion to more senior positions. Furthermore, as their work may require them to travel around villages and townships, women with young children either struggle to balance work with family life, or decline these tasks and accept that they cannot get promoted further. Finally, as women are under-represented in the Party, and senior positions require Party membership, women's promotion within the government system is constrained by their lack of Party membership and experience.

As well as social and institutional constraints, women's participation in politics is also shaped by a number of structural factors such as the gendered division of domestic labour, lower educational prospects for girl-children, women's location in the waged economy, marriage practices and gendered boundaries of mobility. Women's main responsibility for domestic affairs, and in particular for childcare, family welfare, and increasingly the bulk of agricultural production, is a significant structural barrier to women's greater involvement in public life. Taking on such diverse tasks women lack the time to participate in village governance. The gendered division of labour around childcare and domestic duties makes it much easier for men to get involved in village public affairs and attain leadership positions and for men at township and county levels to get promoted. Added to this is the construction of this barrier as a justifying excuse for women's absence from public affairs. Similarly women's prime responsibility

for household matters can also be turned into an expectation that women will not be concerned about issues beyond the household. For example, in several interviews in Hunan and Shandong, county and township cadres and village leaders commented that women were not interested in worldly issues or public affairs. The gendered division of labour within and beyond the household in turn structures the concerns of men and women and their expectations about and their attitudes to the worlds within and beyond the household.

In taking responsibility for domestic activities, which do not have neat time boundaries, it can be difficult for women to participate in village election meetings that are held at lunch-time or in the evening, when children need attending to. Without child-care facilities women cannot easily bring children to village meetings, not least because the presence of children can be seen as a disturbing factor. The problems of child-care pertain not only at the village level but also at higher levels of township and county government. Women's under-representation in leadership positions at township and county levels is in part due to the failure of the workplace to take on board the child-care needs of parents. As domestic chores and responsibility for child-care fall predominantly on women, they carry a double burden. The limits these domestic responsibilities place on women leaders in local government, who are expected to travel around the township and county and 'down' to villages, is in turn then constructed as a reason not to employ or promote women, rather than altering the workplace environment to make family responsibilities and work patterns more compatible. As men do not take on such responsibilities, they approach work with a much lighter weight upon them. Women's domestic burdens also lead them to lower their expectations of advancement in their careers. Women become caught in the trap of being at one time too young for promotion before they start a family, and then too old, once their children have grown up. As a female vice-Party secretary in a township in Hunan province explained: 'People are mainly promoted when they are young. But when women are young, they have a family. If you are young, they say you are not experienced; and if you are too old, then you are no use.'

Apart from women's double burden, there is also the structural barrier of educational requirements for leadership positions, especially at village level. This is probably more an issue for middle-aged and older female cadres, who had fewer opportunities for higher education. However, given that the rate of school absenteeism is higher for girls in rural areas than boys, then women become structurally disadvantaged in later life both in relation to job opportunities and to participation in formal politics. Women's positioning in the waged economy also limits their chances of taking on leadership positions, particularly at village



level. Increasingly in rural areas, household economic success is taken as a proxy of potential leadership capability. Though there is no specific requirement that village committee leaders have a certain income level, it is more likely that someone with a relatively good household income will be on the village committee than a poor household. This can create a barrier for women who have fewer opportunities to become prosperous. On the one hand agricultural work is less well remunerated and valued than factory work; on the other hand women's participation in the private economy is concentrated more on small-scale, sideline activities, than in larger undertakings such as village enterprises.

Marriage practices are a further structural constraint upon women's participation in politics. In most rural areas women relocate upon marriage to their husband's home and village. This practice has a number of consequences for the status of women and the development of girl-children. Women who have married into their husband's villages are seen as outsiders. It takes time for them to build up the networks formed through schooling and shared experiences that other villagers have, and especially compared to males. This puts them at a disadvantage to men in the host village competing for positions on the village committee, who can draw upon already two or three decades of networks based upon school, clan and family ties. Men's 'social capital' and accumulation of 'trust' has had a much greater time to mature than married women from outside the village. The expectation that women will leave the village upon marriage also means that the families are less prepared to invest in the schooling of girl-children, to distribute land to females, and to cultivate women for Party membership and other leadership positions.

Finally, there is the issue of gendered spaces and boundaries. The traditional saying that 'nu zhu nei, nan zhu wai' [women stay in the home and men are outside] has both a normative and an empirical content. With the popularization of the household responsibility system from the early 1980s onwards, the decollectivisation of agriculture and the relaxation of controls over rural-urban migration, women have been increasingly associated with agricultural activities, which are centred within the household. Men in turn have migrated to nearby and distant locations to undertake factory work, construction, and other kinds of manual labour. This new division of labour in the reform period has reinforced the idea that women belong in the home and men engage with the larger world. Men's greater exposure to the world outside the village not only gives them self-confidence but also equips them better to engage in village politics.

The phenomenon of women having less experience of the 'outside world' is a common explanation given by officials for women's low level of interest in



village affairs and their failure to occupy formal positions of power. However the phenomenon of women having less experience of 'the outside' is also changing as women form a considerable part of the rural-urban flow, working in the foreign-invested factories in the coastal provinces. Migration can prove a positive factor in promoting women's political participation. On the one hand out-migration can provide women with the experience of the 'outside' that seems to be sought for in village leaders. There is already a generation of young women who left for the factories in Guangdong and Fujian in the late 1980s and early 1990s who are beginning to return to their villages. Their new self-confidence gained through their diverse experiences in other provinces provides a sound basis for their development as village leaders. On the other hand out-migration by men leaves some women to continue agricultural production but also it can be an opening for the women left behind to take up positions of authority in the village.

However, even though 'outside experience' is often given as a desirable attribute for prospective candidates and as a reason for women's low participation in politics, women continue to be under-represented in villages where women have migrated and returned. For example, in the run-up to the 1998 elections in a village in Xiangxi prefecture, Hunan province, 8 out of 27 female candidates (30 per cent) had worked outside compared to 12 out of 34 male candidates (35 per cent), a slightly higher proportion but hardly sufficient to explain women's low representation in village leadership positions. In Luo Yixi township, Guzhang county, Hunan province, women constitute about half of all migrant workers. Yet only one village head in the township is female and only two out of 17 Party secretaries are female. This suggests that gendered social norms continue to prevail despite the changing patterns of lifestyles of women in rural areas. In any case, the lack of outside experience does not mean that women cannot learn to do the tasks involved in running the village, as seen in the achievements of women village heads. For example, the female village head of Gu Niuping village, Hunan province reported how she solved the problem of irrigation for the paddy fields by liaising with local government officials, even though she had previously never been outside the village. The danger is that the idea of 'outside experience' takes on a self-fulfilling prophecy as women are not given opportunities to acquire skills and experience.

As well as the structural factors constraining women's opportunities to enter public life, the very culture of politics can be unappealing to women. The style of leadership and politics in China is heavily inscribed with male patterns of behaviours, norms and values. For many women this renders leadership and public life an unattractive option. To build relationships and court favour

with influential leaders, cadres should be able to drink and toast, to make fine speeches, and to smoke and distribute cigarettes. However, such behaviour is not normally associated with nor considered socially desirable for women. Hence female village leaders, as well as female cadres at all levels of the government/Party hierarchy, face the dilemma of whether to partake in such practices, and risk being considered 'immoral', or whether to refuse to drink and smoke, and risk being considered 'apart from the people'. As men occupy most leadership positions in the Party branch and village committee, women leaders have to operate in a male-dominated environment. They spend considerably more time amongst men not related to them than would be the case for most women in the village, where activities and roles are strongly demarcated by gender. This also creates problems for women leaders who can be subject to undesirable gossip suggesting that they are immoral, having inappropriate relationships with men. For younger women this is even more problematic. The fear of having one's reputation sullied puts many women off the idea of taking up leadership positions.

For women cadres at township and county levels, the working environment of local government can also be unattractive both because of issues of work/family balance and the male-dominated work culture. Being promoted into local government brings advantages, not least because the Women's Federation lacks comparable resources and status. However for women cadres these advantages may be outweighed by the disadvantages of a higher workload and the male-dominated work culture. As the vice-Party secretary of a township in Guzhang County, Hunan province stated, when asked about the difference in working in the Women's Federation and local government.

Women's status is not high. Higher levels require lower levels to have women cadres but, for myself, I am not pleased about being promoted because of the family burden and there is a lot of work at township level and I don't like the work environment. Women cadres have limitations. At county, township levels, other cadres look down on women...they think they are not convenient...they discriminate against us. They feel it is not convenient because we don't drink. The environment...the culture...of drinking...we don't like this but sometimes you have to join in.

In brief, increasing women's participation in public life faces challenges on a number of fronts. Social norms and values, institutional barriers such as the 'ceiling effect' of quotas, male bias in selection procedures, lack of clear selection criteria, structural issues such as the domestic division of labour and

Party membership, and the culture of politics combine to reproduce the under-representation of women in Party/government organs.

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Having looked at the key challenges facing activists concerned with increasing women's political participation, this section examines some of the opportunities that provide for a more sanguine future. A first important positive factor is the support of the top political leadership in China. The Chinese Communist Party has a long history of promoting the liberation of Chinese women, which goes back to the hard days of the Long March and the communist bases in Yan'an and elsewhere. Drawing upon the historical and materialist Marxist-Engelsian analysis of women's oppression, the Chinese Communist Party sees the participation of women in economic and public life as central to their emancipation. After the Communists came to power in 1949 they gradually introduced over the next decade legislation prohibiting social practices such as foot-binding, polygamy, and child marriage<sup>12</sup>. They made it easier for women to divorce, questioned the acceptability of 'wife-beating', and mobilised women through campaigns to take part in economic production outside of the household.

The propaganda machinery of the Communist Party tried to refashion people's ideas about the appropriate roles of men and women through the promotion of an official gender ideology that both castigated past practices such as footbinding as 'feudal' and lauded women who entered the waged workforce. In the turbulent days of the Cultural Revolution official gender ideology reflected the new Maoist emphasis on the superstructural. It erased the notion of fundamental differences between male and female, advancing the female role model as a steely-eyed, virtually androgynous character, ready to sacrifice all for the future of the revolution. Whatever men could do, women also could do, be that working at a fiery steel furnace all day or using a pick-axe to remove stones at Da Qing oilfield.

With the downfall of the Gang of Four in 1976 and the rise of the reformers from 1978 onwards under Deng Xiao Ping, the ideological fervour of the past era also waned. Though the Communist Party, with the aid of the newly revived Women's Federation, continued to propagate an ideal of female/male equality, this was also tempered by the perceived need to protect women, a notion which admitted fundamental biological differences between the sexes. Furthermore, the introduction of market forces over the subsequent twenty years coupled with the opening of mainland Chinese culture to influences from other parts of Asia and the West pluralised the ideological field and made women subject

to often competing discourses and images. On the one hand official gender ideology continued to promote an image of women that emphasised hard work, moral purity, self-sacrifice, loyalty to Party goals, and the virtues of motherhood. The model woman could now indulge in some attention to her appearance, donning brighter coloured clothes, perming her hair and experimenting with lipstick and blusher. On the other hand films, videos and DVDs from Taiwan and Hong Kong, advertisements of household products, and the growing market in consumer goods offered women a multiplicity of subjectivities, as the proud housekeeper, or the ambitious career woman, or the seductive mistress, or the hedonistic consumerist. Though the propaganda machinery had adjusted its images of women to reflect the changing economic base, it also struggled against competing versions of womanhood and femininity that often had more appeal to young women growing up in a consumer-oriented society based on market forces.

Nevertheless the adherence of the Party leadership as reflected in official gender ideology to the ideals of male/female equality continues to be an important pillar of support for advocates of increased female political participation. Furthermore the official gender ideology represents a resource that can be drawn upon to justify the need for change, particularly in the face of resistance from both within the Party/state and society. Moves by activists within the Party/state system to introduce quotas for women, as a way of increasing the numerical presence of women in Party/state structures, can, and do, make good use of the gender ideology of the Communist Party to bolster their case. The ranking of China in international leagues comparing female political participation such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union's league table is important to the Party leadership and the Women's Federation. Any fall in China's position can then be portrayed as a negative reflection on national pride and Communist ideology, thus warranting action by the Party/state.

A second important factor that is closely related to Party leadership and ideology is the long existence of a state machinery dedicated to the promotion of women's interests and rights, namely, the All-China Women's Federation<sup>13</sup>. Given that many countries only established a women's state machinery such as a Ministry for Women, or specialised department, committee or unit for women's interests, after the UN Decade for Women in 1975, the long history of the All-China Women's Federation as well as its extensive reach constitute a potentially formidable structure for advocating women's rights and interests. The Women's Federation was established in 1949 as a mass organisation aimed at mobilizing women for the goals of reconstruction and the building of socialism. It serves as

a transmission belt organisation, passing down policy from above and reflecting the interests of women from below. Its tentacles reach throughout the country and penetrate down to village level. As of 2003, the Women's Federation employs 52,529 cadres from central down to township level. Altogether there are 31 provincial federations, 435 branches at prefectural level, 2,336 county branches, 48,066 branches at township or neighbourhood committee levels, 73,885 urban women's committees and 611,734 rural women's committees (Du, 2004). Its cadres down to township level receive salaries paid for by the Party/state, though any activities depend upon the fund-raising efforts of local federations.

Having the dual role of on the one hand promoting Party interests and on the other hand representing women's interests can create a dilemma, particularly when policies place the two sets of interests in conflict with each other. This is the case with policies such as state enterprise reform, where downsizing has resulted in women being the first to be laid off work, or family planning, where strict adherence to targets has endangered women's health. How local women's federations have responded depends considerably on the values of leaders and individual cadres. In the case of state enterprise reform women's federations have tended to accept uncritically the role of retraining women for the marketplace rather than, say, intervening pro-actively at an earlier point in the process of enterprise reform to ensure that women are not unfairly made redundant first.

With regard to the issue of political participation, there is no fundamental contradiction of interests between the Party and women. Hence, the opportunity to advocate this issue is far less complex than say discrimination in state enterprise reform. As the Women's Federation is a Party organisation, it has points of entry into the political system that can be levered for the promotion of gender issues. It can take advantage not only of its representation on bodies such as the People's Congresses at all levels, local government committees and ministerial advisory boards, but also of the personal connections developed by individual leaders through Party networks and shared backgrounds. Moreover, through organisations such as the National Working Committee on Women and Children under the State Council or the Office of Workers, Youth and Women's Committee on Internal and Judicial Affairs in the National People's Congress, it can monitor the implementation of policies and laws related to women and children, promote policy and legislative change, and draw up plans for the development of women and children in China. All these official inroads as well as the informal networks and resources of the Women's Federation with key government and Party leaders are a crucial resource that can be levered to advance women's political participation.

These variables of supportive Party leadership, pro-equality gender ideology and the existence of a women's state machinery together constitute a type of 'state-derived feminism'<sup>14</sup>, which represents a powerful force and opportunity for promoting women's political participation. For this state-derived feminism to realise its full potency, however, two key issues need to be addressed. First, the emphasis in official discourse on the need to protect women needs to be reworked. The idea of protection is premised on the notion that men and women are biologically different, and in particular, women are weaker and therefore more vulnerable than men. At stake here is the effect of this emphasis on protection, which reinforces a more general idea that women are weak, vulnerable and therefore less capable than men. Moreover, the notion that women are weaker and need to be protected can be appropriated by more conservative forces to justify the idea of women staying at home or not being promoted into leadership positions.

Second, the relationship between the Women's Federation at all levels and more autonomous women's organisations needs to be rendered more productive. From the mid-1980s onwards, within a broader context of the growth of social organisations, more independent women's organisations began to mushroom in China's major cities (He; 1999, Howell; 2003a and b; Hsiung, 2001; Liu, 2001a; Yi, 2000). The hosting of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 was an important boost to the development of these organisations (Howell, 1997). They range from government-sponsored women's associations to more independent counselling organisations, migrant's clubs, and to less formal structures such as salons and networks. The relationship between the Women's Federation and these new groups has varied considerably. Sometimes the Women's Federation has actively sought to cooperate with some groups; sometimes it has been reluctant to engage with them at all; on other occasions the groups themselves have steered away from any involvement with the Women's Federation. However, from the perspective of increasing women's political participation, cross-cutting alliances involving the Women's Federation and more independent women's groups could provide a powerful tool for raising awareness and advocating for change.

A further key opportunity for promoting women's political participation is the relaxation of controls over rural-urban migration over the last fifteen years. This has enabled both men and women in rural areas to seek employment in the wealthier parts of China, and especially in eastern coastal areas. Working in foreign-invested factories, in the construction trade, in transport and the services sector, rural migrants can earn considerably more than if they were to farm the land in their villages. The remittances from migrants contribute

to improvements in the standard of living of rural families. Apart from these economic benefits, young men and women become exposed to different ways of life, broadening their horizons and raising their aspirations. From the point of view of female political participation, this renders less convincing the belief that men are more suited to leadership because they are more oriented to the outside. A new generation of rural women are gaining much broader life experiences and becoming exposed to the wider world beyond the confines of their childhood households. These women are a crucial resource for leadership in the rural areas, which the Chinese Communist Party and the Women's Federation would be foolish to ignore.

## CONCLUSION

With the introduction of market forces, the competitive principle has become legitimated as appropriate for not only the allocation of productive resources but also entry into positions of leadership at village level and recruitment into certain civil service positions. The decline in women's participation in village committees in the 1980s drew attention to the perils of competition and galvanised activists within the Women's Federation and other Party/government organs to raise the issue of numerical under-representation of women in all Party/government bodies. To counter this downward trend advocates of increased political participation encouraged the interpretation of the phrase 'a certain proportion of women' in the Village Organic Law to mean 'at least one woman'. Some provinces introduced local regulations to ensure that at least one woman was elected onto village committees.

In raising the level of women's numerical representation at all levels of the Party/state hierarchies advocates face a number of challenges. These include social norms and practices that discriminate against women as well as institutional barriers such as the 'ceiling effect' of quotas, the gendered nature of Party recruitment and promotion processes, male bias in election procedures, the lack of clear selection criteria in village elections, institutional discrimination and gendered differences in career trajectories. They also include structural barriers such as marriage practices in rural areas, the household division of labour, lower educational opportunities for girls, especially in rural areas, gendered patterns of mobility, and women's position in the waged economy. Added to these are the male-dominated style of politics that lays down the terms of engagement in a way that is both unappealing and risky for women. All these constraints pose formidable challenges. However there are also a number of opportunities that render these constraints surmountable to some extent. Perhaps most importantly



is the support of the Party leadership and an official gender ideology that promotes ideas of women's equality, protection of women, and the significance to women's emancipation of women's participation in economic and public life. Closely related to this is the existence of an extensive women's state machinery that enjoys the backing of the Communist Party and has inroads into the political system. Given that the bulk of China's population has roots in the rural areas, the process of rural-urban migration is also salient, enabling young rural women to gain exposure to new ideas and experiences, thereby gradually eroding the idea that women belong in the home and understand only 'small things'.

Objective opportunities can always exist. The challenge is whether advocates are able to pursue these in a way that will make a difference. Observing the activities of key activists over the last few years, it seems there is much room for optimism. Not only is there a growing awareness of the gap in political representation between women and men at all levels of Party/government hierarchies, but the possibility of influencing policy and legislative processes is greater than before, albeit still relatively limited. Even if a better numerical balance is reached in the next decade or two, ensuring that women's participation actually makes a qualitative difference for diverse groups of women will remain a challenge in China, as in other countries. Equal numerical representation of men and women is a necessary but not sufficient goal for women's emancipation.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

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#### NOTES

- 1 The phrase 'Party/government' is used throughout this chapter rather than 'party' and 'government' separately as there continues to be considerable fusion between these organisations, despite attempts over the past two decades to delineate more clearly the boundaries between them. Party membership is essential for the highest positions of authority at national, provincial, county and township levels. Lower down the hierarchies Party members tend to dominate in positions of authority.



- 2 For further discussion of the challenges of political participation at local and village levels see Fan (2000), Liu (2001b), Wang (2000), Guo (1993), Wang Qi (1999, 2003), Dong (1993).
- 3 Interview, Women's Federation, Tai'An City, Shandong province, April 2003.
- 4 For further discussion of women's' political participation in different historical periods of Chinese communism, see Townsend, 1967; Ding, 2000; Wang Qi, 1999.
- 5 This refers to 'self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-development'.
- 6 Interview, November 2003.
- 7 Interview, November 2003.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Of 831 new Party members recruited in 2002, 230 were women, over 25% (Interview, Civil Affairs Bureau, Liuyang City, Hunan, April 2003).
- 10 In July 2004 the CCP Central Committee and the State Council issued the 'Views of the General Offices of the CCP Central Committee and State Council on strengthening and improving the systems of making village affairs public and exercising democratic management', which aims amongst other things to standardise election procedures and improve the transparency of village public processes (China People's Daily, 13.07.2004, p. 8 in Summary of World Broadcasts, 30.07.2004).
- 11 There is a disparity between the remuneration to the woman responsible for woman's work and to the family planning person because these two tasks fall under different administrative lines. Due to the importance of the family planning policy in China, family planning cadres, who fall under the Family Planning Commission, are relatively well rewarded at village level, earning a salary equivalent to a deputy Party secretary.
- 12 For more detailed historical accounts of the position of women under Chinese Communist Party rule, see Andors (1983, 1981), Croll (1983), Davin (1976).
- 13 For detailed analyses of the All-China Women's Federation in different periods of post-Liberation history see Davin (1976), Ding (2001), Howell (1996, 1997, 2000), Jin (2000).
- 14 For a full analysis of state-derived feminism see Howell, 2002.

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## Chapter 4

# WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN LEGISLATION IN TAIWAN

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*Lichun Chiang*

For decades, the number of female lawmakers in Taiwan has gradually increased in the national elections with the exception of the 2004 election of the Legislative Yuan (See Table 4.1). The impetus of female lawmakers in the Yuan means that women have gradually challenged male supremacy in a male-dominated sphere in order to pursue the same opportunities as men and have thus reached their work goals as political leaders at the top levels of political institutions. The number of women that entered the political area has increased in recent decades in Taiwan. The influx of women participating in political institutions such as the Yuan has dramatically changed the political environment and landscape. In order to account for the impact on the Yuan, feminists have provided the theoretical groundwork for the ongoing discussion on the effect of congresswomen, but particularly on legislation. Sandra Harding (1997: 1) confirms that feminist standpoint theory is a starting point of research that is based upon feminist understandings on women's lives, which opposes male dominant visions of women. Feminist standpoint theory expresses the social and political interests and values based on women's voices and interests. This theory is thoroughly comprehensive and empirically offers adequate knowledge about social worlds and the differences in human beings (Harding, 1997: 1). Moreover, this research is based on feminist standpoint theory and other related literature, which construct and inform the assumptions of this research.

The main purposes of this chapter are essentially twofold: (1) to apply feminist standpoint theory as a concept central to the analysis of legislation and (2) to show how female lawmakers in Taiwan are responsive to their gender standpoints in the legislative process. Emerging from feminist standpoint theory,

a major question that presents itself in this research is 'Do female representatives speak for similar women's issues because of their common life experiences in the debate process in Taiwan?. From this question, it is helpful to understand whether women legislators do in fact represent women in the legislative process in similar ways.

**Table 4.1: Percentage of women in the legislative Yuan in Taiwan**

National Elections	1995	1998	2001	2004
Congress women	14% (23)	19% (43)	22% (50)	21% (47)
TOTAL	164	225	225	225

Source: Central Election Commission in Taiwan. Online resource

This research begins with a review of the literature related to the study of gender and legislation related to women's issues, including literature on feminist standpoint theory in order to clearly establish the assumption of congresswomen as possible agents of change in legislation. The content of this research includes an introduction to the research design, in particular the case selection, measurements [indicators], and policy issues. The following section focuses on an analysis of floor speeches made on health/welfare policy, education policy and crime prevention policy in the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the Legislative Yuan in Taiwan. The results demonstrate that floor speeches delivered by congresswomen in the Taiwan Legislative Yuan are influenced by their gender and life experiences that in turn impact the legislation. The research results will provide another dimension in understanding the relationship between gender and policy decision-making.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature is rich in discussions on female lawmakers that formulate congressional legislation. Some authors posit an election goal to increase female number in Congress (Carroll, 1994; Lehman, Schlozman and Burns, 1995), and others argue for gender differences (Walsh, 1997 and Thomas, 1997). Susan Carroll in *Women as Candidates in American Politics* offers two categories of major impediments to women's political participation. One is 'limitations resulting from women's socialisation and sex-role conceptions', and the other is made up of 'limitations in the structure of political opportunity' (Carroll 1994: 4). There are several reasons for the small number of female lawmakers in Congress, such as lack of time, culture and the campaign-finance system, which favors male candidates (Grofman, Handley & Niemi 1992). It is difficult for women to run for office, work and care for their families. Additionally, the number of female

lawmakers has slowly increased because of the limitation of campaign financial support, housework and culture.

But, the question remains whether female lawmakers elected to Congress have any policy preferences in legislation. Some authors, such as George M. Belknap (1958), Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes (1963), and Aage R. Clausen (1973), provide the 'policy dimension theory' to explain a lawmaker's preferred position in legislation in the 1950s and 1960s. As the policy dimension theory states that

(...) legislators reduce the time and energy requirements of policy decision-making by (1) sorting specific policy proposals into a limited number of general policy content categories and by (2) establishing a policy position for each general category of policy content, one that can be used to make decisions on each of the specific proposals assigned to that category (Martin 2001:1).

The theorists in this field predict that legislators have a preferred position on legislation and consequently make choices based on their preferred position. Dan Carney and Rebecca Carr offer a specific example of this as in the instance of Louisiana Democratic Senator Mary Landrieu. Landrieu's top priority in the Senate was education policy, thus Landrieu would fight for full funding of Head Start. She 'wants the federal government to help put more computers into classrooms, and would like to make college more affordable by providing tax credits for middle-class families to help pay for tuition' (Carney and Carr, 1996: 17). Female legislators indeed showed their preferred policy according to their own terms.

Feminist standpoint theory has been applied as well to analyse women's preferred position related to racial problems, e.g. the poverty issues of black women. Tracey Reynolds analysed the availability of black women's writings based on feminist standpoint theory. Black feminists in Britain and the United States have argued that there exists a black feminist standpoint theory based on a theoretical understanding of black women's everyday experiences. Reynolds's study draws '(...) connections between black feminist standpoint theory and the widening availability of black women's writings within literature and popular culture to investigate the issue of what experiences get taken up and come to define the black female experience' (Reynolds, 2002: 591). It is clear then that women develop their preferences based on their own life experiences. Lynn and Hallstein point out that feminist standpoint theories provide '(...) a basis for a communication ethic (...) offers some possibility for diverse people, who have interpretive capabilities and intentionality, to deliberate together across their

differences, to make choices, and to be held accountable for those choices in moral reasoning' (Lynn and Hallstein, 1999: 33). Feminist standpoint theorists provide a theoretical foundation that is applicable to different people while recognising how their choices are based on individual life experiences. Brenda J. Allen similarly applied feminist standpoint theory in an analysis of organisational socialization, and what she discovered was that factors of gender and race can demarcate an individual's placement in the labor market, and especially so for women of color (Allen, 1996).

Many studies that somewhat address women's preferred position and feminist standpoint theories generally emphasize policy making and the importance of theoretical understanding while the way which women project their life experiences into the legislative process is rarely discussed in the academic field. As a result, this research is an ongoing project in exploring how female lawmakers maintain their roles and responsibilities in the legislation process that is perhaps impacted by their life experiences. It is expected that this chapter will offer an alternative dimension to that of the practical perspective in understanding the relationship between women's position and their life experiences in respect to the legislation process.

## THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

To begin discussing the reasons why female lawmakers may have their own policy priorities and preferences, we must start from the point of view of the maternal thinking and socialization that dominate women's lives. Further, through the process of consciousness-raising on gender, women as a result see themselves as a group united and engaged in activities to improve their social, economic, and political status in society.

### THE NATURE OF FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY

'Feminist standpoint theory' gives researchers a view of the social structures which shape individuals' lives. As Nancy Hartsock in *Money, Sex, and Power* points out, individuals' knowledge, values and beliefs are structured by society. Since women and men together organize society, they are structurally assigned to two opposite groups within society that further develop their beliefs, experiences, and lives based on material relationships, that is, their daily living styles. According to Hartsock's assertions, women's work is systematically different from men's in every society. The sexual division of labor is the central element that has caused the different developments in men and women's activities, as well as the different

epistemological consequences. The difference in development is not limited to the knowledge of individual women or men, but also extends to systematized social practices and experiences. Women's experiences in everyday life in society differ systematically from men's according to their labors and gender. (Also see Hartsock, 1998).

Based on Hartsock's assertions, Mary Swigonski provides several tenets of feminist standpoint theory to support the concept of material life in how it develops the differences in beliefs and experiences between men and women in society. 'Life experience structures one's understanding of life. The appropriate perspective for research activities is everyday life' (Swigonski, 1994: 390–391). The individual concrete experiences in the daily lives of people are essential in understanding the diverging development of beliefs, insights and knowledge between men and women. For instance, women have very visible and tangible experiences such as childbirth and housework.

Importantly, women's daily experiences have encouraged them to develop a special sensitivity to their knowledge, values and preferences and to interpret them critically. Swigonski emphasizes that daily life experiences can be a tool of education for women in recognizing their inferior positions to men. For instance, a working woman is likely to support equal opportunity of employment if she experiences job discrimination in the workplace. As constantly heralded by feminists, 'the personal is political'. Moreover, people often encounter problems through personal daily experiences, and because people share their experiences with others, they can then connect the relationships with each other in the everyday world. Men and women as distinct groups accordingly develop their own standpoints through their shared experiences and commonalities.

The experiences of individuals shape their diverse insights and beliefs. According to feminist theory, women's experiences emerge from their daily living. As Dorothy Smith in *The Everyday World as Problematic* indicates, '(...) individual experiences, concern, needs, aims, interests, arising among people in the everyday and working contexts of their living, are given expression in forms that articulate them to the existing practices and social relations constituting its rule' (Smith, 1987: 56). For women, the daily problematic is housework and caring for family members, which has limited women's possibilities in pursuing opportunities in the public field, such as higher positions in the workplace or in the political arena.



### *Maternal Thinking*

Because of their biological functions, women, not men, experience menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. Both men and women within the social structure tend to perceive that women by nature have the responsibility for childcare and other domestic work. The maternal practice thus begins in response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world. To be a 'mother' is to take upon oneself the responsibility of childcare, constituting a regular and substantial part of one's working life (Ruddick, 1989: 17). Maternal thinking and the demands of maternal work – for preservation, growth, and social acceptability – envelops a woman's responsibility and commitment in daily life to her family, which consequently requires her to stay at home and limit her choices in participation in the public sphere (Smith, 1987: 88).

Sara Arber and Jay Ginn (1995) respond to the result that motherhood and housework have on women in participating in the workplace and to how both women's husbands and society generally impose responsibilities for childcare and other domestic work upon women. Clearly, childrearing and regular housework can occupy most of women's lifetimes so that women often do not have extra time to work in the outside world. Even though there are some opportunities to work in the workplace, women are frequently limited to jobs related to supposed female characteristics such as being nurses, teachers in the primary schools, and secretarie Rose Capdevila demonstrated that 'good mothering was understood to involve women in child-related public activities such as school functions. It was through these public activities, as integral to the "mothering" of their children, that some women became involved in politics' (Capdevila, 2000: 487). Therefore, it is often assumed that women join the public sphere because of their mothering. Alison Bailey points out, 'the most popular uniting theme in feminist peace literature grounds women's peace work in mothering' (Bailey, 1994: 188). Women and mothers contribute to society in different ways than men, since from childhood women are socialized and stereotyped to fit in the private arena. They play roles as caretakers and children-raisers for their families.

Thus, women, as mothers and wives, are likely to extend their maternal role beyond family to society. Maternal identification will be used in women's political activities.

### *Socialization in the Family*

Socialization ensures that the responsibilities of childrearing and caring will be allotted to women. Hartsock insists that motherhood is an institution and adds

that ‘(...) women as a sex are institutionally responsible for producing both goods and human beings and all women are forced to become the kinds of people who can do both’ (Hartsock, 1983: 291). In order to be capable mothers or caretakers, women are nurtured and educated in different ways than men. For example, girls are given dolls and kitchen toys that mimic the very roles of mothers; conversely, boys have toy guns to play ‘cops and robbers’. This process of socialization ensures that the responsibilities and duties of caring will be assigned to women. Such women’s responsibilities are extended to take care of housework, old people, and other work related to caring. Hence, in the working world, women’s primary jobs are categorized as women’s work, such as nurses, primary and middle school teachers and secretaries.

Generally, in contrast to a male life, maternal thinking is the essential socialization and the central experience of a female life. The reason is that a female earns her life experience nurtured by her mother, rather than by birth. The effects of ‘nature and nurture’, which make men and women act in different ways, cannot be separated. This begins at a very young age with, for example, the assignment of different toys according to the sex of the child (i.e. girls with dolls and boys with toy guns). Thus, socialization guarantees that women will be limited to their womanly duties. In addition, girls learn connective, interpersonal and relational skills in their concrete relations with their mothers as a form of socialization and training. In contrast, boys are not educated to play a role with their mothers; they experience an abstract behavior without the concrete attachment of motherhood (Hartsock, 1983. 291). Therefore, boys grow up in a flexible and free way, and become more independent, assertive and autonomous than girls.

**Table 4.2: Theoretical foundations**

Contents	Maternal Thinking	Socialization
Gendered roles	Mothers	Mothers/caretakers
Personal characteristics	Careful/nurturing	Softhearted/gentle/tender
Labor divisions	Private area	Private area
Job categories	Housekeeper	Related to women, e.g. nursing
Training	For family/children	For others
Responsibilities	Childrearing	Social caring
Life experiences	Motherhood	Sisterhood

As a result of different socialization and learning, women and men have distinct growing-up experiences that shape the development of their personalities, values and beliefs. For both men and women, these early learning and training

activities also become the essential foundation of gender identification which influences their judgment, preferences and beliefs in their vocations and daily lives. Women have a strong sense of self-connection to others through their personal experiences of caring and identification with their mothers (see Table 4.2). This sensitivity gives them a creative ability to sense the problems they confront in their daily lives.

In addition to socialization, gender consciousness-raising becomes a crucial factor in transferring women's gender identity into the public field, especially in the political arena. Early learning and experiences within the family and daily life influence adult beliefs and the assigning of work that has led to women's minimal public role. However, since women have acquired sensitivity and creativity from their daily experiences, when elected as lawmakers they are likely to show the problems related to their lives (such as childcare, healthcare, family welfare, educational reforms and crime prevention) in their policy preferences.

### *Hypotheses*

According to feminist standpoint theory, congresswomen have similar life experiences; therefore, they are likely to speak for women's issues in legislation. The first hypothesis is that 'congresswomen's gender experiences influence the kinds of legislation they support in Taiwan'. Regardless of their different partisan backgrounds, women legislators will speak similarly on women's issues. However, their common life experiences do not transcend partisan differences for issues related to economics, defense policies, or foreign relations. The second assumption is that 'congresswomen will speak about women's interests more frequently than other issues in their speechmaking on the floor'. Women's presence in Congress impacts on the legislative agenda and culture. Therefore, policy preferences held by congresswomen in Taiwan may be personal and are induced by their gender and life experiences. In this research, according to the hypotheses, the dependent variable is 'speeches on the floor'. The main independent variables are 'gender and political party'.

### *Research Design*

To test the hypotheses, all floor speeches delivered by congresswomen in the 4<sup>th</sup> Legislative Yuan in Taiwan (between 1998 and 2000) are selected as research samples. This period is politically important since the number of congresswomen significantly increased from 40 to 50 at the end of the twentieth century.

## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE RESERVED-SEAT SYSTEM IN TAIWAN

The Public Officials Election and Recall Law was first promulgated by the President in May 1960 and was finally amended in 2004 through fifteen various amendments. According to Article 31 of The Public Officials Election and Recall Law regulating the qualification of a candidate, '(...) a citizen of the Republic of China who has attained the age of 23 has no household record or resided abroad sequentially not less than eight years may be registered by a legally established political party as a candidate for public official representing overseas Chinese' (Central Electoral Commission in Taiwan 2004).

In order to ensure a minimum level of female representation in the Legislative Yuan, the government in Taiwan has applied a reserved-seat system, which provides a minimum number of seats for women in legislative bodies as a measure of achieving the advancement of women to elective office. The Additional Articles of the Constitution amended in April 2000 limits the total number of legislators and imposes a number of seats to be allotted to female representatives in the legislative election. Based on Article 4, the Legislative Yuan shall have 225 members beginning with the Fourth Legislative Yuan, who shall be elected in accordance with the following provisions:

1. One hundred and sixty-eight members shall be elected from the Special Municipalities, counties, and cities in the free area. At least one member shall be elected from each county and city.
2. Four members each shall be elected from among the lowland and highland aborigines in the free area.
3. Eight members shall be elected from among the Chinese citizens who reside abroad.
4. Forty-one members shall be elected from the nationwide constituency. (Office of the President in ROC 2004)

Where the number of seats for each Special Municipality, county, and city as set forth in Item 1, and for each political party as set forth in Item 3 and Item 4, is not fewer than five and not more than ten, one seat shall be reserved for a female member. Where the number exceeds ten, one seat out of each additional ten shall be reserved for a female member.

In addition, Article 65–1 of the Electoral Law declares that in the event of a '(...) woman quota in an election of public official and when the number of the elected women are less than the quota, the ballots received by the female candidates shall be counted separately, the one who receive a plurality of these

ballots shall be elected.' The calculation is done as follows, but is not applicable to constituencies where there is no woman candidate:

1. In area elections of delegates of the National Assembly or members of the Legislative Yuan, if the woman quota is not enough as prescribed in the result of ballot-opening, the total amount of ballots for female candidates who are not elected should be counted separately and compared to decide the elected by amount of ballots most obtained in order in the constituency.
2. In area elections of Municipal City Councilmen, County (City) Councilmen, Township (City) representatives, if the woman quota is not enough as prescribed in the result of ballot-opening, the total amount of ballots for female candidates who are not elected should be counted separately and compared to decide the elected by amount of ballots most obtained in order in the constituency.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of the above-mentioned articles, the reserved-seat system is helpful for women in gaining seats in the Legislative Yuan. For example, in the legislative election of 2004, there was not one female candidate out of the total 16 candidates who obtained a number of ballots higher than the male candidates in Tainan County. As a result of the Electoral Law, of the eight seats elected into the legislature for this County, one female candidate named Yi-Jing Ye who earned the highest ballots among the female candidates in Tainan County obtained the reserved seat in her constituency. The final electoral result dismissed the eighth male electee despite the fact that he obtained more votes than Ye did. In the current situation, the elective competition among female and male candidates to enter legislative office is not particularly favorable to women. Women still constitute the minority of candidates in elections, thus, the reserved-seat system can indeed be of benefit to female candidates desiring to participate in the legislative body.

### *Area of Research*

The legislature is an important institution for women to participate in if women are to improve their social, economic and political positions. The legislative process includes the introduction of bills, the assignment to committees, participation in committee hearings and debates on the floor, and voting on the passage of laws. The legislature not only makes laws, but also negotiates and compromises political, economic, and social advantages (Keefe and Ogul, 1997: 3). In the legislative process, floor speeches allow representatives to show not only their expert knowledge and experiences, but also to enable women lawmakers to voice their political commitments, concerns, and beliefs on public issues, such as healthcare/welfare and economic issues. Using both quantitative

and qualitative analyses, this chapter now examines the kinds of arguments used by women in discussing healthcare/welfare, children/family, education, and crime prevention in America and Taiwan. Through their speeches on the floor, representatives present their political attitudes and positions on certain issues. These speeches serve as indicators of the communication and cohesiveness of the legislative activities of congresswomen. The floor speeches presented by women members of the Taiwanese Legislative Yuan are analyzed for their policy content in relation to women's socialization, maternal thinking and life experiences. If female lawmakers are willing to speak in favor of similar women's issues and demonstrate demands and interests of females in the debate process, then women can unite as agents of change in promoting their social, economic and political status in the world.

### SELECTING CONGRESSWOMEN AND CASES

The sample of female lawmakers in Taiwan is selected from the year of 1998 from 20 cities and counties (Taipei City, Taipei County, Taichung City, Taichung County, Tainan City, Tainan County, Pintang County, Taoyuan County, Kaoshiung City, Kaoshiung County, Keelung City, Yunlee County, Xinzhu City, Jiayin City, Jiayin County, Zhanghua, Local Indigenous District, At Large, and Overseas).

The substantive focus of the research is on debates on the floor from 1998 to 2000 in the Taiwan Legislature. During this period, congresswomen spoke on many important issues, such as healthcare, gun safety and violence prevention. The speeches used to defend bills sponsored by congresswomen are analyzed to explore the effect of gender in the use of language. Women's language in speeches reflects sympathy, compassion, caution, gentleness, family-orientation, and support for more education and welfare spending. In order to apply feminist standpoint theory, such samples are accordingly categorized as healthcare, family/children, education, and crime prevention in exploring the policy preferences of congresswomen with the use of Frequency Analysis.

In Taiwan, speeches by legislators are recorded in the Congressional Bulletin, which includes speakers' names, contents, and the dates and times of speeches. The titles of speeches are accordingly divided into groups such as healthcare/welfare, education and crime prevention. Healthcare and welfare policies deal with issues related to medical treatment, family, child and women's benefits. The frequencies of lawmakers' speeches in these five categories are calculated based on speech titles in the 4<sup>th</sup> Taiwan Legislative Yuan. For example, if a lawmaker

speaks about a policy related to healthcare five times, then the frequency of speeches on health policy is recorded as five.

Furthermore, the contents of speeches are analyzed in order to understand the reasons that lawmakers speak in favor of children/health, education policies and so on. The language or words used in the speeches are further categorized into different reasons why lawmakers speak on a particular issue, such as speaking on behalf of women, children, or seniors with regard to healthcare/welfare policies. The data is collected from the Congressional Bulletin in Taiwan, an official document recording all activities and speeches in Congress. The total of speeches numbers 235 in the 4<sup>th</sup> Taiwan Legislative Yuan.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

According to feminist standpoint theory, women are more likely to be concerned about women's interests and children issues regardless of different culture and background. The reason is that women have gender consciousness to recognize their inferior position in society, compared to male positions in a similar environment. For instance, a female is supposed to take care of her family first, before she finds a job outside the family. Therefore, through floor speeches, female lawmakers show stronger concerns for healthcare/welfare policies than for policies addressing education and crime prevention.

**Table 4.3: Total frequencies of speeches in the 4<sup>th</sup> legislature in Taiwan**

Policies	KMT	DPP	NP	PFP	Total
Children/Health	44	18	2	5	69
Education	21	17	4	3	45
Crime protection	9	15	16	5	45
Foreign/Military	6	7	0	2	15
Economic	24	17	18	2	61
TOTAL	93	74	40	17	235

Source: From the author. Note: There are four main parties sharing the seats in the 4<sup>th</sup> Legislature in Taiwan: The Kuomintang (KMT), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), New Party (NP), People First Party (PFP)

### *Children/Health Policies*

In Taiwan, forty-three female lawmakers spoke 69 times on healthcare and children policies, 19 times on the 921 Earthquake, seven times on hospital equipment, six times on medical treatment, and finally five times on special diseases, welfare of retired soldiers, and family problems. These areas make up the top six important reasons why female lawmakers have devoted much

energy to the debates on this issue (see Table 4.4). From the feminist standpoint theoretical perspective, women are socialized to be family caretakers, thus the research results show that congresswomen in Taiwan are not surprisingly concerned about family and children more than other issues. As I-Zhan Chiang (KMT) said, the government should pay more attention to women who face unexpected situations within the family:

When women confront unexpected happenings in their workplace or families, they are in inferior positions without help. In order to assist these women to stand up for themselves as soon as possible, the government ought to enact law to help and protect them (I-Zhan Chiang [KMT], Congressional Bulletin, vol.89 no.25, May 17, 2000, p.40).

**Table 4.4: Reasons of speaking for children/health policies in Taiwan**

Items	KMT	DPP	NP	PFP	Total
921 earthquake	11	3	1	4	19
Hospital equipment	6	0	0	1	7
Medical treatment	3	3	0	0	6
Special diseases	4	1	0	0	5
Welfare of retired soliders	5	0	0	0	5
Family problems	2	2	1	0	5
Social welfare for senior people	4	0	0	0	4
Assistance of teenagers	0	3	0	0	3
Women's healthcare	0	1	0	0	1
Illegal abortion of teenagers	0	1	0	0	1
Eating problems of children	0	2	0	0	2
Assistance of women in special conditions	1	0	0	0	1
The weight of school bag in primary school	0	1	0	0	1
Protection of middle aged female aborigine people	1	1	0	0	2
Establishment of Children Bureau	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	44	18	2	5	69

Note: KMT= Kuomintang; DPP= Democratic Progressive Party, PFP=People First Party, NP=New Party.

On the other hand, congresswomen in Taiwan are also concerned about family problems including the care of seniors and children at home. One possible explanation for this concern is that women are socialized as caretakers in family. Therefore, when women enter the political center, they are likely to consider the problems encountered by the elderly or teenagers or children.



### *Education Policies*

In Taiwan, female legislators spoke 45 times on education policies in the 4<sup>th</sup> Legislative Yuan. They focused on three important areas on education policy and spoke 15 times on educational problems, 13 on the educational budget, and five time on school textbooks (see Table 4.5). On education policies, congresswomen demonstrate their compassion for preschool children and unstable financially insecure couples. Xin-yan Lu (Kuomintang) agrees that the government should support preschool education for young couples:

Young couples are usually troubled about financial inadequacy, while having to take care of the children and seniors in their families, which have caused most of them to have financial burdens. In this situation, they are unable to send children between three to six years old to study in kindergarten. Therefore, the government should provide financial aids to help young parents solving their financial problem (Xin-yan Lu [KMT], Congressional Bulletin, Vol.89 No. 60, November 2000, p. 61).

In terms of education policies, female legislators are more concerned about educational problems and finances than other items.

**Table 4.5: Reasons of speaking for education policies in Taiwan**

Items	KMT	DPP	NP	PFP	Total
Educational problems	7	6	2	0	15
Protection of educational budget	9	0	2	2	13
Text books in primary school	1	3	0	1	5
Handicapped students	2	2	0	0	4
Professional examination	0	2	0	0	2
Qualification of English teachers in primary school	0	2	0	0	2
Selection of principals in the primary and middle schools	1	1	0	0	2
Loan of dormitory	1	0	0	0	1
Education of gender equality	0	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	21	17	4	3	45

Note: KMT= Kuomintang; DPP= Democratic Progressive Party, PFP=People First Party, NP=New Party.

A possible reason is that women tend to assume the responsibility for the education of their children and also to handle family expenditure; thus, they are more likely to be concerned with education policies. They consider influencing education policies as their responsibilities.

### *Crime Protection Policies*

In Taiwan, when concerning crime protection policies, costal patrol law is addressed on ten occasions and is more highlighted than other concerns. The other two important subjects include human rights and civil law. If civil law and criminal law are not rationally enacted, human rights may run the risk of being undermined. Therefore, female lawmakers in the 4<sup>th</sup> Legislature speak eight times in the name of human rights and six times for civil law. In addition, female lawmakers are also concerned about the safety of students and women, especially about teenagers' safety.

**Table 4.6: Reasons for crime protection policies in Taiwan**

Items	KMT	DPP	NP	PFP	Total
Costal patrol law	1	1	4	4	10
Human rights	0	6	2	0	8
Remedy of civil law	3	0	3	0	6
Remedy of criminal law	0	0	4	0	4
Safety of school campus	2	0	0	1	3
Prohibition of sexual violence	0	3	0	0	3
Protection of women's safety	1	1	0	0	2
Proposal of witness protection law	0	0	2	0	2
Prohibition of motorcycle race	1	0	0	0	1
Drug problem	0	1	0	0	1
Crimes of copyrights	0	1	0	0	1
Prohibition of illegal cybercafé	0	1	0	0	1
Employment law	1	0	0	0	1
Prohibition of driver without safety helmet	0	1	0	0	1
Prohibition of guns	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	9	15	16	5	45

Note: KMT= Kuomintang; DPP= Democratic Progressive Party, PFP=People First Party, NP=New Party.

Legislator Pi-E Tang (Democratic Progressive Party) pointed out that the government has the responsibility to help troubled children to avoid criminal behavior:

Because of the change of social structure, the family relationship between parents and children is gradually changed. The ideals of gender relationship and family relationship have shifted. The functions of family are gradually decreased, thus increasing crime rates. The government has responsibility to prevent crime and to help families taking care of trouble children (Pi-E Tang [DDP], Congressional Bulletin, Vol. 89 No. 74, December 2000, p. 177).

According to Table 4.6, female lawmakers are concerned as well with the prohibition of drugs and guns. Women are socialized to take care of children, and they will therefore, be likely to protect their children and ensure that they are able to avoid trouble or crime.

### *Foreign/Military Policies*

According to feminist standpoint theory, female lawmakers are more likely to support issues related to women or welfare than other issues because of their education and training. Not surprisingly then female lawmakers are less concerned with foreign/military policies than other issues, which they addressed a total of fifteen times in their floor speeches. In terms of Table 4.7, female lawmakers spoke most about the political relationship between the Mainland and Taiwan. An explanation for this is that most foreign governments recognize that the 'One China Policy' has had a significant impact on the Taiwanese people, especially in international trade and traveling. Therefore, the issues related to China and Taiwan's relation have been emphasized by female legislators.

**Table 4.7. Reasons for foreign/military policies in Taiwan**

Items	KMT	DPP	NP	PFP	Total
'Three direct links' between the Mainland and Taiwan	3	1	0	0	4
Taiwanese and Mainland law	1	2	0	0	3
Illegal entrance of Mainland fishermen into Taiwan	1	1	0	0	2
Military services	0	2	0	0	2
Diplomatic gifts	0	0	0	1	1
Entrance of Mainlanders into Taiwan	0	1	0	0	1
Military duties	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	6	7	0	2	15

Note: KMT=Kuomintang; DPP=Democratic Progressive Party, PFP=People First Party, NP=New Party. 'Three Direct Links' across the Straits (the Mainland and Taiwan) means postal link mail service, transport link shipping, service, business link (Trade, Investment and Finance) trade.

### *Economic Policies*

Standpoint theorists argue that women are concerned about the disadvantaged minorities and poverty when addressing economics issue because of their experiences and consciousness-raising. Farmers in Taiwan receive more recognition than other groups because agriculture has been the economic foundation in Taiwan. But most farmers do not acquire a high education. Hence, they represent one of the most vulnerable groups in Taiwan.

Female lawmakers have experienced an inferior position to men and thus, understand the farmers' inferior situation. Female legislators are likely to speak for agriculture, as they have on 34 occasions in their speeches (see table 4.8).

In sum, the overall result of female lawmakers' particular emphasis on health, education, crime, and foreign policies clearly showed an influence of their gender. Hence, congresswomen are more likely to speak on behalf of the interests of women, seniors and minorities.

**Table 4.8. Reasons for economic policies in Taiwan**

Items	KMT	DPP	NP	PPF	Total
Agriculture	9	11	14	0	34
Assistance of earthquake disaster	5	0	1	1	7
WTO	3	1	2	1	7
Fishery	3	2	0	0	5
Finance	2	1	0	0	2
Middle size enterprise	1	0	1	0	2
Tax reduction in medication	1	0	0	0	1
Bullet train plan	0	1	0	0	1
Credit cards for students	0	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	24	17	18	2	61

Note: KMT= Kuomintang; DPP= Democratic Progressive Party, PFP=People First Party, NP=New Party

## CONCLUSION

Feminist standpoint theory emphasizes the importance of life experiences. Maternal thinking and childhood socialization influence women's experiences, which affect women's beliefs, attitudes and eventually their political identification. Because of maternal thinking and socialization, women are assigned particular roles within the family as caregivers of children and family members, whereas men are socialized to join the public arena and become the protectors and providers of the family.

With the help of gender consciousness-raising, women have gradually widened their lives from the private to the public sphere. Women have not only become financial supporters for the family, but also a crucial part of the workforce. More importantly, with the help of gender consciousness-raising, women have also recognized that participation in the political arena may be an additional way to benefit women. Because of their personal life experiences, they have become the promoters and the speakers for women's demands and interests in the public arena, especially in Congress. Because of their life experience, female lawmakers

are likely to support women's issues, such as healthcare/welfare, education and crime prevention policies for women and children.

As Table 4.9 demonstrates, congresswomen in Taiwan are concerned about medication and the 921 earthquake in healthcare/welfare policies. When tackling education policies, they speak primarily about the various education problems. In policies related to crime prevention, female lawmakers emphasize public safety and troubled teenagers. Thus, the results of this research have confirmed the hypothesis that congresswomen's gender experiences influence the kind of legislation they support. Regardless of their different backgrounds, female legislators speak similarly on women's issues. Meanwhile, congresswomen will speak about women's interests more frequently than other issues in their speeches on the floor. According to the statistical results, congresswomen speak for healthcare/welfare policies more frequently than education and crime prevention policies. They are additionally concerned about women's health, elderly care, the medical system and social welfare. 'Party identification' is apparently not an influential variable in legislation that concerns women's issues. Female lawmakers from whatever party are likely to speak for women's benefits.

**Table 4.9: Main reasons for speaking policies in the 4<sup>th</sup> Taiwan legislative Yuan**

Policies	Items
Children/Health	921 earthquakes, Hospital equipment, Medicare treatment
Education	Education problems, Protection of educational budget, Textbooks in primary school
Crime protection	Costal patrol law Human rights Remedy of civil law
Foreign/Military	Three contacts between the Mainland and Taiwan Taiwanese and Mainlanders law Mainland fishermen
Economics	Agriculture Assistance of earthquake disaster WTO

The analyses presented in this research are most useful in explaining the effect of gender on policy agenda. Female lawmakers show similar commitments and beliefs in legislation. They have their own policy priorities, such as healthcare/welfare issues, and consequently speak for their own preferred policies that may

benefit women and children. Therefore, if we want to have more policies to benefit women, then we have to elect more female lawmakers who are likely to support women's demands in Congress. Based on similar commitments and beliefs, female lawmakers can be expected to unite and support women's interests and demands. The consequence could be a feminized transformation of politics. Women may constitute the biggest potential agents of change in Taiwan in the future.

#### NOTE

- 1 Official translation, the Central Electoral Commission in Taiwan, 2004.

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## Chapter 5

# WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN JAPAN

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*Kazuki Iwanaga*

Despite the fact that Japan is one of the richest societies in the world and that Japanese women have made significant gains in accessing higher education and professions, women continue to be conspicuously absent from the political scene both at the national and local levels. Although 60 years have passed since Japanese women obtained suffrage in 1946, the gender gap in politics remains enormous. The proportion of female legislators in the Lower House (House of Representatives) in Japan is the lowest among advanced industrial democracies, occupying 102<sup>nd</sup> place in 2005, making it almost equivalent to that of developing countries such as Kenya. At the local level, female governors and mayors are also a rarity. Attempting to increase the numbers of women in public office alone may not solve the issue of gender equality, but arguments in favour of more women in politics are compelling. Increasing the proportion of women holding office at various levels of government may have significant consequences for the distinctive impact they are likely to have on public policy. The increased presence of women can indeed make a difference within the various dimensions of policymaking. So long as very few women are serving in public office, it appears unlikely that their token presence in male-dominated institutions will have much of a gender-related impact on public policy.

The main questions to address in this chapter are: Why are so few women elected to the national parliament in Japan? What are the major barriers facing women's entrance into the political arena in Japan? Can theories developed in the advanced industrialized democracies of Europe and the United States explain women's under-representation in Japanese politics?



## THE PAUCITY OF WOMEN IN JAPANESE POLITICS

Women could not vote in Japan until 1946 and since then women have minimally succeeded in achieving even token representation in the Parliament. The progress of women in achieving political equality has been very slow. Only a few women have been able to achieve political positions of relative significance. At all levels of government, women are fewer in number and are generally restricted to marginal and peripheral roles in the political process despite the fact that they make up half the electorate and that a slightly higher percentage of women than men have voted in every national election since 1969. In both houses of the Diet (Parliament) and in the government, women in Japan have been grossly under-represented. This implies that the interests and perspectives of women are not properly represented in the political decision-making processes. As for cabinets, it was not until 1960 that the first woman was appointed as a minister.<sup>1</sup> Only eighteen women served in cabinet positions between 1960 and 2001. The country has long been at the bottom of the group of advanced industrialized democracies in terms of the proportion of women in the cabinet. One of the major reasons for the low number of women in Japanese cabinets is due to the very low proportion of women in the Diet, thus a seat in the Parliament, especially in the lower house, is almost always a prerequisite for a ministerial post. However, the number of female cabinet members increased after the accession of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. After 2001 Prime Minister Koizumi appointed ten female ministers to his cabinet (as of September 2005).

The gender bias against women is extended to the arena of bureaucracy. In Japan, bureaucrats play a central role in the processes of agenda setting, policy making and implementation. Women are virtually absent in high positions of the powerful government bureaucracy. Only about 1 per cent of female officials hold posts in the three highest grades, the ninth, the tenth and the eleventh (Naikakufu 2003). The proportion of women serving on government advisory councils and committees attached to the various ministries and agencies during the last three decades has also been low, although the numbers of women have steadily grown as a result of the government's conscious efforts to increase the presence of women in the policy decision-making process. In 1975 women's representation in these councils was 2.4 per cent and has steadily increased, reaching 26.8 per cent in 2003.

An overview of parliamentary elections shows that the proportion of women representatives has grown remarkably slowly. In the 1946 general election, the first election in which women were able to exercise their vote, 79 women ran and 39 of them were elected (their success rate 49%), making up 8.4 per cent of the

Lower House.<sup>2</sup> Since this time and until 2005 this particular record number was never broken and the proportion of female legislators in the Lower House ranged from 1.4 to 7.3 per cent. In the Upper House, women fared much better, with a proportion varying from 4.8 to 17.5 per cent. Why has female representation in the Upper House consistently been greater than in the Lower House? The existing literature in the field of gender and politics suggests that the proportion of women tends to be inversely related to the degree of power attached to the post. This pattern of the so-called 'iron law of politics' – 'the more the power, the fewer the women' – should also be seen in light of a corollary, namely 'the more competitive the elective office, the fewer the women'. 'The power and prestige of the political office seem to be factors in determining the level of representation of women – the more desirable the office and/or the greater the competition for it, the less likely it is that women will be represented' (Bih-er, Clark and Clark 1990: 23). Women are less likely to be elected in the Lower House where the competition for office becomes stiffer.

The generalization that the level of power and competitiveness of the public office influences the proportion of female representation is confirmed by the fact that there are more women in the Upper House than in the Lower House in Japan. The Japanese constitution gives the Lower House more power in several critical respects. It has the final voice in formally selecting the prime minister. It also has the dominant power to approve budgets and treaties, and affect a vote of no confidence in the cabinet. The inferior position of the Upper House is reflected in its lesser status and prestige in the political decision-making process. The post of prime minister and most cabinet posts go to members of the Lower House. Because of the weak position of the former, ambitious politicians in Japan run for the Lower House rather than for the Upper House. In short, the lower power and prestige associated with the Upper House, and therefore the less competition for office, are two of the major reasons why there is a greater number of women in the Upper House.

Some commentators referred to the 1989 Upper House election as 'The Year of the Woman' because of the unprecedented number of women running as well as winning in the election, obtaining 22 seats (17.5 per cent) out of 126 seats at stake. Women's remarkable successes during this year were attributed to a variety of factors. A closer look at the 1989 election shows a strong linkage between various facilitators. The political climate favoured women candidates as election campaigns focused on several issues related to women. Such issues included the unpopular three per cent consumption tax which antagonized many housewives as introduced by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government,

the corruption scandal which involved a number of leading LDP politicians, and the issue of Prime Minister Sosuke Uno's love affair with a former geisha. Additionally, the enormous personal popularity of Japan's first woman party leader Takao Doi of the Social Democratic Party (SDP)<sup>3</sup> apparently played a significant role in the success of women candidates. It was under her charismatic leadership that the SDP searched for new unproven women candidates outside the party's normal channels.

In 1989 women were also able to capitalize on the favourable political environment that was provided by the great swing away from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to the Social Democratic Party (SDP), thus facilitating a relatively great increase of women elected. It was the first time that the SDP and other opposition parties obtained a majority of the seats in the Upper House. It is interesting to note that the political parties seldom fielded women candidates before the late 1980s. And the 1989 election campaign was probably the first in which parties specifically targeted female voters. Throughout the campaign, for instance, the SDP attempted to mobilize women voters.

In the 1989 House of Councillors (Upper House) election it was realized that women were finally able to breach the political glass ceiling and were on the path to achieving electoral gains. The success of women continued into the 1990 general election, notwithstanding that the short-term effect of the issues that were favourable to women candidates had largely disappeared and the anti-LDP attitude that surged in the 1989 House of Councillors election had also subsided. However, a number of female legislators elected in 1989 and 1990 proved unsuccessful in their subsequent attempts at re-election due to their lack of experience in politics. Since these eventful years, the improvement of women's representation has continued thanks to the introduction of a mixed electoral system for the Lower House in 1994. This system was first applied in the general election of 1996, producing results which in terms of the representation of women starkly diverged from those in elections preceding 1993.

Women are poorly represented at the lower levels of government. One of the interesting features of women's representation in politics in Japan is that until recently the rate of female legislators in local assemblies has lagged behind that in the Diet. In many other industrial democracies, the proportion of women's participation in legislatures at lower levels of government is higher. Until the late 1980s, women were almost excluded in local assemblies. As late as 1987, the proportion of local assembly-women was only two per cent. Despite some factors that may positively affect women's representation in local government (i.e. less competition for positions available, increased possibilities to participate

in politics alongside employment and family responsibilities, and increased acceptance of women's involvement in local-level government), it has long been difficult for women to enter electoral politics, even at the local level. As women's interest in political involvement continues to grow, the public becomes less hostile to politically active women as more women increasingly begin to run for local elections and get elected. Women's representation in local assemblies has been increasing steadily since the 1990s. After the 2003 local election, the proportion of local assembly-women increased to 7.6 per cent, slightly higher than the percentage of female MPs. Only a few women have achieved the highest positions within the regional and local governments, including the offices of governor and mayor. This pattern was finally broken in February 2000 when Japan's first woman governor, Fusae Ota, was elected to the Osaka prefecture, the second most populous prefecture after Tokyo. There are currently four out of 47 governors who are women (as of May 2004), thus bringing the proportion of female governors from zero to 8.5 per cent. As for the proportion of female mayors, the progress has been much slower. There are seven female city mayors (1 per cent), six female town mayors (0.3 per cent), and one female village mayor (0.2 per cent).

Women's recruitment to local and provincial assemblies is naturally of interest since it provides a good training ground for women wishing to pursue political careers at higher levels of government in addition to providing a future pool of women candidates for the Japanese Parliament. Women who run for political office at the national level often start by holding office at the local level, thus the low percentage of women elected to local assemblies does not offer bright prospects for women's representation in the Parliament in the future. Recruitment to the Parliament is often made up of members from a certain strata of society. Three types of occupational backgrounds are prominent among elected candidates: local politicians, ex-bureaucrats and secretaries to Diet members. Those who held positions in the local legislative organs seem to have the greatest advantage over other candidates, possibly due to both name recognition and patronage. Thus, it is not surprising to find that about 26 per cent of the newly elected members of the Lower House in 2005 were local politicians. 15 per cent of the newly elected members were ex-bureaucrats. As in the past, secretaries to Diet members were also an important channel into the Diet, occupying the third place or 14 per cent of the successful candidates. These three types of occupations consequently constituted nearly 60 per cent of the 480 newly elected members of the House of Representatives. Hence, the poor representation of women in these fields and other 'suitable' occupations has further reduced women's opportunities for

legislative careers. Such opportunities are frequently limited to some individuals and are likely to be officials of farmers' cooperatives, doctors, lawyers, and persons with business careers, of which most are not women.

### WHY SO FEW WOMEN POLITICIANS IN JAPAN?

Political scientists have studied several plausible factors to explain women's political under-representation. Such factors include types of electoral systems, district magnitude (the number of seats assigned to each electoral district), party magnitude (the number of seats which a party expects to win), legislative turnover, incumbency, costs of electoral campaigns, party competition, strength of left-wing parties, political culture, strength of the women's movement, high employment of women in the labor force, and so on. Any adequate explanation for the paucity of women parliamentarians should further consider a combination of various factors rather than relying on only one type of explanation. For instance, it would be misleading to assign responsibility solely to electoral systems in isolation from the current cultural and socio-economic milieu. I will now focus on the relationship between the different aspects of electoral systems and the likelihood of women being elected to Parliament in Japan.

#### *Electoral Systems and Women's Representation*

Japan presents an interesting case for testing the relevance of the impact of electoral systems on women's representation. Japan, like many other Asian countries, is a patriarchal society and the political culture in which politics is conducted emphasizes the dominant role of men. The Japanese electoral system provides an excellent opportunity to study the impact of the two current electoral systems on women's representation under the same set of social, cultural, and economic conditions. The country since 1994 has undergone a radical transformation of its electoral system. Its longstanding electoral system for the lower house (House of Representatives), based on a single non-transferrable vote (SNTV) in multimember districts, was commonly known as the 'medium-sized election district system' and was replaced by a mixed system of single-member plurality elections and proportional representation as part of a political reform package aimed at putting an end to the dominance of money in electoral campaigns and an end to corruption. The previous system did not particularly facilitate women's advancement to public office. According to one study, it proved to be the one least favourable to advancing women's representation (Rule 1987).

Much previous comparative research INTO women's representation in parliaments has focused upon characteristics of the electoral system to account for

cross-national variations. Women appear to do better in some types of elections than others and many studies have shown that the type of electoral system is indeed a major factor in determining women's representation. In fact, the electoral system is often claimed to be 'the most single predictor of women's recruitment to parliament' (Rule 1994). Moreover, as Matland claims, changing a country's electoral system 'represents a far more realistic goal to work towards than dramatically changing the culture's view of women' (Matland 2002: 5).

There is a relatively strong consensus among scholars in literature concerning women and politics that the party list Proportional Representation (PR) systems result in greater representation of women in Parliament than plurality systems, and this conclusion is primarily based on electoral results in industrialized democracies. The common explanation for this is that parties in party list PR systems are more likely to nominate a woman in order to broaden their appeal as well as balance the ticket by representing various groups within the parties. In contrast, in plurality systems, parties are less likely to nominate a woman because the gatekeepers in the parties are more concerned that the parties will lose a seat to a male contender. It should be noted here that some research findings, on the other hand, have revealed reservations concerning the positive relationship between proportional representation systems and women's representation. However, in Sweden the PR system had already been implemented before a substantial increase in the proportion of women parliamentarians was noted (Sainsbury 1993).

What about the impact of a mixed electoral system on women's representation in Japan? If we agree with the contention that women seem to have a greater chance of getting elected in PR systems than under single-member district systems, then it is reasonable to assume that the likelihood of women being elected to Parliament is greater in a mixed electoral system than is the case in a single-member system, however less likely than in a proportional representation system. In other words, the effects of a mixed system on the likelihood of women being elected to Parliament are likely to fall somewhere between a single-member district system and a PR system.

The general elections of 1996, 2000, 2003 and 2005 support the contention that a PR system generally favors a greater increase in women's representation. Until 1993, the Lower House election was held according to the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) in multi-member districts, or as it is also commonly known in Japan as the 'medium-sized election district system'. This particular system did not facilitate women's advancement to public office. In fact, according to one study, the system was proved to be the one least favorable to

the advancement of women's representation (Rule 1987). Beginning with the 1996 general election, the electoral system was changed by combining single-member districts and districts based on party lists by using the d'Hondt method. As a result, the percentage of women in the House of Representatives under a combined system of single-member districts and party lists totalled 7.1, thus a total of 20 seats were occupied by women under the party lists while only 14 were allotted to women from single-member districts.

Before turning to details of the effects of electoral systems on female representation in the Japanese Parliament, we need first to describe the systems of electing legislators to its two houses. Under the old electoral system, 511 seats of the Lower House were selected according to the 129 multiple-member districts. This means that to win a majority position in the Lower House a party had to elect more than one candidate per district. However, with each voter having only one vote, it often promoted contestation, not only between competing parties but also between rival candidates from the same party. This was particularly so for large parties, such as the LDP, that frequently run more than one candidate in the same constituency and could not favor one at another's expense. As a consequence of this, well-organized personal support organizations of individual politicians, known as the *kôenkai*, served as the most important mechanism for mobilizing votes.

The 247 members of the Upper House (House of Councillors) are elected under two different electoral systems for a period of six years of which about half the seats are up for election every three years. In 2004, 48 members were elected from a nation-wide list under the proportional representation system and the other 73 Councillors were elected from 47 prefecture-wide constituencies based on a single non-transferrable vote, similar to the one used for the Lower House before the electoral reform in 1994. Voters cast two ballots, one vote for a candidate running for the national constituency and the other for a candidate for the prefectural constituency.

As noted, the electoral system for the Lower House was changed in 1994 from the SNTV system that was in operation in relatively small multimember districts into a mixed system as part of a political reform package aimed at putting an end to the importance of money in electoral campaigns and to corruption. Moreover, the new mixed system also aimed at strengthening party organizations. The operation of SNTV in multimember constituencies previously emphasized the importance of individual candidates and organizations and often resulted in intense intra-party competition. When Japan was confronted with constructing a new electoral system, one of the key issues it faced was whether it should be based



on the principle of proportionality or that of majority. The one finally adopted carries all the marks of the compromise it represents between the advocates of majority in single-seat district systems and PR. This hybrid system appears to offer a combination of the advantages of both the majority system and the PR system. In the debate over political reform in Japan, proponents of the majority system, of whom many were in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, argued that it would benefit the large parties at the expense of minor parties and that the price was worth paying in order to create a strong government and political stability. They also cited the high level of accountability as another advantage of plurality elections over proportional representation. For critics of the majority system, who often came from smaller parties, which preferred proportional representation, the case for reform was the unfairness of the plurality system for minor parties. The mixed electoral system is thus understood as a concession to the smaller parties.

Under the new system, the number of seats is reduced from 511 to 500, with 300 coming from single-member constituencies and 200 from eleven PR blocs. Voters cast two ballots, one for a candidate in the single-member constituency and one for a party in the PR bloc. Unlike the German mixed system, the results of the proportional and plurality elections are independent of each other. One interesting feature is that candidates can run for both the party list and for single-member constituencies as 'dual candidates'. Another interesting feature permits an unlimited number of such candidates to share the same priority slot in the proportional representation list. According to this scheme, each party submits a list of candidates for the eleven proportional districts with a priority number attached to each candidate. Hence, a loser in the single-seat district race can still win a seat in the proportional system, but only if the person has been ranked high enough to match the number of winners determined by the number of ballots gathered by the candidate's party in the proportional representation districts. In the 1996 general election, the PR lists were often looked upon by many candidates as a fallback against losses in district contests and consequently took their places on the lists as an 'insurance policy'. But what happened to female representation when Japan changed from a medium-size district system to a mixed system of single-member districts and proportional representation? The data from Japan are consistent with the contention that a PR system with party lists promotes higher levels of women's representation. For example, the percentage of women in the Lower House has advanced steadily since the introduction of the mixed system in Japan. And the results of the two portions of the Japanese general election in 1996 diverged much in the relative success of women. The PR races



allowed more women to be elected, while the plurality contests tended to limit the proportion of female representation.

The 1996 general election, the first election to apply this mixed system, shows clearly that women's opportunities in getting elected are hampered in the plurality race. As expected, a majority of winning women candidates, 16 out of 23, were elected in the proportional representation side of the Lower House. It should be noted that there were more seats on the constituency side, but women were still substantially more successful on the proportional side. Only 2.3 per cent of those elected in the plurality contest were women, while women constituted 8 per cent in the PR camp. In the 1996 general election, 21.6 per cent of the woman candidates in the proportional representation side of the electoral system for the Lower House were elected while a mere 5.5 per cent of women running for single-member constituencies were successful. When the plurality and PR counterparts of the system are examined individually, the election results frequently confirm the general finding of the women and politics literature on the relationship between electoral systems and women's electability. In a pure single-member plurality system, the number of women elected would have probably been less than the 1993 general election, which was the last election held under the previous electoral system. In contrast, the proportion of women would have been far more conducive to women's advancement to the Lower House, had it been strictly a proportional system. Alternatively, when the two systems are combined, the proportion of female representation consequently lie somewhere in between the two as they are examined separately, which is approximately 4.6 per cent.

How did women fare in the general election of June 2000? After the 1996 election, an intense political struggle was waged to introduce changes in the system. One such change was the number of seats allocated for the proportional side of the Lower House, which was reduced from 200 to 180. Hence, it was anticipated that this reduction would lead to lower levels of women's representation. Whatever the decreases were in the size of the Lower House, a decrease of women was evidently not matched as shown by the number of women candidates. A record number of 202 women candidates campaigned in the general election of 2000 (166 in single-seat districts and 102 in the proportional representation poll). While 37 per cent of the male candidates proved successful, the overall success rate of women in this election was 17 per cent. Despite more women presenting themselves as candidates than ever before, only 7.8 per cent of the women candidates were successful in single-member districts versus the 21.6 per cent who succeeded in proportional districts. At the end of the election, women

made up 7.3 per cent of Lower House members, 35 out of 480 seats, which constituted the second highest record of women legislators since the end of the Second World War. This figure amounts to a fifty per cent increase compared to the 23 women elected in the previous election of 1996, albeit the success rate of female candidates was less than half of their male counterparts.

In the 2003 general election, the number of women coming forward to stand for election was much less than the previous election. Only 149 ran for election, down from 202, and the number of those elected dropped slightly from 35 to 34. Women made up only 7.1 per cent of those elected and as in previous elections far more women were elected via party lists rather than through single member districts. In the proportional representation system, women succeeded in obtaining 20 seats out of the 180 seats, thus the rate of women's representation at 11 per cent is two and a half times higher than that of the single-seat constituency system. As is evident from the existing literature on women's political representation, opportunities for women in politics are severely limited by single-seat constituencies. This is illustrated by the fact that a mere 10.6 per cent of women candidates were elected to single-member constituencies while 26.7 per cent were elected to the proportional representation side of the electoral system for the Lower House.

The recent experiences with the new hybrid electoral system for the Upper House also show that its PR contest elects considerably more women than prefecture-wide local districts. Rein Taagepera (1994: 242), for example, found that the national constituency with its party-list system of PR 'is four times more favorable to women'. In 2001, 11 of the 48 (23 per cent) winners in PR contest were women, while women constituted only seven out of the 73 (9.6 per cent) winners in the electoral districts. The overall proportion of women in the Upper House, 14.9 per cent in 2001, is far higher than women have ever been able to achieve in the Lower House. In the 2004 Upper House election, the proportion of women elected in the national constituency was 16.7 per cent, much less than that of the previous election while both the number and percentage of women elected in the prefecture-wide local constituencies remained the same at 9.6 per cent.

Although the list system of proportional representation was first introduced in the 1983 Upper House election, it did not bring about an immediate increase in the proportion of women and it was not until the late 1980s that the system began to work favorably for women. Thus, the breakthrough for women's representation finally came in the 1989 Upper House election, increasing women's representation from 8.8 to 13.1 per cent. Since then the representation

rates in the Upper House has varied from between 13.1 and 15.2 per cent. It took another two elections before the fruits of the new PR system became apparent. How can one explain this time gap? When a new electoral system is introduced, there is quite often a transitional period before the electorate and political parties come to terms with its logic. It is not realistic to expect that such a change should deliver immediate results.

### *District Magnitude*

Why has women's representation in countries with proportional representation been greater than those with a single-member district system? A number of scholars claim that district magnitude, that is the number of legislative seats a district elects, is a guide to whether women are elected or not. Norris and Lovenduski (1995) argue that party-list PR systems with large district magnitudes tend to be the most conducive to high levels of women's representation. Women tend also to do better in larger districts where voters can choose more candidates (Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994: 153f; Rule 1987). A substantial amount of literature indicates that as the district magnitude increases, so does the number of women nominated to the party list as well as the number who get elected (Matland 1993; Rule 1987).

District magnitude is important because it influences the extent of electoral competition and the strength of smaller parties (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997; Taagepera and Shugart 1989). This is significant since smaller parties are more likely to nominate women candidates. When a district magnitude is limited to only one candidate, the political party is unable to balance the party ticket, thus parties in single-seat majority systems are less likely to nominate a woman because the parties fear they might lose the seat to a male competitor. On the other hand, when the district magnitude increases, the possibility that a party will win several seats in turn increases. In contrast to races in single-member constituencies, contests in multimember districts are not zero-sum games. As the number of seats of a district increases, the more party leaders are enabled to go further down the party list when selecting candidates. Parties can, for instance, slate women candidates to broaden their appeal in order to attract different categories of voters in addition to balancing the ticket. However, not all research findings have been consistent with regard to the impact of district magnitude on female representation in legislatures. According to some studies, the relationship is not strong as argued by Welch and Studler in their study of subnational elections in Great Britain and the United States. They found that district magnitude 'makes only a small and inconsistent difference to the electability of women' (Welch

and Studlar 1990: 408). District magnitude appears to make a difference with respect to the likelihood of women getting elected to Parliament, but only up to a certain point.

To test whether district magnitude influences women's representation, I collected data on the results of the Lower House elections of 1996, 2000, 2003 and 2005 as well as those of the Upper House elections of 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001 and 2004. In 1996 the district magnitude of the proportional representation portion of the Lower House election varied greatly in Japan, from seven seats to 33 seats. Generally, women performed better in large districts than in small ones. Women frequently did not gain representation when the district magnitude was below 13 and women did best in the largest district magnitude, which was a thirty-three member district. Japan's PR electoral district for the Upper House is as large as it could be – a nation-wide district – and thus allowed for the entrance of a relatively large number of women. The findings of the PR party list contests for both houses of the Diet are as a result compatible with the existing empirical evidence on this relationship.

The data from the general elections of 2000, 2003 and 2005 found the district magnitude's effect to be inconclusive. In these elections, the number of seats per district varied from 6 to 30 seats. As in the previous elections, the greatest representation of women was found in the largest district magnitude. But for other districts, on the other hand, the district magnitude had no direct effect. One possible explanation for the inconclusive results of the general elections of 2000, 2003 and 2005 can be that it is really the number of seats a party anticipates to win in an electoral district, or what is called the party magnitude, rather than the district magnitude that has traditionally been associated with women's representation. In other words, the district magnitude tends to improve women's representation only if it leads to a large party magnitude. If a political party expects to win only one or two seats in a district, it takes on the characteristics of a zero-sum game, as witnessed in the single-member district system. However, if a party has a realistic chance to win several seats in a district, then parties often consider balancing its ticket by including members from different groups on its list (Matland & Taylor 1997).

Because districts of different magnitudes are used for the 47 electoral districts in the Upper House prefecture-wide local constituency, it is useful to examine the impact of district magnitude on women's representation. In the 2004 election, there were 27 single member districts, 15 two-member districts, four three-member districts, and only one four-member district. The one-party dominance by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has long been the pattern

in single-member districts that are primarily found in rural areas. In the 2004 election, the Democratic Party challenged the dominance of the LDP in the single-member districts and succeeded in winning 12 districts out of 27 while the LDP won 14 districts. In areas where the district magnitude consists of one or even two members, women were less likely to be elected. If the two-member districts have a two-party system, the three- and four-member districts have a multi-party system. In his study of the 1989 Upper House election, Theodore McNelly found that 'women do better in large districts (PR and four-member districts) than in small districts (one-, two-, and three-member districts)' (McNelly 1994: 156).

In the Upper House elections of 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001 and 2004, the results are rather inconclusive and inconsistent for the prefecture-wide local constituency with the exception of the generalization that women tended to be better represented in multi-member districts over single-member districts. The likelihood of getting elected is greater in the highest district magnitude (single national district with its PR list), where there is only one district for the entire nation. It should be noted, however, that some countries with the highest district magnitudes show a very limited effect of district magnitude on women's political representation. For example, the proportion of women legislators in the Israeli Knesset is low, even though it has a single electoral district of 120 members. The case of Israel appears to support the contention that district magnitude leads to an increased number of women only if it leads to a large party magnitude, since many parties in Israel often expect to win just a few seats.

### WOMEN AND PARTIES' IDEOLOGICAL PERSUASIONS

In the electoral process, political parties act as gatekeepers in their role of appointing candidates to run for election. In some countries, the nature of parties' ideological persuasions tends to affect how parties differ in encouraging or discouraging women's access to parliament (Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994). Leftist and centrist parties are generally known for their greater support for gender equality. The attitudes of political parties toward women in politics can be a source of great difficulty for women in their efforts to overcome barriers to political representation. Women are quite often considered as electoral liabilities because of voter prejudice against them. As in many other parliamentary democracies, access to the political decision-making process in Japan is only possible through political parties. Parties determine which individuals will have the opportunity to seek elective public office, and thus parties play a key role in electing women to public office.

There are considerable differences in the recruitment of women candidates between the political parties, specifically in the proportion of women they nominate and where they rank women on the party lists. In Japan, the differences between the political parties can be in part explained by the existing ideological differences. Until quite recently, the increase in women's representation in the Diet has largely been a left-wing phenomenon in Japan. The parties on the left have generally been supportive of gender equality, as they espoused egalitarian ideologies and tend to nominate more women than the parties on the right. The Social Democratic Party of Japan was the most 'woman-friendly' party in the 2000 general election, in that 22 (or 29 per cent) of its candidates were women and a number of them were well-positioned to win. The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) has long been known for promoting women candidates in elections in order to garner women's votes. In 2000, the JCP fielded 84 women candidates making up 25 per cent of all the party's candidates. Although it was the Social Democrats and Communists who took the lead in nominating and electing women, their relatively small size meant that few were elected.

Left parties are not the only parties to support women. In recent elections, a great effort to recruit female candidates was made by the centrist Democratic Party, the largest opposition party. The party was formed in 1998 through the realignment process of political parties in the turbulent 1990s. In the 2003 Lower House and 2004 Upper House elections, women were identified as the target group where the party could expand its base of support, and it correspondingly fielded large numbers of women candidates. The party's efforts to attract women voters into its fold were successful. For example, according to an exit poll, the Democratic Party received the largest number of women votes in the proportional side of the 2004 Upper House election (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 12 July 2004, evening edition).

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the largest party in Japan, has proportionally sent much fewer women to parliament than have parties of the left and has one of the poorest records of all political parties in nominating female candidates. Even several smaller parties did much better in this respect, although their relatively small size meant that few women were eventually elected. The LDP continues to field only a few women candidates and the female candidates who do run are often run as sacrificial lambs, or in districts where they have little chance, if any, of winning. The LDP has long been a party of conservative moral and cultural values, and thus a woman candidate is still seen as a political risk (Pempel 1982: 35; Pharr 1981: 101). In the 2005 general election, the political representation of women was accorded high priority by the LDP under the

leadership of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. The 2005 election campaign was the first time in which the party specifically targeted the female vote. This strategy was successful, with all the party's 26 women candidates elected in their own right or on the proportional representation bloc, thanks to the LDP placing them high on its party lists. As a result, the LDP has almost trebled its number of female legislators in the Lower House to 26 from just nine. It helped bring the number of women elected to 43, the highest number since women won the franchise under the post-war constitution in 1946.

### PARTY COMPETITION

Some scholars suggest that the 'opportunity structures' for women candidates may be influenced by the nature of party competition within the parliament. Thus, increased party competition with multiple parties represented in the legislature, together with the growth of new parties may provide more opportunities for women candidates to run for office and get elected (Norris 1993: 317–19). Evidence from Japan supports this assertion. Until quite recently the party system did not facilitate women's recruitment to the Diet. From the formation of the so-called 1955 set-up until 1993, the Diet was dominated by two major parties from the left and the right, and party competition was mainly confined to these two. The party system in Japan during this period can be described in the terminology of Giovanni Sartori (1976) as a 'predominant party system'<sup>4</sup>, or alternatively as a 'one-and-a-half party system', which characterized the LDP's share of votes at the national elections in addition to its share of seats in the Parliament, which overwhelmingly exceeded those of the Social Democratic Party (the largest opposition party).

In the 1958 general election, the LDP and SDP together captured 98 per cent of the seats in the Lower House (62 per cent and 36 per cent respectively). In the 1967 election, their combined seats still amounted to 86 per cent. Though party competition increased during the following two decades in response to the increasing powers of smaller middle parties, the combined total of the two largest parties remained high at 75 per cent as late as the 1986 election. During the period of a predominant party system, women's opportunity for election to parliament was severely limited. The successive LDP governments contributed little to the advancement of women's political position since the question of gender equality has not been accorded high priority by the Liberal Democrats. The role played by the LDP on this issue is in sharp contrast to that of the Social Democrats in Sweden. The ruling party of Sweden has often served as an important facilitator for more equitable representation of women in politics.



This pattern of one-party predominance by the LDP continued without any serious threat from the opposition parties until 1989 when it came to the brink of collapse with the unpredicted revival of the Social Democrats in the Upper House election. The LDP, for the first time, failed to secure a majority in the Upper House since its formation in 1955. The transformation of a party system dominated by the LDP into a truly multi-party system was not completed until 1993. In that year, the LDP lost its ruling majority in the Lower House after controlling the government of Japan for nearly four decades. With the end of the LDP's one-party rule in 1993 and the dissolution of older parties, this led to the emergence of new parties contributing to an increase in women candidates and legislators in the Diet. As Norris noted, 'multi-party systems, where there are more opportunities for candidates to run in a range of parties, tend to have a higher number of women in office than systems with few parties, whether catch-all or ideologically polarized along the left-right dimension' (Norris 1993: 319).

#### CAMPAIGN FINANCE AND PERSONAL SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Women's limited representation can partly be explained by their lack of access to the financial resources and strong personal support organizations that are crucial factors in candidates' ability to win elections. The extremely high cost of election campaigns is one of the major barriers that prevent women from reaching elective office in Japan. Generally, those who can raise money in large sums for electoral purposes are men. As one keen observer notes, '[t]he fact that it takes so much money to get elected has put political office far beyond the reach of most politically ambitious women' (Iwao 1993: 220).

There are several reasons for the high costs of elections in Japan, the most obvious being the maintenance of the personal support organizations of politicians, known as a *kôenkai*. The sums of money involved in establishing and running them are enormous. A *kôenkai* is considered as being closely associated with the previous multi-member constituency system, which was used for almost 70 years from 1925 to 1994. Under this system, candidates running from the same party operated separate election campaigns with their own support organizations and intense rivalries that consequently generated costly campaigns. In Japan there are three prerequisites (known as *ban*) that a candidate must fulfill in order to get elected. In addition to having enough money (*kaban*), a candidate must have high name recognition (*kanban*) and a local support base (*jiban*). All these factors give an overwhelming advantage to incumbents who are men.

The new electoral rules introduced in 1994 were designed to reduce the excessive role of money in elections. It was hoped that if there was no need for



candidates to differentiate themselves from other candidates of their own party under the new electoral system, they would not have to preoccupy themselves as much with money politics as they had in past elections. The introduction of public funding for political parties was intended to change the basic feature of campaign funding in Japan. Along with the provisions of campaign finance reform, a new system of public subsidy was formulated to stop political corruption by making financial transactions transparent as well as decreasing the burden of costly election campaigns borne by individual politicians.

The nomination stage is crucial for getting women elected. Several scholars have pointed out three types of candidates' positions: sure, marginal, and hopeless seats (Elina Haavio-Mannila et al. 1985: 57; Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994: 143). Sure seats are those which a party is sure to keep even if it experiences a poor electoral showing. Hopeless seats are those a party is certain to lose even if it has a good election. Marginal seats are those that a party will win in a good election but lose in a poor election. Sure seats tend to be held by the same politician for years. It is to the marginal and hopeless seats that new candidates are often recruited; hence women have tended to be over-represented among the party's nominees for hopeless and marginal seats.

The problem remains that women are consistently less successful as candidates. In the 1993 general election, the success rate for women candidates was 20 per cent compared with the success rate of 56 per cent enjoyed by men. In 1996, the success rate for women in the general election was 15 per cent compared with the success rate of 35 per cent enjoyed by men. In 2000, the success rate for women increased to 17 per cent while the success rate for men was 37 per cent. In 2003, nearly 23 per cent of women were successful compared with 44 per cent for men. The success rate for women was 29 per cent while 44 per cent of men were successful.

Closer examination of women's representation on parties' lists of candidates in the 1996, 2000 and 2003 general elections reveals several things. First, in the plurality portion of the elections, women ran disproportionately as sacrificial lambs, or in districts where they had no realistic chance of winning. As a result, their success rates in single-member districts were much less than those of male candidates. In the proportional representation part of the elections, women were placed in list positions that had a realistic chance of getting elected. In almost all respects, female candidates fared as well as or even better than male candidates under the PR system. In 2003, for example, women's success rate in the PR part of the election was 26.7 per cent while that of men was 23.9 per cent.

## INCUMBENCY AND TURNOVER

Incumbency or turnover is directly affected by the electoral arrangements (Rule 1994: 16). Incumbency is a powerful factor in a candidate's ability to win elections in most countries because of the political resources that officeholders obtain and the advantage of name recognition. Darcy, Welch and Clark argue that '[t]urnover of previously elected incumbents is necessary if the number of women elected to parliaments is to increase' (1994: 151). However, turnover of incumbents frequently reflects the different types of electoral systems. In a single-member plurality system, the seats in the legislature are more dependent on the incumbents' personal popularity and election campaign than on the party's campaign organization. Under such circumstances, the party has very little input in the candidate nomination process and only a few incumbents voluntarily give up their safe seats in favor of new candidates in any one election. By contrast, in party list PR systems, party organizations at the local and national levels have a major influence over the selection of candidates, thus, turnover is much greater (Darcy, Welch and Clark: 151f).

To the extent that incumbents enjoy an electoral advantage, women are disadvantaged since women are much less likely than men to be incumbents. The oft-described reason for the paucity of women legislators at the national level in the United States is said to be the power of incumbency. In the US House of Representatives and the British House of Commons, incumbents enjoy well over 90 per cent election success (Darcy, Welch and Clark: 176f). The very low levels of turnover in these countries act as a serious constraint on women's representation. By comparative standards, the turnover rate of the Lower House members in Japan has been rather high and should, therefore, facilitate women's entry into the house. Female representation in the Diet has increased when turnover has been high.

A major reason for women's low level of representation has been their exclusion from candidacy. One interesting and unusual aspect of the 1990 general election, which was repeated in 1993, 1996, 2000 and 2003, was the large number of open seats available. In 1990 new candidates outnumbered incumbents for the first time since the formation of the Liberal Democratic Party in 1955. The largest number of women candidates ran for the Lower House in 2000 – 202 of the 1404 candidates (14 per cent) were women. During the 1970s and much of the 1980s, the proportion of women candidates for the Lower House was about two per cent.

In the 1993 Lower House election, there were also more newcomers than incumbents and more new candidates elected than ever before (134). The number

of women candidates also continued to rise as the very high level of incumbency turnover facilitated the entry of women. The number of women candidates elected to the Lower House in the 1993 election was the largest since 1947 because of the unusually high incumbent retirement rate, which provided more open seats than in any previous election. Over 7 per cent (70) of all candidates were women and fourteen were successfully elected. Nevertheless, women still constituted only 2.7 per cent of the total membership in the Lower House.

In the general election held in October 1996, there were more newcomers, more women, and more candidates running in total (1,503) than in any previous election under the present constitution. The election was hailed as historic because it was the first general election under the new electoral system providing more available seats than in the past. About 64 per cent (968) of all candidates in the election were newcomers, making it possible for more women (153) to contest a large number of open seats. In the 2000 general election, there were also many new candidates (974) and a record number of women candidates (202) ran. In 2003 the number of women candidates decreased from 153 to 149.

Why is it that there was not a greater influx of women into the Lower House given the rather high turnover rate? One of the probable reasons is that many new candidates in several recent elections have been relatives (mostly sons) of those who retired or died in office. In the 2003 general election, 13 per cent (150) of all candidates had inherited their *kôenkai* from their relatives or former bosses. Second-generation politicians have an electoral advantage over new candidates, consequently limiting women's access to elective office. Second-generation candidates who inherit well-organized support organizations can even beat incumbents with inferior campaign organizations. The percentage of these second-generation candidates who won in 2003 was high – over 80 per cent.

There is a positive relationship between the rate of turnover and the number of women elected. If an election results in little change from the previous one, then most parties will nominate their incumbents again, retaining many of the marginal seats previously won. For example, until 1989 the LDP maintained its majority in the Upper House with few seats lost to other parties. As a result, the proportion of women members had not varied greatly from one election to another. On the other hand, if an election produces a great transfer of seats from one party to another, then there is likely to be an increase in the proportion of women parliamentarians in the next election (Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994: 143). In the 1989 Upper House election, there was a great loss of seats from the LDP to the Social Democratic Party, with some sure and many marginal seats changing ownership. The result was an influx of new politicians and an

increase in the proportion of women. The female representation in the House of Councillors, including the 11 seats not up for election in 1989, increased from 22 (8.7 per cent) before the election to 33 (13.1 per cent) after the election. The proportion of women among the SDP House of Councillors almost doubled. Of the 46 SDP winners in the 1989 election, 11 (24 per cent) were women while only two of the 36 LDP winners were women.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

It is commonly assumed that socio-economic variables such as the ratio of women's literacy, of women's work force participation, and of women's educational level in respect to men have an effect on women's political representation (Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994; Rule 1987; Togeby 1994). Members of the national legislature tend to come disproportionately from a pool of citizens who are well educated and have professional jobs. Matland (1998) concludes that women's representation tends to increase when women approach men in levels of literacy, labor force participation and university education.

At least on the surface, Japan's socio-economic condition appears to be conducive to the political activism of women. Japanese women have made impressive gains in their levels of participation in the labor market and their educational achievements. But a closer analysis of employment statistics will reveal that women are most often found in lower-status (clerical or secretarial jobs, sales, and production) and part-time jobs, while men dominate employment in professional and managerial positions. It is true that an increasing number of women have gained employment in professional and high-status jobs, but they still fall far behind their male counterparts. Women's inferior socio-economic position in Japanese society seems to reinforce their disadvantage in the political arena by denying them the resources that are needed for political participation.

The political mobilization of women in society goes through various phases and is subject to time lags. Chou Bih-er, Cal Clark and Janet Clark (1990: 73) have, example, conceptualized the way in which the transformation of women's political representation from a traditional society to a 'civic' society according to a three-step process. Firstly, changes in patterns of women's employment must take place, so that more women enter into the labor market, especially to more well-paid and professional jobs. Secondly, women's increased interest in politics leads to greater participation in mass activity in the political arena relative to men's. Finally, mass political participation is transformed into competition for positions among the political elite.

When the Japanese case is viewed from such a three-step perspective, women's access to higher education and employment opportunities in general has rapidly increased. As one Japanese analyst put it, '[t]o some extent, we can say that Japanese women have gained sufficient educational resources to be on a more equal footing with men' (Tanaka 1995: 305). But women workers' access to professional and other high-status jobs relative to men's has been rather stifled even for those with a university education. Nevertheless, as noted previously, women's political participation in voting has long been higher than men's. The mission of channelling women's mass participation into competition for public office as candidates running for national and local elections is, nevertheless, a difficult and long process.

### CULTURAL OBSTACLES

Studies in the past have for the most part failed to present systematic evidence confirming the relationship between cultural variables and women's representation in elected office, since it is difficult to test empirically the influence of culture on women's representation. However, there is now strong and persuasive evidence that cultural factors constitute a key factor in explaining women's entry into elected office (Norris and Inglehart 2001; Inglehart and Norris 2003). Women may not come forward as candidates for elective office because they anticipate being discriminated against. Moreover, if they run for office, they are at a disadvantage relative to male candidates.

Japan's political culture has influenced women's involvement in politics in a negative way. Unlike more gender-egalitarian political cultures in other democratic countries, Japan has not been endowed with such cultural facilitators. The oft-described cultural barriers that stop women from pursuing political careers such as traditional attitudes about the role of women, discrimination against women, the burden of family and parenting obligations, and the discouragement of husbands all seek to undermine women's political participation in Japan (Pharr 1981). Cultural barriers to women's advancement to public office are greater in Japan than in Europe and North America, given the patriarchal nature of Japanese society and especially the male-dominated culture in which politics is conducted. The conditions for balancing family and child-rearing responsibilities with outside employment are worse in Japan than in many Western democracies.

While the traditional view of the gender-biased division of work – 'men at work and women at home' – has been declining, as evidenced by opinion surveys conducted over the years, it is still pervasive. In a 1982 international survey, 71 per cent of Japanese women supported such a view. Ten years later, gender-biased

roles still enjoyed considerable support although the figure had decreased to 56 per cent. Among the eight countries surveyed, only women in the Philippines scored a higher percentage than women in Japan (Inoue and Ehara 1995: 44f). Recent opinion surveys also confirm that the Japanese still hold such attitudes about the role of women. Women have been socialized to become homemakers so that for most women family responsibility comes before any political ambition. The gender bias has not provided many opportunities for women to move into the political arena, and so a lack of self-confidence among women is often cited as a barrier to women's active involvement in politics.

Inglehart (1997) argued that in Western European countries, post-material values appeared and became prevalent in the late 1960s and the early 1970s and that these new values fell more in line with the orientation of the leftist or new centrist parties than that of conservative parties. At about the same time, Japan also underwent similar value changes in response to socio-economic changes (i.e., industrial transformation, rising affluence, growing concerns with quality of life, etc.). As a result, several aspects of the traditional political culture have declined and some new political subcultures have become more prevalent than before. One notes especially the shift in values from a stress on deference to authority, conformity, austerity and piety to an emphasis instead on equality, individualism and permissiveness. The political effects of this change in values became apparent in 'more assertive, participatory orientations and more open minded attitudes towards minority views and dissident behaviour' (Richardson and Flanagan 1984: 227). The impact of these values was, however, primarily confined to the younger generations who grew up in a new environment with post-industrial-oriented values in the metropolitan and urban areas (Ibid. 227f). Nevertheless, the emergence of new post-industrial values was not accompanied by a corresponding increase in female representation in legislatures at both national and local levels, in contrast to Western democracies where 'second wave' feminism in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in an increase in the number of women in legislatures.

In Europe, especially in the Nordic countries, the political mobilization of women occurred within a relatively brief time-span following the development of post-material values that became prevalent among their citizens in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although socio-economic developments in Japan have liberated women in many ways and the participation of women has been visible in many social and economic activities, politics nonetheless remains essentially a male domain. The assumption is that as the male-dominated political culture in Japan moves towards a more gender-egalitarian one, the more women's representation

at both the national and local levels will inevitably rise. But compared to the development of the 'woman-friendly' political culture of many European democracies, the transformation in Japan will probably take much longer – and only after a substantial time lag.

Part of the reason for Japanese women's low involvement in politics stems from the Japanese political culture, which is one facet of the prevailing attitudes towards the role of women in society in general, and in the arena of politics in particular. The traditional Japanese political culture is an impediment to women's advancement to public office. The traditional gender-biased attitudes provide little opportunity and incentive for women to participate actively in politics, but the last two decades have witnessed some erosion of cultural barriers.

An obstacle for women seeking to get elected can be that voters discriminate against female candidates due to gender stereotyping. Voters frequently take more consideration of preconceived notions about female and male attributes rather than the individual's personal characteristics. While female candidates are still perceived in terms of their private and domestic roles, male candidates are viewed in terms of their public and occupational roles. Voters tend to perceive women as less qualified and less suited for politics than men. There exists empirical evidence that voters' stereotypical view of gender has negative consequences for female candidates' chances of getting elected and that women candidates are more successful if they are perceived as possessing masculine traits such as assertiveness and toughness (Hoddy and Terkildsen 1993; Thomas and Wilcox 1998). Evidence of voter discrimination has not been conclusive though as an increasing number of studies in advanced industrialized democracies have questioned the assertion that voters react negatively to female candidates. These studies found that the gender of the candidate has no bearing or little impact on voting and that women do as well as men in garnering votes (Bernstein 1986; Chaney and Sinclair 1994; Riggle et al. 1997).

A number of surveys in Japan in the past ten years tend to suggest that voter discrimination against female candidates has been declining. Mikanagi argues that such discrimination in Japan is low in comparison with other industrialized democracies, and that its relationship to the number of female candidates in legislative assemblies is not significant. My own analysis of the national and local elections from 2000–2004 seems to indicate that the gender of the candidate did not have any significant impact on voting and that voters are just as likely to vote for women as for men.

One of the major causes for the paucity of female legislators in Japan is that most of the candidates running for elective office are men. It is impossible to get



a woman elected if women do not run. Women's political representation would increase if more women were willing to become candidates. Poor self-esteem, lack of experience and resources are often cited as some of the major reasons why women are hesitant to run for office in Japan. Women lack the confidence deemed appropriate for running for public office and do not have the experience necessary for a political role. Women's own perception of their self-worth is shaped or reinforced by the prevailing male-biased social norms and beliefs.

In addition, women's view of politics can serve as a deterrent to women coming forward as candidates. In Japan, as in many other countries, it is often assumed that the political game is too dirty and ugly for women to play because of their supposed moral superiority, an excuse used too often by females for not entering politics: 'If politics has to be such a dirty business, women are extremely reluctant to participate' (Iwao 1993: 221). This attitude appears to be a serious inhibiting factor for women and makes it difficult for women to enter into the predominantly male political arena. Hence, many women view female values as incompatible with money politics and corruption.

In general, power and femininity are still viewed as incompatible even though the very foundation of the traditional gender roles has been eroding. Iwao noted that a general lack of interest in power frequently dampens women's motivation to engage in politics: 'a broad segment of the public feels that women should not be in the power-mongering business. The incompatibility of role expectations for women politicians makes it practically impossible for women to gain political power' (1993: 225).

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to draw on some of the research findings on the various influences on women's political representation. The Japanese case supports some of the common explanations prevailing in the gender and politics literature outlining the most important factors that facilitate an increase in the representation of women at various levels of government. Most scholars agree that the choice of an electoral system has significant consequences for female representation in legislatures. According to the literature, the PR contests of both houses of the Japanese Parliament should bring about the election of larger numbers of women than the single-member plurality portion of the Lower House or local constituencies of the Upper House. As we have seen, this proves to be the case. A pure PR system with no single-member constituencies would be more promising and fruitful for women's election to the Parliament.



The introduction of a PR system for the House of Representatives is possibly one of the most important facilitators in providing women the opportunity for election in Japan, but it is not the only one. In view of the slow pace of change in Japanese culture, improvements can be made by introducing other measures that are likely to bring about significant change in gender relations, such as the active recruitment of women candidates or the introduction of a quota. Additionally, the number of women in the Diet and local assemblies would increase if more women were willing to run for political office and if party leaders, especially those from the Liberal Democratic Party, were more willing to nominate women. In recent local elections, there has been a significant increase in the number of women candidates. Since the local governments often serve as important recruitment pools for national political office in Japan, an increase in the number of women elected to local assemblies could have significant consequences for the future representation of women in the Parliament.

If Japan follows the path of the incremental track model of the Nordic countries and other democracies of the West, it will probably take a few more decades before women's representation in the Japanese Parliament reaches the critical mass of about 30 per cent, and some additional decades before achieving gender parity. The fast track model with the introduction of quotas may be the most feasible and effective means of achieving such changes rather than efforts to overcome deeply entrenched cultural and social barriers that underlie gender inequality in a male-dominated political system like Japan's.

Quotas in various forms have played an important role in the improvement of women's position in many developed and developing countries. Unfavorable societal and cultural conditions, including traditional biased gender roles and attitudes, can be overcome to a great extent by quotas and affirmative action. A quota for elected officials or parties' candidate lists would be an effective method of increasing the number of women in public office in Japan.

## NOTES

- 1 The first woman minister was Masa Nakayama who held the post of Health and Welfare Minister.
- 2 The 1946 general election consisted of 'the large district/multiple ballot system' in which each of the 53 multimember electoral constituencies would elect from four to fourteen lower house members and in which a voter could select two to three candidates. Many voters consequently gave at least one vote to a female candidate. Thus, the system was considered favourable to women and was used only once before it was changed in 1947, restoring the single non-transferable vote (SNTV).

- 3 The Japan Socialist Party changed its name to the Social Democratic Party. To avoid confusion, I use Social Democratic Party throughout this chapter.
- 4 A predominant party system refers to one in which the same party wins elections over time under competitive conditions.

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## Chapter 6

# SOUTH KOREAN WOMEN'S POLITICAL STATUS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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*Won-Hong Kim*

According to the National Statistical Office, as of December 2003 there were 23,799 million women in South Korea (hereafter Korea), accounting for 49.7 per cent of the 47,925 million living in Korea. As of 2002, economically activated female human resources (above the age of 15) accounted for 49.7 per cent (Korean Women's Development Institute, 2003: 43, 167). Since the inauguration of the new participatory government in December 2003, the government has been striving to utilize the power of women and has appointed four female ministers (22.2 per cent) out of a total of 18 ministers when it formed a new cabinet. It has also set various goals like creating 500,000 posts for female workers, incurring 50 per cent of child-care costs through financial aid, and increasing female civil servants from the 5<sup>th</sup> rank and above to 10 per cent by 2006. In December 2002, the proportion of female civil servants in the 5<sup>th</sup> rank and above stood at 4.4 per cent. To enhance and develop women's capabilities, the government has numerous institutional and legal achievements, such as the establishment of the Korean Women's Development Institute (1983), the enactment of the Gender Equality Employment Act (1987), the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality (1987), the enactment of the Act on Women's Development (1995), and the launching of the Basic Plan for the Development of Female Civil Servants. The government additionally constituted the Offices in charge of Women's Affairs in six different ministries (Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, and Ministry of Labor). In more recent years, the Korean government enacted the following acts addressing women: Act on Prevention of

Domestic Violence and Victim (1997), Family Health Act (2003), and Act on Prostitution Prevention (2004).

It was the 17<sup>th</sup> of July in 1948, when the Constitution provided universal suffrage for men and women, that Korean women were first granted the political rights to vote and run for election. The age requirement for eligibility to be elected for public office in Korea is 40 years or older for president, and 25 years or older for National Assemblymen, local government chiefs, and local Assemblymen, while the right to vote is granted to men and women of 20 years of age or older (National Election Commission 2000: 20–22). The 17<sup>th</sup> general election took place on 15 April 2004 with a total of 299 electoral seats up for election; 243 seats were assigned for local constituency – under which candidates who are nominated by individual parties run campaigns in each electoral district with the support of the parties – and 46 seats were assigned for national constituency – under which parties receive a number of seats proportional to the percentage of vote they receive. In this election, the number of females elected made a record as 39 female lawmakers, or 13.0 per cent of the elects, were voted into power, which was more than two times that of the 16<sup>th</sup> general election (16 female lawmakers or 5.9 per cent were elected). We can attribute this recent increase to the amendment of Article 7 in the Political Party Law, which stipulates that 30 per cent of nominations are to be reserved for female candidates running for local constituency seats and 50 per cent for national constituency seats. The result of this new amendment was, thus, detected in the 17<sup>th</sup> general election, leading to a sharp increase of female political representation in Korea. Among the 66 female candidates (5.6 per cent) of the total of 1,177 candidates, 10 candidates were elected (4.1 per cent). The Democratic Labor Party nominated 14 female candidates out of the total of 66 nominations (21.2 per cent), thereby being identified as the party that nominates the largest number of female candidates, even though none of them were elected. Respectively, the ruling Uri Party and the opposition Grand National Party produced the five females that were elected, garnering the highest number of women elected among the parties. Under the proportional representation system that distributes 56 parliamentary seats to parties in proportion to the number of votes they win in the election, parties nominated 91 female candidates, or 47.9 per cent, among the total of 190 candidates, which was a 22 per cent increase from the 16<sup>th</sup> general election's 25.7 per cent. As a result, 29 female candidates were elected out of total 56 seats (51.8 per cent).<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will examine what we have achieved in improving the political status of Korean women so far and suggests challenges we are facing now. Since

women first obtained the right to vote, there have been 16 presidential elections, 16 general elections, and 7 local elections. Voting rates among men and women have been the highest in presidential elections and markedly decrease in the following order of: vice presidential elections, National Assembly elections, and local elections. The voting rates in general have been decreasing gradually as was evident when the voting rate fell from 70.8 per cent of the 16<sup>th</sup> presidential election in 2002 down to 60.6 per cent of the following election in 2004. The general election of 2002 had even lower voting figures of 48.7 per cent. The recent decrease in voting seems to be ascribed to the decline of the Korean economy and people's growing indifference to politics. Sorted by age and gender, male voters in their 50s and 60s show a higher voting rate in respect to female voters in their early 20s, which represents the lowest voter turnout. However, the voting rate of female voters from their late 20s up to their 30s represents a figure from 40 to over 50 per cent, implying that women in this age bracket are closely involved in social activities that tend to concern political issues related to their social commitments. Thus, such outcomes call for an overall improvement of political education provided for younger female voters as part of a political reform.

According to a 2002 report on voters' trends since the 16<sup>th</sup> presidential election that was presented by the Korean Women's Development Institute, voters showed a tendency of putting more stress on candidates' election pledges and party's policies, rather than the candidates themselves. In this particular respect, there was no difference between male and female voters (Korean Women's Development Institute, 2002: 137–141). The voting rate of the 17<sup>th</sup> general election was 60.6 per cent, but the data stratified by age and gender has yet to be released. However, considering that 10 from the total of 66 female candidates running for national constituency seats were elected and as many as 10 female candidates lost the election in local districts as runners-up, to say that women do not vote for women seems to be false. In fact, according to a survey conducted by the Korean Women's Development Institute (20 April 1983), targeting 1,000 male and female voters in the Seoul area where female candidates have been running for elections since the 16<sup>th</sup> general election, 85.3 per cent of the men and 90 per cent of the women responded 'yes' to questions asking whether they will vote for female candidates in the next election if they believe the candidates will be good politicians.

Until the 1990s, women were less likely to discuss whom they will vote for with family members and more likely to reach an independent decision. According to the survey, even though 30 per cent of the women, 5.3 per cent higher than men, answered that they consult with family, a whopping 80 per cent of women

answered that, nevertheless, they stuck to their original decisions (Kim, Won-hong 2003: 37–70). This proves that women's decision-making power in voting has improved compared to the past. This tendency was also confirmed by studies conducted by Oh Yu-seok from Gyeonggido Alliance for Women's Political Power, which targeted districts where female candidates have ran since the 17<sup>th</sup> general election. According to this study, female voters (38 per cent) supported female candidates more than their male counterparts (34.4 per cent). In addition, when they were asked 'Why you support the female candidate?', 11.6 per cent of the male respondents and 15.4 per cent of the females responded, saying 'I support female candidates because they are women.' This shows that women are more likely to vote for female candidates now than in the past. Reasons for this may be attributed to corruption of the male-dominated political arena, the improvement of women's social status, and the spreading notion of gender equality (Oh, Yu-seok, 2004: 4–10). Women must overcome their own gender-based bias that politics is a matter for men not for women. They should be active in political affairs and need to show their power by supporting female candidates in elections.

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 reflect the number of male and female voters and their respective voting rates in presidential elections and National Assembly elections.

**Table 6.1: Number of eligible voters and actual voters during the previous presidential elections**

Year (election)	The number of eligible voters			The number of actual voters		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
1963 (5 <sup>th</sup> )	13.0 mil. (100%)	6.6 mil. (51.2%)	6.4 mil. (48.8%)	11.0 mil. (85.0%)	— (81.3%)	— (88.9%)
1967 (6 <sup>th</sup> )	13.9 mil.	7.0 mil. (50.5%)	6.9 mil. (49.5%)	11.6 mil. (83.6%)	5.8 mil. (82.3%)	5.8 mil. (84.9%)
1971 (7 <sup>th</sup> )	15.6 mil.	7.8 mil. (50.2%)	7.7 mil. (49.8%)	12.4 mil. (79.8%)	6.1 mil. (78.3%)	6.3 mil. (81.4)
1987 (13 <sup>th</sup> )	25.9 mil.	13.1 mil. (50.6%)	12.8 mil. (49.4%)	23.1 mil. (89.2%)	11.6 mil. (88.5%)	11.5 mil. (89.8%)
1992 (14 <sup>th</sup> )	29.4 mil.	14.9 mil. (50.7%)	14.5 mil. (49.3%)	24.1 mil. (81.9%)	12.1 mil. (80.9%)	12.0 mil. (82.8%)
1997 (15 <sup>th</sup> )	32.3 mil.	16.4 mil. (50.8%)	15.9 mil. (49.2%)	26.0 mil. (80.7%)	— (80.1%)	— (81.3%)
2002 (16 <sup>th</sup> )	35.0 mil.	—	—	24.8 mil. (70.8%)	—	—

Source. National Election Commission (1996), *Election and National Referendum Statistics*, pp.36–39.  
National Election Commission (1998), *The 15<sup>th</sup> Presidential Election Voting Rate Analysis*, p. 9



**Table 6.2: Number of eligible voters and actual voters in national assembly elections**

Year (election)	The number of eligible voters			The number of actual voters		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
1963 (6 <sup>th</sup> )	13.3 mil. (100%)	6.8 mil. (51.3%)	6.5 mil. (48.7%)	9.6 mil. (72.1%)	4.8 mil. (70.5%)	4.8 mil. (73.8%)
1967 (7 <sup>th</sup> )	14.7 mil.	7.5 mil. (51.1%)	7.1 mil. (48.9%)	11.2 mil. (76.1%)	5.6 mil. (73.8%)	5.7 mil. (78.6%)
1971 (8 <sup>th</sup> )	15.6 mil.	7.9 mil. (50.8%)	7.7 mil. (49.2%)	11.4 mil. (73.2%)	5.7 mil. (71.3%)	5.8 mil. (75.2%)
1973 (9 <sup>th</sup> )	15.7 mil.	7.9 mil. (49.2%)	7.8 mil. (49.5%)	11.2 mil. (73.0%)	5.6 mil. (70.2%)	5.6 mil. (72.3%)
1978 (10 <sup>th</sup> )	19.5 mil.	9.9 mil. (50.8%)	9.6 mil. (49.2%)	15.0 mil. (77.1%)	7.4 mil. (75.2%)	7.6 mil. (79.0%)
1981 (11 <sup>th</sup> )	21.1 mil.	10.6 mil. (50.2%)	10.3 mil. (48.9%)	16.4 mil. (78.4%)	8.1 mil. (76.3%)	8.3 mil. (80.6%)
1985 (12 <sup>th</sup> )	24.0 mil.	12.1 mil. (50.6%)	11.8 mil. (49.4%)	20.3 mil. (84.6%)	10.2 mil. (83.8%)	10.1 mil. (85.4%)
1988 (13 <sup>th</sup> )	26.2 mil.	13.3 mil. (50.7%)	12.9 mil. (49.3%)	19.9 mil. (75.8%)	9.9 mil. (74.7%)	9.9 mil. (76.8%)
1992 (14 <sup>th</sup> )	29.0 mil.	14.3 mil. (49.3%)	14.7 mil. (50.7%)	20.8 mil. (71.9%)	— (70.9%)	— (72.2%)
1996 (15 <sup>th</sup> )	31.5 mil.	16.0 mil. (50.8%)	15.4 mil. (49.2%)	20.1 mil. (63.9%)	— (62.0%)	— (65.3%)
2000 (16 <sup>th</sup> )	33.5 mil.	17.0 mil. (50.9%)	16.4 mil. (49.1%)	19.2 mil. (57.2%)	— (56.5%)	— (58.7%)
2004 (17 <sup>th</sup> )	35.6 mil.	18.1 mil. (50.9%)	17.5 mil. (49.1%)	21.6 mil. (60.6%)	—	—

Source: National Election Commission (1996), *Election and National Referendum Statistics*, pp. 112–121 (Statistics from the 6<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup>), National Election Commission (1996), *The 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly Election Voting Rates Analysis*, p.9. National Election Commission (2000), *the 16<sup>th</sup> National Assembly Election Voting Rates Analysis*, p.9. National Election Commission (2004), the 17<sup>th</sup> general election homepages

## WOMEN AS LAWMAKERS

Throughout the history of the National Assembly in Korea, the proportion of female lawmakers in the National Assembly was 2.5 per cent on average. However, interestingly enough, women's participation in politics has shown an increase since the 13<sup>th</sup> presidential election when the direct presidential election system was introduced. With presidential candidates now aware of female voters, candidates have now pledged to implement policies that support the expansion of women's political participation. Furthermore, as democracy became consolidated, women's parliamentary participation rate accordingly increased. In fact, the proportion of female lawmakers in the 13<sup>th</sup> general election of (1988) was only 2.0 per cent. However, by the 14<sup>th</sup> general election (1992) eight females

had been elected, accounting for 2.7 per cent, while the following 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> general elections (1996, 2000) continued to see this increase with nine (3 per cent) and sixteen (5.9 per cent) women elected respectively. Such an increase in women's parliamentary participation can be ascribed to a quota system, which stipulates 30 per cent of the female nomination for national constituency seats. This was determined after the National Assembly passed the revision bill of the Political Party Act. Since then, each party has shown higher female nomination rates. Ahead of the 17<sup>th</sup> general election, both ruling and opposition parties agreed to increase local constituency seats from 227 to 246 and increase national constituency seats from 46 to 56. Moreover, an additional amendment to Article 31 in the Political Party Law was passed, stipulating that 30 per cent of nominations for local constituency seats are reserved for females and 50 per cent of nominations for national constituency seats are also reserved for females. This was one of the pledges suggested by candidates who ran in the presidential election at that time.

In the face of the 17<sup>th</sup> general election, 321 women's groups founded the 'Women's Alliance for the 17<sup>th</sup> General Election', through which they played a leading role in creating favorable institutional conditions for women's parliamentary participation. Leaders within the established network of women's politics launched 'Sending 102 women into the National Assembly', through which they collect funds for campaigns of female candidates and support the development of capabilities of women who are expected to be members of the political sector in the future. As a result, the females elected accounted for 13 per cent, which was a sharp increase from the 5.9 per cent of the 16<sup>th</sup> general election.

The occupations of female candidates among the elected in the 17<sup>th</sup> general election represented various fields such as politicians, journalists, professors, and lawyers. However, most of the candidates were experienced within the political field. Of the 39 females elected, by age there were two in their 30s, 19 in their 40s, 13 in their 50s, and five in their 60s or older. Thirty-five women out of the 39 elected, or 89.7 per cent, are college graduates. Their majors are varied including law, pedagogy, politics, philosophy, women's studies, nursing, and electronic engineering.

Although South Korea is far from attaining similar average proportions compared to advanced countries, which stands from 34 to 40 per cent, the recent proportion of female lawmakers in the 17<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, 13 per cent, is proof that we are inching closer to the international average of 15.4 per cent. It goes without saying that the year of 2004 was a great watershed in women's political

**Table 6.3: Rate of females elected in previous elections**

<i>Election</i>	The total seats in national assembly	The number of males elected	The number of females elected (%)
1st	200	199	1 (0.5)
2nd	210	208	2 (1.0)
3rd	203	202	1 (0.5)
4th	233	230	3 (1.3)
5th	291	290	1 (0.3)
6th	175	173	2 (1.1)
7th	175	172	3 (1.7)
8th	204	199	5 (2.5)
9th	292	275	17 (5.8)
10th	231	223	8 (3.5)
11th	276	267	9 (3.3)
12th	276	268	8 (2.9)
13th	299	293	6 (2.0)
14th	299	291	8 (2.7)
15th	299	290	9 (3.0)
16th	273	257	16 (5.9)
17th	299	260	39 (13.0)

Source: National Election Commission (1982), *Comprehensive Bibliography on 1st–11th National Assembly Elections*, National Election Commission (1985), *Comprehensive Bibliography on the 12th National Assembly Election*, National Election Commission (1988), *Comprehensive bibliography on the 13th National Assembly Election*, National Election Commission (1992), *Comprehensive Bibliography on the 14th National Assembly Election*, National Election Commission (1996), *The Report on the Registering of Candidates and the Elected on the 15th National Assembly Election*, National Election Commission (2000), *The Report on the Registering of Candidates and the Elected on the 15th National Assembly Election*, National Election Commission. Online resource. *The Report on the Registering of Candidates and the Elected on the 16th National Assembly Election*.

participation. We may expect a significant transformation in male-oriented political culture with female lawmakers successfully obtaining political powers. In particular, the ruling Uri Party, the opposition Grand National Party, as well as other parties are attempting to draw female voters by showing a tendency of dedication to the development of favorable women's policies and nomination of female candidates. Under such circumstances, if female voters show more support to female candidates, the outcomes will be greater than expected. In fact, in the 17<sup>th</sup> general election, such a phenomenon happened. Therefore, if female voters who account for 50.9 per cent of the South Korean population show a similar tendency in other elections in the future, it will be possible for female voters to make a major contribution to the improvement of Korea's election culture. Furthermore, only when women become politically active will Koreans realize an equal society between men and women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, parties should make a concerted effort to seek female politicians and educate them for the next general election by making the best use of the funds that are allotted

for the development of women's politics by offering training courses or building female human resource banks.

#### FEMALE LOCAL ASSEMBLYMEN AND CHIEFS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Since 1952 when the local government system was established in Korea three local assemblies operated until 1961. After a hiatus, this system was reintroduced in 1991 and from 1995 the local elections were held in unison. The number of Assemblywomen in local governments since 1991 is illustrated in Table 6.4 and Table 6.5. There are two types of local assemblies (Basic Local Assembly and Broad District Assembly). Basic Local Assemblies are based on basic units of locations such as Eup, Myoen, and Dong, while Broad District Assemblies are based on provinces and major cities. The proportion of the females elected in the Basic Local Assembly was 0.9 per cent in 1991, 1.6 per cent in 1995, 1.6 per cent in 1998, and 2.2 per cent in 2002. The low proportion of female members in the Basic Local Assembly can be attributed to the Koreans' perception of politics as a man's job and as well as other factors such as the high cost of election campaigns, and the winner-take-all electoral system. Finding promising female candidates and supporting them can be a big challenge for the future of Korea's politics. In the case of the Broad District Assembly, the female elect accounted for 0.9 per cent of the seats in 1991, 5.8 per cent in 1995, 5.9 per cent in 1998, and 9.2 per cent in 2002. The rapid growth in female representation from 1991 to 1995 (from 0.9 per cent to 5.9 per cent) may be due to the positive performances of women in the assemblies. Their contributions led to female candidates being nominated by 30 per cent of seats reserved for the provincial/city constituency, which accounts for 10 per cent of the total of Broad District Assembly seats. Also, in 2002 the proportion of Assemblywomen in the Broad District Assembly increased to 9.2 per cent thanks to the Political Party Act, which makes it mandatory to assign at least 50 per cent of the nominations to female candidates for national constituency seats. If they fail to reach this requirement, the National Election Commission rejects their nominations. In the case of local constituencies, in spite of the quota system ensuring that 30 per cent of the candidates are females, the local constituencies failed to do so since there is no compulsory article that demands it. This is a challenge that needs to be resolved in the near future. In the case of the chiefs of local governments, there was only one female chief in 1995. In 1998 there was no female chief, but in 2002 two female chiefs were elected. The victory of the two elected female chiefs in the 2002 was heavily attributed to the contribution of female lawmakers in the Grand National Party. They consolidated their powers and influence and called

on the Executive Chairman to nominate female candidates to corresponding districts where female candidates were most likely to be elected.

**Table 6.4: Number of females elected in basic local assembly elections in 1991, 1995, 1998, and 2002**

Year	The number of candidates			The number of the elected		
	Total	Women	Ratio (%)	Total	Women	Ratio (%)
1991	10,151	123	1.2	4,303	40	0.9
1995	11,950	206	1.7	4,541	71	1.6
1998	7,450	140	1.9	3,490	56	1.6
2002	8,373	222	2.7	3,485	77	2.2

**Table 6.5: Number of females elected in Broad District Assembly elections in 1991, 1995, 1998, and 2002**

	Number of candidates		Number of elected	
	Total	Women	Total	Women
1991	2,885	63 (2.2%)	866	8 (0.9%)
1995				
Local constituency	2,449	40 (1.6%)	875	13 (1.5%)
Provincial/city constituency	178	79 (44.3%)	97	43 (44.3%)
Total	2,627	119 (4.5%)	972	56 (5.8%)
1998				
Local constituency	1,571	37 (2.4%)	616	14 (2.3%)
Provincial/city constituency	180	54 (30%)	74	27 (36.5%)
Total	1,755	91 (6.1%)	691	41 (5.9%)
2002				
Local constituency	1,531	48 (3.1)	609	14 (2.3%)
Provincial/city constituency	209	116 (55.5%)	73	49 (°%)
Total	1,740	164 (3.1%)	682	63 (9.2%)

## FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN PARTIES

Despite the fact that female members hold a majority both in the Grand National Party and the Uri Party, the rate of female participation in the party leadership (i.e. Vice-President, Executive Member of Party, Advisory Member of Party, Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General, Floor Leader and Deputy Floor Leader, Spokesman and vice-Spokesman, Chairman and vice-Chairman of Standing Committee, and member of central executive committee or other executive committees) stands only at 10 to 20 per cent. As of May 2004, female lawmakers accounted for 11.2 per cent of the ruling Uri party. Females in the

central standing committee were found at 28.6 per cent and 24.7 per cent in the central electing committee. Lastly, females represented 11.2 per cent of the directors within the party. In the case of the opposition Grand National Party, female lawmakers accounted for 13.2 per cent, female senior advisors of the party at 7.8 per cent, female lawmakers in operating committees at 10.5 per cent, and female directors 6.3 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Such results show that there remains a barrier constraining women's advancement within parties and therefore they have minimal influence over national administrations and major party affairs. In addition, female candidates are easily excluded from nomination for public office, which has been the consistent primary obstacle for the growth of women's influences in the National Assembly.

## MEASURES FOR THE EXPANSION OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### *The Quota Requirement of the Political Party Act*

As an effort to improve the institutional environment for women's political participation, the Political Party Act targeting the 16<sup>th</sup> National Assembly election in 2000 stipulated that 30 per cent of the nominations be reserved for female candidates for national constituency seats. In face of the 3<sup>rd</sup> local election held in 2002, Law Related Politics additionally encouraged a 50 per cent minimum of female candidates for national constituency seats and a 30 per cent minimum for local constituency seats in Broad District Assemblies. In the recent 17<sup>th</sup> general election, the quota system succeeded. This is apparent in the outcome that Korean women's interest in politics has sharply increased. However, given the fact that over 70 per cent of the females elected were first-term lawmakers, it is very important to establish a system that can support their political activities.

### *National Efforts for the Development of Female Leadership*

Article 15 of the Act on Women's Development stipulates '(...) the government and local governments should make an effort to support the expansion of women's participation in politics by using various measures'. The government has set aside budgets for this and has launched supporting packages to develop education programs, through which it attempts to enhance national awareness aiming to create favorable circumstances which enable women to easily participate in politics. The government has also embarked on new ventures in cooperation with active women's groups that have particularly devoted themselves to discovering promising female candidates and been active in offering political education to

the population. Since 2001 the government has supported training programs undertaken to foster female leaders for the next generation. Women's groups are also running programs that develop female leadership in politics and increase women's political participation. Individual parties are also following suit. Such efforts have enhanced of women's political status even though not significantly.

### *Funds for the Development of Women's Politics*

The government annually provides national subsidies for ordinary party operations. Starting from 2004, 10 per cent of the subsidy must be spent towards the development of women's politics. So far, the lack of organization and money as well as parties' support have been among the major reasons why women hesitate to run for elections. Nevertheless, no party has utilized the funds to educate female candidates and support their campaigns. However, beginning with the 17<sup>th</sup> general election, the government has obligated parties to allocate 10 per cent of the subsidy for logistics to the development of women's politics. There are two separate subsidies that the government grants to parties: subsidies for parties' operation and subsidies for election campaigning. The former is dispensed four times per year and the latter is granted at the time of presidential elections, general elections, local elections, and nomination periods of candidates. The amount allocated is calculated by multiplying the number of votes they received by 800 won (Korean currency). In 2002 when the 3<sup>rd</sup> local election and presidential election were simultaneously held, the total amount that the government provided to parties was a total of 113.4 billion won. The opposition Grand National Party received 53.1 billion won (11.9 billion for parties' ordinary operation and 41.2 billion won for election campaigns), the New Millennium Democratic party received 49.5 billion won (11.1 billion won for parties' ordinary operation and 38.3 billion won for election campaigns), the United Liberal Democrats received 7.3 billion won (2.2 billion won for logistical support and 5.1 billion won for election campaigns), and the Democratic Labor Party received 0.9 billion won (0.4 billion won for parties' ordinary operation and 0.5 billion won for election campaigns).<sup>3</sup> The subsidy for parties' operation is spent towards labor costs, office supplies, office management, public utility charges, funds for party development, party members' training costs, operating costs, advertisements, other expenses for party activities, costs related to elections, and funds for the development of women's politics. The subsidy for election campaigning is spent on supporting candidates' campaigning and their trust money – in Korea, candidates must deposit a certain amount of money in order to run the elections. In addition, article 17 of the Political Funds Law stipulates

that parties observe the 30 per cent quota in Broad District elections in order to receive subsidies (an amount of which is calculated by multiplying the number of voters by 100 won).

#### A FUTURE CHALLENGE FOR THE EXPANSION OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: CHANGING THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

As the bill for Law Related Politics was passed in the National Assembly on 9 May 2004, the total number of lawmakers became 299 including 243 local constituency seat. and 56 national constituency seats; a 26 seat increase over the 16<sup>th</sup> National Assembly. Female lawmakers in the National Assembly account for 13 per cent of the corresponding seats. Female legislators in Broad Local Assembly account for 5.9 per cent. Female lawmakers in Basic Unit Assembly account for 2.2 per cent. An unequal distribution of female legislators in each assembly is readily apparent. Furthermore, the current electoral system combining the single-member local constituency system and the national constituency system is more likely to stimulate unnecessary competition during the campaigning period and block political newcomers or minor parties from entering the National Assembly. In order to tackle such problems, reflect people's political opinion as much as possible, and encourage people from all walks of life to participate in politics, the electoral system should be changed as suggested below.

The first suggestion is for the National Assembly to introduce party-list proportional representation on the level of cities and provinces and to additionally introduce a gender equality nomination system that assigns the proportion of genders equally such as 60 per cent vs. 40 per cent. Since Korean people are accustomed to single-member local constituencies, we would be wise to maintain this system and, at the same time, make a move to supplement its shortcomings. This supplementary action could be to reassign the ratio of seats for national constituency and local constituency e.g. one to two. In addition, it is necessary to introduce a gender equality nomination system that reserves 50 per cent of nominations for female candidates for national constituency seats and 30 per cent for local constituency seats. Furthermore, single-member local constituencies and national constituencies could be rearranged at the ratio of two to one.

For the local assembly, the first suggestion is for the Broad District Assembly to introduce a party-list proportional representation and a multi-member constituency system on the level of cities and provinces; the number of elects can be decided in accordance with the number of residents in cities of provinces they are running. The Assembly should additionally introduce a gender equality



nomination system that assigns a proportion of the genders equally such as 60 per cent vs. 40 per cent. The second suggestion is to introduce the medium constituency system, under which three to five candidates are elected in each districts. Among them, at least one or two seats should be reserved for female candidates. For the Basic Local Assembly, the suggestion is to introduce a medium constituency system by unifying two regions among Eup, Myeon, and Dong into one constituency, where two seats are available. Each seat should be allotted to each of the genders.

### OTHER POSSIBLE MEASURES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICS

After the Law Related Politics bill was passed in the National Assembly, article 31 of the Political Party Law was amended as 'Parties are encouraged to nominate female candidates up to 30 per cent of total spots for local constituency seats and 50 per cent for national constituency seats.' If parties observe the 30 per cent quota under local constituencies, parties will then be granted additional subsidies as stipulated in the Political Fund Act. However, considering the 2002 local elections and 2004 general election, no party has observed such stipulations, thus it is pertinent to obligate parties to follow this by amending the Law Related Politics Act. In fact, in the 2002 local elections, the Broad District Assembly nominated female candidates at only 3.1 per cent for local constituency seats and 55.5 per cent for provincial/city constituency seats. This is because the 30 per cent nomination of female candidates for local constituency seats was not a requirement. Such outcomes prove that it is necessary to amend article 31 of the Political Party Law in favor of female candidates. Accordingly, it is necessary to either alter the electoral system into a multi-member constituency system or require parties to observe the 30 per cent quota of female nominations. Furthermore, should a party violate the 30 per cent mandate, the amount of the subsidy received by that particular party should be cut in half. The Political Fund Act stipulates that parties are granted additional financial aid for supporting female candidates, which is calculated by multiplying the number of voters by 100 won (an approximate total of 3.5 billion won). This amount should be further augmented by increasing the current subsidy of 100 won up to 200 won by amending the Political Fund Act. The increased subsidy caused by such a rise in female nomination can be channeled as a fund for the development of women's politics. Besides, the National Assembly should follow the Broad District Assembly in adopting a 50 per cent quota of female candidates under the proportional representative system. Furthermore, any party's list of candidates for national constituency seats should treat female and male candidates equally.

Table 6.6: Comparison of current and suggested electoral systems

	Current System	Suggested System
Electio. for National assembly	Single-member local constituency system, National constituency under proportional representation system – seats: 299 (local: 243, national: 56)	1. To introduce a party-list proportional representation and multimember constituency system on the level of city and province, and also to introduce a gender equality nomination system that assigns a proportion o. the genders equally such as 60 per cent vs. 40 per cent. 2. To introduce a gender equality nomination system that reserves 50 per cent of nominations for femal. candidates under the national constituency and 30 per cent under local constituencies. The number of seats for local constituencies and national constituencies should be rearranged at the ratio of two to one.
		****
Local Election	(Broad Local Assembly) Single-member constituency and proportiona. representation system: each Gu, Si, Gun has two seats; proportion: one tenth of number of districts; seats at minimum 3:  (Basic Unit Assembly) Single- member constituency: the number of population of Eup, Myeon, Dong (If the number is below 5000, they ar. combined); seats at minimum: seven	1. To introduce a party-list proportional representation and multimember constituency system on the level of cities and provinces. The number of representatives is decided according to the population figure in each region, and to introduce a gender equality nomination system that assigns the proportion of genders equally such as 60 per cent vs. 40 per cent. 2. To introduce the medium constituency system by arranging districts, Gu, Si and Gun, in accordance with the number of their populations, in which three to five candidates are elected. Among them, at least one or two seats should be reserved for female candidates.  1. To introduce a medium constituency system by unifying two regions among Eup, Myeon, and Dong into one constituency, where two seats is available. Each seat should be allotted to each of the genders.

IMPROVING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATIVE POWER  
THROUGH THE NOMINATION PROCESS

*Women's Role in Deliberation Committees*

Since the 17<sup>th</sup> general election, parties established deliberation committees which included women for the nomination process aiming to prevent party leaders from advancing particular candidates. For future elections, it is necessary to have a stipulation that obligates a certain number of women on the committees. In doing so, we can prevent women from being excluded from the nomination process and, at the same time, improve the transparency of this process.

### *Nomination of Female Candidates*

In 1993, the Labour Party in the United Kingdom introduced an article in its constitution and regulation stipulating, '(...) women should be nominated into its dominating districts and chief position open in districts at least over 50 per cent'. As a result, in the 1997 general election, the party won the race and the rate of female lawmakers in the House of Commons went up from 60 (9 per cent) in 1992 to 120 (18.2 per cent) (Kim, Wong-hong, Lee, In-suk, Gwon, Hui-wa, 2003: 213–214). Meanwhile, the Socialist Party in France also gave women preference according to results of previous polls. In such a context, parties in Korea should introduce articles in the party's constitution and regulation, stipulating an obligatory nomination of women into its dominant districts.

### *Female Candidates in In-House Elections*

In the 2002 local elections and 2004 general election, parties newly introduced in-house elections to boost democracy within parties. However, female candidates running in in-house election have ironically shown poor results over time. The current in-house election system still has significant shortcomings as was witnessed in the last general election. Most of all, this process was extremely costly. The younger generations are less likely to take part in it and it is still increasingly difficult to reach subjects by telephone to answer questions. And questions on how parties select the electorate continue to arise. In order to overcome such problems, there should exist a public management system of in-house elections, which is completely financed by parties. Additionally, the current in-house election system should be altered to allow for simultaneous elections throughout the nation. It is also recommended that female candidates be provided with 30 extra percentage points to female candidates.

## REINFORCE EFFORTS TO DISCOVER AND TRAIN RESERVE FEMALE CANDIDATES

### *Consolidate a Pool of Female Politicians*

Ahead of the 17<sup>th</sup> general election, 321 women's groups established the 'Women's alliance for the 17<sup>th</sup> General Election' in August 2003 and played a leading role in discovering promising female candidates. As a result, it guaranteed a 30 per cent female nomination mandate in local constituencies.<sup>4</sup> However, there are many challenges we face now. It is desirable that women's groups constitute a pool of female politicians consisting of former or current female lawmakers in the national and local assembly, former or current heads of women's groups, and

so forth in order to prepare for future elections. Once the pool is established, various courses should be provided through which trainees can equip themselves with the power to tackle the various difficulties they may face when dealing with national affairs, including the necessary knowledge and practical skills for their political activities.

### ***Establish a Mentorship Program and Support System***

Sweden has a mentorship program that offers women desiring to run for election in the National Assembly a chance to receive advice and assistance from senior lawmakers (Rydell, B. 1993: 42). Korea should have such a program so that aspiring politicians can obtain personal experience and knowledge from senior politicians. In doing so, newcomers will find confidence in their own decisions. Considering that the majority of females elected in the last general election are fresh politicians, it is also important to set up a support system to facilitate their political activities.

### ***Boost Female Lawmakers' Activities within Parties***

According to 'Studies on measures to help assembly women in local assembly advance to the National Assembly' published by the Korean Women's Development Institute, over half of the females elected in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> general elections did not serve a previous term in the National Assembly even though previous work was primarily related to politics. This implies that women exposed to the political fields are more likely to be nominated by parties (Kim, Won-hong, Kim, Min-jeong, Lee, Hyeon-chul, Kim, Hye-yeong, 2003: 30–50). However, once elected women are less likely to occupy senior-level positions within the parties. Since there are a great deal of limitations for female lawmakers to serve in high-ranking positions within parties, they are accordingly less likely to increase their influence when operating in the party's political affairs. Also, the minimum power of women in nominating candidates is regarded as one of major obstacles in women's advancement into the National Assembly. Under such circumstances, it is very important to introduce a new system that requires a 30-per cent assignment of female lawmakers in high-ranking posts.

### ***Measures to Manage the Funds for the Development of Women's Politics***

The government provides subsidies for the logistical support of parties as discussed previously. Beginning from 2004, 10 per cent of this subsidy is allotted as funds for the development of women's politics. However, some measures must be taken to manage this fund. For example, when elections are not taking place,

this fund should be spent on educating female politicians. During the campaign period, a certain portion of the subsidy should be granted to help the parties. Co-campaigns should be spent on assisting female candidates.

## CONCLUSION

The increase of women's participation in politics in Korea is connected to the degree of the democratization process. The average rate of female parliamentarians from the 1<sup>st</sup> and to the 16<sup>th</sup> National Assembly showed 2.5 per cent except for the 9<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, which marked the rate of female parliamentarians as 5.8 per cent. A variety of election pledges targeted at women voters by the candidates were presented from the 14<sup>th</sup> presidential election in 1992, which was changed from indirect election to direct election. From then on, the rate of female parliamentarians brought about increases by 3.0 per cent in the 15<sup>th</sup>, 5.9 per cent in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 13.0 per cent in the 17<sup>th</sup>. The coalition of women's organizations in increasing the rate of female parliamentarians influenced the political parties. The political parties are changing their attitude, which is favorable to women's political participation. It is essential for the increase of women's political participation to foster and educate female political aspirants on a consistent basis.

Voters, women's groups, female politicians, research institutes, parties, and mass media as well as candidates themselves must make an effort to develop a political culture that increases women's political participation. The role of parties is particularly significant because they are responsible for reflecting popular opinion into political the arena, training and nominating candidates, and providing political education to the common people. The parties' activities are guaranteed in constitutions and these activities and aims should be run in accordance with democratic traditions. Parties must continuously take action to enhance women's low political participation. For future elections, parties should make a conscious effort to introduce women-friendly electoral systems with institutional support such as the consolidation of funds for the development of women's politics and the establishment of a pool for female politicians. Such a system would help women run in political elections without hesitation. Women should also vote for candidates and parties that suggest women-favorable policies and allow space for female leaders who would play a leading role in enhancing women's status and tackling women's issues. Female voters should support parties that suggest favorable policies for women.

Since the 1990s, women's groups have been working hard to discover promising female candidates and to improve institutional conditions for the expansion of

women's political participation. These groups also support female candidates by supporting local women's groups and strengthening monitoring activities for fair elections. Finally, even though parties are organizations for the nation, their basic aim is to obtain power. Hence, we should by now realize that women themselves hold the necessary power to force parties to adopt such suggestions.

## NOTES

- 1 National Election Commission. Online resource.
- 2 It was provided by the Uri Party and the Grand National Party.
- 3 It was provided from the National Election Commission.
- 4 Collection of materials of Women's alliance for the 17<sup>th</sup> general election for press conferences.

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## Chapter 7

# BEYOND APSARA: WOMEN, TRADITION AND TRAJECTORIES IN CAMBODIAN POLITICS

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Cambodia seems to have progressed a long way towards reconciliation and reconstruction since 7 January 1979, when the Khmer Rouge regime, known as ‘Democratic Kampuchea’, came to an end. Policies of liberalization and ‘free and fair’ elections monitored by the international community have re-engaged Cambodia with the world from which it was abruptly severed on 17 April 1975. Women have contributed greatly (perhaps greatest) to the process of reconstruction and reconciliation that has been underway in Cambodia for over twenty years. Yet women seem to have diminished in political status during this time. No women feature in the ‘who’s who’ of post-revolutionary Cambodia as established by political scientists (Gottesman 2003: xxi–xxv). Until 1998, there were no female ministers. Women are expected to fulfil domestic responsibilities in addition to maintaining jobs outside the home, yet few state-run crèches exist, and subsidies for single-parent households are unknown in a country that has no system of social security. This contradicts the policies of gender equity that have been espoused by every Cambodian government since 1979. Why have post-revolutionary governments been reluctant to enforce gender equitable legislation, and what are Cambodian women themselves doing to effect change?

### OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENT OF GENDER EQUITY

All post-revolutionary governments in Cambodia have officially endorsed gender equity and stipulated special protections for women. The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, adopted on 27 June 1981, endorsed ‘equal rights



in marriage' for men and women, 'measures to alleviate the burden of housewives and ensure them the conditions necessary to participate like men in social activities', equality in law, universal suffrage, and equal pay.<sup>1</sup> Article 27 provided for the particular needs of women. A visitor to Cambodia in 1981 recorded that female government officials were entitled to two months' paid maternity leave and access to a special maternity hospital. Some ministries organised day care for their employees' young children, as did certain factories (Boua 1982: 58, 1983: 273). Women were employed as heads of departments in health and industry and throughout the public sector (Boua 1982: 52, 1983: 260; Shawcross 1985: 266). Women themselves did not feel that they were discriminated against. One woman said, 'I think I am treated equally to my male colleague; I have enough knowledge to perform the task and so does he' (Boua 1982: 52). One of the first state initiatives implemented by the PRK government was the creation of *krom samaki*, 'solidarity groups' or 'co-operatives', at the commune and village level. According to the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs, one of the main purposes of the *krom samaki* system was to enable widows, and other women without 'manpower' and the means of agricultural production, to support themselves (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 10). Each *krom samaki*, comprising between five and twenty families, was allocated an equal amount of good and bad land for cultivation, owned in common (Boua 1982: 49; Gottesman 2003: 91). Equipment and animals were owned by individuals, according to their means, but other members of the same *krom samaki* were entitled to their use. In return, owners received an extra portion of the harvest (Boua 1983: 261). Women participated in leadership roles in the *krom samaki*, although some have commented that this probably reflected the high ratio of female to male survivors (Mysliwiec 1988: 30).

Women and men were encouraged to join state associations as a means of contributing to the restructuring of the country, as directed by Article 38 of the PRK constitution. The Women's Association was one of the most important of these. Representatives of the Women's Association were present at central, provincial, district, commune, and village level, and one woman in each *krom samaki* would also act as the representative of the Women's Association (WMC 2000a: 5). The Women's Association maintained a presence throughout Cambodia (Ledgerwood 1990: 225),<sup>2</sup> implementing programmes aimed at redressing poor literacy, improving education, and vocational training for women (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 15). Material assistance was also provided in the form of capital for the establishment of small enterprises or in cases of severe hardship (Mysliwiec 1988: 61). Urban and, to a lesser extent, rural women

received advice, informal marriage counselling, and help in emergencies. They were also 'reminded' of the correct behaviour that a model citizen should exhibit and government policies and initiatives expounded (Boua 1982: 59). Women's Livelihood Groups were established in 1980 at village level. They convened each month to discuss problems facing local women and convey matters of concern to the Women's Association for representation to government policy-makers. Representatives of the Women's Association made recommendations to the Council of Ministers regarding issues of concern to women and commented on draft legislation directly impacting upon women, such as the marriage code and family planning policy. The Women's Association held National Women's Congresses in 1983 and 1988, published a magazine for women from 1984 onwards, and organised yearly events to celebrate International Women's Day every 8 March (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995:26–27, 34–35). A national summit on women's affairs was held as part of the 8 March celebrations in 1993 at which a five-stage proposal specifying recognition, participation, equal rights, development, and solidarity as aims for the post-election government to work towards was formulated (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 21–23).

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, promulgated on 21 September 1993, differed very little from that of the PRK. Gender equity was ensured.<sup>3</sup> Special protections for women were included. Article 46 forbade trafficking 'in human beings, their exploitation by prostitution and obscenity which affects the reputation of women', outlawed the dismissal of female employees on the grounds of pregnancy, guaranteed maternity leave with full pay, and additional services for rural women. Article 73 stipulated that the State would provide crèches and childcare assistance. One of the first international instruments signed by the post-election government in 1993 was the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (Aafjes and Athreya 1996:6). Two months later, the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs was established. Its mandate was to become the focal point and platform for the advancement of Cambodian women through advocacy and the improvement of living conditions (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 3). This was to be effected by increasing women's participation in the economy and in health, education and social services.

In 1995 the activities of the Secretary of State for Women's Affairs included the establishment of Women in Development centres at provincial level, staff recruitment (largely from Women's Association members), explaining the objectives of the Secretariat, and the delegation of tasks (Secretariat of State

for Women's Affairs 1995:29–30). Advocacy for women's issues became a high priority for the government after 1997. Gender awareness programmes were implemented in numerous provincial 'development villages' in 1999 (WMC 2000a: 14). The Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs established a volunteer outreach programme in which existing midwives or other community workers received training in disseminating information that could assist women in their reproductive choices (United Nations Cambodia 2000: 17). It also organised a sixteen-day campaign between 25 November and 10 December 2002 targeted at ending violence against women (Green 2002: 15). These initiatives stemmed from the increase in negative social activities involving women, such as prostitution, sex trafficking, domestic violence, and rape (Gottesman 2003: 304; WMC 2000b: 22).

## WOMEN AND RECONSTRUCTION

Cambodians who had managed to escape death through starvation, illness, or the purges of an increasingly paranoid and brutal regime faced the reconstruction of their country. This was carried out with the direct involvement of the Vietnamese, an involvement that some have chosen to call an occupation (Chandler 2000: 229). The Cambodians most necessary in reconstruction efforts – that is, people who had received some education and experienced members of pre-revolutionary public and private sectors – were those who had been targeted for execution and ill-treatment between 1975 and 1979. More than a million people died during those years; some estimates put the number as high as three million. Hundreds of thousands more fled as refugees (Curtis 1998: 4; Vickery 1986: 3). Over half, and perhaps as many as 65 per cent, of the survivors were women (Mysliwiec 1988: 30; Shawcross 1985: 37). Many had lost husbands and faced raising their children without any emotional or financial support from the extended family typical of Cambodian kinship (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 7). The burden of income-generation and labour fell to women.

Women were the primary breadwinners in the early 1980s, dominating the official and black markets. The first restaurants to be re-established in the towns were operated by women (Shawcross 1985: 203). Women also participated in the training schemes implemented by the PRK government in order to staff the state infrastructure (Ayres 2000: 129; Gottesman 2003: 39). Reflecting the urgency with which the process of rehabilitation was regarded, people with hardly any formal education were sent on training courses lasting from one month to one year in duration, and sent to the provinces for 'fieldwork'.<sup>4</sup> The School of Pedagogy offered a one-month training course before dispatching

graduates to schools (Gottesman 2003: 75). Some of the training conducted by government officials was by women such as Chhouk Chhim, vice-president of the Women's Association, who lectured on 'Qualities of a cadre trained in the mores of a revolutionary' (Boua 1983: 287). Women were enthusiastic about their contribution to national reconstruction through these training programmes. A nursing student finishing her course in 1981 said: 'When we finish the course we shall serve the people well – and just as competently as the men do!' (Boua 1982: 56). Graduates of civil service courses worked in municipal offices in a variety of capacities, including legal advisory and clerical work (WMC 2000a: 22).

Rural women were more directly involved in the physical reconstruction of Cambodia in the immediate post-revolutionary phase. Although men and women had both participated in the physically demanding agricultural work of rural communities before and during Democratic Kampuchea, men had assumed the most laborious of tasks such as ploughing and irrigation. Women were now required to shoulder all of these tasks (Boua 1982: 47; Mysliwiec 1988: 58). When the cycle of harvesting permitted, rural women would travel to provincial capitals or Phnom Penh in search of other work or in order to purchase goods for re-sale in their area (Boua 1982: 49). Older women ran roadside food stalls. Large numbers of rural women were engaged in military activities, some in direct combat, but most in logistical support. Women transported supplies of food, arms and ammunition and made uniforms. Some female commune leaders in rural areas participated in anti-Democratic Kampuchea activities. Thlang Yam, deputy leader of Tang Krang commune, Kompong Cham, conducted regular sorties into DK areas in order to persuade 'misled people' to defect to the PRK. After some success persuading men to integrate into the PRK – once by snatching two live grenades from the hands of a DK soldier – she recounted that she was approached by several other women wanting to leave the DK-controlled areas (WMC 2000a: 25). Women living in these remote areas under control of Democratic Kampuchea assumed the preponderance of labour roles, working in the fields and transporting goods in addition to food preparation and other household work (Shawcross 1985: 350). They also retrieved food from relief trucks, in line with aid agencies' policies of distributing food to women only, and carried ammunition for the DK military forces (Mysliwiec 1988: 100).

### WOMEN'S INTEREST GROUPS

The stability of the UNTAC era and the subsequent influx of donor funding saw the creation of many interest groups in addition to political parties (Curtis 1998: 119). Many had women's issues as core objectives (Shawcross 1994: 59). Human

rights groups in particular advocated women's rights. Women were enthusiastic supporters and members of these organisations,<sup>5</sup> which extended their agendas to development, HIV/AIDS, and health. Although most were initially based in Phnom Penh, some maintained a presence in the provinces. They organised debates and provided forums for women to question the various candidates as to their parties' policies towards women and women's concerns (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 31–32). Less than three months after the elections all parties were beset by internal dissensions and a period of disillusionment set in (Roberts 2001: 150–163). The withdrawal of UNTAC personnel resulted in an economic slump in privatised concerns such as hospitality, tourism and real estate, although development of service and industry sectors led to an average growth rate of six per cent over the next three years. Unemployment, corruption and politically motivated violence increased. William Shawcross described the Cambodia of 1994 as 'a society of patronage and theft' (1994: 38). On the weekend of 5–6 July 1997, fighting escalated between CPP and FUNCINPEC factions of the Cambodian armed forces. Prince Ranariddh fled the country and Hun Sen assumed control. The disapproval of the international community was registered in the suspension of humanitarian assistance and a massive decrease in tourism, leading to a decline in economic growth to only 2.6 per cent in 1997 and 1.3 per cent in 1998 (Kato et al. 2000: 9).

A consequence of the political environment between May 1993 and July 1997 was that no group or association was believed to be non-partisan. Although their existence and activities were conducted quietly, however, women's associations managed to weather the years between the 1993 elections and the events of July 1997 better than most. Many local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) focusing on women's issues and human rights were established in 1993 and 1994 (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 3), and these were vocal in demanding the enforcement of legal protections for women (Aafjes and Athreya 1996: 3). In 1995, there were sufficient local women's organizations to warrant the establishment of the Amara Women's Network, an umbrella organization that oversaw dialogue and co-ordination of activities, particularly at the village and commune level (Larsson 1996: 25). Members of Cambodian Women Against Violence founded the Women's Media Center of Cambodia (WMC) in 1995.<sup>6</sup> The same year, Koh Kor Island, a resettlement program for abused women, was established. The women-run community supported itself through farming and sewing and elected its own leaders annually (Kihara and Phann 2001: 1, 9). Khemara, established in 1990, began running outreach workshops for sex workers in 1995 (KWVC 1998: 11). When a young woman died as a result of

marital abuse in 1996, a human rights NGO worker came to inform her family of their rights and how to lay charges (Zimmerman 1995: 54). In October 1996 the Khmer Women's Voice Center (KWVC) conducted a grassroots national training programme in women and family law (KWVC 1997).

The political environment in Cambodia between July 1997 and July 2003 was relatively stable, although incidents of harassment and intimidation worsened. Stability, in addition to the resurgence in confidence and investment on the part of the international community, fostered the development of civil society and initiatives for special interest groups. A number of NGOs with women's issues as their focus, including Women for Prosperity, Amara, Banteay Srei, and the Women's Association for Peace and Development, trained women candidates in topics germane to political participation, including electoral process and decentralization, prior to the commune elections in 2003 (Vanthanouvong and Sak 2003). Women in Prosperity was described in 2000 as the first organisation 'committed to helping women in political positions to develop skills and gain the courage to take the candidacy and become members of the parliament and the senate', including leadership training projects for women candidates in all three political parties. The Women's Association for Peace and Development had similar proposals in process in 2000 (WMC 2000a: 19–20). On 25 February 2000 the gender unit of Khmer Women's Voice Center, led by Koy Veth, in cooperation with the Ministry for Women's and Veteran's Affairs, laid sixteen proposals before the Senate and the Royal Government of Cambodia concerning 'the strengthening of women's power, promoting women to assume mid-level positions and creating favourable conditions for equality and equity'. The proposals included the organization of gender training courses in all localities to promote the understanding of the population in general, the introduction of gender issues into school curriculum, the establishment of dormitories for female students and the provision that 30 per cent of the candidacy will be women standing for the commune elections (WMC 2000b: 35–36).

The media became a prime vehicle for the dissemination of general information concerning women's issues. The Khmer Women's Voice Center began publishing an eponymous bilingual magazine each month in 1998. The Women's Media Center of Cambodia established Radio WMC in 2000 in order 'to raise awareness of social issues in Cambodia and to improve the situation of women for the benefit of Cambodian society'.<sup>7</sup> Radio programming included programming aimed at women, children and teenagers, funded by ILO and UNICEF, and general programming wherein people could phone in requests for songs or discuss issues.<sup>8</sup> The Women's Media Center also carried out a series of sociological

gender analyses in 2000. The human rights group ADHOC published a booklet, 'Satrei khmei neung setthi manus' [Cambodian women and human rights], in 2001. The Cambodian Women's Crisis Center raised grievances concerning law enforcement with regard to attacks on women, saying that the likelihood of prosecution 'was subject to the power of money, bribes and powerful backers to prevent justice' (WMC 2000b: 25). NGOs continued to address issues such as prostitution, sexual health and bonded labour. The Indradevi Association, a local NGO working in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, provided practical information and training for sex workers (O'Connell and Boua 2000: 16). The Vulnerable Children Assistance Organisation initiated a project that re-trained liberated child domestic workers, the majority of whom are girls, in skills such as hairdressing (McDonald-Gibson 2003: 12).

### POLICY VERSUS REALITY

The government installed in 1979 lauded gender equity and praised women's contributions to reconstruction. Those who had been active in the National Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea were rewarded with positions, pensions and property.<sup>9</sup> Yet few women occupied high-ranking positions in the PRK government, although Michael Vickery is correct to state that the immediate post-revolutionary period is that in which the highest number of women participated in political life in modern Cambodia.<sup>10</sup> Even the PRK's slogan of appreciation for women's contributions to reconstruction efforts, 'Her fingers move from morning until night (...) and the fact that their husbands become cadres is due to their wives' (WMC 2000a: 16), relegated women to a supporting role. Writing in 1982, Chanthou Boua remarked: 'The accelerated short-term training has already produced numerous, surprisingly forceful and capable cadres. Among them, there are many women, but, as yet, very few occupy important positions' (1982: 52). Government policies of gender equity appear to have been ill-enforced. Although the government espoused equal access to education for boys and girls, the latter comprised only one-third of children enrolled in the last year of primary school (Boua 1982: 55). The Women's Association was criticised for not doing much to change the situation of Cambodian women: 'It does not yet seem to exert much influence on vital decisions concerning women's economic and social well-being' (Boua 1982: 52). This included a glossing over of questions such as divorce, a phenomenon that did not fit the desired image of a functional society of happy workers (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 58). Many visitors to Cambodia in the early 1980s commented that the main activity of the Women's Association appeared to be propounding the



policies and programmes of the new government rather than promulgating a development agenda (Boua 1982: 59; Mysliwiec 1988: 61). The accessibility of training programmes for rural women was also an area of contention (WMC 2000a: 16). Critics of the Women's Association acknowledged, however, that its activities may have been constrained by government policies and budgetary priorities (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 34–35).

Only eight of the 162 full members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) attending the Fourth Congress in May 1981 were women,<sup>11</sup> and only one woman, Men San An, was appointed to the twenty-two member CPK Central Committee for Organization (Vickery 1986: 74). Three years later the Central Committee for Organization admitted its second female member, Mean Saman.<sup>12</sup> The following year saw more women in key party positions. Men San An was appointed President of the Central Committee for Organization as well as the Central Committee for Propaganda and Education. Other women occupying key political positions included Ho Non (Deputy Council Minister), Som Kim Suor (editor of the state newspaper); and Lak On (Party Secretary, Ratanakiri province) (Vickery 1986: 80–81). More women were elected to leadership positions at the municipality and provincial commune levels. A study conducted in early 2000 reported that there were four women commune leaders in Phnom Penh. The Chief of Boeung Keng Kang I quarter had held the position since 1985; the Chief of the Olympic quarter had been elected in 1981, downgraded to Deputy in 1985, then appointed Chief again in 1987; and the Chief of Psar Kandal II quarter came to office in 1985 after working at a series of low-ranking authority positions since late 1979 (WMC 2000a: 22). In the 1981 commune elections, twenty-one out of the twenty-four provincial female candidates won their seats and the other three were elected Deputy leaders. These elections are particularly significant, as prior to 1985 candidacy was not based on central party nominations. After the introduction of this requirement, fewer women were nominated, resulting in fewer women in leadership roles (WMC 2000a: 16). The actual number of women appointed to high-profile political positions belied the equitable policies of the PRK government. In 1995, the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs estimated that the average number of female parliamentary numbers until the signing of the Paris Peace Accords was 18 per cent (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 26).

In April 1989, the National Assembly of the PRK adopted a number of amendments to the constitution as part of a general policy of liberalization and Cambodia began to prepare for the United Nations-sponsored elections of 1993. A positive consequence of liberalization was that many khmei khieu,



or Cambodians who had been living overseas (in some cases, since the 1960s), perceiving Cambodia to be safe, returned, bringing wealth, children who had been born or grown up in Western countries, and their own ideas for the reconstruction of Cambodia. A negative consequence, and one that tends to be dwelt upon, is that the sudden appearance of wealth and foreign influences in Cambodian society led to inflation, corruption, nepotism, widespread prostitution, and the spread of HIV/AIDS (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995:20; Shawcross 1994: 15).<sup>13</sup> Returning male Cambodians were given positions within the government structure as a reward for their return. Women, who staffed many of the lower and mid-level positions of the ministries, were ousted (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 10).

The representation of women in politics did not improve during the lead up to the elections in 1993. Only 5 per cent of the candidates put forward by over twenty political parties were women, and only five were amongst the 120 members elected to the National Assembly (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 17). Although the percentage of women candidates on the ballot for the 1993 elections was small, women were indispensable at the grassroots political level (Boua 1994: 14). The official reasons, put forward by the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs in 1995, that so few women ran in the May 1993 elections, were political harassment, lack of true democracy, and 'the lack of political will of the parties' leaders, who were predominantly men' (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1994: 18). Male politicians were not adverse to using women in order to confer legitimacy upon themselves, however. Judy Ledgerwood attended a political rally in Kompong Cham province in April 1993 in which a khmei khieu politician drew upon the presence of two women imbued with the power of tradition in order to establish himself as man who deserved election to a position of power. One of the women was his wife, dressed and styled in a traditional Cambodian silk sampot with expensive jewellery identifying her as a wealthy (and therefore influential) woman. She did not address the crowd but remained attentive and approving in the background. The other woman was older, dressed as a secular nun, and the leader of a local militia. The politician said that she was 'too strong' to address the crowd but referred to her and her loyalty to him frequently. Conversely, the politician verbally castigated another woman, the wife of the chief provincial official of the politician's party, for daring to take the microphone and make a statement that supported a point that the politician had just made, delivered a harangue against American women and their freedom, and said that 'Khmer women would never reach this stage' (Ledgerwood 1996: 141–142).

Representation of women in politics hit its lowest level in the post-revolutionary period after the May 1993 elections, despite a number of official policies and programmes aimed at increasing gender equity and development. No women occupied ministerial positions, although they constituted a large percentage of government employees. There were five female Under-Secretaries of State in the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Social Action, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Most women who had run for election or campaigned for political parties found low-ranking jobs in government ministries after the elections. Subsequent administrative reshuffles increased the number of women in high office to seven in 1995. No women were elected to governorships at the provincial level, although there was one female deputy governor, of Stung Treng province (Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs 1995: 17–19). In 1995, Cambodia sent a delegation, led by princess Norodom Marie Ranariddh, to the *Fourth World Conference on Women* in Beijing (Jeldres 2003: 76). Almost immediately afterwards, the Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs was expanded into a Ministry, with a male minister. At the same time, Mu Sochua was appointed a special advisor on women's affairs to the Cambodian prime minister in 1995.

In the 1998 parliamentary elections, 16.47 per cent of candidates were women. Less than 10 per cent of seats were occupied by women in the final analysis (WMC 2000a: 7). A number of important positions were, however, occupied by women. Princess Vacheahra, daughter of King Suramarit and *Khun* Tep Kanha Sophea Kim-An Yeap, was elected member for Siem Reap. She then became the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, Press and Information. A major focus of her portfolio has been border demarcation (Jeldres 2003: 85–86). Princess Sisowath Santa, daughter of Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak and Princess Norodom Kethneary (a grand-daughter of King Norodom), was elected to the National Assembly as representative for Prey Veng. She also participated in the Commission on Public Health, Social and Women's Affairs (Jeldres 2003: 94). Tioulong Saumura was elected one of the representatives for the Municipality of Phnom Penh (Women's Media Centre 2000a: 8). In October 2000, Princess Norodom Marie Ranariddh led the Cambodian delegation to the 7<sup>th</sup> *Asia Kyushu Regional Exchange Summit* in Oita, Japan (Jeldres 2003: 77). Princess Bopha Devi was appointed Minister of Culture and Fine Arts, having held the positions of Deputy Minister and Advisor to the Royal Government regarding the portfolio since 1991 (United Nations Cambodia 2000: 6). Mu Sochua replaced Keat Sukhun as Minister for Women's and Veteran's Affairs (Larsson 1996: 18). There were also four female

secretaries of state and four under-secretaries of State during this period (United Nations Cambodia 2000: 6) One of these under-secretaries, Im Run, was quoted as saying in 1998 that the state encouraged women to 'work in government, industry and businesses and to participate in making decisions outside the home, in the community' (KWVC 1998: 9). This was a sentiment taken to heart by many women. Noun Bunna established the Cambodian's Women's Party the same year. The Democratic Front of Khmer Students and Intellectuals, formed in January 2000, had as its spokesperson and vice-president a young woman named Sun Sokunmelea, who led hundreds of students through the streets of Phnom Penh in January 2003, following the registration of the party for the July 2003 elections (Lon 2003: 3). The overall proportion of women in political representation remained slight, however. In 1999, the number of women in the 122-member Cambodian senate was twelve. This was reflected in the number of women in leadership positions at other levels of government, despite the fact that women made up 30 per cent of civil servants, with percentages of female parliamentarians, ministers, provincial governors and commune leaders at 12.9, 7.41, 0 and 0.81 per cent respectively (WMC 2000a: 13).

The low level of female participation and inclusion at the highest levels of government was reflected in the membership of the three main political parties during this period. In 2003, the Central Committee of the Cambodian People's Party included nine female members out of a total of 153, or 5.88 per cent. The Standing Committee had only one woman, Men Sam An, who was also the sole female member of the Permanent Committee.<sup>14</sup> This was little changed from the situation in 1999, when Men Sam An was the only woman on the twenty-member Permanent Committee and women comprised eight of 151 members of the Central Committee. In an interview conducted by the Women's Media Center in 2000, Men Sam An said that there was no woman's movement within the party structure '(...) but [we] have a 30 per cent principle for women'. She added that the principle was enacted through the work of the Women's Association for Development, saying the latter was '(...) all for women but not for the party.' The FUNCINPEC record was little better, despite Articles 1(b) and 3 of the 1999 party by-laws guaranteeing gender equality. There were no women on the Permanent Committee in February 2003 and only five on the forty-member Board of Directors. The women's movement within FUNCINPEC was described in 2000 as 'not doing much at present' (WMC 2000a: 20).

The Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) has been the most active in terms of activities for women. In 1999 the SRP created the National Council of Women, comprising two women for each province and forty-eight for Phnom Penh, in

order to monitor women's affairs (WMC 2000a: 19). The guiding force for this initiative was Tioulong Saumura. Elected to the National Assembly in 1998, she later chaired the Electoral Reform Task Force of the Alliance for Reform and Democracy in Asia. Tioulong Saumura has been vocal in advocating the necessity of involving more women in Cambodian politics and criticising the attitude of male Cambodian politicians, including her husband, Sam Rainsy. At the *14<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Roundtable*, held 3–6 June 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, she said: 'I am now fighting a double battle: one for democracy and freedom for all Cambodians against dictators, and one for better recognition of the contribution of female activists within the party, against my own colleagues and friends. I try to convince my male colleagues and party leaders, not to forget my dear husband, Madame Chair, that freeing political leadership will bring a beneficial evolution for both men and women.'

In the same speech she stated that she would establish her own political party for women eventually, but the first priority for all Cambodian politicians was to ensure 'the basic rights for Cambodians of both sexes' (Tioulong 2000).

### OBSTACLES TO GENDER EQUITY

Clearly, there is disparity between the official policies of post-revolutionary governments and their implementation, despite the involvement of Cambodian women in social and economic reconstruction. The legacy of colonial- and Sangkum-period educational trends weighed heavily against women in being selected for public service positions. Fewer women than men went on to secondary education in the 1950s and 1960s and fewer still to tertiary institutions. There were more women left alive after the fall of Democratic Kampuchea, but most had not finished secondary school. There was also little precedent for the involvement of women in political representation. Women in politics had only just begun to make their presence felt when revolution intervened. Those that had held positions of high office, for example Tong Siv Eng, Khieu Thirith, and Khieu Ponnary, had all been appointed to their positions on the basis of their close association with King Sihanouk or Pol Pot. The one example of historical female leadership known to most Cambodians, Queen Ang Mei, had negative connotations due to her association with Vietnamese imperialism. Chanthou Boua explained the lack of Cambodian women within the government hierarchy in 1981 as the result of ingrained modesty, 'the widespread chauvinism of Khmer men', and a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence due to trauma suffered during Democratic Kampuchea (1982: 52). Relationships – between urban and rural people, between adults and children, and between men and

women – were perceived to have been turned upside down during the Khmer Rouge period. The natural response in social reconstruction was to re-invert what had been inverted in a return to pre-revolutionary, ‘traditional’ norms. The return to ‘traditional’ values meant, for most people, those espoused in *Cbpab srei* and *Neang krup lakkhana*. As Judy Ledgerwood has explained, the socially acceptable Cambodian woman of these texts, ‘is not discussed as being “strong” or “powerful”, but as “virtuous” ’ (Ledgerwood 1990: 24). Although some literature produced during the early 1980s, such as *Vijjea aprum satrei khmei* [How to raise Cambodian girls] (Meung 1981), spoke of the dangers of Cambodian women being ‘too weak’ and a new interdependence between men and women rather than the subordination of the latter (Ledgerwood 1990: 234), it also drew upon the symbolism of Angkor Wat, the ‘new dawn’ of a sunrise, and the hierarchical relationship between parents and children in order to explain the role of Cambodian women in post-revolutionary Cambodian society – namely, to carry out their new responsibilities of reconstructing the nation whilst safeguarding ‘traditional’ Cambodian culture.

This assumption of dual roles, in the workforce and at home, impacted on the self-identity of women. They feared that their very capabilities would render them less feminine and jeopardise their marriage prospects, already reduced due to the scarcity of men (Mysliwiec 1988: 58). A young Cambodian woman complained to a foreign aid worker, ‘I wish you would bring a shipload of men instead of food!’ Polygamy, despite its prohibition by Article 7 of the PRK Constitution, became socially acceptable in the early 1980s (Martin 1994: 274; Mysliwiec 1988: 59). In 1981, a senior (female) member of the Women’s Association suggested that polygamy be legalized in order to ease the economic burden and loneliness of women (Boua 1982: 47). Although Boua believed that the situation in the provinces was better as there was ‘more solidarity between women’ (1982: 47), there is evidence that male commune leaders treated members of the Women’s Association in some areas as their personal harem, thus undermining these women’s ability to act autonomously (WMC 2000a: 18). This was a reversion to the demonstration of power exhibited by politicians in pre-colonial and colonial times.

Once policies of liberalization and the first stages of the peace process were implemented in the late 1980s and early 1990s, returning Cambodians sought to re-instate the half-remembered Cambodia of the 1950s and 1960s, perceived by many as a ‘golden age’ (Chandler 2000: 190). As Judy Ledgerwood has pointed out, notions of what did and did not constitute correct behaviour for women during this period were moderated by the nineteenth-century *Cbpab srei*, or

‘Code for women’. Secondary school students were required to memorise this text as part of the Cambodian literature curriculum. Women who did not conform to the expectations of *Chpab srei* – by drawing attention to themselves through loud speech, laughter, or movement – were ‘asking for trouble’ (Ledgerwood 1990: 87). Although the misogynistic texts of the nineteenth century in no way reflected what was truly traditional, generations of Cambodians had been taught – and are still being taught – that this was the way that Cambodian society in a previous ‘golden age’, before colonization, had operated. This underlying perception of women sat uneasily with official policies of gender equity, very much as Cambodian leadership culture concluded an uneasy truce with western notions of democracy (Ayres 2000: 160; Gottesman 2003: 219).

Preserving female sexual integrity has become synonymous with preserving ‘traditional’ Cambodian culture. Elizabeth Fuller Collins has commented upon this phenomenon in South Sumatra: ‘[Men] may enjoy new freedoms and opportunities because women have been given the task of preserving traditional values (...). Women are to be responsible for filtering out negative influences from abroad’ (1996: 136). This status as ‘guardians of culture and morality’ precludes women from power-sharing in post-revolutionary Cambodia. Gender identity, particularly female, is intricately bound up with ideas of culture and tradition, and resistance to change in this area is therefore connected to notions of ethnicity and nationalism (Gorman 1999: 1). At times this has had extreme implications in Cambodia. Social acceptance of domestic violence against women continues because, according to ‘traditional’ mores, the wife must be at fault, or the husband would not need to beat her (WMC 2000b: 21; Zimmerman 1995: 25). Enrolment rates for girls – only 60 per cent of the total population of girl children attend primary school – are a result of a bias against allowing women the means to become independent. Fear of ‘love letters’ dominates explanations as to why girls are precluded from attending schools (Bainbridge 2003: 14). Ledgerwood identified two social absolutes that showed no sign of changing in Cambodian societies: sexual control and the ordering of society, wherein virginity and sexual fidelity within marriage and the dominance of husbands over wives were of prime importance (1990: 243). This is evidenced by the absolute insistence upon traditional engagement or wedding ceremonies by the most modern and progressive families.

A double standard of gargantuan proportions has resulted from the tension between the reinvented traditional role of women and modernization. Rath Yong, district governor of Ba Phnom in Prey Veng, was dismissed on charges of corruption in August 1999. Many held that if Yong had been a man, the more

wealth he acquired, by whatever means, the higher 'she' would have been promoted (WMC 2000a: 16–17). The sexual double standard is worse. Whilst Cambodian women are expected to preserve their virginity until marriage and remain faithful to their husbands thereafter, men are expected to engage in numerous paid sexual encounters. A leading advocate of women's rights explained that most men would like to see Cambodian girls in a long skirt, as this meant that they were 'good girls', and modest. The same men, however, would think nothing of frequenting billiard-halls, bars and brothels where they paid Cambodian and Vietnamese girls for sex. Sex workers themselves, not the men who utilise their services, however, are seen as the social evil. In early 1998, Riem Sarin, then chief of the Phnom Penh Municipal Office of Minor Offences of the Ministry of Interior, said that a crackdown on prostitution 'helps bring happiness to every household because prostitution distracts husbands from their wives. If the prostitutes are available only at rather inaccessible places, husbands will stay at home and concentrate on caring for their families' (KWVC 1998: 9).

The policy of 'blaming the victim' has occurred with regard to retribution against second wives and mistresses of powerful men and in cases of rape. Since 1999 acid attacks have claimed the lives of many women and disfigured many more (WMC 2000b: 27). Rape is perceived as being at least partly the woman's fault. This perception has not been dispelled by the attitude of Cambodia's male political leaders in the post-revolutionary period. In 2001, Hun Sen issued a warning to female singers on a popular television programme in which he suggested that they not show their cleavage or wear short skirts as he felt that they were showing too much of themselves.<sup>15</sup> His Royal Highness Norodom Sihanouk, then king of Cambodia, a prolific commentator and writer of notes (available online in daily batches), once compared the ex-Minister of Women's and Veteran's Affairs, Mu Sochua, to 'Esther Williams – a famous Hollywood niade from the years of my youth' (Norodom Sihanouk 2003). Similarly, if a man takes a second wife, it is a public statement that his first wife was inadequate in some way. The supposed submissiveness of Cambodian women has made them valuable marriage partners, reflected in marriage migration trends. Cambodian men living overseas acquire 'traditional' brides raised in Cambodia, as they are likely to be more obedient than those raised in the west (Fitzgerald et al. 1998: 51).

Maria Mies has commented that 'Vietnamese men not only resent women in leadership positions, but also belittle or ridicule women's objective contributions to society and economy' (Mies 1986: 189). Elizabeth Fuller Collins has described Indonesia's New Order policies towards women as legitimized by the ideology



of *ibuism*, which ‘sanctions any action provided it is taken by the mother who looks after her family, a group, a class, company, or the state, without demanding any power or prestige in return’. In the Indonesian example, the ‘Pañca Dharma Wanita’ [Five duties of women] requires that women support their husbands, be good managers, produce the next generation of Indonesians, educate and socialize these children, and be good Indonesian citizens (Collins 1996: 130). The Cambodian government has yet to enshrine the position of women as ‘private’ and that of men as ‘public’ in law. There is, however, a tangible hostility towards ‘feminism’ as yet another western concept that would not translate well to Cambodian society (Gorman 1996: 6). In 1994, Eva Mysliviec, then director of the Cambodian Development Resource Institute, concluded that gender awareness training had not been effective due to ‘a fixation that gender is feminism (which, in their view, is bad), there is a lack of interest and a failure to see the relevance to the Cambodian development context’ (Larsson 1996: 25). Thun Saray, director of ADHOC, commented in 1996 that ‘(...) foreigners find it difficult to understand [Cambodia] and try to force co-operation (...). [They] impose models of development (...) and control their growth and direction’ (PPP 1996: 7).

Western concepts, by and large, have been ineffectual in Cambodia, and many Cambodians see ‘westernization’ as a bad influence upon ‘traditional’ behaviour. A WMC report commented in 2000 that in *Koh Santepheap* and *Rasmei Kampuchea* newspapers between January 1 and May 11, 2000, 12 cases of immoral, non-traditional conduct involving 17 young women and 18 young men were noted. ‘The misconduct was done in groups in which there were fewer girls than boys. They secretly had sex everywhere, including at the Olympic Stadium and guesthouses. Such irresponsible behaviours have caused our society to lose its dignity and the good characteristics of some positive aspects of the ancient Khmer values (...). This unlimited freedom will allow a disgraceful uncivilized culture to prevail over the Khmer society if the government does not take any measures to assist the teenagers’ (WMC 2000b: 27).

Prostitution, rape and incest, according to a government representative in 2000, were also attributable to western cultural influences, which ‘made poor men, who could not afford other girls, rape their own children or relatives’ (WMC 2000b: 26).

The blame for the perceived inferiority of Cambodian women cannot be laid wholly at the feet of Cambodians themselves. Western, ‘First World’ women are contributing to this construct. The assumption is that Cambodian women have been incapable of contributing to their own emancipation, that because



their methods have been largely unseen and unappreciated by international observers they have not been successful in designing and implementing ameliorative or advocacy strategies, and that because women's associations and political participation have not mirrored the development of women's liberation movements in the West, they are somehow inadequate. This attitude was exemplified by the sponsor of an international beauty pageant in 2002, who said that 'In Cambodia, women are traditionally not as respected as men (...). But now, women are becoming freer and more confident, and this contest is a celebration of that (...). It will encourage women to look after themselves' (Stubbs 2002: 20). Notwithstanding the questionable legitimacy of beauty pageants as vehicles of empowerment, the director of Lux Cosmetics echoed the sentiments of many women who encourage their Cambodian counterparts to pull themselves out of their unemancipated predicament.

Conflicting perceptions of Cambodian women have resulted in a confused and fragmented construct that threatens to preclude future gender equity. On the one hand, women are expected to act as the keepers of tradition and the moral regulators of society. According to most Cambodians, a good woman is one who respects her husband's wishes, stays home, cares for the house and family, is faithful, and keeps quiet. A good daughter should not choose her own husband, but allow her parents to choose one for her. Girls should not be permitted to study too long, as they could then read and write, therefore enabling them to receive and send love letters and potentially compromise the honour of the family through an undesirable liaison.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, bookstalls in the markets display the bilingual *How to write love letters* next to *The role of women in human rights* and *Treatise on the seclusion of pubescent girls*, while a reprint of the 1964 *Good manners for men and women* jostles for position with lurid thrillers, whose covers show half-naked young women. An employee of local NGO Gender and Development for Cambodia commented in 2002 that '20 people can rape a woman at the same time, and consider this a fun, bonding experience between males' (PPP 2002: 14). Perhaps the most bizarre commentary on the role of women in post-revolutionary Cambodia is to be found on the Cambodian People's Party list of important events in Cambodia's history: '20 June 1999 – Royal palace denies rumour of evil god demanding thousands of long-haired virgin girls' (CPP 2000).

#### ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Cambodian women are acting within the confines of their environment to effect changes to the way that they are perceived. Maria Mies described a universal

model of post-revolutionary socialist societies wherein despite 'progressive constitutions and legal equality between men and women, and women's enormous contribution to the war effort and to the reconstruction of the economy, women are nowhere adequately represented on the political decision-making bodies and are, moreover, sent back to the family and the "subsidiary economy", whereas men "move up" after struggles for national liberation' (1986: 198). Cambodian women have noticed the applicability of this phenomenon to their own experience. In 2000, WMC published a study of political participation in which the first line was 'Weak women make the younger generation weak' (2000a: 2). The same publication asked why the activities of women's associations, once active nation-wide, were '(...) hidden or reduced (...)', and asked '(...) is being a female candidate for commune elections at this time of peace and national reconciliation harder than it was on the battlefields?' (2000a: 5). This initiative rose to a crescendo in March 2000, when over 200 representatives from national and international NGOs, United Nations agencies, and government bodies marched from the Independence Monument to the National Assembly, where they presented proposals advocating women's rights to Prince Ranariddh (WMC 2000b: 36–37).

There are other indications of a changing attitude towards gender equity. Some feel that the events of 5–6 July 1997 '(...) would not have seen bloodshed if women had been the political leadership' (WMC 2000a: 30). Sek Yi, believed to be 119 years old, told an interviewer in 2002 that the secret to his long life was the following mantra: 'Don't make bad karma. Don't steal things. Don't rape someone's wife' (PPP 2002: 14). This attitude has been fostered by new slogans devised by people involved in women's issues advocacy, such as '(...) man is one hand, woman is the other: Cambodia uses both hands to build the nation!' (KWVC: 1998: 15), and '(...) women in power means that the country is powerful' (WMC 2000a: 10). Women have been described as better at dispute resolution and implementing initiatives than men; they have also been described as less corruptible (WMC 2000a: 28). Of 138 people interviewed in a 1999 survey, 90 per cent gave an affirmative answer to the question 'Does day-to-day life in a commune require women to participate in the leadership?' (WMC 2000a: 8).

Once women are relegated to child-rearing and subsistence activities, the state profits, men are privileged, and competition for positions is removed; men's wages, necessarily low as the nation seeks to reconstruct itself, are subsidised by women's private labour; women are fixed to their activities throughout the day, thus freeing men for 'nine-to-five' work in more prestigious and economically

lucrative fields. Last but not least, men thereby control women's work (Mies 1986: 193). Clearly, the majority of Cambodian men would have no interest in power-sharing, as this would put an end not only to the arrangements that have privileged them, but also alter prevailing concepts of Cambodian masculinity. This is a serious proposition for members of a society that have already faced a number of violent changes in the past thirty years. The erosion of further traditional values – or values inculcated as traditional – would increase the vulnerability of a people already threatened with an identity crisis, as kin and client support systems, decimated by the revolutionary decade and its aftermath, slip away (Collins 1996: 136).

According to Tioulong Saumura, Cambodian political leadership culture is averse to gender equity for a reason that is connected to the larger framework of power relations: 'One explanation is the understandable lack of will from our male leaders to allow any challenge to their dominant position (...). But another factor, more powerful and more specific to Cambodia, is the resistance of formerly communist leaders to engage in any reform which would jeopardise their centralised and dictatorial style of government. They have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and to pay only lip service to modern concepts such as gender equality, good governance, transparency in public affairs, preservation of natural resources and the environment, decentralization and devolution of powers' (Tioulong 2000).

This is, in effect, a 'new state-class which lives by the fact that it monopolises politics' (Mies 1986: 198–199). Yet Cambodian society is changing. Authors are beginning to write novels that reflect the 'new' Cambodian woman.<sup>17</sup> Women in Cambodian politics are operating within the constraints of society to effect change. This approach was epitomised by the Minister of Women's and Veteran's Affairs on 30 November 2002. At a concert organised to promote awareness of violence against women, Mu Sochua began her keynote address by saying 'I would like to suggest to men – please do not violate women, or think that they are not valuable' (Green 2002: 15). Cambodian women have chosen negotiation, rather than war; traditional *sampot*, rather than battle fatigues. Although these choices may differ from approaches to gender equity taken by women in other parts of the world, as inhabitants of a land that has been beset by war and violence for three decades, these choices should not be held against the women of Cambodia.

## NOTES

- 1 See Articles 7, 27, 31, 33, and 81 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Kampuchea.
- 2 At times this presence put representatives at risk. In 1981 Khmer Rouge soldiers arrested a sub-district president of the Women's Association in Stung Treng. She was held captive for two months, during which time she was tortured and sexually assaulted (Boua 1983: 264).
- 3 See Articles 31, 34–36, 43, 45, and 50 of the 1993 Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia.
- 4 This consisted of explaining the national political philosophy and how it differed from that of Pol Pot, reassuring people of their security, and encouraging participation in collective initiatives (Boua 1982:51).
- 5 LICHADO was established by a woman, Kek Galabru, on 10 December 1992.
- 6 Notes of interview with a representative of the Women's Media Center, 9 May 2001, Phnom Penh.
- 7 Text from a leaflet distributed by the Women's Media Centre in Phnom Penh, 2001. In the possession of the author.
- 8 Notes of interview with a representative of the Women's Media Center, 9 May 2001, Phnom Penh.
- 9 The house in which the present author lived for several years in Phnom Penh, a French villa that had once been a convent school managed by the Carmelite nuns, had been given to a party heroine in 1980.
- 10 Michael Vickery, pers. comm., 10 November 2003.
- 11 'Full' designates members with full voting rights. The CPK established the post-revolutionary government that became known as the People's Republic of Kampuchea in conjunction with the socialist government of Vietnam (Vickery 1986:64).
- 12 Mean Saman had been the national president of the Women's Association since 1979.
- 13 A typical description of these influences can be found in Tarr and Aggleton (1996): 'The young and glamorous appearance [of women who poured beer in Cambodian restaurants] symbolised what the consumption of alcohol could do for young males. Before the appearance of UNTAC in 1992 alcohol was not marketed in this fashion.'
- 14 Notes of interview with a representative of the Cambodian People's Party, Beoung Keng Kang III office, Chamkar Mon, Phnom Penh, 16 January 2003. The female members were Men Sam an, Som Kim Suor, Lim Thy, Chhouk Chhim, Lak On, Khuon Sodary, Nin Saphon, Ho Non, and Im Run.
- 15 Notes of interview with a representative of the Women's Media Center, 9 May 2001, Phnom Penh.

- 16 Notes of interview with a representative of the Women's Media Center, 9 May 2001, Phnom Penh.
- 17 Notes of interview with a representative of the Women's Media Center, 9 May 2001, Phnom Penh.

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## Chapter 8

# WOMEN IN THAI POLITICS

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*Kazuki Iwanaga*

In Thailand, as in most other Asian countries, politics has traditionally been a male preserve. Compared to men, women have not been visible in governance and politics. Although Thailand was among the first Asian countries to grant the right to vote to women, after almost seven and a half decades of slow, incremental gains for women in politics, the representation of women remains no more than a blip on the political landscape dominated by men. Women have a long way to go before reaching the critical mass needed to produce women-oriented policies. Since women are grossly under-represented in political bodies, the interests of women are not adequately represented in the legislature or in government. As a result, the country is deprived of the benefits which accrue from women's expertise and experiences.

There is still little analysis on the participation of women in politics at various levels of government in Thailand and research to date is fragmentary. However, interest in this field is growing in light of the development of democracy with the introduction of the new constitution in 1997, as well as changes in civil society. In this chapter, the case of Thailand is used to achieve three main objectives.

- First, the position and advancement of women in the Thai parliament will be analyzed in order to contribute to research on women's political representation in the developing world.
- Second, the case of Thailand will be used to test some of the assumptions and theories developed in the industrialized democracies of Europe and North America concerning the impact of women in public office.
- Third, the major barriers facing the entrance of women into the national parliament in Thailand will be examined to see whether the Thai case is consistent with research findings on women and politics in industrial democracies of the West.



Thailand constitutes an interesting and significant context for studying women's political representation. First, the country is undergoing fundamental changes in her political system as a result of constitutional reform in 1997. Thailand had until the military *coup* in September 2006 served as an example of a relatively stable, transitional democratic country. Since the new constitution, or the 'People's Constitution' as it is sometimes called, Thai democracy has been moving from a system with traditional patriarchal characteristics of governance toward one with greater accountability and greater transparency. Second, Thailand's economic development since the 1960s has gradually transformed it from a poor agrarian society to a more industrial one. This has changed the preconditions for democracy and civic society. Thus, Thailand provides an interesting test of the consequences of economic development and industrialization for the status of women. Third, the strong patriarchal tradition of Thai society and women's subordination has carried over into the contemporary period. If significant improvement in the political participation of women can be seen in Thailand, it would mean that the barriers to women's political under-representation are surmountable in a strongly patriarchal society.

One of the important questions concerning the low proportion of women in the Thai national legislature is whether or not their numbers can make a difference with regard to the types of bills introduced and passed. Female politicians who constitute a small minority may not be able to express their distinct preferences and priorities until their numbers approach a 'critical mass'. Hence, two questions come to the fore. What can account for the relatively low proportion of women's representation in the parliament in Thailand, and what can they do for women in general once they get to power?

## DATA COLLECTION

We know very little about the various factors inhibiting women's advancement in electoral office at the national level in Thailand and almost nothing regarding whether policy outputs differ due to women's participation in policymaking. In order to assess women's impact in the Thai parliament and evaluate obstacles to their advancement in public office, I conducted a number of in-depth interviews in December 2002, based on an interview guide, with female members of both houses of the Parliament, including one former cabinet member. The interviews covered a wide range of issues, each lasting approximately one to three hours, and were tape-recorded. I also interviewed several persons, including those who ran unsuccessfully for seats in the Senate in 2000 and the House of Representatives 2001, who are knowledgeable and closely involved in the question of women's

political representation. They provided first-hand insight into how women in politics at the national level actually function.

Realizing that any analysis of the legislative priorities of women legislators in a single session is unlikely to give a complete picture of the extent of their involvement with legislation affecting women, additional data was gathered. Data on the legislative agendas of female and male members of the House of Representatives in the Thai parliament was collected for several legislative sessions beginning with the advent of the government led by Thaksin Shinawatra, the leader of the Thai Rak Thai party, in 2001 to September 2003. In my analysis, women were compared to men serving in the House at the same time. Given the small proportion of women in the House of Representatives and the small number of bills initiated by the MPs, all types of bills were included in the analysis. The data were obtained from the Thai parliament, which maintains records of all bills and their fates.

## BACKGROUND

In 1932, women acquired the rights to vote and stand for election in Thailand following the change from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. Although Thai women were among the first in Asia to gain the franchise, their situation in the political arena did not change substantially – career opportunities in electoral politics were culturally closed to them. It was not until 1949 that the first woman was elected to parliament. In the 1952 elections, four women were elected. In 1955, a law requiring candidates in parliamentary elections to belong to political parties was enacted. In the election that followed in 1957, there was little space for women and only one woman was elected. During the five decades between 1949 and 2000, there was little growth in the representation of women, and women's participation in electoral politics continued to remain minimal, although women consistently exercised their right to vote.

Thai women face numerous obstacles in their struggle for political representation, and this poses serious problems as it runs counter to the ideals of democracy. Research in this area suggests several explanations for this predicament. Women's sex-role socialization is a basic obstacle to their participation in formal politics. Women and men are conditioned by society to play different roles – men are more active in the public domain while women are more active in the private realm. The concept of socialization encompasses the development of the stereotypical belief that only certain patterns of behavior are suitable for women and that politics is not included in these behavior patterns. Women also encounter this problem with the dual role as mother/wife and politician, and the

lack of self-confidence among women has also reduced many women's desire to participate in politics. There is a complex interaction of structural, institutional and cultural variables that have had the effect of establishing the political realm as a near-male monopoly.

During the last 15 years, Thailand has undergone an extraordinary transformation. It has changed from an authoritarian regime towards a multiparty democracy in which politicians are chosen in regular elections. In the late 1990s, a range of new institutions were established. The new constitution of 1997 has provided a significant enabling framework for gender rights. Article 30 states that women and men shall enjoy equal rights, this being a first step towards giving women more opportunities to participate in the male-dominated political arena. It was the women's movement that has continually emphasized the gender-based capsizing of political institutions.

The slow incremental increase in the numbers of women serving in the Thai parliament still raises important questions concerning the impact of women in public office. If more and more women enter public office, what are the consequences likely to be for the content of politics? It appears that women do have some specific political priorities, and evidence especially from the U.S. and Nordic countries has demonstrated that women representatives actively seek to promote their agendas (Bratton 2002; Swers 2002; Thomas & Wilcox 1998; Wängnerud 2000). When we look at the national level of government in Thailand, the question of women's representation is however problematic as women's representation in the parliament has remained at the range of level of tokenism. In the late 1960s, for example, there were only six women in the House of Representatives, or a mere 2.8 per cent of the total House membership. This gradually increased to about 4 per cent during the 1980s and jumped to 6 per cent after the 1992 elections. In the 2001 general elections, women occupied only 9.2 per cent of the seats in the lower house of the Thai parliament, a figure that is considerably below the Asian average of 14 per cent. The proportion of women in the lower house increased to 10.6 per cent in the 2005 general election, the highest ever in Thailand. In addition, women occupy only 10 per cent of the 200 seats in the Senate.

This dismal record is also apparent at lower levels; women legislators are markedly absent from provincial and local assemblies. The local level is often seen as the level where women can move into the political arena with relative ease (for example through less competition for available positions, the possibility for women to participate in politics alongside employment and family responsibilities, and the increased acceptance of women's involvement in local-

level government). Women's recruitment to local and provincial assemblies may be of interest because it provides a good training ground for women wishing to pursue political careers at higher levels of government, in addition to providing a future pool of women candidates for the Thai parliament. However, the current low proportion of women elected to provincial and local assemblies provides only bleak prospects for the representation of women in parliament and other higher political positions in the future. Unlike many other countries, the representation of women in Thailand has been somewhat higher at the national level than at the local level until quite recently. One of the main reasons may be that most local political bodies comprise rural areas, which are predominantly influenced by traditional views of women's public and private roles. Moreover, at the local level, power has traditionally remained vested in the hands of local worthies, and women have generally been marginalized in the affairs of villages and communities. Female political representation at the local level varies considerably depending on the degree of urbanization. In the Bangkok area, for instance, the proportion of female politicians at the local level is considerably larger than at the national level.

The literature on women and politics suggests two major perspectives on political representation, namely, the descriptive and the substantive (Pitkin 1967; Phillips 1995). From the perspective of descriptive representation, electing more women serves the symbolic purpose of gender equality (as it reflects their proportion in society), and renders legitimacy to the political system. The substantive perspective claims that increased representation of women in parliament would make a substantive difference because women and men have different experiences and different priorities in political issues. Women officeholders are often assumed to act on behalf of women, working to introduce and pass legislation that improves their political, economic and social positions.

Can we assume that female politicians have a shared experience and perspective that unites them because of their gender? There are differences among women politicians based on ideological, ethnic, religious, economic, social, or other differences. There will always be women legislators who deny gender as a factor in shaping their priorities in policy issues. There are important factors such as party policy and party discipline that influence their political behavior. There also exist male politicians who advance women's interests and form alliances with women politicians to promote those interests. In order to understand the question of whether women are in fact representing other women, it is important to keep in mind the possibility that women politicians represent differences among women.

## WOMEN'S LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES AND POLICY PRIORITIES

Despite the recent increases of women in the national legislature in Thailand, very little research has systematically explored the careers and the policy contributions of these women. Who are they, and what motivated them to seek public office?

The demographic and social characteristics of representatives have changed over time. The newly elected legislators of the House of Representatives in 2001 were younger and decidedly better educated than their predecessors. In terms of education, female and male parliamentarians do not differ much. Candidates have been required to have at least a bachelor's degree or its equivalent, but in comparison with those elected in the 1996 general elections, representatives with a master's degree increased by nearly 24 per cent, and from 17 to 41 per cent in the House of Representatives. The increase was particularly noteworthy among those elected in the party-list system: 43 per cent of the deputies had a master's degree and 17 per cent had a Ph.D. (Kokpol 2002: 304).

The majority of female legislators had been actively employed before becoming representatives, either as professionals or business women, local officeholders, or members of women's organizations. Some entered politics from a civic worker or volunteer background. Both male and female parliamentarians are drawn disproportionately from the best educated in Thai society, but female parliamentarians are more likely than their male colleagues to come from advantaged backgrounds and political families (in fact, most come from the middle and upper classes, and belong to prominent political families). As one female member of the House of Representatives explained her entry to politics:

My father was my role model. He was formerly a local politician, acting as a member of the municipality, and a member of the provincial council, and later became Member of Parliament and Deputy Minister of three ministries, respectively. During his two periods of being a senator, I had an opportunity to work as his assistant. That experience made me feel that when I was ready, be it my qualification and age, I would enter politics. I thought that to serve people or the nation, appropriate qualification and age were necessary so I waited until I was 25 years old, according to the new constitution, and got my master's degree to enter politics (<http://library.riu.ac.th/webdb/images/InterviewKantawan.htm> accessed May 2003).

Although some of the women politicians are feminists and have made efforts to advance women's causes, most of them are virtually indistinguishable from their male colleagues in their background, performance, and policy agendas. Women however enter into national politics later in life than their male colleagues be-

cause women often have to fulfill responsibilities as mothers and wives before entering politics.

Do women legislators in Thailand serve as role models for the women of their country? Since the women parliamentarians in Thailand are from the same socio-economic elite as their male colleagues, it can be difficult for them to serve as role models for the masses of Thai women.

The women I interviewed were questioned about their motivation for entry into the national legislature: all expressed a motivation for entering politics that could be characterized as civic-inspired (they wanted to help the constituency, society or country in general, a goal which was coupled with a sense of public service), and some also expressed an opportunity-based motivation (such as being encouraged to seek office, recruited to run, wanted to enter politics, or had previous political experience). Most of them said that they received encouragement from their family circle to enter politics. Two conclusions may be drawn from the interviews. First, women senators put more emphasis on civic-inspired motivations than their female colleagues in the House of Representatives. Second, women legislators of both houses of parliament pointed out that women in politics make more responsible choices, guided by civic-oriented considerations, rather than career or other opportunity-oriented motives, than their male counterparts.

A study of twenty senatorial candidates carried out by the Women in Politics Institute (2000) also supported the notion that the women primarily sought office for civic-oriented reasons. They also found, interestingly enough, that many female candidates did not emphasize the issues of women and other underprivileged groups in Thai society. Some of the respondents gave a more opportunity-based explanation, such as being supported by various organizations, friends or their families. Moreover, all respondents were influenced in one way or another by the fact that the Thai political system was changed by the adoption of the new constitution.

### THE IMPACT OF WOMEN POLITICIANS

Do women legislators in the Thai Parliament have some specific policy preferences and interests different from those of male legislators? If the Thai parliament increased its amount of women legislators, could we expect then a shift to issues that reflect women's concerns? It is expected that the priorities and interests of female and male politicians are relatively similar because as long as women in a legislative body constitute a small minority, they tend to adapt to existing conditions and act more like their male colleagues.

In the international literature on women and politics, there has been a great deal of discussion on questions concerning the relationship between the numerical presence of women in politics, sometimes referred to as descriptive representation, and the expression of women's interests, or substantive representation. Many researchers interested in determining the impact of women on the policy process argue that issues pertaining to women would be better represented if there were more women legislators. In other words they believe that the more women legislators elected, the more likely it is that women-friendly policies would be enacted. However, there is no guarantee that increased descriptive representation would lead to enhanced substantive representation. Past studies in this area indicate that women do not hold distinctive policy preferences as do men, except on a few issues (Holmberg & Esaiasson 1988; Wängnerud 1999). Recent research, however, indicate that there exist differences in attitudes and behavior between the sexes. Much has been written about the impact women have on issue areas of traditional concern to women in established democracies in the West, and studies of female politicians – especially from the Nordic countries and state legislatures in the United States – show that they have distinctive priorities and interests, especially when the numbers of women legislators increase beyond token levels. Female politicians are more attentive to issues of special interest to women such as families, children, health, education, and social issues (Clark 1998: 118–119). These recent studies show that women have different policy agendas and priorities compared to men, determined by differences in their socialization and life experiences. Once elected, women politicians are expected to legislate differently to men, giving higher priority to issues of traditional interest to women, such as families, social welfare, education, women's rights, children, environment, and health care. Their male colleagues are more likely to be concerned with 'men's issues' such as economy, finance, business and defence.

A survey of nearly 200 female parliamentarians in 65 countries by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) also indicated that women have different priorities and interests compared to those of men. Nearly 82 per cent of the respondents believed that women hold conceptually different ideas about society and politics. A very high proportion of respondents to the survey agreed that women's involvement in politics makes a difference. 86 per cent of the respondents believed that women's participation in the political process changed the nature of politics by bringing about positive changes in form, political behavior and traditional attitudes, substance, processes and outcomes. Moreover, an overwhelming majority, nearly 90 per cent, felt they had a responsibility to represent the interests and views of women (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2000).

The theory of critical mass, when applied to gender relations in politics, suggests that when women remain a distinct minority within a legislative assembly, they tend to conform to the prevailing norms, but once the numbers of women reach a certain size, there will be a change in the nature of political discourse and policy agenda as the minority begins to act distinctively and challenge the patterns of gender interactions (Dahlerup 1988; Bystydenski 1992). Dolan and Ford, for example, argue that '[t]here is a variety of evidence to support the "critical mass" thesis – that women act more distinctively once their numbers reach a certain threshold' (1998: 77). In a study of the Arizona state legislature, Saint-Germain concluded that when women were present in small numbers in the legislature, the proportion of bills proposed by women and men with regard to areas of traditional interests to women was not noticeably different. However, once women captured more than 15 per cent of the seats in the legislature, women changed their legislative behavior – they were more likely than men to propose such bills (Saint-Germain 1989). It has been said that, with the proportion of women below 15 per cent of a legislative assembly, women members may be relegated to token status. As Taylor-Robinson and Heath argued, 'The problem for token women is that they may not feel that they have enough support to rock the boat and bring up topics of interest to women, because such topics may be criticized or ignored by the male super-majority' (2003: 81). Norris and Lovenduski argue:

When a group remains a distinct minority within a larger society, its member will seek to adapt to their surroundings, conforming to the predominant rules of the game (...) But once the group reaches a certain size, critical mass theory suggests that there will be a qualitative change in the nature of group interactions, as the minority starts to assert itself and thereby transform the institutional culture, norms and values. (Norris and Lovenduski 2001: 2–3)

One of the most convincing pieces of evidence of the 'critical mass' thesis comes from Sue Thomas's (1994) study of female and male politicians in 12 state legislatures in the United States. In states where the proportion of women in the legislature was below 15 per cent, women were reluctant to take a high profile on women's issues. However, in states where the proportion of women was 20 per cent or more, female legislators gave priority to legislation that addressed traditional women's interest areas as well as increased their legislative activity and success at obtaining enactment for their proposal in such areas.

It is important to note, as Sawyer points out: '(...) to increase the number of women in parliament, or even to increase the number of feminists in parliament,



is insufficient to ensure that “women” are better represented’ (Sawyer, 2002: 17). Nevertheless, previous findings on the policy priorities of women in respect to men have proved to be rather inconsistent. Some studies have found little evidence of gender differences in priorities and agendas due to party discipline, which tends to inhibit the manifestation of any gender differences in legislative behavior.

A critical question was whether female legislators can make a difference in a predominantly male institution like the parliament in Thailand. It is difficult to test the ‘critical mass’ proposition – that women act more distinctively once their numbers reach a certain threshold – since the proportion of women in Thailand is far from attaining a sufficient critical mass (approximately 15 to 35 per cent) to enable them pursue a different legislative agenda than men. Indeed, with 21 women serving in the Senate, compared to only 46 in the House of Representatives (remaining well below the Asian average of 15 per cent in total), it seems unlikely that they would ‘act for’ women. Some female politicians told me that their goal is to reach the ‘critical mass’ stage that will allow them to advance their political position and gain influence in the policymaking process. But alliances are not necessarily exclusively gender based – on the contrary, alliances have been forged with male colleagues in order to bring about positive outcomes. Although the new electoral system did help to facilitate the election of women to the House of Representatives, it also acted to reinforce party dominance. Consequently, women legislators in the House feel more accountable to their party than to any potential groupings outside the parliament, such as women. As of now, the impact of party is stronger than that of gender, and as long as women constitute a small minority women can not be expected to behave differently on a number of ‘women’s areas’.

In any case one may ask – do women politicians in the Thai Parliament legislate differently than men, even if they are in a token position? As mentioned previously, research on gender differences in policy priorities has focused on the U.S. and Nordic legislatures. Research that goes beyond highly advanced industrial democracies is rare. Taylor-Robinson and Heath (2003) have however extended the research on gender difference in policy priority to Honduras, and their research did not support the generalization that women legislators tend to place a higher priority than men on legislation relating to issues of traditional interest to women such as children and family issues. Yet they found that the results of their study support the contention that, as with women legislators in advanced democracies in the West, women politicians in the Honduran Congress put a higher priority on *women’s rights* than their male colleagues, even when they have only token representation:

(...) even in an inauspicious setting, where women have only token representation in the legislature, and economic and social forces make the task of women in politics difficult, women still legislate differently than men. Particularly when it comes to women's rights issues, even token women representatives play an important role in bringing legislative attention to women's concerns. (Taylor-Robinson & Heath 2003:94)

In looking at women's legislative activities inside the Thai parliament, I focused on committee service activities. In Thailand, as in many other countries, committee positions play an important role in the legislative process. Given the importance of committees in determining what issues get placed on the legislative agenda, the appointment of more women to relevant committees may increase the openness of the parliament to take up women's issue legislation. Previous research in Western democracies found female legislators serving on committees dealing with traditional 'women's issues', such as education and health and social welfare. Thomas (1994), for example, wrote that female state legislators in the United States were more likely than their male colleagues to hold seats on committees related to their traditional role as caregivers. Either by choice or discrimination based on sex-role stereotypes, women rarely serve on committees dealing with finance, budget, or science and technology. The women legislators in my interviews were involved in various careers, including the health field, education, business, and social work. Their educational and occupational background proved important in determining what these women selected in regard to committee assignments once they were in office.

In looking at committee assignments in Thailand, I found that female legislators in both houses of the parliament focused much of their legislative activity on issues of traditional interest, but not to the exclusion of all other issue areas. Not surprisingly, nearly 65 per cent of the members of the House Committee on Children, Youth, Women and the Aged consisted of women (as of 20 April, 2003), areas where women have traditionally borne disproportionate responsibility. Further, women constitute 24–29 per cent of committees such as Tourism, Public Health, and Social Welfare. Yet, in comparison with the past, women were no longer exclusively confined to a narrow set of committee assignments since women have recently made their way to the more traditional 'male' committees, at least to a certain extent. Almost 24 per cent of the committee members on Science and Technology and nearly 18 per cent of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the lower house are women. With this said, women are much less likely than men to sit on business committees. In committees such as Communications and Telecommunications, Armed Forces, Economic

Development, Monetary Affairs, Finance and Banking, either there was only one woman or none sitting on the committee. The picture is also similar in the Senate. The data on committee assignments appear to indicate that these women parliamentarians pay considerable attention to issues of traditional concern to women, but it would be misleading, however, to conclude that Thai women parliamentarians as a group are exclusively concerned with issues having an impact on the needs and lives of women to the neglect of other issues.

What about women's leadership activities inside committees? The chair is the focal point of committee activities and an important source of legislative power by way of controlling the agenda and the flow of discussion. The gender pattern in committee assignments is much more pronounced in the profile of women committee chairs. Only three women in the lower house held this position in 2003, all within the traditional 'women's committees', namely Children, Youth, Women and the Aged, Consumer Protection, and Social Welfare. Despite the increase in the number of women MPs in the 2001 House election, the proportion of committee chairpersons who are women is much less than the proportion of legislators who are women. As for the Senate, the proportion of chairpersons who are female is the same as the proportion of female legislators. Only two women held a chair position in the standing committees on Public Health and Labor and Social Welfare.

Why have women's membership and their leadership been concentrated on certain types of committees? There are several plausible explanations. One is that women legislators may have been steered toward areas of interest to women because of stereotypical views about their expertise. Another plausible explanation is that women may have chosen 'female-oriented' committees because of their interest in these issue areas. My interviews with female legislators suggest that it is out of their own choice rather than outright discrimination that this gender disparity in committee assignments occurred. In short, appointments to committees tended to be based on the expertise and interests of the legislator.

To examine the role of these issue concerns in the legislative career of female legislators, we also have to look at their legislative behavior. In contrast to committee assignments, women legislators did not specifically target women's issues in their legislative focus. Although nearly all the female legislators of the Thai Parliament I interviewed expressed women's common interests and concerns, they differed in the extent to which these concerns were salient. Judging from these interviews, it seems that both men and women have supported bills promoting issues related to women's interests in many instances. Yet, female legislators have appeared

to be more concerned with women's interests than their male colleagues, even though they did not feel any 'obligation' to represent women's interests.

To explore further whether female politicians behave differently than male politicians, where women have only token representation in the legislature, I examined the legislative agendas of both female and male legislators in the House of Representative from the time Prime Minister Thaksin formed the government. The bills were grouped into six categories by subject area (children, education, environment, health care/public health, welfare-social security, and other). The data were obtained from the offices of the House of Representatives, which keep records of all bills proposed and the bills' fates. It is difficult to assess the impact of women's political presence in national legislative assemblies such as the House of Representatives in the Thai parliament due to the small number of women MPs, as well as to the strength of party discipline.

Are women legislators more likely than their male colleagues to attach priority to legislation concerning women? Women MPs have had an impact on a number of content areas. The presence of women legislators has made a difference in the number of bills introduced and passed dealing specifically with children and welfare-social security, the areas where women have traditionally shared a disproportionate responsibility for the rearing of children and for the care of those who cannot care for themselves. Proportionally speaking, the single subject of children has received an unusually large amount of legislative attention. However, there is no significant gender-based difference in the numbers of bills relating to children proposed. It is possible that male legislators in Thailand have become more diverse and knowledgeable about the issue of children than their forefathers. Contrary to my expectations and the patterns of the long-established democracies in Europe and the United States, where women legislators tend more often than men to prioritize issues such as the environment, public health and health care, women legislators in Thailand did not introduce and work on legislation specifically relating to these areas. In sum, with respect to the issues of children and welfare/social security, even token female legislators play an important role in introducing and pushing those issues through the legislative process. Perhaps a further increase in the presence of women legislators could make a significant difference in the types of bills introduced.

Several explanations arise as to why women legislators did not introduce and prioritize issues important to women through the legislative process. One possibility is that they may find themselves pressured to conform and fit in to an overwhelmingly male-dominated institution. It is noteworthy that only one of the respondents to my interviews felt a sense of responsibility to represent women,

**Table 8.1: Bills initiated by both female and male legislators in the house of representatives from the beginning of the Thaksin government to September 2003**

Category	No. of bills Total	Proposed by women		Proposed by men	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Children	9	4	44	5	56
Effective	8	4	50	4	50
Under discretion	1	—	0	1	100
Withdrawn, rejected, put on hold	—				
Education	35	5	14	30	86
Effective	21	2	10	19	90
Under discretion	14	3	21	11	79
Withdrawn, rejected, Put on hold	—				
Environment	6	—	0	6	100
Effective	6	—	0	6	100
Under discretion	—				
Withdrawn, rejected, put on hold	—				
Health care – Public Health	18	—	0	18	100
Effective	12	—	0	12	100
Under discretion	6	—	0	6	100
Withdrawn, rejected, put on hold	—				
Welfare – Social Security	26	9	35	17	65
Effective	24	8	33	16	67
Under discretion	2	1	50	1	50
Withdrawn, rejected, put on hold	—				
Special category*	288	17	6	271	94
Effective	131	4	3	127	97
Under discretion	147	13	9	134	91
Withdrawn, rejected, put on hold	10	—	0	10	100
Total	382	35	9	347	91

\* The special category covers bills related to all other issues, such as local administration, state enterprises, political parties, investment, taxation, businesses, finance, transportation, and funds

but this can be understood in the context of concern about being pigeonholed as exponents of women's issues. There was a feeling that if they devoted themselves to women's issues, they could experience this as an obstacle in their political careers, by becoming closely associated with 'soft' issues with a low status. Some women parliamentarians I interviewed appeared not to be anxious in giving

special attention to issues having an impact on the lives of women and on areas of traditional concern to women, such as children, welfare, and education. They said that their roles were no different from those of their male colleagues. However, if some gender solidarity could be developed, the female legislatures found this to be so much the better.

Existing research tends to suggest that the presence or absence of an organized women's caucus can influence the extent to which women legislators actively discuss and work on legislation that affects women and have a positive influence on the passage of such bills (Thomas 1991). Moreover, the presence of a women's caucus provides female legislators with additional resources beyond their numbers (Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas 1994). In an effort to provide a focal point for women legislators of all parties, the Women's Parliamentary Club, consisting of women members of the lower house and senators, was established in 1992. In the Thai context, women legislators come together more as an informal group than through a formal legislative caucus. It was intended as a forum for women legislators in both houses of the national legislature to meet together and provide encouragement and support for efforts that they make on behalf of women. Although it is the only formal space for women legislators, the Club has not been very successful in forging unity. Unfortunately, a majority of women legislators are infrequently involved in the activities of the Club. It seems that women legislators in the parliament do not have a strong collective sense of group membership since women are not a homogeneous group. Its core membership consists of only about twenty members and, in the absence of a feminist identity or orientation among Thai parliamentarians, it meets quite infrequently and informally.

In addition to an idea of women having a particular effect on the *substance* of politics, they are also thought to bring difference to the *form* of politics. Not only are they perceived as sanitizing and cleansing in a otherwise corrupt environment, some female leaders also emphasize women's distinct approach to problem solving. Women legislators are more likely than their male colleagues to conceptualize issues and policy problems more broadly. For example, Dhipvadee Mekawan, director-general of the Office of the Civil Service Commission said: 'Generally, men tend to particularise problems while women's way of thinking is more holistic. On average, women are less overbearing and are therefore more capable of paving the way to a democratic society as opposed to a pyramidal or hierarchical social structure' (The Nation, 8 March 2000). Other female leaders in Thailand were convinced that women legislators have proven to be more sensitive to issues most directly affecting women, families, and children than

their male colleagues. For example, Laddawan Wongsriwong, a former deputy secretary general to the prime minister, said: 'They are more concerned about the quality of life, about children, education, AIDS and the environment' (The Nation, 8 March 2000). The former Deputy Education Minister Kanchana Silpa-acha was of the opinion that '(...) men may give more importance to issues other than those directly related to the needs of women and children' (ibid.). Supatra Masdit and Pavena Hongsakula acknowledged that female leaders have distinct interests, but emphasized that they shouldn't confine themselves to 'women's issues' (Far Eastern Economic Review, 13 April 2000). In addition, in my interviews, female parliamentarians expressed the belief that women bring a different perspective to the legislative process.

### OBSTACLES TO INCREASED FEMALE REPRESENTATION

What obstacles do Thai women encounter when they try to get elected into political office? In a patriarchal society like Thailand with a strong emphasis on the dominant role of men, the obstacles to women's candidacy and representation are many and extremely difficult to surmount. There are many factors that combine to preclude women from elected office in Thailand. Various factors that underlie women's representation, or lack thereof, in advanced industrialized democracies are well researched and understood, while our understanding of women's representation in developing countries is much poorer. Moreover, Matland (1998) found in his study on women's political representation in developed and developing countries that none of the significant variables promoting women's representation in established democracies, such as electoral systems, women's participation in the labor force, the cultural standing of women and the country's level of development, has a statistically significant and consistent effect in those of less developed countries. His research seems to indicate that a minimum level of socio-economic development is needed to create favourable conditions, such as the development of electoral systems and women's participation in the labor force, in order to have any positive effects on the representation of women. Otherwise, anything below the minimum threshold has very minimal impact on factors favoring the representation of women in developed democracies (Matland 1998).

Pippa Norris (1987) argues that women candidates must overcome three major barriers to get elected to public office: *eligibility*, *selection* and *election*.

- First, they must be willing to become candidates for office. Women's political representation would increase if more women were willing to become candidates. Women are under-represented because most of the candidates for office are men.

- Second, the party gatekeepers must select those women who desire to run as candidates. The attitudes of political parties toward women in politics can be a source of great difficulty for women in their efforts to overcome barriers that hinder their representation.
- Third, the voters must elect the female candidates. The sex of the candidates plays a factor in whether a woman is elected, since women candidates can face difficulties in winning approval from voters due to the prevalence of sex-role stereotyping.

The process of legislative recruitment involves the availability of individuals who are i) simultaneously interested in political activities and have the resources to get involved; ii) willing to come forward and to run for elective office; and iii) selected among the pool of aspirants by the gatekeepers casting the final decisions over who is to stand for election. This supply and demand model is not unique and has been applied to established democracies (Norris 1997).

## RECRUITMENT PROCESS

In this section, various factors that influence the parliamentary representation of women in Thailand will be examined. Through the recruitment process of eligibility, selection, and election, I will attempt to delineate the different variables responsible for women's access to the Thai parliament in order to provide a better understanding of the obstacles women face in political participation.

### *Eligibility*

Which variables inhibit the mobilization of women as parliamentary candidates? The first step is to be eligible to stand for elections. Eligibility as such refers not only to the basic democratic rights such as the right to vote and the right to stand for elections, but also includes the informal requirements for candidacy. After the enfranchisement of women, the formal requirements have not appeared to present any particular barrier to women in running for public office in most political systems and, therefore, do not seem to work to the disadvantage of women, relative to men. There are further legal requirements for the eligibility of candidates, such as nationality, age, residence, holding public office, and education (Norris, 1996). But, how do the formal rules of eligibility affect women in Thailand? The legal eligibility requirements are the same for men and women, and thus fail to explain the paucity of women in the Thai parliament. The informal rules and norms of Thai society, however, may be seen to present severe obstacles, given the lamentable social and economic position of women in Thai society. Generally speaking, parliamentarians are part of the socio-economic



elite and are recruited from occupations in which there are few women; they are additionally distinguished by their high levels of education and often come from influential political families.

### *Social and Cultural Obstacles*

It is commonly assumed that socio-economic variables, such as the ratio of women's literacy, the ratio of women's participation in the work force, and the ratio of university-educated women, have an effect on women's political representation in the public arena. A recent study, for example, concludes that women's representation tends to increase when women approach the same level as men in areas of literacy, labor force participation and university education (Matland, 1998).

In Thailand, when compared to other countries in Asia, the ratio of women's employment outside the home is high. In fact, Thailand has one of the highest participation rates of women in the labor force in Asia, accounting for nearly half of the working population. Thai Buddhism influences gender relations in that it places women in the economic sector. There exists however a gender-based difference in job occupation: women are concentrated in workplaces that are traditionally considered female and within these work places the overwhelming majority of women hold low-ranking jobs. Their activities in the economic spheres apparently do not have the effect of stimulating women's participation in politics. Women are rarely found in high-level positions in economic structures, where men acquire the skills and behavior patterns necessary and advantageous in the formal political arena. At all levels of government, women are fewer in number, and occupy marginal positions in the formal political arena. The paucity of women in the Thai legislature cannot be attributed to the level of women's participation in the labor market. What then can account for the extremely low proportion of women candidates?

Studies on the relationships between socio-economic changes and cultural values have resulted in the development of two contending schools of thought. The modernization school has argued that industrialization brings about pervasive cultural change. For instance, Ronald Inglehart (1997) argues that systematic changes in a culture and its value system take place as a result of the shift from pre-industrial to industrial society, and additionally from industrial to post-industrial society. The other opposing school emphasizes the enduring nature of traditional cultural values and attitudes despite rapid socio-economic changes, and claims that traditional values tend to persist in the industrial era and have an autonomous impact on society (Inglehart and Baker 2000).

Thailand has experienced rapid social, economic, and political changes in recent decades. How have these changes affected Thai culture and its value system? The case of Thailand does not support the central tenet of modernization theory that economic development eventually leads to changes in gender roles, attitudes toward authority, and political participation. Traditional values persist in today's Thai society, despite the rapid socio-economic changes that have taken place in recent decades. The deep and broad cultural heritage of Thai society, and more particularly its religious elements, with its traditionally negative attitude towards the participation of women in political life has left an imprint on cultural values, despite modernization, and it is still common to see politics and women constructed as each other's antithesis.

According to cultural explanations, women in traditional societies tend to be reluctant to become candidates for elective office because they anticipate being discriminated against. Moreover, women's chances for election to parliament are generally not as good as men's, and studies in the past have for the most part failed to present systematic evidence confirming the relationship between cultural variables and women's representation in elected office, since it is difficult to test empirically the influence of culture on women's representation. However, there is now strong and persuasive evidence that cultural factors constitute a key factor in explaining women's entry into elected office (Inglehart and Norris 2003).

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2003) have put forward the argument that prevailing political culture affects women's political recruitment. In fact, systematic cross-national evidence has shown that egalitarian attitudes toward women as political leaders are strongly related to the proportion of women elected to public office (Norris and Inglehart, 2001: 133–34). One of the most important cultural factors in explaining women's under-representation in politics is sex-role socialization. One aspect of this is the stereotypical attitude that women's domestic roles are incompatible with the toughness and assertiveness that politics and political leadership require; thus politics is perceived as a male domain. What thus has been discovered in many societies with traditional cultural values is that women may be reluctant to come forward as candidates for elected office. In a survey of nearly 200 female parliamentarians in 65 countries by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), many respondents (76 per cent) cited hostile attitudes toward women's political participation as an important obstacle to running for parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2000).

The exclusion of women from public life in Western cultures also reflects the warp and woof of Thai culture. The influence of a hierarchical and authoritarian

culture in which women's roles are defined by Thai Buddhism, which is circumscribed by more or less non-egalitarian attitudes towards women's political role, has subsequently led to the low participation of women in political life.

Buddhism, for instance, has repeatedly legitimized women's subordination by providing a rationale for containing women in the private world (Darunee 1997: 169). Women are prohibited from being ordained as monks and as a result they are frequently considered to be 'merit deficient' – unable to obtain merit as monks (Doneys 2002: 168). While women can become nuns, the status of nuns is held as inferior to that of monks. However, a woman can at times obtain merit through a son who has been ordained; hence upon entering monkhood, sons can pass on the merit to their mothers. In the spirit of Thai Buddhism, women are viewed as 'polluters', and there is a fear that women will '(...) contaminate and lessen the sacredness of Buddha images, and especially holy amulets worn by men' (Juree 1994: 523). Any physical contact between women and monks is forbidden. There is a widespread fear that, upon entering the public sphere, women may drain strength from men.

This religious influence can additionally be found in the legal codes of the country through, for instance, the many laws relating to labor and family, which have been discovered to be discriminatory. In short, the pattern of male supremacy and women's subordination in Thai society is underpinned by Buddhism, reinforcing cultural values that continue to marginalize women's political interests.

### *Educational Obstacles*

Women often lack the 'appropriate background' to be chosen as a candidate. It has often been said that women's educational, occupational, and socio-economic status is important in determining the eligibility of women for elective office. Despite the fact that the educational level of women in Thailand has risen substantially, the formal requirements for candidacy in the Senate and the House of Representatives is a minimum of a bachelor's degree. This disadvantages women in comparison to men,<sup>1</sup> especially women leaders at the local level who do not have a university degree. The high educational profile of parliamentarians has thus only served to reinforce elitism in national politics. Orathai Kokpol observed that the requirement of a bachelor's degree for candidacy discriminates against women:

It has a negative impact on social groups with a low level of education such, as farmers, industrial workers and informal sector workers, because it excludes the majority of them from the right to stand as a candidate in an election. This has reduced the already low representation of these groups even further. In contrast,

this requirement favours civil servants as the most educated group in Thai society (...) The fact that under 10 per cent of Thai people with passive voting rights hold bachelors' degrees brings into question whether this requirement for candidacy obstructs democratic representation. (Kokpol, 2002: 296–7)

### *Occupational Obstacles*

Women are also handicapped when it comes to occupation. In the 2001 general election, three types of occupational backgrounds were prominent among candidates and elected members of the House of Representatives: politicians, businessmen, and civil servants. As a result of the high educational requirements, bureaucratic positions have now become a significant channel into parliament. The proportion of candidates with bureaucratic backgrounds dramatically increased from 6 per cent in the 1996 election to 24 per cent in the 2001 election for the House of Representatives. It is also interesting to see the decrease in the number and proportion of candidates with political backgrounds dropping from nearly 18 per cent in 1996 to 12 per cent in 2001. It is not clear whether this change can be attributed to the requirements of a bachelor's degree (Kokpol 2002: 296). Businessmen have always been an important component of the pool of candidates, but the percentage of candidates with business backgrounds has decreased to 24 per cent in the 2001 election, lower than previous elections. The occupational backgrounds of the candidates for the 2005 general election appeared similar to candidates in the previous election. When examining the backgrounds of senatorial candidates, it was found that civil servants (38 per cent), lawyers (17 per cent), and candidates with business backgrounds (16 per cent) were amongst the most prominent. Since women are found to be few in such 'suitable' occupations, this has only further reduced their opportunities of securing a political career.

### THE SELECTION PROCESS

The second stage consists of the selection process whereby potential candidates are identified and selected for elections. One significant factor is women's willingness to go forward as candidates, another is the motivation and resources of potential candidates. The resources necessary may include financial backing, human resources needed to run the campaign, education, availability of time, organizational affiliation, and established networks. Generally speaking, women less often possess these necessary resources.

In interviews female parliamentarians mentioned lack of experience, lack of resources and poor self-esteem as some of the major reasons why women do not want to run for office in Thailand. Women's perception of their own self-worth is shaped and reinforced by prevailing male-biased social norms and beliefs. It may also be the case that women lack information and knowledge about the procedures and mechanisms involved in politics. One Thai study argues however that Thai women's interest in politics is not less than that of men and that they are even more knowledgeable about politics than men (Thomson 1995).

Another reason women have been slow to enter the arena of electoral politics is related to Thai views of politics, from both men and women. Politics is viewed as representing an arena for dishonesty in which politicians do not shy away from bribery and corruption and frequently pursue their own selfish interests. In Thailand, as in many other developing countries, it is often assumed that the political game is too dirty for women to play because of their supposed moral superiority, an excuse often used by females not to enter politics. Almost all female parliamentarians I interviewed emphasized that women's distaste for abuse of power and money in cultivating influence has made it difficult for many women to be part of political life.

It is however worth pointing out that the perception of women in politics may work in two directions. The 'moral superiority' of woman may be perceived as *negative*, disabling women from taking on a 'tough' and 'dirty' job – but it also can be understood as a *positive* force because of a perceived sanitizing influence on politics. The women I interviewed were optimistic about the future as well as convinced that voters perceive women candidates as a new alternative in the tarnished political scene dominated by men.

This linkage between the self-conception of women as symbols of innocence and moral superiority and the voters was also evident in an interview with Sudarat Keyuraphan, a woman MP of the Thai Rak Thai party, conducted by the Far Eastern Economic Review. As she explained, 'I deeply believe that most voters would like to elect women politicians at both national and local levels. They have strong confidence that women politicians have better intentions and are less corrupt than male politicians' (13 April 2000). Generally speaking, female political leaders in Thailand appear to believe that women are a force for good governance. Pavena Hongsakul, former minister of the Prime Minister's Office, said: 'Women tend to be more concerned with creating a just society. And 99 per cent of women are clean (not involved in corruption)' (*The Nation*, 8 March 2000). Similarly, Sudarat Keyuraphan, the first woman to hold a ministerial post in the Interior Ministry, claimed that if half the Cabinet were female, there would be far less corruption

in Thailand: 'And by tackling the issue of corruption we could make a major contribution to improving just about everything in our society' (ibid.).

Thai elections also frequently feature vote-buying, vote-rigging and cheating – a deterrent for women to come forward as candidates. The 1997 Constitution included several provisions designed to fight the corruption and vote-buying which had marred elections in Thailand for decades. Compulsory voting was introduced as an attempt to make the electorate so large that vote buying would become extremely expensive, and greater transparency of political contributions became statutory. Also, a mixed electoral system was created in which 100 members of the House of Representatives are elected under a party-list system, while 400 members are elected in single-member constituencies. Nonetheless, the elections of 2000, 2001 and 2005 show vote-buying and other election irregularities as a persisting reminder of the continuing deficits of Thai democracy. While it is difficult to assess the level of vote-buying, the practice seems to exist in all parts of the country, although it is most common in rural regions. Since candidates cannot distinguish themselves by a set of distinctive party policy stances, they continue to rely on their own vote-mobilization apparatus with vote canvassers. This means that candidates have to foster personal networks for a support base through district services and by building up a large campaign war chest.

It was estimated that despite the new regulations to eliminate vote-buying and corruption, a total of 20 billion baht in bribe money was circulated during the election campaign, with the price of votes ranging anywhere from 50 to 1,000 baht in the 2001 elections to the House of Representatives (Ockey 2003: 671; *Bangkok Post*, 30 January 2001; *Newsweek*, 15 January 2001). The Senate election in March 2000 was seen by many Thais as the first test of the political reforms undertaken by the 1997 Constitution, which attempted to broaden citizens' participation in politics while limiting the influence of traditional money politics and corruption. There were hopes that Thailand's first Senate election would bring about a change in the country's corruption-riddled, fragile democracy. However, there were numerous reports of electoral corruption and malpractice, such as vote buying and voting irregularities, including accusations that political parties were financing candidates behind the scenes.

As for other individual-related factors, financial resources have come to play a determining role. The electoral contests in Thailand, notwithstanding the official ceilings imposed by the National Election Commission, are very costly; this gives an undue and unnecessary advantage to candidates with large sources of funds available to them. Women, due to lack of financial resources, often find these measures prohibitive and unhelpful. There is very little reliable data

available thus far that assesses the use of campaign funds under the new system, but it is still more than likely that a successful candidate needs huge amounts of money. In 1995, for example, a politician in a typical constituency in the northeastern region spent 20–25 million baht (Surin and McCargo 1997: 139; Bünthe 2001: 194). In the 2001 House of Representatives election, it was estimated that the total amount spent by a politician was within the range of 30–50 million baht, and in some cases up to 70 million baht. Where do these funds come from? Candidates draw upon their own and family resources and from whatever wealthy, personal connections they may have in the constituencies. In the case of candidates for the House of Representatives, some economic support for approved candidates comes directly from their parties. The fact that candidates need such financial resources to get elected has rendered political office at the national level, especially in the House of Representatives, beyond reach for many politically ambitious women. Electoral and financial rules for the Senatorial elections forbade candidates to belong to a political party and further regulated how the money should be raised and spent. In many cases, candidates for the Senate had to raise the bulk of the money themselves. Although candidates for the Senate are not permitted to conduct election campaigns, money still proved to be an important asset for election (Women in Politics Institute 2000).

Thai political parties tend to have weak structures, without clear-cut ideologies and policies. Moreover, many parties do not survive very long and, generally speaking, voters appear to be less interested in the programs of political parties than in obtaining the benefits brought to the constituencies by politicians. This is especially so in rural areas where the failure of parties to formulate concrete policies to benefit the rural poor led other factions and individual politicians to '(...) seize the initiative in promising benefits to rural voters, and claiming personal credit for improvements delivered' (Ockey 2003: 670). When it therefore comes to elections, it isn't so much the stand on specific issues candidate's take, but the strength of the candidate's support base that assures electoral victory. From the very beginning, Thailand's parties were formed around personalities, not around particular issues. As one analyst of Thai politics argues, '(...) parties have always had to rely on factions, and individual MPs, to establish their own electoral networks' (Ockey 2003: 670). Parties are largely based on patron-client relations as they form, merge, split, and disappear with the political fortunes of these patrons. At various local levels, parties are largely absent, thus allowing traditional networks of politicians and local bosses to dominate Thai electoral politics. Personal support organizations, based on networks of vote canvassers for politicians (usually consisting influential individuals in the villages), are thus a



key factor for the high cost of electoral politics in Thailand. In order to cultivate a supporters' organization that will ensure election and re-election, candidates use enormous amounts of money in presenting gifts of money to their constituents.

Women are often at a disadvantage in the patron-client system of Thai electoral politics because they often do not have the same access as men to the patronage network machinery for election campaigns. Even if a woman could succeed in establishing a support structure, men have even larger networks from which they may draw support. As a result, if a woman is to win an election, she may very well have to rely on a male-dominated network. Indeed, successful women candidates are often linked to the patronage system through kinship political networks established by the woman's political family and the family of her husband.

### *Political Parties and Women Candidates*

The selection of potential candidates also involves the process through which individuals are selected by the party. In many countries, party leaders, party officials, and faction leaders play the role of gatekeeper in the nomination process. In some countries, non-party selectors, such as local notables, financial sponsors, and interest groups play a crucial role in selecting candidates. Norris (1996) distinguishes between the bureaucratic and patronage systems of candidate selection. In a bureaucratic system, the selection process is highly institutionalised and based on legalistic authority in the Weberian sense; and it is determined largely by party rules that are detailed, explicit, standardized and followed by party officials. In contrast, in a patronage-oriented system, the selection process is relatively closed and characterized by patronage led by power brokers at various levels. Such a system is built upon either traditional or charismatic authority.

In the past, it was quite common for women candidates to face discrimination by party elites in long-established democracies. Party leaders did not recruit women to run for office, while they directed those women who desired to run for election toward seats in which they were sacrificial lambs. As a consequence, women had difficulty in fund-raising and in being perceived as credible candidates by the media and by voters. More recent studies in advanced industrial democracies, on the other hand, have shown that such bias against women candidates has diminished significantly (Carroll 1994; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994).

In the case of Thailand, one of the most important causes of the failure to mobilize more women candidates to the House of Representatives is attributable to the inability or unwillingness of party leaders and other selectors to recruit a substantial number of women candidates.<sup>2</sup> Although an increasing number of



women have become members of political parties, they are largely excluded from governing bodies in political parties and occupy less than 10 per cent of high positions in political parties. In Thailand, where the selection process takes place in the context of a patronage-oriented system, non-party gatekeepers such as financial supporters, provincial and local notables as well as various interest groups also play a role as selectors. The traditional cultural conceptions of women's social roles are deeply embedded in political parties – several female MPs I interviewed held the male political culture in the parties responsible for the parties' failure to nominate women. The few women who have managed to attain parliamentary seats have usually had family ties to a male party or faction leader.

Thai political parties are less likely to nominate women candidates for the winnable seats in the House of Representatives. An analysis of the 2005 general election results clearly show that women were nominated for hopeless contests more often than men. With the exception of the Thai Rak Thai Party, the success rates for women candidates were low. The Democratic Party put up 52 women candidates, but only six were elected. Among the 35 women candidates from the Mahachon Party, only one was elected. The Chart Thai Party nominated 40 women candidates, but only two were elected. As for the Thai Rak Thai Party, the success rate of its women candidates was extremely high. 44 out of the party's 51 women candidates were elected, reflecting the unusual, but favorable political atmosphere for the governing party.

## ELECTION

The last hurdle in the process of becoming a parliamentarian is being chosen by the voters.

### *Voters and Women Candidates*

An obstacle for women seeking to be elected is that voters discriminate against female candidates due to gender stereotyping. While female candidates are still perceived in terms of their private and domestic roles, and less suited for politics than men, while male candidates are viewed in terms of their public and occupational roles. There exists empirical evidence that voters' stereotypical view of gender has negative consequences for female candidates and that women candidates would be more successful if they were perceived as possessing masculine traits such as 'assertiveness' and 'toughness' (Hoddy and Terkildsen 1993; Thomas and Wilcox 1998). Evidence of voter discrimination has not been conclusive and an increasing number of studies in advanced industrialized

democracies have questioned the findings that voters react negatively to female candidates. These studies have found that the gender of the candidate has no or only little impact on voting, and that women do as well as men in garnering votes (Bernstein 1986; Chaney and Sinclair 1994).

In my interviews with female legislators in Thailand, some indicated that voters' gender stereotypes had some negative impact on women candidates when running for parliament, while others said the gender of the candidate did not have any significant impact. I was told by several female parliamentarians that in election campaigns, female candidates had experienced difficulty in being taken seriously, and had often been subjected to humiliating comments and derogatory remarks. They had to convince voters that they were competent and possessed masculine traits. Unfortunately, comprehensive and systematic surveys of voters' perceptions and attitudes do not exist in Thailand. My analysis of the results from the general elections in 2001 and 2005 found that women candidates were less successful than men candidates, and those studies available seem to indicate gender-biased voters. This lack of support reconfirms the predominant perception of women and men's roles in Thai society, where public life is male.

### *The Effects of Electoral Systems*

According to the existing literature on women and politics, the characteristics of an electoral system in a country is one of the most important factors affecting women's representation in national assemblies, especially in long established democracies. The effects of the electoral system cannot be explored in isolation from the broader institutional and socio-economic context of a society. The literature tends to support the contention that women have higher levels of representation in legislatures in countries with party-list systems than in countries with single-member majoritarian electoral systems.

Under the proportional representation (PR) system, women are often included to broaden the party ticket in order to appeal to as many different segments of voters as possible. Rule's study (1987, 1994) found that the PR system was the major determinant of women's political representation, even when socio-economic, political, and contextual factors were controlled. Nations employing mixed systems, combining both PR and majoritarian electoral systems, were shown to elect more women by proportional vote than by district vote. Studies have also found that there is a direct relationship between women's representation and district magnitude (i.e. the number of representatives per district), hence the larger the district, the higher the women's turnover. It should be noted here that the relationship between the type of electoral system and women's representation

is not automatic. Some studies question the argument that PR systems are better suited than majoritarian systems to increasing women's representation in national parliaments. Chapman, for example, argues that '(...) before the sudden improvement of recent times, proportional representation systems had already existed for decades in Norway and Denmark with the same infinitesimal proportion of women legislators as everywhere else' (1993: 6–7). It has also been argued that some majoritarian systems have elected more women than some PR systems.

Can theories about the relationship of electoral systems and women's electability, developed in the advanced industrialized democracies in Europe and North America, explain women's under-representation in Thai politics? Thailand has recently undergone a transformation of its electoral system since the country experienced widespread dissatisfaction with the existing political system in the 1990s. This resulted in a new constitution and a new electoral system. What happened to female representation when Thailand changed from a plurality system, in small multi-member constituencies with multiple voting, to a mixed system of single-member constituencies and proportional representation? In mixed systems, such as in elections to the Japanese House of Representatives and the German Bundestag, far more women have been elected through proportional representation than through single member districts. Before the introduction of a new Thai constitution in 1997, direct elections were held only for members of the House of Representatives, based upon the relative majority system. During the period of 1978–1997, Thailand had a unique type of majoritarian electoral system. While most majoritarian systems have single-member constituencies where each voter has only one vote, Thai voters were permitted to cast ballots for as many candidates as there were seats in a constituency. In other words, a plurality system in small multi-member constituencies with multiple voting was used for elections to the House of Representatives. In the pre-1997 electoral system, party labels were weak and candidates tended to rely on their own vote-getting mechanisms rather than on parties in election campaigns. This was because, in two and three seat constituencies, it promoted contest, not only between competing parties but also between rival candidates from the same party. As a consequence, well-organized personal vote-getting networks of individual politicians served as the most important mechanism for mobilizing votes. The previous electoral system for the Lower House, based on multi-member constituencies and a multiple vote plurality system, did not facilitate women's representation.

The 1997 constitution provided for a mixed electoral system whereby 400 members of the House of Representatives are to be elected on a single-member

constituency basis and the remaining 100 elected on a party-list basis forming a single nationwide constituency. It was expected that those elected in the national constituency would need far more than solely local appeal and thus need to represent larger interests, compared to short-sighted local interests. Cabinet ministers are further chosen from the party-list MPs, forming a mixed system that is partly based on the German electoral system. The electoral threshold on the proportional side of the election is 5 per cent nationally. This new mixed system was first applied in the general election of 2001, producing results which, in terms of the representation of women, were higher than the election which preceded it.

It was presumed that certain features of the new electoral system had the potential to facilitate more women into public office. The first feature was the creation of new seats in the House of Representatives in Thailand which increased from 392 to 500. This new change was perceived as allowing for the election of more female candidates; however, this increase was not at all matched by substantial increases in the number of women candidates. The oft-described reason for the paucity of women legislators at the national level is the low level of turnover among the legislators – a high level of turnover can facilitate women's entry into parliament. In the 2001 Lower House election, for instance, there were more newcomers than ever before. Since it was the first general election under the new electoral system, there were suddenly more new open seats available than before. Half of the 400 constituency MPs and 36 of 100 MPs from the party-list system were newcomers (McCargo 2002: 249).

Another feature of the new electoral system allotted 20 per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives to a party-list system. It was anticipated that this particular feature would facilitate the election of more women. However, the Thai political parties have yet to nominate a sizeable number of women in winnable positions. Although only a few female candidates were placed within the top ranks of party lists, there were some differences in the recruitment of women candidates between political parties. The Thai Rak Thai Party, the Democrat Party, and the Chat Thai Party were very poor in nominating women candidates. Each of them had only one woman candidate in the top twenty slots while a number of parties, such as the New Aspiration Party and the Chat Pattana Party, were marginally better and had two candidates. Altogether, the two largest parties, the Thai Rak Thai Party and the Democrat Party, fielded a total of four and nine candidates on their party lists (Kokpol 2002: 294). The differences between the political parties cannot be explained on the basis of ideological differences. As Orathai Kokpol (2002: 94) commented, '(...) no

party paid serious attention to the promotion of the role of women in politics in recruiting candidates'.

The change of electoral systems from multi-member districts to a mixed system, in turn, affected women's legislative recruitment. The new electoral rules resulted in much smaller single-member constituencies, making it possible for candidates to focus their election campaigning on a more limited area of influence than in previous elections. Consequently, these smaller constituencies favored those candidates who had close contact with their home districts, thus enhancing the significance of local politicians in influencing elections, and especially members of provincial assemblies and their vote-getting networks. For political parties, these provincial politicians were interesting as potential candidates for the House of Representatives (Nelson 2002: 289).

A low number of women candidates participated in the January 2001 election for the House of Representatives – 352 (12.65 per cent) of the 2,782 candidates competing for the 400 seats in the constituency election were women, while in the party-list election 148 (15.74 per cent) of the 940 candidates vying for the 100 seats were women (Kokpol 2000). The number of women candidates was lower than in the previous general election of 1996. A mere 11 per cent of women candidates in the single-member constituencies were elected, while 4.7 per cent in the proportional representational side of the electoral system for the House of Representatives were successful. In the 2005 general election, as in previous elections, far more women were elected through single-member majoritarian systems rather than via party lists. About 11 per cent of women candidates were successful in single-member constituencies and only 6 per cent in the party-list election. In other words, women were more successful in single-member districts, a format that commonly restricts women's success at the polls, than in party-list districts. This is contrary to the existing literature on women's representation, in that women are more likely to get elected in PR systems than single-member majoritarian systems.

In examining women's representation on the parties' lists of candidates, I found that women were over-represented in those list positions that do not have a realistic chance of getting elected. Some studies pointed out that there are three types of candidate positions: sure, marginal, and hopeless seats (Haavio-Mannila et al., 1985; Darcy, Welch and Clark, 1994). The sure seats are those which a party is sure to keep, even if they experience a poor electoral showing. The hopeless seats are those a party is certain to lose even if it has a good election. Marginal seats are those between the above two types of seats, namely, seats a party will win in a good election but lose if it experiences a poor election. For

the party-list election for the House of the Representatives in Thailand, women were represented disproportionately in marginal, and more especially, in hopeless seats. The Thai case is consistent with past research findings. If women's political representation in descriptive terms is to be improved, it is necessary to increase women's nominations to winnable seats. In fact, a number of female MPs pointed out in interviews that it is important to get women into positions high enough on the party list to be elected.

Unlike its predecessor, the new Senate was to be entirely elected. The electoral reform under the new constitution provides for direct elections for the 200 senatorial seats from 76 provinces. The new Senate has become more powerful than the previous one. In the past, Thai senators were political appointees and acted as rubber stamps for the government. But, what expectations did the framers of the Senate hold with regard to its function?

*First*, the Senate was considered essential to a system of checks and balances. It was expected to act as a check on the House of Representatives and the government. It has the power to recommend the removal of persons holding political posts including the prime minister, cabinet members and MPs. The constitution calls for an elected Senate to act as a watchdog over the country's political arena.

*Second*, it was expected that the Senate, like the party-list members of the House of Representatives, would represent larger national interests as opposed to the partisan and parochial local interests represented by the members of the House of Representatives. Thus, senators are required to be non-partisan. Since the Senate, unlike its predecessor, was to be elected, the framers had to create an electoral system capable of yielding the desired result. Instead of the 400 single member districts that elected representatives, there were only 76 districts for the Senate, one for each province (*changwat*). The larger constituencies designed for the Senate were one means. It was assumed that the Senate would provide for alternative elements, unlike those elected through the electoral system of the House of Representatives. Hence, it was hoped that persons elected from the larger constituencies would be different in character from partisan politicians. A further expectation was that the Senate would, most probably, provide stability and continuity. The Senate with its independent and longer term of office (six years) would give stability to the political process of the Thai political system.

The 2000 election to the Senate was unusual in many respects, with voter turnout particularly high in the Thai context – 70 per cent of all eligible voters voted in the election. The constitutional requirement of compulsory voting, with penalties for those who fail to exercise the right to vote, and the provision for

advance voting, appeared to be reasons that drove people to the polls. Senatorial candidates are not permitted to engage in 'normal' election campaigning. They were only allowed to introduce themselves to the voters. The 2000 Senate elections under the new electoral rules took a long time to implement, requiring five rounds to complete, due to voting irregularities and fraud. The fact that the senatorial election excluded the role of parties further raised expectations regarding the number of women willing to run, since it was perceived that non-partisan politicking would protect women from being subjected to discrimination by party elites. Even though candidates for the Senate were not allowed to have backing from political parties, it was estimated that a majority of the senatorial candidates, that is 70 per cent, had close connections with political parties (Croissant and Dosch 2002). This was also confirmed by a number of senators I interviewed. Among the candidates for the Senate seats, a dominant group was made up of figures from the military and bureaucracy (39.5 per cent) (*ibid.*).

Research, particularly in the United States, has shown that the paucity of women female legislators at the national level depends on the power of incumbency and that open seats are advantageous to women. Women's chances for winning elections for the U.S. House of Representatives are not so great because most female candidate have to run against incumbents, not for new or open seats. Since the 2000 election for the Senate was the first opportunity in Thai history for candidates to be directly elected by the people, all seats were open seats. However, despite the expected surge of women to participate in the election in addition to the reformist atmosphere in which the constitution was drafted, the electoral results were disappointing. Women's representation in the Senate did not improve under the new Constitution. The new Senate contained a slightly larger proportion of women representatives than in the outgoing Senate. What was surprising was the very low number of women who did decide to run. There were no women candidates at all in 28 of the 76 provinces and among the total number of 1,523 candidates for the senate, only 115 candidates were women (7.6 per cent), and only 20 women were elected out of a total of 200 elected (10 per cent). In the Bangkok area, a mere 26 women of the 265 candidates ran for Senate, only one was elected.

The Thai case thus defies most accepted explanations prevailing in the literature concerning related factors facilitating increases in the representation of women in parliament. According to common belief, the Thai party-list system should have brought about the election of more women to the House of Representatives. Thailand's experience serves as a caution against common expectations that the adoption of proportional representation will lead to greater

legislative opportunities for women. The number of women elected to the Thai Parliament remains minimal.

On the whole, it is difficult to discern any significant influence that the new electoral system has had on women's electability. It will most likely require a number of elections before the new electoral system will bear any fruit. When a new electoral system is introduced, there is quite often a transitional period before the electorate and parties come to terms with its logic. Hence it is not realistic to expect that it will deliver immediate results. The Thai people have barely had a chance to familiarize themselves with the new electoral system, let alone acquire any experience with its operations. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the electoral system changes will have an immediate effect. Matland (2002), for example, has urged caution in attributing too much significance to the effects of the PR system on women's political representation in the developing world. He argues that PR systems do not help to increase the numbers of women legislators in developing countries (Matland 2002: 10), while Norris also claims that the role of the electoral system is '(...) independent of levels of political and socio-economic development' (Norris 2000: 349).

Although the existing literature on women's representation tends to find electoral systems as being positively influential, the impact of the electoral system concerning the representation of women in Thailand has not resulted in any significant changes in both the single-member constituencies and the PR multi-member constituencies. What is of more significance are the cultural, socio-economic, and political factors that have a daily impact on women's lives. Hence, as far as women's representation in the national assembly is concerned, the main problem in Thailand lies not with the electoral system per se, but with the dearth of women candidates and the absence of women selected to run in winnable seats.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

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#### NOTES

- 1 Former members of the House of Representatives and the Senate are exempted from this educational requirement.
- 2 Parties are not gatekeepers to the Senate because candidates for Senate seats are not permitted to have party affiliation.



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## WOMEN AND THE DEMOCRACY PROJECT: A FEMINIST TAKE ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

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*Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza*

Feminism both as a social movement and as an academic field, which struggles to penetrate and cut across all disciplines, was ushered in as a critique of what it saw as a world discriminatory of women. As an intellectual/academic pursuit, one of the greatest challenges that it continuously faces is the masculine enterprise of the study of politics. This is because the whole domain of the 'political' was traditionally seen as a 'man's world' both in theory and in practice. Hillary Charlesworth notes that the public-private '(...) dichotomy is central to liberalism – the dominant political, and legal, philosophy of the West' and it '(...) assumes a public sphere of rationality, order, and political authority in which political and legal activity take place, and a private, "subjective" sphere in which regulation is not appropriate' (1994: 69). For Asian feminists, however, the public-private dichotomy is inadequate in the analysis of women's situation in Asia for it tends to delimit the experiences of women into a generic schema – women marginalized in the public sphere and women defined as the 'other'. What is needed is to locate women's experiences within their own context without falling into the tyranny of generalization, thus recognizing that women are both the same and different.

This study is an attempt to describe women's political participation in the Philippines within its own context and peculiarity. The country's experience of democracy is specifically used as a frame of reference and women's political participation the measurable element. As such, the present chapter will broadly:

- Look into the recurring patterns/practices of Philippine politics and how these have neglected women in the narrative of the country's political history;

- Discuss the political participation of women both in the realms of formal and informal power and additionally within the context of the experience of democracy in the Philippines; and
- Make some feminist inferences on the connection between the democracy project in the Philippines and women's political participation.

### SOME CONCEPTUAL GROUNDING: DEFINING DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Its Greek origins suggest that democracy is the 'rule of the people'. How this 'rule' is operationalized and by whom will yield quite a rich exchange of discourses. Thus, to make it more manageable, David Beetham suggests a look at democracy as '(...) a mode of decision-making about collective binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control' (quoted in Richards, 2002: 4). Long before Beetham, Joseph Schumpeter already viewed democracy as '(...) that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which the individual acquires the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for people's votes' (1943: 269). According to these constructions, it would seem that democracy operates on the assumption of people's participation in decision-making, specifically through elections. This is to say that political participation is a given in a democracy for it aims to affect public policy on two fronts: through the determination of public policy itself and through choosing the people who make public policy. However, if the latter merely serves as a legitimizing ritual for political leadership and thus, no substantive democratization actually takes place. When political participation is defined as '(...) the process of any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods, and intended to influence the choice of political leaders at any level of government', the foci are the people's action and the result of their actions (Winer and Chowdhury in Kabir, 2003: 1). Political participation gives the people a stake at democracy, which is why it is critical to have due recognition for congruent transformations in both institutions/structures and actors in the political system. Drawing on the ideas of Huber, Rueschemeyer and Stephens as well as combining the key tenets of formal democracy, participatory democracy, and social democracy, Nathan Quimpo has noted the following as concrete manifestations of democracy in contemporary times:

1. regular free and fair elections
2. universal suffrage
3. accountability of the state's administrative organs to the elected representatives

4. effective guarantee of freedom of expression and association as well as protection from arbitrary state action
5. high levels of participation without systematic difference across social categories (e.g. class, ethnicity and gender)
6. increasing equality in social and economic outcomes (2002: 5).

Parameters such as these are important in order to gauge the meaning of democracy as concretely felt by the people. Though a minimalist interpretation of election may be a rather convenient way to increase the number of democratic countries in the world<sup>1</sup> (and thus justify democracy's hegemony as a sign that it is an ideal political system), it does not guarantee, however, a meaningful improvement in the lives of the people. Human dignity, after all, is an imperative of democracy; if this is not authentically felt by the people, then the promise of democracy has not gone beyond mere rhetoric.

Unfortunately, democracy has not fully worked for the women of the world. The right of suffrage itself, for example, was not readily guaranteed to women as it was for men. Across most of the political history of liberal societies, the right to vote was tied to the whole notion of citizenship and the privilege of the citizen-man. The women were excluded because they were mere appendages of the men in their lives (i.e. father or husband), not being allowed to own properties or define their identities for themselves. In the notion of the citizen-man, '(...) "duty" is what defines the citizen – the duty to put the "common good" or the good of the community over and beyond oneself' along with the assumption that '(...) a woman can never take on this duty for she cannot act beyond herself' since she can '(...) not be able to act for the "good" of the community' (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2004: 27). With this unquestioned and unchallenged assumption came the belief that women need not participate politically through elections, as they have no business there in the first place. They neither need to be represented since it is accepted that their husbands or fathers represent them. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there still remains five per cent of countries in the world that has not granted the right to vote to its female population nor the right to run for elections. For those countries that have democracy or a semblance of it (i.e. minimum requirement: elections), the endemic problems that plague them are the unequal political representation and participation of women. Carole Pateman reiterates this with the observation that '(...) for feminists, democracy has never existed; women have never been and still are not admitted as full and equal members and citizens in any country known as a democracy' (quoted in Eschle, 2000: 1).

Women comprise half of humanity and with the consolidation of their numbers in the form of women's votes, social changes can be effected in society. That is, if we assume that women think differently than men. However, '(...) women do not carry a "gene for democracy" primarily because of gender socialization – the subordination of women to men, relegation of women to the "private" sphere as well as their marginalization in public/political life' (Jaquette, 2000: 6). With such effective depoliticization, women who were initially able to claim and practice their right to vote looked to men as models for political actions, and as tutors in political decisions. In running for elections, women likewise referred to the male-paradigm of raw, coercive and competitive politics, thereby not differentiating themselves as women political leaders. Given this reality, the real test of democratization must go beyond the project of increasing the number of women who participate politically. A Western feminist standpoint '(...) encouraged the expansion of the political into the personal and of democracy into intimate life and emphasized the need to participate themselves in shaping their destiny rather than delegating that capacity to others' (Eschle, 2000: 13). But this liberalist frame is not enough, and that is why from the experiences of Black and Third World feminists, the critical project is to put forward some kind of 'transversal politics' that '(...) aims to be an alternative to the universalism/relativism dichotomy' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 125). Eschle aptly points to the negotiated space between feminists to see the logic of transversal politics as '(...) a process of coalition building through dialogue in which participants must recognize the historical and specific nature of their own identities, acknowledge the partiality of their perspectives and attempts to be open to exchanges with others' (2000: 16).

To guide democracy away from a universalist (i.e. beyond demand for institutional changes to expand women's 'public' presence) towards a transversalist form (i.e. pluralizing the 'public' into many 'publics' and reconceptualizing it as multi-tiered and heterogeneous), it is necessary to mitigate what Caryn McTighe Musil says are two contradictory truths:

(...) as women, we are the same and different. The bridges, power, alliances and social change possible will be determined by how well we define ourselves through a matrix that encompasses our gendered particularities while not losing sight of our unity (quoted in Yuval-Davis, 1997:126).

Women are indeed the same by virtue of shared experiences and women are also different because of the varying contexts and conditions of their lives. Women are part of the story of democracy of each society – not simply just under a social



category of gender but as an agent and facilitator of change. Unfortunately, the dominant interpretations of democracy and the narratives of Philippine politics have not comprised a feminist analysis and that is why Filipino women are excluded and marginalized in the re-telling of the country's political history. To mitigate this politics of exclusion, a feminist re-reading of Philippine democracy must include all the arenas where women are located and look at their contribution through a political lens. This means that women's presence in the traditional practice of politics (i.e. involvement in the revolutionary/anti-colonial struggle, suffragist movement, civil society actions, electoral politics, etc) as well as in the non-traditional political domain (i.e. exercising their gendered roles as daughters, wives, mothers and mistresses) should be recognized as a factor in shaping the country's political life. Women's stories should be weaved along with the depiction of institutional structures, the societal practices and norms. Building on the idea of transversal politics, the alternative discourse would now be the interface of dichotomies – private-public, universal-relative, same-different – in the re-telling of Philippine democracy.

#### RECURRING PATTERNS/PRACTICES IN PHILIPPINE POLITICS: A CONTEXTUALIZATION

The Philippines is an archipelagic state of about 7,100 islands located in the South China Sea. It has approximately 84 million people with about 54 per cent living on the island of Luzon, approximately 32 per cent in the Visayas, and the remaining 14 per cent in Mindanao. Fifty-five per cent of the population lives in urban areas while the rest live in rural areas. It is a republic under a presidential system with a (weak but functioning) multiparty system. As reflected in the 2000 The Philippine Report, the country has 15 regions and is further subdivided into 78 provinces, 87 cities, 1,534 municipalities, and 42,000 barangays; there are also three political units, namely the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) (2000: 2).

Owing to its historical experience under Western powers, the country has identified more with its former colonizers than with its Asian neighbors. The Philippines is the only country in the region that is predominantly Catholic – a colonial inheritance from the three centuries of being under Spanish rule. From an agglomeration of diverse groups of people in its pre-state form, the colony was consolidated under the rule of the Spanish crown that had a unique mix of civil, military, and religious authority. In the context of electoral contests (on the

municipal level), the Spaniards restricted electoral participation to the local elite – a practice that continued during American colonial rule. In fact, the pacification of the country under the Americans was effected through the consolidation of the elite in which they were guaranteed roles in the future self-governance of the Philippines. Temerio Rivera explains that ‘The American strategy of gradually putting the native elites into power through electoral contests (...) legitimized elite rule, further entrenching the power of local elite families who were able to control the electoral process’ (2002: 2).

As a consequence of this historical-political backdrop, the Philippines experienced a democracy plagued with elite politics, familial/kinship power and influence, and a patron-client system. In looking at the recurring patterns in Philippine politics, Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza summarizes them as:

1. The Philippine political system, though democratic, is characterized as largely elitist.
2. It operates on a clientelist tradition where the patron-client system figures prominently.
3. The breeding ground and the strongest root of this clientelism is the family – more specifically, the political families reigning in dynastic continuity and clustered into clans.
4. Political families largely form the elite base of Philippine politics and their major instruments are both political and economic power (2003: 6)

The recurring patterns of Philippine politics as well as the recurring themes of the country’s quest for democracy intersect with the dominant analytical frameworks of patronage politics and patrimonial schema. What happened for women was interpreting elite democracy or using the patrimonial view with the conscious effort of women’s involvement, and advancing the idea of familial/kinship politics and the patron-client system with the conscious effort of depicting what women have done - as a dutiful wife/daughter who takes on the political career of an assassinated husband/father or of a husband/father who has utilized his maximum term of office for an elected position. Interestingly, it is the very practice of elite democracy, familial/kinship politics, and a patron-client system that has enabled women to struggle and negotiate space for their inclusion in the practice of politics, both through the use of informal and formal power.

Through the channels of formal politics, women have been active as organizers, campaigners, fund-raisers, voters, political protesters, letter-writers, candidates for elective office, and even as national liberation fighters. They have belonged to political parties, to activist and religious groups, and to the bureaucracy itself.

Through the way of informal politics, women have been present as politicians' wives or daughters who would carry the family name or the family tradition of holding on to political power – especially if the term of office of the incumbent male-figure had expired. These women would take it upon themselves to run for public office if only to perpetuate their families' political power.

In both the formal and informal arenas, women have been significant actors; however in fact women have been conveniently removed from the depiction of Philippine politics – falling into what Saskia Sassen terms as a '(...) narrative of eviction (...)’ (1998: 82).

### THE DEMOCRACY PROJECT AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Some have observed that women in the Philippines are relatively better off than women from other Asian countries. During pre-colonial times, there were women who took on functional roles in society by virtue of being a *babaylan* (Visayan term) or *katalonan* (Tagalog term).

On the one hand, as part of the pre-colonial community, women had freedom and enjoyed what the men had. In fact, a woman:

(...) was her brother's equal in the home, society, in government. She could hold position of honor and prestige like him; born to a ruling family, she could succeed to her father's rule; born to less, she still had as much as her brother might inherit; her dignity as an individual was recognized, before and after marriage; her rights to own property were upheld even after marriage; she could divorce her husband for cause; her judgement heeded; her person respected (Subido, 1955: 1).

On the other hand, there were also many instances of inter-*barangay* raids to capture women in order to serve as additional wives for the 'datu' [chieftain] – where the number of wives reflected the wealth and status of the male political leader.

Nonetheless, it is believed that women occupied an equitable position in society prior to the coming of the Spaniards – they had power both formally (as *babaylan* or priestess) and informally (as *may bahay* or equal of the husband). These positions were lost with the coming of the colonizers and women were reduced to a status of perennial dependence in all aspects of their lives. In fact, with the relegation of the indigenous population to non-citizens, women were placed lower than the lowest status. The country's two major colonizers (namely Spain and the USA) imposed their cultures and their attendant biases on it

through effective methods of religion and education, which gave it a strongly western pattern of patriarchy (Tapales, 1992: 13).

As the Philippines marched on its quest for democratization, women have been part of the process. But since politics, public life, and state affairs have been perceived to be paradigmatically male and (more importantly so) run by men, women tended to be pushed out of this arena. Men come up with all sorts of 'justifications' that women have no place in politics – especially the kind of politics that depict '(...) state power as organized, formal political power, and conventional politics as limited to the formal processes and structures of winning and exercising state power' (Tancangco, 1990: 325). In this regard, the narrative of women's political participation and contribution to democracy should not be only a story of what happened in the formal echelons of power, in the formal practice of politics. For example, equal importance must be given to the figures of Gabriela Silang who took over the reigns of her revolutionary husband, Diego, Melchora Aquino who earned the title Mother of the Philippine revolution, Trinidad Tecson who was the prominent female figure at *Biak-na-Bato*, Gregoria de Jesus who was the spouse of the *Katipunan's* *supremo*, and Teresa Magbanua who came to be known as 'the Joan of Arc of the Visayas' (Maranan quoted in Tancangco, 1990: 326), and to all the un-named women revolutionaries who have struggled for independence. Women who have contributed to the struggle both as members of the revolutionary movement and as individuals assisting the revolutionaries should be given due recognition as facilitators for change. In this regard, women primarily from the *ilustrado* or the middle class who engaged in socio-civic organizations like the 1893 *Logia de Adopcion* (Masonic Lodge of Filipino women), the 1899 *Asociacion de Damas de la Cruz Roja* (Women's Red Cross Association) founded by the wife of General Emilio Aguinaldo, and the 1905 *Asociasion Feminista Filipina*<sup>2</sup> (Feminist Association of the Philippines) founded by Concepcion Felix-Rodriguez that sought prison reforms for young women/girls should also be categorized as political involvement and participation.

In analyzing the activities of women, a limited notion of politics has to be expanded to capture women's political contribution, found to be at the periphery of the formal seats of state power, but very much part of its structure and dynamics (Tancangco, 1992: 61). This is to say that women's actions should be documented beyond the androcentric definition of political participation. The year 2005 marks the centennial of the women's movement in the Philippines, but the first organized women's political participation is the Suffragist Movement's campaign (1898–1937). This was in the context of formal politics that women came into the political front with their mobilizing to work for extending the

right to vote to women. The Suffragist Movement is seen as the first instance of women organizing politically. Though many, including women themselves, believed that 300,000 women saying 'yes' to the provision would be impossible to meet and also that the law would not materialize, the suffragettes' unwavering resolve launched an intensive campaign to win the ballot. Women came together to organize themselves for this task. As narrated by Tarrosa Subido:

Weeks before plebiscite day, the Council<sup>3</sup> and provincial women's clubs sought new converts to the suffrage cause, by press, radio, posters, student rallies, house-to-house appeals, speaking tours, distribution of sample ballots and informative lectures (...) On plebiscite day, members of the Junior Federation of Women's Clubs did their baby-sitting for mothers who needed to go to vote; club women who can afford it held open house and served meals to out-of-town women voters; car owners loaned their cars to those who needed transportation. The net result of all these efforts: some 500,000 women registered during the two registration days, far exceeding the quota, and of this number 447,725 voted 'Yes' (1955: 33).

Because of the unprecedented organizing of women and the systematic attempts to popularize the struggle for women's right to vote, women's right of suffrage was finally legalized on September 17, 1937. Note that the actual law came four months after the plebiscite held on April 30, 1937 and that it came two years after the 1935 Philippine Constitution stipulated that woman could be granted the right of suffrage. Nonetheless, it came to be known that the Philippines was one of the first countries in Asia to grant women the right to vote. Indeed, this was a huge milestone for the women in the Philippines – not only because women were successful but also because this was the first political event that women voted as women.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICIPATING IN FORMAL POLITICS/POWER: CONTESTING THE STATE

The narrative of women's experience of political participation in Philippine democracy is one colored by the many contestations of various women's groups with the running of state affairs and the formulation of policies that directly affect women. Although women's right to vote was one of the greater achievements of the women's movement, one must note that the women's movement itself was not a monolithic one. A key critique of the women's Suffragist Movement is the notion that it was a colonial construct embraced by middle and upper class educated women who fought for this right within the 'equality frame' of liberal

democratic demands – in the quest for ‘equality with men’, women must have everything that men have and the right to vote was a step in this direction. In comparing the Philippines and Sri Lanka, Kumari Jayawardena observes that the women:

(...) did not move beyond the sphere of limited and selected reforms: equality for women within the legal process, the removal of obviously discriminatory practices, the right to vote, education and property, and the rights of women to enter professions and politics, etc. These were reforms which had little effect on the daily lives of the masses; neither did it address the basic question of women's subordination within the family and society (quoted in Tapales, 1992: 110–111).

The class element of the Suffragist Movement casts a shadow over those involved, for the very simple reason that they belonged to the upper echelons of society. It was felt that through the Suffragist Movement, the Filipina women (or so-called ‘bourgeois’ women) were transformed in the image and likeness of ‘emancipated women of Western society’. The class element tainted the Suffragist Movement as a colonial construct and thereby alienated the majority of poor women in society.

The women of the elite class saw the electoral process as a pillar of democracy and thus became comfortable with the system. The significance of their contribution was great, but as a consolidated group they failed to see other substantive structural and institutional changes that needed to happen in order to authentically improve the conditions of women. This may have been the reason why the 1951 National Political Party of Women<sup>4</sup> was not as successful as it intended to be. In the pervading political landscape of that time, it was a pioneering and noble idea; but without an adequate integration of critical social and gender analysis within the political platform, it did not differentiate itself from existing political parties then.

There has been a proliferation of women's organizations in pre- and post-independence Philippines. Most, if not all, really helped women. But just as ‘woman’ as a category cannot be homogenized or standardized, so is true for these organizations. However, from the vantage point of radical or marxist feminism, women's organizations that do not go to the root of women's conditions, simply perpetuate the status quo. Without any ideological line or feminist critique, organizations will not go as far as challenging the state. It was to challenge the state that the modern women's movement emerged. Particularly, militancy with an ideological frame meant a more meaningful and substantive political participation

of women. Such was the case of women's groups that fought dictatorship during the Marcos regime:

Activism during the First Quarter Storm as it came to be called in the universities were led by young intellectuals, fascinated with the Cultural Revolution in China and the heroism of the Vietnamese people. From among the myriad of activist groups that sprang during this period was the 'Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan' (Makibaka – Free Movement of New Women) (...) It would be the first time that a woman's organization openly subscribed to an ideological framework. Its inaugural activity was most fitting and had maximum impact – it picketed the annual Miss Philippines contest as a crass commercialization of sex and a debasement of the Filipina (Javate-De Dios, 1992: 146).

But the greatest factor that nearly defeated this critical effort was the very male-centric arrogance of the national democratic movement's failure to recognize women's concerns as part of the liberation struggle from imperialism, bureaucrat-capitalism, and feudalism. Just like any national liberation movement, women's issues were seen as too specific for the cause to be struggling for. In an interview<sup>5</sup> cited by former National Democratic Front (NDF) leader Satur Ocampo, a member of the MAKIBAKA was quoted as saying:

During the early years of MAKIBAKA, our existence was widely questioned by comrades in the movement. Aside from asserting that our particular problems were only secondary to the movement's concerns, and that they were capable of carrying these issues without having to set-up a separate organization, they also labeled us as divisive 'Western' and petit bourgeois' (1993: 68).

There was tension between '(...) feminism and nationalism, the priority of national liberation down-played women's issues and prioritized issues of social injustice, dictatorship, class struggle, democracy, violence and revolution (...)’ as if they were all not related to the conditions of women (Roces, 2000: 122). Nathan Ocampo himself acknowledges '(...) that while the revolutionary movement provides conditions for women's liberation, patriarchy is still pervasive in the revolutionary ranks (...) ergo, all revolutionaries are called upon to combat patriarchy within the movement' (1993: 68).

At any rate, whether women were confronted in various arenas – be it by elements of the state or by their own comrades – this does not erase the reality that women have fought for national liberation alongside men; women have been part of the armed movement and as such were subjected to gender-based violence more than their male comrades (i.e. rape as a form of torture). In the context of grave

human rights violations as well as deepening economic and social deprivation, several other women's groups, particularly those affiliated with the Church<sup>6</sup> such as the Association of Women in Theology (AWIT) and 'Kapisanan ng mga Madres sa Kamaynilaan' [Organization of Women in Manila] emerged to protest against the state. The challenge against the state became more pronounced with women's concerns of finding a voice in the media, and with this critical issue taken on by Women in Media Now (WOMEN). Women workers also banded together to use the power of trade unionism against exploitative capitalism and thus was created 'Samahan ng Kababaihang Manggagawa sa Pilipinas' [Organization of Philippine Women Workers] and 'Kilusang Manggagawang Kababaihan' [Movement of Women Workers]. On the other side of the fence came the exclusive grouping of women entrepreneurs, business executives, teachers and housewives to form the Alliance of Women for Action towards Reconciliation (AWARE) and sectoral as well as youth women established the 'Samahan ng Malayang Kababaihan' [Organization of Free Women]. It has been observed that the impetus for the increased growth and reach of the women's movement was the socio-political and economic crises experienced during the Marcos regime. These groups needed to be consolidated so as not to divide their strength. In 1984, the General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Equality, Leadership and Action (GABRIELA) was formed as an umbrella organization to unite all politically active women's groups and organizations '(...) regardless of ideological color into one big coalition (...) with a (short-term) goal of removing Marcos from power. Events and mobilizations leading to the 1986 People Power Revolution sa. women – organized or otherwise and for with ideological line they subscribed to – coming together to work for a common end. When the time arrived for the movement to reclaim Philippine democracy from the dictator and to succeed, a number of women became part of the formal institutions of politics, while most continued contesting the state from outside the state structures.

With respect to a critical engagement with the state, it has been observed that on the average it takes about six to eight years to pass a law in the Philippines. Politicking, bureaucratic and administrative work inefficiency (or the guise of being 'overworked') and bumping off bills to an unprioritized oblivion may account for the slow pace of legislation. This is the main reason why women's groups have remained vigilant in their engagements with the state – through practical experiences, continuous lobbying, protesting, contesting, and negotiating, all in aid of the passage of law. The much delayed Anti-Rape Law (RA 8353) was a product of seven years of legislative work thanks to the help of women's organizations. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 (RA 9208)



was a product of five years work and the Anti-Violence Against Women and the Children Law of 2004 (RA 9262) was lobbied for in Congress soon after the first EDSA People Power convened. In this regard, it cannot be denied that the women's movement has introduced gender issues and awareness to Philippine society, as well as gender advocacy and gender analysis in policy making.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICIPATING IN FORMAL POLITICS/POWER: NEGOTIATING WITH AND NAVIGATING THROUGH THE STATE

In theory, the right to stand for elections or to become a candidate and to get elected is based on the right to vote. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) has projected that women's political participation and representation are necessary for the strengthening of democracy while Part II, Article 7 of the Convention Against the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has declared that 'State parties shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and in particular, shall ensure on equal terms with men, the right:

1. To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
2. To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
3. To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with public and political life of the country'.

Despite these international conventions around the world, '(...) the fundamental problem facing the process of democratisation is the continued lack of gender equality in political leadership' (Norris and Inglehart, 2000: 1). Obstacles to the full and equal participation of women in politics remain.

While examining women's political participation in South Asia, Farah Kabir identifies women's involvement in mass mobilization and their '(...) supportive role in enabling male leadership in the forefront of political struggles (...) ' as part of the negotiation of political spaces created for women by the state (2003: 2). She further continues:

Even when women do become part of the formal political process as members of elite political groups, they are usually assigned to soft portfolios 'appropriate' for women's concerns. The many barriers to political participation that South Asian women face exist at different levels, both formal and informal, and they arise from socio-cultural values and practices that are firmly entrenched in systems and structures in society (Kabir, 2003: 2).

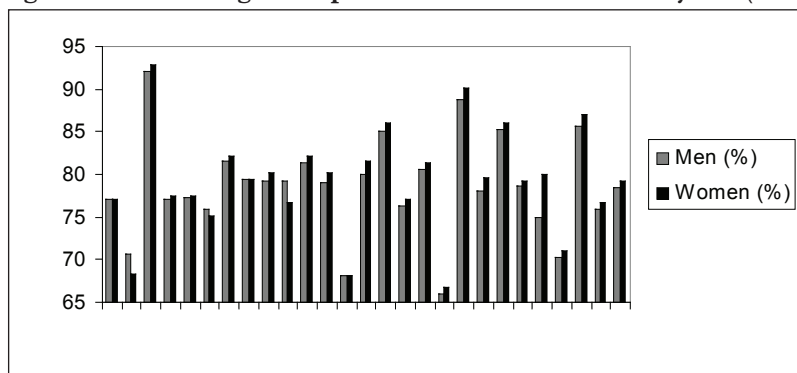
In the Philippines, electoral politics is seen as the primary mode for political participation. Drawing from the provisions stipulated in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Marlea Muñoz summarizes the key ideas of the Philippine electoral system:

- The President and the Vice President are elected nationally for a six-year term with no re-election allowed.
- The Philippine Congress is bicameral, with a lower house of at least 200 representatives elected in single-member district constituencies for 3 years, plus “Party List” representatives that address “sectoral” or specific concerns. Representatives are limited to three terms. The Senate has 24 members elected for a six-year term nationally, with half of the members elected every 3 years. Senators are limited to two terms.
- Local government officials (governors, provincial councils, municipal and city mayors, municipal and city councils) are elected for a three-year term, with a three-term limit or a maximum of nine years service.
- Senators, representatives and local government officials are elected in mid-term elections. During presidential election years, they may also be elected.
- Those with the most number of votes are declared winners.
- The Commission on Elections (COMELEC), a constitutionally mandated, independent body, supervises the elections. A Political Party that would join the electoral process is required to register with the COMELEC with a verified petition that presents the party’s organization through its constitution, by-laws, platform, and other information. Each party is required to have chapters in the majority of the regions and provinces, down to towns and barangays (2004: 132).

Ever since women won the right to vote and began exercising it in the elections to follow, voter turnout among women has been slightly higher (by 0.77 per cent) than men as Figure 9.1 (p. 224) shows.

Out of 26 election years, a total of 20 elections showed more women voting than men. The election years where men voters outnumbered the women were in 1947, 1949, 1959, 1961, 1965 and 1970.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the general trend is that there are more women voters than men. Hypothetically, the continuity of such a trend may see the point where a critical mass of women voters may find the courage to change the leadership in government through electoral politics. As Luzviminda Tancangco assumes, ‘(...) constituting almost half of the total electorate, sheer number can be power if women so desire’ (1990: 340). Never mind if they voted dictated to by the man of the house; the mere exercise of the right to vote may transform into authentic empowerment of women as direct sources of changes in the polity.

**Figure 9.1: Trending of Filipino voters' turnout rates by sex (1947–2001)**



*Source:* COMELEC, Official Website of the Commission on Elections, Republic of the Philippines.

But there is a long way to go because there is no authentic ‘women’s vote’ just yet. For example, election data from 1946 to 1987 (Table 9.1) show that despite 11 election years having more women voters, women being elected into public office was trivial – a total of 63 out of 1284 positions to be filled or 4.98 per cent.

Thus, it can be inferred that the higher voter turnout of women is not really a cause for celebration, for the simple reason that women do not differ in their voting patterns from men. More women vote because they perceive that this may be their only way to meaningfully participate in politics; but it does not translate into having a different voting preference from men. A woman will not generally vote for another woman because of her gendered socialization that continues to echo in her psyche.

The non-existence of a solid women’s vote can be traced to our cultural make-up. Filipinos generally believe that men are superior to women especially in the field of politics. It is also generally believed that public life is a man’s domain and familial and private concerns are the woman’s (Tancango, 1990: 342).

In explaining the cultural dimension of Filipino women’s political behavior, Proserpina Tapales cites a 1983 study on Filipino women’s values conducted by the University of the Philippines College of Education and the National Commission on Women where the Filipino women’s political values are listed as:

1. Filipino women are politically aware and knowledgeable.
2. However, they refrain from participating in political discussions; do not have direct contact with government leaders; and are not members of political organizations.

**Table 9.1: Number of women in the Philippine senate and house of representatives, 1946–1987**

Election Year	Position	Number of Women Elected	Number of Positions to be Filled
1946	Congresswoman	1	8
1947	Senator	1	8
1949	Congresswoman	1	100
1953	Congresswoman	1	102
1955	Senator	1	8
1957	Congresswoman	1	102
1961	Senator	1	8
	Congresswoman	2	104
1963	Senator	1	8
1965	Senator	1	8
	Congresswoman	6	104
1967	Senator	2	8
1967	Senator	0	8
	Congresswoman	3	109
1971	Senator	1	8
1978	IBP Member	9	165
1984	Mambabatas Pambansa	10	181
1987	Senator	2	23
TOTAL		63	1284

Source: Luzviminda Tancangco, 'Voters, Candidates and Organizers: Women and Politics in Contemporary Philippines' in *Filipino Women and Public Policy* (1992), ed. Proserpina D. Tapales, Manila: Kalikasan Press, p. 101

3. Moreover, their political activity is voting in elections and attending rallies.
4. They regard government positions as basically for men, preferring to engage in economic activities. All other things being equal, they would rather vote for a man than for a woman (1992: 112).

In the same vein, Cortes observes that '(...) because of deeply-rooted biases, male and female voters have a prejudicial outlook against female candidates such that between a man and a woman candidate with equal qualifications, they exhibit an irrational preference for the former' (1983: 9). It is for this reason that the greater number of women voters additionally has not led to more women in public office. Despite the experience of several political upheavals and opportunities for social changes after the post-Marcos years, both female and male voters remain biased against women candidates. For example, as the data from 1987, 1992, 1998,

2001, and 2004 national/local elections (Tables 9.2, 9.3 and Figure 9.2) suggest, women voted into public office account for a startlingly low percentage.

**Table 9.2: Women elected to public office: executive branch: national**

	1987–1992		1992–1998		1998–2004		2004–2010	
	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
President	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Vice President	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0

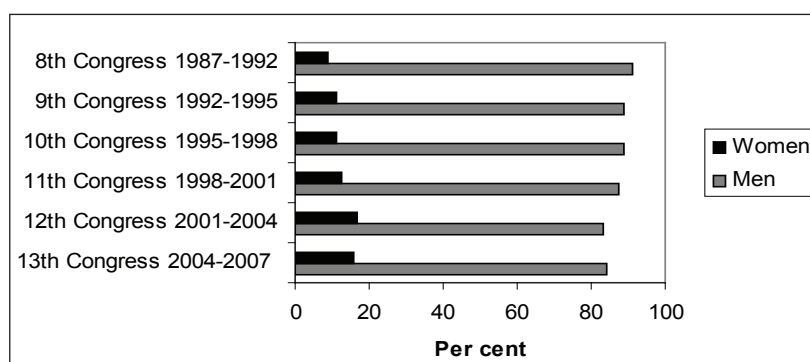
Sources: COMELEC, Official Website of the Commission on Elections, Republic of the Philippines

**Table 9.3: Women elected to public office: legislative branch: national**

	8 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1987–1992		9 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1992–1995		10 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1995–1998		11 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1998–2001		12 <sup>th</sup> Congress 2001–2004		13 <sup>th</sup> Congress 2004–2007	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Senators	2	22	4	20	4	20	4	20	3	19	4	19
Representatives	19	195	23	192	23	192	27	193	36	175	37	200
TOTAL	21	217	27	212	27	212	31	213	39	194	41	219
%	9%	91%	11%	89%	11%	89%	13%	87%	17%	83%	16%	84%

Sources: COMELEC, Official Website of the Commission on Elections, Republic of the Philippines

**Figure 9.2 Trending of women elected to public office: bicameral legislature**



**Table 9.4: Women elected to public office: executive and legislative positions at the local government levels**

E X E C U T I V E					
	Governor	Vice Governor	Mayor	Vice Mayor	Total
8 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1987–1992					
Women	4	8	118	96	226 (7%)
Men	69	66	1,460	1,495	3,090 (93%)
9 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1992–1998					
Women	5	—	101	—	106 (6%)
Men	68	—	1,459	—	1,527 (94%)
10 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1995–1998					
Women	9	13	129	132	283 (8%)
Men	67	89	1,469	1,465	3,090 (92%)
11 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1998–2001					
Women	13	9	233	179	434 (13%)
Men	62	69	1,374	1,428	2,933 (87%)
12 <sup>th</sup> Congress 2001–2004					
Women	15	10	241	192	458 (14%)
Men	59	67	1,394	1,356	2,876 (86%)
13 <sup>th</sup> Congress 2004–2007					
Women	15	6	293	232	546 (16%)
Men	64	73	1,366	1,377	2,880 (84%)
L E G I S L A T I V E					
	Provincial Board	City/Municipal council	TOTAL	T O T A L executive and legislative	
8 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1987–1992					
Women	62	1,305	1,367 (10%)	1,593 (10%)	
Men	1305	11,101	11,665 (90%)	14,755 (90%)	
9 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1992–1998					
Women	68	1644	1712 (12%)	1,818 (12%)	
Men	579	11,408	11,987 (88%)	13,514 (88%)	
10 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1995–1998					
Women	76	1,840	1916 (14%)	2,199 (13%)	
Men	601	11,423	12,024 (86%)	15,114 (87%)	

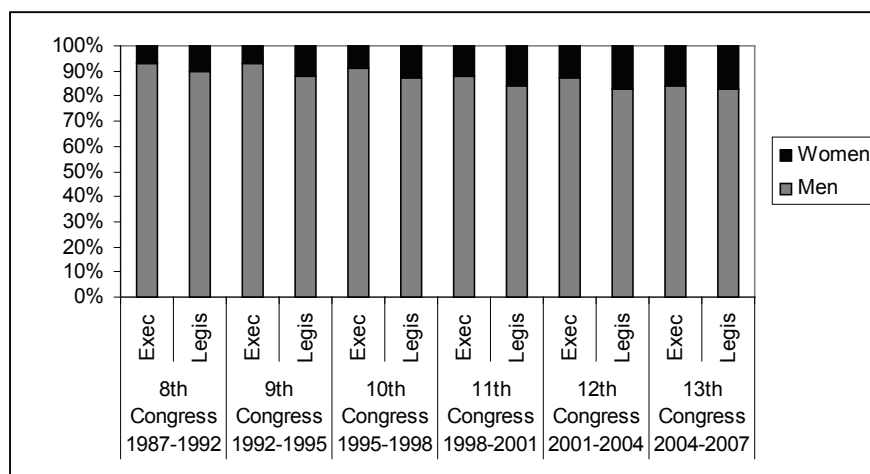
## Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia

11 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1998–2001				
Women	93	2,141	2,234 (17%)	2,668 (16%)
Men	629	10,570	11,199 (83%)	14,132 (84%)
12 <sup>th</sup> Congress 2001–2004				
Women	120	2,198	2,318 (17%)	2,776 (17%)
Men	607	10,457	11,064 (83%)	13,940 (83%)
13 <sup>th</sup> Congress 2004–2007				
Women	102	1,,718	1,820 (17%)	2,366 (17%)
Men	514	8,283	8,797 (83%)	11,677 (83%)

*Sources:* CLD International – Center for Legislative Development International. Online resource.  
COMELEC, Official Website of the Commission on Elections, Republic of the Philippines. Online resource.

The same trend is manifested at the local government level from 1987 to 2004. Though higher percentages are posted for women elected into positions compared to the national level, the data still depict a great gap between women and men (Table 9.4 and Figure 9.3).

**Figure 9.3: Trending women elected to public office: executive and legislative positions at the local government levels**



Inferring from the data during the post-Marcos years, it is quite evident that more women are entering politics through the electoral contest (Figure 9.4). However, the general trend of more women going out to vote does not manifest itself in putting more women in public office. In fact, there is a possibility that

there is no gendered dimension in the voting preference of women – thus, there is no ‘women’s vote’ to speak of at all. In other words, the additional number of women elected in public office is not significant enough to deduce that there is a trend towards either the feminization of political leadership or an equalization of political representation. These women come to occupy elective positions not by virtue of the ‘myth’ of the ‘women’s vote’ but through other factors such as political party machinery, patronage politics, familial and kinship ties and an elitist type of democracy.

Given this information, it is quite logical to presume that despite the country’s commitment to improving the status of women, significant changes for broader structural/institutional transformations will be very difficult to attain. With men dominating these positions, can we confidently believe that men are able or even willing to represent women? And even for the women who are elected themselves – are they willing to categorically state that will represent women’s issues? For both men and women candidates, such acts and statements would lead to political suicide. In the case of women candidates, very few of them will seek political office with the intention of representing women’s interests *per se*. Female candidates tend not to initiate discussions on women’s issues so as not to be branded as having a narrow intent. Furthermore, women who eventually are placed in office do not automatically take on women’s concerns because they themselves have been catapulted to power by patriarchal politics. In addition, they have also been socialized in the system of patriarchy and thus will also have a male mind-set. Dr. Farzana Bahari reflects:

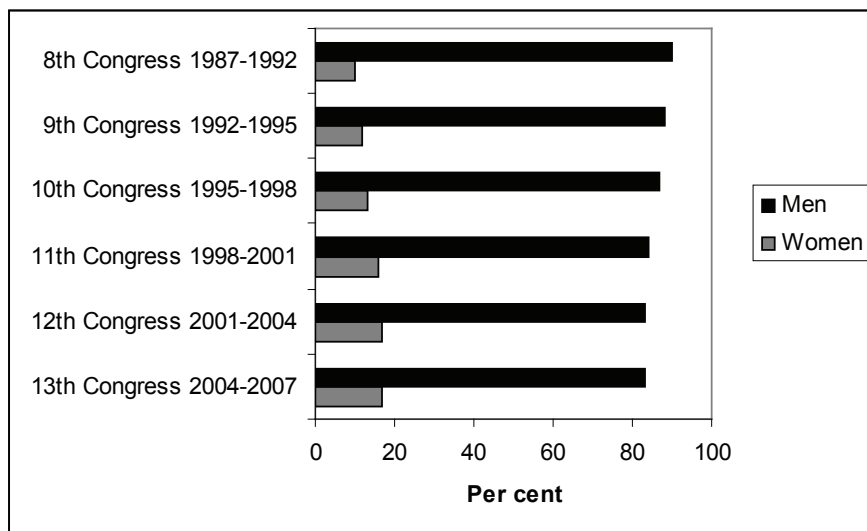
It can be said that women’s presence in formal politics will not bring a qualitative change by putting social issues on the national agenda. It can be argued that women, because of their gender alone will not place gender issues on the national agenda (...) women in the upper echelons of politics are more likely to become an elite group among women and develop their own vested interest (as quoted by Karam, 1998: 10).

If mere numbers alone were enough to ensure the improvement of women’s lives, then the Philippines would be in relatively good shape. Although proceeding in small steps in terms of increasing the number of women in public office, this is nevertheless a political opening that still must be recognized. However, it is also very important to note that if we are concerned with deepening women’s participation in politics, then ‘(...) one has to look not only at the quantitative increase in women power-holders but its impact on the qualitative transformation of women’s lives’ (Reyes, 1991: 1). Thus, the dual approach consists of broadening



the space for political participation as well as making it work for the women in the general populace.

**Figure 9.4: Trending of women elected in public office: executive and legislative branches: national and local elections, 1987–2004**



#### THE OTHER SIDE OF FORMAL POLITICS: THE CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND ITS CONVERGENCE WITH MAINSTREAM POLITICS

In the domain of formal politics, the mainstream view of political participation is that which involves taking part in electoral exercises (e.g. voting or running for public office) as well as being part of organized interest group actions (e.g. rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, lobbying or running electoral campaigns). Hague and Harrop consider both modes as within the framework of political participation – where orthodox political participation is largely concentrated on the electoral exercise while the unorthodox mode is actions ‘(...) built on disenfranchisement within the existing political structures’ (1987: 90). Within the framework of the democracy project in the Philippines, women have been involved in politics. The method or strategy for engaging the state may vary but this does not diminish the fact of their significance in Philippine political history. In discussing organized women's groups participating in the electoral contest, Josefa Francisco distinguishes women's groups based on their orientation:

1. *Socio-civic oriented women's organizations* are those that are (a) generally less critical of the status quo; (b) tending towards the prioritization of the elimination of discrimination against women in politics; (c) less involved in the community organizing of grassroots-women's specific political or economic objectives; and (d) less concerned with the feminist line.
2. *Activist oriented women's groups* are those that (a) call for reforming the existing political and economic system; (b) address equality issues in connection with the need for broader social equity; (c) engage themselves with grassroots organizing; and (d) are conscious of their feminist identity (1998: 5).

The women's movements in the Philippines converge at the idea of the shared experience of women's disempowerment but their framework for action diverges in terms of priority – where on the one hand priorities are inclined towards a political empowerment agenda (socio-civic) and on the other hand energies are concentrated on economic empowerment (activist). In discussing organized women's groups as change agents, Socorro Reyes categorized them into groups by:

- *sector* or women's organizations cutting across various sectors in the country such as the rural peasantry, urban factory workers, the studentry, the urban poor, church workers and university-based intellectuals;
- *issue* or groups differentiated by specific issues they carry such as reproductive health, women's rights, non-discrimination of women, protection of the welfare of prostitute women, gender education and counselling for women victimized in domestic violence;
- *ideology* or having varying shades of political line from conservatism to radicalism; and as
- *research/resource organizations* providing valuable information for advocacy (1992: 8).

Interestingly, these women's organizations converge within the formal structures of the polity and serve as a vehicle for mitigating the inefficient performance of legislators on women's concerns. These elected women officials have not fully realized the intent of women's organizations. As a result, laws and policies on women have been quite difficult to come by. In a Congress dominated by men, it is obvious that it will not serve the interest of women; and in a Congress where the elected women think like men, we find a hopeless scenario for improving women's conditions. A focus on the legislators themselves reflects the sorry state of women placed in critical decision and law-making positions because they have not made an issue of women's concerns. As Table 9.5 shows, women's concerns do not even comprise a significant percentage of bills filed in Congress.

**Table 9.5: Data on Women-Related Bills Filed in the Bicameral Legislature: Comparison of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Congresses.**

	11 <sup>th</sup> Congress <sup>a</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup> Congress <sup>a</sup>
Senate	101 of 1,627 (6.2%)	197 of 2,957 (6.7%)
House of Representatives	108 of 7,706 (1.4%)	168 of 7,389 (2.3%)
TOTAL	209 (2.2%)	365 (3.5%)

*Sources:* CLD International – Center for Legislative Development, 1999 Occasional Paper, online resource. 2004 Legislative Women's Watch.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress, out of 9,333 bills filed, only 209 or 2.2 per cent pertain to women's concerns. The percentage went up by 1.3 per cent with 365 pro-women bills filed out of 10,346 in the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress. With such a low number of proposed legislations contrasted with a slow increase of women legislators, it can be inferred that there is no direct correlation between the two – more women does not translate into more laws for women. In fact, the legislative performance of law-makers is locked within the framework of their party affiliation. This is to say that the force behind the proposal and passage into law of women-related bills is the commitment and vigilance of women's organizations. Women legislators themselves are not keenly sensitive to women and gender issues and thus women being in power does not necessarily mean the empowerment of women (CLD Fact Sheet, 2000: 1).

Based on the experience of network organizations such as 'Sama-samang Inisyatiba ng Kababaihan Para sa Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan' (Collective Initiative of Women for Transformation of Laws and Society) and AMEND (Alliance of Migrant Workers and Advocates to amend RA 8042), senators are inclined to take their parties' stance on issues which are usually discussed in caucuses outside the formal senate sessions (Muñez, 2004: 137).

In other words, women's organizations lobby and negotiate with women legislators or male legislators sensitive to gender concerns. This is an acceptable way of ensuring that the interest for pro-women legislations is sustained within the halls of congress. Though the engagement is quite cautious because of possible politicking, women's organizations along with their sponsors in congress were able to reflect the importance of women's concerns. Table 9.6 shows the typology of women's issues as well as the number of bills filed within each category.

In all likelihood, these bills were filed as a matter of responding to the country's commitment to both CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). However, judging from the composition of the legislative branch, it was not inevitable for the legislators to pick up the struggle for improving the status of Filipino women.

It is even safe to assume that the efforts came from the lobbying, monitoring and strategizing of women's groups.

**Table 9.6 Categories of women-related bills filed in the bicameral legislature: summary between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Congresses**

	11 <sup>th</sup> Congress	12 <sup>th</sup> Congress
Education/Training	3	20
Girl-Child	47	55
Health	22	28
Human Rights	26	70
Institutional Mechanisms	12	23
Media	9	10
Violence Against Women	54	99
Women in Armed Conflict	—	—
Women in Poverty/Economy/Work	30	49
Women in Power and Decision-Making	6	11
TOTAL	209	365

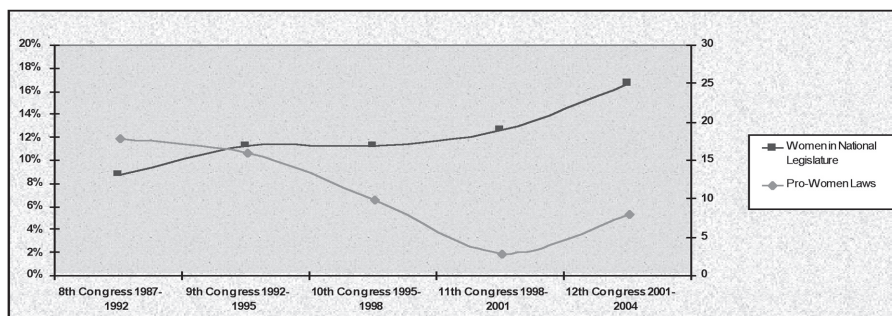
*Sources:* Center for Legislative Development (CLD) 1999 Occasional Paper and 2004 Legislative Women's Watch

Prior to CEDAW and BPFA, a very small number of women-related laws were drafted during the Commonwealth period and the post-World War II years such as 'An Act to Amend Section 431 of the Administrative Code, by Granting the Right of Suffrage to Women and Making them Eligible to All Public Offices, and for Other Purposes' (1933), 'An Act Providing the Manner in which the Option to Elect Philippine Citizenship Shall be Declared by a Person whose Mother is a Filipino Citizen' (1941), 'An Act to Grant Maternity Leave to Married Women who are in the Service of the Government or of any of its Instrumentalities' (1941), 'The Revised Election Code' (1947), 'An Act Granting Maternity Leave to Women in Government under Temporary Appointments who have Rendered Two Years of Service, by Amending Commonwealth Act Numbered 647 as Amended' (1956), 'An Act to Establish in the Department of Labor a Bureau to be Known as Women and Minors Bureau' (1960), and the 'Law on Registry of Civil Status' (1963). During the administration of the Marcos government, the following pro-women laws were passed: 'Amending Further certain Sections of R.A. Numbered 679 as Amended, Commonly Known as the Women and Child Labor Law' (1973), 'Further Amending Republic Act Number 1161 Otherwise Known as Social Security Law' (1977 and again in 1979), 'An Act Further Amending Numbered R.A. 679, as Amended by R.A. Numbered 1131' (1971). It was also during this period that the government agency for the advancement of women was established:

The National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) was established on January 7, 1975 through Presidential Decree 633, as an advisory body to the President and the Cabinet on policies and programs for the advancement of women. It is mandated “to review, evaluate, and recommend measures, including priorities to ensure the full integration of women for economic, social and cultural development at national, regional and international levels, and to ensure further equality between women and men (NCRFW – National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. Philippine Machinery for the Advancement of Women. Info Resource – Laws on Women. Online Resource).

Despite the marked increase, it is still unfortunate that within the span of 17 years only 55 women-related laws were enacted. Of this number, the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress passed the most laws followed by the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress; a downward trend was reflected in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Congresses and it only picked up (albeit in a small scale) during the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress (Table 9.7, p. 235). Furthermore, most of the laws were in the category of women in poverty/economy/work, followed by health and (women’s) human rights, then violence against women, and finally, women in power/decision-making, institutional mechanisms, the girl-child and media. Interestingly, these laws were not the children of women legislators. While looking into the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress, Soccoro Reyes notes the irony that ‘(...) men not women, took the initiative in the introduction of legislation on child care, domestic violence, mail order brides, divorce, birth control, amendment of the Family Code to protect women’s health and guarantee their property rights, amendment of the Penal Code to ensure equality between women and men in the dissolution of marriage, etc’ (1991: 2).

**Figure 9.5: Women in national legislature vis-à-vis pro-women laws: from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> Congresses**



In comparing the trend of an increasing number of women in the national legislature side by side with the number of women-related laws passed, it

**Table 9.7: Tabulation of women-related legislations passed into law: from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> Congresses: by categories**

Categories	8 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1987–92	9 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1992–95	10 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1995–98	11 <sup>th</sup> Congress 1998–2001	12 <sup>th</sup> Congress 2001–04	Total per Category
Education/ Training	2	2	–	–	–	4
Girl-child	–	1	–	–	1	2
Health	3	5	–	–	1	9
Human rights	2	–	2	2	3	9
Institutional mechanisms	2	–	–	–	–	2
Media	–	–	2	–	–	2
Violence against women	2	2	2	1	1	8
Women in armed conflict	–	–	–	–	–	–
Women in poverty/ economy/ work	6	5	4	–	1	16
Women in power and decision- making	1	1	–	–	1	3
TOTAL/ CONGRESS	18	16	10	3	8	55

*Sources:* <http://www.election2004.ph/main/candidates.php>, NSCB – National Statistical Coordination Board. Philippines policy making and coordinating body on statistical matters. Online resource. NCRFW – National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. Philippine Machinery for the Advancement of Women. Info Resource – Laws on Women. Online resource.

is important to note that despite the relative increase in women in power no substantive increase was seen in policy making. As Figure 9.5 illustrates, there was even a decline in enacting pro-women laws when there was a relative increase in women legislators. although by the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress the trend was mitigated possibly because of women's groups learning to negotiate the potential of the party list system.

But before moving on with the discussion on how the party list mechanism has assisted in the critical engagement of women's groups, some key ideas concerning the Executive Branch must be looked at. The Philippines, like most presidential forms of government, has a President who approves the law passed

in the legislative branch.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on Table 9.7, it is interesting to point out that the term of Fidel Ramos (1992–1998) saw the most number of pro-women laws enacted, with a major concentration on women in development and economic empowerment. Credit must also be given to the Ramos presidency for Executive Order (EO) 273 and the adoption of the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (PPGD) from 1995 to 2025. According to Muñoz:

This is the successor of the Philippine Development Plan for Women (PDPW) with some instructional content. Aside from implementing the PPGD, the government was tasked to institutionalize Gender and Development (GAD) programs. Authority, such as the creation of interagency committees, issuance of orders, circulars, or guidelines was vested in the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) (2004: 134).

Ramos can likewise be credited for many gender-responsive executive orders and proclamations such as:

- E.O. 329 or 'Designating the National Council of Women in the Philippines (NCWP) as One of the Leading Monitoring Arm of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) for the Effective Implementation of the Global Platform for Action and the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development in the NGO and Private Sector';
- E.O. 368 or 'Amending E.O. 356 Dated 12 August 1996 which Provides for the Implementing Guidelines on the Institutional Arrangements to Fast Track SRA Localization to Include the National Council on the Role of Filipino Women in the Membership of the Social Reform Council';
- Proclamation No. 731 or 'Declaring the Second Week of February of Every Year as National Awareness Week for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation';
- Proclamation No. 759 or 'Declaring the Fourth Week of March 1996 as protection and Gender-Fair Treatment of the Girl-Child Week'; and
- Proclamation No. 1105 or 'Declaring October 15, 1997 and of Every Year Thereafter as National Rural Women's Day' (NCRFW – National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. Philippine Machinery for the Advancement of Women. Info Resource – Laws on Women. Online resource).

Corazon Aquino comes in second for the enactment of women-related laws. Her term also saw the approval and adoption of the Philippine Development Plan for Women for 1992 (Executive Order 348), which explains why most of the pro-women laws were along the lines of economic empowerment. Joseph Estrada's term, cut short by three years because of being ousted from office, saw the enactment of only one pro-women law (i.e. Rape Victim Assistance

and Protection Act). Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo took over from Estrada and was elected for a full term of the presidency in May 2004. From 2001 to 2004, only eight pro-women laws were enacted; these laws materialized ‘(...) not because she pushed for their passage, but because of the efforts of advocates from government and the NGOs’ (Muñez, 2004: 135).

In the context of a functioning democracy, the quality of legislation ‘(...) is the hallmark of a people’s sense of justice; in many instances, it has proven to be the touchstone by which inequalities in society are addressed and redressed’ (Santos, Conda and Natividad, 1999: 1). In working towards the goal of increasing the laws enacted for the benefit of women, women’s organizations should be engaged in multi-dimensional engagements – on the one hand, utilizing and supporting the electoral process in order to place ‘pro-women minded’ women in office and committing to sustain their energy in negotiating with other powers in congress; and on the other hand, training, educating, organizing and mobilizing other women for a more meaningful participation in politics. In other words, there is a need to advance an alternative paradigm of politics.

An opportunity for engendering alternative politics arose through the enactment of the Party List System Law (RA 7941). As per definition, ‘(...) a party list system is a mechanism of proportional representation in the election of representatives to the House of Representatives from national, regional and sectoral parties or organizations or coalitions thereof registered with the COMELEC’ (R.A. 7941). The law stipulates that 20 per cent of the 250 seats in the House of Representatives will be allotted to ‘small’ political parties and sectoral groups. Party-list groups have to get at least two per cent of the total votes cast for party-lists to obtain a Congressional seat.

Drawing from the provisions of R.A. 7941 and the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Adriano Fermin lists the salient features of the party list system as:

- *Twenty per cent allocation.* The party list representatives shall constitute 20 per cent of the total number of representatives including those under the party list.
- *Two per cent threshold.* For a party or organization to be entitled to one seat, it must obtain at least two per cent of the total votes for the party list system.
- *Three-seat limit.* Section 11 of RA 7941 specifies that a qualified party would be entitled to a maximum of three seats.
- *Proportional representation.* The additional seats that the party is entitled to is computed in proportion to its total number of votes (Fermin, Adriano (2001) ‘Prospects and Scenarios for the Party List System in the Philippines’).



When it was enacted in 1995, positive reactions toward it revolved around its intent of ensuring that '(...) legitimate representatives of small parties and sectoral groups would have some voice in the policy-making process that is dominated by traditional politicians' (Calimoso quoted in Francisco, 1998: 1). The law's main aim is to bring into the fore and mainstream the otherwise marginalized peoples of Philippine society.

A party-list system can help create a healthy democracy, providing a citizens' voice in Congress and in local government. The Philippine party-list system aims to increase the representation, particularly of 'marginalized and underrepresented' sectors and enhance transparency and accountability, leading to more efficient government. Political parties are strengthened, encouraging program and platform-based politics instead of weak affiliations between opportunists. This challenges moneyed and patronage politics that have bred corruption and inefficiency, hindering the country's development (KASAMA, the Quarterly Newsletter of SPAN – Solidarity Philippines Australia Network).

Twelve politically excluded groups were identified as benefiting from this law: urban poor, laborers, peasants, fisherfolk, war veterans, cultural minorities, youth, overseas contract workers, professionals, elderly, handicapped, and women. The first party list elections were held in May 1998, synchronized with the national/local elections, the second in 2001 and the most recent in May 2004.

According to the Center of Legislative Development (CLD), women's participation in the party list elections was (a) an opportunity for women to transform traditional male-oriented ways of party organizing, electoral campaigning and overall strategizing, and (b) a way for social activists and feminists to act on a massive education and popularization of women's issues. Though the political space was indeed opened for most marginalized groups in Philippine society, women and feminists groups were pushed to engage in a critical discourse of coming to terms whether 'women' should be defined as a separate sector or a category that is integral to all mass sectors. The conceptual debate led women's groups to reflect on the implications of varying definitions. For the socio-civic oriented women's groups, women comprise a political sector that is under-represented in Congress and does not have a voice in politics; the distinctiveness of women as a sector is based on the specificity of their problems and status in society; while for the activist oriented women's organizations, '(...) women cut across sectors and classes' (Francisco, 1998: 13). But rather than suffer an opportunity loss, divergence of views converged with a recognition that defining women as a sector (as defined by the party list law) serves as a tactical mechanism to enter formal political structures.

In 1998, a total of six groups were accredited to run under the women sector and these were: Woman Power, Abanse Pinay! (Advance Filipinas!), Ang Bagong Pilipina (The New Filipina), Babayi (Women), National Council of Women in the Philippines, and Gloria's League of Women (GLOW).<sup>1</sup> Of the total of 123 accredited groups that ran in the party list elections, only Abanse Pinay! was the only women's party that was able to garner the required percentage vote to be allotted a seat in Congress. In retrospect, Agustin Martin Rodriguez and Djorina Velasco observe that rather than consolidate a women's vote in the first party list elections, '(...) many women voters dispersed their votes among other party-list sectoral and multi-sectoral groups that claimed to also bear women's issues' (1998: 21). This is not surprising particularly because of the tendency of voters to vote based on parameters other than gender. Though Abanse Pinay! was able to break into formal politics, the efforts of women's groups that ran for the party list election did not capture the political imagination of women voters. As a result, by the 2001 national elections, women's political parties were not able to gain ground. The women who actually came to sit in Congress in 2001 were from other multi-sectoral groups (such as Akbayan or the Citizen's Action Party and Bayan Muna or Country First) and not from a women's political party.

In the May 2004 elections, about sixty-six party list groups joined the electoral contest. Only two of these groups ran under the banner of women's concerns: Gabriela Women's Party and Abanse Pinay. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, fifteen party list groups were proclaimed by the Commission on Elections: among them were Bayan Muna, APEC, and Akbayan with three seats each; Buhay and Anakpawis with two seats each; and finally, CIBAC, Gabriela Women's Party, Partido Manggagawa, Butil, AVE, ALAGAD, Veterans' Party, Coop-NATCO, Anak Mindanao, and Anwaray with one seat each. Gabriela ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the overall rating with 464,586 or 3.6518 per cent of the total votes garnered. Abanse Pinay, on the other hand, ranked 33 with 115,855 or 0.9107 per cent of the votes.

At this point it is important to recognize that women's organizations were experimenting with ways to navigate through electoral politics. From their experience in the 1998 and 2001 elections, women's groups were now able to strategize their way to obtaining a seat in Congress – through multi-sectoral parties which are actually a kind of umbrella organization for various groups or a type of broad coalition of interest groups. Much like the experiences of women in the leftist/anti-dictatorship movement in the 1970s, they found themselves bargaining for a space within their own organization. The realization came that it is very difficult to run under the banner of a woman's political party; the better option is to join a broader alliance that also believes in the upliftment of

the status of women. Two cases in point are Etta Rosales, a three-term party-list representative from Akbayan; and Liza Maza, secretary general of Gabriela, who ran and won under Bayan Muna in 1998 and 2001 but returned in 2004 to consolidate Gabriela as a political party. Both Rosales and Maza have been active in filing for pro-women bills for the whole duration of their terms in Congress. Among other things, Rosales has been lauded for introducing House Bill 5708 or the 'Gender Balance in Political Participation and Representation Act'; interestingly, her party list organization, Akbayan, has been known to operationalize gender balance within the organization with thirty per cent of all leadership positions reserved for women. Liza Maza has been very prominent in flagging women's issues as a party list representative of Bayan Muna. She continues to do so now in the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress under Gabriela – to date, of the total 38 bills and resolutions filed on women's issues, Maza takes credit for filing 15.

To summarize, rather than consolidating the women's vote towards electing a female party list representative, votes were split among the several women's groups that were divided between women representing other women's socio-civic interests and women representing a more activist or militant stance. Likewise, it can be inferred the three party-list elections that women's groups were not spared from the practices that party politics sees as staple, hence party competition and conflict within the parties thwarted the efforts of the women that could have otherwise been an electoral force to be reckoned with.

It has been over sixty years since women were granted the right to vote, about 58 years since the first woman was elected to the Senate, and 18 years since the Philippines reclaimed democracy from an authoritarian regime. Within this period, most of the headway that came in legislating for pro-women laws came from the unwavering and tireless efforts of women's organizations. Ideas, frameworks and strategies for social reforms come from them. The formal structures of society are being utilized as just one strategy for effecting social changes. Working for a gender-balance in the country's political offices is no longer seen as an end-all or be-all of things. Women's organizations have realized that putting more women in office has not translated into more empowerment for the rest of Filipino womankind and thus they must simultaneously engage the state and other organized groups to negotiate within the democratic terrain.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICIZING THE INFORMAL  
ARENA OF POWER: USING WOMEN'S 'TRADITIONAL'  
ROLE EN ROUTE TO POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

In the Philippines, women's capitalization of their traditional role as wife or daughter en route to formal political power has been a phenomenon applicable only to the political elite within the dynamics of familial politics:

Unofficial power has been the 'field of power' that so far has proved to have given women maximum empowerment in the Filipino cultural context. In this realm women's activities in their role as wives, sisters, daughters, mothers and mistresses of male politicians provided the power base from which to exercise power and practice kinship politics (...) kinship politics dictates that women function as a support system for the male politician (Roces, 2000: 29).

As wives of politicians, women engage in activities that their husbands would rather avoid – ceremonial ribbon-cutting, fund-raising, charity work, or dispensation of funds to aid their constituencies in times of great necessity (i.e. hospitalisation, burial of kin, etc.) – but are nonetheless important, especially in projecting the image of a 'caring' leader through the actions of his wife. Patronage is thus fostered and measured when it is recognized by the people that their leader has taken 'good care' of them (Filipinos refer to this as 'utang na loob' or debt of gratitude) and in return they will pledge that they will vote for him again. Come election time, the wife's presence on the campaign trail gives the male candidate a semblance of integrity and even a shadow of morality for it is perceived that women are more 'moral' than men. The wife's presence states that she is standing by her man, no matter what difficulty may come. In the same vein, a daughter's presence also gives an image of how the male candidate is as a father – through the commitment of daughters, voters are wooed with an idea of the male candidate<sup>12</sup>.

The backstage activities of wives and daughters directly interact with the actors and structures of formal politics. In fact, most if not all their activities constitute political actions – the only thing that they do not do is enact actual legislation. It would be naïve to describe them as political neophytes. Further, with the Constitutional term limits<sup>13</sup> for public officials, the male figure has no other choice but to 'pass the torch' of his political career to a female member of the family. Under 'normal' circumstances, when the husband's term of office as mayor expires, he will run for another position (i.e. governor) and his wife will run for the position that he has vacated. More often than not, the formula works

because his family has already built a patronage relationship with the constituency through the work of his wife or daughter. For Mina Roces, these women are the most empowered political agents because they are able to juggle and transform themselves from informal to formal power (2000: 191).

Another way women enter formal politics is through the violent or untimely demise of the husband. When the male figure is assassinated, the female 'chosen one' gets all the sympathy – more often than not, as translated into electoral votes – and thus goes the story of the woman's metamorphosis from a politician's wife or daughter to a politician herself. In the Asian context, this is known as the 'over my dead body' syndrome or the practice where '(...) widows or daughters of dead charismatic male leaders acquire the legitimacy to take over the leadership in a culture of dynastic politics' (Kinkaid as quoted in Taylor, 2000: 100). Such has been the case of Corazon Aquino<sup>14</sup> who was catapulted to the presidency in 1986 with a combination of factors: (1) popular sympathy as the widow of Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, staunch political rival of the then President Ferdinand Marcos; (2) the absence of choices from the current ranks of the political elite; and (3) the perfect opportunity for the middle-class and elite to revolt against the dictatorship. Much like other politicians' wives who have become politicians themselves, Aquino came from the traditional landed elite, growing up in a political family and marrying into another political family. However, she was not a political thoroughbred, as she preferred to stay in the background while her husband snatched the political limelight. 'She epitomized a woman engendered by society to accept her traditional role as a woman – a very pious daughter (being a devout Catholic), a very supporting and docile wife, and a very nurturing mother' (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2001: 76). In contrast with other wives of politicians, she did not engage in any civic organizing nor participate in organized protest actions. 'She was the quintessential housewife, uninterested, uninvolved, and almost detached from the political scene' (Roces, 2000: 75)

The most political thing she ever did was to stand by her man in his days as a political detainee, as a political exile, and as a political opposition leader. She did step into his shoes when her husband was assassinated and when the public clamor for her to run for the presidency became strong. In fact, there were women who organized themselves to serve as one of the political machines of Aquino when she decided to run for the presidency.

With the participation of ordinary women, Cory's Crusaders became a people's movement. This made the group different from previous women's arms of political parties organized during elections which ... were elitist. Cutting across the different levels of the social ladder, members of the Cory Crusaders were

greatly motivated to join the campaign not only for Aquino but more so for the country (Fiel as quoted in Tancangco, 1992: 345)

More often than not, women in developing countries rise as the alternative to an authoritarian political leader. In the case of Aquino, she was the perfect antithesis to Marcos. Combined with her coming from the educated and wealthy class and her being the Filipino ideal of a woman as being devout, morally upright and non-political, Aquino was the chosen messiah for the people suffering under a 20 year dictatorship. Of course, the ideal did not serve her well for her actual performance as woman political leader. Her task was to put the country on the road to democracy by creating the democratic space for groups that had been persecuted and illegitimized by the Marcos government; it was a period when good governance and economic and human development were paramount concerns. By and large, Aquino's six years in office were precarious – ruffled by the masculinized military in several coup attempts. Sadly, when a woman political leader has been perceived as a failure, all accounts point to her gender; when a male leader is inefficient, varied accounts will be utilized such as corruption, politicking, etc. Nonetheless, Aquino is a perfect example of a woman comfortable in the private domain but who was thrown into the highly-charged public world. Hers was an informal/unofficial power that negotiated its transformation into formal/official power not because it was her political project but because of political circumstances.

#### EPILOGUE: A FEMINIST AFTERTHOUGHT

Of 163 countries, the Philippines ranks 112 in terms of female candidacy; the country also ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> in terms of female ministers compared to 126 other states; it also has an average of 17.2 per cent of female parliamentarians compared to the overall world average of 17.84.<sup>15</sup> Based on statistics, women in the Philippines are better off than many: women won the right of suffrage in 1937 and the right to run for elections has been operational since 1946; major legislations against violence against women, trafficking, sexual harassment, discrimination in the workplace, and institutional mechanisms are being implemented with the perception of women as partners in the country's development. This is the picture of women in a democratic Philippines. Democracy is working in the country despite the fact that it has been criticized for being elitist. The institutions are working, elections are held, and the government increasingly works on being transparent and accountable to its citizens. But there will always be people who are not able to taste a slice of the pie – these are the people whose hearts along

with their stomachs have hardened with a poverty that is ever worsening; with the social benefits that are not trickling down to the ones who need them most. The hardest hit are women, with all their burdens even further complicated by their class or religion. This phenomenon is noted as the feminization of poverty. As assessed by party list Representative Liza Maza:

We have a formal democratic institution, but really, it is not democratic...When you talk about real democracy, I believe it also starts with democratizing wealth, democratizing economic power, and democratizing political power (Aquino, Joann Natalia (2002) 'HerStory Series: Interview with Liza Maza, Philippine Congresswoman').

Philippine democracy is one that relies on the erection of formal structures of power and neglects the social inequities that they breed. In the context of women in politics, women have been involved in the democracy project in different arenas that have merged at certain historical moments. Some groundwork has been laid but actual and overwhelming social transformation has yet to be seen. A patriarchal mindset continues to frame a culture that perpetuates gendered realities detrimental to women; patriarchy has been entrenched in the political realm where men still possess the political authority. Women are an addendum, an afterthought, even perceived as an inconvenient requirement of the signed international women's conventions. Most headway in women empowerment has been great on paper. For Filipino women, '(...) the feminization of political power means more than increasing the representation of women in the formal structures of political power' (Reyes, 1991: 2).

In the Philippines, economic power begets political power. Those who have access to wealth have been the ones to use it to secure public office. According to Joel Rocamora, executive director of the Institute for Popular Democracy, '(...) if you are not rich – or do not have a rich patron – you cannot get elected in the Philippines'<sup>16</sup>. Those who choose to run for public office choose to do so because they can afford it. Those who want to run but have no funds to back them up, affiliate themselves with a political party that can provide the campaign machinery. According to Sheila Coronel, from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> Congresses:

The legislators elected to these bodies have hardly been representative of those they represent. In that sense, they have not been different from the past, when members of Congress were drawn from a narrow elite in terms of property, education (since 1898, they have been trained mainly in law) and social standing. (Coronel, Sheila (2004) 'How Representative is the House of Representative?'. Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism).



In both the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> Congresses, women legislators were mostly lawyers, medical doctors/practitioners and businesswomen/entrepreneurs prior to their new role as legislator. A clear majority of them likewise belonged to a major or dominant political party, which indicates that these women make use both of their financial resources (from their families) and of their affiliation with a political party. Women who do not run on a women's agenda nor campaign using a feminist/pro-women platform will not be expected to legislate for women as this is not a political thing to do. They will be representing and guarding the interests of the forces or agencies that placed them in power.

The majority of Filipino women who are trapped below the poverty line have not reaped the benefits of the promise of empowerment. Consider the following:

1. 'According to a study by the Center for Women's Resources (CWR), the unemployment rate of women increased from 9.9 per cent to 10.3 per cent in the first 11 months of 2001 (...) as of October 2001, 52 per cent of employed women were in the informal sector, as own account workers or unpaid family labour, such as housewives with sidelines or prostitutes. Only 48 per cent were in the formal sector as wage and salary workers.
2. The trend under globalisation is the promotion of a cheap, flexible and docile labour force. For women workers, this has meant the relentless implementation of contractualization schemes such as job and service subcontracting. The creation of the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) has intensified the exploitation of women workers who make up the majority (70 per cent – 85 per cent) of EPZ workers. Women are often hired over men in the EPZs for their 'natural' abilities for this type of work such as: manual dexterity, attention to detail and obedience.
3. Peasant women and children are also the hardest hit by militarisation in the countryside (...) Military operations against armed rebel groups like the New People's Army (NPA) and the Moro Islamic Front (MILF) as well as bandit groups like the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) have resulted in the evacuation of 173,004 families or 928,874 individuals in Mindanao alone (...) under these conditions, many peasant women are forced to migrate to the cities to seek work in factories or as househelp or to migrate abroad (i.e. feminisation of migration) or be forced into prostitution (i.e. sex trafficking of women), (Filipino Women under GMA, 'The Challenge Ahead', by Hetty C. Alquitas from IBON Data Bank, Philippines. Online resource).

This information is relevant to the period when Gloria-Macapagal Arroyo succeeded Joseph Estrada as President. As a woman political leader, she has been governing with the framework of *realpolitik* or politics of power and thus, has not shown any counter-pattern to her male predecessors.

To summarize, the experience of politically empowering women in the context of democracy in the Philippines has exhibited the following:



*1. The nominal participation of women in the electoral exercise*

As the electoral history has shown, there is a trend of more women voters than men. However, this pattern has not translated into more women being elected into public office. Thus, it can be inferred that there is no consolidated women's vote to speak of or feminization of support for women's groups negotiating their entry into mainstream and formal politics.

*2. Women in power is not equivalent to the empowerment of women in society*

Women are elected into public office not because they are women but because they are members of political families who would like to perpetuate power in the current and succeeding generations. They also come from the propertied classes – for the old elites or traditional politicians, power is based on land ownership, while for the new elite wealth comes from various entrepreneurial and business ventures – and as such they have access to the financing of their political ambitions through patronage politics. Patronage may come from an expansive familial kinship network or from cultivating relationships with those who are seen to be maintaining political power. In this light, women politicians, especially those who were bred in informal power, subscribe to the same cycle of self-perpetuation in power. Legislators will never legislate against themselves and will likewise never pass laws that will not benefit them. A gender balance in politics is no more than a good step forward. It may not necessarily benefit the Philippines because of its own inherent historicity and circumstances.

*3. Men are trapped in women's bodies*

Women in office have a male mindset because of their gendered socialization and because patriarchy is endemic in the system. It is hard enough that Philippine politics is highly bureaucratic and is submerged in endless political bickering. Add the complex inefficiency in passing laws and political grandstanding and you have the perfect formula to paralyze the passage of needed social, political and economic reforms. In this regard, it is difficult to pass pro-women laws because the policy-makers themselves are not imbued with the importance of gender in political decision-making. These women are no different from male political leaders as they follow the same political framework. What is needed is the commitment to devalorize patriarchy in social structures, political culture and practices.

*4. Women's organizations have not escaped the sorry state of Philippine politics*

Women's groups have experienced their own share of politicking in their critical and tactical engagement with the state and amongst themselves. Though women's groups generally accept the idea that women have been and still are disadvantaged, they pursue their goals in various ways. Not all of them subscribe to the idea of feminism. As a result, these groups fight for a women and gender agenda minus a feminist analysis.

The narrative of democracy often seems to be nothing but rhetoric, a political imagination conjured by the ones in power. Such a rhetoric can hypnotize people into being comfortable in the status quo and can, douse any incipient ferment for causing a social transformation. Women, both individually and collectively, must make democracy work for them – a democracy based on genuine precepts of peace, development and gender justice.

NOTES

- 1 Specifically, with the downfall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the perceived increase in the number of countries 'shifting' to a democratic political system, it has been said that the triumph of liberal democracy has come.
- 2 According Luzviminda Tancangco, *Associasion Feminista Filipina* was the first women volunteer organization. Among its goals were moral education in schools, campaigns against prostitution and gambling, and the drive to have women appointed in municipal and provincial boards of education, polling precincts and municipal level committees.
- 3 This pertained to the General Council of Women was created by the suffragettes who composed the National Federation of Women's Clubs.
- 4 According to Luzviminda G. Tancangco in her article entitled 'Voters, Candidates, and Organizers: Women and Politics in Contemporary Philippines' (2005), the NPPW aimed to consolidate the women's vote and in the process attempted to cross party lines.
- 5 The interview came out in *Laya (Freedom)*, a feminist quarterly, in 1992.
- 6 According to Mina Roces, although the political activist nuns '(...) did not challenge how power was gendered (...) they showed some signs of questioning and criticizing the cultural narrative that was oppressive to women, using the experience of living with the poor or supporting poor communities and society's victims – prostitutes, mail-order-brides, rape victims, pregnant teenagers, and juvenile delinquents'. For a more extensive discussion, see her *Women, Power and Kinship Politics: Female Power in Post-war Philippines*.

- 7 In 1947, the Philippines was fresh out of the World War II experience as well as out of the colonial administration of the United States; the 1970 election was against a background of economic instability and political repression under the government of President Ferdinand Marcos. With the cultural schema that expects women to be relegated in the private sphere as well as put the family as their prime concern, Filipinas were more or less discouraged to join any political exercise, especially during times of socio-economic and political instability.
- 8 The bills reflected here are those that were filed during the 1<sup>st</sup> regular session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress covering 1 July 1998 to 3 June 1999. For this period, a total of 9,333 bills were filed from the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- 9 The bills listed here are those filed for the whole duration of the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress or from 2001 to 2004. A total of 10,346 bills were filed in the bicameral legislature.
- 10 It must be recalled that in the Philippines the President serves a six-year term. Congress, on the other hand, spans a three-year time frame with a possibility of being re-elected twice for the members of the House of Representatives and once for the Senators.
- 11 This group was established to assist the Vice Presidential bid of then Senator Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.
- 12 In the 1950s, Angelita Roces organized the wives of local leaders in congressional districts of Manila under the Checkered Ladies for Roces while in 1953, the Women's Magsaysay-For-President Movement was organized by Pacita Madrigal Gonzales, daughter of shipping tycoon Vicente Madrigal. In 1965, the battle of the 'presidential candidates' wives' occurred between the Blue Ladies of Imelda Romualdez Marcos and the Lakambinis 1865 of Eva Macapagal. In 1969, daughter Minnie Osmena of presidential candidate Sergio Osmena, Jr. led the Osmena Pearls and the Osmena's Women League (OWL). Come 1992, Gretchen Cojuangco, wife of presidential aspirant Danding Cojuangco led the Gretchen's Ladies Auxilliary for Danding (GLAD) and Cristina Ponce Enrile did the same that election year with her Pink Ladies supporting the senatorial bid of Juan Ponce Enrile.
- 13 The 1987 Philippine Constitution has stipulated fixed term limits for elected public officials as a safeguard against perpetuation in power and dictatorship. For example, a member of the House of Representative can only be elected for a maximum of 3 consecutive terms, with 1 term in a period of 3 years.
- 14 Widow of assassinated Marcos oppositionist, Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino.
- 15 NationMaster – World Statistics, Country comparisons. Online resource.
- 16 Quoted in CORIS – Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Online Research and Information System. Online Resource.

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## ELITISM IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN SRI LANKA WITHIN A SOUTH ASIAN CONTEXT

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*Anula Attanayake*

The concept of nation-state is the concrete form of political identity in South Asian affairs. The concept of nation-state is composed of five components: culture, structure, groups, leadership, and policies. In Sri Lanka, as in other countries in the region, political participation occurs in the context of constitutionalism. Theoretically, three basic concepts contribute to shaping the values of constitutionalism. The first two – legality and legitimacy – seem to be at the core of the constitutional process. The relationship of constitutionalism to democracy is the third. Accordingly, the constitutional process is a system of governance founded upon the rule of law and popular sovereignty; and moreover, the principle of popular sovereignty implies an absence of gender, racial, religious, or socio-economic obstacles to political equality. However, the post-colonial politics of the states within South Asia have been closely related to the socio-economic evolution and cultural changes of the colonial period. A number of important points can be noted in this direction: the origin of the modern economy and its existence alongside traditional subsistence culture; the emergence of the new national elite and power sharing between colonial masters and the national elite; population growth and the evolution of increasingly diverse social groups; and the acceptance of the commitment to social welfare activities of the state.

From this background, the roots of socio-economic as well as political inequalities in modern South Asia can also be seen through these changes. Here,



one must deal with the period prior to 1947 in the case of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, the year that the Indian sub-continent achieved independence from British rule; the period prior to 1948 in the case of Sri Lanka; and the period prior to 1950 in the case of Nepal, the year that the rule of the Rana family was abolished. What characterises the 'modern period' in the general context is the complex and enduring processes of change that have been going on since the late eighteenth century under the concept of 'progress'. Some scholars including Adrian Leftwich (Leftwich 1996: 7) have defined this process as the rationalization of means to given ends.

During the post-colonial nation-building process, the national governments faced the formidable task of political consolidation, economic reconstruction, and re-establishing social order. In the process, legacies of pre-modern culture and history remained in something like a sub-structure in shaping the socio-economic as well as the political fabric. That which was being constructed as a modern surface was effectively restricted and regulated by the underlying structures. Hence, apart from the relations of pre-conditionality with present structures, the patterns of traditional values operate as deep influences on formal power relations. It is according to this background that modern political systems in South Asia place emphasis on three basic principles of modern politics: sovereignty, popular participation, and social justice. At the same time, because of the above context, political legitimacy in the region has acquired two sources. The first is the legitimacy derived from representative democracy, and second the legitimacy attached to the political forces of the state. This unstable historical development has witnessed a tension between the two principles of popular participation: equality of opportunity and equality of rewards.

The 'emancipation of women' has been an integral part of the modern nation-building process in the region. But the actual practice of politics has been historically centered on masculine identity despite the fact that women comprise half of the Southasian population. In addition to unequal patterns of the modernisation process, the ethics of religion and other cultural factors have also reduced the women's role in positions within the public and political spheres. For instance, although motherhood is respected as the 'power behind the throne' (according to a popular saying in Sri Lanka), the wisdom of a woman is compared to that of a kitchen spoon's handle. It is a classic evaluation (or devaluation) of her expertise in the domain demarcated for her, i.e. the kitchen. Specific South Asian concepts such as 'stop-gap' syndrome, widow politics, and emancipation of women have to be analysed in this reality.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND GENDER. A GENERAL APPROACH

### *Democratic Participation*

In a global framework, the best-tested approach in governance is believed to have global democracy as both a cause and an effect. Democracy is defined as when rulers have the consent of the ruled. The scope of this definition includes not only the nature of political institutions, but also civil competence, or in other words, the encouragement of a high level of political participation. In conventional terms, politics is interpreted as governance and party politics; but in the broader sense politics is about differential access to legitimate areas of power – both material and symbolic. Politics introduces a new dynamic dimension to social life, which is purposeful social activity. It is with this approach that Herman Heller defines modern political power as the effort to develop and utilize organized social power (Heller 1962:302). Hence, most issues which have an impact on life – from the price of rice to internal war – have a political dimension, and in some respect current politics encompasses the whole gamut of power relations in society. Political participation can be viewed at two inter-connected levels: decision-making and the struggle for power. It involves a series of activities linked to political processes that is practiced by members of a society with the intent to influence public life. These activities cover a wide area of work with a bearing on electoral and administrative processes. In such a context, the social construction of gender is obviously a system of power that assigns greater value to the activities associated with decision-making processes within a society.

Consolidating and sustaining democracy is the principal challenge faced by developing countries. There are three interrelated themes that have emerged as fundamental in determining their future: democracy, broad-based development, and violent conflict. South Asia is by no means an exception to this rule, especially after the 1970s, which was host to the third wave of the democratisation process that combined the concept of democracy with *human* development. There are several goals of this process, which includes not only the basic principles of liberal democracy, but also the principles of equity, stability, and autonomy. This new approach emerged from thinking about development issues in the developing world, leading to the construction of new ways to manage urgent dilemmas, blending concerns about economic growth and social justice in a framework that asserts the primacy of democracy, participation, and civil society. Since the 1990s, this new approach has led to a new development paradigm, namely *Sustainable Human Development (SHD)* in a global framework, and focuses on radical changes in economic and social relationships, including gender relations, political culture, institutional frameworks, and public attitudes. The suggested

building blocks of this process are the state (governing organizations), capital (economic organizations), civil society (countless citizen's movements) and mass media (Carlson and Ramphal 1995: 200). This new vision sees equity and justice as essential underpinnings of the governing process. Starting from the first *Human Development Report* (HDR) in 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is critical in assessing the process. For instance, the HDR 2002 asserts that politics matters for human development because people everywhere want to be free to determine their destinies, express their views, and participate in the decisions that shape their lives. The *Report* further notes that the links between democracy and human development are not automatic, thus when a small elite dominates economic and political decisions, the link between democracy and equity can be broken (*HDR-2002:1*).

Although South Asia has made significant progress in improving its human development indicators during the 1990s, as the Report on 'Human Development in South Asia 2002' revealed, the region is still home to the largest number of poor people in the world totaling 515 million, with nearly half of the total rural population in South Asia living below the poverty line. Furthermore, 365 million women are still illiterate in South Asia and the three large South Asian countries – India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh – together were estimated to account for nearly half (45 per cent) of the world's illiterate adults of which there were 387 million people.

**Table 10.1 Gender inequality in education (per cent)**

HDI Rank and country	Adult literacy rate		Youth literacy	
	Female rate (age 15 and above) 2002	Female rate as percentage of male rate 2002	Female rate (age 15–24) 2002	Female rate as percentage of male 2002
84. Maldives	92.7	100	99.2	100
96. Sri Lanka	89.6	95	96.9	100
127. India	46.4 <sup>a</sup>	69 <sup>a</sup>	—	—
134. Bhutan	—	—	—	—
138. Bangladesh	31.4	62	41.1	71
140. Nepal	26.4	43	46.0	59
142. Pakistan	28.5 <sup>b</sup>	53 <sup>b</sup>	42.0 <sup>b</sup>	64
South Asia	40.8	67	45.0	70

<sup>a</sup> Census data

<sup>a</sup> Census data. Data refers to a year between 1995 and 1999.

Source: Human Development Report 2004

Furthermore, women in South Asia on average earn only four per cent of what their male counterparts earn. The life expectancy in the region is also still

amongst the lowest in the world, second only to Sub-Saharan Africa (HDR 2002: 2–14). Generally, there are many sources for the region's vulnerabilities including chronic dissensions on national issues, political instability, economic underdevelopment, ethnic disturbances, natural disaster and environmental problems, and social frustration.

### *Gender and Politics*

Gender analysis has been a basic tool utilized for understanding gender differences underlying decision-making processes. The term 'gender' refers to the socially determined differences between men and women (Kardam 2001: 2). The definition argues that sexual difference acquires a socially and culturally constructed meaning and guides the formation of identity and manifests itself in power relations. However, in practical terms, gender analysis in South Asia has often been conceived within the discourse of feminism, i.e. the struggle for the achievement of women's equality, dignity, and freedom of choice within and outside the home, especially in the modern development debate. In classical gender analysis, women are principally identified in relation to reproductive roles and responsibilities (popularly known as 'domestic' affairs) while men are principally identified in relation to productive roles and responsibilities ('public' affairs). For these purposes, male and female members are socialized from early in life according to respective roles via education, media, and behaviour patterns that are designed by respective cultures and their formal and informal power relations. In such a dilemma, correcting 'participatory exclusions' (Shirin 2003: 2) has been the theme of gender equality goals in global discourse.

At this stage, it is worthwhile to clarify the relationship between feminism and empowerment as well as gender and politics. Women comprise half of the world's population and carry out two-third of the world's work, but they are poorly represented in positions of public and political power. Although 'the question of women' has been pegged as a political issue since the middle of the nineteenth century, the question of the political significance of gender only became an issue in the 1970s. It arose partly in response to the Women's Liberation Movement in the West beginning in the late 1960s. During the 1970s, prevailing views were challenged and a wide-ranging debate was generated which continued throughout the 1990s. In general, from the 1960s to the 1980s, women's political engagement in most countries was influenced by socio-economic challenges in the developing world, a remarkable transformation in political powers, and a growth in the international components of the women's movement. One product of these debates was the framework for policy interventions assisting women for their

empowerment. The political rights of women have been on the United Nation's (UN) agenda since its founding in 1946. With the creation of the Commission on the Status of Women in the same year, the UN immediately began working on behalf of women. The Commission initiated a drive to establish the legal basis for the promotion of women's equal rights and in 1967 the UN finally accepted the basic principle that men and women should have the same rights (Hawkesworth and Kogan 1992: Ch. 37).

With this progress, 1975 was declared International Women's Year and 1976 to 1985 as the Decade for Women with its theme entitled 'Equality, Development and Peace'. Accordingly, the promotion of women's rights was seen as an important component of the development programme. At the first international women's conference held in 1975 in Mexico, the Plan of Action stressed the need for women's representation in all spheres of public life. Consequently, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and it has been described as the international bill of rights for women. The equality that this convention seeks to secure for women is not equal rights but 'the right to be equal', which means it is a corrective mode of equality. At the end of the Women's Decade, the conference in Nairobi in 1985 called upon political leaders to nominate more women for elections. These steps contributed greatly to the raising of awareness of issues of gender equity, so that by the end of the 1980s many Western societies had experienced more than two decades of what is sometimes labeled as the second wave of feminism. At the Beijing Summit in 1995, power sharing was a critical area to which attention was drawn. It is in this setting that women's rights and gender equality goals were given priority by the declarations and action programmes of some of the world's leaders in the 1990s.

At these global gatherings, states made commitments to the advancement of women, gender equality norms and incorporating gender mainstreaming in legislation. Gender mainstreaming is defined as taking into account gender concerns in all policies, programmes, administrative and financial activities, assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation. One of the eight Millennium Development Goals set by the UN General Assembly in 2000 in order for development to be achieved by 2015 is promoting gender equality and empowering women. As highlighted in the HDR 2002, quoting the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Universal Declaration on Democracy in 1995, genuine democracy presupposes genuine partnership between men and women. In this respect, if we accept Gustavo Esteva's explanation (Sachse 1997: 26), this celebrates the appearance of 'new commons'

to transform the developing world. It is in this regional and global background that one may examine women and politics in Sri Lanka within a South Asian context.

## THE SHAPING OF ELITISM IN SRI LANKA AS THE DRIVING-FORCE OF POLITICAL POWER

### *Women's Participation in Sri Lanka*

Until the late 1970s, especially in conventional political terms, Sri Lanka had been viewed as a model of Third World Democracy and as a model of women's participation in the Asian region (Jupp 1978: introduction). The credibility of the democratic model was characterized by the acceptance of legal and constitutional norms of parliamentary democracy for a fairly long time. From a female perspective, aside from gaining universal franchise in 1931, Sri Lanka has had the proud record of producing the world's first woman Prime Minister – Sirima Bandaranaike – in 1960. She was also the first female Leader of the Opposition. Thirty-four years later Mrs Bandaranaike cheerfully commented, 'I am glad that history has been kind in making my husband, my-self and now my daughter leaders of this country,' when her daughter, Mrs Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, was elected as the first woman executive President of the island in 1994.

In some respects, Premier Sirima Bandaranaike's ascension in 1960 gave Sri Lanka a role parallel to that of the Nordic region of Europe in projecting the advancement of women's representation in politics. As ground realities indicate, Sri Lankan women have scored high on literacy figures (89 per cent) as well as on other demographic indicators such as birth rate, fertility rate, and infant mortality rate. At present, women make up 52 per cent of the total Sri Lankan population. While characterized as a low-income country, Sri Lanka is rated comparatively high in terms of its physical quality of life. The life expectancy for women is 75.3 years against 69.5 years estimated for men. Fortunately, there are hardly any gender disparities in education and female university enrollment is around 48 per cent. The paradox remains that Sri Lankan women have reached the highest political status in Asia while having one of the lowest levels of representation in the national legislature and in local government institutions in the region. The percentage of women in the parliament is less than five per cent and Sri Lanka rates 74<sup>th</sup> in the World Gender Empowerment Measure as seen in Table 10.2 on next page.

Within political parties female representation at decision-making levels is between two and ten per cent. At the district and local levels female representation is between three and four per cent. Political parties' track record in nominating women for elections is very poor. Sri Lankan political parties are highly centralized and the party leader wields enormous power with regard to the choice of candidates. This situation in Sri Lanka demonstrates two contradictory factors: (1) the active role of women as voters, campaigners, and fund raisers especially in times of election, and (2) the very low participation of women at decision-making levels in the established party structures and political processes.

**Table 10.2: Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)**

HDI rank and country	GEM rank	GEM Value	Seats in parliament held by women (% of total)	Female legislators & other senior officials (% of total)	Female professional and technical workers (% of total)	Ratio of estimated female to male earned income
84. Maldives	—	—	6.0	15	40	—
96. Sri Lanka	74	0.276	4.4	4	49	0.57
127. India	—	—	9.3	—	—	0.38
134. Bhutan	—	—	9.3	—	—	—
138. Bangladesh	76	0.218	2.0	8	25	0.56
140. Nepal	—	—	—	—	—	0.50
142. Pakistan	64	0.416	20.8	9	26	0.33

*Source:* Human Development Reports 2004 'Cultural Diversity in Today's Diverse World', HDR, United Nations Development Programme. Online resource

### *Political Mediation*

In Sri Lanka, there are no legal barriers to the participation of women in political bodies or government institutions. But the high profile of a few powerful women in political decision-making overshadows the reality that women in Sri Lanka are poorly represented in mainstream political structures. Except for voting, the grant of universal suffrage in 1931 political independence in 1948 did not result in any meaningful change in the status of a critical mass of women in the Sri Lankan political scene. As Professor Sirima Kiribamune has correctly pointed out, it was two women who entered the national legislature as early as 1931 and 1932 that set a trend for the future which is termed the 'stop-gap syndrome' – women who served as substitutes for a father or a husband in filling a vacancy – and this has become a feature of Sri Lankan political life ever since (Kiribamune 1997: Introduction). Thus, family background or support from male relatives has played a decisive role

in the successful entry of many Sri Lankan women into the legislature. This trend has also been seen in other South Asian countries, too.

Although the first female Prime Minister in the world from Sri Lanka had been a shining sapphire of the Sri Lankan crown, it simultaneously marked the advent of widow politics in Sri Lanka. Incidentally, the political leadership of other countries in the region – Sonia Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, and Vijayalakshmi Pandith of India, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, and Khaleda Zia and Sheik Hasina from Bangladesh – shows too that this feature is not restricted to Sri Lanka alone. In this regard, one of the key factors of electoral politics in Sri Lanka, perhaps in all South Asia, is the role of ‘modern kinship ties’ and ‘dynastic’ political affiliation. These ties are far more significant for women’s entry into politics than they are for men. For instance, widows and daughters of deceased political leaders have an increased edge over others in being nominated for election. In other words, family inheritance has decided their status and legitimized their political role. Taken together, this situation makes visible the contradictory pattern of the modernization process and the centrality of tradition in South Asian societies.

### *The Shaping of Elitism*

Historically, pre-colonial South Asian societies were based on kinship and caste ties. In Sri Lanka, the governing process consisted of kings who were assisted by the local chieftains. According to Michael Roberts’s analysis, just before the advent of British rule, there were several elite groups in the society and three of these groups have been identified; namely, the low-country Sinhalese elite, the Ceylon Tamil elite, and the Kandyan Sinhalese elite. These elite groups shared power with the respective rulers and like most other developing countries in Asia at the time it was a traditional society in which village communities had a dominant role to play in the family-based system. It is into this integral system that European influences were introduced after the sixteenth century. The consequences of British rule particularly were profound and pervasive (Roberts 1972: 263–264).

The competitive struggle for social mobility was also imported into the country as part of the colonial modernization process under the British. But only a very small fraction of the population was initially affected by the above process. Uneven in its diffusion, the economic and social transformation during the British period provided some groups with the opportunity of achieving and consolidating their status through two broad avenues: the various fields of capital investment and economic enterprises, and educational acquirements generally through the British education system. These two avenues were closely related.



In addition, the colonial administrative structure and the changing economy created a body of administrators and professionals. Those who emerged through those avenues became a new privileged group and their power and prestige were based on personal achievements rather than on traditional values. This new elite was heterogeneous in structure and the group encompassed something between 5 and 18 per cent of the Sri Lankan adult population or around five to six per cent of the whole population. By the early twentieth century, the term elite was referred to as a social formation, which commanded most of what others wanted and maintained an influential position that enabled it to provide leaders. It also implied the prevalence of a system of status evaluation which was based on economic power. One of the notable features of this change was the role of elitism in the advancement of the internal political process. Thus the achievement of independence was a project of the elite minority and the resulting legal and political values required for it were based on those of the minority elite culture. Both men and women who gained access to politics in the modern state formation as well as the nation-building process belonged to elite groups with their backgrounds endowed with financial security and other resources (Attanayake 2001: 41–44).

The lack of a competitive political party system should be noted as one of the significant features of pre-independence political evolution in Sri Lanka. This is important in a context where universal suffrage had been granted in 1931. In general, political parties shape the linkages between citizens and policy-makers and the party-system has been defined as the lifeline of modern politics. There are three distinct explanations of the recent origin of political parties: institutional theories, historical theories, and theories of modernization and political development. While each approach seeks to embed parties in theories of social and political change, they all acknowledge a common determining factor, which is the social mobilization or entry of the masses onto the political stage (Hawkesworth and Kogan 1992: 393–409). Putting it another way, once politics is no longer confined to a small circle of aristocratic elites, parties will emerge as the instruments linking the centre of political power with the masses. In this view, leadership recruitment, formation of governments and mobilization, and integration of the vote are considered as the key functions of the party system.

Sri Lanka had three elections (in 1931, 1936 and 1947) from the introduction of universal franchise to national independence. General elections fought on competitive party lines came only after independence, however. The organization of the United National Party (UNP) in 1947 consisted of nearly all elements of the colonial reform movement into one bloc. The eventual break-up

of the UNP and the formation of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1951 'as a democratic alternative' to the UNP did not change in any way the elite domination in the polity (Attanayake 2001: 52). As is evident in the post-colonial political evolution, the greater the degree of development of the elite social order, the greater the chances of success in framing and operating the political power base of *status quo*. It is argued that the post-colonial patron-client relationship between the privileged elite leadership and the non-privileged rural and urban majority has not resulted in the mass mobilization of men and women in decision-making processes except in the instances of voting.

Added to this is the role of culture in the broad processes of modernization that have been going on since the nineteenth century. In the evolution of modern nation-states, culture is generally not only a system of values and ideas that influence behaviour patterns, but also a social barometer that mirrors social consensus on fundamental issues facing a given society. In the West, the concept of popular participation is a result of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which had far reaching socio-political and cultural consequences for the modern world. Especially after industrialization and urbanization, popular participation became a strong reality resulting in a plurality of social activities shared by the majority in the society. Accordingly, modern popular participation overwhelmed the medieval aristocratic domination. Hence, in most observers' view, in the South Asian transformation, the dialogue of East-West cultures was successful in forming a group of 'interpreters' or mediators between European masters and the millions whom they governed; this was the new elite group. Finally, some of them emerged as constitutional agitators and nationalist leaders. Thus the nationalist movement in colonial Sri Lanka did not undertake the responsibility of mass political mobilization following independence. Political leadership came from a relatively small category of Westernised elites dominated by men. Consequently, equity and social justice were mainly sought through the means of welfare services.

### *The Classical Model of Woman*

In South Asia, Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic ideologies dictate the social hierarchy relations between men and women (Jayaweera 2002: 241). Generally, within the patriarchal family, (1) a quiet and obedient life as a virgi. before marriage, (2) work for social service activities such as *Kulangana Samithi* (societies of respected women) and *Mahila Samithi* (conventional female societies) under the guidance of male relatives, (3) being a model of *Sita* (ideal type o. wife depicted in the great Indian Epic *Ramayana*) or *Visakha* (one of the first female

devotees in Buddhist literature) after the marriage these could be seen as essential components of the model of an enlightened woman, especially since the cultural revivalist movements in the early twentieth century. It is this combination of traditional Asian values and Victorian ethics that has over time become accepted and developed as the ideal type of woman through such means as education, mass media, and even the ethics of conventional women's associations. Although this ideal type is commended as the best-tested model even for the contemporary 'global village' in 'domestic' affairs, manipulation of its originality against the ordinary mass of women in 'public' affairs is put as a barrier in the political terrain, particularly in a post-modern era. In practical terms, it is said that only women with good educational and protective family backgrounds can perform the dual role for the family and nation successfully. Additionally, the position enjoyed by women as the power behind the throne is also a feature of socio-cultural life; the manner in which the woman discharges that role is reflected in the well-being of her family. Hence, a woman's main role is deemed to be in the private sphere where activities are confined to meet the daily needs of the family and perpetuate human life. Equally important is the fact that nearly three-quarters of the population live in rural areas where they are relatively less affected by the modernization process compared to the urban sector. Many of the elements of the traditional belief system persisted in rural areas into the early sixties. In such a context, when a majority of women accept the ideal classical model as part of the natural order of things, they are less likely to challenge it. This is the general background against which we will trace the beginnings of an awakening process in political consciousness among women, particularly among women in the upper and middle layers of society.

### *Commitment and Composition*

When the Ceylon National Congress was formed in 1919 for constitutional agitation, its membership was opened to both men and women. A women's organization, *Mallika Kulangana Samithiya*, was affiliated with the Congress. Additionally, two women's organizations were formed that were called the Women's Franchise Union, formed in 1927, and the *Lanka Mahila Samithi* formed in 1930. In 1944 the Ceylon Women's Congress was established. There were also a number of publications such as *Lakminipahana*, *Lakangana*, *Lanka Matha*, *Kulangana Siri*, *Weera Matha*, and *Sri-Kantha* that came into print during this time. These activities, however, did not involve the large mass of ordinary people and only a few women from an elite background were the main participants. In this context, Adeline Molamure came into the national legislature in 1931 with

the death of her father. She was the first Sri Lankan woman to win an election to the national legislature. Similarly, Naysum Saravanamuttu replaced her husband in 1932 after he was unseated on an election petition. Mary Ratnum who formed the Ceylon Women's Union became the first woman Municipal Councillor in Colombo in 1937 (Kiribamune 1997: 19–67).

Political independence in 1948 and the nation-building process that followed did not bring any fundamental changes to the *status quo* in political participation, and among the 34 women who were nominated by parties between 1947–1990, 25 of them came from political families. In addition to the 'stop-gap' syndrome, husband-and-wife combinations were also an important feature in representation. When a second chamber, the Senate, was established in 1947 under the Soulbury constitution, it opened more opportunities for women to enter national politics without electoral competition. But the very few women Senators who were selected were from the urban elite.

Participation in political processes was made possible by the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931, which granted universal franchise. Since then, Sri Lankan women have been a part of conventional politics as voters and party workers. In that same year, the first woman was elected to the legislature, but it was not until 1956 that the first female cabinet minister was selected. However, the numbers of women in the legislatures were minimal, varying between two or three in Assemblies of 95 representatives in the years of 1947, 1952, and 1956; and even among the 151 elected seats in 1960. The percentage of women being elected ranged from 1.3 to 2.1. The percentage rose from 2.6 in 1965 to 4.8 in 1977. When that parliament, which was the last under the system of single-member electoral constituencies,<sup>1</sup> was dissolved in 1989, there were nine women parliamentarians. The Proportional Representation (PR) system<sup>2</sup> welcomed slightly more women representatives into Parliament. Thus, the 1989 Parliament of 225 representatives numbered 12 women, a number that remained static during the second general elections under the PR system in 1994. Six years later, however, we witnessed the October elections in 2000 that decreased this number almost by half with only eight women-members elected. In that election, the percentage dropped from 5.3 per cent to 4.3 per cent. During the parliamentary elections in December 2001 – the second election of the new millennium – there was some reason to believe that in a global context that there would be a reasonable increase in the situation of women; but instead the number of eight women from 2000 was minimally increased to ten. In retrospect, this was a tiny increase of just 2 per cent in comparison to the country's first Parliament 56 years ago in 1947 (Abeynaike n.d.). There are only eleven female representatives in the

present Parliament, formed after the general elections in April 2004. However, the number of female Ministers, including the President, has risen to four; all of them are from political families. There have never been more than 12 female Members of Parliament since 1947. Sri Lankan women hold less than five per cent of the seats at parliamentary as well as provincial levels, and less than four per cent at the local government level.

Looking at the situation in South Asia, as of 2004, the highest representation of women in parliament was in Pakistan, which stood at 21.5 per cent while in the Bhutanese Parliament the figure was 9.3 per cent. Table 10.3 demonstrates that women's political participation in decision-making is neither adequate nor equitable.

**Table 10.3: Womens Political Participation**

HDI rank and country	Year first women elected (E) or appointed (A) to parliament	Women in government at ministerial level (as % of total) 2001	Year women received right		Seats in parliament held by women (as % of total)		
			to vote	to stand for election	Lower house 1990	Lower house 2004	Upper house 2004
84. Maldives	1979 (E)	—	1932	1932	6	6	—
96. Sri Lanka	1947 (E)	—	1931	1931	5	4.4	—
127. India	1952 (E)	10.1	1950	1950	5	8.8	10.3
134. Bhutan	1975 (E)	—	1953	1953	2	9.3	—
138. Bangladesh	1973 (E)	9.5	1972	1972	10	2.0	—
140. Nepal	1952 (A)	14.8*	1951	1951	6	5.9	—
142. Pakistan	1973 (E)	—	1972	1972	10	21.5	18

\* Parliament was dissolved or suspended

Source: Human Development Reports 2004 'Cultural Diversity in Today's Diverse World', HDR, United Nations Development Programme. Online resource.

Within these nominal representations, the majority are from political families. Thus, the nomination of women candidates by the two major parties – UNP and the SLFP – continued to be within a particular culture of elitism where national or regional political dynasties predominated. Furthermore, the 'stop-gap' syndrome, widow politics, or husband-and-wife combinations can be rationalized within the above political culture as the burden of the political family in the context of their already institutionalized voluntary service, or dedication to the majority.

Table 10.4 shows the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) in South Asia. Although the constitutional framework has theoretically recognized the value of giving equal opportu-

nities to women, in practice the opportunity to lead and the opportunity to reap rewards are not facilitated equally.

Political biographies also accept this reality. According to one writer, '(...) the SLFP has been the one and only party in the world that has been steering its programme by a single family almost for half a century', and '(...) Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike was a wife and mother till the death of her husband ... but a tireless worker in the *Mahila Samithi* movement (...) it was on the death of her husband that the ancient chieftain drums called her to battle (...) The adventurous spirit of her ancestors who guarded the hill fastnesses in the days of yore, began pulsating in her veins urging her to fight; and (...) her slight Mona Lisa smile has the power of a secret mantram (...)'

(Daily News 2000).

**Table 10.4: GDI and GEM rates in South Asia**

HDI rank & country	GDI	GEM
84. Maldives	—	—
96. Sri Lanka	0.738	0.276
127. India	0.572	
134. Bhutan	—	—
138. Bangladesh	0.499	0.218
140. Nepal	0.484	—
142. Pakistan	0.471	0.416

*Source:* Human Development Reports 2004 'Cultural Diversity in Today's Diverse World', HDR, United Nations Development Programme. Online resource.

## AFFIRMATIVE AGENDA FOR CHANGE

### *Global Approach and Regional Barriers*

The *Human Development Report* in 2002 focuses on five areas of concern for gender equality: law, economics, education, health, and governance. However, nine years after the Beijing Conference, much remains to be done in improving women's capacities in providing them with opportunities for income earning, political participation, and ensuring legal justice. At the same time, studies done by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women have found that at least 30 per cent of female representation is necessary for any meaningful impact on decision-making processes.

Social and economic barriers to women's participation in South Asia include the unequal responsibility and difficulty of balancing private and public spheres of life, preconceived ideas and beliefs about women and their role, economic dependence, fear of devastating political and physical violence, character assassination, lack of self-confidence, and comparatively low levels of political

education. Political obstacles for women are arbitrary and hinder women's participation in definite ways. Such obstacles include a lack of motivation, the electorate's lack of confidence in women, unreasonable economic and social criteria for candidacy, and the lack of positive thinking in political culture. In addition, because of patriarchal attitudes, women face enormous hurdles within political parties. In such a context most women select a culture of silence. A majority of educated women think that keeping silence is better than doing politics or talking about politicians in Sri Lanka.

### *Quest for Affirmative Action*

The mobilization of women requires a radical transformation of political and socio-economic structures as well as cultural norms. Especially needed is a fundamental change in the *status quo* of power relations. In addition, the establishment of a reservation system may constitute a structural foundation for change.

As a short-term strategy, it is important to distinguish between equality of opportunity and equality of rewards; and the planning mechanisms must consider increasing the slow evolution of women into power. Usually, equality of opportunity implies equal rights to seek power. Equality of rewards, on the other hand, implies not only the potential of power but the actual realization and acquisition of power. Equality of opportunity has often led to unequal rewards, thus affirmative action has now been accepted for implementing more just relations. In pursuit of this purpose, certain interventions both by the state and civil society are considered as a necessity for the realization of an equitable society. Affirmative action can be defined as a programme designed to equalize admission opportunities for disadvantaged groups, taking into account the prevailing negative characteristics. Hence, the aim of affirmative action is to compensate for inequalities by providing an equalizing opportunity. In addition, underlying affirmative action is the concept of compensatory justice. Affirmative action policies are often accompanied by quota laws that establish minimum percentage shares for target groups and are considered part of a larger programme of action.

Since Sri Lanka has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, few legal measures have been taken in respect to the Convention, beginning with the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1982. The adoption of the Women's Charter can be cited as the most significant of these measures. The Charter is aimed at eradicating sex-based discrimination and achieving gender equality in all areas of life. The National Plan of Action was formulated in 1996. The Draft Bill of *The Women's*

*Rights* in March 2004, said to be in accordance with the Women's Charter, is still waiting for approval after the change of government in April 2004.

In contrast to Sri Lanka, India ratified CEDAW at a later date (1993). Some of the important measures the government of India has taken include the establishment of a separate Department of Women and Child Development, the National Perspective Plan for Women, the National Commission for Women, and the 33 per cent of reservations for women in local government institutions. Added to these was the abortive Bill that sought parliamentary approval for reserving one-third of the seats for women in the national legislature.

Generally, much of the current debate on the political empowerment of women has revolved around three interrelated issues: women's status, women's participation in decision-making structures, and the network of the women's movement. Creating women's networks in professions, business, government, trade unions, and women's organizations in order to share experiences and create solidarity as well as a knowledge base is an essential tool for change. At the same time, women's organizations can become a major route for the entry of women into public life and for advancing women's interests. But in practice, Sri Lanka can not boast of a women's movement in its own right. The great irony in Sri Lanka is that most of its women's organizations' works are confined to its own world and the common agenda has often been tilted towards social welfarism – a legacy of elitism. For instance, the *Lanka Mahila Samithi* movement, which was established in 1930 for the upliftment of the social-economic and moral standards through welfare activities, continues its work in rural areas as a non-government voluntary organization. In the recent past, it had extended its training programmes in the fields of weaving, sewing, home gardening, self-employment projects, and reproductive health and so on. The *Seva Vanitha Movement* began in 1983 and is an approved charity with its main objective being to harness the support of Sri Lankan women in national development projects through service, hence it is mainly engaged in promoting charitable projects (Jayaweera 2002).

As a professional organization, the Sri Lanka Federation of University Women has recently defined one of the goals of the Association as increasing women's role in policy and decision-making, and raising awareness on current issues. Unfortunately, in practice, even this organization has not focused attention on leadership training. In short, most of the women's organizations are for the poor and not by the poor. More radical groupings such as Women in Peace, Women in Need, and the Daughters of Ethnicity have also demarcated their boundaries along their own lines. In a shapeless civil society such as that of Sri Lanka, elitism appears to dominate the leadership both in the formal and informal sectors. However, as



time goes on, some organizations' acceptance of programmes that meet basic needs as a first step in promoting women's participation in politics is a step away from the welfarist approach. Of these organizations, Women in Development (WID), popular among women's groups, emphasizes its focus on income generation for women. In the formal sector, the *Janasaviya/Samurdhi* programmes involve ordinary women who are more social welfare oriented than politically active.

An important trend emerging throughout the past decade is the indirect participation of women in the political process through their collective membership of informal women's organizations. Before the general elections in December 2001, a caucus of 12 women's organizations released the Women's Manifesto-2001, which called upon the state to ensure a minimum reservation of 30 per cent for women in all legislative bodies. This call was an update of their Manifesto in 2000 and it reiterated that women should be given a quota in parliament. It recommended a minimum quota of 30 per cent of women at the local government level, a minimum of 30 per cent of women in parliament, and at least 20 per cent of seats in the national list to be reserved for women. The elections in 2004 witnessed a step forward in this direction. In their rationale, quotas were one way of addressing some of the socio-economic problems of women in addition to debunking certain ideological assumptions in social relations. Simultaneously, the most obvious explanation for women not coming into politics is due to the level of political violence and character assassination directed against women who dare to come forward. In addition, women's organizations pointed to the fact that in the October 2000 elections, of the 22 political parties and 91 independent groups, between them all they were able to field 117 women – the UNP and SLFP coalition fielded only 11 and 18 women candidates respectively – of a total of 5048 candidates. Although Marxist groups – including the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party (CP) – welcomed women's participation in their work much more than their conservative rivals, their political participation has been minimal since the Old Left movement has always been a minority movement. There have been smaller parties in the New Left that have stressed the need for women representation, such as the Left Democratic Alliance and the New Left Front, but their failure to make any impact on the national electorate is a sad episode in the Sri Lankan political scene. However, new radical groups like the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* [Peoples Liberation Front] (JVP) have shown a green light to women's participation at local and national levels. For instance, the JVP, from their two seats of the National list in 2001, nominated one female member, a Muslim, to the Parliament.

With the unchanged socio-economic realities, the system of quotas will not be without pitfalls. There is the possibility that the women nominated by mainstream parties may just be token nominations. This is the case with the youth quota in local government elections. There is also the possibility that the nominations may be wives, daughters, or sisters of current or previous candidates. There is no way of preventing puppets from being elected to parliament since it is harder to argue that the prevailing background necessarily attracts 'most suitable' candidates for political participation. Nevertheless, the question of how to welcome committed women capable of positively influencing our political culture is a crucial problem. Paradoxically, in August 2000 we saw an earlier guarantee of a 25 per cent quota for women at the local government level becoming quietly eliminated from the revised constitutional reform proposals. Coincidentally, the Committee which met to draft this constitution did not have a single woman member, apart from the President.

## CONCLUSION

In summing up, several important conclusions can be made in light of the preceding analysis. Underscored in the analysis is the need for a critical mass of women in the decision-making processes. Throughout the ages, the majority of South Asian women have been in bondage, looked upon as a mere reproducer and housekeeper. The political power of the high profile women has not contributed to the enhancement of women's status in the region. These powerful women belonged to renowned and influential political families and have accepted power so as to reinforce the power and colour of the family rather than that of women. Although policy statements may pay lip service to the principle of equal rights, they fall short in distribution. At the same time, disconnecting women's problems from their common socio-economic and political contexts only alienates women. On the other hand, the network of the Sri Lankan women's movement has not managed to break the interconnection between unequal kinship ties and dynastic politics. The impact of women's pressure groups on political decision-making is uneven and women's groups have not attempted to create history through unconventional paths.

Equally important on the other side is the proven track record of the female leaders, even within this elitist context in the region. For instance, although Mrs Indira Gandhi in India had emerged from a political family, she was able to exert pressure in Indian politics amidst various internal and external threats to her power. Like Mrs Thatcher in England, Mrs Gandhi made history as an 'iron lady' in the political world. In Sri Lanka, Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike's public and

foreign policy initiatives and her performance in response to two threatening incidents to topple her government – first an elite coup attempt in 1962 and then a youth insurgency in 1971 led by the JVP – have been accepted as far-sighted on the global scale. Furthermore, amidst contemporary political uncertainties in Sri Lanka, a columnist has recently said that ‘Chandrika Bandaranaike is the only *man* in her party – perhaps even in her Alliance (...) [and] (...) [i]f Chandrika Bandaranaike is the only *man* in her party, there are no *men* in Ranil Wickramasingha’s party at all’(emphases added) (Sunday Times 2004). Although this phrase has indirectly implied the columnist’s conventional thinking in drawing lines between ‘man’ and ‘woman’, such points clearly reveal the relative strength and wisdom of the female leaders. However, actual transformation towards development in Sri Lanka will only occur, among other things, through the critical mass of women in the governing process.

In examining women’s political representation in Sri Lanka, some observers have accepted the need for affirmative action in the form of a women’s quota. Sri Lanka’s present PR system is better suited for the introduction of quotas than the ‘first-past the post’ system. When the idea of the PR system was first broached in 1978, the increase of women in parliament might have been a distant priority. But the two main parties have not used even their National Lists<sup>3</sup> to increase the number of female representatives. This has happened because a great majority of developing countries including Sri Lanka have achieved some degree of democracy before achieving a culture of democracy. This reality makes democratic norms in these countries weak. For instance, liberal democratic ideals and institutions in Western societies are represented in terms of a weakening in state power and the consequent empowerment of civil society. In contrast, democracy in developing countries – including the South Asian region – has not lived up to peoples’ expectations. Thus at the top of the pyramid, we have female political leaders; at the bottom, among others, we have female suicide bombers. Ironically, both top and bottom are often mediated by their deceased male relatives. This is the harsh reality of the socio-economic evolution of post-colonial nation-building in South Asia.

Although cultural factors hamper women’s participation in politics, more important in this regard are the structural barriers. Modern political identity in South Asian states is the heir to two incompatible legacies; namely, the colonial master’s command and set of values, and to a successful nationalist movement whose main task was to contest and preserve the mass culture of the state. In their transition from traditional to modern societies, the elite’s vision was firmly focused on the Western model of progress. In the process, the ‘burden of the

colonial master' was immediately adopted as a burden of the elite. Hence, as in other policy orientations, the state-derived women's empowerment approach has depended on legal and constitutional texts. This 'text-based approach' tends to seek the cause of subordination in the realm of South Asian ideology rather than power structure. The absence of clear-cut cultural boundaries and a historical distinction between traditional and modern periods – paving the way from ethics of religion to ethics of science – helps in strengthening and preserving the *status quo* of power relations. Elitism in women's political participation in Sri Lanka is not the result of domination but the reason for it.

### NOTES

- 1 Introduced by the British, this system was popularly known as the 'first-past-the-post system' or the Westminster system of representation.
- 2 This was a new device by the 1978 Constitution. According to this system, each party has to draw up list of candidate for each electoral district, individuals being declared elected according to the proportion of vote polled by the party, read from the top of the list.
- 3 According to Article 99 (section 4) of the 1978 Constitution, one of the crucial features in allocating parliamentary seats is a bonus plan: the party receiving the most votes in any electoral constituency automatically receives a seat not distributed on the basis of proportional representation. So, each party prepares national level lists, nominating experts in various fields who prefer 'not to contest' in elections. For instance, Professor Leslie Gunawardena, Science and Technology Minister of the SLFP-led Government in 2000, entered the parliament as a 'National List' member.

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## WOMEN AND POLITICS IN BANGLADESH

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This study seeks to critically appraise the extent of women's participation in politics in Bangladesh. It also investigates the reasons for women's low rate of holding elected office. In short, the study attempts to address the following questions. Why are so few women elected to public office in Bangladesh? Why are women not welcomed in political and electoral processes? What are the main reasons and obstacles for any existing impediments to women's participation in politics? Can theories propounded in the Western liberal democratic states explain the low level of women's representation in politics and government in Bangladesh? What strategies have the government adopted for increasing women's representation in politics? What have major parties done to increase the proportion of women's participation in politics? Is female representation in political party management at all levels still very low? What advancement has been made toward women's participation in public life?

A study on the political empowerment of Bangladeshi women from a historical and analytical perspective is carried out mainly for three reasons. First, one of the most important resources of Bangladesh is its people, and women comprise about half of the population and a substantial part of workforce. Second, recent literature on the subject is limited. Third, the study is expected to contribute to adequate understanding of the present condition of Bangladeshi women's participation in politics and in national policymaking process.

### WOMEN AND POLITICS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

A truly democratic and representative government cannot be established without women's participation in the political processes. Political participation generally refers to those actions of people by which they want to influence or support

the government and politics. Political participation can be both conventional and unconventional. Scholars and researchers suggest that people participate in politics for a variety of reasons such as, (a) to show support for their country; (b) to achieve some advantages for themselves; and (c) to influence broad public policy (Janda, et al. 1992: 260). Almond (1974: 66) notes that '[i]n most countries, higher education is strongly related to political participation and skills'.

Conway (2000: 3) defines political participation as '(...) those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government authorities, or the policies of the government'. Conway elaborates that in a political culture that emphasizes '(...) freedom, equality, and democracy', citizens can involve themselves in politics by voting in elections, or participating as an active member of a political party, or running for public office. In this study, political participation refers to voting by Bangladeshi women in national elections, their position and role in the national party structure, and running for political office at both national and local levels.

In a democracy, women should enjoy equal rights of political participation and exercise their rights fully. Historically, men have dominated the world of government and politics everywhere. As Milbrath and Goel (1977: 116) note: 'The finding that men are more likely to participate in politics than women is one of the most thoroughly substantiated in social science.' Women are less represented in national legislatures, vote less, and do not scrutinize policies enacted that address their needs and circumstances. Parliament like other state structures has been a male domain. Parliament has been created by men and for men with little regard to women. Fashioned in Western countries, Parliament emerged as an indispensable political institution and integral organ of democratic government. Yet, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women comprised only about 14.9 per cent of the members of both the houses of Asian parliaments in February 2005. Women's participation in politics in Asian countries and in other regions of the world is still very limited. A leading journalist of Bangladesh, Enayetullah Khan (1999) notes, 'The limitations in this regard are more or less universal in all societies developed or otherwise, bourgeois, democratic or socialist, and the emerging newly independent post-colonial societies in the Asian and African continents.' In some developed democratic countries such as the U.K., Switzerland, United States and France women's representation in the national parliament still remains much below that of some developing countries like Uganda, Tanzania, Vietnam, and Cuba. In fact, the goal of achieving adequate women's representation in national parliaments around the world remains a long-standing one. In October 2000, the UN adopted a resolution to increase women's



representation at all levels of decision-making institutions. But the percentage of women legislators worldwide has not increased much since then.

One witnesses the continuing low percentage of women politicians internationally. At the dawn of the new millennium, there are only 12 incumbent women heads of state and government worldwide and that is even including the Queens! As of 2002, only 11 countries (the Nordic countries and South Africa, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Mozambique) could achieve the benchmark determined by the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action demanding 30 per cent of women representation in the national parliaments by adopting quotas. Currently, the Nordic countries have the highest women representation in the parliament (39.17 per cent). By contrast, women hold only 15 per cent of the seats in the United States Congress in 2004. Political parties in most countries, which are responsible for the pre-selection process of candidates before the national elections, have not yet implemented strategic plans to encourage women to participate more effectively in government and politics.

The need to grant women's suffrage and the rationale for women's participation in politics came to be recognized gradually around the world when feminist organizations and groups launched their campaign for achieving equal rights including voting rights and participation in the electoral process. Progress in achieving women's right to vote has been quite slow. In the United States, freed male slaves gained the right to vote immediately following the Civil War, but women had to wait decades more. It was not until the 1920s that it was recognized by some developed states that in order to establish government by the people and to advance national development, both men and women must participate in politics. Despite this recognition, women's participation is negligible in most countries of the world. The issue of women's participation in the political process remains on the international agenda.

However, ensuring women's equal political and economic rights has seemed to cause controversy, uninterest, and denial everywhere (Giele and Asmock 1977). The situation in Bangladesh is not at all different. Governed by a parliamentary system, Bangladesh is a pre-dominantly Muslim state with an estimated population of 140 million. According to an ADB study (2001: x), '(...) traditionally women in Bangladesh derive her status from family. Her role includes the maintenance of her family as a social institution and as an economic entity.'

The presence of women in both national and local level politics has remained very low, although some concerned women demanded more representation in government and politics. Independent women's groups, activists, and NGOs in

Bangladesh such as 'Jatiya Mahila Sanshad', 'Women for Women', 'Naripokho', 'Bangladesh National Women's Lawyer Association' (BNWLA), 'Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha', 'Democracy Watch', and 'Khan Foundation' are strong advocates of women's rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment. They also demand affirmative action and positive policies to redress the current problem caused by continual discrimination and denial of women's participation in politics. Nonetheless, the struggle for women's political equality in Bangladesh still has a long way to go, despite the efforts of women's organizations and groups.

Most world constitutions now guarantee political equality to women at least in theory, if not in practice. Pressured by the global women rights groups and influenced by various United Nations Charters and Declarations during the past five decades or so, democratic governments have reckoned that adequate and effective women's participation in political processes and in public life is a tangible step towards realizing women's status and equality. Thus, Karam (1999: 3) states, 'Women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of advancement of women.'

The Western liberal arguments in support of increased representation of women in politics are the following: (a) Women comprise about half of the population and should be represented adequately to establish a government by the people; (b) Women are more likely to want an open and transparent government; (c) Women will bring a different perspective to politics; (d) Women can broaden the political agenda; (e) Women are more aware of the needs and issues which affect them; and (f) Extensive participation of women in public life is likely to lower the level of corruption. A 1999 World Bank Research Report stated, 'Where the influence of Women in public life is greater, the level of corruption is lower' (Dollar 1999). Indeed, several scholars, such as Reiss and Mitra, Glover and others also observed that women may have higher standards of ethical behavior and may be more concerned with the common good.

#### THEORIES ON WOMEN'S LOW LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Why do women show lower levels of political participation than men? Women have been depicted as politically ineffective, unmotivated, naive, invisible and dependent upon the wisdom of men (Baxter and Lansing 1980: 6). Additionally Almond and Powell, Jr. (1978: 124) point out that universally 'Political leaders are drawn disproportionately from upper-status occupations and privileged family backgrounds.' In fact, many reasons explain the low political position of women globally. One major reason is women's weak access to political institutions, due

to formal or informal practices that deny women equal opportunity. Further, women face impediments in reconciling their family and public life. In addition, women often experience education that is inadequate in preparing women to take up politics as a career. In most contexts, there is a culture that imposes on women a role different from the one that is reserved for men. Last but not the least, women often face a lack of party support including financial support, which fails to facilitate women's participation in the decision-making process.

A UN study observed that the level of development of a country as demonstrated by its demographic and social indicators limits the participation of women in politics. In those countries where female illiteracy is high along with low living standards and high fertility rates, the prospect of women's political participation is low.<sup>1</sup> This is however only partly true. Despite a higher literacy rate and living standard and general development, women representatives in the Japan's Diet (parliament) are few compared to India, Uganda and Tanzania. The study seems to have overlooked religious factors and social biases that limit women's participation in politics in Muslim societies around the world. Scholars such as McGlen and O'Connor, Steuernagel and Ahern, and Fowler have advanced different theoretical approaches – legal/institutional, sociological, psychological, and rational choice – to explain the patterns of participation and non-participation in various types of political activities. Sociological theory stresses cultural reasons for the low proportion of public offices occupied by women. Conway (2001: 3) argues that combined with social norms, limited educational and occupational opportunities have denied most women the skills and resources essential to contest successfully for public office.

#### ARGUMENTS FOR WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

Most constitutions now guarantee political equality of men and women at least in theory, if not in practice. The 1972 constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has recognized and guaranteed equal rights to women to participate in all aspects of public life. Thus, Article 28(1) stipulates '(...) the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth'. Again Article 28(2) states, 'Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life.'<sup>2</sup> Besides these, Articles 9–10 and 37–39 also clearly proclaim that steps should be taken to ensure women's participation in all spheres of state and public life. In addition, in order to safeguard women's rights, the Bangladesh government has also enacted various legislations such as the Women and Children Repression Act 1995 (amended in 2000) and the Dowry Prohibition Act 1980 (amended in 1982). Despite all these guarantees to protect

women's rights and eliminate discrimination against women, Bangladeshi women are disadvantaged and denied equal rights with men. Consequently, women cannot participate equally in the development process.

Moreover, popular history has not sufficiently documented the political contribution that women have made to Bangladesh society. One may recall here that Bangladeshi women did participate in the anti-British political movement in the 1930s and 1940s. In the aftermath of independence in 1947, women also participated in the autonomy and democratic movements when Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan. Although women played a significant role in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh in 1971, their historical contributions remain largely invisible. Women for the first time exercised their voting rights in Bangladesh when it was a part of Pakistan. Women voted in the 1954 East Pakistan Provincial Assembly Elections where only one woman was elected despite a provision for ten reserved seats for women at that time. Women also exercised their voting rights in the 1970 general elections of Pakistan. It may be stated here that the government of Bangladesh established the Ministry of Women Affairs to mainstream women into the development process and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. In fact Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world that has set up a separate ministry for women. Nonetheless, during the past decades Bangladesh has had one of the lowest levels of women's participation in politics. In the first general election in 1973, only two women were nominated by the major parties and both women were defeated in the elections. Consequently, women's active participation in politics and government was unusual and minimal until the early 1980s. Women's participation in politics was widely discouraged and denied by the major political parties. In particular, the religion-based political parties such as the Jamat-e-Islami did not believe in gender equality and viewed women's direct participation as 'anti-Islamic'. This prompted analysts to argue that the economic and social empowerment of women cannot be advanced unless Bangladeshi women are brought into and made a part of the political institutions (Begum 1977: 1).

Undoubtedly, the most vital resource of Bangladesh is its people. Women make up nearly half of the population and work force of Bangladesh. It is essential that they participate in sufficient numbers in politics and government to ensure a truly democratic and representative government. But women's participation in politics continues to be discouraged, denied and resisted. As pointed out by Choudhury, 'In Bangladesh, women have remained outside the play of power politics. Their visibility in the popular struggle for democracy, in election campaigns and in community work has not translated into greater

influence in the public domain. Only a small number have been able to enter positions of public decision making.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, particularly in recent years, it is alleged that there is a set price for securing a party's nomination. With meager financial resources, women are highly disadvantaged to gain the preference of the political parties. An international survey conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union demonstrates that Bangladesh ranked 122 globally out of 184 countries with only 2.0 per cent of women members in the national parliament in 2005 (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2002: 4). Table 11.1 below provides the comparative position of women in national parliaments of selected countries.

**Table 11.1: Women in national parliaments in selected countries**

Rank	Country	Elections	% of women
1	Rwanda	2003	48.8
2	Sweden	2002	45.3
3	Norway	2001	38.2
2.	Australia	2004	24.7
49	United Kingdom	2001	18.1
59	USA	2004	15.0
93	India	2004	8.3
98	Japan	2003	7.1
122	Bangladesh	2001	2.0

*Source:* IPU – Inter-Parliamentary Union, The international organization of Parliaments of sovereign States (as of 2005). Online resource.

In most developing countries, women political leaders more often than not rise to power 'in times of social or political distress'. Both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina ascended to power in times of social and political turmoil in Bangladesh. We also observe a similar scenario in other Asian countries such as Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, Srimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia, Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi of India, and Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan.

In 1981 the Awami League (AL) chose Sheikh Hasina Wazed as their first female head of the party and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chose Begum Khaleda Zia as their first female party chairman in 1984. These two highly popular women leaders at the top of public office entered into politics mainly because of family connections. Both are from political families who got substantial sympathy and support of the masses and the media. While Khaleda Zia was the wife of former president General Zia (assassinated in 1981), who proclaimed the independence of the country, Sheikh Hasina is the daughter of the father of the nation, Sheikh Mujib (assassinated in 1975). In Bangladesh society

women's entry into politics is considerably dependent upon their family's past or present direct involvement in the power structure and its social activities.

Nonetheless, Bangladesh occupies the unique position of having had successive women prime ministers – Begum Khaleda Zia (1991–1995), Sheikh Hasina (1996–2000), and Begum Khaleda Zia (2001–2006) – an exceptional feature in world politics. Both Khaleda and Hasina are popular and powerful leaders who caught the attention and support of many followers, and directed effectively their respective parties. Notably they also on one occasion fought cooperatively against the authoritarian regime of President Ershad in 1990.<sup>4</sup> Hence, women in Bangladesh should enjoy a distinct advantage in advancing their rights of political participation. Until quite recently (2006), Bangladesh was the only country in the world where both the head of the government and the leader of the opposition were women. However, that does not portray the real picture of women's political participation.

Despite having women leaders at the top, women remain highly excluded from government and politics and subjected to oppression and discrimination. Moreover, existing laws seem unable to protect women effectively from violence and economic deprivation. There is also very limited women's participation in party hierarchical structure. The BNP and the AL have yet to involve women in their inner circle of advisers. Indeed, little advancement of women in the realm of politics has taken place as women face severe economic and social constraints as well as cultural impediments. Besides social biases and situational barriers, women also lack education and the support of parties and volunteers. As a result, the status of women has remained very low, dismal, and depressing. A leading woman activist of Bangladesh asserts that male politicians take it for granted that politics is a matter of black money and armed hooliganism coupled with pressuring voters to vote by visiting house to house (Daily Janakantha, 13 May 2000). Women have not been part of this rough and violent political process.

None of the major political parties of Bangladesh such as the (BNP) and the (AL) have in reality emphasized women's issues or promoted women's participation in public life. In fact, the above two major parties have not been enthusiastic about increasing the share of women's participation in politics. For example, in the seventh general election held in June 1996, the major political parties extended nomination to only 24 women candidates. It is noteworthy that the extreme right party, the Jamat-e-Islami, has not nominated a single woman in any elections, as it has been always strongly opposed to gender equality and particularly women's participation in politics.<sup>5</sup> Some Mullahs (local religious fundamentalists) openly condemn those women pursuing public life. Although

statistically very insignificant, one may point out that in one union in the country namely, 'Kalikapur' located in the Madaripur district, women are still prevented from going to the pooling centers because of local 'fatwas' declaring that it is inappropriate for women to vote (Shehabuddin 1999).

It is important to note that Bangladesh has never had a women president or women in other leading positions such as minister of foreign affairs or finance. So far not a single female member of the parliament has been appointed as a Speaker or Deputy Speaker. Additionally, no woman has been appointed as a committee chairperson in the thirty-five Standing Committees of the national parliament 2001–2006. Thus, women leaders in Bangladesh have had very limited access to the highest decision-making bodies.

In 1996 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inducted three women leaders in her 42-member cabinet including herself. Other women cabinet ministers included Motia Chowdhuri (Minister for Agriculture) and Sajeda Chowdhury (Minister for Environment and Forest). Women cabinet members did not increase afterwards. Sheikh Hasina lost in the 2001 parliamentary elections and Khaleda Zia was elected as the prime minister for the second time. The former BNP-led coalition government of Khaleda Zia (2001–2006) has also included three women cabinet ministers (excluding herself) in the unprecedented 62-member large cabinet. These women were Khurshid Jahan Huq (Minister for Women and Children Affairs), Begum Selima Rahman (Minister for Cultural Affairs), and Jahanara Begum (Adviser for Primary and Mass Education). It is apparent that women ministers are assigned somewhat 'soft' ministries. The same politically and financially influential men belonging to large political parties have always dominated government and politics and occupied more significant ministries.

## WOMEN AND THE 2001 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

In the 2001 Bangladesh parliamentary elections, 37 women candidates contested the 300-seat parliament from different constituencies. The major political parties i.e. the Awami League, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jatiyo Party nominated a total of 30 women candidates only. Other political parties did not offer nomination to aspiring women although they regularly claim that they are committed to women's empowerment and participation in politics. The AL nominated ten female candidates for fourteen seats. The AL Chief Sheikh Hasina contested five seats and she was elected from four constituencies. Another nominee of AL, Hamida Banu Shova, was also elected, but eight other AL female candidates including former ministers of AL Motia Chowdhury, Sajeda Chowdhury and Jinnatunnessa Talukder were defeated in the election. BNP



Chairperson Khaleda Zia also contested five seats and she was consequently elected from all. The main reasons for Khaleda and Hasina's victory from multiple constituencies were their mass popularity and the lack of credible opposition in most of these constituencies. In the 2001 elections, two other BNP nominated female candidates, Khurshid Jahan Haque and Israt Sultana (Elen Bhuttu), were also elected. Thus, BNP female candidates won seven seats out of eight contested. The Islami Jatiyo Oikya Front elected Rowshan Ershad, wife of former President Ershad, as a candidate. A record number of nine female candidates ran for election as independents, but not surprisingly they were all defeated due to lack of party sponsorship, campaign money and group support.

In the 2001 elections, women voter turnout was 76 per cent, which is very high and significant compared to many developed countries. This overwhelming turnout of women voters in a dominantly Muslim society can be largely attributed to women's increasing political consciousness and special arrangements by the government, such as the provision of separate booths for women voters exclusively conducted by female presiding and pooling officers. In the rural areas, female voters came to exercise their right to vote in substantial numbers defying inclement weather, the inconvenient transportation system, and disregarding household work and long hours of waiting. Observers point out that a record number of women voters came to the polling stations as the election was held under the 'Caretaker government'<sup>6</sup> who ensured security by deploying armed forces, police, and others responsible for law and order. Women could cast their vote without any intimidation, fear, and political violence and they turned out to do so. This indicates that although women are increasingly eager to participate in national elections, their representation remains low during most elections.

Running for the Bangladesh Parliament is actually a tough and strenuous exercise because of the rising high levels of campaign costs and pre and post election violence. These reasons deter women from entering direct politics and contesting in elections. Moreover, women candidates in parliamentary elections generally do not have a full-fledged campaign strategy, sufficient volunteers, and a broad network. They are not at all enthusiastic to give shelter to the hooligans in order to capture pooling centers. As pointed out by an observer, in order to capture the pooling booths, and purchase voters, motorcycles and gangsters, the major parties prefer to nominate those who have an enormous amount of black money as well as their own motorcycles and musclemen.<sup>7</sup> The major political parties seem to ignore principles and compromise when considering quality leadership in the nomination process. All this explains why Bangladeshi women are disadvantaged when competing for political office against men. While money



plays a dominant role in politics and elections everywhere, the extent of the black money, muscle power and violence that characterize national elections in Bangladesh poses a barrier to women's participation and casts doubt on whether it is a fully functioning democracy. Table 11.2 below shows the position of elected women members to the Bangladesh *Jatiyo Sangsad* (National Parliament) during 1973–2001.

Table 11.2 shows that in 1996, the Bangladesh Parliament had the highest representation of women (13.03 %) including the reserved seats. However, in both the 1988 and 2001 Parliaments, the provision for 30 reserved seats for women was not maintained, which resulted in fewer women represented in the Parliament. In respect of the reservation of seats for women, the debate continues. The Election Commission of Bangladesh earlier observed that '(...) whether the present system of reservation of 30 seats for women in the parliament should be continued in its present form or in some other suitable system should be reviewed.'<sup>8</sup>

**Table 11.2: Elected women's members in the Bangladesh parliament (1973–2001)**

Year of election	% of women candidates	Won in direct seats and by-elections	Total elected women	Reserved seats	% of women in the parliament
1973	0.3	0	0	15	4.8 (out of 315 seats)
1979	0.9	0+2	2	30	9.69 (out of 330 seats)
1986	1.3	5+2	7	30	11.21 (out of 330 seats)
1988	0.7	4	4	0	1.33 (out of 300 seats)
1991	1.5	8 +1	9	30	11.81 (out of 330 seats)
1996	1.36	13+2	15	30	13.0. (out of 330 seats)
2001	1.79	6	6	0	2.00 (out of 300 seats)

Source: Election Commission of Bangladesh.

Women's organizations/groups, and women celebrities and activists such as Nazma Choudhury, Rounaq Jahan, Rokeya Afzal, Mahmuda Islam, Ayesha Khanam, Tasmima Hossain, Maleka Begum, Farida Akhter, and Sultana Kamal are opposed to the previous pattern of reserved seats in the national parliament. Women activists also demand an increase in the women's quota reservation as well as direct election to those seats. Their argument seems to be reasonably based

because the provision of reserved seats as well as direct elections for women representatives at both local level and municipal elections already exists. In fact, during the past decades, different women organizations have been demanding direct election for the reserved seats to enable them to represent the people and not the party in power. They held many conferences, seminars and discussion meetings, and organized human chains to realize their demands. In addition, women organizations also handed over submissions and memorandums to the government, the main opposition party, and the national parliament. Women activists believe that a mere increase in the reserved seats will not bring any qualitative change in women's participation in politics. They argue that with no accountability to any constituency, the provision of reserved seats restricts women's effective participation in the decision-making process as they only serve as the supporters of the majority party in the parliament. Despite the fact that leaders of the two major political parties are women, politics in Bangladesh continues to be a male domain. The nomination of fewer women candidates by the major political parties and absence of a quota reservation was responsible for the very low percentage of elected women to parliament in 2001.

#### WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL-LEVEL POLITICS

Article 9 of the Bangladesh constitution proclaims that, 'The state shall encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers, and women.'<sup>9</sup> The lowest level of local government in Bangladesh is known as the Union Parishad. At the local level, women's representation is still insignificant, but is gradually growing. In the 1973 local government elections, for the first time, only one woman was elected as chairperson. In the 1977 and 1984 local government elections, four women won as chairpersons. As many as 39,192 women candidates contested the January 2003 reserved seats for women in the Union Parishad which clearly show their increasing eagerness to participate in politics.

In the 2001 Union Parishad (UP) elections, as many as 102 women candidates contested the 4,443 UP chairmanship positions countrywide, but only 20 women were elected. However, in the 2003 Union Parishad elections, the number of women candidates who contested the position of UP chairmanship increased to 232. This does not mean that the major parties and the media are encouraging women leaders who keenly enter into politics at the local level. At present, there is not a single woman city mayor in the five city corporations of Bangladesh. No women received a nomination from the political parties to contest the mayoral

position in the six-city corporation's elections. However, for the first time in 1994 as many as 19 women ward commissioners were elected to the reserved seats of the Dhaka City Corporations. Table 11.3 provides the data of the elected female chairpersons to the Union Parishad of Bangladesh during 1973–2003.

**Table 11.3: Elected women chairpersons to the Union Parishad of Bangladesh (1973–2003)**

Year	Total Union Parishad	Female candidates	Elected female candidates
1973	4,352	Not available	1
1977	4,352	Not available	4
1984	4,440	Not available	4
1988	4,440	79	1
1992	4,443	115	15
2001	4, 443	102	20
2003	4,443	232	22

*Source:* Election Commission of Bangladesh, *Women in Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Report*, 1995, p. 9.

In 1997, the Bangladesh government took a positive step to ensure women's participation in elected bodies at the local level. The government enacted a law introducing the direct election of women for three reserved ward member seats to each Union Parishad – the lower rural administrative tier of the local government.<sup>10</sup> This step was taken in conformity with Article 9 of the Bangladesh constitution. However, the exact role and authority of women representatives particularly in the UP has not been clearly defined to guarantee their effective participation where the Chairman and his male cohorts always dominate.

Apart from the exclusive reserved seats, women can also contest any of the general seats. Welcomed by concerned women's organizations and groups, the quota system provided women the right to be elected in local level politics. For example, 43,969 female candidates contested in the 1997 Union Parishad direct elections for 12,723 ward member seats reserved for females. Women members consider their participation in local level politics as less disruptive to family life. They are found to be regularly attending the meetings of the Union Parishad. In an overwhelmingly male dominated political environment, the quota system has enhanced the opportunity for women's participation in politics at the local level. Hossain, head of the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), found that reserved seats for women have boosted women's confidence in their capability. But he points out that lack of opportunity to play an effective role from those seats has filled them with frustration.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, women elected under

the quota system in UP all the time experience structural impediments as they work with unequal power and resources compared to their male equals elected to the general seats. While generally directly elected members are in charge of only one ward, each women member has to manage three wards having no real authority.

Although women members attend the Union Parishad meetings regularly, very few can influence the discussions and ultimate resolutions. In the male dominated Union Parishad, female ward members hold subordinate position and cannot express their views as forcefully as their male counterparts. The male colleagues have a propensity to ignore their development proposals on diverse socio-economic issues. In addition, Salma Ali alleges that many women elected through quotas were subjected to sexual harassment by their male counterparts and were looked down upon as 'second category' members.<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy however, that the percentage of women willing to contest at the local level has been increasing in recent years, which indicates that women are eager to participate in both national and local politics.

#### THE ROLE OF PARTIES AND WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT IN POLITICS

Political parties everywhere control and choose who will represent the party in elections. Thus, they play an important role in shaping women's representation in politics. Strong party affiliation is one of the basic requirements to become selected as a candidate and eventually to gain a position in national or local politics. Before a woman can be assured of party support, she must be an active member and foster a relatively long relationship with a particular party. Studies on women and politics have often suggested that female quotas and affirmative action are instruments of women's successful entry into public office (Lovenduski and Norris 1993). Traditionally, the major political parties in Bangladesh have not encouraged or supported prospective women candidates who wish to enter into public office. However, major political parties such as the BNP and the AL have always been very keen on mobilizing women workers and supporters to launch political campaigns, anti-government protests, demonstrations and rallies in the streets to ultimately seize political power. Despite the creation of women's branches or committees by the parties in recent years, women still primarily hold weak and non-influential decision-making positions in the central executive committee of the different political parties in Bangladesh. Thus women have little or no voice in the decision-making process. In most cases, they are rudely described as 'show pieces'. The inner circles of advisers of both BNP's Kaleda Zia and AL's Sheikh Hasina have always been composed of male politicians.

In fact the virtual non-existence of women representation at the apex of policy-making bodies of different political parties in Bangladesh not only continues to undermine democracy within the party but also greatly restrains women's effective participation in politics. The major political parties are not enthusiastic to involve women in the decision-making processes of the party. But Bangladesh's gradual movement towards good governance and democracy necessitate women's sufficient representation and participation in the policy-making process.

A lot of prejudice, mostly unconscious, still exists among most male leaders of most political parties against women political contenders in Bangladesh, as is the case in other Asian countries. The critical barriers against women's successful entry into politics are: (a) huge campaign costs, (b) not receiving nomination in expected winnable seats to the parliament, (c) lack of strong party backing and financial assistance, and (d) lack of a powerful support base in the constituency she wants to represent. Male politicians always occupy the top positions of the party. Table 11.4 shows women's position in the structures of the major political parties of Bangladesh in 2002.

**Table 11.4: Female members in the party hierarchy of major parties in Bangladesh**

Party	Structures of Party	Total no. of members	Female members
Bangladesh Nationalist Party	National Standing Committee	15	1
	National Executive Committee	164	11
Awami League	Presidium and Secretariat	36	5
	Working Committee	65	6
Jatiyo Party	National Standing Committee	31	2
	National Executive Committee	201	6
Jamat-e-Islam	Majlis-e-Shura	141	0
	Majlish-e-Amela	24	0

*Source.* Data obtained from the offices of the respective political parties of Bangladesh.

Table 11.4 clearly shows the negligible participation of women politicians in the party hierarchies. The major parties have not really been enthusiastic about increasing women's representation in the party leadership. For example, among the eleven members of the Parliamentary Board of the Bangladesh AL, there are only two women members on the Board including the party chief Sheikh Hasina. Similarly, out of 15 members of the BNP National Standing Committee (NSC), there is currently only one female member, the party chief Khaleda Zia. Acknowledging the issue of women's low participation in politics, the AL in its

2001 election manifesto declared that the number of reserved seats for women in parliament would be increased to 60 and that direct elections for reserved seats for women would be introduced. On the other hand, the election manifesto of the BNP also promised to increase the number of reserved seats for women and provide direct elections. As of now, the pledges of the major parties still remain unfulfilled resulting in less representation of women in the national parliament.

Of importance is how the Bangladesh Constitution initially guaranteed at one time 15 reserved seats for women in the national parliament for a period of ten years, which expired in 1987. In order to redress the overall development of women's status, the reserved seats for women in parliament were increased to 30 by a 5<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution that was introduced in June 1990 and extended over a period of ten years. But with the dissolution of parliament in July 2001, the previous constitutional provision for reserved seats for women expired. The major parties could not reach an agreement on the issue for a long time due to lack of understanding, consensus, and cooperation. Eventually, in May 2005, a bill for indirect elections to 45 reserved seats for women on the basis of the proportional representation of parties in parliament was passed. Subsequently when 36 women MPs out of total 45 were elected to the reserved seats, the main opposition AL stayed out of the parliament and boycotted the women MP elections.

### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AGAINST WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT INTO POLITICS

Everywhere men are more visible in politics than women. A leading political scientist and former chairperson of the Women Studies Department at the University of Dhaka observed that politics in Bangladesh remains male-dominated with respect to number, position in the party hierarchy, presence, and effectiveness in the national parliament.<sup>13</sup> A number of obstacles have kept the representation of women in government and politics low. In fact, the time restraints associated with women's traditional roles as wife and mother as well as the frequent lack of family support for women seeking elected office still remains as one of the primary reasons for women's inability to make any advancement into politics (Conway 2001).<sup>14</sup> The reasons and obstacles why few Bangladeshi women are in politics even today can be attributed to religious and economic factors, social biases, obstacles, and negative attitudes based on gender roles and stereotypes that continue to persist. The patriarchal culture that has dominated Bangladesh society with its social attitude and role expectation has placed women

within the realm of domestic life or in narrowly defined work roles. In addition, most of the religious parties in Bangladesh, including the Jamat-e-Islami, want to restrict women's rights and equality and intentionally deny women's political participation. Salma Sobhan notes that in most Muslim societies, the fundamentalists urge the full submission of women to their husbands and expect them to always be obedient in the name of social order and religious doctrines.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, there are multiple explanations for the low numbers of women in public office in Bangladesh. Besides situational barriers, economic problems and dependency, political and social violence, and lack of education and political knowledge, one major explanation is that Bangladeshi women have been conditioned not to take much interest in government and politics. They are also rarely pre-selected by the major political parties for possible winning seats. Another reason for their under-representation is that women have been reluctant to run for parliament due to domestic responsibilities. A former member of the parliament from the AL, Sajeda Chowdhury, observed that, 'Women must be encouraged to be more independent and self-reliant and social norms and cultural values must be re-oriented.'<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the problem of reconciling family life and public life has been a serious disincentive to Bangladeshi women contemplating whether to participate in the political process. For many Bangladeshi women a political career is seen as a non-traditional choice. A 1992 UN study observes that, 'Women's political participation will be enhanced if social and economic support structures exist, legal discrimination is eliminated and negative stereotypes vanish from education and media.'<sup>17</sup> Clearly, these measures are lacking or insufficient in Bangladesh. The difficulty of running for office in the rough and tumble of Bangladeshi politics and a continuing economic inequality limit women's opportunities in achieving political office. Legal discrimination may have been largely eliminated, but negative stereotypes and entrenched attitudes regarding proper gender roles mean that legal equality has not translated into any real political equality. This in turn means that women's issues are inadequately addressed in public policy.

However, two important changes in policy have been initiated by the major parties (the BNP and AL) that may ensure a continued increase in women's participation in politics. They are: first, an increase in the number of women in the party structures and an increase in the number of women running for election and second, a strong commitment by the parties in extending to women the same access and support as men to winnable seats. Therefore, the responsibility to improve the parliamentary representation of women mainly rests with the

major parties. Unfortunately, the parties have shown little inclination to see these changes through.

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that women's development has been accorded priority by different governments in the consecutive Five-Year Plans of Bangladesh, women continue to be disadvantaged, deprived, neglected, and face discrimination even after thirty years of independence. During the past three decades different governments have taken initiatives and adopted some encouraging measures for the empowerment of women. But realization of such policies has remained feeble and ineffective in the persistently male-dominated society. The percentage of women in politics does not correspond to their percentage in population. The unrelenting traditional gender role accounts for the low proportion of women in politics in Bangladesh.

In spite of constitutional guarantees, women have not enjoyed the same rights as men. Women still remain considerably under-represented at both the local and national level of politics. There is now a general consensus among women's organizations about the need to increase the number of seats reserved for women as well as to hold direct elections for those seats. The major parties such as the BNP and the AL made this promise in their election manifesto. Despite the fact that top leaders of the two major political parties (BNP and AL) are women leaders, politics in Bangladesh continue to remain a male monopoly. At the onset of the new millennium, the percentage of female representation at both the local and national level has remained low compared to global standards.

Although women have made some advancement in many fields that were previously dominated by men, politics is not one of them. The reasons and obstacles why few Bangladeshi women are involved in politics can be attributed to the social biases, enormous campaign costs, financial dependency, social and political violence, religious problems, lack of education and political knowledge, and situational barriers and attitudes based on gender roles and stereotypes. The recruitment and nomination processes of parties in the national elections also explain women's continued under-representation in the Bangladesh parliament. These various explanations for the most part substantiate Freeman's (2000: 231) statement that '(...) empowerment requires group solidarity and resources. Both of these routes were fraught with problems for women and neither was readily available.'



In sum, this study suggests that in order to give Bangladeshi women a place in the decision-making process, there is a need to increase the number of women holding political office at both the local and national level. However, any substantial increase in women's representation in public life depends on mainstream changes within the major political parties; the strong support and campaigning by women's groups, NGOs, and the media; the removal of structural impediments, traditional mindsets, biases and attitudes based on gender roles; and access to financial resources. The religious parties are opposed to women holding public office. It is likely that at both national and local level politics, women's representation will remain insignificant in the near future despite their enthusiasm to provide political leadership.

#### NOTES

- 1 See UN Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, *Women in Politics and Decision-making in the Late Twentieth Century: A United Nation's Study*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1992, pp. 30–31.
- 2 See GOBD, *The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*, Part III, p.8 (modified up to 2000).
- 3 Mohiuddin Ahmed Chowdhury, *Bangladesh Towards 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 178.
- 4 Begum Khaleda Zia became the first woman Prime Minister in the male-dominated society and politics of Bangladesh.
- 5 In the 1996 parliamentary elections, Jamat-e-Islami won 3 seats and obtained 8.62 per cent of the total votes cast.
- 6 The 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution of Bangladesh provided for a Caretaker government to conduct a free and fair election in the country.
- 7 See *Daily Star*, 19 August 2000.
- 8 See Bangladesh Election Commission, *Gender and the electoral process*, 2001–2003, p.2.
- 9 See The Constitution of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh, op.cit.
- 10 See GOBD, *Memorandum for Bangladesh Development Forum 1999–2000*, April 19–20, 1999, p.49.
- 11 *Daily Star* (Dhaka), 8 May 2003
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 See Najma Chowdhury, 'Women in Politics in Bangladesh' in Ahmed Q.K. et. al (eds) *Situation of Women in Bangladesh*, Ministry of Social Welfare & Women Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1985, p.268.
- 14 Even in advanced democratic countries such as United States, Australia, and United Kingdom women have always been considerably underrepresented in political life.

Currently, the USA has a figure of 14.0 per cent, the United Kingdom 17.9 per cent, Australia 15 per cent. In contrast, the number of women presents in government and politics has been relatively better in some countries such as Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark where women's representation in the parliament is over 35 per cent.

- 15 See Salma Sobhan in Valentine M. Moghadam (ed.) *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, London and New Jersey: Zed Books. 1994, p. 75. Salma Sobhan is a distinguished lawyer.
- 16 See Commonwealth Secretariat Publication, *Voices from the Commonwealth Women in Politics*, 1999.
- 17 See *Women in Politics and Decision-making in the Late Twentieth Century: A United Nations Study*, Op.cit. p. xi.

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## Chapter 12

# GENDER QUOTAS IN POLITICS: EMPOWERMENT FROM ABOVE OR FROM BELOW?

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*Drude Dahlerup*

*'Then I said to my husband: All right, you are the head of the household, but I am the head of the Panchayat. Said by an Indian woman who was elected chair of the local council (Panchayat).<sup>1</sup>*

### RETHINKING THE CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

The recent global trend of introducing electoral gender quotas in order to rapidly increase women's political representation necessitates a re-examination of our very understanding of the concept of empowerment. In this chapter I will argue that today's renewed interest in women's representation in formal political institutions should lead to a renewed discussion about the current possibilities of women's access to formal political institutions (parliaments, local councils, governments, etc.). On a theoretical level, recent historical advances in women's political representation challenge the relevance of the well-known dichotomy of 'empowerment from above' versus 'empowerment from below'. For example, is the woman elected to the local council of her village as exemplified in the quotation above involved in empowerment from below or from above?

### ELECTORAL GENDER QUOTAS – A NEW GLOBAL TREND

A surprisingly large number of countries from all over the world have recently introduced gender quotas to increase women's political representation.<sup>2</sup> Electoral

gender quotas imply that a certain number or percentage of the candidates for election or of those actually elected shall be women. In spite of all the philosophical and political controversies concerning the category of 'women', around 50 countries today have introduced gender quotas in their constitutions or electoral laws. Further, in many other countries major political parties have introduced their own voluntary party rules stipulating for gender quotas. In Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans and South Asia different types of quotas regimes have been introduced very recently. Gender quotas are also being instituted in Arab countries, where religious and ethnic quotas have been well known.

In 2003 Rwanda surpassed Sweden as the leading country in the world in terms of women's representation in politics. Rwanda is a country that is undergoing total reconstruction following the genocide and can stand as an example of the new trend in introducing gender quotas in post-conflict countries as well as in countries that are in a process of democratization, like Latin America.

We are now witnessing a worldwide experiment in which affirmative action policies are used in order to undermine the hegemony of male dominance in politics. Previous discourses on women in politics have traditionally accounted for women's under-representation primarily due to women's lack of resources. An alternative discourse, embedded in the Beijing *Platform for Action* (1995), focuses more on the mechanisms of exclusion that prevent women and other marginalized groups from obtaining a fair and balanced representation in political institutions. In the Western world, including the Nordic countries which are well known for their high representation of women, the *incremental track discourse* implies that only after women have increased their resources (i.e. education, gainful employment, etc.) will their political representation rise. In contrast, electoral gender quotas that are not just symbolic but actually are embedded in the electoral system in place may rapidly increase women's political representation, as seen in South Africa, Costa Rica, Mozambique and Argentina (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005). The research question of concern is whether such advancements can contribute to the empowerment of women, or conversely, whether the sudden election of many inexperienced women with a very small power base in civil society will give those women politicians problems in making use of their new position?

This recent development challenges our previous understanding of how women's political representation can be improved. Having gathered information on the use of quotas in all the nations of the world (see the online resource [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)<sup>3</sup>), it is time for extensive research on whether women are indeed empowered and how women are politically empowered through the use

of gender quotas in public elections. In the ongoing research project entitled ‘Gender Quotas – a Key to Equality?’, we argue that the Nordic countries in spite of the very high representation of women can no longer be considered the model for women’s political empowerment, or at any rate the only model. We talk about the *incremental track model*, well known in the Nordic countries and most Western countries in contrast to the *fast track model*, which may be exemplified with the leap from 19 to 35 per cent of women in the Costa Rican parliament in just one election with the help of gender quotas (Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005; Dahlerup 2006).<sup>4</sup>

Carol Bacchi warns against the use of such notions as ‘positive discrimination’ or ‘preferential treatment’ because they wrongly imply that the present social rules are generally fair. If, on the contrary, present arrangements are considered unfair because there is indeed the existence of structural discrimination, then gender quotas are merely imposed as a measure of compensation for present and past inequalities, not as a policy of discrimination against men (Bacchi 2004). Quotas as a fast track measure of compensation not only challenge the Scandinavian model of women’s representation, they additionally represent a wish by the quota advocates to move from equality of opportunity to equality of result (Dahlerup 1998).

### *Defining Quotas*

Electoral gender quotas come in many forms today, and it is important to study how different quota types correspond or do not correspond to different electoral systems. The two most common gender quotas types are on the one hand *candidate quotas* (legal or voluntary), which set a minimum percentage of women (or other groups) on the parties’ lists for public election, and on the other hand quotas in the form of *reserved seats*, which mandate a certain number of a special grouping, in this case women, to be elected. In the case of Uganda, there are 56 seats in parliament reserved for women correlating to one woman elected from each of the 56 districts. The reserved seat system has been introduced in many countries seeking to assuage religious groups, ethnic groups and clans, but many more reserved seats have recently been introduced for ‘women’. Reserved seat systems have traditionally been associated with non-democratic systems. It is interesting to note that many of the new reserved seat systems for women are not based on appointment, but on competitive elections among women candidates, as found in Uganda, Morocco and Rwanda, and such elections are also found at the local level in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan among other countries (for details, see Dahlerup 2006).

In the present research project, we analyze the discursive controversies surrounding quotas, the actual rules, the implementation process as well as the outcome (*Quotas – A Key to Reality?* Stockholm University, Institute for Political Science. Online resource). In quantitative terms, the final outcome concerns under what conditions quota provisions actually contribute to an increased number of women in formal political institutions. In qualitative terms, the crucial question to examine is under what conditions electoral gender quotas can contribute to increasing women's capacity to use their elected positions, and even more so in strong patriarchal political cultures. In our book written by researchers from different regions, the use of electoral gender quotas in all major parts of the world are compared (Dahlerup 2006). This comparison of the use of electoral gender quotas all over the world shows the need for a re-evaluation of the concept of empowerment.

#### EMPOWERMENT 'FROM BELOW' VERSUS 'FROM ABOVE' – AN AMBIGUOUS DICHOTOMY

The well-known dichotomy, 'empowerment from below' versus 'empowerment from above' needs to be scrutinized. Although this dichotomy has an ambiguous meaning, it is nevertheless widely used in development studies and feminist studies as well as by various actors from feminist movements and development agencies all the way to the World Bank.

Just as the concept of empowerment itself has become what Parpart, Rai and Staudt call a '“motherhood” term, comfortable and unquestionable' (2002: 4), empowerment 'from below', or alternately phrased as empowerment as a 'bottom up' process, is mostly used with positive connotations. Because the focus on empowerment is often received as a reaction to top-down, state-led development, it may appear that real empowerment is always a process from below (Parpart, Rai & Staudt 2002: 4).

For many researchers and practitioners, empowerment 'from above' may consequently seem to be a contradiction in terms. In development theory, true empowerment is usually seen as mobilization at the local level, but as Mayo argues, this focus on community participation and empowerment may in fact be just a strategy to give structural adjustment programs with heavy social cuts a 'human face' (Mayo 2004: 140).

While 'empowerment from below' often indicates empowerment through grassroots mobilization, it is not at all clear what the other part of the dichotomy namely that of 'empowerment from above' implies. Do we by 'from above' mean

changes imposed on people by political institutions in general, or alternatively by the central level in contrast to the local level? Or is the focus what politicians do seen in contrast to what social movement movements do? Does this dichotomy primarily concern the relations between civil society and the state? Or is the focus rather on structural change versus agency?

Some researchers have defined empowerment from below as the mobilization of movements, or as movement policies, in contrast to representative politics, which concerns participation in formal political institutions (Christensen 2004). However, with increasing focus on globalization, we see the same dichotomy being used in framing the global versus the national and local. Hence, one ‘(...) key question is how to link the construction of new forms of global governance “from above” with the formation of political identities of citizens rooted in everyday life problems “from below” ’ (Andersen & Siim 2004: 4). In this quotation it is the global that constitutes ‘from above’, but it is not evident whether the dichotomy pertains to different arenas or different aspects – everyday life versus more over-reaching perspectives? One criticism in this debate concerning the various levels is *that the global is nowhere and everywhere*, since no one actually lives in a global village.

### *Aspects of Empowerment*

The discussion of empowerment from above versus from below seems to include a variety of aspects that ought to be analytically separated. What do we mean by ‘above’ and what does ‘from below’ imply? Four important aspects are discussed in the following.

### *Different Arenas of Decision-Making*

The first perspective deals with the *different arenas of participation in decision-making*. Here at least three different perspectives are discussed in the literature which focuses on participation and mobilization. In all three cases, empowerment is usually confined to the first half of the following dichotomies:

- a. Mobilization in movements and community involvement versus participation in formal political institutions.
- b. Participation at the local level versus the national level.
- c. Participation at the local and national level versus the global level.

In the discussion about empowerment from above versus from below we need to clarify the decisions-making arenas in question. It does not seem relevant



to conclude in advance that participating is more empowering in one of these decision-making arenas rather than in the others.

### *Empowerment as a Gift?*

A second perspective is the question of where empowerment comes from. Can empowerment come as a gift 'from above' or can only self-organization and mobilization trigger the empowerment process? This is a very relevant discussion central to development policies, but also central to the discussion on quotas since quotas may be, and have been in some recent cases, 'given' to women by an almost totally male-dominated parliament and party system. In non-democratic states, political positions are almost always given from above – both to women and to men.

### *Structure or Agency?*

A third perspective is that of structure versus agency. There is no doubt that the very process of fighting for one's rights empowers people. The historical legacy of social movements shows that even when the primary goals are not achieved, the very mobilization process often enhances new collective and individual capacities. But, does the empowerment process always necessarily involve agency or can structural changes additionally trigger a process of empowerment in such cases where individuals did not actively fight for changes? The answer to this is *yes*. Just as structural changes may disempower people, so can structural changes in other cases lead to the empowerment of citizens. In general, one can argue then that empowerment implies both mobilizing people as well as changing structures.

It would be wrong to locate the structures at the global level and actors only at the local or national level. The present rather confusing debate concerning local actors confronting anonymous market forces at the global level is misleading. It is important to recognize that there are actors operating at all levels of decision-making, including the global level, which are too often neglected. One of two important examples is the liberalization of financial transactions, which took place in the 1980s with far-reaching consequences. This change was in fact the result of political decisions, even if many of the decision-makers did not understand the full consequences. But some actors in this game were very well aware of what was about to happen. Another recent example is the liberalization of the energy market within the European Union, which tends to suppress local energy markets and to deprive national politics of the means to regulate on the basis of environmental and other public considerations. The liberalization of

European energy markets is also the result of deliberate decisions, not abstract market forces as is often misrepresented. It is one of today's many astonishing examples where politicians deliberately give away power to regulate in the name of the public good – to the market. Such decisions restructure the frames of individual lives and set limits – or conversely present new opportunities – for actors. Nevertheless, the capacity to act and the possibility to influence such structural changes are unevenly distributed.

### *The State as Ally or Enemy?*

Even if political institutions from a movement perspective can be considered as oppressive, and even if anti-state sentiments have flourished in social movements throughout history, often for good reasons, today many movements are in a process of re-evaluating their perception of the political institutions (the state). Political institutions of today are considered important in counteracting the market. In the present neo-liberal era that is based on privatization and liberalization, many movements have turned into defenders of the (democratic) state as a force that – because of its popular base – might be able to challenge the multinationals and the neo-liberal policies of international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank (Taylor 2000). Recently, even the World Bank itself has also revised its attitude towards the nation state. Consequently, we see a renewed interest in political institutions and accordingly in gender quotas.

As indicated above, many crucial perspectives in development theory and feminist theory are at stake here. My conclusion therefore is that when using the dichotomy of empowerment from below versus from empowerment from above one needs to clarify whether the focus is (1) the different arenas of decision-making, (2) empowerment as something you get or something you have to fight for, (3) a structure versus actor perspective or (4) whether this discussion is embedded in a discourse about the state. Fundamental to the discussions of these four aspects is of course how we define the very concept of empowerment.

### *The Concept of Empowerment*

Although widely used, empowerment is a contested concept within development research and policies as well as in feminist theory. At first, the concept of empowerment implied a move away from the negative connotations of power as in 'power over', which was often associated with traditional, male-dominated politics. Instead a new concept of the 'power to' was introduced, which correlates much closer to feminist thinking and practice. Development research as well as development agencies began using the term empowerment, and today even

international financial institutions employ the term. Presently empowerment fits many shoes as Parpart, Rai and Staudt argue (2002: 5).

One may ask whether empowerment is to be understood as a *process* or as the *result* of the process. No uniform answer to this question has been found in the literature, but Marjorie Mayo makes an interesting distinction between (the concept of) empowerment itself and the strategies in promoting empowerment (Mayo 2004: 139). However, this distinction goes further in implying that empowerment is seen as the result. And even more fruitfully, to my mind, Naila Kabeer defines empowerment not as a process, nor as a result, but rather as a *tool*. Thus, the core of empowerment is the capacity to choose (Kabeer 2000).

I argue that the difficulties in distinguishing between empowerment as a process and as a result derive from the very term 'empowerment'. In fact, the term seems to encompass both process and result. By including the term 'power', the term empowerment itself by definition implies that we are coming closer to the goal. Consequently, it does not make sense to argue that empowerment does not give people power, or that empowerment does not lead to gaining power. Empowerment is about gaining power and the final result of any process of empowerment is by definition – *power*. Consequently, we need to realize that the term empowerment carries with it all the problems of definition and the differing understandings that are embedded in the term power (Mayo 2004: 142–43). When speaking of power it is important to discern whether we mean power according to Steven Lukes' three dimensions of power or are we basing our understanding on Foucault's definition of power? Accordingly, we may ask if power is a possession. Is power relative? These are but many examples of the endless debates within political science over the meanings of power. Thus, by using the term 'empowerment', we do not escape the problems that pervade the contested concept of power.

Following Kabeer, I prefer to define empowerment as an acquired capacity to choose. Used in the field of political participation, empowerment implies the growing capacity of the citizens to effectively participate in political decision-making (Dahlerup 2006; Andersen & Siim 2004: 2). But, since no choice is completely free, what is really significant is the degree of freedom in choice.

The lack of clarity between empowerment as a process or a result may be resolved if we distinguish the various *steps* that occur during the process of empowerment, during which one achievement may constitute a new beginning of the next process. Seen in this light, empowerment may be both a result and an important tool to be utilized in the next process.

Empowerment defined as the capacity to choose should not be limited to the capacity of individuals to control their own lives. Empowerment is not just

about altering the resources of one individual – or to use another term the ‘social capital’ of an individual. Most important is the transformation of social and discursive structures that frame the agency.

In feminist studies within political science, women’s political representation has been a central theme for a long time. Increasingly, male dominance in political institutions all over the globe is seen not just as a problem for women, but for the development of society as such. However, the concept of empowerment has not been very central to studies of gendering political institutions, but has been mostly discussed in social movement studies. Now it is time to return to the question of the potential for empowerment by using electoral gender quotas.

### EMPOWERMENT THROUGH POLITICAL REPRESENTATION?

Can increased political representation of women contribute to the empowerment of women as defined above? Is fighting for gender balance in politics a worthy cause, for instance through gender quotas?

If empowerment is defined as the capacity to choose, to increase women’s political representation is no doubt potentially an empowering process. This conclusion is based on the specificity of political institutions in that they provide elected politicians with not only the capacity to choose for themselves, but also the potential power to make authoritative decisions for a whole society. In this respect, political representation clearly gives women politicians tools in trying to change women’s position in general, provided that they so wish. However, in performing the job as a politician, many obstacles might meet the female MP, a subject that will not be discussed further here.

The formal political institutions such as parliaments and governments are not frivolous organizations. Even if the power of the nation state is somewhat weakened by the forces of globalization (which for Third World states is nothing new), the power of the state remains unique. The state has in principle the capacity to issue legitimate and authoritative decisions, which are supported by the courts and by the monopoly of the state to use violence (army, police, etc.). Access to formal political institutions is important for all individuals; however mechanisms of exclusion against particular groups may continue and prevail inside the parliament.

Tokenism, co-optation and absorption are all well known terms that are especially used about women politicians – as if male politicians were never tokens and co-opted. It can be shown that electoral gender quotas may lead to historical leaps in women’s representation and even trigger women’s presence in politics in some countries where women were not represented previously. Quotas may,

however, in other instances lead to no increase in women's political representation at all, especially in cases where the parties do not comply with the new rules and where no sanctions are installed. Further, quotas may lead to the election of token women whom have no room to maneuver. In such cases, gender quotas remain a symbolic gesture. Hence, the present research project is interested in *under what conditions* electoral gender quotas may lead to the political empowerment of women (Dahlerup 2006).

Following the rise of neo-liberal attacks on the state, women's movements have begun to re-evaluate the state (Taylor 2000). This recent move obviously has serious implications for the value attached to political representation. Consequently, grassroots mobilization should not be seen as an alternative to formal political institutions, as was the case some decades ago. Rather, it is the present point of view around the world that even if there is the risk that women's political representation remains mostly symbolic, increased political representation of women through gender quotas does represent an opportunity for women. Strong women's movements based in civic society are, however, still very important, if the increased representation of women in political institutions is to result in policy changes that will better women's position.

### *Gender Quotas and Democracy*

The right to participate in political life as well as the right to vote and stand for election is seen as an essential part of citizenship rights. But the lack of equal representation of groups that historically have been excluded was not until recently considered a shortcoming of democracy itself. Nor was the male domination in politics considered as a violation of women's citizenship rights as long as women had the right to vote. Today, however, an all-male political assembly has lost its democratic legitimacy. In the UN Platform for Action from the Beijing Women's Conference of 1995, the goal is stated as 'gender balance' in politics, not just, as previously, 'more women in politics'.

Table 12.1 demonstrates that a very high representation of women in a national parliament may be obtained with or without the help of electoral gender quotas. But the table also shows how a good number of countries from the South are now competing with the Nordic countries when it comes to women's political representation.

Due to quota provisions, Rwanda, Costa Rica, Argentina, Mozambique and South Africa are now ranked among countries with the highest representation of women in parliament, as Table 1 demonstrates. The five Nordic states of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden stood virtually alone at the

**Table 12.1 The top of the world rank order: parliaments with more than 30 % women<sup>5</sup>**

Country	Women in National Parliament (%)	Quota Type	Electoral System
Rwanda	48.8 (2003)	Legal quotas (C)	List PR
Sweden	47.3 (2006)	Party quotas	List PR
Finland	42.0 (2007)	No quotas	List PR
Costa Rica	38.6 (2006)	Legal quotas (L)	List PR
Norway	37.9 (2005)	Party quotas	List PR
Denmark	36.9 (2005)	No quotas	List PR
Netherlands	36.7 (2006)	Party quotas	List PR
Cuba	36.0 (2003)	No quotas	Two Rounds
Spain	36.0 (2004)	Party quotas	List PR
Argentina	35.0 (2005)	Legal quotas (C)	List PR
Mozambique	34.8 (2004)	Party quotas	List PR
Belgium	34.7 (2003)	Legal quotas (L)	List PR
South Africa	32.8 (2004)	Party quotas	List PR
Austria	32.2 (2006)	Party quotas	List PR
New Zealand	32.2 (2005)	No quotas	MMP
Germany	31.6 (2005)	Party quotas	MMP
Iceland	30.7 (2007)	Party quotas	List PR
Burundi	30.5 (2005)	Legal quotas(C)	List PR
Tanzania	30.4 (2005)	Legal quotas (C)	FFP

*Key Electoral System:* List PR: Proportional Representation; Mixed: MMP=Mixed Member Proportional; FFP: First past the post, single member constituencies.

*Key Quota Type:* Legal quotas: Constitutional (C) or Law (L). Party quotas: voluntary party rules.

Source: Interparliamentary Union (2007). [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org); International IDEA and Stockholm University (2006): [www.quotaprojekt.org](http://www.quotaprojekt.org); official statistics. Election day figures

top of the world ranking for a long time and are now finally being challenged. In Latin American and in many other parts of the world, the high representation of women in Scandinavian parliaments has been used to invoke the introduction of electoral gender quotas mandated by law. Such repeated use of the Nordic example is somewhat misleading since electoral gender quotas have always been voluntary in the Nordic countries and not a legal requirement as found in Latin America, and only used by some political parties at the centre-left. And even then, it took approximately sixty years following women's enfranchisement in Denmark, Norway and Sweden to cross the twenty per cent threshold, and likewise seventy years to reach thirty per cent. Nowadays women's movements

and other advocates of gender balance in politics seem unwilling to wait so long. This in turn implies that the Nordic countries, in spite of the high representation of women, can no longer be considered the only model for reaching gender balance in political institutions (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005; Dahlerup 2006).

There is a link between women's political empowerment and socio-economic changes. Without significant structural changes in society, the inclusion of women in political institutions will not lead to any long-term political empowerment of women. In terms of the redistribution-recognition debate, one may argue in line with Iris Marion Young, that *recognition* in the form of political representation equally means *redistribution* (Young 1997). While Iris Marion Young focuses on redistribution of discursive power, it is my conclusion that the recognition of rights to political representation for groups that have been previously marginalized involves a redistribution per se, namely of decision-making power.

In post-conflict societies like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda as well as countries in transition to democracy like Latin America, electoral gender quotas have been introduced (Dahlerup and Nordlund 2004). New quota regimes have additionally been instituted in the Arab world (Dahlerup 2006). The traditional Western discourse – that women's political representation will come in due time with rising 'development' – is now being challenged. Today, it is increasingly being argued that the inclusion of women is a prerequisite for development and transition to democracy (UNDP 2003).

Even if the introduction of gender quotas may be purely symbolic in some countries, the rapid increase of women's representation in the parliaments of Costa Rica, Argentina, South Africa and Rwanda among others – not to mention the similar increase in the local councils of South Asia – nevertheless presents a remarkable new trend in the world, although it may be too early to judge the long-term effects on democracy and development.

## NOTES

- 1 Said at a conference for 1500 locally elected women, organized by the Institute for Social Science, New Delhi, April 2004, which the author attended.
- 2 In our book (Dahlerup 2006), the quota systems in all major regions in the worlds are compared.
- 3 For a worldwide overview the use of electoral gender quotas, see [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org) a Global Database of Quotas for Women, established and maintained by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and our research project at Stockholm University.

- 4 The research project 'Electoral gender quotas – a key to equality?' is supported by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet). See the online resource [www.statsvet.su.se/quotas](http://www.statsvet.su.se/quotas).
- 5 Single or lower house.

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