INTRODUCTION

Background

The research project was designed to produce a documentary film on the political participation of women in Japan and the Philippines. At the start of this study in July 2010, it was reported that no Asian country had achieved the 30-percent quota for women in decision-making positions recommended by the 1975 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Although both the Philippines and Japan had ratified the CEDAW in 1981 and 1985 respectively, in July 2011, at the end of the research period, women only made up 22.1% and 11.3% of the lower house, respectively.

This project was also motivated by a curiosity about the journey Asian women have taken in politics. According to Andrea Fleschenberg (2008):

“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 analyze the individual traits of Asian female political leaders, especially regarding any shared, common factors in their political biographies”.

Research Methods

From recommendations by the host organization and the key contact, a list of possible interviewees was drawn and the list expanded throughout the research period, as the snowballing effect persisted. Concurrently, data was gathered through Internet searches via news sites, government websites, political parties’ websites, organizational websites, and blogs. Combining all the available names, a matrix was drawn to help identify key candidates to study.

This research only covers a small sample size of women politicians, and is limited to the accessibility of the interviewees. Nevertheless, attempts were made to ensure diversity and the inclusiveness of the sample to cover members of the ruling and opposition parties, representatives of interest groups, as well as independent candidates, and those currently or formerly holding an elective position. I also interviewed some former politicians, cabinet members, and voters, women activists and their supporters and support staff.

The rapport I built with my main informants and some of the participants in this research project went beyond merely an interview session. In this sense, I agree with Bloom (1998) who wrote, “Feminist interviews are dialogic in that both the researcher and respondent reveal themselves and reflect on these disclosures”. My interaction with the participants varied from merely being an observer or participant in a public forum or political campaign, to having in-depth interviews that lasted from 30 minutes to three hours in their personal premises. I also received permission to shadow a few women politicians up-close for a day or more, during their official, social, and even private functions.

The final product of this research project, the documentary film, was produced out of our mutual interactions, conversations, and, at times, our sharing of life experiences together.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In Japan, the women’s suffrage movement started in the late 19th century. Nonetheless, it was only in 1946 when the Japanese women stood for election and voted for the first time, namely, in the election of members of the House of Representatives. The positive result of the election whereby 39 of the 79 women who ran for public office were elected, enhanced momentum the following year, when Japan’s new constitution was enacted. Debate over the equality of the sexes came to the forefront.

While the Japanese women’s movement evolved from the fight for suffrage for women in the 1920s to the establishment of a radical feminist movement in the 1970s, contemporary women’s movements are rather diversified and woven into other civil movements including those focused on issues like labor, the environment, poverty, and anti-nuclear activism. The discourse on gender mainstreaming became significant in the 1990s, while the fourth United Nations World Conference on Women was convened in Beijing, China in 1995. As for women institutions in Japan, the Women’s Suffrage Center was put up in 1946 (it was called the Women’s Center back then), the National Women’s Education Center (NWEC) in 1977, and the Japanese Association of International Women’s Rights in 1987, after Japan had already ratified the CEDAW.

Meanwhile, the women in the Philippines acquired their right to vote in 1937; and the women’s movement continues to have a strong presence in Philippine society. The political landscape of the Philippines was shaped largely during the Marcos administration (1965-1986), part of which period saw the Philippines under martial law (between 1972 and 1981). Unfortunately, while the collapse of martial law was attributed to the success of People Power in 1986, the participation of the women’s movement in the larger anti-Marcos movement was basically sidelined after the people’s uprising.

It is interesting to note that despite the country are having had two women presidents, their victories were hardly the result of feminist politics. For example, back in 1986, Corazon Aquino became an icon of the opposition after her husband, Benigno Aquino Jr, was assassinated. With the support of the military, the church groups, her political party, and most importantly, the people during the People Power Revolution, she became the first woman president after the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos, the dictator accused of being behind the assassination of her husband.

The second woman president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA), the 14th president of the Philippines and daughter of the 9th Philippine president, Diosdado Macapagal (1961-1965), secured her initial presidential term (2001-2004) through another people’s revolution (People Power II) and military intervention, rather than through election.

SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Within the current social setting in Japan as it is, gender remains an important organizing principle in terms of cultural expectations on the part of society and in the assignment of social roles. Division of labor according to gender is apparent in both private and public spheres; and the clear distinction between gender roles is taught to Japanese children from a young age. It is still widely believed that caregiving (i.e., childcare and the care of the elderly) is the Japanese women’s primary role in the family, community, and society. Women are expected to manage the household and ensure the wellbeing of each member of the family through the preparation of nutritional food, and the maintenance of a healthy and comfortable living environment. In contrast, Japanese men are expected to have a job and to be the “salary men”. Consequently, Japanese men are more likely to find full-time employment and to seek promotion. Gender is also a major factor in attracting targeted consumers, especially in terms of media consumption.

Gender divisions are less visible in the Philippines. The level of political awareness is generally higher among Filipinos. Specifically, the strong presence of the women’s movement in it has played an important role in raising the political consciousness of Filipino women such that their political participation is defined in a broader sense to include academe, NGOs, the civil movement. In addition, Filipino women are also involved in efforts to effect social change through formal and informal channels. However, Filipino women also still face multiple burdens at work and in the household, taking up as they do, the responsibility of childcare and the performance of household chores. Due to serious economic pressures in the country, many Filipino women have been looking for jobs outside the Philippines and therefore constitute a good portion of the large pool of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW).
The Political Participation of Women in Japan

My research period in Japan ran from July 2010 to January 2011. I arrived in Japan on 1 July 2010, in the midst of the campaign period for the 22nd Upper House election on 11 July 2010. On 31 August 2009, the then opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), experienced a groundbreaking victory over the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the Lower House election. Therefore, by the time I was there, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was the incumbent ruling party.3

The Pacific Asia Resource Centre (PARC), my host organization, and Otsuka Teruyo, the political secretary of the DPJ, were my focal points in Tokyo. Through their recommendations and references, I gained access to a significant number of prominent women politicians and a wide network of feminist scholars, women's rights activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and non-profit organizations (NPOs) in Japan.

Brief Profile of Selected Women Politicians in Japan

Japan has a bicameral system, which consists of the Upper House (Sangiin) and the Lower House (Shugin). The local levels are known as Metropolitan, City, Prefecture, and Ward.

Upper House Members (44 women out of 242 seats)

- Fukushima Mizuho has been the chair of SDP (Social Democratic Party) since 2003. She was a lawyer prior to her first candidacy with SDP in 1998. She was the Minister of State for Consumer Affairs and Food Safety, Social Affairs, and Gender Equality when SDP was part of the ruling coalition with DPJ. In 2010, SDP stood firm in opposing the military base in Okinawa, and left the ruling coalition.

Lower House Members (54 women out of 480 seats)

- Tsujimoto Kiyomi of Osaka’s 10th district was an SDP member starting 1996, but turned independent in July 2010. She had later aligned herself with the LDP alliance of Independent Candidates Club and appointed as Deputy Transport Minister. A student activist previously, she started the peace boat movement.

- Miho Takai of DPJ entered politics by answering an advertisement of DPJ in 2000 upon her return from overseas studies. She was then in her late 20s. She was first elected at the age of 32.

- Koike Yuriko is the Chairperson of the General Council in LDP. She was the first female appointed as Defense Minister (2007). Prior to entering politics, she was a journalist specializing in Arabic.

- Kyono Kimiko of Akita started as an independent candidate in Akita Province in 1999 but lost. She was elected in 2003, and in 2005, she re-signed to run for a seat in the Lower House. Although she lost the election, her political career was revived by way of proportional representation, thereby paving the way for her ascent to national politics.

LOCAL POLITICIANS

City Councilor (four-year terms)

Kamikawa Aya of Setagaya ward made news by being the first open transsexual to stand and win in elections (2003) at the age of 35.

Otsuka Emiko of Higashi Murayama is from Seikatsu Sha Network. She was a housewife prior to her involvement in politics. After she lost her husband, she realized that she had to be financially independent. Thereafter, she started to work for the sustenance of the family. She finally landed in Seikatsu Sha Network.

Inomata Mie of Kawasaki City is a veteran in politics, having been on the field since 1991. Formerly from Seikatsu Network, she is currently an independent candidate.

Former politicians interviewed include former ministers Akametsu Ryoko and Noono Chieko; former assemblywoman of Tokyo Metropolitan, Mitsui Mariko; and former local councilor of Sapporo City, Yamaguchi Taka.

Routes to Politics

Most women politicians interviewed claimed that they had had no plans or ambitions to take part in politics during their childhood. The opportunity to be in politics came later in their lives. Among the routes they identified were the following:
1. Working in Government

Some initially worked in the government department closely linked to policy making. For example, Akametsu Ryoko of LDP worked her way up to be Head of the Department of Labor before her appointment as Minister of Education.

2. Personal Fame or Celebrity

Quite a number were celebrities or media personalities or even Olympic medalists before they were recruited by a political party.

3. Participation in the Civil Movement

A significant number of women politicians were active in the civil movement before they became politicians. Most notably, the housewives movement in the 1970s and 1980s provided a platform for the Japanese women’s political awakening.

4. Political Recruitment

Political parties have a recruitment process. For example, Miho Takai, the Lower House Representative of DPJ, said she actually responded to an advertisement while exploring her options upon returning from studies abroad.

The Catalyst Effects

Factors observed to have encouraged women’s involvement in politics were as follows:

1. Japan and the Cold War Politics

Most of the women experienced their political awakening during their student days when some specific political event or issue catalyzed their participation in politics. For example, Koike Yuriko and Tsujimoto Kiyomi mentioned the impact of the Cold War on their decision to follow their political calling. Tsujimoto Kiyomi founded the peaceboat movement as a student and it was her activism that led her to politics during the “Madonna boom”.

2. Feminist Consciousness and the “Madonna Effect”

When Doi Takako became the first woman president of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), she started to recruit women politicians to be part of the 1989 Upper House election. This sudden boom in women’s participation in politics was widely known as the “Madonna Effect”. Doi not only recruited and nurtured a good number of women politicians from community-based social work and the civil movement, and from among feminist academics, but also became known for her impressive and inspiring “non-feminine” leadership and mannerisms. Her legacy continues to be acknowledged by contemporary women politicians, including lawyer Fukushima Mizuho, the current president of SDP, Tsujimoto Kiyomi, and feminist activist, Mitsui Mariko.

Subsequently, a decline in women’s participation in politics was noted. Then the number picked up once more when male politicians recruited women to run in the elections. For example Ozawa, a veteran politician from DPJ, was known to have supported the “Ozawa girls”. Similarly, there were women recruited by Koizumi in LDP: “Koizumi’s children”.

3. Local Politics and the Citizen and Consumers Movement

Apart from some women being recruited by mainstream political parties, what was unique in Japan was the existence of local political parties like the Citizen Network and the Seikatsusha Net Club (SNC).

SNC was set up as a local political party in the 1980s, with Seikatsu Club as its base. Seikatsu Club is a cooperative movement, which started in the 1970s. At the time, it campaigned for safe food to be available at reasonable prices and opposed the consumer tax. Most importantly, SNC provided a mechanism for recruiting women to join the local elections. In 1985, Tokyo-based SNC won its first citizen’s seat and by 2010, there were about 50 women elected in various parts of Tokyo. These women politicians were part of the local cooperative network and kept very close contact with the residents in this area. SNC has since imposed a term limit whereby each female candidate has a maximum term limit of three terms, equivalent to 12 years. Thereafter, the SNC would support a new candidate. This mechanism is implemented to encourage more women to participate in local politics. On the other hand, some women politicians opt out from the party after their term limit has expired and decide to join the contest on their own as independents, instead.

4. Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Quotas

At the national level, the Association of Feminist Renmei (AFER) was founded in 1992 to promote the
political participation of women in government and in recognition of the need to provide support for women politicians. Since then, AFER has been active in pushing for 40 percent women’s participation, apart from voicing out issues pertaining to women. In the effort to ensure women’s representation in all constituencies, AFER also launched a campaign to eliminate the Zero-Women Representatives Assembly by tracking and lobbying in the constituencies without any woman representative. Mitsui Mariko, one of the founders of AFER, is a former Tokyo Metropolitan City Councilor. When she was in that position, she campaigned for the enactment of the Sexual Harassment Act in the Metropolitan Tokyo government. The act has since been expanded to other parts of Japan.

The Political Participation of Women in the Philippines

My research period in the Philippines lasted three months, from February to May 2011. I arrived early February 2011, and upon the recommendation of Prof Mike Luz of the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) and contacts from women NGOs, I took an interest in the heated debate on the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill, then being discussed in Congress. The bill aims to provide women with family planning facilities and services, to empower them and reduce the alarming maternity mortality rate. The RH Bill is strongly supported by the women’s movements and NGOs; but the Catholic Church is against it.

Unlike Japan, which is showing a trend toward a two-party system, the number of parties in the Philippines is fluid, with parties being formed, merged, and dissolved so frequently that party loyalty is hardly practiced. Even though the number of women politicians in the Philippines is higher than in Japan, most women politicians are usually from a political dynasty that enjoys a high societal or elite status but may not necessarily represent women’s rights.

In the Philippines, the national elections are for the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives (Congress). At the local level, there are elections for the provincial, city, municipal, and barangay levels.

Brief Profile of Selected Women Politicians in the Philippines

• Leticia Shahani, former Senator (1987-1998). In 1975, as a member of the Commission of the Status of Women, Leticia R. Shahani prepared the working draft of the CEDAW based on the UN Declaration. She was Secretary-General of the World Conference on the UN Decade of Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985.

• Nieves Confessor, former Secretary of Labor and Employment, the first female to hold the position. She was also the first Asian woman to serve as Chairperson of the International Labor Organization Governing Body (ILO).

• Risa Hontiveros, former congress representative and one of the founders of Akbayan (see point 3 in “Routes to Politics” below). She is a strong advocate of the RH Bill and Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transsexuals (LGBT) rights. She ran for Senator in 2010 as a guest candidate of the Liberal Party, the party of President Benigno Aquino III, but lost.

• Raida Bansil, who was appointed as commissioner of the National Congress of Muslim Filipino (NCFM) after completing three terms as mayor of Kapatagan. She rebuilt Kapatagan from ashes and was succeeded by her husband as mayor in 2010.

• Janette Garin, Congress Representative of the 1st district of Iloilo. After succeeding her husband, who is from a political family, she has since won three consecutive terms. She is an advocate of the RH Bill.

• Perla Zulueta, city councilor of Iloilo city. She is the only female in the council.

Routes to Politics

1. Political Clan or Kinship Politics

In the Philippines, one’s political clan and family name play an important role in politics. According to CEDAW Watch Philippines 2009, a study conducted by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) showed that most of the women in the House of Representative in 2001 were from political clans (UNIFEM 2009). The national politics of the Philippines is deeply entrenched in kinship politics. Filipino feminist scholar, Mina Roces (1998, 2) pointed out that “While men held official power, women held power unofficially as wives, sisters, mothers, daughters, and even mistresses of male politicians”.

The Work of the 2010/2011 API Fellows
My observations are in line with Mina Roces’ (1998) argument that women power in the Philippines is defined by the dynamics of kinship. According to her, power is not concentrated on and confined to the individual politician, but held by her kinship group.

On many occasions, the term limit set for various positions indirectly created more opportunities for women to participate in politics. For example, many women mayors were elected after their husbands reached the maximum three-term limit. This phenomenon further illustrates “kinship politics”, where close relatives running for election are endorsed by the outgoing candidate. This could happen to either gender as illustrated in the case of Raída Bansil Maclangit, whose husband succeeded her as mayor of Kapatagan.

2. The Politics of Gender Equality and the Women’s Movement

In the Philippines, many laws and acts have been put in place to ensure gender equality. For example, the General Appropriations Act of 1995 set aside 5 percent of the budget for gender and development projects. Republic Act 6949, on the other hand, declared March 8 as a special working holiday in honor of International Women’s Day. On top of that, March is also celebrated as Women’s Month.

Apparently, the strong presence of the women’s movement has brought a significant number of women activists into decision-making positions in government. For example, Remy Rikken who is the Chair of the Philippine Commission of Women (PCW) was a veteran feminist, while Dinky Soliman, the Secretary of Department of Social Welfare and Development, had a solid background in community organizing prior to her appointment in the government.

3. The Party List System Act and the Women’s Party

With regard to women’s participation in politics, the most effective piece of legislature relating to it is the Party List System Act of 1995 which dictates that 20 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives be reserved for party representatives from marginalized sectors such as peasant communities, the urban poor, farmers, fishers, and women (Munez 2004). Under the Party List system, Gabriela Women’s Party, which was an offshoot of the biggest alliance of women’s organizations, won two seats.

However, an individual political party may set its own gender quotas. For example, the Akbayan Citizen’s Action Party, a multi-sectoral party with a feminist agenda, implements a gender quota within its party. It designates that 30 percent of all leadership positions at every level of the Philippine political structure be reserved for women. Prior to the success of Gabriela Women’s Party and the Akbayan Citizen’s Action Party, another women’s party, Albanse! Pinay (Advance! Filipinas) emerged. It was the first all-women’s party to win a seat in 1998. However, it later failed to retain any seat in the subsequent elections.

Dominant Beliefs And Success Factors In Politics

A. San-ban and the three Gs.

In Japan, it is generally believed that politicians need to have the “sanban” or three foundations. In the male-dominated politics of Japan, a politician needs to consider acquiring “chiban” or family support, “kanban” or organized group support, and also “kaban” or financial support.

Intriguingly, in a rather different context, some women politicians in Japan indeed possessed rather scant resources when they started. However, they were highly educated and politicized, and decided to join politics after having already developed their own political influence and network in a social movement or through their professional credentials. Those who fall under the aforementioned category include the following: lawyer Fukushima Mizuho, activist Tsujimoto Kiyomi, feminist Mistui Mariko, housewife Yamaguchi Takai, and transwoman Kamikawa Aya.

In contrast, Munez (2004) contends that women in politics are “not a widely held concern in the Philippines”. Instead, it is widely believed that the three Gs are the determinant factors for a politician to win an election. Munez (2004) expressed, “In the popular mind, politics is for men and often, particularly come election time, is synonymous with guns, goons and gold”.

It is likewise widely perceived that those with social capital and economic power have the means to be in politics.
B. Network and Number
Politics is about numbers and networks, regardless of the background of the politicians. Their successes lie in whether they get strong support from the voters or from the ones who have the authority to put them in a position. Therefore, it is important for women politicians to have a platform for maneuvering such political support from the public, be this through a political party which will provide network support, machinery, and financial sources; or through community activism—the NGOs, civil society, or issue-based groups.

For example, Noono Chieko, former Minister of Justice who enacted the reproductive health act in Japan recounted that “It might not be too exaggerated if I say that there was not any women’s issue in the Diet”. She found her network of support after making huge efforts to do so, “I found those who could share the same opinion and discussed with the people who really needed the new act”.

Despite political support from a political party and social activism in the form of a citizen’s network (SNC), or a minority rights movement (Kamikawa Aya and sexual minorities), women politicians need to maintain their public image and reach out to their constituency in order to sustain the voters’ support. This explains why politicians are often seen to be constantly building their network of support, using every opportunity, for example, to organize events, give interviews to media, attend public forums as speakers, etc.

C. Characteristics and Personalities
What characteristics do these women politicians possess? They are mostly confident, determined, and passionate about their choices, even if these may be uncharted paths. They do not give up easily—many of them have actually experienced failure and rejection, but persevered. While they acknowledge that they are outnumbered, they do not think of themselves as inferior to their male counterparts. In fact, some have to deliberately remind their counterparts of their differences by wearing skirts, or pinning a big rose on their suit, so recounted Nieves Confesor. Women politicians are also good communicators and good listeners, and are present to the people they are speaking, despite their busy schedules. For example, in Japan, Yuriko Koike had this refreshing outlook: she discarded the notion that as a woman, she faced gender discrimination from her male counterparts. To her, gender difference is not a concern because all politicians, including men, face obstacles; so, she sees every obstacle as a challenge, which she will tackle along the way.

All candidates interviewed were enthusiastic and motivated in their political career. They experienced a strong sense of fulfillment from their achievement, as they believed they were in a position to effect positive changes in society. All of them recognized the importance of making a difference as a woman, even though they may not be active in the women’s movement, or may not have identified themselves as feminists. A significant number of women politicians were first elected only in their 40s or 50s, except for a few who started in their 30s. Almost all of them have a university degree, except for a few who were in university but did not graduate because of their commitment to start a family.

The Challenges Women Politicians Face in Politics

A. General Perceptions about Politics
Most women have not been “attuned” to politics, and most have never thought of politics as a viable career option. There is also a continuum of definitions for politics. For most, politics means joining a political party, campaigning, or running for elections. For many feminists, politics is defined in a broader sense, including being active in a women’s movement, or joining a rally. According to them, it is more effective to work from outside the system, either in NGOs, academe or civil society. Many perceive that by being part of the political system, one will be corrupted, not just in the monetary sense, but also in terms of principles, just so to stay in power. Most importantly, they do not believe in the effectiveness of the current political system. Even some of those interested in politics felt that they may not be qualified as they have little access and exposure to political networks. Even though this perception applies to both genders, this affects women more as there is a lack of representation in decision-making positions. As a result, many “women leaders” probably end up as leaders in the civil movement, with little interest to run for election.
B. Socio-Cultural Expectations for Women

In the Philippines, the perception of a woman’s role as a mother overpowers that of her role as politician. Many women politicians are often asked, “What about your kids?” “Where is your husband?”. As highlighted by Carolyn Sobritchea, “Marriage is still viewed as the destiny of women regardless of educational attainments. The definition of woman is still interchangeable with her role as wife and mother, and her major concern is still the management of household affairs or family’s needs and the organization of the family’s economic, spiritual, and physical life”. While some women politicians receive support from their spouse or family, in my interviews with the children of women politicians, a number showed their resentment toward their mothers because of the absence of the “latter” from their daily lives.

Aya Kamikawa, who lived her early adult life as a man and later as a woman, comments that the public has different expectations of women and men. While manliness is highly perceived as signifying “competence” in man, women who have their own opinions would be regarded as “too strong”, “selfish” or “aggressive”. When I interviewed a male voter about his preference for women politicians, he said he prefers them to manifest feminine style leadership, adding that he perceived those with an aggressive style as being masculine.

Masculine perception of a woman’s physical appearance also affects the choice of attires and physical outlook of women politicians. There have been occasions when a statement like “She is like a man” or “She behaves like a man” would be directed at women politicians as a neutral statement, a negative remark, or a positive affirmation. In fact, physical appearance and the manner of dressing contribute to image building for women politicians. In Japan, even though androgynous, feminine, or professional attires are acceptable for women politicians, these have implications on their public image. For example, when Yuriko Koike became the first minister of the ministry of defense, she was caught in a dilemma on the appropriate attire to use while carrying out her duty during a military inspection. In contrast, Nieves Confesor deliberately wore accessories or a huge flower on her suit to remind her colleagues that she is a woman. In general, feminine outfits and traditional costumes are preferable for women politicians in the Philippines, and it is, in fact, compulsory for them to be in traditional costumes during official ceremonies.

C. Religious Influences on Women’s Participation in Politics

In the Philippines, religions play a determinant role in politics. The Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country with about 80 percent of the population being Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholic Church is, in fact, very much involved in state politics. While the Church groups are not against Christian women’s participation in politics, the hierarchy within the Church is still male-leadership oriented. Obviously, the Church may not support issues that are deemed to be in conflict with Church positions, for example, the RH Bill, which seemingly implies that women have the right to undergo abortion. On the other hand, the influence of Islam/Muslim in the Mindanao area, which is also referred to as the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), appears strong. A Muslim religious leader who sits in the Commission of Election in the Philippines commented that when someone has to choose between two candidates of equal strength, that person should choose the male as leader—this stands despite the fact that there are many Muslim women leaders in Mindanao, and the Philippines itself has already had two women presidents.

D. Male Domination within the Political World

In general, male domination of political parties remains notorious, so women merely assume supportive roles rather than high decision-making positions. When women are appointed to the cabinet, they are usually confined to portfolios, which are related to family, education, or social welfare.

In both countries, the experiences of women in politics at the national and local levels were vastly different. In Japan, for example, most women politicians commented that male-oriented norms and male-dominated structures within a political party could be demoralizing for them.

In the Philippines, on the other hand, some decisions were made during golf sessions or social functions so that women politicians were expected to accommodate out-of-office hour’s activities or to socialize with their male counterparts. For instance, Nieves Confesor claimed that she was made to “run with the boys”, until she got to a point where she demanded “No, let us do this during work, Monday morning, and let me, as a woman, attend to my personal things on weekend”.

The Work of the 2010/2011 API Fellows
E. The Negative Implications of the Electoral System

This research found out that the single seat system whereby only one candidate is selected for a particular constituency has a determinant impact on women candidates in an election. The system operates like an invisible filter that favors male candidates over female ones because of the public perception that men are the “natural leaders”. Feminist researchers generally agreed that “A Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system is more favorable to the representation of women than the single-member constituency system”. (Dahleup 2010).

Both Japan and the Philippines have incorporated the proportional representative system, but most of the constituencies in Japan still use the single seat system. Even though the party list system in the Philippines is supposed to protect the interest of minority groups including women, in recent years this system has been used by a few well-established male politicians such as Mikey Arroyo, Gloria Arroyo’s son, to gain seats for himself and some party mates. Mikey Arroyo indeed used the party list system to avoid having to run against his mother, and to still gain a seat for himself with his new NGO or party.

Certainly, the high election deposit fees were also cited as a challenge to some women politicians, especially as this cost may not be recovered after election, unless the woman candidate will have managed to receive a certain percentage of votes. The fees pose a barrier to entry, especially to those who lack the financial means to mount a campaign.

F. Media Strategies: What Gets to the News?

Media plays an important role in politics, as it is the source of information for the public to decide whom to vote. However, media portrayals of women are always of the stereotype variety. Within this context, media coverage of women politicians is also skewed towards certain other stereotypes, e.g., women politicians tend to get coverage based on personal news rather than their personal views on policy matters.

Still, media exposure and personal fame are influential factors in women’s entry into politics. Many women politicians are invited by the male-oriented political parties to join them because of these women’s high celebrity status. It has been widely recognized that some women politicians are former TV celebrities, actresses, or even Olympic gold medalists. This tendency is closely linked to the “celebrity-centric” media, which play on the fame of these personalities more than their political ideology or contribution. While this “celebrity” factor is not limited to females, the capability of women as politicians is doubted more often than that of their male counterparts. Therefore, women politicians need to be able to utilize media to their advantage.

In Japan, many of the women politicians are authors of books and maintain blogs to share their opinions, schedule and activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Politics Is Gendered

Politics in itself is “gendered”. Each gendered person is situated within his or her specific living environment, socio-cultural context, and a variety of social networks. Gender determines one’s level of access to information, resources, and opportunity for power. For example, girls who lack role models in politics will be less likely to aspire to be a political leader compared to boys.

Despite social changes that enable women access to public spheres in education, employment, technology, and science, the perception that women are confined to either their household or gendered social circles still holds true. According to Rashidah Ramli (2005), “Power tends to be associated with the public sphere of existence... Thus, in order to maintain power, especially in a male dominated system, the power structures can choose to make women invisible”. In the face of the “big boys club” in politics, women could either “cross over” to the boys’ network, or start their own network until it is substantial enough to demand inclusivity in politics.

While women politicians are often being asked about how they manage between being mothers and wives, male politicians are hardly ever asked about their roles as fathers and husbands. We are also tricked by our biases if we tend to question the credibility of women politicians who have made it due to kinship politics, or their celebrity status, but fail to apply the same question to discredit male politicians. In fact, male politicians who use the same routes are praised for being resourceful and influential in exercising their power. For our part, we should start educating the
younger generations that both leadership and politics are as well the rights of women, rather than merely reinforcing these gender stereotypes.

Is Affirmative Action a Solution?
The question on how to increase women’s participation in politics has been debated on at the international level in the UN World Conferences on Women since three decades back. While affirmative action has been introduced as a workable solution to increase women’s participation in politics, arguments that substantive representation is not guaranteed by affirmative action have been raised, because women can be integrated into the male-dominated political system as a form of “tokenism”.

However, it is important to recognize that affirmative action has been put forward to address the symptom of gender imbalance in leadership positions by trying to ensure the presence of 30 percent or more women in all levels of decision-making. It is hoped that this minimum 30 percent will form a critical mass that will effect change in the existing power structure, and in the male-dominated political culture, thus allowing greater opportunity for gender equality to be established. The gender quota should be implemented as an integrative strategy, together with gender equality policies and the existence of a supportive network, in order for women candidates to contest and win elections.

Democratization and Feminist Political Networks
If we treat politics as a powerhouse, we need to democratize the current power structure or the existing political system to enable the distribution of power to women. Despite the current political milestone that has been achieved by women politicians in Japan, in the 2009 JAC (Japan Accountability Caucus) NGO Joint Report, the government of Japan was condemned for failing to enact effective public policies to increase women’s substantive participation in politics.

Instead of waiting and hoping for the current political system to align itself, it is crucial to have feminist political networks that will lobby the government to bring about greater political participation of women, and representation for feminist politics at the estate level, while at the same time providing effective support to women politicians to contest and win elections. Here, I apply the broader definition of the term “feminist” as referring simply to “someone who is aware of the subordinate social position of women in his/her society and attempts to do something to reduce gender inequity”. The cases of SNC and AFER in Japan and Akbayan in the Philippines are clear examples of efforts initiated from the bottom up.

Instead of seeing the current situation of gender imbalance as “disempowering”, we could view this situation as an important yet strategic historical juncture for forming a feminist political representative network. This network would facilitate, recruit, or provide support to women’s entry in national politics, and push for greater electoral reform. It would likewise push for the inclusion of a gender sensitization strategy in voters’ education.

Towards implementing these changes, it is not enough to merely increase the quantity of women taking part in politics; just as essential is improving the quality of such political participation. Therefore, it is important for the younger generation of women to be inspired to take part in national politics for social change. With these in mind, the documentary film was made to capture the journeys of various women politicians and the forces behind their success, as case studies for future generations.

Acknowledgement
I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to everyone who has helped me in this project, right from the application for the fellowship, up until the submission of this report. Apart from getting assistance from the host organizations, I also received personal support from many others. Allow me, therefore, to express my sincere thanks to those who helped me in the process of researching and interviewing for the documentary, and, ultimately, in its production.

NOTES
Peaceland started as an NGO with the aim to promote world peace, whereby a boat was chartered to bring students abroad for visits, for them to interact, exchange views and knowledge with the locals of each country. It has evolved into a business operation offering round-the-world trips.

Changed later to Social Democratic Party (SDP).

Diet: The Parliament of Japan

APPENDIX

Number of women in Parliament (http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif310711.htm)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Lower or Single House</th>
<th>Women % W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>9,208 80</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>6,207 65</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Laos People’s Democratic Republic</td>
<td>4,201 131</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>5,201 99</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>5,201 90</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>5,201 280</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>5,201 480</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>5,201 222</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures correspond to the number of seats currently filled in Parliament

The rankings do not reflect the actual world rankings because there could actually be more than one country sharing one particular rank within this list.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


