We Have Come This Far. Now, What Is Next?

Gary N. McLean

According to the United Nations (Worldometers, n.d.), there are 48 countries and 3 others/dependencies (Taiwan, Macau, Hong Kong), 10 of which are included in this book. This is an unfortunate necessity given the page limitations of this book. The nine countries and one in the other category come from the top half based on population. Three of the UN's subregions (Central, Southern, and Western Asia) were not included. Many of these countries are commonly referred to as the Middle East. Future books in this series, covering the Middle East and Central Asia, are currently in the proposal stage.

In this chapter, the concluding chapter of this book, I compare these ten Asian countries and region, looking at their convergences and divergences. I also, briefly, look at how these countries and region compare with western literature, which contains the bulk of the research on women in leadership, focusing primarily on the USA and the UK. I then offer my vision of what the future might look like for women in leadership and finish with a proposed research agenda.

G.N. McLean (✉)
McLean Global Consulting, Inc., St. Paul, MN, USA
e-mail: gary.mclean@mcleanglobal.com

Convergences

It was surprising to me that there was so much commonality across countries that have such different religious foundations, languages, cultures, traditions, rituals, and age demographics. Yet, we found that in all of the countries included in this book:

- Women have the primary responsibilities for childcare, eldercare, and homecare.
- Men seldom participate in these tasks, and, if they do, it is to a much lower extent.
- Boy babies are preferred to girls.
- If the family has limited resources, it is boys who receive education.
- Men are seen as primary breadwinners.
- Women's work is often seen as secondary and supportive, not primary.
- Some women who wanted to progress in leadership needed to remain single and without children.
- Only a few women have been able to rise to senior leadership positions, whether in companies, government agencies, politics, the community, or NGOs (non-government organizations).
- Some of those leaders succeeded through the support of their husbands or fathers.
- Religion and tradition are often the source of discrimination against women.
- Women are more likely to be in leadership roles in multinational organizations.
- No country is homogeneous in the way in which women are treated; regional differences exist within each country, often based on urban and rural differences.

One could well argue that there is no reason to see Asia as a unified region, and I would be one of those to make such an argument. In spite of such differences, however, as I have observed in this brief section, there are many, many similarities that provide a united view of the opportunities that women have for leadership across Asia.

Divergences

In spite of these many similarities, we did find some differences among the countries:

- While the influences appear to be similar, the religious drivers are quite different, including Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, with some influence of Christianity.
- In spite of the similarities in cultures and practices, the outcomes are very different, with women, for example, being a major influence in entrepreneurship in Myanmar and women, generally, having much more success in leadership in Indonesia.
- The extent to which the west has influenced practices in business varies widely, with Korea being heavily influenced by the USA; India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Myanmar being significantly influenced by the UK; Indonesia by the Dutch; and Vietnam by the French (as well as by the Chinese).
- The extent to which girls and young women receive education varies across countries, also influencing literacy rates.
- The extent to which women have succeeded in achieving political influence also varies, though in no country or region are they equal to men in the number achieving such roles.
- The extent to which English is spoken widely also varies, influencing, to some degree, the extent to which multinational (or transnational) corporations are active within each country.

In spite of these differences, which I would consider to be rather minor, the similarities (convergences) seem to outweigh the differences (divergences).

Comparison with Western Countries

During the winter holidays of 2016, while in St. Paul visiting our family, we attended the Mill City Museum in Minneapolis. Minneapolis was built along the Mississippi River beside the St. Anthony Falls. There were two benefits to this location: there was easy transportation for the timber from

the rich forests of northern Minnesota, and there was plentiful hydropower to run the saws to cut the lumber. Later, timber sawing was replaced by flour milling. The museum was built on the site of the last active flour mill in Minneapolis driven by hydropower. While in the museum, we watched videos talking about the *girls* (yes, that's how women were referred to in those days) who were key to running the mill during the Second World War. They talked about how they had to give up their jobs to the men when they returned from the war. Some were kept on to do the packing, but they had to give up their jobs when they got married or after giving birth. My 13-year-old granddaughter looked at me and asked incredulously, "Really, Grandpa? NO WAY!!" It was hard for her to believe these statements that we have seen are common across the countries and region included in this book. But the reality is that the rest of the world was, not too long ago, in the same place as the women in the countries and region included in this book.

In the World Economic Forum (2015, 2016), cited by almost every author in this book, the top five positions (of the 145 countries included in the index) are occupied by countries from Scandinavia in 2015, with Iceland dropping to sixth place in 2016. Surprisingly, Rwanda ranked 6th in 2015, rising to 5th in 2016, and an Asian country, the Philippines, ranked 7th in both years. Countries typically thought of when considering leadership research ranked considerably lower and dropped in 2016: UK (18th to 20th), USA (28th to 45th), and Canada (30th to 35th). As a result, there is still much conversation in the literature about difficulties faced by women who are trying to break through the glass ceiling (Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012). In fact, the most recent data (Zaiya, 2016) show that the number of women in the CEO position in the *Fortune 500* companies has dropped to 21 from 24 in 2015, or only 4%. Authors in this book have been bemoaning the number of women in senior management positions in their countries, yet a country that ranks 28th in the world has a miserly 4% of positions – definitely not something of which to be proud.

Many of the authors of the chapters made reference to national religions or religious beliefs to explain how women are perceived to be inferior to men, whether that religion is Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, or Islam. The USA is usually perceived as a Christian nation, though it is becoming much more diverse. And the message from Christianity is ambiguous. The Apostle Paul is attributed as writing, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says" (1 Corinthians 14:34).

But he is also purported to have written, "There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). The Bible is full of such apparent contradictions, but that should not be surprising as there are many authors of Biblical sources, and there is no certainty about the authorship of almost any of the Bible. Further, the Bible, as with almost all of the sacred writings of the world religions, was written thousands of years ago in a cultural context that was very different from our current context. Finding culturally appropriate canonized sacred writing is almost impossible. We should not be surprised, then, to find that such sacred writings do not speak to today's culture without carrying with it the biases and stereotypes from cultures very different from today's.

My Vision

Sadly, all of the religious books of the world's major religions convey the same message. The creation stories of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions all teach the same message – that women were created to be supporters of men. Adam (man) needed a helpmate so God created Eve (woman). And remember who is blamed for the fall of humanity; of course, it was Eve. And throughout the religious books of all major religions, the *cultural* message is conveyed that women are to serve men. As a Christian minister, there is no way that I believe that this is what the universe (or a higher power) intended or intends. I believe that we were all created equal, as partners.

My vision is simple; men and women will be given the same opportunities for training and development. They will be given equal opportunities for mentoring and promotion. They will receive equal pay for equal work. Men and women will be offered paternity and maternity leave to allow them a period of time for at-home childcare for the first few weeks of the new baby's life. Personal leaves will be available to both genders for elder-care and for addressing issues related to a child's well-being, such as illness, medical visits, and school-related activities. Both genders will have available on-site government- or company-sponsored daycare. Women will have easy access to on-site nursing facilities. Both genders, in other words, will have everything made available, equally, to allow them to take on the dual responsibilities of the job and of the family. Companies will no longer want to discriminate, as they currently do, assuming that women will carry the burden of childcare and eldercare, as both genders will have equal access to whatever is needed to care for the family.

The point of sharing this vision is to offer hope to the sometimes pessimistic messages of our authors who see thousands of years of the subservience of women to men and find it difficult to find a promising future of gender equality in their countries or region. And, while those in what is colloquially referred to as the west have come a long way, and we have, we still have a long way to go for full gender equality, as well. When we proposed (McLean & McLean, 2001, p. 322), in our definition of HRD, that it was of benefit "ultimately, to all humanity," we were accused of being overly optimistic. I prefer to believe, however, that we were (and are) full of hope, and, as the saying goes, "without hope, we have nothing" (source unknown).

A Proposed Research Agenda

Throughout this book, the authors have proposed two or three suggestions for research agendas. In this section of the concluding chapter, I am offering a brainstormed list that I made as I thought about this book and this chapter while returning from a teaching assignment in Mexico. As such, it is unreferenced (all of the ideas have accumulated during almost fifty years of thinking about this topic) and presented briefly so as not overly to influence the direction of the research. As such, it is presented in bulleted format and without a priority order.

- Mentoring continues to be a popular approach to leadership development. Men and women mentors may have different benefits to offer a woman on the leadership journey. What benefits are available from each gender? Is age/generation of either partner a factor? What aspects of leadership development are most likely to be served by mentoring? Can partnering of equals, or peer mentoring, across both genders, be useful in leadership development?
- Many of the authors talked about the importance of mentoring, but mentoring in the traditional sense may soon be obsolete. In all aspects of our lives, social media are replacing more traditional approaches. How do women aspiring to leadership in Asia access social media for networking, mentoring, information, and other ways to support their journey to leadership?
- Almost every author talked about the importance of family culture in influencing women in seeking a leadership position. But no author

talked about what caused the culture of one family to be different from the culture of another family within the same national culture. Why are some families supportive of a daughter seeking a leadership position while others are not?

- I was surprised to see how quickly Indonesian women seem to have made progress in comparison with other leading economic powers like India and China. What are the factors that influence how quickly change takes place related to gender equality? What aspects of gender equality take longer, and which a shorter time? How long does it take for such changes to become embedded in the culture?

- In many of the countries and region reviewed, the drive to leadership begins with the individual woman, supported by family and organization. But not much was said about men who are colleagues and potential peers and even subordinates. What will it take to change the mindset of men in the workplace to accept women in leadership roles? Who has the responsibility for bringing men to this level of acceptance? What is the experience like for men in Asia to have a woman as a boss? As women need partners to move into leadership positions, what are the costs and benefits of partnering with women to help them move into leadership positions for both men and women?

- Many of the authors talked about the political scene. While in some countries and region women are making more progress in political arenas than in some other arenas, progress is still not at a point of gender equality. What will it take to encourage women to run for office? What are the characteristics of women who run successfully for political office? What will it take to convince the electorate to vote for women to political office? What impact have elected women had on changing the culture of politics in their country?

- And, once elected, in what areas are women most successful in influencing decisions? Even if numbers become equal, that does not assume that women have achieved gender equality. On what issues do women speak up and not speak up and why? What changes in the political system are needed for women to have equal influence in the political systems?

- I have long argued that women's issues are also men's issues. Men benefit when women benefit in so many ways. Yet many men resist changes in gender roles. Why? What are the benefits that men and women see for their own gender as well as the opposite gender from achieving gender equality? What arguments are most

likely to convince each gender of benefits exceeding costs for gender equality?

- There is considerable evidence for the benefit of early childhood education influencing how adults view gender roles (e.g., Aina & Cameron, 2011; UNESCO, 2011). Yet, the field of human resource development (HRD) does not typically look at early childhood as it considers the development of adults in the workplace. This situation needs to change, probably requiring us to get more involved in interdisciplinary research to focus more on early childhood education.

- What role do the media (TV, movies, toys, games, videogames) play in helping or hurting girls in setting their sights on leadership, beginning in elementary and secondary schools? My wife and I were committed to giving equal opportunities to our children, regardless of gender. When our kids were still preschoolers, we overheard our first two children quarreling in the living room over who would be doctor and who would be nurse in their make-believe hospital. Our son said, "You have to be the nurse because you're a girl. I'll be the doctor because I'm a boy." We couldn't believe it. When we discussed this conversation with them, they immediately pointed to *Sesame Street*, which, at the time, had still not figured out that their gendering was creating stereotypes in children. So, what message is the media in various geographies sending about who can be leaders?

- When we move into the elementary and secondary schools, we need to look at the factors there that encourage or deter girls in their quest for leadership. What stereotypes do teachers have? What are their beliefs about gender and leadership? What do textbooks convey about leadership and gender? One of my early research articles (McLean, Kleven, & McLean, 1978) focused on the pictures and language used in textbooks in my field at the time of business education. They were clearly stereotyped. Whether this article was an influence or not, I do not know, but shortly thereafter the textbooks moved toward equal genders in all roles. Similar studies in all fields of study are needed to identify those books that are telling girls that they cannot succeed in leadership.

- And, given the important role that schools play in developing gender identity, what are ministries of education, departments of teacher education, professional teachers and curriculum organizations,

accreditation associations, and other influential bodies doing to eliminate gender stereotyping in school curricula?

- Storytelling can be a powerful tool for understanding and for creating change, whether the stories relate to organizational issues (Hansen & Kahnweiler, 1993; Tyler, 2007) or to personal stories through autoethnography (Grenier & Collins, 2016). As an example of the latter, I had often heard how women were invisible and inaudible when they made suggestions around a table of men, but I never really understood until the following experience. Our youngest daughter was in Brownies, the Girl Scout program for girls in grades 1–3, and she had wonderful leaders. However, when she moved to 4th grade (the Juniors stage of Girl Scouts), her leaders decided to stay with Brownies for their younger daughters. Because my wife had a previous commitment, I attended the meeting of parents at the school (the sponsoring agency) to decide what would be done about leadership. I was one of only three men in a room with over 200 women. At our troop table, we went around the table, and each mother (of 12) indicated that there was a reason why they couldn't be a leader. When it got to me, I suggested that, with my flexible schedule, I could probably do it. There was no reaction, and one of the women suggested that we might be able to merge with another troop. She went to talk with them, but they were already at their maximum. She came back, long-faced, saying, "We will probably have to give up the troop." Again, I said that I could make myself available. No reaction. Finally, all of the troops had made their leadership decisions except ours. The lead person came to our table and asked us what our problem was. One mother said that we had no leader, so we would probably have to shut down the troop. Again, I spoke up, "I'm willing to do it!" This time, I was heard. The lead person asked, "So, what's the problem?" There was a chorus of explanations: "A man can't be a Girl Scout leader"; "Will our girls be safe with a man as leader?" and so on. We talked out all of the concerns, and I ended up being a Girl Scout leader for three years, and we had a wonderful time. The girls experienced things that none of the other troops were experiencing, like flying a flight simulator at Delta Airlines (a friend was a pilot trainer), taking a bike apart and putting it back together, and earning Super Troop each year before the year was half over. Most of the girls came from split families, so I became a surrogate father, which was great for the

girls. Many still contact me and tell me how that experience changed their lives! Now, isn't that a powerful story? From a research agenda perspective, how can stories be used to influence women toward leadership or to help men accept women in leadership roles? Why is storytelling not used more frequently to bring about the changes discussed in this book?

- As has been pointed out in almost every chapter, men have invisible privilege. They wear it in a backpack hidden from view. But tens of thousands of years of privilege is not easy to unload. So, the research questions arising from this include: What are the invisible privileges that men have? What are the cultural components that allow these privileges to remain packed and out of sight? When men have been able to unpack them (and some few men have succeeded in doing this), what factors in the environment have allowed this to happen? What are the life experiences of those men and the women with whom they are in relationship?

- It has been a long time since we have realized that language influences our gender patterns. In English, inclusive language has almost become the norm. As a result, we now talk about flight attendants rather than stewardesses, servers rather than waiters and waitresses, and firefighters rather than firemen. We use the plural (they/them/their) whenever possible, rather than "he" for the generic. What factors in other languages continue to convey gender roles that might inhibit women's advancement? What are the characteristics of those who use inclusive language compared with those who do not? Why do some people resist the use of inclusive language? As another form of communication, what are the cultural rituals, traditions, religious practices, festivals, and so on that continue to influence how genders are viewed?

- From an HRD perspective, we cannot leave out the possible impact of training, adult education, and development, for both genders. Each of these approaches has benefit for women as they journey up the ladder in various leadership positions. From a research perspective, what can be expected from each of these three approaches for women? Men may need to experience these approaches to gain their buy-in. What approaches are most effective in helping men to understand how they benefit from gender equality? Can attitudes be affected through mandatory training? What objectives are most accomplished through each of the three approaches?

- Another popular approach in HRD is dialogue as a means of managing conflict. As conflict is often encountered by women who are attempting to climb the career ladder, what benefits can be expected from the use of dialogue? How well is dialogue accepted by both genders?
- Finally, some measure may be needed beside numbers to determine progress in overcoming gender discrimination and gender stereotyping. What factors should be included in a gender audit to determine such progress? Can a reliable and valid instrument be created within each cultural context to be used in doing a gender audit?

While this is a long list, I could easily add many more suggestions. In spite of all of the research that has been conducted on leadership, I do not believe that we yet have a good sense of leadership based on research. This is especially true from an indigenous perspective. Sadly, there is still too much reliance on western research. This is not just a reluctance to do indigenous research, but also a reluctance on the part of reviewers and editors to publish such literature in the international arena. We all have a responsibility for this situation and for changing it.

Conclusion

I was part of the women's lib movement in the 1960s in the USA and have been actively pushing for gender equality since then, in my politics, in my scholarship, and in my personal life. I have come a long way since those days and recognize that I still have progress to make. And I have seen the US society make huge progress since then, in spite of occasional setbacks. But society, too, has lots of work yet to do before gender equality becomes reality. We seem to take two steps forward and one step backward. But I do not get discouraged. One of the benefits of aging is that I can look back over many decades and see gradual change. We clearly have much more gender equality today than we had sixty years ago.

I carry this same optimism when I view the issue of gender equality in Asian countries. Every chapter in this book (and, thus, in every one of these ten countries and region) is moving toward gender equality. Some have further to go than others, but none is excluded from some progress. The readers of this book can join with the authors of the book chapters in continuing to exert political pressure, share in the scholarship called for in the research agenda proposed in this book,

and continue to challenge your personal life journey toward gender equality. As with the famous advertising campaign of the 1960s (sadly, advertising the right of women to smoke), we cannot stop with celebrating, "You've come a long way, baby!" We need to continue to remind ourselves and our stakeholders, "We've got a long way to go yet, everyone!"

REFERENCES

Aina, O. E., & Cameron, P. A. (2011). Why does gender matter? Counteracting stereotypes with young children. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, *39*(3), 11–19.

Grenier, R. S., & Collins, J. C. (2016). "Man, have I got a story for you" A facilitated autoethnography as a potential research methodology in human resource development. *Human Resource Development Review*, *15*(3), 359–376. doi: 10.1177/1534484316656658.

Hansen, C. D., & Kahnweiler, W. J. (1993). Storytelling: An instrument for understanding the dynamics of corporate relationships. *Human Relations*, *46*(12), 1391–1410. doi: 10.1177/001872679304601202.

McLean, G. N., Kleven, B. D., & McLean, L. H. (1978, February). Sexism in general business texts. *Journal of Business Education*, 215–7.

McLean, G. N., & McLean, L. (2001). If we can't define HRD in one country, how can we define it in an international context? *Human Resource Development International*, *4*(3), 313–326. doi: 10.1080/13678860110059339.

Smith, P., Caputi, P., & Crittenden, N. (2012). How are women's glass ceiling beliefs related to career success? *Career Development International*, *17*(5), 458–474. doi: 10.1108/13620431211269702.

Tyler, J. A. (2007). Incorporating storytelling into practice: How HRD practitioners foster strategic storytelling. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, *18*(4), 559–587. doi: 10.1002/hrdq.1219.

UNESCO. (2011). *Strong foundations for gender equality in early childhood care and education—Advocacy brief*. Bangkok, TH: Author.

World Economic Forum. (2015). *The global gender gap report 2015*. Retrieved from http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/.

World Economic Forum. (2016). *The global gender gap report 2016*. Retrieved from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR16/WEF_Global_Gender_Gap_Report_2016.pdf.

Worldometers. (n.d.). Countries in Asia. Retrieved from www.worldometers.info/geography/how-many-countries-in-asia/.

Zaiya, V. (2016, June 6). The percentage of female CEOs in the Fortune 500 crops to 4%. *Fortune*. Retrieved from fortune.com/2016/06/06/women-ceos-fortune-500-2016/.

Gary N. McLean is president of McLean Global Consulting, Inc., a family business. As an OD practitioner, he works extensively globally. His most recent academic assignment was in the Graduate School of Management in the International Islamic University of Malaysia as "Renowned Scholar." He has worked with universities throughout Asia and has consulted and presented workshops and delivered keynotes there. He teaches regularly in the Ph.D. program in HRD at NIDA in Thailand. Previously, he was a Senior Professor and Executive Director of International HRD at Texas A&M University. He is professor emeritus and co-founder of the HRD program at the University of Minnesota. He served as President of the Academy of Human Resource Development and the International Management Development Association. His research interests focus on organization development and national and international HRD. He has received many recognitions including induction into two halls of fame (Home address: 200 Laguna Villa Blvd., Unit C12, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32250).