

Korean Women in Leadership in an Asian Context

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Korean women's leadership is situated in the wider context of Asia. From centuries of shared cultural and historical influences, women across Asia face similar challenges and opportunities in leadership. Yet, Korea's particular culture and history has shaped a uniquely Korean context for women leaders.

Asia is a geographically vast, and a culturally and economically diverse region. Yet, it has long been linked by trade, which fostered cultural, intellectual, and religious exchanges (Murphey, 2006). This enabled the spread of Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam across Asia (Murphey, 2006). Although each culture adopted these religious philosophies in its own way, these cultural threads tied the region together. Most of Asia was gradually colonized by Western powers and, later, Japan, but the end of World War II brought independence to Asia's many colonies (Murphey, 2006). Japan's rapid industrialization was echoed in the postwar industrialization of Asia's four little dragons: South Korea (hereafter Korea), Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore (Steinbock, 2017).

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Modern Asia hosts countries spanning the full range of development, income levels, and governance systems (Ching, 1993; Cooke, 2014). Alongside Japan, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore, Korea is one of four high-income countries in Asia (World Economic Forum, 2016). Across Asia, a region with a history of valuing education, primary and secondary education are nearly universal for both boys and girls, but this has neither translated into equal employment or wages nearly anywhere in Asia (Asian Development Bank, 2016; MasterCard, 2016a), nor to a direct relationship between human resource development and women's empowerment and leadership (Tuminez, Duell, & Majid, 2012). For example, the 2016 Global Gender Gap Index ranked Korea 116th of 144, above only Bhutan, Timor-Leste, and Pakistan in Asia (World Economic Forum, 2016). Table 13.1 details the Gender Gap Index rankings and several other indicators for women's status in Asia.

The Global Gender Gap Index utilizes a variety of indicators to track women's economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. Korea's low rank reflects its relatively poor performance in political empowerment, wage equality, and workplace promotion records (World Economic Forum, 2016). At a labor force participation rate of 56%, Korean women work only slightly less than the regional average of 57% (World Economic Forum, 2016). Meanwhile, Korean women earn 55% of the amount paid to Korean men for the same work, lower than the regional average of 57% (World Economic Forum, 2016). Many of Korea's lower-income neighbors perform better on these metrics.

Although a few Asian nations have been led by women heads of state, women's representation in national parliaments remains low, averaging 19.4% across the region (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017). Only 17% of Korea's parliamentarians are women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017). Korea also has among the lowest rates of women business leaders, managers, and senior officials in Asia (World Economic Forum, 2016).

In this context, we explore the influences of traditional gender roles on women's leadership in Korea in an Asian context. We examine the status of Asian women leaders in the workplace and in governance. Next, we place Korean women's leadership in the context of institutional challenges and support across Asia. We close with an examination of attitudes towards changes about Asian women leaders and directions for the future.

Table 13.1 Metrics for women's status in Asia in 2015–2016

	<i>Global gender gap index ranking</i>	<i>Women labor force participation rate (%)</i>	<i>Women-to-men ratio of wages for similar work</i>	<i>Women-to-men ratio of leadership positions</i>	<i>Seats held by women in parliament (%)</i>
Bangladesh	72	45	0.54	0.06	20.3
Bhutan	121	60	0.78	0.20	8.3
Brunei Darussalam	103	54	0.79	0.51	9.1
Cambodia	112	78	0.76	0.22	18.5
China	99	70	0.65	0.20	24.2
India	87	28	0.57	–	11.6
Indonesia	88	53	0.68	0.24	19.8
Japan	111	66	0.66	0.13	13.1
Lao PDR	43	81	0.77	–	27.5
Malaysia	106	52	0.79	0.28	13.1
Maldives	115	59	–	0.15	5.9
Mongolia	58	59	0.74	0.61	17.1
Nepal	110	83	0.59	0.22	29.6
Pakistan	143	25	0.56	0.03	20.0
Philippines	7	52	0.80	0.87	29.1
Singapore	55	66	0.81	0.51	23.8
South Korea	116	56	0.52	0.12	17.0
Sri Lanka	100	33	0.69	0.33	5.8
Timor-Leste	125	28	–	0.17	38.5
Thailand	71	70	0.77	0.51	4.8
Vietnam	65	79	0.64	0.35	26.7

Note: Compiled from Inter-Parliamentary Union (2017) and World Economic Forum (2016)

GENDER ROLES IN ASIA

Traditional values across Asia place the primary roles of women as wives and mothers in varying degrees. This consequently raises hurdles for women entering the workplace and advancing to leadership positions, often while striving to maintain work–family balance (Rendon, 2011). In Korea and several neighboring East Asian countries, Confucianism is the root of many of these values (Tuminez et al., 2012). Similar values also exist across the rest of Asia that stem from other cultural and religious origins.

Confucianism and the Roles of Women

The historically Confucian regions of Asia include the Korean peninsula, China, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, and the island of Taiwan (Tuminez et al., 2012). Although Confucianism originated in China, Confucian values serve as a basis for contemporary Korean society more strongly than in any other Asian countries today. China's transition to communism and socialism moved away from Confucian values and established gender equality as a priority in the Chinese constitution—though full gender equality has yet to be realized (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015; Peus, Braun, & Knipfer, 2015). This shift away from Confucian gender roles is also occurring elsewhere in Asia (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015).

Traditional Confucian ideology holds normative beliefs of men's inherent dominance and women's subordination (Cooke, 2014; Tuminez et al., 2012). Women are expected to be nurturing, passive, ignorant, and deferent, while men are expected to be active, aggressive, and intellectual (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015; Resos, 2014). In Korea, this extends to a belief that women are naturally apolitical (Resos, 2014). Confucian gender roles also stipulate that women's primary role is to maintain their homes and raise children.

In a number of Asia's Confucian cultures, women are still expected to choose family over work, including Japan and Korea (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015; Süßmuth-Dyckerhoff, Wang, & Chen, 2012). Women who choose to work and have a family often struggle to fulfil their expected domestic roles (Peus et al., 2015). This is true even in Singapore, where work has begun to take priority over family (Peus et al., 2015).

Gender Roles and Religion in Asia

Gender roles in other parts of Asia are driven by other religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and even conservative Christianity, but many similar values have emerged. In India, where Hinduism and Islam are the major religions, women are expected to take care of the house, their children, and their in-laws (Peus et al., 2015; Süßmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). In Sri Lanka, where Buddhism is the religion of the majority, traditional values stipulate that women should be homemakers and caregivers, and working women's skills are valued less (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015). Thailand is historically a Buddhist country that has been

influenced by both Chinese and Indian values. This blend of values has led to beliefs that women are subservient to men and should focus on caring for their families (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015). Throughout Asia, traditional and religious values have fostered patriarchal societies where women tend to be valued less than men and are expected to care for the household, but modernization has generated more economic opportunities for working women. Nevertheless, shifting cultural norms in Asian urban areas have allowed for the emergence of career-oriented women and new policies for women in the workplace (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015; Tuminez et al., 2012).

ASIAN WOMEN LEADING IN THE WORKPLACE

Asian women are underutilized in the job market. A study by the Asian Development Bank (2011) found that 45% of working-age women in Asia were unemployed, compared with only 19% of men. Table 13.2 provides several metrics for women's economic participation in Asia.

Notably, women in developing economies, such as China, Thailand, and Vietnam, are more likely to be working—in either formal or informal sectors—than their counterparts in developed economies, such as Japan and Korea (MasterCard, 2016b). This is probably because economic necessity outweighs traditional values in developing economies (MasterCard, 2016b). Similarly, high costs of living in Singapore, a developed economy, have led to higher employment rates for women (MasterCard, 2016b). Nevertheless, the 2016 Gender Gap Report ranked Korea 15th of 21 Asian countries for women's economic participation, behind less developed countries such as the Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Thailand (World Economic Forum, 2016).

Korea, like other Asian developed countries, including Singapore and Japan, faces rapidly declining birth rates, which creates tension between the need for more workers and the need for more babies. For many young women, especially in Japan and Korea, this pressure leads them to choose between starting a family and pursuing their careers (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015; Süßmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). Indeed, nearly 30% of Korean's population lived in single-person households in 2016, a number that was on the rise (Jung, 2016). For those who do choose to raise a family, traditional values of childrearing remain strongly at play.

Table 13.2 Asian women's workforce participation in 2016

	<i>Labor force participation (% of women)</i>	<i>Labor force participation (women-to-men ratio of % employed)</i>	<i>Professional and technical workers (women-to-men ratio)</i>	<i>Ministerial staff (women-to-men ratio)</i>
Bangladesh	45	0.54	0.32	0.07
Bhutan	60	0.80	0.50	0.11
Brunei Darussalam	54	0.69	0.82	0.00
Cambodia	78	0.88	0.54	0.08
China	70	0.84	1.07	0.13
India	28	0.34	–	0.29
Indonesia	53	0.61	1.08	0.30
Japan	66	0.78	0.63	0.29
Lao PDR	81	1.03	–	0.12
Malaysia	52	0.65	0.80	0.06
Maldives	59	0.73	1.09	0.14
Mongolia	59	0.84	1.70	0.13
Nepal	83	0.94	0.43	0.16
Pakistan	25	0.29	0.28	0.00
Philippines	52	0.65	1.60	0.25
Singapore	66	0.80	0.91	0.06
South Korea	56	0.73	0.93	0.06
Sri Lanka	33	0.41	0.97	0.08
Timor-Leste	28	0.49	0.64	0.14
Thailand	70	0.81	1.27	0.04
Vietnam	79	0.92	1.17	0.10

Note: Compiled from World Economic Forum (2016)

Dropping Out from the Workforce

While the representation of women in junior-level positions is improving across Asia, the region suffers from a “leaking pipeline” (Tuminez et al., 2012, p. 8) in which women quit mid-career in order to take care of their families. A survey of women in Asia by Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff et al. (2012) found that 28% believed that the cultural norm of women's traditional role being in the home influenced many to most mid- and senior-level women to quit their jobs. Korea ranked the highest, with 47% of women agreeing with that statement.

Women may face pressure in the workplace or at home, or they may individually internalize the value of women taking care of the household. Many Korean companies have the longest working hours in the world, making it very difficult for working women to fulfil their household responsibilities (Cho, Kim, et al., 2015). As a result, many career-oriented Korean women have delayed having children or forgone marriage entirely in order to pursue their careers. In Japan, women are expected to quit their jobs after marriage or childbirth (Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). Despite a shared Confucian background, women in China and Singapore experience much less pressure to drop out of the workforce after marriage (Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). There, a combination of lessening importance of traditional gender values and availability of childcare has given women more flexibility to remain in the workforce.

Asian Women in Business Management

Women are also under-represented in leadership positions in Asia, as demonstrated in Table 13.3 (Cooke, 2014; Rendon, 2011).

As shown in Table 13.3, only the Philippines is close to achieving equal representation of women legislators, senior officials, and managers, thanks to its extensive institutional framework promoting gender equality (MacPhail, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2016). Korea and Japan rank near the bottom, while other less developed countries, such as Mongolia, Thailand, and Vietnam, have much higher ratios of women in leadership roles (World Economic Forum, 2016). Very few businesses in Asia are owned by women, as well. In 2011, only 1% of working women in Asia owned businesses with employees (Asian Development Bank, 2011). Korea's proportion of women business owners is roughly average for Asia (MasterCard, 2016a).

In Asia, women are more accepted in business leadership roles than in government, yet in 2011 only 7% of board members across Asia were women in (Rendon, 2011). In 2012, Korea was found to have among the lowest representation of women on boards in Asia: women comprised only 1% of board members (Heidrick & Struggles, 2013). Japan followed closely with only 2% (Heidrick & Struggles, 2013).

A lack of women CEOs is a common trend in Asia. Only 0.73% of 1,787 major Korean companies had a woman CEO in 2013 (Heidrick & Struggles, 2013). In both Korea and China, most women CEOs

Table 13.3 Ratio of Asian women to men in leadership roles in 2015–2016

	<i>Legislators, senior officials and managers</i>	<i>Business owners</i>	<i>Business leaders</i>
Bangladesh	0.06	0.35	0.06
Bhutan	0.20	–	–
Brunei Darussalam	0.51	–	–
Cambodia	0.22	–	–
China (Mainland)	0.20	0.41	0.33
Hong Kong	–	0.25	0.51
India	–	0.09	0.15
Indonesia	0.24	0.31	0.20
Japan	0.13	0.21	0.13
Malaysia	0.28	0.18	0.29
Maldives	0.15	–	–
Mongolia	0.61	–	–
Nepal	0.22	0.73	0.23
Pakistan	0.03	0.01	0.04
Philippines	0.87	0.31	0.91
Singapore	0.51	0.42	0.50
South Korea	0.12	0.30	0.13
Sri Lanka	0.33	0.14	0.32
Taiwan	–	0.24	0.24
Timor-Leste	0.17	–	–
Thailand	0.51	0.34	0.51
Vietnam	0.35	0.40	0.30

Note: Compiled from MasterCard (2016a) and World Economic Forum (2016)

either founded or inherited the company from men in their family, although this trend is decreasing today (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015).

Discriminatory hiring and promotion processes are also widespread across Asia (Peus et al., 2015). In Korea, as in other Confucian countries, the glass ceiling is maintained by the assumption that women are inferior to men (Cho, Kim, et al., 2015). Gender norms have also led Asian women to express less self-confidence, self-promotion, or ambition than men (Jalal, 2014). These self-limitations present a barrier to women's leadership. In addition, the traditional preference for sons in China, Korea, India, and other parts of Asia has produced a significantly larger population of young men than women, which fosters intense competition for leadership roles (Rendon, 2011). However, thanks to the 2005 abolition of a law (*Hojuje*) that established inheritance and household headship for

eldest sons as well as urbanization and physical mobility, Korea is beginning to reverse its preference for boys (Tuminez et al., 2012). For Korean women, the most prominent barrier to leadership is the glass ceiling, followed by work–life balance, and a lack of faith in the competence of women (Heidrick & Struggles, 2013).

ASIAN WOMEN LEADING IN GOVERNANCE

In 1960, Sirimavo Bandaranaike became prime minister of Sri Lanka after the assassination of her husband; she was the world's first woman who was not a monarch to become a national leader (Jalalzai & Krook, 2010). Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Mongolia, Indonesia, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Taiwan have also had at least one major woman political leader in recent years (Brînză, 2016; Jalalzai & Krook, 2010). See Table 13.4 for a breakdown of women political leaders in Asian countries.

Like Bandaranaike, many of the Asian women who rose to positions of national leadership entered politics only after their politician husbands or fathers were assassinated, imprisoned, or exiled (Brînză, 2016; Ching, 1993; Richter, 1991). In these cases, it was kinship and political dynasties rather than gender that mattered most (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015; Jalalzai & Krook, 2010; Rendon, 2011). The 11th president of South Korea, Park Geun-hye (2013–2017), was also the daughter of an assassinated former president. Although she became president over 33 years after the death of her father, many still argue that her election is the result of nostalgia for her father (Choe, 2013). With the notable exceptions of Pratibha Patil of India and Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan, nearly all of Asia's women that have served as major political leaders have been a part of a political dynasty in which their fathers, husbands, or brothers served in a leadership role prior to their appointment or election (Brînză, 2016; Jalalzai & Krook, 2010; Lewis, 2016).

Although the number of women elected to national governments has increased in recent years, women's representation still remains low across the region, as shown in Table 13.4 (Rendon, 2011; UNDP, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2016). The representation of women in Korea's national parliament (17%) is slightly lower than the regional average of 17.9% (Asian Development Bank, 2016). In legislatures at local level, women's participation has grown in East Asia but decreased in South Asia (UNDP, 2014). In South Asia, this may be occurring because it is feared that a woman's family honor may be compromised if she enters the public

Table 13.4 Women as major political leaders in Asia in 2014–2016

	<i>Years with women national leaders (of last 50 years)</i>	<i>Number of woman national leaders (last 50 years)</i>	<i>Seats held by women in national parliaments (%)</i>
Bangladesh	23	2	20.3
Bhutan	0	0	8.3
Brunei Darussalam	0	0	9.1
Cambodia	0	0	18.5
China	3	1	24.2
India	21	2	11.6
Indonesia	3	1	19.8
Japan	0	0	13.1
Lao PDR	0	0	27.5
Malaysia	0	0	13.1
Maldives	0	0	5.9
Mongolia	0	1 ^a	17.1
Myanmar	1	1 ^b	10.2
Nepal	1	1	29.6
North Korea	0	0	16.3
Pakistan	5	1	20.0
Philippines	16	2	29.1
Singapore	0	0	23.8
South Korea	4	1	17.0
Sri Lanka	13	2	5.8
Thailand	3	1	38.5
Timor-Leste	0	0	4.8
Vietnam	0	0	26.7

Note: Compiled from Cahoon (2016), Gurubacharya (2015), Inter-Parliamentary Union (2017), Lewis (2016), Szczepanski (2017), and World Economic Forum (2016).

^aNyam-Osoriyn Tuyaa served as acting prime minister in Mongolia for only one month (Lewis, 2016).

^bAung San Suu Kyi was the first State Councilor of Myanmar, which is roughly equivalent to prime minister (*Washington Post*, 2016).

sphere of politics, especially when she is not already part of the politically elite class (Richter, 1991). These particular cultural influences are absent in Korea and the rest of East Asia.

Since the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women, quotas have been a popular approach in Asia to guarantee women's participation in politics (Real, 2012). These quotas come in a number of forms, but countries with electoral quotas have an average of 22.6% women in parliament, compared with 8.2% in countries that do not (UNDP, 2014). Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia without electoral quotas, and its representation of women in parliament is the lowest in the region, as shown in Table 13.4.

Korea's quota regulates the percentage of women candidates (Real, 2012). Korea's Political Party Law was amended in 2000 to require that 30% of each political party's candidate list had to be women, a quota that was raised again in 2004 to 50% (Real, 2012). This successfully increased the percentage of women in parliament from 6% to 13% during the following election, yet it is surprisingly low given the number of women nominated in accordance with the quotas (Real, 2012). Elsewhere in Asia, some political parties have voluntary quotas for women (e.g., the Philippines, Thailand), national candidate quotas such as Korea's (e.g., Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, Timor-Leste), or reserved seats for women in the national legislature (e.g., Bangladesh, China, Pakistan) (International IDEA, Stockholm University, & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015).

In some cases, such as Timor-Leste and Singapore, quotas appear to have successfully boosted the number of women in the national legislature, but quotas alone may not be sufficient to increase the number of women in politics (Tan, 2016). Tan (2016) suggests that, as in the case of Korea, gender quotas are unlikely to succeed if the society lacks the political will to overcome patriarchal norms. In Asia, political dynasties still seem to be the best way for women to get involved in high-level politics, but the increased participation of women in local and national politics may indicate cultural change towards women's sustained participation in politics (UNDP, 2014).

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT

National and local institutions can provide support for women leaders, while their absence leaves challenges for aspiring women leaders to surmount. Here, we examine the support and challenges presented by the presence or absence of national laws for women, educational opportunities, domestic support, networking opportunities, and the availability of role models.

Legal Support for Women

Starting in around 1990, various governments in Asia established ministries or semi-governmental organizations to support women, including the Philippines, Malaysia, and Cambodia (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015). The Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI), a semi-governmental think-tank for gender equality, was founded in 1987 (KWDI, 2016). Indonesia's semi-governmental National Commission on Violence against Women fills a similar role of influencing national policy on women (Real, 2012).

While the KWDI began with a stronger feminist agenda, it has shifted to less controversial gender mainstreaming initiatives, which only sought to include assessments for gendered implications in policy decisions, in order to maintain government funding (Real, 2012). Likewise, Korea's Ministry of Gender Equality (2001) suffered a backlash against its progressive feminist stances and was restructured as the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2005, then downsized in 2008 (Real, 2012). Similarly, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Women's Affairs was realigned to add the focus of children, reinforcing women's role as mothers in the eyes of the government (Real, 2012). The Philippines Commission on Women stands out for its successful implementation of both gender mainstreaming programs and a wide variety of gender equality initiatives (MacPhail, 2015). Across Asia, the recent emergence of political conservatism in many countries has led to limited mandates and influence of women's institutions, leaving many to pursue only gender mainstreaming instead of initiatives for gender equality (Real, 2012).

From a legal standpoint, a number of Asia's national constitutions include clauses for women's rights, gender equality, or protection from discrimination, including China, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Indonesia (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015). As Real (2012) noted, the writing and revision of "constitutions that usually follow political transitions has provided women with the opportunity to incorporate principles on women's human rights into fundamental laws" (p. 2). Indeed, Korea's national constitution, established in 1948, following the country's democratic transition, states, "All citizens shall be equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic, social, or cultural life on account of sex, religion or social status" (Resos, 2014). While an important assertion of equality and freedom from discrimination for women, it is a smaller measure than offered in some other Asian constitutions. In developing countries that utilize multi-year development plans, such as Malaysia, improvements for women are sometimes included in those plans (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015). On the other hand, there have been cases, such as that of Sri Lanka, where women's groups and ministries were sidelined and unable to participate in the planning process (Real, 2012).

Nearly all Asian countries have passed legislation on violence against women and various other women-friendly policies (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015; Real, 2012). However, implementation of these laws and policies is often hindered by a lack of funding and resources, leaving many of

Asia's developing countries to rely on external donors for women's initiatives (Real, 2012). This does not seem to be an issue for Korea, however. Since its democratic transition, Korea has enacted several pro-women laws, including Equal Employment Act (1987), Act on Punishment of Sexual Crimes and Protection of Victims (1994), Women's Development Act (1995), and Gender Discrimination, Prevention and Relief Act (1999) (Real, 2012). In addition, Korea's Supreme Court abolished the legal basis for men's dominance over family and inheritance (*Hojuje*) in 2005, taking steps to overturn Korea's traditional preference for sons (Tuminez et al., 2012).

Affirmative action laws are also common across Asia. Countries including China, Japan, Korea, and Malaysia have enacted policies aimed at increasing the number of women in management positions in private firms (Cooke, 2014). These policies could take the form of suggested targets, such as in Korea and Japan, or hard quotas as utilized in Malaysia (Cooke, 2014; Süßmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). In addition, a number of Asian governments employ quotas for women employees or managers in the public sector, including China and Malaysia, which have successfully increased the number of women leaders in their governments (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015). Korea's affirmative action policies, adopted in the 2000s, set voluntary targets for women employees and managers in private firms, but the law had little power for enforcement and failed to achieve its desired results. Only 41% of companies voluntarily committed to achieving the targets during the first year (Cooke, 2014). Likewise, in 2013 the Japanese government set a target of 30% of women in management by 2020, but the target was reduced to 7% by the end of 2015 due to a lack of progress (Aoki, 2015).

Educational Opportunities

For most of Asia, access to primary and secondary education is not a barrier to women's advancement to leadership (Jalal, 2014). Some of the developing economies, such as India, Pakistan, and the Lao PDR, require further improvements in education for girls in order to foster women leaders (Rendon, 2011; Süßmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). However, even where women are better educated, educational achievement often fails to translate into increased employment, wages, or promotions for women in Asia (Asian Development Bank, 2014; Jalal, 2014; MasterCard, 2016a).

Childcare and Maternity Leave

Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff et al. (2012) found that the most common barrier for women entering leadership roles in Asia has been the double burden of work and family. This was followed by corporate cultures that require leaders and employees to be available for work at any time and a lack of public policies in support of families, such as childcare (Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). Korean women leaders interviewed by Cho, Kim, et al. (2015) echoed these sentiments; their definitions of success at work tended to include work–life balance and raising children successfully. All of the women with children stressed the importance of their role as mothers (Cho, Kim, et al., 2015). In Korea, a women’s success is often measured by the academic achievements of her children (Cho, Kim, et al., 2015). Human capital has been regarded as the nation’s most important resource in Korea, where few natural resources are available. This education fever, which puts heavy pressure on women—especially working mothers—is regarded as the key to Korea’s rapid growth and success after the Korean War in the early 1950s.

For Asian women who want to raise a family and advance into leadership positions in corporations where employees are expected to be married to their work, childcare and maternity leave are necessities. While China has relatively available and affordable childcare, both Korea and Japan lag behind (Cooke, 2014; Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). Unlike Japan and Korea, which have stricter immigration policies, the availability of foreign domestic help in Singapore has provided women with ample childcare (MasterCard, 2016b). In less developed Asian countries, where institutionalized childcare is uncommon, working women also rely on hired domestic help or family members (Richter, 1991). Similarly, the childrearing duties of women leaders in Korea who chose to put their careers ahead of their families are often fulfilled by other women, such as grandmothers and nannies, but rarely husbands (Cho, Kim, et al., 2015). In recent years, the Japanese and Korean governments have been pushing for measures to sustain women’s careers (Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). In Korea, these reforms began in the early 2000s and include financial support for childbirth, expanding maternity leave to 12 weeks, improved childcare systems, and incentives for companies to build childcare facilities and to offer paid childcare leave (Resos, 2014).

Networking

Korea's compulsory military service for men creates one networking challenge for women. While men build strong networks during their time in military service, which continue to play a strong role in the workplace, Korean women find it very difficult to replicate professional networks of that strength (Heidrick & Struggles, 2013). Heidrick and Struggles (2013) found that over 50% of women executives felt that they and their peers lacked the necessary networking opportunities to integrate into the existing networks built by male executives. Laos, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, and Vietnam also have some form of compulsory military service for men, so it is likely that women there experience similar networking challenges (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). North Korean conscription, on the other hand, recruits both men and women into its military, so North Korean women probably experience the same networking advantages from military service as men do (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017).

Another disadvantage for woman in Korea is a lack of networking opportunities after work. It is customary in Korean, Japanese, and Chinese workplaces to develop networks, hold in-depth discussions, and explore opportunities over long dinners or drinks after work (Meyer, 2015). However, married women are expected to return home quickly to take care of their families. Therefore, if working mothers choose to return home early, they are unable to participate fully in these informal, yet often more important, gatherings that could provide them with an invitation to join key in-groups.

Role Models

In Asia, a lack of women role models for aspiring women leaders also presents an institutional barrier to advancement in both business and politics (UNDP, 2014). While some women have successfully reached leadership roles on their own and inspired women who followed after them, in many other cases "women have not fostered success for other women to follow similar paths, partially because women's leading roles were given by their family backgrounds in some cases and not by their own leadership excellence" (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015, p. 424). In some countries, such as Thailand and the Philippines, top women managers are striving to mentor women in the leadership pipeline, but Korea still lacks many

women in senior positions that could serve that role. Nevertheless, the current generation of rising women leaders in Korea often see themselves as role models for junior women under them, perhaps because few of them had women as mentors themselves (Cho, Kim, et al., 2015).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Over the last few decades, the status of women's leadership in Korea and the rest of Asia has markedly improved. Since 2000, nearly all Asian nations have seen significant improvements in girls' education and women's representation in legislatures (Asian Development Bank, 2016). In particular, the Global Gender Gap report noted Korea's improvements in the area of women's political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2016). Although Korea and other Asian nations still have a long way to go to achieve true gender equality in the various areas of women's leadership, progress is being made. As in Korea, most of Asia's women's empowerment agencies and laws were established in the late 1980s and 1990s (Cho, McLean, et al., 2015). The first young women that graduated from high school and college under those policies are only now reaching places of seniority in their fields. This is especially true of societies with seniority-based promotion systems, such as Korea and Japan. Even despite the hurdles for women to reach management positions, Koreans are the most optimistic about improving gender diversity in the workplace in Asia. Of Korean executives, 48% held gender diversity as a top priority, and 68% believed more gender diversity initiatives were coming soon, significantly more than executives elsewhere in Asia (Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff et al., 2012). Although improvements for women's leadership may be slow, they are progressing.

To further improvements for women's leadership in Korea and elsewhere, Asian governments need to move beyond gender mainstreaming and arbitrary targets for percentages of women in management positions. Although popular, neither of these policy strategies has achieved significant empowerment for women. The model of the Philippines Commission on Women, which combines gender mainstreaming data collection with research and various women's empowerment projects, could be a model for Korea and other Asian nations (MacPhail, 2015). Mentoring and training programs, as well as policies to shorten working hours, increased childcare, and general improvement in the work-life balance for women are examples of possible strategies (Tan, 2016, UNDP, 2014). Moreover, media training to produce a more positive image around current women

leaders, politicians, and political candidates is needed to overcome gender biases imbedded in Asian traditional values and the recent surge in political conservatism in Asia (Real, 2012; Tan, 2016).

Ultimately, more women are needed in leadership positions to help improve the future of women's leadership in each country. While not every woman leader supports feminist policies, involving women in politics has generally improved gender equality, reduce gender-based violence, and improve the availability of childcare (UNDP, 2014). This, in turn, can boost future women leaders. In addition, the involvement of women leaders has strengthened democracies, transparency, and tolerance around the world—all desirable outcomes for Korea and the other nations of Asia (UN Women, 2016; UNDP, 2014). For some countries, quotas for hiring, promoting, or electing women may need to be established in order to overcome traditional prejudices through the representation of competent women (Tan, 2016). Korea can learn from the many different quota systems in Asia, and other Asian countries can learn from Korea's successes and failures with quotas, as well. With similar hurdles of traditional values and expectations to overcome, Korea and its neighbors can look to each other for example programs and policies to improve prospects for women's leadership in the future.

CONCLUSION

Korea has exceptionally strong Confucian traditions and expectations for women, long working hours, and networking hurdles for women, but its challenges with work-life balance and patriarchal values are certainly not unique in Asia. Traditional gender roles and perceptions of women remain at the root of many challenges that women in Korea, and elsewhere in Asia, face in advancing into leadership. These challenges include institutional barriers, such as insufficient childcare and wage gaps; interpersonal challenges, such as networking barriers and a lack of women as mentors; and internalized assumptions that lead women to decide not to pursue leadership. Successes in increasing women's leadership across Asia have shown that these challenges can be overcome by institutions, when designed effectively, including governmental programs and laws, as well as policies implemented by individual organizations. To differing degrees, all Asian countries must find the political and cultural will to overcome traditional values to solve these challenges. Asia has much to gain from fostering more women leaders.

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