Chapter 2

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

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

OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

SOCIO-POLITICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF TOP FEMALE ASIAN POLITICIANS

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

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

**Figure 2.1: Women presidents and prime ministers by region (1945–2004)**
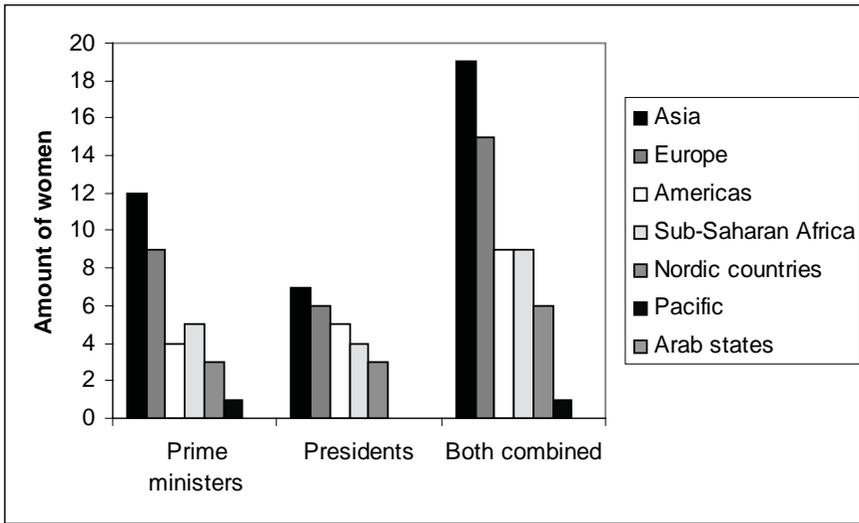
Source. Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership. Martin K.I. Christensen. Online resource. (Graphic and calculations by the author).

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

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

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

Figure 2.2: Women presidents and prime ministers by development level (1945–2004)
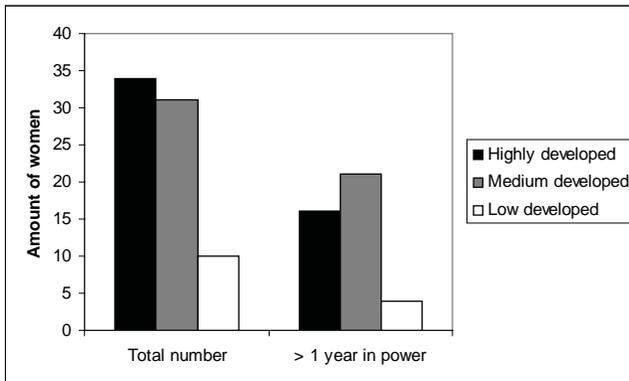
Source: Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership. Online resource. (Graphics by the author).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BETWEEN REPRESENTATION AND EMPOWERMENT I

Electoral Performance of Women Politicians

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quota regulation applies in parliamentary elections (national level)

[a] currently no parliament due to military-led autocratic regime

[b] out of 121 countries with parliaments

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

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

BETWEEN REPRESENTATION AND EMPOWERMENT II

General Patterns of Female Political Participation in Asia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOTES

1 HDR – Indicators (Alphabetically). Human Development Reports, United Nations Development Programme. Online resource.

2 Women in Parliaments – World and Regional Averages. Inter-Parliamentary Union. Online resource.

3 For further analysis see: Kelly et.al. 2001.

4 'Country Overview'. Quota Project – Global Database for Quotas of Women, IDEA – International IDEA: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm. Online resource.

5 Ibid.

6 UNDP – United Nations Development Programme, 'Female Employment in Industry (as % of female labour force)'. Online resource.

7 There is no total number given. The previous figure is 3 out of 26 or 10,34 per cent in 1999 (Mahbub ul Haq, 2000: 140).

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