＜書評＞

Emma Dalton 著
Women and Politics in Contemporary Japan

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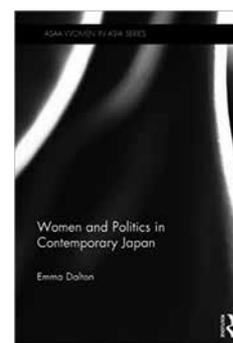
In a recent election, 45 women (from a total of 475 members) won seats in the lower house of the Diet. With 9.5% of female members in the lower house, Japan is currently ranked at 116 from a total of 190 countries in the percentage of female parliamentarians worldwide[1]. The proportion of women in the Japanese Diet has increased only marginally since 1945, when women could vote and run for political office for the first time—women comprised 8.4% of the Diet that year. The masculine political culture also seems to have changed little over the years. In 2015, a senior male assemblyman threw sexually offensive insults at Ayaka Shiomura—a 35-year-old female member of the Tokyo Metropolitan assembly—during an assembly session, which spurred an intense political debate in the country.

In her book *Women and Politics in Contemporary Japan*, Emma Dalton asks how the gendered political system shapes gender equality and women's representation in national-level politics in Japan. Dalton focuses on the political parties in Japan to find answers, and holds them accountable for hindering women's increased participation in politics as well as in the political decision-making processes. Specifically, the author argues that the dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan, and the party's approach to women explain the reasons why women and women's interests remain marginalized in national politics. Her point is illustrated clearly in Prime Minister Abe's proud statement that 'the LDP will make women-friendly policies,' where 'women-friendly' and 'mother-friendly' policies suggest the same thing according to the dominant political discourse (pp. 1-2). Dalton identifies the perpetuating cycle of political disinterest as the central problem, citing Oyama who stated that 'perhaps it is not women who are uninterested in politics, but politics that is uninterested in women' (Oyama 2003, pp. 169-170).

The book approaches the problem of women's political under-representation in Japan from two different levels—the structural and the individual. The structural-level analysis focuses on the political and social contexts surrounding post-war politics in Japan, such as party politics, economic development, as well as broader political culture. On the other hand, the individual-level analysis shows how women themselves understand the problem and find ways to overcome challenges. In this section, the author asks female Diet members how they present their political ambitions and negotiate their own space within the masculinized party culture.

Specifically, the first chapter of the book introduces the political system in post-war Japan, which reinforced male-dominance as well as female under-representation in politics simultaneously. That is, institutional characteristics of Japanese politics, such as the electoral system and the campaigning style worked unfavorably for women. For instance, multi-member districts with relatively large district magnitudes worked well for the LDP to hold on to its power and influence at the expense of its major opposition—the Social Democratic Party (SDP) until 1993. Similarly, the *koenkai* (personalized candidate support groups) as well as factions (power-broking groups) promoted moneyed influence in politics. Women—who remained as outsiders in these important political institutions—were systematically excluded. Furthermore, gender norms in post-war Japan worked as major cultural barriers. The family model consisting of the men as the breadwinner (*salaryman*) and women as the homemaker (*shufu*) persisted throughout the years as Japan underwent rapid development under the LDP rule. The author argues that gender policies produced in this period consolidated gendered divisions economically, socially, and politically.

The subsequent chapter discusses the electoral reform of 1993 and the changes in political power structures since the reform. Two major changes include the LDP losing control of the lower house in 1993 for the first time since 1955, and the electoral reform in the lower house elections to a hybrid system consisting of both the proportional representation (PR) and majoritarian systems. These institutional changes were accompanied by broader demographic and economic changes, such as declining fertility rates and economic slowdown. Ironically, however, the chapter finds that none of these changes had significant implications for women's political representation because the structural characteristics of Japanese politics (described in chapter 1) barely changed. Furthermore, it is quite surprising that popular reform initiatives of Prime Minister Koizumi in 2005 accompanied by the recruitment of new female candidates (assassins) to replace the old male incumbents who refused to accept the reform agenda (rebels) did little to improve women's political representation in the long run. The author describes these actions of Koizumi simply as the utilization of women as the image of change as opposed to men representing old-style politics. In the end, the Koizumi assassins had a hard time winning in the subsequent round of elections, because they lacked access to strong support groups.

After looking at some of the structural factors affecting women and politics in Japan, the book moves on to the personal experiences of female Diet members (past and current) asking them to describe how they themselves understand the issue of women's political representation. Specifically, chapter 3 delves into the motivations for women in running for office and their political ambitions as Diet members. Several interesting findings stand out. First, some women interviewed state that they entered the political arena after being asked to do so, whereas others expressed a strong sense of civic duty behind their political ambitions. Second, female Diet members expressed that their motivations for joining the LDP was primarily due to pragmatism—LDP has a strong power base

that increases the likelihood of them being elected into office. Sometimes this meant joining the party even though they personally opposed what the LDP represented: 'rather than opposing it by joining the opposition party, which is the path that might seem more logical, they decided to join the party that ignited their feelings of opposition because it was the government party' (p. 75).

The following chapter investigates the importance of women in politics. The author brings in the theory of the 'politics of presence' by Phillips as the starting point, which argues that women represent different interests from men (Phillips 1995, pp. 67-68). Unsurprisingly, women's issues cannot be fully considered in the parliament dominated entirely by men. Dalton argues that women's policy interests as 'mothers, wives, care givers to the elderly and members of their local community' remain central to women's interests and perspectives (p. 83). Indeed, she finds in her interviews that women in the Diet believe that a woman's perspective is inherently different from man. Although the women she interviewed rarely articulated exactly how women's interests were distinct from men, it became obvious that the interviewees understood women to be better suited to deal with matters that were 'close to daily life, like society, welfare and the environment'. Dalton finds that women legislators highlight such femininity as mothers and housewives as outsiders to challenge male-dominated politics, as well as to appeal to voters. These findings highlight the identities of women involved in local politics as *seikatsusha* (lifestyler)[2] and *shufu* (housewife). At the same time, however, Dalton notices that these understandings echo the dominant discourses of gender promoted by the LDP—the narrow definition of women as mothers, wives, and *seikatsusha* (p. 100).

Next chapter of the book examines women's discussions of sexism in the political sphere and how they negotiate their own space within the masculinized party culture.[3] Women as outsiders of the political sphere face fundamental challenges being integrated into the masculinized political culture as insiders. That is, masculine political culture sets the expectation for women to perform supporting roles in the private sphere, rather than in the Diet that is central to the public sphere. Women face enormous hurdles entering the political arena in the cultural context when they are expected to keep performing their major duties related to childcare and household chores. Furthermore, direct and indirect sexism in the Diet make it difficult for women to feel that they could be integrated. Dalton lists a few examples to best illustrate this point. While engaging in a dialogue about the party's stance towards the Wiretapping Law, a male colleague in the Diet told Madoka Yoriko an irrelevant comment like 'but you are divorced' (p. 112). Similarly, male colleagues would make uncomfortable remarks like how wonderful it is to be working with such a beautiful woman. In the end, the chapter finds that within the conservative party culture, many LDP women have internalized this as an individual issue rather than a systematic one, minimalizing and trivializing potential and actual sexism.

The conclusion reiterates major arguments and findings of the book. The LDP's dominance

and conservative approach to women, as well as masculine political culture have contributed to the scarcity of women in politics in Japan. The final section of the book also contemplates future prospects for women in politics, including recent debates on the possibility of introducing gender quotas to increase the number of women in politics. Yet, the author states that the quota path to 'fast-track'[4] women's increased political representation is unlikely to work in Japan for a number of reasons. First of all, parties approach female political underrepresentation from the equal opportunity perspective, which fundamentally assumes political systems and social structures to be gender-neutral. Second, despite active mobilization of women's groups, such as the Femiren and WINWIN to push political parties to implement quotas, both the governing and opposition parties have responded ambiguously to such demands. Finally, Dalton believes that the chances of quota adoption in Japan are quite low, particularly when female Diet members themselves are divided over whether quotas are indeed the best way to fast-track women's representation. Some believe that quotas could further marginalize women within the masculine political arena by attaching 'quota women' labels to them (pp. 132-134).

Women and Politics in Contemporary Japan is highly recommended for researchers working in the area of women, politics, and policy in Japan. Similarly, students in political science and gender studies disciplines interested in women's political representation in Asia would find the book extremely useful. The book has several key strengths. First, it is one of the few books published in English on the topic of women's political representation in 'national' politics in Japan. In addition, the book includes thorough discussions of women's political ambitions and interests, accompanied by rich information drawn from personal interviews with 14 female Diet members with diverse characteristics (e.g., family ties to the LDP, professional background). Finally, rather than looking exclusively at women and femininity to understand the problem of women's political underrepresentation in Japan, the book takes a broader approach that focuses on the dominance of masculinity and how women become marginalized in politics under such contexts.

At the same time, the book raises a few important questions that invite future explorations. First, what implications do the findings from the Japanese case have on understanding women's political representation worldwide? A comparative look would help the readers situate the findings of the book in a global context. For instance, why is the proportion of female parliamentarians higher in some countries with a similar electoral system, the dominance of masculinity in politics, and a two party system as in Japan? Similarly, why are quota policies adopted in other countries, despite the fact that political parties and male politicians often oppose the proposal arguing that it is reverse discrimination as they do in Japan?

Additionally, it would be interesting to hear the views of male LDP members and members of opposition parties to get a more elaborate picture. Would female members from the opposition party

like Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) hold similar kinds of gender consciousness (e.g., conservative understanding of femininity) as LDP women? If not, in what ways would their views diverge? Similarly, it would be interesting to uncover the masculinity within the LDP by speaking directly with the male members of the party. How do male LDP members describe their political ambitions, policy interests, and experience with the power struggles within the party? Such a comparison across male and female members would improve our understandings about the gendered nature of political and party cultures.

Finally, sections of the book allude to the fact that female politicians in Japan try to promote their personal experiences as mothers and caregivers because voters expect female and male politicians to conform to pre-existing notions of gender. Such conclusions stand out in light of the fact that global research on women and politics consistently finds that voters do not discriminate against female candidates. Perhaps it is true that voters do not disfavor women just because they are women, but as Dalton shows, voter discrimination may work in nuanced ways, forcing female candidates and Diet members to behave in a certain way to portray how they conform to the gendered expectations of the society. The author exemplifies her argument well in her observation of LDP upper house member's official webpage where Marukawa introduces herself in terms of her favorite color, first love, and hip, waist, and chest measurements (p. 121). Voter discrimination may not occur at the final stage when voters cast their votes, but it might have occurred at an earlier stage by indirectly pushing candidates to conform to the political norms that are highly gendered.

1　See http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm. Situation as of November 1, 2015.
2　For the author's definition of *seikatsusha*, see p.86 and p.141.
3　It was quite surprising to see Dalton's discussion in this chapter without referencing LeBlanc (2009)'s recent publication, which analyzes the prevalence of masculinity in Japanese politics (i.e., gut politics) extensively.
4　See Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005.

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