
Preface

Women are now grossly underrepresented among the political leaderships of every nation, reflecting their subordinate social and economic positions within widely differing types of society. Yet despite the constancy of this political underrepresentation and subordinate status throughout the world, the industrial revolution of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has clearly transformed women's social and political roles to a dramatic extent. Interpretations of these changes remain quite controversial, however. Modernization theory argues that "the passing of traditional society" leads to an improvement in women's position and implies that full equality is just a matter of time, as the processes of social and economic development move toward full fruition. Feminist theory, in contrast, remains highly skeptical of such claims, arguing that patriarchy and capitalism are very compatible and interact to perpetuate the "marginalization" of women.

This book presents a case study of women in politics in the Republic of China on Taiwan. Taiwan provides an interesting test of these competing perspectives for several reasons. Traditional Chinese society, strongly patriarchal, would be expected to be most antithetical to women's equality. Thus, feminist and modernization theory would make opposite predictions about whether the rapid industrialization and social transformation that occurred on Taiwan during the postwar period would affect the status of women. Furthermore, the ROC has a possibly unique system that guarantees women a minimal level of representation in all its legislative bodies. Can such an institutional mechanism promote women's participation in a society where women's role in politics would be expected to be very limited because of that society's culture and development level?

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