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Looking again at Taiwan's Lü Hsiu-lien: A female vice president or a feminist vice president?

Wen-hui Anna Tang^a, Emma J. Teng^b^a College of General Education and Sociology Department, National Sun Yat-sen University, 70 Lien-hai Rd., Kaohsiung, Taiwan^b Global Studies and Languages, and History Faculty, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 14N-303, 77 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139, USA

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SYNOPSIS

In 2000, Lü Hsiu-lien was elected Taiwan's first female vice president, adding to the striking successes of Asian women in electoral politics. Lü differs from the majority of Asia's "ruling women" in two key respects: she was elected without reliance on "dynastic descent" and she has a long track record as a feminist activist. Her position as both a pioneering feminist and a female vice president prompts us to ask whether she was able to promote a pro-woman agenda during her tenure as vice president. We conclude that despite constraints on Lü's pursuit of an overt feminist agenda—including the patriarchal political culture and a gap between Lü and Taiwan's contemporary feminist movement—she is significant as a female leader who transcends both the Asian dynastic model and the tokenistic model of women as "flower vases," while also contributing vitally to the development of an indigenous Taiwanese feminist theory.

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Introduction

In a historic landslide election victory on January 16, 2016, Dr. Tsai Ing-wen of the [Democratic Progressive Party \(DPP\)](#) was voted into office as Taiwan's first woman President.¹ Following on the heels of the inauguration of Park Geun-hye in 2013 as South Korea's first female president, Tsai's election further expanded the success of "ruling women" throughout Asia, where a striking number of women have been elected head of state ([Hoogensen and Solheim, 2006](#)). Park Geun-hye was the first woman democratically elected president in East Asia, breaking a long-standing gender barrier in the so-called Confucian cultural area. Yet, as the daughter of former President Park Chung-hee, Park can also be regarded as simply the latest example of a pattern that is well known to observers of Asian politics: the female politician who derives legitimacy through her familial ties from a male leader, whether as wife, widow, daughter, or sister. This "dynastic descent" model has brought Asia's most famous female leaders. However, it has also raised serious questions about whether these women can truly be considered pioneers, "agents of refreshing change," or

mere representatives of dynastic authority and "business as usual" for the region ([Iwanaga, 2008](#); [Hoogensen and Solheim, 2006](#); [Fleschenberg, 2008](#); [Crossette, 1996](#)). Journalist Barbara Crossette once urged readers enthralled by "Asia's Ruling Women" to "look again": "anyone who would write feminist history needs to look hard at how these powerful women have ruled, and what their exercise of authority has meant to the people they governed" ([Crossette, 1996](#)).

Expressing similar skepticism, Andrea Fleschenberg has argued that "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" ([Fleschenberg, 2008, 50](#)). Fleschenberg's study of Asian women politicians focused on eight countries in South and Southeast Asia. Notably missing from her discussion are East Asian countries like Taiwan, where women have enjoyed electoral successes at various levels ([Sun, 2005](#)). The number of female legislators in Taiwan is currently 33.6% ([Central Election Commission, 2015](#)), impressively high compared to Japan, where women's parliamentary representation stands at 8.1%, South Korea (15.7%), and even the world average (22.2% in 2015) ([Huang, 2015, 207](#),

Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015). Taiwan is furthermore important, we contend, as an exception to the “dynastic descent” model of female leadership in Asia, and provides an opportunity to examine the potential for Asian women leaders as agents of social change and pioneers in social justice.

If many of Asia's most famous female leaders—Indira Gandhi, Corazon Aquino, and Aung San Suu Kyi, for example—rose to political leadership following the imprisonment or assassination of male family members, in the early years of Taiwan's transition to democracy (1980–1990), many female candidates were similarly the wives or widows of famous political prisoners or martyrs. By the 2000 presidential election, however, it was clear that Taiwanese women's political participation had moved beyond this phase. In 2000, Taiwan elected its first female vice president, Annette Hsiu-lien Lü (hereafter Lü Hsiu-lien 呂秀蓮): a woman who has forged her own political path, and is famous as a pioneer of Taiwan's autonomous feminist movement. Long before Tsai's historic victory, then, Taiwan joined the select group of nations with a woman elected to the vice presidency, and an even smaller cohort of countries with an avowed feminist in the top circle of power.

The unique position of Lü Hsiu-lien as both a pioneering feminist and a female vice president prompts us to ask whether she was able to promote a pro-woman agenda during her two-term tenure in the vice presidential office (2000–2008). In short, will she go down in history as a *female* vice president or a *feminist* vice president? The distinction between descriptive representation, which serves the symbolic purpose of gender equality, and substantive representation, which assumes that women politicians act on behalf of women, is central to the analysis of gender and political representation (Celis et al., 2014; Iwanaga, 2008, 4). Most of the literature on this question has concentrated on female legislators and on European or North American case studies. Studies of Taiwan have similarly focused on women in the legislature, aiming to explain the relatively high level of female representation, and to examine whether this “critical mass” has improved the substantive representation of women (Gelb, 2010; Clark and Clark, 2000; Huang, 2015; Sun, 2005). In contrast, we approach the issue of descriptive versus substantive representation from a different angle, examining an individual female elite as a top leader in the executive branch in order to contribute to the writing of feminist history on Asia's “ruling women” as called for by Crossette. Lü is an interesting comparative example since she is roughly the same age as Sonia Gandhi, Khaleda Zia, Megawati Sukarnoputri, Aung San Suu Kyi, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and Hasina Wajed, and moreover similarly rose to prominence under circumstances of “political turmoil and/or transition” (Fleschenberg, 2008, 33). We furthermore focus on Lü because her role as a feminist pioneer and Taiwan's first high-level female political leader is an essential part of the story of women's “impressive rise” (Ramzy, 2015) in Taiwan's politics, and hence of Taiwan's overall democratization. By examining Lü's feminist ideology as expressed in her seminal work *New Feminism* (*Xin nüxing zhuyi* 新女性主義, 1974) and her track record as Taiwan's vice president, we contend that it is unfair to characterize Lü as a “tame kitten,” for her pursuit of an overt feminist agenda was impeded by constraints she faced from both Taiwan's constitutional structure and her party's patriarchal culture, as well as a gap between Lü and Taiwan's contemporary women's movement. We

furthermore contend that the label “tame kitten” is itself laden with gendered assumptions about female leadership, which should be reevaluated with reference to Lü's own articulation of an indigenous Taiwanese feminist theory. Indeed, Karen Celis et al. (Celis et al., 2014, 151) have theorized that “the simple presence of female elected representatives pursuing feminist goals within political institutions can no longer be taken as a standard test of women's substantive representation.” We follow their approach in asserting that the very definition of “women's issues” cannot be assumed a priori, but should be identified through open-ended investigation and understood as produced through “active, multifaceted, and contingent process” (Celis et al., 2014, 152).

Materials and methods

Our research draws on interviews conducted with Lü and other feminist activists, analysis of published texts and speeches by Lü, a survey of the major Taiwanese newspaper coverage of Lü between 2000 and 2008, and participant observation in the Taiwanese feminist and pro-democracy movements in addition to a review of secondary literature. In order to identify the factors that both enabled and constrained Lü's political career, the following sections will briefly trace her personal political biography and the evolution of her feminist philosophy. We then assess her record in the vice presidential office with regard to substantive representation. Finally, we consider Lü's legacy for women's participation in Taiwan's electoral politics, and her case as a counter-example to stereotypes about Asian women as political leaders. We conclude that despite constraints on Lü's pursuit of an overt feminist agenda in elected office, she has great significance as a female political leader who transcends both the dynastic model of women's leadership common in Asia and the tokenistic model of women as decorative “flower vases” (*huaping* 花瓶), promoted by male patrons on the basis of their feminine charisma rather than political abilities.

Discussion

The long road to high office

As noted by Kazuki Iwanaga, that women in Asia, more than any other region, have been able to attain the highest political positions in their countries, although “the lack of a political culture supportive of women's political involvement is strongly manifested in many societies in Asia,” has long been a puzzle (Iwanaga, 2008, 6). In explaining this puzzle, the Western media has typically centered on women as dynastic representatives, for example: “Political dynasties are seen in other parts of the world but Asia is striking for the lack of female leaders who have come to power in any other way” (Macnamara, 2011). This dominant narrative may be intertwined with the stereotype that “women in East Asia are often portrayed as passive, easily manipulated and thus political followers” (Chang and Welsh, 2013, 1). In this section, we trace Lü Hsiu-lien's path to political office as a counter-example to the dominant popular narrative regarding Asian women's route to power.

Lü Hsiu-lien was born in Taoyuan, Taiwan in 1944, just before the end of Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945), into a

family of modest class background. As a child, Lü lived through several major events: the return of Taiwan to Chinese control following World War II; the infamous February 28 Incident of 1947 and the Chinese Nationalist (Kuomintang or KMT) government's brutal suppression of a local Taiwanese protest movement; and the retreat of KMT forces and "Mainlander" (*waishengren* 外省人) refugees to Taiwan after the Communist Revolution of 1949. Lü came of age during an era of martial law, one-party rule, strident anti-communist ideology, and the ethnic dominance of Chinese Mainlanders in the political arena (Lü and Esarey, 2015).

Lü also came of age in a time when traditional Confucian gender ideology, which subordinated women to men and relegated them to the domestic sphere, held sway. While this ideology profoundly shaped Lü's early childhood experiences, she also benefited from her family's idiosyncratic decision to raise her like a boy, and their emphasis on her education (Rubinstein, 2004, 249). Lü excelled in school, and in 1963 she won first place in the highly competitive entrance exam to the National Taiwan University School of Law. After earning her BA, she again took first place in the exam for the National Taiwan University master's program in law. In 1969, she was awarded a scholarship to study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, earning an LLM in Comparative Law in 1971.

Pioneering feminist

While studying in the US, Lü experienced life in a liberal democracy and witnessed the emergence of a vibrant feminist movement. In 1971, she returned to Taiwan to work as Section Chief with the Commission of Laws and Regulations in the Executive Yuan (1971–1974). She also sought to reform Taiwanese society by promoting liberal democratic ideals. Spurred on by several highly publicized cases of gender discrimination, Lü launched a series of newspaper editorials protesting inequality of the sexes. Gaining recognition thus, Lü began promoting an autonomous women's movement, founding a feminist publishing house and a hotline for battered women and rape victims, and eventually quit her job to become a full-time activist (Teng, 1989; Lü and Esarey, 2015).

Combining Western feminist theory with her personal analysis of Taiwanese society, Lü formulated her own feminist ideology, first published in 1974 as the *New Feminism*, a text that became the bible of the women's movement in 1970s Taiwan. In this book (reprinted numerous times between 1974 and 2008), Lü laid out an eclectic mix of liberal feminism and difference feminism, which Doris Chang describes as a uniquely Taiwanese strand of "relational feminism" (Chang, 2009, 9; Offen, 1988). Lü emphasized the fundamental notion of equal treatment for men and women, protesting gender discrimination in education, employment, and law. While attacking elements of traditional Confucian gender ideology, Lü also took pains to emphasize that her "new feminist" ideology differed from Western feminism. She argued, for example, that it was not a demand for women's rights, but for human rights. "Women's rights as human rights" became her trademark slogan. In addition, with a nod to Confucianism, Lü foregrounded not women's "rights," but rather their potential contributions to society were they allowed to fully exercise their "abilities."

Lü's emphasis on "fairness" for both sexes over "women's interests" narrowly defined was evident in her criticism of

Taiwan's reserved seats system, which guaranteed women a minimum number of seats at all levels of elected office. An early adopter of this institutional measure to promote gender parity, Taiwan had ensured a basic level of women's political representation (around 10%) as early as the 1950s (Huang, 2015, 208; Chou et al., 1990, 90–92). However, by the 1960s, the system was already becoming outdated, with the quotas set too low (Chou and Clark, 1994, 164). Lü and others protested that the reserved seats effectively served as a ceiling suppressing greater levels of female participation and stigmatized those elected to office. While acknowledging that such affirmative action had been "kind" and "encouraging" to women, Lü called for the abolition of the reserved seats system on the grounds that it was "unfair" and hindered women from using their "genuine talent" to shine in the political arena (Lü, 1977a, 67–72).

Although the substitution of "human rights" for "women's rights" and contributions over entitlements might be regarded as a rhetorical strategy to make her "new feminism" compatible with the conservatism of Taiwan in the 1970s, Lü in fact had strong points of disagreement with American feminism as she had encountered it. First, Lü rejected the "sameness feminist" position that equality meant elimination of gender differences. Supporting instead "difference feminism," Lü argued that women should not strive to be like men, but should be "who they are." In effect, she endorsed women's pursuit of higher education and professional careers while maintaining traditional gender roles within the family. Lü championed the image of the new woman who "holds a spatula with her left hand, and a pen with her right hand" (*zuoshou na guochan, youshou wo bigan* 左手拿鍋鏟,右手握筆桿) (Lü, 1977b, 32; Lee, 2014, 35). She furthermore advocated that talented women should show their femininity by using dress and makeup to cultivate a "soft" and "beautiful" appearance. Finally, understanding that sexual liberation would be a flashpoint for resistance in Taiwan's highly conservative society of the 1970s, Lü proclaimed that "new feminism" endorsed "love before marriage, marriage then sex" (Lü, 1977a, 152–154). Hence, Lü fought against institutional gender discrimination, while simultaneously upholding certain traditional standards of femininity, domesticity, female beauty, and chastity. Lü's relational feminism, as Chang writes, "suggested that one's individual freedom should be counterbalanced by fulfillment of specific obligations in family and in society" (Chang, 2009, 92).

Despite Lü's concerted efforts to make feminism compatible with aspects of Confucianism, and to avoid challenging Taiwan's capitalist socio-political order, she drew fire from conservatives, and was soon subjected to political pressure and government surveillance. The martial law regime feared any political radicalism, and treated Lü's women's movement as a potential anti-government activity. Their harassment only pushed Lü (once a KMT member) to perceive the government as corrupt and oppressive. Traveling abroad, she interacted with advocates of Taiwanese independence, and "began to see the establishment of a democratic and independent Taiwan with new enthusiasm when [she] realized that democratization and feminist activism are two sides of the same coin" (Lü and Esarey, 2015, 64).

Discouraged by setbacks to her movement, Lü left to pursue a second LLM at Harvard Law School in 1977. She returned to Taiwan in 1978, and ran for a seat in the National Assembly (Lü and Esarey, 2015, 78–91). Unfortunately, this run was cut short

when the US recognized China in December 1978 and the KMT suspended the elections. This crisis propelled Lü's entry into the *Dangwai* (黨外, "outside the party") opposition movement, which advocated Taiwanese self-determination. In sharp contrast to many American feminists of the 1970s, who began their political engagement in the civil rights or anti-war movements and then turned to feminism, Lü began her political engagement on the issue of women's rights, and then turned to the broader issues of democratization because of her experiences advocating feminism under the strictures of martial law.

Lü and the Dangwai

Whereas Lü had remained politically neutral while pioneering the women's movement, the canceled election served as a tipping point in her radicalization (Chang, 2009, 104). Lü became deputy publisher of the *Dangwai's Formosa* magazine, once again putting the power of her pen to work. In 1979, Lü delivered a speech criticizing the KMT regime at a human rights rally that was violently suppressed in a crackdown that became famous as the Kaohsiung Incident. Following a trial by military court, Lü and other *Formosa* leaders were found guilty of sedition and imprisoned. Lü was sentenced to twelve years, and served nearly 2000 days in jail before being released on medical parole.

Following parole in 1985, Lü spent three years (1986–1989) as a Visiting Fellow in the Harvard Law School's Human Rights Program. She then returned to Taiwan, running for a seat in the Legislative Yuan in the 1992 elections, the first major election after the lifting of martial law in 1987. Women politicians of the 1970s had already achieved an important milestone, exceeding the quota of reserved seats in Taiwan's National Assembly and Legislative Yuan (Farris, 2004; Chou et al., 1990; Lee, 1997; Huang, 2005; Chiang, 2008). Now, Lü firmly believed it was time for women's political participation to move beyond the "victimization sentiment" (Hoogensen and Solheim, 2006) stage of the 1980s, during which numerous wives/widows of jailed or martyred opposition leaders had been elected to office as political proxies. Lü fervently hoped to prove that women could be elected to office based on their own merits and without reliance on either affirmative action or ties to a prominent male political figure (Interview with Lü Hsiu-lien, 12 February, 1989).

Lü furthermore asserted that the time was ripe for self-declared feminists to enter the political arena. At an event for Lü hosted by Awakening, a feminist group founded in 1988, she raised the issue that women leaders such as Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher had done very little to improve the status of women, and urged feminist groups to put forward candidates for the next election (Lee, 2014, 142). However, as Awakening leader Lee Yuan-chen recalled, many that evening voiced a desire for feminists to stay out of electoral politics, maintaining their non-partisan neutrality in order to best promote their feminist goals. Lü opposed this separation of "women's movement" and "politics." While Lee promised Awakening's support for Lü's campaign, this disagreement made evident Lü's growing divergence from the autonomous women's movement. Looking back on this turning point, Lee reflected: "From this, it was apparent that Hsiu-lien had a much more

courageous personality than I, and was willing to risk the winds of politics" (Lee, 2014, 145).

Like many of Asia's top female political leaders, Lü campaigned as a "transitional [agent] with a political agenda for remodeling" the political regime (Fleschenberg, 2008, 33). She furthermore used her status as a former political prisoner to mobilize followers, although this was not her sole source of political capital. Running as a candidate from the DPP (founded in 1986), Lü won a seat in the Legislative Yuan (1993–1996), serving as the Convener of the Foreign Affairs Committee in 1994. Lü was then elected Mayor of Taoyuan County (1997–2000) before presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian invited Lü to be his running mate in the 2000 election (Lü, 2006, 3). The Chen–Lü ticket won the 2000 election, and was reelected in 2004.

Although Lü did not come into power through dynastic descent, her political biography shares key elements common to Asia's top women leaders (Fleschenberg, 2008, 31; Hoogensen and Solheim, 2006). First, she has an outstanding educational career, including attendance at an international elite university. Second, rising to prominence within an environment of political turmoil and transition, Lü was able to mobilize victimization sentiment and campaigned as a "transformational leader." However, in sharp contrast to the majority of Asia's "ruling women," Lü was not raised in a prominent political family, nor was she a member of an entrenched social-political elite. Rather, as a native Taiwanese from a lower middle-class background, she was an outsider in a Mainlander-dominated era of KMT rule. Lü further differs in that she had a track record of political experience before running for high office. We also note that Lü diverges from the general pattern of Asia's "ruling women" in that she has never been married and remains childless. Whereas many Asian women leaders have leveraged their "housewife image" to put a positive spin on their political inexperience by invoking stereotypical notions of feminine moral purity and caring, Lü's image was that of a single career woman and feminist (Fleschenberg, 2008, 32–33; Hoogensen and Solheim, 2006).

Gender in the campaign

If Lü is distinct from Asia's other top female leaders in her departure from the dynastic model and her long track record as a feminist, her case nonetheless begs the question—was Lü elected because of her feminist profile, or *in spite of it*? Gender certainly played a role in the campaign. Chen Shui-bian's decision to invite Lü to be his running mate was made according to careful political calculations, which included gender among other factors. As the former defense attorney for the "Kaohsiung Eight," Chen sought a running mate from this older generation of *Dangwai* leaders, singling out "Taiwan's number one woman of talent" (*Taiwan diyi cainü* 台灣第一才女) (Chinareviewnews.com, June 14, 2011). As Chen told Lü: "You are female, I am male. You are from the North, I am from the South. Your legislative background is in foreign affairs and mine is in national defense. You studied abroad, and I did not. We are complementary" (Interview with Lü Hsiu-lien, 21 July, 2010). In this calculation, descriptive representation trumped substantive representation: that is, nominating Lü served the "symbolic purpose of gender equality," rendering "a greater legitimacy... to the political system," without the promise that

it would produce more women-friendly policies, since Lü was expected to specialize in foreign affairs (Iwanaga, 2008, 3–4). Asserting that he had selected Lü based on her qualifications and not gender, when Chen publicly announced Lü as his running mate he declared: “she will not be a ‘flower vase,’ but she will really govern with me when we get elected” (Interview with Lü Hsiu-lien, 21 July, 2010). It appears that the party was attempting to have its cake and eat it too: floating a female running-mate in order to attract women voters, while also downplaying Lü’s sex by emphasizing her gender-neutral qualifications.

Lü herself viewed the mobilization of women voters as key to the campaign strategy, and touted the election as a historic opportunity to “put an end to government solely by men; [and] to usher in an era of gender equality in which women and men administer national affairs together” (Lü and Esarey, 2015). On International Women’s Day, she chartered a train to bring 2000 prominent women across Taiwan, with each car of the train featuring a workshop on women’s issues (Interview with Lü Hsiu-lien, 21 July, 2010; Lü and Esarey, 2015, 270). Lü’s public stature as a pioneering feminist helped the DPP attract voters from Taiwan’s active women’s movement—though pro-unification feminists remained leery of Lü’s stance on Taiwan’s self-determination (Chang, 2009, 152–153). Campaign polls showed Lü the favored vice presidential candidate, especially popular with three sets of voters: women; younger voters who hoped to improve Taiwan’s international image; and older voters who remembered her role in the Kaohsiung Incident (Cooper, 2000, 27; Lü and Esarey, 2015, 264; *United News*, February 13, 2000).

Since public opinion polls in Taiwan at the time paid little attention to gender analysis, beginning in December 1999, Awakening decided to bring these issues to the fore, calling on candidates to take a stance on women’s issues, and conducting their own voter surveys. Their surveys found, perhaps not surprisingly, that women voters placed more importance on gender equity issues than men, but were not statistically significant in terms of female voter preference for women candidates (*Lienhe bao/United News*, September 1, 2000). A subsequent Gallup poll conducted in January 2000 paid close attention to female public opinion, finding that women over the age of twenty viewed the Chen–Lü ticket as the most likely to attract women’s votes, and considered Chen the strongest of the three presidential candidates (Chen Shui-bian, Lien Chan and James Soong) on support for women’s issues (*Lienhe wan bao/United Evening News*, January 29, 2000). In the end, however, the three major candidates adopted similar stances on gender issues, and election exit polls showed independent Soong ultimately taking the majority of women’s votes (Cooper, 2000, 32, 44).

Lü’s record on women’s issues

If Lü had campaigned on a feminist platform of gender equality for Taiwan, what was her record on women’s issues once in office? Did she use her position of power to make a difference for other women? Scholars have long debated whether female politicians tend to support different issues, or operate with a “different voice” than their male counterparts (Githens and Prestage, 1978; Kelly et al., 1991; Jaquette, 1997; Iwanaga, 2008). Lichun Chiang’s study of Taiwanese women

legislators (between 1998 and 2000) showed clearly different policy preferences from their male colleagues, with a greater commitment to welfare, health, children and education, and less interest in military and foreign policy (Chiang, 2008). However, Asia’s “ruling women” have generally not been found to operate with a “different voice,” and indeed have been criticized for their resemblance to traditional male politicians (Crossette, 1996). How does Lü, with her feminist track record, measure up?

When Lü entered electoral politics in the 1990s, she shifted her focus to foreign affairs—which had been a lifelong passion—rather than the more typical areas of women’s policy concerns (Chiang, 2008). She thus moved in a different direction than the autonomous women’s movement, which pushed for Taiwan to emulate the social welfare and gender-related policies of the Nordic states, and to adopt stronger gender quotas (Lee, 2014; Huang, 2015). During Lü’s years as a legislator and then county mayor (1993–2000), women’s groups and their allies were successful in lobbying for reform of family law, public childcare, and the passage of the Juvenile Prostitution Prevention Law (1995), the Sexual Assault Treatment and Prevention Act (1997), and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (1998) (Chang, 2009; Chiang, 2008; Zeldin, 2008c). Similarly, during Lü’s tenure as vice president (2000–2008), several important pieces of legislation were passed, including: the Two Genders’ Employment Equality Law (2001), amended to include protections for sexual minorities in the revised Gender Employment Equality Law (2007); the Gender Equity Education Act (2004); and the Sexual Harassment Prevention Act (2005) (Zeldin, 2008a; “Taiwan Gender Equity Education Act”; “Sexual Harassment Prevention Act”). In 2008, the Domestic Violence Prevention Law and the Child and Juvenile Welfare Law were amended Zeldin (2008b, 2008d). Throughout, Lü focused on foreign affairs and had limited participation in the passage of this legislation. Thus, Lü gradually lost her identity as a feminist leader (Personal communication July 2, 2011). In the words of one [anonymous] informant: “it was obvious that as soon as Lü Hsiu-lien entered electoral politics, she kept her distance from the women’s movement... emphasizing her abilities in foreign affairs... to appeal to male voters” (Personal communication July 2, 2011). Another said: “after she entered electoral politics, it was evident that raising the status of women was not her primary focus. She would only raise these issues occasionally, when needed, and it was completely unsatisfactory [to us]” (Personal communication July 2, 2011). Notable in such comments is a sense of betrayal from members of the women’s movement who felt that Lü had “moved on.”

Lü’s diminishing visibility as an agenda-setter in Taiwan’s contemporary feminist movement was evident in discussions concerning gender quotas during the 1990s, when women’s groups began advocating for reform of the reserved seats system and for adoption of a 40% gender quota in political representation (“Women’s Political Participation”; Ku, 2008) (Huang, 2015, 211). Lü, we will recall, was a long-standing critic of Taiwan’s reserved seats system. Particularly influential in advocating for quota reforms was Peng Wan-ru, Director of the DPP’s Department of Women’s Affairs, who pushed for her party to adopt a one-fourth gender quota for candidates, which they did in December 1996 (Huang, 2015, 212). The series of quota reforms implemented in the 1990s and 2000s

resulted in an increase of the number of reserved seats for women in both local and national elections, and a constitutional mandate (2005) that at least 50% of the party lists for the parliamentary elections must be filled by women (Huang, 2015, 213–215). Under pressure from women's groups like Awakening, in 2004, the Executive Yuan's Gender Equality Committee passed a resolution calling for all Executive Yuan departmental committees to adopt a one-third gender quota (Fanchiang, 2003, "http://www.ey.gov.tw/gec_en/cp.aspx?n=11EFF33070D6DF4," Huang, 2015, 216). These reforms demonstrated not only the impact of feminist advocacy on government policy, but also the Taiwanese feminist movement's shift away from the tenets of Lü's New Feminism toward Nordic-inspired models (Fanchiang, 2003).

Lü's lack of public visibility in the passage of this legislation and on the quota reforms does not mean she retreated from feminism (*Ziyou shibao/Liberty Times Net*, November 11, 2015). Indeed, as vice president, Lü kept her sights set on the campaign promise to "usher in an era of gender equality in which women and men administer national affairs together" (Lü and Esarey, 2015, 261). The Chen–Lü administration brought a number of prominent feminists into the government, and achieved a record of women holding one-fourth of all cabinet positions during their tenure (Lü and Esarey, 2015, 282; Huang, 2015, 215; Lü, 2013). Lü hosted a Women's National Affairs Conference and helped former "comfort women" in their campaign to seek compensation from Japan (Lü, 2013). In addition, although Lü never became a vocal advocate for quota reforms, her promotion of the "two sexes governing together" (*liangxing gongzhi* 兩性共治) ideal provided high-level political influence supporting institutional measures to promote gender parity. On the Chen–Lü watch, the Executive Yuan's Gender Equality Committee called on all ministerial-level agencies to establish gender equality taskforces (Fanchiang, 2003, "Gender Equality Committee of the Executive Yuan," Huang, 2015).

Moreover, Lü's shift to foreign affairs can be explained as an attempt to avoid being pigeonholed. Elizabeth Esterchild argues that "historically, women representatives have been reluctant to push for women's specific interest because they feared being labeled as too 'narrow' or as 'only' interested in women's issues" (Esterchild, 2006, 532). Lü long ago recognized this stereotype threat for women, writing in the *New Feminism*, "first be a person, then be a man or a woman" (*xian zuoren, zaizuo nanren huo nuren* 先作人,再作男人或女人) (Lü, 1977a, 133–134). Focusing on foreign affairs enabled Lü to break the gender barrier that had limited women's political participation to the domain of "women's affairs," as defined by the KMT's Mme. Chiang Kai-shek.

Lü was also constrained by her desire to respect the autonomy of the women's movement as it had evolved during her years in prison and abroad. When we interviewed Lü on this subject she stated:

I know they [feminist activists] worked very hard in those days before the liberalization of electoral politics, and I know that they did not get enough public recognition, but I don't really know how to help them. They told me they prefer to keep their own agency and don't want me to interfere with their movement. They choose not to rely on political figures too much. So I respect that and stand aside and try not to influence them too much. But I am still willing to help, if they need me (Interview with Lü Hsiu-lien, 21 July, 2010).

Thus, if Lü appeared to distance herself from gender issues after her entry into electoral politics, this was not simply due to her political ambitions within a male-dominated political domain, but also due to significant changes that had taken place in the Taiwanese feminist movement since the 1970s (Teng, 1989; Ku, 1988; Chang, 2009; Rubinstein, 2004; Lu, 2004; Lee, 2004; Farris, 2004). The generation of feminists that emerged in the 1980s was heavily influenced by Lü's New Feminism, but they had also forged their own path in Lü's absence, and eschewed close identification with her controversial stance on Taiwanese self-determination (Lee, 2004). In addition, in the post-martial law environment, a plurality of women's organizations with diverse agendas sprang up in Taiwan: with a turn to radical feminism, sexual liberation, LGBTQ issues, and even Marxism, Lü's brand of "New Feminism" seemed out of step with the times.² According to Murray Rubenstein, by the 1990s "some members of the new generation of Taiwanese women view [Lü] as a bit old and dowdy—as a bit too much of a persona from an earlier decade and a different stage in the struggle for women's liberation" (Rubinstein, 2004, 271). In other words, Taiwanese feminists were ready to throw out the spatula—and to trade in their pens for bullhorns.

Obstacles to pursuing a feminist agenda

Given Lü's track record as a pioneering feminist, and her self-proclaimed desire to distinguish herself from conservative women leaders like Thatcher, it may seem surprising that she was generally unable to promote a pro-woman agenda during her tenure as vice president. In order to explain this apparent paradox, we must also examine the socially constructed gender barriers faced by Lü within her political environment (Fleschenberg, 2008; Sun, 2005). Lü herself identified gender as a constraint to her actions as vice president. As Lü explained in an interview, she had agreed to be Chen's running mate based on his promise of a full partnership between president and vice president, man and woman. After the election, Lü recalled, "When I became vice president, I felt that the promise changed. There was a huge gap between before and after the election, I started to realize I had nothing to do as the vice president. Nobody paid attention to me, and I didn't have any power at all" (Interview with Lü Hsiu-lien, 21 July, 2010). Although this lack of power stemmed from the constitutional definition of the vice presidential role, Lü perceived her sidelining as an effect of gender discrimination. To the degree that party bosses expected Lü to play the role of Chen's "political wife" (*zhengzhi shang de taitai* 政治上的太太) Lü was not incorrect.

Almost immediately after the election, it became evident that Lü's feminist identity was a source of tension within the party. A firestorm was kicked up in May 2000 when Lü told foreign reporters that she considered Taiwan "an independent sovereign state," triggering denunciation from Beijing. The press made much of Lü's stance as an independent woman who spoke her mind and was beholden only to her own ideals, and not her party or even the president himself (Landler, 2000). Some in the DPP called Lü a "loose cannon," or "big mouth," while others urged her to take a backseat to Chen. The media played up images of Lü as a "loud mouth crow," and a "bossy" woman eager to grab media attention and steal Chen's thunder. Rumors circulated that senior advisers were working to marginalize or silence Lü in an effort at damage control.

Discontented at being sidelined, Lü soon began to openly complain of gender discrimination, saying: “Don’t treat me this way because I am a woman” (*Zhongguo shibao/China Times, Lienhe bao/United Times, Ziyou shibao/Liberty Times*, 14, 15 and 16 April 2000). In fact, Lü had long been subjected to micro-aggressions from individual men within the DPP, who were unable to accept her outspoken and dominant leadership style, which does not conform to common expectations of feminine demureness in Taiwan. As a grassroots opposition organization, the DPP had long been a male-dominated political party, with men assuming most of the leadership roles and women generally playing subordinate roles as support staff or volunteers. As Lü noted of the party’s gender culture in our interview: “If you are a service-oriented type of woman then [men in the party] like you, but if you want to become a decision-maker, it depends if you can compromise with them or not” (Interview with Lü Hsiu-lien, 21 July, 2010). This is consistent with Tsai-Wei Sun’s findings that, despite gains in the numerical representation of women in politics “the politics in the [Asia] region is still a ‘masculine model of politics.’ Men still dominate the political arena, formulate the rules of the game, and define the standards for evaluation” (Sun, 2005, 161).

The gender issue soon became a hot topic in the media, with newspaper cartoons caricaturing Lü as an “aggrieved woman in the inner palace” (*shengong yuanfu* 深宮怨婦), crying alone in the women’s quarters (see Figs. 1 and 2). Angered by the negative press, President Chen and powerful men in the DPP criticized Lü for what they regarded as false accusations of gender discrimination. They argued that Lü’s subordinate position as vice president had nothing to do with gender, but was rather dictated by very nature of the vice presidential office as defined by the Constitution.

On the face of it, this explanation appears legitimate. However, responses by male politicians to the media storm revealed that gender dynamics were deeply imbricated in the party’s treatment of Lü. DPP party bosses countered Lü’s complaints by suggesting that she ought to serve as the president’s “political wife” (Lü, 2001, 11). This comment was partially prompted by the fact that President Chen’s wife had been confined to a wheelchair after an auto accident, limiting her public appearances as the First Lady, but really aimed to put Lü “in her place” by suggesting she should assume a properly subordinate position to Chen. When interviewed, Lü bitterly recalled: “From the moment I became vice president, from the



Fig. 1. “Aggrieved [woman] of the Inner Palace” (the book reads “two sexes governing together”). Source: [Cartoonist] Hunter Chen, *Liberty Times*, April 15, 2000. Used with permission.



Fig. 2. “Aggrieved Woman of the Inner Palace.” “The party chairman wants me to hang some lights so that you can read the Constitution.” Source: [Cartoonist] Yufu, *Liberty Times*, April 16, 2000. Used with permission.

second day, everyone in the DPP was jealous of me. They treated me like a political wife and they wanted me to keep my mouth shut. But I wanted to be a real vice president and I wanted to do and speak what I should do and say. I cannot keep silent and do nothing. I was chosen by our citizens. I represented them” (Interview with Lü Hsiu-lien, 21 July, 2010). Similarly, in her account of her first year in office, Lü reflected:

...right after I was elected, there were many cartoons and media commentaries describing me as “resentful,” as an “aggrieved woman of the inner palace,” and even people suggesting I should be the “president’s political wife,” and other disrespectful and inappropriate characterizations. This is absolutely due to gender factors. Because people are typically used to seeing the First Lady by the president’s side, and not a female vice president, it is very difficult to change this type of traditional attitude (Lü, 2001, 7).

She further recalled:

From the moment of my nomination through our election victory, President Chen continually emphasized that his vice president definitely would not be a “voiceless person” [like former Vice President Li Yuan-zu], and would not be a “flower vase,” but would be a “co-participant in national affairs.” This was something *he* said, and not something I demanded... The strange thing was, immediately after the election the pressure came down and suddenly things reverted to the Li Yuan-zu era, and they wanted the vice president to be voiceless (*meiyou shengyin* 沒有聲音). Then you add the gender factors... (Lü, 2001, 10).

As a result of the controversy, Lü’s reputation within the DPP and in the Taiwan media was tarnished. A media darling at the beginning of her vice presidential candidacy, Lü faced strong hostility in the press after she complained of her lack of power as a vice president. Opposition to Lü within the party came to a head in the run-up to the 2004 election, when Chen faced pressure from male leaders to drop Lü from the ticket. At a press conference, a group of DPP legislators urged Chen to consider three conditions in selecting a running mate: meeting social expectations; ability to “add points” to the ticket; and

ability to work collaboratively. As one commentator put it, “the anti-Lü sentiment was palpable” (“Lü lacks popularity,” www.huaxia.com, November 6, 2003). In contrast to polls leading up to the 2000 election, Lü was no longer the favored vice presidential candidate, with one poll showing 53% selecting James Soong as the vice presidential candidate most likely to strengthen his party's ticket, and only 26% saying the same for Lü (*Lienhe bao/United News*, December 13, 2003). Campaign polls furthermore indicated the Chen–Lü ticket garnering support from only 35.5% of women voters, while 46.1% supported the Lien–Soong ticket (Su, 2007, 91). Nonetheless, with a factional power struggle underway in the DPP, Chen decided to keep Lü as a running mate in order to neutralize dueling factions led by two powerful men (Su, 2007, 91).

In the aftermath of the “political wife” controversy, Lü faced two types of constraints as vice president: the first was structural, deriving from the limited constitutional role of the vice president; the second stemmed from the patriarchal political culture of the DPP, which proved doubly difficult to navigate given Lü's lack of a strong male patron within the party. Sociocultural expectations were another factor. As Sun has shown, “although women are encouraged to participate and involve into politics and administrations, they are expected to participate as ‘supporting’ roles to help men, but not to go beyond. In other words, the social values of Taiwan society remain not much encouraging and supportive of women to become top leaders in politics [sic]” (Sun, 2005, 163). In the face of these obstacles, Lü was unable to fully leverage an “old girls’ network” (Jaquette, 1997), although women had a “critical mass” in the legislature and women's organizations like Awakening were gaining influence in shaping public policy. This limitation can be explained by the KMT's majority in the legislature, which compelled women's groups to avoid close association with DPP leaders, and by the gap that had opened between Lü and the contemporary Taiwanese feminist movement. Given these constraints, it proved impossible for Lü to act as a strongly identifiable “feminist” vice president. As one feminist activist asserted: “In my opinion, she is only a female vice president, and cannot be called a feminist vice president, because she really never did anything for women!” (Personal communication July 2, 2011). Lü found herself sandwiched between party patriarchs and traditionalists who branded her a “loudmouth” feminist, and women activists who considered her not radical enough.

Defining feminist leadership

An assessment of Lü's status as “feminist” vice president must consider her own self-identification. We posed the question to Lü in an interview: “Do you consider yourself a *female* vice president or a *feminist* vice president?” Lü replied: “Both.” How do we account for the gap between Lü's self-perception and her record promoting a pro-woman agenda? This begs the question of how does one define “feminist leadership” in the first place (Offen, 1988; O'Conner, 2010). In their study of feminist leadership, Chin et al. (2008) argue that “a truly transformational approach to theorizing feminist leadership allows us to question the basic definition of who is a leader and how leadership is enacted” (Chin et al., 2008, 37). Their research revealed a broad spectrum of female leadership styles and a “strong consensus that feminist leadership is more

than leadership style based on female socialization. Feminist leaders are acutely and constantly aware of their parallel roles to serve at the helm as well as to bring about change in power—not only for women, but also for underrepresented racial/ethnic and other oppressed groups” (Chin et al., 2008, 70). If we go back to Lü's *New Feminism*, we find that a broad vision of “women's rights as human rights” has been central in the evolution of her feminist thought and action. Lü has sought throughout her political career to champion the oppressed and subordinated, but over time she increasingly defined “the oppressed” not as women per se, but as the “voiceless” Taiwanese people as a whole. Hence, Lü widened her sphere of concerns outward from women's status in Taiwan, to the democratization of Taiwan, and finally to the fight for Taiwan's recognition on the global stage. As she told us, women are only one among many oppressed groups in society, and men have also suffered from the strictures of traditional gender roles (Interview, Lü Hsiu-lien, 17 July, 1988). In other words, Lü adopted a viewpoint that patriarchy is a broader system of oppression that in the words of bell hooks “has no gender” (hooks, 2010, 170). Indeed, articulating such insights in the 1980s, Lü belonged to a generation of women of color and non-Western feminists that pushed white, middle-class feminism to recognize an intersectional approach combining gender, race/ethnicity, and culture (Teng, 1989). As her thinking evolved, Lü replaced her early slogan of “holding a spatula in the left hand, and a pen in the right,” with “supporting feminists with the left hand, and promoting democratists with the right” (*zuoshou fuchi xinnixing, youshou tuicu minzhuren* 左手扶持新女性,右手推促民主人) (Lin, 1991; Lü, 2015). During the 2000 presidential campaign, Lü emphasized the key role of the DPP in empowering the oppressed and giving voice to those who had been excluded from political participation, thus exhibiting feminist leadership as defined above (Lü, 2006, 34). Indeed, while it may appear that Lü abandoned women's issues to focus on international relations, a closer examination of her vision for Taiwan's future reveals underlying links with her feminist ethos.

“Soft power” and female leadership

When asked if a woman brings any “difference” to the office of vice president, Lü replied with reference to her efforts to promote “soft power” as the key to Taiwan's future on the international stage. Whereas the Cold War conflict between Taiwan and China primarily involved military and economic contests of power, Lü sought to articulate a new path for Taiwan's future based on “soft power,” a concept she derived from Joseph Nye. Nye (1990) described “soft power” as a country's influence through attraction, in contrast to “hard power” as coercion or payment (“sticks and carrots”). Bringing a “different voice” to her conceptualization of “soft power,” Lü put her own personal stamp on the concept by relating it to difference feminism: women, she told us, are especially equipped to recognize the benefits of soft power, unlike men, who often remain preoccupied with contests of hard power.

As articulated in *Soft Power: Vision for a New Era* (Lü, 2006), a collection of Lü's vice presidential speeches, she “advocated the implementation of soft power politics and the need for Taiwan to distinguish itself through its adoption of soft power” (Lü, 2006, Preface). Given the military and diplomatic impasse

between Taiwan and China, and the growing uncertainty of Taiwan's economic power, Lü argued that soft power, as an alternative path, provided the key to Taiwan's future. Lü defined Taiwan's soft power "as referring to human rights, democracy, peace, love, and technological progress" (Lü, 2006, Preface), and identified women's emancipation, on top of Taiwan's "economic miracle" and the "follow-up political miracle" of peaceful democratization, as a core feature of Taiwan's soft power (Lü, 2006, Preface). In contrast to official DPP statements, Lü consistently put gender equality front and center of her vision for the new, democratic Taiwan, identifying gender equality as one of four essential elements of a strong foundation for democracy (Lü, 2006, 55–56).

She moreover gendered soft power by invoking difference feminism. Lü asserted that women possess "their own soft powers of mercy, beauty, wisdom and courage" (Lü, 2006, 30). These gendered differences, she argued, should not be suppressed but rather harnessed to transform the political arena, promoting democratization and even global peace. As she wrote of women's capacity for mercy: "I have often said that 99.9 per cent of the wars in human history have been started by men. If there were more women making decisions, peace would prevail" (Lü, 2006, 30–31). Of women's beauty, she claimed: "With more women in the public sector, politics will become cleaner, and nicer. With more women, politics can be more beautiful" (Lü, 2006, 31). According to Lü, these special feminine qualities are potential assets to Taiwan in the pursuit of soft power as global influence. Thus, she refashioned foreign affairs as a "soft" issue, consistent with the notion of female leadership as a "different voice." Examples of her "soft power" efforts to promote Taiwan's presence and visibility in the global arena include her founding of the Democratic Pacific Union, an extra-governmental group of 28 Pacific Rim democracies, her "Sending Love to Tibet" campaign, and a humanitarian relief drive for refugees in Afghanistan (Lü, 2006, 6–7). In 2001, she received the "World Peace Prize" from the World Peace Corps Mission for her efforts to promote world peace, human rights, women's rights, and democracy (Lü, 2006, 85). Although Lü's relational feminism is no longer at the "cutting edge" of Taiwanese feminism, her "soft power" campaign is an example of feminist leadership deeply informed by an ethos derived from her personal vision of difference feminism (Chang, 2009).

Conclusion

Unlike the case of South Korea, which seems to confirm the popular notion of dynastic descent as the sole route to the top leadership for Asian women, Taiwan affirms that female leaders in Asia can break the molds of dynastic or tokenistic leadership, both of which depend on male patronage, and rely on their individual achievements and political networks to reach the top levels of national leadership. A strong example of electoral success, Lü's record in office in terms of pro-woman agenda setting is more difficult to assess. As we have argued, Lü faced various constraints in pursuing an overt feminist agenda as vice president. In structural terms, she was constrained by the lack of constitutional power accorded the vice president, and by her lack of a strong support network within the patriarchal political culture of her party. Negative media attention aroused by her failure to conform to expectations of proper subordinate behavior led to her labeling as a "bossy woman," and an

"aggrieved woman of the inner palace," further constraining her power to advance her agenda. The gap between Lü and Taiwan's contemporary women's movement additionally diminished her recognition as a feminist spokesperson. Given these constraints, we contend that Lü's lack of a clear record on this score does not make her by default a "tame kitten."

Indeed, Lü faced a double standard in her vice presidency: needing to excel in foreign affairs in order to prove she was not a narrow "women's issues" representative, she was still expected to devote time to women's affairs (see Hoogensen and Solheim, 2006). Moreover, despite her impressive academic and professional credentials in foreign affairs, Lü felt compelled to articulate a feminine dimension to "soft power" to help legitimate her expertise in this domain. The gendered expectations placed on women leaders, inherent in the label "tame kitten," create a dual burden that deserves further scrutiny.

Lü's case also points to the difficulty of clearly identifying "women's interests": recognition of "within-group diversity," which is especially pronounced in Taiwan's case owing to both ethnic politics and "Blue (KMT) versus Green (DPP)" tensions, is crucial to avoid essentialism and highlight instead the competing claims of "women's interests" put forward by various actors (Celis et al., 2014, 171). Hence, we foreground Lü's own indigenous feminist theory as a vital element in assessing her degree of substantive representation. Lü's insistence on the inseparability of women's emancipation and Taiwanese self-determination is core to her personal vision of feminist leadership—even as it has alienated her at times from patriarchal male *Dangwai* leaders, on one hand, and from politically neutral feminists, on the other. If "good" substantive representation is "conceived of as a process, involving debate, deliberation, and contestation over group interests, occurring inside and outside of formal institutions" (Celis et al., 2014, 151), Lü's role in high-visibility debates surrounding gender and political leadership shows her as a catalyst for productive conflict in the contestation over women's interests.

After serving as vice president for eight years, Lü was unable to break the final glass ceiling of the presidency and failed to win the DPP primary. Nonetheless, her vice presidency broke the mold of Asia's top women leaders as dynastic family representatives, and opened the door for her fellow DPP member Dr. Tsai Ing-wen to become Taiwan's first female presidential candidate in the 2012 election. Although Tsai lost this election by a narrow margin to the incumbent Ma Ying-jeou, her candidacy was convincing enough to enable a second run, and ultimate victory, in the 2016 presidential election. Women's progress in the political arena was further confirmed during this election cycle when the right-wing KMT stepped up in July 2015 to nominate a female candidate, Hung Hsiu-chu (replaced by Eric Chu in October 2015), launching Taiwan's "woman on woman" presidential race as trumpeted in the international press for a few heady months in 2015 (Yen, 2015).

Hence, in the final analysis, if "the burning question" for scholars studying female political leadership is whether "women politicians make a difference for other women" (Fleschenberg, 2008, 49), our answer in Lü's case is a resounding yes: her pioneering efforts, first with the Taiwanese feminist movement of the 1970s, then in the electoral arena of the 1990s and 2000s, and finally in the top leadership as vice president,

have helped make Taiwan a shining global example of the twin progress of peaceful democratization and women's emancipation, a facet of the island's development that observers declare "underline[s] the genuine, gaping differences between" Taiwan and China (Ridge, 2015). Taiwan in 2016 is a very different place for women than in 1971, when the government considered setting a cap on women's college admissions, and it is undeniable that Lü has played a major role in this sociocultural change. Whether or not one agrees with Lü's brand of feminism, she has been an original thinker and prolific writer who has contributed fundamentally to the development of what Chang has called an "indigenous strand of relational feminism independent from Western influence" (Chang, 2009, 9; Ku, 1998). Her early feminist activism set the stage for gender issues to become "hot and popular" in Taiwan today, propelling candidates of both sexes to address these issues (Sun, 2005, 158). Lü helped to move Taiwanese women's participation in electoral politics beyond the political proxy stage of the 1980s, and she has made a difference for other women by serving as a highly visible role model proving that a woman can enter the high ranks of political leadership based on her own merits. According to Joyce Gelb's interviews of Taiwanese women politicians, Lü has inspired "an entire generation of Taiwanese women" (Gelb, 2010, 4). Considering the long-term impact of her legacy, we conclude that Lü has been an effective agent of "refreshing" social change for Asian women, and a feminist pioneer for social justice, and not simply a "[throwback] to the past" and entrenched political hierarchies (Crossette, 1996). The power of such transformational leadership to make a difference for Taiwan's women (and men) is not adequately captured, we argue, in the false dichotomy of "roaring tigress" or "tame kitten." Perhaps the image of a lone mountain climber, facing an uphill ascent with her sights ever set on the top, would be more apt.

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Endnotes

¹ The DPP candidate Tsai Ing-wen ran against the KMT's Eric Chu. Hung Hsiu-chu was the official KMT nominee from July 19 to October 17, 2015.

² More recently, Lü has spoken on the need to expand gender equity to include sexual minorities or the "third sex." Lü, 2015.

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