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Wil Burghoorn, Kazuki Iwanaga, Cecilia Milwertz and Qi Wang (eds.), *Gender Politics in Asia: Women Manoeuvring within Dominant Gender Orders*. Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS Press 2008. ISBN 978 87 7694 0157 (pp. 235, paperback).

These seven essays, edited by Burghoorn, et al., were originally presented at the first International Conference on Women and Politics in Asia in 2003. The aim of the volume is to examine how gender politics is played out by women situated in different social and cultural locations in Asia. Following R. W. Connell's definition, *gender politics* here means 'the steering of the gender order', the gender order being 'the dominant patterns of gender arrangements and norms in a given society' (p. 1).

The editors' focus of the volume is Asia, as they perceive the recent modernization and democratization process in Asia is bringing about an ongoing gender negotiation. However, the book's purpose is not to find similar patterns of gender politics that are specific only to Asia. Rather, they illustrate how different positionalities of women living in various countries in Asia – both in higher and lower social and political status – manifest certain forms of gender politics, by challenging, resisting, changing or even maintaining gender orders in their societies, precisely because of their specific positionalities. However, if not explicitly, the many essays in this book implicitly challenge the dominant way of understanding the political movement of women. By investigating various micro-politics led by women in Asia, the authors in this book draw attention to an informal organization, or as Mikiko Eto states in chapter two, 'another type of women's movements', in Asia (p. 43), which can be very different from mainstream western perceptions of a feminist movement.

All essays in this volume highlight these aspects successfully. More importantly, though the majority of essays examine the women's movement under a microscope in relation to a specific historical and social context, the authors bring such micro, or often very personal movements, up to much larger frameworks – to local, national, transnational and historical levels, thereby making their arguments richer and more interesting. This is one book that will hold readers' interest because of the wide range of interesting research topics and approaches.

The volume starts with Mina Roces' fascinating examination of Filipino women's usage of costume in political matters. It traces different political regimes in the twentieth century, from colonial to democratic and to authoritarian regimes, and shows how women, such as suffra-

gists, Catholic nuns, and Imelda Romualdez Marcos, among others, chose specific dresses to challenge, maintain or even create the dominant political power within the given sociopolitical context.

In the second chapter Mikiko Eto challenges the conventional idea of the 'feminist movement' that often rejects women's positionality as housewives and their capability of challenging the gender order. The essay uses as illustration a Japanese non-feminist movement represented by the Life Club movement, which was originally launched by middle-class housewives who, as care-givers, share similar concerns and frustrations over certain issues, such as food safety, environmental conservation, etc. The author shows how such 'non-feminist' movements brought about multiple political successes and deconstruction of the gender norms in Japan. Their grassroots activity as housewives brought not only changes in some social areas, but also democratization in the existing Japanese political institutions, as it is through such collective movements that they developed political knowledge and skills and then entered the political world via rather unconventional manners.

Chapters three and four deal with gender politics in religions in Malaysia and Thailand. By comparing the way in which a male and a female healer, followers of Indian guru Sathya Sai Baba, conduct their healing in Malaysia, Alexandra Kent reveals how a male healer works within the dominant patriarchal social order, reinforcing the state patriarchal propaganda, while a female healer challenges such gender ideology through her micro-politics of practice. Similarly, through a case study of Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, the first Thai woman who obtained the status of a female monk, Monica Lindberg Falk demonstrates how her struggle to be ordained in a patriarchal sphere – Thai Buddhism, which has not accepted women for ordination in the last 700 years – not only contributes to changes in the traditional gendered religious order but also to the overall social status of women in Thailand.

Triggered by both internal political changes and external forces, political movements led by non-governmental women's organizations in the People's Republic of China (PRC) have increased since the 1980s. In chapter five, Cecilia Milwertz and Bu Wei examine Beijing-based NGOs that advocate non-violence against women, especially domestic violence (DV), and show how the activists initially borrowed and blended the western perception of DV and their ways of carrying out an activist movement to set off the NGO movements in the PRC.

Chapter six deals with another kind of political movement in the PRC: the Women Mayors' Association. In this unique case study, Qi Wang

discusses why these politically and economically powerful women needed to develop a nationwide support-organization. Sharing the same sentiments and struggles in dually-male dominant spheres – work and home – women mayors in the PRC needed emotional and career support from their peers to continue and maximize their career opportunities. Interestingly, they did so not by challenging the existing patriarchal gender orders but by conforming to it.

The volume ends with the insightful essay by Phyllis Chew on historical changes in women's political involvement in Singapore. What is interesting in her essay is that it shows multi-level reasons behind the lack of women's political interests, despite their more equal gender position than women in other Asian countries. The post-colonial depoliticization, the state's strong functionalist approach to the family, the industrialization of the nation in their nation building, the neoliberal labour market economy, etc., have all affected the cause.

Though highly interesting, the one drawback of the volume is the invisibility of 'male' gender politics. While the book acknowledges the concept of 'gender' to be 'relationships between men and women' (p. 3), the book focuses solely on the gender politics of women. As R. W. Connell has theorized, gender is not about social relationships based on the dichotomous category of 'men' and 'women'. If there are multiple social locations and hierarchal orders among women, as the book emphasizes, this is also the same for men. Perhaps the dynamics and layers of power hierarchy are even more complex in modern Asia as it functions as a hub of labour migration in the globalized market economy, actively sending and/or receiving male and female foreign workers – both blue-collar and white-collar expatriates. How do men in various different positionalities/social backgrounds maneuver the existing gender relations in their social context?

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