

# Meiji Institute for Global Affairs

## *MIGA COLUMN GLOBAL DIAGNOSIS*

February 1, 2017

Takashi Hoshino

Joint Researcher, Meiji Institute for Global Affairs, Meiji University

### Short Curriculum Vitae – Takashi Hoshino

Born in 1954, he graduated from the Kyoto University Faculty of Economics in March 1977, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management in May 1983. He joined the Long-Term Credit Bank of Japan in April 1977. After service in units of Economic Research, and Industry Research departments beginning in May 1983, he was appointed a member of the Board and General Manager of the LTCB Research Institute (in January 1999). Thereafter, he served as Director of the Board and General Manager of both the planning and economic research departments at the Institute for Socio-economic Infrastructure Research and Leader of the strategic unit in the head office of Sanyo Electric Co., Ltd., before his appointment as Legislative Assistant & Policy Secretary for Yoriko Kawaguchi, member of the House of Councilors, from January 2006 to July 2013, and the same appointment for Shoji Maitachi, Member of the House of Councilors, from October 2013 to March 2016. From April 2016: Current post.

As for major publications, he is the author of “Corporate Siting and the Investment Environment in the United States” (Toyo Keizai Shinposha, May 1986), author and editor of “Offshore Siting Data & Manual, US Volume” (LTCB Research Institute, Inc., June 1987), and “The Collapse of Undignified Companies” (PHP Institute, October 1993). He was born in Osaka Prefecture and is now 62 years old.

### **To Increase Participation by Women in Japan’s Political World**

The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has posted greater participation by women in the workforce and society as one of its flagship policies. It has targeted an increase in the share of all women occupied by those in positions of leadership in

society to at least 30 percent by 2020, and the sphere of politics is no exception. Nevertheless, participation by women in Japan's political world is not widening much. What must be done to produce more female politicians in Japan?

In answer to this question, this column first takes an overview of the current state of female participation in the political sphere, and assesses it from the perspectives of the historical trend and international comparison. Next, it outlines the quota system, which is regarded as a promising policy, and examines its effects and issues in countries that have instated it. Finally, it describes the present status of discussion in the National Diet.

## **1. Current state of female participation in the political sphere**

On the level of national politics, women account for 44 (9.3 percent) of the 475 members of the House of Representatives (Lower House) and 50 (20.7 percent) of 242 members of the House of Councilors (Upper House).<sup>1</sup>

On the level of local politics, women accounted for 24 (1.3 percent) of the total number of 1,787 local governmental heads (prefectural governors, special district heads, mayors, and heads of towns and villages), and 4,127 (12.4 percent) of the 33,165 total membership of local assemblies (prefectural assemblies, special district assemblies, city councils, and town and village councils).<sup>2</sup>

It can be seen that, on both the national and local levels, the female share is much lower than the target (at least 30 percent) posted by the Abe administration. It is extremely low in the case of heads of local governments.

Next, the following can be cited as characteristics appearing in the historical trend of the number of women in the National Diet.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on figures from the Politics and Diet Section of the National Diet Library as of October 26, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Source: "Study of the Membership of Assemblies of Local Public Bodies and the Staffing by the Party or Faction Affiliation of the Head," Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications; figures as of December 31, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Miyuki Takazawa, "Trends in the Rate of Female Diet Members" (National Diet Library, "Studies and Information - Issue Brief -," No. 883, November 24, 2015, pp. 11 - 12)

- ① The female share has constantly been higher in the House of Councilors than in the House of Representatives since the elections of 1947.
- ② In both houses, the female share has been higher among members elected by proportional representation.
- ③ In the House of Representatives, the female share remained low during the period of the medium-constituency system (1947 to 1993).
- ④ In the House of Representatives, modification of the electoral system induced major change in the number and share of female members.

Each of these characteristics are of great interest as indicating that results can be changed by changing the electoral system. The fourth in particular is related to an occurrence of historical importance as well, and deserves to be looked at in a little more detail.

## **2. When the female share was historically high: the major constituency restricted plural entry ballot system in 1946**

The election for the House of Representatives held in April 1946, which was the first national election after the war, led to the birth of 39 female representatives (8.4 percent of the total membership of 466). The figure of 39 was a record-high that was not bettered for just under 60 years, until the election of 43 women (9.0 percent of the total membership of 480) in the House of Representatives election in September 2005.

Behind this election lay a major occurrence: the enfranchisement of women under the policies for democratization deployed by Douglas MacArthur. In addition, however, the application of the major constituency restricted plural entry ballot system merits special mention.<sup>4</sup> The major constituency system is a mechanism for election of a plural number of members from a single constituency. In the 1946 election, the number of members elected from a single constituency ranged from four to 14.<sup>56</sup> In the restricted

---

<sup>4</sup> Detailed information on this subject may be found in Chapter 7, “The Story of Women’s Enfranchisement,” pp. 328 – 366 in “The First House of Representatives Dietwomen – Believing in a Bright New Tomorrow,” by Mitsuyo Iwao (Shinpusha on October 5, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> The mechanism for election of three to five members from a single constituency is called the “medium constituency system.” It may be considered a type of major constituency system.

<sup>6</sup>Major constituencies were allocated as follows. a) The six prefectural units of Hokkaido, Tokyo,

plural entry ballot system, voters enter the names of two or more candidates, but less than the number to be elected. In the election in question, voters were allowed to enter the names of up to two candidates in constituencies with 10 or less seats and up to three in those with 11 or more seats.<sup>7</sup> At the time, it was very difficult to ascertain the voters in cities, towns, and villages due to disruption, evacuation, and other phenomena immediately after the war, and there was reportedly no other way to conduct the election.<sup>8</sup>

Beginning with the election in the following year, however, a switch was made to the medium constituency single entry ballot system, and the number of women elected to the Diet plunged to 15. Thereafter and until the abolition of the medium constituency system (the last election under this system was held in July 1993) the number of women elected to the House of Representatives continued to hover in the range of six – 14. This was in spite of the fact that, over the same period, the number of seats rose from 466 to 511.<sup>9</sup> The number of female representatives began to rise with the election of October 1996, when the system combining small (single-seat) constituencies and proportional representation was instated.

As indicated by the above, the historical trend shows that there was a period when the number of female representatives was high. The variation was closely intertwined with the type of electoral system. In post-war Japan, the major constituency restricted plural entry ballot system was adopted in April 1946 alone, and was therefore viewed as a “special” system applied in the period of post-war disruption. I, however, cannot help but think that it is worth reconsideration from the perspective of use as a means of increasing the number of female representatives.

---

Niigata, Aichi, Osaka, and Hyogo were divided into two constituencies, and b) the remaining 40 prefectural units each constituted a single constituency. c) The constituencies of Fukui and Tottori prefectures each had the lowest number of seats at four, and d) the Hokkaido 1 constituency and the constituencies of Nagano and Shizuoka prefectures had the highest number of seats at 14. It should be noted that e) Okinawa prefecture was the only constituency with two seats, but the election was not actually held there because Okinawa was still under the administration of the U.S. military. Source: “Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia,” the 22nd House of Representatives General Election (accessed on January 23, 2017)

<sup>7</sup> Source: “Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia,” the restricted plural entry ballot system (accessed on January 23, 2017)

<sup>8</sup> Mitsuyo Iwao, “The First House of Representatives Dietwomen,” p. 360

<sup>9</sup> Beginning with the general election held in December 1976, the number of seats in the House of Representatives was 511 (except for the elections of July 1986 and February 1990, when it was 512).

### 3. Japan ranked 111th among 144 countries overall

Every year, World Economic Forum releases the Gender Gap Index (GGI), which contains indices for the degree of gender equality in each country. The objective is to contribute to the promotion by governments in all countries of societies with co-participation by men and women. In the Global Gender Gap Report 2016 released last October, Japan ranked 111th among 144 countries overall. Moreover, its overall rank slipped 10 places from 2015, when it ranked 101st.<sup>10</sup> This was indeed an “inconvenient truth” for the Abe administration, which has taken wider participation by women as one of its flagship policies.

This 111th ranking puts Japan behind Ethiopia (109th) and Nepal (110th). Behind it are many Islamic countries in the Middle East (Kuwait at 128th, Egypt at 132nd, Iran at 139th, and Saudi Arabia at 141th). While their populations are largely Islamic,

The countries of Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia ranked above Japan (at 72nd, 88th, and 106th, respectively). It would therefore be a mistake to label all Islamic countries alike as lagging in respect of gender equality.

To take a closer look, the GGI converts gender gaps into indices for four items: 1) economic participation and opportunity, 2) educational attainment, 3) health and survival, and 4) political empowerment. Table 1 shows Japan’s ranking by field in 2016 and 2006, ten years earlier. For reference purposes, it also shows the breakdown (field-specific rankings) for Iceland, which ranked first overall in 2016.

Table 1 Japan’s ranking by field (2006 and 2016)

	Overall	Economy	Education	Health	Politics
2006	80	83	60	1	83
2016	111	118	76	40	103
<Iceland>					
2006	4	17	50	92	4
2016	1	9	1	104	1

Source: Prepared by the author based on “Global Gender Gap Report 2016,” World Economic Forum

<sup>10</sup><http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/>

While this table can be read in various ways, it clearly shows the following at the least. Firstly, Japan's ranking fell in all fields over the ten-year period. Secondly, it fell by a wider margin in the economic and political fields. In addition, comparison with Iceland suggests that Iceland's first-place ranking reflects its high ranking in the political field. It would probably not be wholly mistaken to conclude that the decline in Japan's ranking derives from its fall in respect of political empowerment.

#### **4. Outline and assessment of the quota system**

What measures could conceivably be taken to promote wider participation by women in the political sphere, and specifically, an increase in the number of female Diet members? Generally speaking, various measures are conceivable, such as the provision of study and training for women who want to become Diet members, and of financial assistance required for their political activities and election campaigns.<sup>11</sup> One measure with good prospects for having a strong effect that is increasingly being taken in other countries and also attracting attention in Japan is the quota system.

The quota system is a measure which is: 1) aimed at achieving a balance between men and women in respect of the number of assembly members (i.e., an increase in the number of female members), 2) is incorporated into law or the rules of political parties etc., and 3) explicitly obligates a gender-based ratio (or number) for assembly members, officially nominated/adopted candidates, or aspiring candidates.<sup>12</sup>

Countries that have instated a legal quota system for national elections (for the lower house in the case of bicameral systems) number 79. Of this total, 24 apply a seat allocation system (many of them being African or Asian countries), and the remaining 55, a candidate quota system.<sup>13</sup> Among countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), legal quotas of

---

<sup>11</sup> Julie Ballington, et al. (translation by the Prime Minister's Office), "Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Guidebook to Promote Women's Political Participation" (2013). This work introduces the measures and nature of the same, that are producing results in promotion of wider participation by women in politics by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and presents actual cases in certain countries.  
[http://www.jp.undp.org/content/dam/tokyo/docs/Publications/UNDP\\_Tok\\_GB5\\_20130904.pdf](http://www.jp.undp.org/content/dam/tokyo/docs/Publications/UNDP_Tok_GB5_20130904.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Takeshi Miyahata, "Measures to Increase the Number of Dietwomen – Cases of the Quota System in Other Countries –" (National Diet Library, "Reference" No. 778, November 2015, pp. 48 – 49)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 50

this type have been instated by 12: Ireland, Italy, South Korea, Greece, Spain, Slovenia, Chile, France, Belgium, Poland, Portugal, and Mexico. In each of these countries, the quotas are for the number of candidates. <sup>14</sup>

Let us consider the actual nature and effects of the quota system in the cases of South Korea and France. <sup>15</sup>

(Case 1: South Korea, instatement in 2000)

The National Assembly of South Korea is unicameral. It has a membership of 300, consisting of 246 elected from small constituencies and 54 through proportional representation (of the restrictive-listing type, from a nationwide constituency). The quota system is applied in the election of members elected by proportional representation. It compels each party to have women make up at least 50 percent of their total number of candidates, and to choose women as candidates for odd-numbered slots on the list.

As for the election of members from small constituencies, the system obligates parties to make efforts to officially back female candidates in at least 30 percent of the constituencies. Parties are furnished with incentive by the provision of subsidies for nomination of female candidates.

[Assessment]

As a result of instatement of the quota system, the share of all National Assembly members occupied by women rose from 2.9 percent in 1997 (before the instatement) to 5.9 percent in 2000, 13.0 percent in 2004, 13.7 percent in 2008, and 15.7 percent in 2012.

Because the scope of quota system application is confined to 54 (18 percent) of the 300 National Assembly seats, it cannot be denied that its effect is limited. By the same token, however, realistically speaking, it is also important to facilitate acceptance of the system.

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 50

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 59 - 61

As compared to the proportional representation system, the effects of quota system instatement would be more difficult to induce in the small constituency system component. Parties must be given more effective incentive for extensive use of the provisions for official subsidies.

(Case 2: France, instatement in 2000)

The French Parliament is bicameral, and the quota system is applied to the National Assembly (i.e., Lower House), which has 577 seats (small constituency, two-round voting system). Each party must keep the gap between men and women in respect of the number of candidates to no more than 2 percent of its entire number of candidates. Parties which violate this rule are penalized in payment of official aid from the government. More specifically, for that portion of the official aid varying with the percentage of votes obtained (equal to 50 percent of the total budget, the remaining amount corresponding with the number of members as percentage of the total), the amount is reduced in correspondence with the degree of difference between the number of male and female candidates (by up to 75 percent under the existing system, and up to 100 percent under the system to be applied beginning with the next general election).

[Assessment]

As a result of instatement of the quota system, the share of all National Assembly members occupied by women rose substantially, from 10.9 percent in 1997 (before the instatement) to 12.3 percent in 2002, 18.5 percent in 2007, 26.9 percent in 2012, and 26.2 percent in 2015.

Similarly, the female share of the number of candidates increased from 23.0 percent in 1997 to 38.9 percent in 2002, 41.6 percent in 2007, and 40.0 percent in 2012 (data for 2015 were not available). But at the same time, there was also a big gap between the female percentage of the number of National Assembly members and that of the number of candidates.

Like South Korea, France is faced with the need to revise the system of official aid to make incentive for political parties more effective. This is because, under the prevailing provisions for penalties, the big parties which have a good chance of



obtaining higher subsidies for their percentage of the number of National Assembly members do not necessarily feel motivated to increase the number of female candidates. In addition, it has been pointed out that, under the system of small constituencies and two-round voting, female candidates tend to be fielded in constituencies where the party in question has low prospects for winning, in order to “make the number” required by the quota system.<sup>16</sup>

## **5. Discussions behind stagnation of quota system instatement at the preliminary stage**

Lastly, let us view the state of discussions in Japan’s National Diet. Initially, a non-partisan Diet group whose members came from the Liberal Democratic, Komeito, and Democratic parties hoped to jointly propose a bill to increase the number of female members in assemblies on the national and local governmental levels, as a piece of legislation initiated by the Diet. As a result of confrontation about the phrasing of the stipulation for the objective of the bill, however, the ruling and opposition parties decided to propose their own respective bills, and there are not yet any clear prospects for consultation on modifications to consolidate these bills.<sup>17</sup>

The bill tentatively titled “Promotion of Joint Participation by Men and Women in the Political Sphere” unfortunately does not obligate the instatement of a quota system and does not go beyond the level of a law of principle without binding force.

The bill prepared by the Liberal Democratic, Komeito, and Japan Innovation parties clearly states that its objective is parity between men and women as far as possible in respect of the number of candidates fielded in elections on the national and local levels. The bill prepared by the four main opposition parties states the objective of an equal number of men and women as far as possible. The only difference in the statement of objective is essentially that between “parity” and “equal number.” It appears that both parties wanted to be quick about emphasizing their active stance on policy for women’s empowerment, and have been unable to proceed any further.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 59

<sup>17</sup> “Promotion of ‘Women’s Participation’ in the Political World Founders,” Yomiuri Shimbun, morning edition, January 9, 2017

Wider participation by women in society can make society more vibrant through effects such as the introduction of diverse new ideas, value outlooks, and insights into problems. Among companies, it can heighten the diversity of human resources as the wellsprings of technological innovation breeding new products and businesses. In the context of Japanese society, which has very few immigrants and foreign workers, women can be termed virtually the only principals supplying this precious kind of diversity. The same can be said of Japan's political sphere as well.

As indicated by the World Economic Forum's GGI, the pace of improvement in various other countries is far higher than that in Japan. The world is not going to wait for Japan.

Even if it is internationally disparaged as lagging a full lap behind other countries, the Abe administration should strive to have the Diet pass the aforementioned bill tentatively titled "Promotion of Joint Participation by Men and Women in the Political Sphere" during its current session. In addition, besides starting substantive discussion on the quota system, it is important for the government to implement other measures as well, beginning with those that are easiest to execute.

(End)