

Compelled by Duty, Conscripted by Destiny

PORTRAITS OF 16 ASIAN WOMEN AT THE
FRONTLINE OF DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE

By John Joseph S. Coronel



IN MEMORIAM

SURIN PITSUWAN

(1949 – 2017)

Founding Chair
Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats

DINA ABAD

(1955 – 2017)

Founding Chair
CALD Women's Caucus

The book “Compelled by Duty, Conscripted by Destiny” is a testimony that Liberal Democrats, compared to other parties to the left and right of the ideological spectrum, have been the most committed to women empowerment, particularly in promoting women in politics.

In their stories, sixteen laudable women overcome incredible barriers, not just in the form of political persecution committed by tyrants in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes but also in the form of social and cultural biases and prejudices that prevail among the general population. Though these challenges are not necessarily unique to women, the obstacles are created and perpetuated mostly by men.

But one thing these sixteen democracy frontliners have in common is the support from the women and men of their respective political parties as well as solidarity from regional and global networks in times when succor was needed most as they were subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, politically motivated trials, public vilification, physical threats, violence, and assassination attempts.

Of these sixteen women, two became presidents, Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia and Tsai Ing Wen while two became vice presidents—Annette Lu of Taiwan and Leni Robredo of the Philippines. One, Aung San Suu Kyi, was given the title of State Counsellor having been disqualified from becoming Prime Minister of Myanmar despite the overwhelming mandate given to her party. But before reaching their positions, they experienced similar oppression as the other women profiled in this book.

Philippine Senator Leila de Lima, 2018 Liberal International Prize for Freedom Laureate, remains in detention as did Lu and Suu Kyi before. The party of Mu Sochua and Saumura Tioulong was dissolved by the Cambodian Supreme Court and many of its leaders are in exile and some are in prison—something reminiscent of Suu Kyi’s National League of Democracy. There is the threat that Vice President Robredo may lose her position also by virtue of a Supreme Court decision.

CALD has nine full member parties, an observer party and individual members from another party; it is an alliance involving 11 political parties. Four of these 11 parties are currently chaired by women: President Tsai, former President Megawati, Vice President Robredo and State Counsellor Suu Kyi. My immediate predecessor as CALD Chair, Oyun Sanjaasuren, only recently stepped down as the leader of the Civil Will Green Party of Mongolia while Emily Lau was the first woman to chair the Democratic Party of Hong Kong. It is also significant to note that Megawati, Suu Kyi and Sanjaasuren are the founders of their respective parties.

The inroads that CALD has made in empowering women is reflective of the commitment of the political parties that are part of its alliance. The CALD Women’s Caucus has evolved into a dynamic organization with its own programs and projects that complement and synergize CALD’s own general program of action.

I would like to congratulate the current Chair of CALD Women’s Caucus, Jayanthi Balaguru, incoming chair of the International Network of Liberal Women (INLW) as its first leader from Asia. The accomplishments of the Caucus is being recognized beyond the region.

Abhisit Vejjajiva

Chair

Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats

Though the CALD Women's Caucus is only a dozen years old, women have been primary movers and dynamic trendsetters in the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) since its founding a quarter of a century ago in Bangkok, and even before that, during the "inception meeting" in Taipei.

Asian Liberal women have significantly shaped the lives of their nations and their compatriots for the better. Many of these stories may be familiar. But many more aspects of the lives and work of the women in the frontline of democratic struggle are not as well known. All these and more are captured in the book, *Compelled by Duty, Conscripted by Destiny*, written by CALD's first Executive Director, John Coronel.

It is a great honor to be in the company of these 15 remarkable women, many of whom are my friends and all of them I have long admired. They are our models we at the CALD Women's Caucus want to emulate. And if we succeed in achieving even a fraction of what they have exceptionally done, then the lofty goals we have aspired for will be within reach.

We are all Asians, liberals and women. But despite these three common and defining characteristics, we remain a diverse group. We span a mere couple of generations but the diversity lies in the varying political, economic and socio-cultural milieu we live in, and the circumstances that have been thrust upon us.

A good number of us come from families with politics flowing in our veins. We have a presidential daughter who became president herself, the daughter of an independence hero who freed his nation from colonial rule and who herself was tasked to free that same nation from the shackles of homegrown generals, an accomplished economist and politician by any measure but whom people insist on referring to as the daughter of a beloved prime minister and wife of the country's opposition leader, the bashful wife of the rising star of his country thrust in the limelight after her husband's untimely demise, and a brilliant scientist employed by a large corporation in cosmopolitan London who had to immediately return to her remote, landlocked homeland to continue the mission of her assassinated brother.

On the other hand, a good number of us also had to learn the ropes by ourselves. Regardless of our backgrounds, there are more common threads, probably less immediately apparent because they are abstract in nature—grace under pressure, compassion for the less privilege, inner strength, and a balanced combination of intellect and instinct.

This book contains the stories of our lives, our struggles and successes, our hopes and our fears. Many of these woman have been instrumental in setting their countries free; others are still in the midst of ongoing struggles. But even amidst the most grueling of circumstances, even while in prison or in exile, we, the women in this book, get to tell our stories and this is a victory in itself.

It is with sadness to note the passing of our dear friend, Dina Abad, Founding Chair of the CALD Women's Caucus. It is but proper that this book is dedicated to her and to the late CALD Founding Chair, Surin Pitsuwan. The fact that CALD and the Caucus are thriving is a testimony to their lives well lived.

Jayanthi Devi Balaguru
Chair
CALD Women's Caucus

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First of all, I would like to thank the women profiled in the book, *Compelled by Duty, Conscripted by Destiny*, as well as their staff, for their invaluable insights and feedback. To them, we are indebted. The inspiring stories of these 16 women are the essence of this book. They are the epitome of the spirit behind the silver anniversary celebrations of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD): reclaiming democracy, rebuilding society.

The enthusiastic support of the CALD leadership, Chair Abhisit Vejjajiva, and Secretary General Kiat Sittheeamorn, and the CALD Women's Caucus chaired by Jayanthi Balaguru, gave the impetus for the publication of the book.

Our partner from the very beginning, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), provided the necessary resources for this worthwhile publication to come into fruition. The silver anniversary celebration of CALD is also a commemoration of the twenty five-year dynamic partnership between CALD and FNF, a lasting cooperation based on shared goals, and characterized by reciprocity and synergy.

The CALD Secretariat, as usual, gave the vital logistic and organizational support. My successor as Executive Director, Lito Arlegue, provided the clear direction and sagacious guidance from the book's inception to its final printing.

I served CALD on a fulltime capacity for eight years. Lito is now on his eighth year in his current position while CALD Program Manager, Paolo Zamora, has been with CALD since 2002 after graduating from college. Lito was an assistant instructor at De La Salle University in Manila when he became CALD Program Officer way back in 2001. He left CALD a year later and carved a niche in academia and returned in 2010 to assume his current post.

I have witnessed how CALD has achieved even greater heights since I resigned in 2007. A great deal of credit must go to these two fine gentlemen whose competence, dedication and hard work were invaluable in creating a conducive environment for the alliance to pursue the challenging task of democracy building in the region. Paolo was a fresh graduate while Lito was a year-old graduate of my alma mater, the University of the Philippines, when they joined CALD. But my instincts then told me that they were the best the choices from the many applicants, several of whom had impressive track records. I was proven right!

Pictures are just as important as words. Thank you to the owners of the photographs used for allowing their inclusion in the book.

And kudos to the production team! Mike Gadi did the layout and art design with same passion for excellence he has shown for other CALD publications for more than a decade now. A former CALD intern, Micah Casem, was hired as project assistant particularly for this project. Among others, she helped me in the research process and was primarily responsible in communicating with the profiled women and their offices. Cover and Pages Publishing Corporation accommodated our request for the speedy printing of this book, working overtime and even on a Sunday to ensure that the book would make it to Bangkok on time. To Chi Lachica of this company, thank you.

Painting the portraits of the 16 Asian Women in the frontline of democratic struggle using as my brush, the power of the pen, is an honor and privilege—as well as an obligation. The lessons in life that they imparted are etched in my memory.

JOHN CORONEL

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

"It is not I who has been consigned to the bedroom of history."

—Philippine President Corazon C. Aquino (1933-2009)

On 4 November 1985, President Ferdinand Marcos surprised everyone by declaring on an American news telecast the holding of snap elections in two years and three days. The Philippines was in the midst of political and economic turmoil triggered by the assassination of the country's foremost opposition leader, Senator Benigno "Ninoy" A. Aquino, Jr., Secretary General of the Liberal Party (LP).

Democratic institutions including the bicameral congress and political parties ceased from functioning when Marcos declared Martial Law on 21 September 1972. LP leaders were arrested, incarcerated, tortured and murdered. Many of those who survived eventually went to political exile. Sadly, the Philippine experience was far from unique. Dictatorship became the norm in Asia with a few exceptions like Japan.

Taiwan's Martial Law, lasting more than 38 years from 1949 to 1987, is the longest in the world. The history of the island-nation dominated by one party is even longer, beginning in 1949 and ending only in 2001 when the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) ended more than half a century of political hegemony. Even democratic Japan was ruled almost entirely by one party from 1955 until 2009 when the liberals won a majority in the parliament that was long dominated by the conservatives. The authoritarian rule of Indonesia's Suharto, South Korea's Park Chung Hee, and Marcos lasted 31, 18, and 14 years, respectively.

Ninoy's widow, Corazon, or more popularly known as Cory, became the reluctant candidate of the unified opposition of the 1986 snap elections. Marcos, his followers and mass media, mostly government controlled, vilified her. She was dismissed as an inexperienced woman who knew nothing. She turned the tables around by declaring that, indeed, she knew nothing when it came to stealing, cheating, and most importantly, to killing political opponents.

As to the misogyny, she did not have to reply. The quiet strength of her character and her dignified composure spoke in her behalf. These endearing and admirable qualities are not unique to President Aquino.

Sixteen exemplary Asian women epitomize grace under pressure and calm amidst calamity: Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen, former Vice President Annette Lu, and Bi-Khim Hsaio, MP, of DPP; former Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri; Vice-President Leni Robredo, Senator Leila de Lima, the late Deputy Speaker Dina Abad and Zamboanga City Mayor (and former Deputy Speaker) Beng Climaco of the Liberal Party of the Philippines; Senior Minister Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar; former Women Minister Mu Sochua and Saumura Tiouloung of the National Rescue Party of Cambodia; former Mongolian Environment Minister Oyun Sanjaasuren of the Civil Will-Green Party; Jayanthi Devi Balaguru, of Malaysian People's Movement Party; Dr. Rachada Dhnadirek of the Democrat Party of Thailand; Legislator Emily Lau of the Democratic Party of Hong Kong; and Renho Murata, MP, of the Democrat Party of Japan.

All the women featured in this book are connected with the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD) and/or its member and observer parties. CALD is the publisher of this book. Oyun was the first woman to become CALD Chair in 2014 while Bi-Khim became CALD Secretary General in 2005. Dina, Sochua, and Jayanthi all served as Chair of the CALD Women's Caucus.

It is also interesting to note that none of the women from East Asia (Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan) come from political families. In contrast, many from Southeast Asia and Mongolia are the wives, daughters or sisters of prominent politicians. This is not to say that there are no political dynasties in East Asia, although the dominance of political dynasties in Southeast Asia is a concern.

Expectedly, many of them are daughters of privilege, the keepers of the flame of their illustrious legacies; others are self-made. But all them have been subjected to various attempts of degradation: chauvinism, public vilification and political persecution. Dark clouds of tyranny, populism, dogmatism and misogyny hover above many countries in Asia and many parts of the world; these heroines of democracy are the silver lining.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President Megawati are both literal daughters of their nation's figurative founding fathers while Nhiek Tiouloung, Saumura's father, once served as prime minister. A majority of them have been educated in the leading universities of Asia, Europe and the United States, including those whose ivy league education became possible only because of scholarship grants.

Several come from middle-class backgrounds while one, Annette Lu, experienced a difficult childhood because of the financial limitations of her family. But a considerable number of them come from families that suffered from persecution despite a more comfortable socio-economic status and also in spite their political prominence (or most likely because of it)—the Aung Sans of Myanmar, the Sukarnos of Indonesia; the Mus, Tioulongs and Sams of Cambodia; the Climacos and Abads of the Philippines and the Sanjaasurens of Mongolia.

Suu Kyi, Annette Lu and Dina Abad were all prisoners of conscience. For more than a year now, Leila de Lima has been in detention. For almost three decades, Hong Kong's Emily Lau was banned from crossing the border to China. Saumura and Sochua are in exile while many of their colleagues remain in Phnom Penh jails. These two Cambodian women as well as Rachada of Thailand have had their legislative tenure prematurely and abruptly ended, the latter because of martial law, and the former, because of political machinations, government abuse and the executive's usurpation of judicial and legislative powers—in other words, an undeclared martial law.

But whether from elite or humble backgrounds, they are women for the underprivileged, the disenfranchised, the poor and the oppressed. Compelled by duty, they persevered under the most grueling circumstances. With inner strength, they squarely faced their nemesis, unrepentant tyrants of which this region has many: Suharto of Indonesia, Marcos and Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines; Ne Win, Sein Lwin and other generals of the Myanmar junta; Chiang Kai Shek and his KMT successors; and the longest reigning authoritarian leader, Hun Sen of Cambodia.

These are not gender-based battles. But rather, a struggle between courage, conviction and character as exemplified by these 16 women versus the guns, goons and gold of the patriarchs of patronage politics.

Often reluctant to be at the forefront, these 16 incredible women were conscripted by history. For many, their foray into the political fray was by chance. But for all, the ultimate decision to enter it in the first place, the steadfastness to remain there, and the determination to finish their tasks were all their own choices.

Ever since its foundation in 1993, CALD has always been a strong advocate of women's rights, and gender issues have been on top of its agenda. Women in CALD have been instrumental in formulating policies, in being in the forefront of crucial campaigns and in making CALD "an epicenter of democracy in Asia" as the late President Kim De Jung proclaimed during its tenth foundation anniversary. CALD has been most vocal against the political persecution of women in politics whether

within or outside its network. It is, therefore, but fitting that its silver anniversary publication focus on democracy's women champions in Asia.

That said, it is also time for some serious introspection. It quite unfortunate that it had to take more than two decades for a woman to finally assume the top post of this alliance of progressive political parties. An organization committed to breaking glass ceilings has no other option but to first batter its own gender barriers. Liberals must be willing, ready, and able to do its fair share of shattering, the scathing of scattering shards notwithstanding. More often than not, Liberals often do. Sometimes we just need to do more.

During its 20th anniversary celebration in Manila, CALD cofounder and former chair, Secretary Butch Abad described CALD as "a tapestry of our collective struggles." And with this book, this tapestry is made more beautiful and stronger because the stories of these 16 amazing women have become part of it.

And despite the richness of this tapestry, it remains unfinished. There are more stories to be told and fulfilled. A tapestry of restrictive realities, perhaps; a tapestry of promising possibilities, for sure. The women and men of CALD are the interlocking and interconnected wefts and warps that create this tapestry.

It is not enough for this tapestry to be a landscape of what our world is, it has to be a landscape of what our world ought to be. For at the end of the day, whether we in CALD like it or not, this tapestry will also become a portrait of who we are, what we stand for, what we have done and what we have failed to do.

John Joseph S. Coronel

Founding Executive Director of the Permanent Secretariat (1999-2007)
Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats

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Outside Great Shadows, Their Place in the Sun

The wives, daughters and sister of larger-than-life public figures
carve their own niche while keeping the legacies
of their fathers, husbands and brother alive.



The Founding Father's Daughter, A Presidency of Her Own

MEGAWATI SUKARNOPUTRI

President (2001-2004)

Vice-President (1999 to 2001)

Republic of Indonesia

One can only imagine the weight on her shoulders for simply being born as the first daughter of the Founding Father of Indonesia, President Sukarno, who led his country's independence and later becoming the first president of the world's biggest predominantly Muslim nation in 1945.

One can only imagine the burden of her heart seeing her own father reluctantly resigning in 1965, a move instigated by a man once trusted by his own father, and, later, witnessing his father incarcerated in the Bogor Palace for three long, sorrowful years until his death. In this unfortunate paradox, the man who freed his country from the colonial shackles of the Dutch became a prisoner of a homegrown tyrant.

She was the custodian of her father's legacy. Sukarnoputri literally means "daughter of Sukarno". But Megawati was more than the descendant of a beloved presidency intervened and ended by the force



SOURCE: YUKEPO

of a military leader's iron rule. More importantly, she was, by fate and by popular clamor, the ascendant of a democracy interrupted. Growing up with the burden of the past—both triumphant and tragic; the burden of chartering her country's future squarely fell on her shoulders during one of its most tumultuous times.

Her mother was the first First Lady of Indonesia, Fatmawati. The woman who wedded a future president when she was but twenty and bore another one four years later had a proud and majestic legacy herself, her lineage can be traced to a Sumatran sultanate. The flag that was hoisted when the world's fourth most populous nation proclaimed its independence on 17 August 1945 was sewn by Fatmawati. In 1980, after being widowed for a decade, Fatmawati died at the age of 57, leaving behind five children.



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



SOURCE: HIPPOSTCARD



SOURCE: TRIBUNNEWS

Her death was quite a blow to the then 33-year old Megawati especially after being orphaned from a father whom she adored and widowed from her pilot-husband whom she loved. Her father's nemesis had a firm grip of political power and the authoritarian government had zero tolerance for dissent. General Suharto was Sukarno's Chief of Staff and the message was clear: if Suharto can persecute his former commander in chief—and more importantly, the founding president of the country—then no one would be spared from the grip of his iron hand.

Like many children of long serving world leaders, Megawati grew up in the official presidential residence. The Istana Merdeka in Jakarta was home during her childhood and youth. She was but a toddler when her father became president. As a young adult, she was virtually under house arrest as well for three years. But in her case, it was voluntary as the dutiful daughter spent as much time with his father during the many dark and uncertain days he needed her most. Megawati left college to be with his ailing father. Until she became vice president more than three decades since his father's ouster, most of her adult life was spent in more modest surroundings, and under much more difficult circumstances.

The transition from Sukarno to Suharto witnessed some of the worst episodes of violence in the 20th century, the events of which were dramatized in the film *"The Year of Living Dangerously"*. On 1 October 1965, an attempted coup took place in Jakarta, the consequences of which changed national life in Indonesia," according to the Australian Institute of International Affairs (2015). "The immediate results of its quick collapse were a change in the power balance in Indonesian politics, the purge of the Communist Party and the death of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians."

Sri Harsono, her long-time friend who once said that Megawati never wanted to be president, narrated, "Because of Suharto, she couldn't finish (college). No children of Sukarno were allowed to go to university. They had no money, no education, no jobs. The family was so poor then."

It was only after she married Taufiq Kiemas that she was able to live in a guarded and gated neighborhood. A one-time Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly after his wife's presidency, he encouraged Megawati to contest a parliamentary seat despite her family's aversion to politics while Suharto was in power. Her brother Guntur, a former MP, asserted, "We are not cut out for politics. It's Mega who has staying power. She has guts."

Guts and compassion. In 1979, together with friends including Harsono, she opened a flower shop catering to upscale hotels and the proceeds were used to support a kindergarten for poor children (McDonald, 1999). Despite her burdened pecuniary situation, she devoted time, effort and money for her country's people, majority of whom were poor. Despite being a presidential daughter, she had a reputation for modesty and simple living. This public persona added to her appeal later in life, when she would draw some of the biggest crowds and demonstrations in Indonesian history. Furthermore, it was this



SOURCE: QUORA

genuine heartfelt philanthropy and natural compassion for the less fortunate, no matter how modest, that would help define her presidency.

In 1987, at the age of 40, she won a seat in parliament and joined the opposition to Suharto's continued authoritarianism. She successfully ran as a candidate of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI-P), later becoming its leader in 1993. PDI-P, a fusion of Christian and secular nationalist parties, is committed to Pancasila, the first iteration of which was given by Sukarno. Pancasila reflects Indonesian nationalism, humanity and internationalism, democracy, social justice and belief in one God and PDIP considers this as the uniting power of Indonesia, always in the forefront of supporting diversity in the socially, culturally, economically, ethnically and geographically diverse country (Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, n.d.). In 2009, PDI-P became a CALD full member after being an observer for several years.

Suharto was no different from the many dictators in the region of that era like Ferdinand Marcos, Chiang Kai Shek and Park Chung-Hee. They were strongmen who held a tight grip by terrorizing their citizens with the military as the prime institution to carry such task. And as it was with Marcos, it must have been particularly discomfiting for Suharto to have a woman as the biggest threat to absolute power. And like many dictators in Asia and beyond, his reign ended with remarkable drama.



SOURCE: KOMPAS

In 1996, Suharto supporters attacked the headquarters of PDIP and the melee resulted in five deaths and many injuries. The economic crisis in Indonesia was exacerbated by political turmoil. This was a turning point and Megawati became a rallying point for Reformasi, a democratic revolution that ended Suharto's 22-year authoritarian rule two years later. Aside from Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, comparisons with Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto became inevitable.

On May 2000, the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD) held a major conference focusing on the theme "Democratic Transitions in Asia" in Jakarta. The conference was postponed a couple of times because of the political uncertainties, including riots,



SOURCE: AKARPADI NEWS

that were taking place in the capital and other parts of Indonesia. But CALD was adamant that there could be no other venue except in Indonesia where such historical transitions were actually taking place. The conference resulted in the publication of a book using the conference theme as its title.

“Cries for freedom and reforms reverberate in all corners of the continent. In Demokrasi, Reformasi, Doi Moi, People Power or by any other name, we witness democracy in the region,” then CALD Chairman, Sam Riansy, MP, declared in the said book. “Whether reeling from a long history of foreign domination or homegrown tyranny, the will of the people makes democracy in Asia not only possible but ultimately inevitable. Many voices, united by shared ideals, one in human spirit” (Johannen & Gomez, 2001).

Jusuf Wanandi, a prominent Indonesian political scientist, observed, “She has a charisma she got from her dad. Megawati is incredible with crowds. At a rally here in Jakarta, the crowd was 200,000, very rowdy as usual, and she told them to be silent and sit down. And they did! I’ve never seen anyone else able to do that — except her father” (Mcdonald, 1999)



SOURCE: PORTALBANDUNG



SOURCE: MEDCOM

Unlike Cory Aquino, Megawati did not emerge as president as an immediate result of the restoration of democracy. She occupied the second highest office in the land during the presidency of Abduraman Wahid also known as Gus Dur. Wahid, who became a CALD individual member in 2009, belonged to another party—the PKB, another CALD member party since 2016.

Interviewed by Keith Richburg of the Washington Post, Megawati asserted her mandate to lead the country given her party's performance in the 1999 Indonesian elections, getting twice as many votes as the second placer, GOLKAR, the party of the last two presidents, Suharto and Habibie. PDI-P did not get enough votes for an outright majority and her gender was viewed as the biggest stumbling block from assuming the highest public office.

In a later interview with the same Washington Post journalist, Wahid explained the dilemma of Megawati assuming the presidency: "If we deny Megawati the presidency, then there will be riots, because her followers are very rough. They can do bad things...But if we take her, the Muslim rightists are also very rough. There will be rioting as well." With the benefit of hindsight, Megawati must be given credit for not instigating her supporters to rally in protest.

As she once said, again to Washington Post, «In our culture, there is not only a formal leader. There is also an informal leader. Sometimes the informal leader can be more powerful than the formal leader. You can see how my father, even though he has already passed away, in spirit still lives inside the Indonesian people» (Encyclopedia of World Biography, n.d.). Three years later, the informal leader took her oath as the formal leader as well when she was sworn in as the Fifth President of Indonesia.

For Megawati, resiliency did not come as a surprise. She lost her father during the Sukarno family's lowest point, and she lost a husband while she was pregnant.

“Megawati stabilized the country and oversaw its path to democracy,” said Dewi Fortuna Anwar, a former adviser to B.J. Habibie, who served briefly as president after Suharto. “That’s no mean feat.” She has also been credited for improving security in several provinces once riven with religious and ethnic violence” (The New York Times, 2004).

The daughter of Indonesia’s founding father also attended the birth of another nation: East Timor. Her presence was internationally acclaimed. East Timor was violently annexed during the time of Suharto.

Megawati is the custodian of her mother’s legacy as well. Fatmawati sew Indonesia’s first flag as an independent country. As President herself, it was up to Megawati to mend the tattered pieces of an archipelago of 13,000 islands still reeling from Suharto’s politically and economically disastrous reign. Reformasi was a success but like People Power in the Philippines, it is unfinished.



SOURCE: MERDEKA

Indonesia is the largest country in Southeast Asia both in terms of geographic size and population; it is the fourth most populated country in the world; and it is the biggest predominantly Muslim country in the world. The success of Indonesian democracy is of global interest. Indonesia is now a living proof that Islam and democracy are compatible.

During the tail-end of Suharto’s reign, Thailand and the Philippines were considered beacons of democracy in Southeast Asia. Now, the tables have been turned. Thailand is under a military dictatorship, and the Philippines is ruled by a populist president notorious for extrajudicial killings, other human rights abuses and misogyny.

With President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) now at the helm of Indonesia, and also his party, the legacy of Sukarno is not lost. “Again, the role of PDIP cadres is important,” Jokowi stressed, “and the nation has always looked up to them to work together with the people in the spirit of *gotong royong* (solidarity)...to ensure that the values of Pancasila are upheld in the community... to improve economic growth, reduce gap, and alleviate poverty” (Tempo.Co, 2018).

As Jeffrey Hutton (2018) of the South China Morning Post reported, “Reformasi, the people-power movement that dumped a dictator and started Indonesia on the road to democracy 20 years ago, was renewed this week as more than 150 million voters turned their backs on dynastic politics opting for competence over connection... (as) voters in three of the country’s biggest provinces elected reformers with proven track records over powerful incumbents... The sweep for reformist candidates bodes well for the re-election chances for the reformist Widodo, whose own background was reflected in some of this week’s winners.”

As Sukarno and his daughter had proven, one’s presidency does not end with his or her term of office, but the legacy and goodwill left behind will have their greatest impact and will benefit more the generations to come.

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The Millennial Widow in Yellow

MA. LEONOR “LENI” GERONA ROBREDO

Vice-President (2016 to Present)

Republic of the Philippines

In 1965, Ferdinand Marcos was sworn in as Philippine president with a popular mandate and considerable political capital. In that same year, Ma. Leonor “Leni” Gerona was born to a middleclass family without fanfare in Naga City in the southern part of Luzon Island.

Twenty-one years later, the president turned dictator left Malacanang Palace and the country, overthrown by a peaceful revolution and even abandoned by his own allies in his native land and in the United States, notably President Ronald Reagan. The youth were in the forefront of the EDSA People Power Revolution and one of them was a student leader from the University of the Philippines named Leni Gerona. She belongs to that generation known as Martial Law Babies and by 1986 or even earlier, they have had enough of Marcos and Martial Law.

Though the political capital of the fallen and disgraced leader had greatly eroded except from amongst his most



SOURCE: RAPPLER

ardent loyalists especially in his home region, his financial capital accumulated from corruption and crony capitalism can only be described as mindboggling. The Washington Post (17 April 1991) reported that Marcos “is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world’s biggest thief... with a total of \$5 billion to \$10 billion allegedly looted from the treasury during his 20-year rule” (Branigin, 1991).

Though no one is certain of how much the former First Family stole, and some cash, jewelry, and real estate properties were already turned over to the Philippine government, one thing is certain: then and to this day, they have enough money to finance the mostly successful electoral campaigns of Marcos’ widow, eldest daughter and only son. The Marcoses experienced few electoral defeats: Imelda Marcos run for president in 1992 and ended in the fifth place; and the more recent one was in the 2016 national elections. The only difference between the electoral defeats of mother and son in 1992 and 2016 was that for the latter, the margin between the winner and Marcos was minimal.

The late President Ferdinand Marcos, and his only son, former Senator Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr. share a lot in common aside from their name, not least of which is the abhorrence for democracy in general. Much as the younger Marcos may not wish to admit it, father and son, in a period covering two millennia, share this rather ignoble and inglorious distinction: despite the advantage of having much more resources at their disposal, they were both defeated by widows in yellow.



SOURCE: CNN

And like his father, Senator Marcos refused to accept his lost to Robredo who was eventually proclaimed as the 14th Vice President of the Philippines. The Philippines has this unique system of electing the president separately from the vice president.

Before 21 August 1983, very few Filipinos have heard of Corazon “Cory” Aquino until that fateful day when she became a widow. The same can be said of Leni Robredo.



SOURCE: YAHOO NEWS

On 18 August 2012, a small Piper Seneca plane with the Secretary of Interior and Local Government onboard crashed near Masbate Island. His wife had to be strong for their three daughters. For three long days and nights, the fate of the charismatic, well-loved and highly respected public figure remained uncertain. Countless Filipinos joined them in prayer, and several masses of special intention were held, imploring for a miracle. But on the fourth days since that plane crash, his mortal remains were retrieved from the deep sea. Sadly, the miracle did not happen.

Before joining the Aquino cabinet, Jesse Robredo was a familiar name as the living epitome of outstanding local governance especially when he was given the 2010 Ramon Magsaysay Award, Asia’s Nobel Prize, for public service. He was cited as “a Filipino icon for good governance because of sheer dedication, untarnished reputation, and visionary leadership as the three-term Mayor of Naga City” (The Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, n.d.).

It was the first President Aquino who appointed the late Robredo as head of the Bicol River Basin Development Program in 1986. He was plucked from his cushy corporate executive job in one of the top and most profitable corporations of the country. One of the government agency’s new employees was an economics graduate of the country’s premier state university who described her boss as a “perfectionist and a slave driver.” Robredo was smitten with the young, attractive Leni Gerona and after a whirlwind romance of four months, the two got married (Yap, 2016).



SOURCE: LENI ROBREDO OFFICIAL WEBSITE

In 1988, Jesse Robredo, then only 29 years old, ran and won as Mayor of Naga City. In the meantime, Leni Robredo finished her law studies and passed the bar on her second attempt. This was particularly important for her father, a lawyer who became a judge. One of her childhood memories was joining her father to fetch and pay the bail of a destitute client, which instilled in her an appreciation and concern for people “at the seams of society.” At one point in her legal career, she joined the Public Attorney’s Office and some of the clients she defended were those ordered arrested by her mayor-husband (Yap, 2016.).

Interestingly enough, Mayor Robredo’s only other appointed government position was given by Cory’s son, the second President Aquino who invited him to join his cabinet. It was likely then that Jesse Robredo did not have an idea that what happened to his idol, the martyred Senator Noynoy Aquino, Jr., would happen to him—die while in the service of his country and have his widow catapulted to higher office as a result.



SOURCE: GMA NEWS

Bereaved by the sudden loss of a valued colleague and a cherished friend, President Benigno Simeon Aquino III declared a state funeral. Long before his untimely demise, Jesse was considered a viable “presidentiable” who could replicate what he did to Naga City to the rest of the country. Jesse believed that people empowerment is integral for local governance to succeed and that leader as well as his subordinates are expected to give their best efforts no matter how small the task (Mendoza, 2012).

“I have not always been in politics; it was my late husband, Jesse, who was the politician in the family. While he was busy as the mayor of Naga City, I was working as a human rights lawyer, supporting him, and taking care of our home behind the scenes. It was the life I chose, and it was the life I loved,” Robredo wrote in her article, “This is the Time for Women to Shine”, as part of the 25th Anniversary Silver Lining series of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD).

“My years as a lawyer were spent providing legal aid to indigent clients in far-flung areas—farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, laborers, and abused women and children. We would sleep in boats and makeshift huts because there was nowhere else to spend the night. We taught people paralegal skills and explained their rights under the law, so they could defend themselves even after we left. That was my work for more than a decade, and I may never have given it up if Jesse did not pass away so suddenly.”

During the 2013 elections, many especially from the Liberal Party and civil society, wanted her to run for a senate seat since a significant number of them wanted her late husband to be in the ruling party’s senatorial slate. She humbly refused and instead run for and later won the lone congressional seat of Naga City—her home district as well as her husband’s. This was a testament to her respect and faith in her husband who believed that the most profound change can be done at the local level.

Like Cory Aquino, she was attacked for two things: first, for simply being a woman, and secondly, for her candidacy being merely circumstantial resulting from her husband’s death. And she was against a most formidable candidate. Like the Marcoses of Ilocos Norte,



SOURCE: LENI ROBREDO OFFICIAL WEBSITE



SOURCE: LENI ROBREDO OFFICIAL WEBSITE

the Villafueretes of Camarines Sur were a deeply entrenched traditional political dynasty that came into, and retained power through guns, goons and gold.

Her 2016 vice presidential campaign was even more challenging. It was a national position and she was up against senators. In the Philippines, senators are elected nationally. Most vice presidents were senators before. Only Diosdado Macapagal was an incumbent congressman when he became vice-president in 1957. Macapagal, the Ninth President of the Philippines who served from 1961 to 1965 was the third Liberal Party stalwart to become head of state. Of the vice presidential candidates in 2016, she was the only one who had not previously won a nationally contested election. And having entered the race late in the game, she started with a single-digit support that swelled as people began to read and hear more about her and her platform.



SOURCE: CNN

In the end, it became a two way-race between her and Bongbong Marcos, Jr. It was a very narrow victory with Robredo winning by a margin of only 260,000 votes. As of this writing, the son and namesake of the late dictator is preoccupied with his electoral protest.

Her position as vice president is in jeopardy. The ousting of Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, considered to be at the behest of President Rodrigo Duterte himself especially with his solicitor general filing the Quo Warranto petition that led to the Chief Justice's removal from office, is widely seen as ensuring a Supreme Court decision that would pave the way for Senator Marcos to be proclaimed as vice president.

It was only Duterte who allowed the burial of the dictator at the Heroes Cemetery in Manila despite the massive protests. Duterte has never been bashful for his admiration of dictators and strongmen like China's Xi Jinping, Russia's Vladimir Putin, Cambodia's Hun Sen, and the father of Senator Marcos. He once invoked Hitler who killed millions of Jews to justify the high death toll of his war against drugs and his willingness to commit murder of the same scale.

During the 2016 electoral campaign, the author joined an international delegation from CALD to observe the vice presidential debates, which was a six-way contest. It was clear to the delegation who won that debate. It was also the consensus of nonpartisan observers: Robredo gave clear, concise answers to most, if not all questions posed (giving) examples from her term, highlighting what she has done rather than throwing mud at the other candidates (Philippine Primer, 2016).

Her final words in that historic debate reverberated throughout the country: "I am a mother who will always look after her children. I will always look after our country. To the six of us, may the best woman win." At that moment, it was as if the rug was pulled from underneath the five male vice presidential candidates.

The repercussions for the victor are considerable if one's opponent has tremendous resources at his command. This is especially true when the victor is a woman and the loser is a sexist tyrant and/or, the son of one.

Cory Aquino was smeared by mass media during the campaign, all major newspapers and radio and



SOURCE: LENI ROBREDO'S PERSONAL FACEBOOK PAGE

television stations were controlled by either the government or by Marcos cronies. But the first widow in yellow did not have to contend with the next millennium's internet age. Leni Robredo's vilification in social media is intense, to say the least, coming from the handlers and supporters of two very powerful men—President Duterte and Senator Marcos. There have been allegations that Duterte secured the services of Cambridge Analytica, which was accused of helping Donald Trump win the elections by spreading lies and half-truths in social media, particularly Facebook.

All sorts of dirt had been thrown Robredo's way. Her daughter, Aika, graduated with a master's degree from the Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in May 2018, something that Mayor Jesse Robredo accomplished 19 years earlier. Robredo attended her graduation like any proud parent ought to. For this, she was accused of corruption for how else could she afford to send her daughter to one of the top universities in the world. A simple googling could have provided the answer: Aika was an Edward S. Mason Fellow. Robredo's patriotism was questioned suggesting that the Vice President considered that Philippine universities were not good enough despite the fact that Aika, prior to graduate school, received all her formal education in the Philippines.

But when faced with twisted logic and shameless rhetoric, she took the high road, reminiscent of what Michelle Obama once said, "When they go low, we go high."

In a newspaper interview for a Valentine Day story, Leni stated that in their 25 years of marriage, Jesse never gave her any headache and what she would miss most were the



SOURCE: LENI ROBREDO'S PERSONAL FACEBOOK PAGE



SOURCE: LENI ROBREDO'S PERSONAL FACEBOOK PAGE

“left-over” roses. When Jesse was still Naga mayor, he would give flowers to all his female employees and the remainder he would bring home to Leni. This is symbolic of the love and life of Leni and Jesse Robredo, both private and public—simplicity, humility, empathy and compassion. Leni knew that being married to a public servant meant that she would have to share him with the people of Naga whom they both loved and loved them back (Yap, 2016).

Leni knew Jesse for what he was and appreciated him for what they both valued. And instead of feeling jealous by receiving nothing more than leftover flowers, she cherished them most as these carried with them the essence of his being—a devoted husband and a loving father, to their children and to the people of Naga.

“How lucky we are that you shared your life with us,” the widow said in a eulogy for her husband. “We are truly blessed to have been loved by you. As my daughter said you may have been prepared to die, but we were not prepared to lose you. We are devastated by your loss, but even if we are grieving we will continue to live because your spirit lives in us. I will make sure that your dreams for our children will be fulfilled. I will not say goodbye because I know that you will never leave us and will always be in our midst.”



SOURCE: LENI ROBREDO OFFICIAL WEBSITE

God works in mysterious ways and one such mystery is the quirk in the Philippine constitution that stipulates the election of the vice-president separate from that of the president. Leni Robredo and Rodrigo Duterte coming from two different parties with different ideologies were elected at the same time. But more than the parties they belonged to, the two have personalities and dispositions that could never be more diametrically opposed.

The vice president does not really have much power to begin with, especially since she belongs a much reduced and sidelined opposition party. But I believe that the essence of Leni Robredo's vice presidency takes a primarily moral purpose, if only to remind ourselves and show the rest of the world that not every Filipino is like him; that not everyone of us laughs as he continues to publicly humiliate his critics whose only fault is to speak the truth; that not everyone of us cheers as he emboldens the police and vigilantes to intensify their murderous rampage; and that not everyone of us gets tickled every time he brags about his sexual exploits...every time he intimidates, and yet gets intimidated by, women of strength and substance.

We did not realize it then but now, it is very clear: a miracle did happen. In our darkest hours, we need this flicker of light that courageously illuminates, withstanding threats, lies and ridicule. She is a tempering force to assuage this regime's many perfidious legacies. And typical of Jesse and Leni Lobredo, even the miracle they brought forth was not for their own benefit, but for the sake of the Filipino people whom they unconditionally love and serve.

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Her Brother's Keeper, A Global Earth Keeper

DR. OYUN SANJAASUREN

External Affairs Director of the Green Climate Fund
Chair of the Global Water Partnership (2016-2018)
Inaugural President of the United Nations Environment Assembly (2014-2016)
Minister of Environment and Green Development (2012-2014)
Minister of Foreign Affairs (2007-2008)
Member of Parliament (1998-2016)
Chair of the Civil Will Party (2000 -2012)

Mongolia

Landlocked between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, it was not surprising for Mongolia to feel the tremors of Berlin Wall's collapse in 1989.

Only in his early twenties, Zorig Sanjasaaren was in the forefront of demonstrations in Ulaanbaatar, demanding free elections, the adoption of a multi-party system, the free-market economy and other cherished ideals of liberal democracy.

"Zorig was the embodiment of the democratic change which came to Mongolia after more than 70 uninterrupted years of one-party rule," Tom Garrett (2014) of Democracy Speaks recalled, "He founded the New Generation, young dissidents who spoke out in 1988 for democracy in their country. While never formally part of the Soviet Union, Mongolia was its early satellite state; as the USSR began to come apart at the end of the eighties, Zorig and other young Mongolians seized the opening to demand representative government."



SOURCE: MORUNGEXPRESS



SOURCE: ASSA.MN

He eventually earned the moniker “Golden Swallow of Democracy” and one of the most iconic pictures of the peaceful Mongolian Revolution of 1990 was Zorig carried by his supporters calming a large, tense crowd in Sukbaatar Square as protesters scuffled with the police forces of the communist government.

Zorig was elected to the parliament, first as a member of the minority, then as part of the Democratic Union which formed the first democratic government in Mongolia since the one-party rule of the communists in 1921. In 1998, he became Minister of Infrastructure and many believed he would eventually become Prime Minister. In that same year, he was assassinated.

Zorig’s murder remains cloaked in mystery and a closed trial rendered an unconvincing verdict two decades after the crime. “Our family has asked for a declassifying of the case and we have been calling for [an] open hearing,” Oyun stated on January 2017. “The requests have not been met. We do not think the case has been fully solved or closed” (Hornby, 2017).



SOURCE: RFERL.ORG



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Given her impressive academic record, Oyun was gainfully employed by two multinational corporations as a geologist with a Mongolia-Czech joint venture exploration project and Rio Tinto, a British firm (Global Water Partnership, 2016). She was in London when Zorig was murdered.

Zorig's martyrdom became the impetus for his younger sister to leave the financially rewarding corporate world for something uncertain, or even dangerous. She left her cushy job in London and returned to Ulaanbaatar. She immediately jumped into the murky waters of Mongolian politics and continued her brother's work through political activism and social advocacies. But her multifaceted accomplishments are beyond those of continuing her late brother's legacy.

A geochemist by profession and training, she earned her doctorate in Earth Sciences from Cambridge University, as well as her bachelors and masters in Geochemistry from Charles University in Prague. The tumultuous events arising from both the Mongolian Revolution and the martyrdom of her brother were a far cry from the tranquility of European academia and the relative calm and stability of the corporate world of the West. Like a Phoenix, she rose from the ashes of family tragedy, left her comfort zone, and flew home.

She ran and won Zorig's parliamentary seat and became Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Environment. But Oyun's one important political legacy is the foundation of her own political party. "In 2000, I founded Mongolia's Civil Will Party. We ran on a platform of good governance and clean politics. This idea was completely new to Mongolian politics at the time," she recalled in a Huffington Post interview (Ward, 2017).

The Civil Will Party was inspired by the prodemocratic ideals and reformist principles of Zorig, later merging with the Green Party to form the Civil Will-Green Party. Anchored on green liberalism as its ideology, the party's belief in the compatibility of the core values of liberal democracy and the environmentalism of green politics is, in a sense, the synergy of the spirits of the Saanjasuren siblings.

Oyun noted that in 2003, policies on gender issues resulted in better laws, including the law on domestic violence that safeguarded the women in Mongolia. In education, more or less women are equal in number with men in terms of enrollment. In decision-making, Sanjaasuren said women's participation has improved. In the Parliament, 14 percent are women. Mongolia also introduced a 20 percent quota for women to participate in elections and because of this, elected women increased from 3 in 2006 to 11 in 2012. Mongolia also has National Committee on Gender Equality, chaired by the Prime Minister, which aims to address gender issues in the country (Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, 2015).

Oyun acknowledged that much improvement is needed so her party also introduced a quota for women. In the first by-laws of the party, it required 30 percent participation of women in the party structure including important roles in the party council (Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, 2015).

The party recognizes how much populist politics has taken its toll on the country's political life and economy as it remains a strong advocate of democracy, liberty, justice, human rights, good governance and the free market economy (Asia Pacific Greens,



SOURCE: THE MONGOLIAN OBSERVER

n.d.). It believes in lesser but better government as well as innovation and private sector development.

“Every country has similar problems and these are mainly due to old mindsets that were passed from generations to generations. What is important now is to start challenging those mindsets especially in the aspect of women participation and empowerment,” Oyun stressed.

During the above said Huffington Post interview, Oyun enumerated the challenges and successes she had as party leader, parliamentarian and minister:

In the 2004 elections, our party was invited to be part of a coalition with the Democrats. They agreed to our condition of making good governance part of our joint platform. We then formed the government as part of a grand coalition, which incorporated our platform on good governance into policy. In other words, we were able to put the platform of our small party, with just a small number of seats, into the action plan of the new government.

I offered to chair the working group of the anti-corruption action plan. We had to fight to get the passages we wanted included and at the same time be flexible with other parties in the working group. You have to know what you stand for, and you have to be willing to do the grinding, tough work of implementation. As a result, we passed Mongolia’s Freedom of Information Act, the Anti-Corruption Act, and Conflict of Interest legislation. The latter had been my idea right from the beginning. When I initially ran for office in 2001, I was the first Mongolian politician to voluntarily declare my assets. With this legislation, such declarations have become the legal norm. So, getting big ideas onto a party platform is one way to succeed. Of course, it’s not easy. Big ideas need a big conviction.

In the 2012 elections, our party merged with the smaller Green Party, which had fresh new ideas about the environment in their platform. The party that won the most votes offered to make us part of a new governing coalition. We agreed on the condition that the Ministry of the Environment would become a core ministry. This meant that like Finance and Justice, all new policies would be filtered through the ministry – through a “green lens”.

As party leader in the coalition, I was asked which portfolio I wanted. Of course, I selected Environment and Green Growth. Running that ministry, we were able to turn about 60 percent of our party election program into legislation or government policies. The government passed a Green Growth Development Strategy in 2014. First, local governments received ecosystem service payments for the value of protecting their forests and watersheds. Second, we tripled the water taxes on industrial users (but not citizens). The revenues went directly to the local governments. They were then required to put 50 percent of these revenues into environmental rehabilitation and reforestation of their rural areas. Third, we put in place subsidies and incentive for renewable, clean energy and technology, to help Mongolia move away from coal.



SOURCE: SPAF OFFICIAL WEBSITE

2.1°C, which is three times more intense than the world average level of warming. This has directly resulted in desertification, pasture degradation, water resource shortage, increase of frequency and magnitude of natural disasters and melting permafrost and glaciers that are threatening nomadic pastoralism.”

Furthermore, to the south of Mongolia is China, the biggest producer of greenhouse gas emissions in the world which released more than 9,000 million metric tons in 2015, almost twice as much as the second biggest polluter, the United States (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2015).



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

It is not surprising for Oyun to become an environmentalist considering her country of birth. “My native Mongolia—with its long, rich semi-nomadic traditions and lifestyles harmonized with nature—is a country that has contributed minimal greenhouse gas emissions and yet is experiencing its disproportionate impact,” Oyun wrote in her message in *Vulner-Able, From Risk to Resiliency*, the CALD book on climate change published in 2014, which the author edited. “The average temperature in my country has risen by

Fluent in English, Russian, Czech, and Mongolian, she is an internationalist. With her sterling credentials and global outlook, she eventually headed two United Nations agencies—as the Inaugural President of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP in 2016 and Chair of the Global Water Partnership two years later. She was recently appointed by the Green Climate Fund as its Director of External Affairs. Oyun is also a member of advisory boards of a number of global initiatives including the Future Earth, Green Growth Knowledge Platform and International Environment Technology Centre of UNEP (Green Growth Knowledge, n.d.). If her national political triumphs are stellar, her feats as a global earth champion are equally spectacular.

In 2014, she became the first female Chair of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD), three years after the Civil Will-Green Party became a full member of CALD. The party is also a member of Liberal International.

Mongolia is an expansive country that is one of the least densely populated, sandwiched between the former Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. During most of the 20th Century, it has become a literal and figurative prisoner of its geography. It was the will and power of the Mongolian people that ended decades of iron rule. And martyrs like Zorig gave up their lives to end Mongolia's long cold political winter. And now, Mongolia is faced with another global challenge: climate change and global warming. And this time, Zorig's younger sister, Oyun, had taken the cudgels to fight one of the biggest threats of this millennium.

The Mongol Empire founded by Genghis Khan in the 13th Century was the largest contiguous land empire in history covering much of Asia and Europe. But the greatness of new Mongolian leaders like Oyun will not be measured by the extent of territories it conquered, but rather how they are able to conquer the hearts and minds of the Mongolian people to embrace the principles of liberal democracy while living in harmony with Mother Nature as the best road to realize their collective dreams of freedom, peace, sustainable development, security and wellbeing of families and communities.

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Aristocrat & Activist, East and West, Synergy & Individuality

SAUMURA TIOULONG

Member of Parliament (1998-2018)

Kingdom of Cambodia

This author has personally heard Saumura, on more than a few occasions, say this statement or permutations of the same point—“The wife of Sam Rainsy?! I am Saumura.” Indeed, it is but just to refer to her as her own person whose solid credentials and competence in the fields of both politics and economics stand on their own merit.



SOURCE: CAMBODIA DAILY

She is the daughter of a former prime minister, minister of three portfolios: foreign affairs, finance and education, and governor of Phnom Penh and other provinces; and the wife of the leader of the Cambodian opposition who was also a former finance minister after a successful career in Paris in business and finance. But make no mistake about it, she is her own person.

At the zenith of its power and glory, the Khmer Empire covered much of today's Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. More than five hundred years later and after a century of French colonial rule, the genocidal reign of the Khmer Rouge reduced Cambodia to one of the poorest nations in the world.

Imperial Khmer...*Indochine*. The ruins of the magnificent Angkor Wat in Siem Reap and the dilapidated *maisons* along Sisowath Quay in Phnom Penh are monuments of stone to Cambodia's past—both as conquerors and conquered, both triumphant and tragic. In 1953, Cambodia gained independence from France. Though political turbulence continued, Cambodia in the fifties and the sixties held promise and possibilities. And Saumura's father was part of that promise.

Then came the Killing Fields (1975 to 1979) that assaulted Cambodia with the relentless orgies of death and destruction of the infamous and murderous Khmer Rouge.

Saumura spent her primary education in Phnom Penh, Paris, Tokyo and Moscow; her high school at the Lycee Descartes in Phnom Penh. In 1969, Saumura went to France, her prominent family maintained a home in the center of Paris. She was still in her late teens when she left Cambodia, several years before the Khmer Rouge came to power. She returned only in 1992 with her husband, Rainsy. They have three children.

In France, she received the best education: a Political Science Diploma from the Institute of Political Science of Paris (1974) and an MBA from the prestigious Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires (European Institute of Business Administration) or INSEAD (1980), acknowledged as one of the best business schools in the world, in its main campus in Fontainebleau.

With her sterling academic qualifications, she entered the world of high finance. Starting as Financial Analyst and Portfolio Manager at Banque Indosuez de Paris (1975-1983), she became Managing Director of the French branch of Robert Fleming and Company, a Scottish investment bank specializing in securities management (1983-1988). And from 1988 to 1993, she was President and Chief Executive Officer of Mobiliere Conseil, a stock market advisory firm specializing in the Southeast Asian market.

Her being Asian and a woman were not obstacles not necessarily because the European and the men were open-minded but more so, because she did not allow it to be so. Had she remained in Europe, she would have certainly made more impressive strides in world finance. But Cambodia, her home, beckoned.

During her long years in France preoccupied with her studies and immersed in the world of finance while raising a family at the same time, Cambodia was always in her mind and heart. She was a member of the royalist FUNCINPEC since its founding in 1981. The *Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif* (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia) or FUNCINPEC was founded by King Norodom Sihanouk and his son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, led the party to electoral victory in the 1993 elections supervised by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) (Facts and Details, n.d.). Sam Rainsy was one of the FUNCINPEC candidates who won that year's election and he was later appointed as Minister of Finance.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Saumura became Vice Governor of the Cambodian Central Bank in 1993. She negotiated and supervised the implementation of the first International Monetary Fund (IMF) support programs in Cambodia. She left the Central Bank in 1995, the same year Rainsy founded the Khmer Nation Party (KNP), the precursor of the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP).

In 1998, she became a member of parliament for the first time, representing Phnom Penh during the second National Assembly of Cambodia. She was one of the 15 SRP stalwarts who became part of 122-member legislature. She was reelected in 2003, one of the 24 SRP legislators in the 123-member third National Assembly of Cambodia. In 2008, she became one of the 26 SRP members in the fourth Cambodian National Assembly. During that year's general elections, the Human Rights Party (HRP) of Kem Sokha won three seats.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

SRP and HRP merged to become the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) on 17 July 2012. A CALD press release (18 July 2012) reported that Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha and other leaders of SRP (including Saumura and Mu Sochua) and HRP convened at the CALD Secretariat in Manila to discuss the long-awaited unification of the two parties. After two days of careful deliberations, the two party presidents reached a historic agreement to “unite in accordance with the Khmer people’s will in order to save Cambodia by bringing about political change to put an end to a dictatorship serving destructive foreign interests.” The merger between SRP and HRP aims to directly oppose the dictatorial government that lies at the root of Cambodia’s problems. The ruling CPP recklessly exercises its power in violation of human rights and without consideration of national interests. It is this government that has led Rainsy into multiple self-imposed exiles to avoid imprisonment for politically motivated charges.

When the merger happened at the CALD office, Rainsy was the incumbent Chair of CALD, the first person to chair the alliance twice (2000- 2002, 2012-2014).

During the fifth National Assembly (2013-2018), the opposition CNRP won a staggering 55 seats or 45 percent of the 123-member body. Hun Sen’s CPP won 68 seats or 55 percent, the smallest and worst victory in its entire history.

Given the pattern of an increment in the number of opposition seats every national elections; the small difference of ten percent in the number of seats occupied by the ruling and opposition parties during the latest general elections; the almost similar results in the June 2017 commune elections where CNRP got 44 percent while CPP received 51 percent; and, the growing dissatisfaction with the ruling CPP and Hun Sen himself, the victory of CNRP in the 2018 elections became not only a distinct possibility, it was the logical conclusion.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

And lest we forget, the successes of the opposition must not be taken at face value, they were realized despite the political machinations and massive electoral fraud committed by the Hun Sen regime and all its tentacles—a politicized military, a rubber stamp parliament, the systematic suppression of media and civil society, and last but not least, a subservient judiciary.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Thus, on 16 November 2017, the Cambodian Supreme Court dissolved the CNRP resulting from the politically motivated government-filed law suit that CNRP had conspired with foreigners to stage a revolution. This was the only surefire way for Hun Sen to remain in power. Also, more than a hundred opposition politicians, including Saumura, were barred from seeking elections for five years. In 2005, Rainsy was stripped of his parliamentary immunity. A dozen years later, 55 oppositionists were simply stripped of their parliamentary seats. And Saumura, a four-term parliamentarian who never lost an election in her

life, was one of them. To this day, she and Rainsy remain in exile while Kem Sokha remains in detention.

Part of this supposed conspiracy is a CALD partner, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs or NDI. Before the Supreme Court ruling, the Cambodian Foreign Ministry ordered the shutting down of the NDI office in Phnom Penh and the expulsion of all its foreign staff.

Despite the scale of political persecution, Saumura is still luckier than most of her compatriots, especially the estimated two million people who died as a result of one of the worst genocides in history. But her people's tragedy is forever etched in her consciousness. And it must be particularly painful that the current oppressor of the Cambodian people, Hun Sen, is a remnant of the hideous Khmer Rouge having served as one of the commanders of the dreaded and dreadful Pol Pot.

Hun Sen has been in power since 1985, the longest authoritarian leader in the world today. But despite being in power for more than three decades, the legacy that he is perpetuating is much older. This atavistic tendency is also manifested by the ruling CPP. The Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party, CPP's precursor, was the sole legal party during the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989). After winning only 55 percent of the parliamentary seats during the 2013 elections, the CPP now has 125 seats in the 125-member Sixth National Assembly of Cambodia as a result of 2018 elections.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Saumura, a pillar of Cambodian democracy, remains strong and outspoken. She has gone a long way—having thoroughly immersed herself in the rough and tumble of Cambodian politics—from the comforts of her privileged childhood.

“I was raised to be a ‘rose in a vase,’” Saumura once said in a 2007 interview with the Phnom Penh Post, as she recalled spending much of her childhood in Paris, Moscow and Tokyo (McDermid, 2007). The same article described her as “an engaging mixture of aristocrat and activist.”

When Charles McDermid (2007) interviewed her for this Phnom Post article, she asked if this would be the first article that did not refer to her as the wife of Sam Rainsy. McDermid asked her why this is important and she responded, “When I was young, I was known as the daughter of my father. Now... I’m always introduced as the wife of Sam Rainsy. I am a human being in my own right, and I have had to fight for my own identity. All men are biased against women. It makes me furious: even the best man, in the bottom of their hearts is still a male chauvinist. I think I am married to the best of the best, and even Sam Rainsy is one...I have a long fight before me.”

She is a citizen of both France and Cambodia. During a particularly long journey from Phnom Penh to Kampong Cham City with a delegation of European and Asian parliamentarians, the author once asked her in what language she thought. She said mostly in French especially when constructing ideas, theories and arguments as the logical structure of the French language is better suited for such purposes. But her heart and soul are definitely Cambodian.

This author personally witnessed how well she could argue whether as a speaker or merely reacting during the open forum in many of our conferences and workshops. CALD and the Alliance for Liberals Democrats in Europe (ALDE) have jointly organized meetings in Asia and Europe. In Brussels, she took to task officials of the various European Commissions, in fluent French and English, for their continued financial aid to Cambodia without stringent and sufficient oversight; thus, contributing to the corruption of the Hun Sen Regime and the perpetuation of CPP’s one-party rule.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES



SOURCE:

Her talents are globally recognized. In 2007, Saumura was elected Vice-President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade. In 2014 she was elected president of that committee.

And this author has also joined Saumura and Rainsy in the remote villages of Cambodia. Simple folks would approach her and she would talk with them, this time in Khmer, with the same intensity and interest as she would when meeting with the highest echelons of European policymakers. The empathy between them, despite the obvious differences in education and social stature was apparent. She is never condescending, always treating everybody else with respect. Cambodia is a poor country: it is the fourth poorest country in ASEAN; 14 percent of the population live below the poverty line; 37 percent of Cambodian children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition; and only 24 percent of Cambodians have access to electricity, 64 percent to clean water and 31 percent to adequate sanitation (Borgen Project, 2017).

Rainsy is a frequent visitor to the Philippines. To make things easier, this author would simply introduce him as “The Ninoy Aquino of Cambodia.” But at the back of this author’s mind, he had thought that the only reason why Hun Sen had not done to Rainsy what Marcos did to Ninoy was the Cambodian tyrant’s fear that Saumura would take over the leadership of the opposition.

Saumura is no Cory Aquino, a quiet housewife and mother of five who shied away from politics until she was thrust in the limelight in 1983. To those who know her quite

well, she is intelligent, outspoken, eloquent and brutally frank. Simply put, no one messes with Saumura!

Journalist Michelle Vachon (2016) reports about Tioulongville, a beautiful abandoned forest town—the subject of photographer Kim Hak’s exhibit, “Tioulong, Echoes from a Golden Past.” Named after Nhiek Tioulong, “the well-designed and environmentally friendly” community was built on verdant hills and valleys for middle class public servants, a forest town with its own hospital and utility services. As Vachon (2016) narrates, then Prince Norodom Sihanouk’s 1969 movie *Le Joie de Vivre* featured some of the villas of Tioulongville, the tranquil scenery reflecting the mystique of the era.

Like Angkor Wat, Tioulongville was left for the forest to encroach upon about fifty years ago, a casualty of the brutal Khmer Rouge. According to Vachon, the locals believe that the place is inhabited by spirits and should not be intruded upon.

Such is the DNA of Saumura. Though very much her own person with her character built through her own struggles and ventures, the spirit of her father lives within her. She has a clear vision of a better tomorrow for Cambodia, a very possible future given that it has proven itself in her father’s glorious past.

Saumura’s small stature and powerful voice reminds me of the legendary French chanteuse, Edith Piaf. And her life reflected in the famous Piaf song, *Non je ne regrette rien*. “No! I will have no regrets. All the things that went wrong. For at last, I have learned to be strong.”

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2

A Fork in the Road

These successful lawyers, academicians, journalist, and civil society stalwarts were not really politicians until they reached the crossroad from where, by accident or by design, they trekked into the rough world of politics, which they changed for the better.



SOURCE: THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A Legal Eagle Soars to Become Taiwan's First Female President

TSAI ING WEN

President (since 2016)

Taiwan

China has always been wary of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and this intensifies every time it becomes the party in power in what it considers its renegade province.

The Chinese communist government was particularly displeased, to say the least, with a phone call on 2 December 2016 between Taiwanese President Tsai Ing Wen and President-elect, Donald Trump. The 10-minute conversation stirred a hornet's nest across the Pacific. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement opposing any official contact between the US and Taiwan, and even sought clarification from the outgoing Obama administration though the White House did not reveal any detail (Samuelson, 2016).

President Tsai herself, in characteristic fashion, tried to calm the situation. "I do not foresee major policy shifts in the near future because we all



SOURCE: TIME

see the value of stability in the region,” she added, according to The Washington Post (Samuelson, 2016).

It was the first direct conversation between the presidents of Taiwan and the United States since 1979, when diplomatic relations between China and the US was formally restored. But then again, Tsai Ing Wen is a person of many firsts—the first woman president of Taiwan, the first president of Hakka or aboriginal descent, the first female presidential candidate of Taiwan, the first to become president without any prior elected office, and the first Taiwanese president to travel to the United States accompanied by Taiwanese journalists.

She recently landed in mainland United States, again to the dismay of China which protested before, during and after her short visits to Los Angeles (on her way to Paraguay and Belize) and Houston, on her way back.



SOURCE: CHINA TIMES

In Los Angeles, she met with three California lawmakers, including Democrat Brad Sherman, who called on his government to formally invite Tsai to Washington, which would break decades of American foreign policy (Horton, 2018). Sherman, a ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific who describes himself as a strong advocate of US-Taiwan alliance, stated, “There may be a time when the president of Taiwan addresses to the joint session of congress, but I think that will be in the next decade. It will begin not with the presidential visit but perhaps at the foreign ministerial level” (Lee, 2018). She delivered a lecture at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and, as another first, she visited the Taiwan’s de facto consulate (Horton, 2018).



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Quoting Reagan, Tsai said “everything was negotiable except two things: our freedom and our future,” but stressed that “we will keep our pledge that we are willing to jointly promote regional stability and peace under the principles of national interests, freedom and democracy” (Lee, 2018).

Tsai spent sixteen years of her life as an academic and a few years in government as a technocrat. She only joined the Democratic Progressive Party in 2004. Until she became head of state, she had not campaigned for any elected post. Yet her acumen in realpolitik and her charismatic touch with the public will put to shame traditional politicians who have spent most of their adult lives in politics and campaign elections.

But aside from making inroads in politics and diplomacy, Tsai’s achievements can be measured by Taiwan’s recent economic successes.

As Ko Shu-ling of Kyodo News observed, Tsai ended her second year in office with a very strong economy. Ko cited Taiwan’s growth of 2.86 percent in 2017, which was the highest in three years; a new low of 3.63 percent unemployment rate; and the local bourse hitting 10,000 points for 12 consecutive months. Looking ahead, she proposed



SOURCE: NEWSMOBILE.IN

investments in biomedical and clean-energy technologies with the goal of a nuclear free Taiwan by 2025 as well as initiatives to encourage population growth and immigration, especially of skilled workers (Shu-Ling, 2018).

The New Southbound Policy (NSP) is a centerpiece of the Tsai presidency. It seeks to further enhance and expand regional social and economic cooperation with Southeast and South Asian countries, Australia and New Zealand. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “the policy ranges from loosening visa restrictions to providing a more suitable environment for businesses looking to expand” (Shu-Ling, 2018).

The Diplomat, which observes geo-political trends throughout the Asia-Pacific, note that “Taiwan (seeks to) form meaningful relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific that are predicated on arenas in which Taipei has a comparative advantage over Beijing, ultimately aiming to foster and preserve favorable geopolitical relationships at a time when China appears to be ever-expanding and increasingly bellicose” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

Brookings Institute noted that Tsai herself said that the primary goal of NSP is to “bid farewell to our past overreliance on a single market” and that “the New South bound Policy is our new ‘Regional Strategy for Asia’. Under this policy, we intend to work with countries in the region and around the world to deepen and broaden our presence in South and Southeast Asia,” The said institute keenly observed:



SOURCE: YAHOO NEWS

“Aside from reducing economic dependency on mainland China... the second driver of NSP (is) ‘to hold a more advantageous position in international society.’ Professor Joyce Lin, Director of the ASEAN Studies Centre at Tamkang University, interprets this as striving to ‘increase [Taiwan’s] international space,’ or room for strategic maneuverability. But because China has a consistent record of trying to block Taiwan’s efforts to expand its international role, in addition to reducing the number of its diplomatic partners, Taiwan must be skillful in identifying and filling non-traditional economic and diplomatic niches. The NSP is a prime example of such an effort” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).



SOURCE: SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST (SCMP).

Tsai is walking the tight rope and with very little space, to maneuver in creating these non-traditional economic and diplomatic niches. But diplomacy is one her strengths. After all, while “working under the then-ruling Kuomintang (KMT), she served as a key trade negotiator involved in Taiwan’s entry into the World Trade Organization” (Hong, 2018).

But she is stern when speaking of Chinese aggression and warning other countries that they too can be subjected to its expansionist agenda. “This is not just Taiwan’s challenge, it is a challenge for the region and the world as a whole, because today it’s Taiwan, but tomorrow it may be any other country that will have to face the expansion of China’s influence. Their democracy, freedom, and freedom to do business will one day be affected by China. We need to work together to reaffirm our values of democracy and freedom in order to constrain China and also minimise the expansion of their hegemonic influence,” Tsai told Agence France Press (AFP) (Hunter Marston, 2018).

Such fiery words from someone soft spoken and as the youngest of nine children, she was not even expected to have a professional career, much less enter politics and be president of her country.

She was born in a coastal village, the child of a Hakka (an indigenous tribe in Taiwan) father and a Taiwanese mother. She spent her leisure time taking care of her father who run a successful automotive maintenance business.



SOURCE: READ01.COM

She moved to Taipei at age 11 and by the time she was 24, she finished law at her country's top institution of higher learning, the National University of Taiwan, one of the top-ranked in the world. In 1980 and 1984, she would earn her masters and doctorate degrees, respectively, from leading universities in the United States and the United Kingdom-- Cornell University, and the London School of Economics and Political Science. Armed with impressive academic credentials with a solid track record in three continents, she became a professor of law from 1984 to 2000. Her career as an academic is the longest she had.

She is a dynamic and reformist leader. And this is evident when she became the leader of DPP even prior to her election as president. She believes "in a more sophisticated DPP" given the complexities of the global economy and politics, particularly cross-straits relations.



SOURCE: NEXT MAG



SOURCE: THE STRAIT TIMES

For centuries, politics is discussed in cafes. Revolutions and independence movements have been conceived in coffee shops. But in this particular case, a cafe—and its entire chain—became the very center of a political war, as reported by The Independent:

“Shortly after she visited a Los Angeles location of the Taiwanese coffee chain 85C, the Chinese internet erupted with anger, calling for a boycott of the chain’s several hundred locations in China, its largest market. That day, 85C’s parent company, Gourmet Master, whose stock trades on Taiwan’s exchange, lost \$120 million in share value. The company promptly apologised and expressed support for peaceful unification.

Many Taiwanese were upset by the company caving in to Chinese pressure, with some also calling for a boycott of the chain. Polls consistently show that the overwhelming majority of people in Taiwan, a multiparty democracy, oppose being absorbed into China’s one-party, authoritarian rule. The episode is the latest example of the Chinese government using its grip on the country’s enormous market to pressure corporations into serving its political agenda” (Horton, 2018).

Paraphrasing a line from the lyrics of a song by Sting, China watches every step that Tsai makes. And like the smartest girl in school, she deals with the class bully by being nonprovocative but stern and with intelligence, maturity and some cunning. With her astute legal and scholarly mind, tempered by intuition and street-smart audacity, she reached the pinnacle at a relative short time, and without bloodshed.



SOURCE: THE STRAIT TIMES

On the other hand, Taiwan's first non-KMT president and vice-president, Chen Shui-bin and Anette Lu, experienced first-hand the brutality of Martial Law including imprisonment and assassination attempts.

But despite Taiwan's dark past, it has long emerged as a vibrant democracy with a prosperous economy. Taiwan is a small country in terms of territory and population. Yet, it is the seventh biggest economy in Asia and is ranked as the 15th most competitive nation in the world. Taiwan's success is the best argument against the principle of Asian values which was and continues to be favorably espoused by authoritarian leaders including Taiwan's past presidents.

The ascent of a non-traditional politician who does not come from any political dynasty and who made her early mark as an academician and technocrat is a testimony to the political maturity of Taiwanese people and their adherence to good governance and democracy. And her selection by DPP to be its leader and later presidential standard bearer is a living proof that DPP is a model for internal democracy and principled politics.

There is a need to be both strategically effective and morally acceptable, to strike a balance between pragmatism and principles. President Tsai demonstrates an important lesson—nice guys don't always finish last and in fact, they can finish first. But in this case, the highest nice guys can aim for is the second place—and, that is not necessarily a bad thing.

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Gender Politics in a Bastion of Patriarchy

RENHO MURATA

President of the Democrat Party (2016-2017)

Minister of State (2010-2012)

Member of the House of Councillors (2004 to Present)

Japan

The Edo Period (1603 to 1868) of the militaristic and isolationist Tokugawa Shogunate ushered in a long era of peace and prosperity as well as social hegemony” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). During this period, Japan institutionalized the “le” traditional family where a patriarch presides over multiple generations. The lasting effects of this patriarchal system where men control sociopolitical affairs and have authority over women are still evident to this today (Manga and Gender, n.d.).

The global #MeToo Movement against sexual harassment and assault has made significant inroads in most developed countries and several other developing countries. However, a 28 February 2018 Associated Press article observed, “The #MeToo movement has not caught on in Japan, where speaking out often draws criticism rather than



SOURCE: RENHO MURATA OFFICIAL TWITTER PAGE



SOURCE: PAGE SUITE

sympathy, even from other women...‘Conformist pressure in Japan discourages women from speaking out or saying “no” to many things, including unwanted sex,’ said Saori Ikeuchi, a former lawmaker and gender diversity activist” (Voice of America, 2018).

This patriarchy is very much reflected in Japanese politics. Data from the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) ranks Japan as 161st out of 193 countries in terms of women representation in parliament, the lowest among developed countries with only 47 women out of 465 (10.1 percent) in the Diet or House of Representatives and 50 out of 242 (20.7 percent) in the upper chamber (Women in National Parliaments, 2018). “The status of Japanese women in the realm of political and economic empowerment is abysmally low,” Emma Dalton (2016) observed, “(and) this gender inequality in the workforce extends to the world of politics, which continues to be dominated by middle-aged and elderly men” (Dalton, 2016).

But Japan remains as one of the strongest and most stable democracies in the world, aside from being the globe’s third largest economy. This East Asian country with a multi-party parliamentary system is ranked by Freedom House as “1” or “most free” (with 7 as the lowest) in terms of Freedom Rating, Political Rights and Civil Liberties with an aggregate score of 96 (100 being the highest or most free) (Freedom House, 2017).

“Women need to fight lots of invisible pressure in order to get a leg up in this society. I may look strong, but I’m actually weak and shy,” Renho stated during a campaign debate. “But by breaking the glass ceiling myself, I hope women, and the men who support them,

will be encouraged to work harder and make Japan a less suffocating place to be” (Jusino, 2016).

Not so many women have risen to political prominence in Japan. Time Magazine mentioned of only three women who have made recent political strides— Yuriko Koike, the first female governor of Tokyo, Defense Minister Tomomi Inada and Renho Murata (Worland, 2016). Born as Hsieh Lien-fang, she is better known by the mononym, Renho. But even amongst Japanese female politicians, Renho is not typical.

As an opposition legislator, Renho belongs to the minority not just in terms of party affiliation (except during the brief period when DPJ held the majority), but also in terms of gender and generation. As if being a woman and her relative youth (she was first elected as legislator while in her thirties) in patriarchal Japan are not challenging enough, an issue used against her is, ironically enough, her own patriarchy.

When she was born in 1967 as to a Taiwanese father and a Japanese mother, Japanese law stipulated that a child’s citizenship was passed on by the father. At age 17, she elected to be Japanese when the law was changed in 1985 (Worland, 2016) and allowed her to acquire her mother’s citizenship.

In Japan, people of mixed race are known as *hafu*, a phonetic play of the word “half” (Chung & Ogura, 2018). “Among Japanese, the perception of pure ethnic background is a big part of belonging to the culture,” according to Al Jazeera which further observed that *hafus* often faced ridicule and rejection (Saber, 2015). As a CNN report noted, “despite increasingly progressive attitudes towards race in Japan, foreigners and their *hafu* children often live as outsiders” (Chung & Ogura, 2018). Her having a foreigner father had repeatedly been a bone of contention, even controversy. But quite the contrary, should not this not be to her advantage? Unlike most candidates who were Japanese at birth, Renho chose to be Japanese!—a rather positive soundbyte.

Renho is extremely charismatic. A former swimsuit model and broadcast journalist, she was used to being in the



SOURCE: RENHO MURATA OFFICIAL TWITTER PAGE

limelight even before she entered politics. In 1990, she graduated with Bachelor's in Law degree in Public Law from Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo. She also studied Chinese language from Peking University from 1995 to 1997. In 1993, she married Noboyuki Murata, a journalist and academician, and in 1997, she gave birth to twins.



SOURCE: RENHO MURATA OFFICIAL TWITTER PAGE

As a journalist, she had covered important events including natural disasters and politics in Japan and Taiwan and was highly regarded in both countries for her extensive and well-researched reportage. In 2000, Renho covered the historic 2000 presidential elections in Taiwan which saw President Chen Shui-bian and Vice President Anette Lu of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) ending more than half a century of the one-party rule of the Koumintang (KMT). It is interesting to note that DPP's Mark Chen, former Secretary General of the Office of the President of Taiwan and Foreign Minister under President Chen, and Renho are distant relatives.

Renho herself would join a political party that would earn a similar distinction. In 2009, the Democrat Party of Japan ended 54 years of almost uninterrupted rule by the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) when Naoto Kan became prime minister.



SOURCE: RENHO MURATA OFFICIAL TWITTER PAGE

Despite the obstacles, Renho's political career has been nothing short of stellar. She is an incumbent Member of the House of Councillors, the upper chamber of the Japanese parliament—a position she first assumed in 2004. She was Minister of State of two portfolios: Government Revitalization (2010-2011; 2011-2012) and Consumer Affairs and Food Safety (2011) under Prime Ministers Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda.

But it was her election as President of the Democrat Party on 1 October 2016



SOURCE: RENHO MURATA OFFICIAL TWITTER PAGE

that put her under the spotlight in Japan and in the world stage. Her party presidency received an overwhelming mandate of 503 votes of 849 edging out her rivals by a landslide, veteran lawmaker Seiji Maehara and rookie contender Yuichiro Tamaki, who garnered 230 and 116 points, respectively (Jusino, 2016). She was the first woman to lead DPJ and the first mixed-race politician to head a major political party in Japan. And, as leader of the opposition and the second largest political party, being Japan's first female prime minister became a distinct possibility.

"I will have more discussion within the party about how Japan can promote such values as diversity and coexistence," she said upon her election as DPJ leader (Worland, 2016). This is not at all surprising for despite being more progressive than the ruling LDP, DPJ can be just as monolithic.

According to the Financial Times, "Renho had sought to cast herself as a voice for Japan's younger generation. With strong name recognition, she was regarded as the only politician with a chance of reviving the DP" (Harding, 2017).



SOURCE: RENHO MURATA OFFICIAL TWITTER PAGE



SOURCE: RENHO MURATA OFFICIAL TWITTER PAGE

Fortune enumerated several of her policy agenda. But since the Democrats did not manage to win the majority during her presidency, these did not come into fruition. “Renho has indicated that she wishes to implement policies that will enable more women to participate freely in the workforce and to be better rewarded for their work. She supports some elements of Abenomics—the fiscal policy package being rolled out since 2012 under the Shinzo Abe administration—but she also believes that it has arrived at an impasse and that some changes are needed, especially the policies regarding families and working women. Specifically, she calls for more investment in education, childcare, and other forms of support that will enable families to raise children more easily. At a time when Japan faces a rapidly aging population and a very low birth rate, Renho is keen to create policies that enable couples to feel confident having children without the fear of being excessively financially penalized. She has also proposed revising income tax laws that penalize dual-income families, since the laws have been criticized for encouraging some women to limit their participation in the paid workforce” (Dalton, 2016).

After ten months as party president, Renho stepped down, a move seen as her way of assuming responsibility for the party’s dismal performance in Tokyo’s city assembly elections. “My judgement is that, for now, the best way forward is 1 step down so that a stronger leadership can take my place. I hope we can move promptly to a leadership election and form a new executive” (Harding, 2017).

Her gracious exit, like her magnanimous victories, is a testimony to her character.

Like Hillary Clinton, Renho Murata has broken the glass ceiling even if the ultimate goal is not achieved. In her 2016 concession speech, the former American Senator and State Secretary stated, “And to all of the little girls who are watching this, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.”



SOURCE: THE INITIUM

Renho has done something very remarkable, she is a living reminder to all young Japanese women that they can pursue and achieve their dreams, several centuries of patriarchy, notwithstanding.

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The Reluctant Politician and the Politics of Conscience

HENEDINA ABAD

Deputy Speaker (2013-2016)

Representative of Batanes (2004-2007, 2010-2017)

Republic of the Philippines

“The truth of the matter is that Dina was not a politician and up to the time that she left us, she was a reluctant politician. And I think she became a politician because of I think one trait that really led her to where she is right now, and it was her willingness to give off herself,” thus said Florencio “Butch” Abad during one lonely, rainy night, executing a task that is one of the most difficult and painful for a man to do—deliver the eulogy for his wife. Batanes Rep. Henedina “Dina” Razon Abad succumbed to cancer on 8 October 2017.

It was not coincidental that the wake and memorial services were held at the Ateneo de Manila University’s main campus in suburban Manila. Dina, a long-time university professor, was the Founding Dean of the Jesuit institution’s School of Government.

The reluctance in politics was understandable given Dina’s longstanding career in the academe and civil society, and by being a “parliamentarian of the streets” even before becoming a member of parliament.

“I first encountered Dina Abad in my youth at the height of the Marcos



SOURCE: ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY OFFICIAL WEBSITE



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Dictatorship when I was a student leader and she was a young professional, as we found ourselves marching together and protesting in the streets,” Jose Luis Martin “Chito” Gascon, current chair of the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, narrated. “She, along with her husband Butch, were part of the group of people we looked up to as mentors. Dina struck me then as a firm and steadfast person who had a clear understanding of the problems in Philippine society and had a vision of how to go about transforming it. Her steadfastness was equal parts encouraging as she engaged others to follow her path, and unnerving as one could be intimidated by her demeanor. Her resoluteness was admirable!”

Her predecessor as Dean of Ateneo School of Government (ASOG), Dr. Ronald Mendoza, asserted, “Dina Abad, the educator, was also a visionary development entrepreneur, growing the only private sector run school of government in the Philippines. Along with like-minded leaders, (she) helped to lay the institutional groundwork for lasting change, by producing and influencing leaders that would carry the Ateneo’s distinct brand of servant leadership. Our commitment to what Dean Dina started is reflected in the school’s new motto: ‘Forming leaders. Leading reforms’ (Ateneo de Manila University, 2017).”

Her multifarious and multidimensional roles became more evident as she never really gave up being an educator, a development worker and an activist even when she joined mainstream politics, reaching her pinnacle as deputy speaker during the presidency of Benigno Simeon “Noynoy” Aquino, III.

As Dr. Florangel Rosario Braid (2017) observed, “Her early years in development advocacy were focused on rural development and agrarian reform – as a valuable partner to her husband Butch, who later held three critical cabinet posts as agrarian reform, education, and budget secretary. But it was not long before she began to do things on her own – engaging with NGOs and civil society on critical national concerns including human rights. She was elected representative in Congress where she became Deputy Speaker during the 17th Congress. She chaired the Committees on Energy, Government Reorganization, and Rural Development and was active in the crafting of bills on reproductive health, freedom of information, among many others.”



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

The reluctance in politics and with it the unwillingness to achieve power no matter what the cost made Dina, the politician, more conscientious, and diligent than most of her colleagues. It made her truly honorable, a title compulsorily affixed to all Filipino congressmen whether they deserved it or not.

Former President Aquino himself acknowledged the invaluable contributions of Dina Abad, as legislator and deputy speaker, in pushing for a key legislative agenda of his administration—the women’s health and reproductive rights law. It was an issue that was close to Dina’s heart as Dina wore another hat—as an advocate of women’s rights. During his eulogy, the former president who also served as legislator in both houses of congress, expressed his admiration for Dina’s steadfastness when it came to issues she was passionate about, narrating how he and a few others were once given a lecture on gender sensitivity and how no one had the guts to offer a rebuttal.

Indeed, the reluctant politician was determined to be and do her best in this new frontier of her life, and she never ceased from being the stern teacher she had a reputation for.

“This is my story about Dina. I was really afraid of her. I was scared of Dina Abad. In fact, I was scared and still am scared that I actually wrote out what I was going to say not wanting to disappoint her,” confessed MAR Roxas, former senator, secretary and LP president during his eulogy. “I was scared I would not live up to her expectations, to her high standards, or that I would fail her. She had a gentle, yet firm way about her: supportive, encouraging, enabling. She made me want to do better--to do my best.”

In the same memorial service, Vice President Leni Robredo recalled that it was her late husband, Interior Secretary Jesse Robredo, who introduced Dina to her during a Liberal Party event. She later privately told her husband that she was surprised that Dina was only a few years older than she was. The vice president recalled that “though Jesse called Secretary Abad as ‘Butch’, Jesse would always address Rep. Abad as ‘Ma’am Dina’. I would overhear Jesse talking with Dina on the phone and when he spoke to her it was as if he was talking to his mother, there was always this reverence. And in these discussions, there was always some form of consultation as Dina’s advice was always sought after.



SOURCE: LENI ROBREDO PERSONAL FACEBOOK PAGE

It would not take long before the vice president and Dina would become close friends as well, just as their husbands were especially since the two women were both members of the 17th Congress. The two shared a lot in common: they were married to very successful and principled public servants and before becoming politicians themselves, they were in careers that were more altruistically rewarding that gave relatively little financial compensation. The vice president was a human rights lawyer representing the poor and underprivileged before she run for congress. And, they were nurturing mothers who raised accomplished children who eventually studied in ivy-league universities in the United States and leading schools in Europe—all on scholarship grants.

Even outside the House of Representatives, the two would often meet and share their stories, their hopes and frustrations, especially with what was going on in the country. “I had a very difficult time making a decision (when asked to run for vice president). And Dina would always say to me ‘just follow your heart because what is in your heart is right.’ And I did just that, she was right, and I followed what was in my heart.”

Indeed, these two remarkable women shared many things in common: they were both reluctant politicians who not only followed their hearts but answered the call of destiny.

“You know precisely where Dina stands,” President Aquino further narrated, “(though we were) almost always in complete agreement, you might have very spirited and heated discussions. There might be even a raising of voices. But at the end of every debate no matter how hard it was, no matter (if) your blood is boiling, Dina always had a ready smile.” The author has, in many occasions, observed Aquino addressing Dina as “Atche”, meaning “older sister” in their native Pampango (The Razons are from Lubao, Pampanga while the Aquinos are from Tarlac).

“Dina was a loving person. Even if she disagrees with you, you would not take it personally. She never made you feel less of a person,” Vice President Robredo recalled.

Butch and Dina were a power couple both in the Liberal Party of the Philippines and the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD). Butch was a founding member of CALD who previously served as the international organization’s secretary general and chairman. Dina was the founding chair of the CALD Women’s Caucus. It was Butch, as CALD Secretary General, who hired the author to run the then rotating secretariat of CALD. (It was previously in Bangkok and Taipei before Manila became the base of the permanent secretariat.)

Butch previously served as LP Secretary General before becoming Party President while Dina was previously Vice President for Policy and Chair of its old think tank. But Dina will be remembered most in the Liberal Party for a position that had no official title—as the party’s moral compass.

“Right and wrong, that was what it was all about with Dina Abad,” MAR Roxas asserted. “I feel Dina’s high standards for herself as well as for others who are the products of her all-out commitment to everything she did. Her family, her friends, her beliefs and



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

advocacies, her love of our country, which bring us together tonight. We are gathered as Dina's colleagues and allies in the LP. It was her love of country that brought her to us at the LP. First as a supportive wife to Butch, and then as a principal herself. Somebody with her own identity, not just appended to (someone else) no matter how great Butch was but Dina stood out on her own. She is like Xena Warrior Princess, fierce and unrelenting in her struggle for what's right, for what's fair."



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

"When I look back at my mother's life, I said—before I'm sure everybody's heard this passage from the second letter of Paul. It says: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,'" the second President Aquino reminisced about the late democratic icon. "And you cannot but look at Dina and her life and how meaningful she lived her life, how purposeful this life was, and we cannot help but say, this is so apt to you and how you lived... All the pain, all the suffering, all the hardships that she had to undergo, she will be receiving multiples of recompense for all that she has done. So, we who are seeing her on this passage the better aspect of our existence. Perhaps we should not be sad that she has departed. Shouldn't we be glad that we had the opportunity to have interacted with her, to have had a life that was enriched by her, to have been supported by her at our own darkest moments."

"Our political culture will not reward a person like Dina," Butch Abad lamented. "In fact, our political culture makes people like Dina suffer a lot. But to her, if that's what needs to be done, she was willing."

Aside from public service, Butch and Dina were also civil society stalwarts and political activists especially in times when they were needed most. Butch and Dina had done so many things together, and this is not just in terms of their family life. They protested against



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

the Marcos dictatorship together; they studied in Harvard together; they were in CALD and LP together; and they were even imprisoned together.

“Before the dreaded secret police of Marcos was able to capture me, I was constantly on the run with my wife Dina,” Secretary Abad narrated in the Inaugural Freedom Speech of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in 2011. “For days and months, we were on the lam, moving from one town to another, seeking refuge in relatives and friends. Fleeing north, we ended up in the Cordilleras, under the care of Episcopalian priests. It was there in the mountains of Sagada where our first child—later on to be named Julia Andrea—was conceived. Finally, the *berdugo* caught up with us, and we were transferred from one prison to another for interrogation and detention. My greatest fear at that time was that Julia would be born and raised apart from us. That she will never know how it is to be free.”

As former President Aquino again narrated, “Whether it was conscious or unconscious, Dina always seem to exude the motherly instinct of not producing tensions or unnecessary tensions or unnecessary conflicts. Dina always had the supportive work or action at times of intense crisis. Dina perhaps, also like any other mother, can scold you. But (she is) the type of mother who will scold you now and give you ice cream afterwards.”

The vice-president remembered the last few times she spent with Dina. “If she were not in the hospital or had she not lost so much weight, you wouldn’t suspect she was sick at all. She was the same Ma’am Dina—lively, telling a lot of stories and still giving advice. And I was telling her: ‘Get well, Ma’am Dina because in January, there is a family wedding



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

in Batanes, if I go there, I hope you're there. And she said, 'If I'm still around, I will be in Batanes. But if not, I'm fine with it. Whether I get well or not, I have accepted everything.' It was as if she didn't take it very hard."

But the rest of her friends and colleagues did. And so much so for Butch, Julia, Luis, Pio and Patsy, and the rest of the Abad and Razon families.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

About five years ago, the author and two of his siblings, vacationed in Batanes. She hosted a dinner at the Abad home. At the veranda, the author pointed out the manicured garden that seamlessly blended with the rest of the land and seascapes. “That (the garden) is all Butch’s work,” she said with appreciation, love and pride.

After attending the 54th Liberal International Congress in Marrakesh way back in 2006, a small group from the Taiwanese, Burmese, Canadian and Philippine delegations toured the Moroccan countryside. She and the rest of the delegation noted with sheer astonishment the abruptly changing landscapes—from vast desserts to snowcapped mountains to lush greenery with flowing streams—an incredibly diverse spectrum of scenery confined within a limited space and explorable in such a short period.

All that beauty in such a confined space. So much like Batanes. And just like Dina Abad.

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She Who Teaches Can Do Politics Better

RACHADA DHNADIREK

Member of Parliament (2007-2013)

Kingdom of Thailand

The idiom “those who can, do; those who can’t, teach,” is often used to disparage educators. Dr. Rachada Dhnadirek is a living argument against this fundamentally wrong saying.

She was not a reluctant politician in the strictest sense of the word. That was simply because there was nothing to hesitate from. It was not because she was determined to become a politician early on but quite the contrary, she never even imagined she would be one until a crucial turning point. Given her impressive educational background, she was an accomplished assistant professor for a decade. Her father runs profitable enterprises—and one option she did entertain in her youth was to join him in managing the family businesses. There was not a single politician in her family or even in her closest circle of friends. In fact, she did not personally know a single member of the Democrat Party of Thailand even when she made her decision to shift gears.



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

Her decision to enter politics in 2006 was a spur of the moment. And 2006 was quite a moment in the ancient kingdom's modern history, spurred by a series of mostly unfortunate events.

In January of that year, embattled Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra sold his Shin Corporation, a telecom and media giant, to Singapore's Temasek in the hope that it will reverse a slump of his popularity amidst accusations of conflicts of interests (The Economist, 2006). But there were allegations that Thaksin avoided paying taxes from that sale which netted almost two billion dollars for his family (Prapanya, 2006). It also fueled long standing criticisms that he had been using his public office to protect his private business interests and even financially gain from it. On February 4, for example, 50,000 Thais demonstrated in Bangkok demanding for Thaksin's resignation (BBC, 2006).



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

On February 24, on Thaksin's behest, the parliament was dissolved but the new elections was boycotted by the Democrat Party and other opposition parties. The move of dissolving parliament was seen to deflect attention from the scandal-ridden government. The ruling Thai Rak Thai Party was uncontested in 278 out of 400 constituencies (The New York Times, 2006). The massive demonstrations and protests continued during the campaign and afterwards, given its inevitable outcome. The March 5 anti-Thaksin rally in front of the Government House drew an estimated crowd of 60,000 (CNN, 2006). A few days after his party won the April 2 national elections, Thaksin stepped down as prime minister and on May 8, the Constitutional Court later invalidated the said polls and declared it unconstitutional.

On September 19, the military launched a *coup d'état* while Thaksin was in New York to address the U.N. General Assembly. The Declaration of Martial Law effectively dissolved

parliament and revoked the constitution (Walker, 2006). The coup was bloodless and even evoked scenes from a *fiesta* typical in the Land of Smiles but the colorful year ended with violence. On December 31 and the following day, six small bombs were detonated in Bangkok, killing six and injuring at least 28 people, including foreigners (Mydans, 2006).

The silver lining in this tumultuous year was the kingdom-wide celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of the venerated monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who ascended the throne on 9 June 1946.

It was amidst this discontent and disquiet when Rachada decided to leave the relatively peaceful confines of the university and join the more turbulent political arena, even more tempestuous in the case of Thailand.



SOURCE: RACHADA DHUNDIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

“I made my decision in 2006, there was political turmoil in my country. I was an ordinary citizen who disliked Thaksin so much. I felt that I could do more as an observer or a commentator. I could be a good player and a much better one than the existing politicians, definitely much better than the ones who deserved to be ousted.”

The author asked Rachada, an assistant professor of public administration of her alma mater, Mahidol University, who also thought courses in critical and creative thinking in Chulalongkorn University, if she discussed current national issues with her undergraduate and graduate students, many of whom were in the bureaucracy. “Of course, but I was a very ethical professor—very neutral in raising issues on government policies, and discuss the pros and cons with my students. As ordinary people, they were upset with corrupt politicians.”



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

“I was teaching public administration but my education was in corporate strategy and finance,” stated the assistant professor who earned two masters’ degrees from the United Kingdom—Nottingham University and Glasgow University. She earned her PhD in International Business from the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok.

“When I was young, I wanted to be a business woman—either continue my dad’s business or be a stock investor. After my first master’s degree in corporate strategy and governance, I did not want to work so I took another master’s in accounting and finance.” She returned to Bangkok under the most inauspicious circumstance, intending to work in a financial institution like the stock exchange commission given her background. “In 1997, there was a financial crisis in Thailand and across ASEAN. More than half of the financial establishments closed down which disabled me to get a job in a field that I liked. Then, there was an opening (for a faculty position) in Mahidol. The crisis was a critical factor that changed my career decision from business to academic. Because of the financial crisis, corporate governance became so popular as corporations started to look for good governance.” It was her father who encouraged her to pursue an academic career, a life which she considered rather predictable.

“I teach my students to be critical thinkers (another Chulalongkorn professor tackled the creative component), and how to live in this modern world with fake news.”

One evening, after a day in the university, Rachada was watching the news on television: the usual fare of demonstrations and protest rallies occurring during those times. “Then I stood up and I talked with Dad and Mom over dinner and just said, ‘I want to be a politician. I did not want this situation to continue.’ They merely asked, ‘Are you sure?’” Rachada narrated.

“My parents were worried that being a politician you have to be nice to people all the time. I was introverted and reserved. They were confident that I would be able to fulfill the core functions of being a politician, but they were not sure that I will be happy attending all these weddings and funerals,” Rachada recounted. Like in most Southeast Asian societies, parliamentarians were expected to build personal and familial relationships with their constituents; one’s capacity for drafting sound and effective legislation often overlooked by the voters.

Her parents were very supportive—morally and otherwise. “You need financial capability as well and not just rely on somebody else as this will not allow you to be independent,” Rachada explained. “I don’t need external support as I can rely on my parents. It’s not like in America where voters support candidates.”

The author asked her if she would still consider running for elections if her parents were not capable of financing her candidacy. She replied that she probably would not. “I know that I am not thinking of making money from politics. I don’t see politics as a career for my financial needs.” This is good for her and more importantly, for Thailand. Corruption become more prevalent because of politicians who want to profit financially for politics—the very same politicians who spurred young and intelligent professionals like Rachada to run for office and replace bad habits with the infusion of new blood.

“Once I decided to be a politician, I did not know anyone from the Democrat Party which I wanted to join. At that time, I really did not know what to do. So, what’s next then?



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

I just did not want to walk into the DP headquarters and fill in the application—I don't think I will be selected by doing this. Then by coincidence, I happened to talk to a friend whom I have not seen for ten years and told her my intention. Her father used to work with Chuan Leekpai.” Her friend’s father arranged a meeting between Rachada and the former Prime Minister. “Khun Chuan was the first Democrat I met. We met at the party headquarters. He gave his blessings.”



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

“It’s so nice that you are interested in politics,” the veteran politician and highly regarded statesman said to the academician who was about to become, by her own personal choice, a novice in politics.

“You started (your talks) at the top,” The author told her, remembering that Khun Chuan was party leader for a long time.

“Yes, the very top,” Rachada responded. “When I talked with Khun Abhisit (Abhisit Vejjajiva, the new party leader who would soon become prime minister), he wanted me to contest in a district that we had a good chance to win.” But despite the blessings and support from the two most eminent leaders of the party, there was still no assurance that she would get the nomination. There was a selection committee that picked the candidates. But she had no idea that getting the nomination was one thing but whether or not there will be elections was another. “With the September 2006 coup, my and every other candidate’s political career became uncertain. So, I went back to teaching to the university but not giving up my political plans.”



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

“I think I have luck in politics. During the coup, I continued my political activities. Then I happened to meet the very popular Bang Plat Councilor, Taweesak Kamolvej, who treated me as a daughter. She was appointed as chief adviser that enabled me to work in the district. Working for him with a year convinced me that I wanted to be in politics. I learned the groundwork—how to engage with voters and deal with village leaders.”

“Given your comfortable life and having studied in the Europe, was it easy for you to relate on the grassroots level?” The author frankly asked.

“I understand the grassroots and their needs and their problems and their sensibilities,” she responded candidly. “I have heart but I don’t understand them that well. I know their hardships and difficulties but I know it by brain. Now I also know it by heart. And I learned to solve problems by brain and by heart.”



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

After the coup, many politicians wanted to run under the Democrat Party and despite the nomination she received before, she was not assured that she would still be the official candidate for Bang Plat. But working for the district for a year with Councilor Taweesak earned her a good feedback. In a town hall-like assembly of the party, she was just asked to give the synthesis of the meeting. She summarized the proceedings, did a SWOT analysis and presented strategic recommendations. Khun Abhisit and the rest of the party leadership took notice. She clinched the nomination and won the much coveted seat of Constituency 12, which before only included the District of Bang Plat. BangkokNoi, Talingchan and Taweewatana were added in Constituency 12 in 2007.

“I grew up in a good family who always thought me to do good things. I was raised to believe in myself. I have a good education. I see the virtue of having good politicians. I am capable and independent—I understand the conditions of Thai politics,” she stated when asked of qualities that would make her a good politician.



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

When asked how her academic background is applied to her work in parliament, she replied that the principles of governance can be applied to all aspects, from the local to the national to the global. “The difference lies on which appropriate mechanisms for transparency and checks and balances are appropriate over time.” She is cognizant that policies must not only be sound but must also resonate with the grassroots. In many instances, good and effective policies are not popular, at least, on the short-term.

Rachada is a strong advocate of women’s rights. “Gender-based violence is a big problem in Thai society. It’s the attitude: Thai women, they tolerate their violent husbands, and female teenagers who do not know their rights.” Thailand has laws against violence against women, but the problem is their enforcement.



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE



SOURCE: RACHADA DHNADIREK OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

She cited the case of an 11-year old girl whose Thai-Muslim family allowed her to marry a 41-year old man from Malaysia. This was against the Thai national law and even the Shariah Law in Malaysia where the minimum age for marriage is 15. But the Shariah law which is practiced in certain parts of Southern Thailand does not specify the minimum age for marriage. But this was not only a gender issue, for Rachada, it was a problem of poverty. This was a loophole that must be addressed in the pertinent committee in parliament. But with Martial Law declared in 2014, there is no parliament. Rachada was on her second term as a member of parliament during the latest coup.

Rachada is working with the Women's Friends Salvation that engages with Muslim women in the South. She also wants to encourage women to enter politics, starting with little things like learning how to speak out and not to underestimate themselves. Even without parliament, she pushes for certain agenda that are close to her heart.

Rachada is, by no measure, a member of a political dynasty. Nevertheless, this daughter of privilege has the heart for those who have less in life and the mind to actually do something about it. She is the antithesis of self-entitlement, self-enrichment and self-aggrandizement that often inflict so many politicians in Southeast Asia.

Indeed, those who can, do; those who can teach, do it better.

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3

Forged by the Crucible

They persevered against tyranny, martial rule and armed conflict, squarely facing their nemeses who put them behind bars, attempted to have them killed, and vowed to crush them whether in elections or in war.



The Lady of the House Arrest

AUNG SAN SUU KYI

State Counsellor (2016 to Present)

Elected Member of Parliament (2012-2015)

Leader of the National League for Democracy (1988 to Present)

Myanmar

“The only real prison is fear, and the only real freedom is freedom from fear”

-Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

The house on 54 University Avenue in Yangon is probably the most famous residence in Myanmar. The home of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi first belonged to her widowed mother. The elegant, two-story white colonial mansion by the serene Lake Inya is quite picturesque. It does not look anything like a prison. But for more than 15 years covering a period of more than two decades (1990 to 2010), it actually was.

“The lonely struggle taking place in a heavily guarded compound in Rangoon is part of the much larger struggle, worldwide, for the emancipation of the human spirit from political tyranny and psychological subjection,” Suu Kyi declared when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 in a message read by her son, Alexander Aris (The Nobel Foundation, 1991).



SOURCE: YAHOO NEWS

“Often, during my days of house arrest it felt as though I were no longer a part of the real world. There was the house which was my world, there was the world of others who also were not free but who were together in prison as a community, and there was the world of the free; each was a different planet pursuing its own separate course in an indifferent universe” Suu Kyi stated during her Nobel Lecture which she was able to finally deliver in Oslo only in 2012 (The Nobel Foundation, 2012).

During the last several years of the 20th Century, Suu Kyi presented the biggest threat to the ruling military junta that had ruled this mainland Southeast Asian nation since 1962 when she was still a high school student in New Delhi. Two years later, she would enter Oxford University where she earned her B.A. in philosophy, politics and economics at St. Hugh's College, and met her husband, Michael Aris, a British academician.

The junta was known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) from 1988 to 1997. SLORC replaced the Burma Socialist Programme Party of strongman Ne Win, the sole political party allowed to operate from 1962 to 1988. In a deceptive attempt to have a veneer of legitimacy and political stability, it was renamed as the State Peace and Development Council (1997 to 2011)—basically the same ferocious creature with different collars.

Suu Kyi was the only one capable of uniting the opposition. Her presence, even unannounced, would attract thousands and thousands of supporters, even ordinary Burmese, despite constant threats of abuse and arrest. By simply waving her hand, peering above the gate of this iconic house, would result in thunderous applause and cheering not unlike the resulting euphoria every time the pope steps into the balcony of St. Peter's. In other words, she was not to be underestimated. The despotic junta made that mistake before and it was determined not to repeat it.



SOURCE: YAHOO NEWS

The overconfident junta called for elections in 1990 and the generals were dumbfounded with the results. With Aung San Suu Kyi both as leader of her party, and more importantly, as the embodiment of the Burmese people's dream for freedom and prosperity, the National League of Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory taking 392 out of the 492 seats. In any other country, Aung San Suu Kyi would have been made head of state and her party, with a comfortable majority in parliament, able to legislate laws for the upliftment of an impoverished people. But Burma, or rather, Myanmar, was not just another country.

The military regime simply did not recognize the results of the elections and banned the convening of parliament. It became more and more repressive, curtailing civil liberties and committing widescale and atrocious human rights violations. The mere mention of her name was considered subversive. So, she was simply referred to as “The Lady”.

Like many women leaders portrayed in this book, Suu Kyi was viciously maligned by the junta. Liberal International, which gave her the prestigious Prize for Freedom in 1995, noted, “She was also attacked because of her marriage to a British national, Michael Aris, and therefore accused of serving foreign interests. She was not allowed to see her husband for several years, not even when he was passing away in the spring of 1999” (Liberal International, n.d.).

She was the daughter of the General Aung San, the Father of the Burmese Nation, who was assassinated in 1945. For the daughter to suffer the same fate as the family patriarch was a distinct possibility. But Suu Kyi’s prominence and stature reached beyond her country—something her father did not even accomplish in his short lifetime. He died at the age of 32 when she was only two years old.



SOURCE: READTHISBOOK

The legendary hero probably had no idea that her daughter would become an icon of democracy, one of the most famous and revered people of the century of his birth and death. During most of her life before 1988, the year she returned to Burma from England to visit her ailing mother, she also had no idea of the dramatic events that were to unfold that were to completely change her life, that of her family and that of her entire nation.



SOURCE: THE DAILY MAIL UK

It was on 30 May 2003 when a mob descended into her motorcade and Suu Kyi survived since his supporters surrounded her car. Scores were killed and injured in what was believed to be an assassination attempt. Despite this act of perfidy, Suu Kyi’s global stature did serve as a deterrent. She enjoyed the support of most of the Western World—North America and Western Europe as well as other democracies like Japan, South Korea and Australia. Her call

to “use your freedom to promote ours” reverberated in every corner of the globe. It was heeded not just by governments and parliaments worldwide but also by civil society, the media, the academe and even Hollywood.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Nelson Mandela, Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Kim Dae Jung, Hillary Clinton, and Corazon Aquino were some of her famous and ardent supporters. Even people who did not enjoy freedom themselves like Sam Rainsy, MP, of Cambodia who was repeatedly forced to exile, and Dr. Chee Soon of Singapore who was incarcerated himself were actively campaigning for her release and the restoration of democracy in Burma.

But more importantly, she was genuinely loved by her compatriots who would surely rise, even more united and determined than before, should something happen to her. The junta probably learned from the dictator of another Southeast Asian country who fell from power less than three years after the assassination of his most prominent political opponent in 1983.

“In their heart of hearts even those in power now in Rangoon must know that their eventual fate will be that of all totalitarian regimes who seek to impose their authority through fear, repression and hatred,” Suu Kyi asserted in her Nobel acceptance speech (The Noble Foundation, 1991).



SOURCE: KONAIGOO BLOGSPOT

But sadly, only Suu Kyi enjoyed this kind of international prominence that served as an invisible shield. Her colleagues in the party, fellow democracy advocates, religious leaders and ordinary citizens were not spared from imprisonment, torture and summarily executions. Even orange robes turned red with blood.

Since its founding in 1993, the cause of Burma's freedom and democracy had been a key advocacy of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD). The exiled National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) was a longtime CALD member. Aside from the several resolutions CALD issued, the organization also lobbied with both the executive and legislative branches of various governments including in missions where Dr. Sein Win, head of the "government in exile", and other elected members of parliament and NLD leaders participated.

Several CALD personalities were active members of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) with Sonn Chhay of the Sam Rainsy Party of Cambodia being a member of its steering committee. AIPMC worked for the unconditional release of Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, and for the convening the legitimately elected Parliament of Burma as a first step towards genuine democratic and constitutional reforms (European Parliament, n.d.). AIPMC is particularly significant given the nature of ASEAN of not interfering with the internal affairs of member countries. For the first time, the pressure came from within.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Aung San Suu Kyi became a CALD honorary member by virtue of a unanimous decision by the CALD Executive Committee during its Manila meeting on 29 June 2010. She was the first ever honorary member of CALD, the first organization of political parties in Asia. Her plaque of honorary membership presented by the Chair and Secretary General was received by the International Coordinator of the Burma Campaign in Liverpool during the UK Liberal Democrats Annual Conference on 10 September 2010. And on 31 January 2011, a CALD delegation visited Yangon and paid a courtesy visit to Suu Kyi in her lakeside house.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

As Suu Kyi herself noted while she was still under house arrest, “Throughout the years of my detention, CALD has been a consistent voice in calling for my release and more importantly, for the restoration of freedom and democracy in Burma. Much remains to be done and solidarity of organizations like CALD is most important for freedom and democracy. There remain many oppressive regimes in the world, including in our part, Asia. That is why I call upon CALD and its allies to please continue to use its freedom to promote ours.”



SOURCE: MEDIUM/THECIBAO

In 2012, she received in her famous home the most powerful person in the world. “I was honored to be the first president to welcome Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to the White House and I’m proud to be the first American president to visit this spectacular country,” President Barack Obama stated. “And I am very pleased that one of my first stops is to visit an icon of democracy who inspired so many people not just in this country but all throughout the world. I specially want to thank Aung San Suu Kyi for welcoming me to her home. Here, through so many difficult years is where she displayed such unbreakable courage and determination. It’s here where she showed that human freedom and dignity cannot be denied.”



SOURCE: THE NEW YORK TIMES

During this occasion, Suu Kyi stated, “The United States has been staunch in its support of the democracy movement in Burma and we are confident that this support will continue through the difficult years that lie ahead. I say difficult because the most difficult time in any transition is when we think that success is in sight. Then we have to be careful that we are not lured by a mirage of success and that we are working towards genuine success for our people.”



SOURCE: UPCLOSED



SOURCE: THE GLOBE AND MAIL

“The icon of democracy is also an advocate of gender rights, just like her strong-willed mother, Maha Thiri Thudhamma Khin Kyi, an accomplished politician and diplomat. During her video message for the 1995 NGO Forum on Women in Beijing, she declared, “In societies where men are truly confident of their own worth, women are not merely tolerated but valued.” And she needed not look beyond the men in her own family. Her father, Aung San; her husband, Michael Aris; and her two sons—Alexander and Kim, all confident of their own worth who held her, and women in general, in the highest regard.

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The Thorn of a Thousand Tyrants

ANNETTE LU

Vice-President (2000-2008)

Taiwan

She is best known as the first woman vice president of Taiwan for two consecutive terms. An impressive political career but she is more than that. Her ascent to the second highest position of the land is attributable to courage, competence and character but it was also paid with a hefty price—personal sacrifices including her health, political persecution, imprisonment, constant threats of execution, and gender discrimination.

The feminist, journalist, lawyer, activist, politician, academic and author of several books both fiction and nonfiction has been hailed for her unassailable intellect. But again, she is more than that. She has heart, she has guts, and she delivers strong punches. A Renaissance woman with the warrior instincts of a Medieval ruler; a helpless damsel in distress is the last thing that she is, and a knight in shining armor is the last thing that she needs.

But the communist government of China, panicked by the prospect of the reformist Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) gaining control of government and promoting its pro-independence



SOURCE: BUZZORANGE.COM



SOURCE: GOTV.CTITV.COM.TW

advocacy, and in particular, the prominent role that the fiercely outspoken Annette Lu was surely to play in the new dispensation, branded her as the “scum of the earth” and “sinner of a thousand years”.

She has had detractors and critics even from her own party who described her as “a big mouth” and “a loose cannon”. Her independent mindedness and her ardent and unwavering pro-independence stance did not sit well within the party hierarchy by the new millennium, which in Taiwan was also the dawning of a new political era. *Realpolitik* demanded a toning down of DPP’s independence rhetoric which was loud and clear when it was in the opposition but without compromising the country’s sovereignty and the party’s core values. DPP was not just a political party with like-minded members, it was now the government for all Taiwanese irrespective of partisan persuasion.

A 21 April 2000 Asiaweek article reported that President Chen Shui-bian, the first non-KMT member to hold the highest position of land, necessarily playing the role of peacemaker, was trying to be conciliatory with China as much as possible. While Lu did not have any personal problems with Chen, she was vocal with her differences in terms of cross-straits relations.

Things were becoming clear. As vice president, she did not see herself merely as a lady in waiting. And she was not just a female vice president, she was a feminist vice president. But this is getting ahead of the story. To fully appreciate this complex and multi-faceted person, it is important to start from the very beginning.

It is quite ironic that at the pinnacle of her political career, she earned a reputation as a loose cannon (Tang & Teng, 2016) and an unguided missile. But quite the contrary, all her life she was always focused. And this was evident since she was a young girl. Her life is captured by the poem, *Invictus*, and indeed, she has been the captain of her soul and the master of her fate: this despite the many staggering obstacles that came her way.

Born Lu Hsiu-Lien in 1946 in the northern Taiwanese city of Taoyuan, she was an eye-witness to the most tumultuous events of her country's history. She was born when Taiwan was still a colony of Japan and she was but a toddler when the nationalist government of China led by Chiang Kai-Shek moved to Taipei after the communist take-over of China.

Her family was financial needy, and her parents twice tried to give her up for adoption but her elder brother prevailed upon his parents not to. She and her brother excelled in school. The unremarkable childhood of this remarkable woman underscores this essential point: that unlike many of the democratic icons profiled in this book, she did not belong to any family dynasty. Her political stars rose because of her own doing.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

During a women's conference of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD), Lu narrated that "I am the one who started to advocate feminism here in Taiwan 45 years ago. Traditionally Taiwan's women suffered from the double burden of Chinese Confucianism and Japanese male chauvinism. Under such culture, women were taught nothing else but to serve and to please men, making women the second sex."



SOURCE: CRNTT.COM



SOURCE: UWPPRESSBLOG.COM

She lived through the entirety of martial rule from 1949 to 1987, the longest in world history. From a member of the monolithic Koumintang (KMT), she joined the Tangwai movement, the precursor of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which called for an end to authoritarian rule and the institutionalization of democratic reforms.

She joined the opposition at a time when there was no chance of gaining the majority given the KMT-installed system of appointed representatives aside from elected ones, in the guise of representing the non-voting districts of mainland China. This ensured the unchallenged power of the KMT regardless of electoral results. Members of both the Tangwai Movement and DPP were systematically oppressed, and some, even assassinated. Lu's life was spared but she was not exempt from systematic political persecution.

Lu delivered a passionate twenty-minute speech criticizing the one-party government during Human Rights Day in 1979 in southern Taiwan's biggest city. Virtually the entire leadership of the prodemocracy movement was arrested as result of what was to be known as the Kaoshiung Incident. Lu was tried, found guilty of sedition and sentenced to twelve years interment. One of her legal counsels was a young human rights lawyer who would later be her running mate in the historic 2000 elections. After being a prisoner of conscience for five and a half years, she was released because of international pressure especially from the United States.

Lu is an accomplished lawyer who graduated with a law degree from Taiwan National University in 1967. She has Master's in Law degrees from University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign (1971) and Harvard University (1978). With her impressive credentials, she could have made a fulfilling, and even profitable, career in the legal profession, in academia or in the corporate world had she remained in America or chosen a third country.

Or she could have returned and rejoined the ruling party, enjoying the unbridled powers and unscrutinized perks of being part of an authoritarian regime. One thing was certain, she would have not been subjected to the kind of abuse that she underwent had she sought political asylum in the United States or elsewhere or rejoined the KMT. But she was not in the habit of choosing the path of least resistance.



SOURCE: HARVARD LAW SCHOOL OFFICIAL WEBSITE

From freely roaming the campus of a world-class university in historic Massachusetts, and joining discourses on democracy and freedom from intellectuals from all corners of the world, she found herself years later in a Taipei jail that was to be her new home for almost six years.

During her incarceration, tragedy struck twice. Her mother died, and with her deteriorating physical and mental health exacerbated by the constant threat of execution, she suffered from thyroid cancer. She was operated on and ironically, it seemed that her failing health would succeed where the unlimited powers of the despot failed—silence her. But she persevered. To this day, the operation affects her speech.



SOURCE: CHINA TIMES

To lull time and make productive use of her stay in prison, she wrote the novel, *The Three Women*. Using the wash basin as her desk, part of the novel was written on toilet paper to avoid detection by the prison guards. A Taipei Times feature narrated that the novel “is about the contrasting lives of women. One gets married and moves to the US, and to her friends it seems as if she has everything, but she remains dogged by a strong sense of loss. Another character is a university teacher, who despite being single leads a very colorful life. The third woman is a widow, who reminisces about the good old days with her late husband who she loved dearly – yet also abhorred. It would later be made into a television program produced by the people behind the phenomenally successful *Meteor Garden* (Ko, 2006).



SOURCE: BBC

In 2000, Chen Shui-bian, Annette Lu and DPP made history when they collectively toppled the more than a half-century of KMT’s monopoly of power. They were also the first Taiwan-born president and vice president, of their country.

During her term, her primary responsibility was promoting human rights, environmental protection, technology development, and foreign affairs.



SOURCE: TAIWAN NEWS



SOURCE: INLW OFFICIAL WEBSITE

In 2004, Chen Shui-bian became the first incumbent president to serve as CALD Chair. As a result, CALD and its members were subjected to certain pressures—ranging from polite requests to veiled threats—from China and its various embassies in Asia.

As the University of Washington Press stated, “Lu Hsiu-lien’s journey is the story of Taiwan. Through her successive drives for gender equality, human rights, political reform, Taiwan independence, and, currently, environmental protection, Lu has played a key role in Taiwan’s evolution from dictatorship to democracy.”

Indeed, the history of Taiwan and Lu’s life story are intertwined. Needless to say, Lu was shaped by forces very much out of her control. But she did have an impact on how her country would turn out to be. And she had the scars to prove it.

Taiwan is a beacon of democracy enjoying a prosperous economy, a high quality of life and an appreciation of its rich indigenous and Chinese heritage. It has had its more than fair share of turmoil, suffering, foreign occupation and oppression from within, and other hardships.

Her fondness for pearl necklaces has a practical purpose—to cover the scars of her neck. Pearls are formed when irritants like sand enter an oyster and as a defense mechanism, layers of nacre form a thick coat to assuage the effect of the irritant.

As stated earlier, the history of Taiwan and Lu’s life story are intertwined. And they both remind us of how pearls are made.

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The Prisoner of Conscience who Spoke Truth to Power

LEILA DE LIMA

Senator (2016 to 2022)

Republic of the Philippines

“There is a lesson here to be learned about trying to stifle a thing with a means by which it grows,” President Corazon Aquino stated in 1986. The housewife turned new president of a free republic captivated the audience in her speech before the joint session of the US Congress in Washington, DC.

“I have faith in God that I will be able to hurdle this. It’s my honor to be jailed for the principles I am fighting for,” Senator Leila de Lima stated as she was taken to prison (Rappler, 2017) in what is widely considered as fabricated and politically motivated drug-related charges. In a most ironic twist, De Lima who served as Chair of the Commission on Human Rights and Secretary of Justice under two presidents, has been denied of both justice and human rights.



“But I never, for a single moment, ever imagined that he would be this vindictive. I never anticipated that I would be imprisoned ever. I was a DOJ secretary. I was putting people behind bars. Now, I am here,” she said months after her incarceration” (Elemia, 2017).



Since her detention in a small cell on 24 February 2017, de Lima has received massive outpouring of support from the Liberal Party, civil society and academia, and ordinary Filipinos. Of equal importance are the concern for her and outrage for her treatment expressed by the global community, which have bolstered the senator's spirits. Delegations from Liberal International (LI) and the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) have visited her in Camp Crame although LI President, Juli Minoves, was barred from seeing her as were other delegations from the European Union and the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has also paid her a visit.

The late President Aquino was right on this one. President Rodrigo Duterte's attempts at stifling de Lima only made her stature grow by leaps and bounds—and beyond national boundaries. Time Magazine listed her as one of “100 Most Influential People” in 2017 for “speaking truth to power.” Asian Correspondent recognized her as among “Southeast Asia's Power Women” highlighting her role as “flagbearer of human rights in the Philippines and beyond.” For standing up to an extremist leader, Foreign Policy listed her among its “Leading Global Thinkers” for two consecutive years while Fortune Magazine named her as one of the “50 Greatest Leaders in the World” for 2018.

In her article as part of the CALD Silver Lining Series, de Lima mentioned this paradox: “My persecutors thought that putting someone like me in jail will isolate me until I wither into oblivion. I have to say, in my 10 years in public service, this has been the most liberating and engaging experience in my life...And as far as I am concerned, short of killing me,

my enemies have already done their worst. And I thank them for making that mistake. It placed me somewhere I could have not reached without their help—in the company of giants and immortals.”

De Lima, in the Senate and even while in prison, is one of President Rodrigo Duterte’s fiercest critics. But the animosity between the two is rooted to earlier times when the two held other government positions. In 2009, as Chair of the Commission on Human Rights, de Lima investigated the extrajudicial killings and other atrocities committed by the Davao Death Squad, a vigilante group very much associated with then Davao City Mayor Duterte.

But de Lima herself admitted that the investigation hardly progressed because “the city of Davao was then and perhaps still is under the spell of a ruthless King. We (the investigators) were regarded as ‘enemies’ and ‘intruders’ into their kingdom engulfed by a false sense of peace and order. (Punzalan, 2017) As Anne Marie Goetz of Open Democracy reported, “De Lima’s investigation explored the future president’s potential administrative and even criminal liability for a surge of unsolved murders, including of minors – and summoned Duterte to a public hearing in Davao City. ‘I publicly chastised him,’ she told me recently. ‘No one had ever dared do that to him in his own kingdom’”. Duterte was city mayor for 22 years.

Duterte’s act of ruthless revenge is described by Philippine Daily Inquirer columnist John Neri who wrote, “Sen. Leila de Lima is Exhibit A of the Duterte government’s weaponization of the rule of law; all good men and women know her innocence and true love of country are the shield that will protect her” (De Lima, 2018).



In September 2016 while repeating his vow to put de Lima in jail, Duterte threatened to release a supposed sex video tape involving de Lima. Duterte is known for his lewd comments and his habit of casually telling rape jokes. He recently responded to criticisms that his native Davao City has one of the highest incidents of rape by reasoning that there is a lot of rape because Davao has plenty of beautiful women.

Duterte's then Justice Secretary as well as his allies in the House of Representatives wanted the video tape as part of evidence against de Lima. This generated a lot of public outrage and criticisms since the video tape was of no relevance and of doubtful authenticity. This tactic is but symptomatic of the misogyny, duplicity and perfidy of the Duterte presidency.

“(De Lima) has been the subject of the kind of lies that all despotic regimes propagate—lies that would dehumanize those it would call ‘enemies’ so that the violation of their rights can be rationalized,” Dr. Sylvia Claudio, Dean of the College of Social Work and Development of the University of the Philippines, explained. “She has been turned into a monster by a propaganda machine that churns out division and hatred so that some may keep and use their power arbitrarily. This is done routinely for those alleged drug addicts that the government is killing.

In May 2018, the #BabaeAko (I am Woman) campaign was launched to counter the sexism and chauvinism of Duterte and his government. “Why is Duterte so afraid of women, especially strong women?” the founders of the movement asked. Though primarily a social media campaign, this women’s rights movement also held live protest rallies. The founders of #BabaeAko were named this year by Time Magazine as one of the 25 most influential people on the internet.



Throwing her support for #BabaeAko movement, de Lima wrote in Filipino (translation by the author), “#BabaeAko, I am degraded and vilified by the Duterte regime because of my convictions. I call upon my fellow women to oppose the belittlement of our worth and the repression of our dignity as women. We will fight! #BabaeAko, like you, I have the innate intelligence and heart to fight for our country and the rights of our citizens. We have equal rights and no one can trample upon these rights; not the coward Duterte who is afraid of women, and not the patriarchal system that condones his incompetence” (Layug, 2018).

Like her late father, Vicente de Lima, who dutifully served as Commissioner of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), she became a lawyer specializing in electoral law. Her marriage having been annulled, she is a single mother of two sons. She was the salutatorian of her 1985 graduating class at the San Beda College of Law and placed 8th in the Philippine Bar Exams that same year. In 1980, she graduated with an AB History – Political Science degree from De La Salle University, also in Manila. She was also consistent class valedictorian in her grade school and high school years.

Being close to her family, it was her brother who read her response and her son, a 36-year-old autistic, who received the Liberal International Prize for Freedom on 28 July 2018. She is the second Filipino recipient of the award after President Corazon Aquino, and that was 34 years ago. But there is a conspicuous difference: Aquino was instrumental in the toppling of the seemingly invisible Marcos dictatorship while de Lima continues to be incarcerated by the dictator’s reincarnation, Rodrigo Duterte.

“I would rather be jailed in defense of what is right, than go to hell in the company of those responsible for our collective descent into impunity, fear and inhumanity,” de Lima once asserted. As expected, de Lima was barred from attending the awarding ceremonies. But she was there in spirit, and she was certainly in good company.





The awarding ceremonies was attended by LI President, Dr. Juli Minoves and LI Deputy President, Madame Hakima El Haite, as well as CALD Secretary General Kiat Sittheeamorn and Hon. Emily Lau of the CALD Women's Caucus. Filipino Liberals came in full force with the presence of Vice President Leni Robredo and former President Benigno S. Aquino III. Human rights activists and civil society stalwarts were there as well as representatives from media and academia.



The Liberal Party, de Lima's political party, is the first Asian member of Liberal International, the leading and biggest federation of liberal and progressive political parties worldwide. LP is also a founding member of CALD, and former Deputy Speaker Raul Daza, former Secretary Florencio Abad and Senator Franklin Drilon have all served as CALD Chairmen. LI is based in London while the permanent secretariat of CALD is in Manila. In 2011, LP and CALD hosted the LI Congress in Manila, the first ever in Asia.

"Representatives of our global political family are here today in the Philippines to join hands with millions of Filipinos as we shine light into what has become a shady political atmosphere and a subject of global consternation—some of the very threats to freedom that we warned of when defining the challenges to liberalism in the 21st Century as set out in our Andorra Liberal Manifesto," Dr. Minoves declared. "Senator de Lima's struggle, her sacrifice is not solely a Filipino matter nor is it even an Asian matter. Leila's cause transcends petty political rivalries and regional nuances; she personifies humanity's shared aspiration for universal human rights and it is appropriate that we are awarding Leila the Prize for Freedom in this 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

The fiery Emily Lau of Hong Kong who together with two other members of the CALD Women Caucus visited de Lima the year before narrated, "(When) I asked, 'Are you safe here?' She said, 'No. Any time a death squad could come in and that would be it.' And of course, all our hearts dropped to the floor. And what has she done to deserve such treatment? In the Philippines, you used to have a reputation for fighting for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. How come in such a short time that reputation has been ruined?"

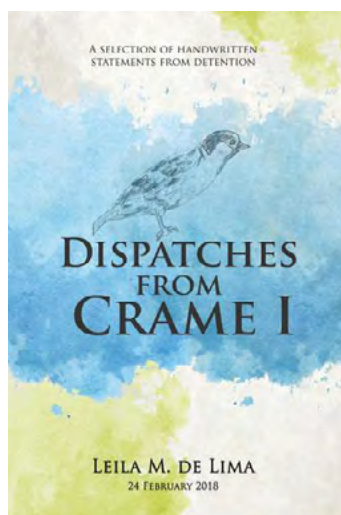


Vice President Robredo considered the Prize as a testament to de Lima's fearlessness and indomitable spirit as a freedom fighter. "The magnitude for this struggle (for human rights) can be seen in how our beloved nation, one of the earliest cradles of democracy in Asia, with citizens who are willing to die to protect freedom, are now waking up to a whole new value system." The vice president further lamented that "slowly, we see that people are willing to give up the idea of inviolable human rights for all, in the name of so-called security, safety and even convenience."



"What happened to us? Where is our nation going now?" Robredo asked. "We now realize that in the Philippines today, the way Filipinos understand human rights is still largely dependent on the actions of the powerful. No wonder that many Filipinos remain powerless." But Robredo remained optimistic and culling from her own experiences as a public interest lawyer prior to entering politics, she was convinced that "Filipinos are naturally emphatic people, with a dept of love for freedom and their rights that will not be snuffed out by any tyrant. We have had a long history of bloody struggles...and I refuse to believe that we suffered for nothing. We will prevail!"

In her response, de Lima stated, "I know very well that you are not here just to honor one person. Our international friends did not travel here and brave our monsoon rains and storms to join a celebration. We are here to profess our continued commitment to the ideals of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights and freedom. We are here because our work is far from being done."



"I find inspiration in the weather," de Lima continued. "Dictators, oppressive leaders and human rights abusers are national and transnational disasters. They come bringing violence, destruction and terror to the populace...They leave behind devastated nations, dead and dying people, hopelessness and a precarious world order."

De Lima then defined the role of liberals, democrats and defenders of human rights: "We

are the people in lighthouses and watchtowers who call out warnings that a destructive force is bearing down on us...We are the breakwater that protects the people from pounding waves. We defend them from abusers and in doing so, make ourselves the target. We are the levee that regulates the flow of raging floods so that they may not devastate people's lives, property and security."

A prolific writer, de Lima published two books this year. In the second book, *Fight for Freedom and Other Writings*, former President Benigno S. Aquino III wrote the Foreword. "If injustice can be done to Leila, a sitting Senator, injustice can be done to anyone," Aquino argued. "In all this, I am reminded of what my own father once told me: 'if you allow the rights of others to be violated, you are setting up the condition for your own rights to be violated.'" (De Lima, 2018)

In early 1986, this author briefly worked for the Manila Bureau of an American network. In his travels throughout the country, people told him that the assassination of Senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr. was the last straw. Permutations of this statement were repeated: "If they could kill a senator, then Marcos and his men could just kill anyone of us."

The atavistic Duterte regime possesses all the callousness and brutality of the original template, but none of its intellect and sophistication. Unlike his idol, the late Ferdinand Marcos, Duterte is not exactly known for his sterling academic record. He is definitely a poor student of history—a history he refuses to learn from, a history that is bound to repeat itself.

And, as the younger President Aquino asserted, "One is challenged, therefore, to make a personal inquiry: What could I do; and if I have done something, is it enough?... I am certain that when the time comes, our people, cognizant of this undeniable and enduring truth (of having to protect human rights for all), will do what is right."

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SOURCE: MIKE SAAVEDRA

The Defender in Chief of Her City under Siege

MARIA ISABELLE “BENG” CLIMACO-SALAZAR

Mayor of Zamboanga City (2013-Present)

Deputy Speaker (2010-2013)

Representative of Zamboanga City (2007-2013)

Republic of the Philippines

“It was dawn of September 9, 2013 and I was at home. We just arrived the evening before, after launching the City’s newest tourism campaign, Zoom in Zamboanga, in a Travel Expo in Manila. I was informed through SMS by a reporter and got a call from our Chief of Staff and Police Chief. I immediately conferred with the City administrator and decided the cancellation of classes to protect the students, parents and teachers.”

Thus, narrated the mayor of Zamboanga City, the center of commerce, industry and education of the Zamboanga Peninsula (Region IX) in Western Mindanao, and the sixth most populous city and third largest in land area in the country. Only after a few hours arriving from the Philippine capital after promoting to the nation and the rest of the world her beloved Zamboanga of which there are many reasons to visit, she returned home to a city in the brink of war. Her tourism campaign aimed to put Zamboanga City in the limelight. She had no idea that it would be in the headlines as the major national news story in the days and weeks to come. But all for the wrong reasons.



SOURCE: RAPPLER

Maria Isabelle Climaco-Salazar, or known as simply Beng Climaco, quietly celebrated her birthday two days before that eventful day. She had been mayor for only two months and nine days but she carried with her decades of experience both within and outside politics and governance—all of which proved useful as the neophyte mayor albeit seasoned leader was faced with the toughest challenge of her career; it was more so, the biggest threat to the city's security and wellbeing in recent memory.

Before being elected mayor in the May 2013 elections where she received the highest mandate in the city's history, she was a two-term city councilor from 1998 to 2004 after which she was immediately elected as Vice Mayor. From being a local legislator and head of the city council, she became the city's representative in Congress for two consecutive terms (2007 to 2013). During her second term in the House of Representatives, she became one of the six deputy speakers, overcoming the barriers of age and gender—she was both the youngest and the only woman who held that post during the 15th Congress.

She finished her secondary education in the United States and became a novice in a Catholic convent. She was an educator and guidance counsellor with a Master's degree in Family Ministry and Counseling from Ateneo de Manila University, the country's leading Jesuit learning institution. She holds the rank of Lieutenant Colonel as a reservist in the army. She is married to General Trifonio Salazar.

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a Muslim separatist group, started its insurgency campaign way back in 1973 after President Marcos declared Martial Law (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). On 9 September 2013 at dawn, more than 500 rebels from an MNLF faction led by Nur Misuari stormed into Zamboanga City onboard boats (Saavedra, 2018). They took over several coastal villages, triggering a standoff between government forces and the rebels who held civilians hostage (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2014). The assault, apparently aimed at thwarting a government peace plan with its rival Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), paralyzed the city of over a million residents, razed 10,000 homes and reduced once-thriving communities to rubble (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2014).



SOURCE: NDPP

“The MNLF wanted the full implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement. The discontentment stemmed from MNLF’s perception of being left out in the peace process with the MILF,” Climaco responded when I asked her what motivated the MNLF to attack the city. “There was a wrong appreciation of Misuari’s capability to cause chaos despite intelligence reports, because some branded Misuari as a ‘spent force’. As a result, we ended up spending so much, including lives of innocent civilians and security forces who fought in defense of Zamboanga City and our Republic.”



SOURCE: MIKE SAAVEDRA

“I first led the Crisis Management Committee, but the crisis was eventually elevated to the national level with the presence of cabinet members and the Commander in Chief,” she narrated. Then President Benigno “Noy” Aquino, III spent several days in Zamboanga, and so did the Secretaries of National Defense, and Interior Local Government, among others. “I was still part of the security cluster and remained the voice of government and of the people during those trying times. Likewise, I focused on humanitarian response, alongside with the Social Welfare Secretary, in addressing the needs of over 120,000 displaced individuals.”

Branded by the United Nations as a humanitarian crisis, the Zamboanga Siege, which lasted for 20 days, resulted in the death of 132 people, the displacement of more than 100,000 city residents and more than 8,000 in nearby Basilan province, and the destruction of more than 10,000 homes (United Nations, 2013).

“I feared the death of the hostages. Thank God they were released but still precious lives were lost in the crossfire, such as the young student who was set to graduate,” the mayor and former educator who once taught English and Religion and served as guidance counsellor at Ateneo de Zamboanga lamented when I asked her what her biggest fears were during the crisis. “Another was a three-year-old boy, Ethan Ando, who was hit by a bullet in his forehead. He was the youngest hostage to die from the siege while both his parents (were) held as captives. This gave me the firm resolve to stand-up in their defense and seek justice as no innocent civilian must suffer because of cruel and selfish intentions of others.”



SOURCE: BENIG CLIMACO OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

I asked her, with the benefit of hindsight, what could have been done better during the siege by the military and the civilian government, both local and national. “The security forces initiated a pre-emptive, calibrated response with the objective of neutralizing the enemy while being able to rescue the hostages. It would be clear if the Crisis Management Manual be accessible and comprehensible to local governments and even to many in the national departments. A team ready to negotiate with the hostage takers, which have a significant knowledge of peace process and a full understanding of its socio-political implications would have been helpful. In fact, it could have been prevented had negotiations and agreements been surely inclusive. Most importantly, the Office of Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), being the arm, which advises national government on such concerns, should have never underestimated the potency of the MNLF while engaging with the MILF. It should have heeded intelligence and security reports related to the group’s plan to stir chaos. The failure to act on intelligence reports had been catastrophic.”

There’s a light side to the crisis between the two key players as reported by the Philippine Daily Inquirer. During the mayor’s brief talk with MNLF leader Nur Misuari at the height of the siege, he raised his voice and as Climaco recalled, “He softened a little after I told him that I was a guidance counselor of his children” (Dizon, 2013).

Maguindanao Representative, Bai Sandra Sema, said Climaco's leadership style has a "woman's touch. She's very sweet but she's strong, diligent and systematic. It's like how you would plan for your household. She identifies right away what is needed the most" (Dizon, 2013).

"In 2004, I was single and was running for Vice-Mayor. My opponent harassed me saying that, 'I am already dried-up,' to directly attack my womanhood and my capacity to give birth. It was cruel and prejudicial. He lost the election for Vice Mayor" (National Democratic Institute, n.d.).

"Being female is quite challenging in the field of politics. Cultural and religious mindsets would prefer a male who is viewed to be endowed with strength and power genetically. Society is biased against women leaders who view us, as weak and emotional," Climaco stated candidly when I asked about gender barriers she encountered in politics. "But this in itself is what is enigmatically fascinating about this stereotypical myth. Once women excel in the field of public service, we break the barriers that imprison society's norms and limitless possibilities happen. I always say never ever underestimate the strength of a woman. This was proven in the MNLF attack of the City. I penetrated the battle line and went as far as the only elected official to file a case against the MNLF, because I will fight for justice especially for the helpless innocent victims of the siege."



SOURCE: BENG CLIMACO OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE



SOURCE: BENG CLIMACO OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

An advocate for women and children's rights, Climaco was inspired by her grandmother, who was a principal author of the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act 9710) (National Democratic Institute, n.d.). "My grandmother, Isabel, who was a suffragist and a strong advocate of Filipino women's rights, was also a teacher"

A major influence in her life is her uncle, Cesar Climaco, who was mayor of Zamboanga for eleven years beginning in the 1950s. He attained national prominence during martial law as one of the fiercest and most fearless critics of the Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. Mayor Cesar Climaco was assassinated in 1984, one of the many martyrs of the Liberal Party during the dark days of the conjugal dictatorship.



SOURCE: BENG CLIMACO OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

“I was ‘an accident!’ who was conceived while my father was helping out his brother, Cesar Climaco, in his electoral protest on December 1965,” Climaco narrated. “Uncle Cesar won a seat in the Senate, but eventually lost his seat after the Supreme Court declared a statistical improbability for a candidate of a major political party to get zero in Lanao. On my 18th birthday, Uncle Cesar said that he thought I would never survive, because I was a frail baby. It is only now that I realize, I was conceived from his loss. I used to march with him in protest for the death of Ninoy Aquino. He taught me to fight for justice and to uphold the rule of law.”



SOURCE: BENG CLIMACO OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

“In 1995, my dad lost the elections for Mayor and being his youngest and only daughter, I felt his pain. It was because of this that in 1998, when I also lost a part time job, I said yes to help Zamboanga City. This invitation came from my godmother, Mayor Caling Lobregat,” the second female mayor of Zamboanga narrated; interestingly, Lobregat was the first. “The Climaco brand of community service is a trait taught by my Abuelita Isabel, to her

children and passed on to us. My dad, Jolly, who was a former Vice Mayor tutored me on the work of legislation. He taught me to be honest and to be a fiscalizer. He is an inspiration in public service. I thank God I was able to make him happy before he died, by being elected as a Councilor. He gifted me with a book, Republic Act 7160, the Local Government Code, after my oathtaking and told me to study it like a bible.”

The author then inquired what made her finally decide to enter politics and become a Liberal like many in her family. “I was asked if I wanted to help Zamboanga. But deep within I wanted my dad to be happy and experience victory after losing his last political battle. My dad run as a member of the Liberal Party and my Uncle Cesar was a member of the LP with (Ninoy) Aquino and (Gerry) Roxas, during the dictatorship. It was in November 2009 that I took my oath in the Liberal Party since this was the party that the family has been part of.”

“The Liberal Party advocates women and human rights and advocates democracy and inclusive opportunity for all. To be a member means one is committed to the principles of democracy. It makes us part of a global community and has given us opportunities to work with like-minded Liberals,” Climaco responded when asked what made LP stand out from the rest of the mainstream political parties.

Zamboanga City which has a rich and colorful history was the center of barter trading among Chinese, Malays and the native Tausugs, Samals, Subanons, and the Badjaos as early as the 13th Century and in 1569, the Spaniards established its first Catholic mission (City Government of Zamboanga, 2005).

There are, at least, three Zamboangueno cultural legacies that illustrate an enduring and strong Spanish heritage. One is the language, the Spanish-based Chavacano, the only creole language in Asia. It is also the fastest growing creole language in the world with over a million people speaking Chavacano (Saavedra, 2018).

The second is devout Catholicism. Both Zamboanga City and Region IX are predominantly Catholic. A Marian devotee, the young Beng was a novice who almost became a nun. “I was a postulant in the Carmelites’ Missionary, a teacher and a guidance counselor in the Jesuit-run, Ateneo de Zamboanga. Yes, I intended to be a nun right after college. However,



SOURCE: ELBERT ATILANO/FACEBOOK



SOURCE: LIBERAL PARTY OF THE PHILIPPINES OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE



SOURCE: BENG CLIMACO OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE

after a process of discernment and prayer, I realized I had a calling to go out and face the world. Just like Maria in the Sound of Music! This was also where my formator, Sr. Joy, discovered my gift of public service, since I was exposed in the urban poor communities when a postulant.”

But it must be pointed out that despite the siege, Moslems, Christians and indigenous peoples have been living most often in harmony for more than four centuries in Zamboanga City.

The third legacy is literally more concrete: Fort Pilar. Built in the 17th Century as a military fortress, it is also a Marian Shrine for the Our Lady of Pilar, the patron saint of Zamboanga City. The fort is an enduring symbol of Spanish colonialism and the Catholic faith. Built by the Jesuits in 1635 as a defense against raids by Moslem pirates from Mindanao and Jolo, 378 years later, the fort’s *raison d’etre* seemed to have found a renewed significance.

Ancient stone walls are of little value in modern warfare. But fortunately for Zamboanga City and its people, they had a formidable Defender in Chief whose competent and inspiring leadership provided the contagion of strength and grace while the entire city population was under duress.

Her multifarious and multifaceted talents in politics, governance, management, psychology, education, military and religion were literally put to test during the crisis. And she proved to be the right mayor at a time when things in the city went wrong.

With the crisis over, the city went to rehabilitation mode. “Security, health and education are now our priorities. We have the Zamboanga City Roadmap to Recovery and Rehabilitation and have set up security infrastructures, including the Naval Station in the area where the siege began. We have invested more than 1.5 billion pesos for security to support the security sector in keeping the City safe. It is our primary policy to make services of government accessible to all – Christians, Moslems and Indigenous Peoples. We envision growth and development to be inclusive.”

As the mayor's Chief of Staff, Michael Saavedra noted, "Zamboanga City, even after the siege, got an influx of investments. The National Cities Competitiveness Council cited Zamboanga City as one of the two Most Improved City and the fourth Most Resilient in the Philippines in 2016." This year, Climaco is in the shortlist of 27 women mayors nominated by the City Mayors Foundation for the 2018 World Mayor Prize, the only Filipino and one of only four Asians (World Mayor, 2018).

"Looking back, it was solid faith in God and our Blessed Mother, the Nuestra Señora La Virgen del Pilar, the Patroness of Zamboanga, that kept me on the battle. The siege might have ended, but five years later the memories of those who died are still fresh in the minds of their loved ones," Climaco reminisced.

"We are still inching our way to rehabilitation—a battle for housing, water, electricity and sanitation continues. The rebuilding of trust amongst Christians, Moslems and the Indigenous communities, the healing of the wounded spirit, goes on. What is consoling is seeing grandmothers, mothers and daughters learning to write their names and be literate, a housewife, busy with colorful clothes in her sewing machine- a grant from our foreign donors and a mother able to joyfully earn a living in her new home. Today, many of these homes are filled with vegetable patches even in houses on stilts. We are indeed on our way to Build Back a Better Zamboanga City!" the mayor declared with optimism and determination.

The Spaniards built the walls of Fort Pilar to protect the city from pirates, marauders, and insurgents. Beng Climaco, instead, chose the opposite approach. She is breaking barriers and building bridges.

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4

Beyond Gender Barriers

Overcoming more than just the patriarchal nature of the political, social, cultural and economic milieu, they have to contend with the political machinations of ruling elite, the built-in advantages of the status quo, and lopsided electoral regulations meant to further disadvantage the already marginalized.



The Brilliance & Resiliency of the Gem of Cambodia

MU SOCHUA

Minister of Women and Veterans Affairs (1998 to 2002)

Member of Parliament (1998 to 2017)

Kingdom of Cambodia

Cambodia is a paradox. The Khmer Empire, one of the greatest civilizations of Southeast Asia, produced some of the most magnificent manmade monuments in history. Angkor Wat is the triumph of art and architecture as it is of faith and genius. But Cambodia has a dark side: the bloody legacy of the Khmer Rouge resulted in one of the worst genocides of recent history.

Cambodia is both rich and poor, young and old, free-spirited and repressed. In Cambodia, one should learn to expect the unexpected.

“There’s no gentle way to put this. Cambodia messes with your mind,” journalist Jen Cowley put it succinctly. “It takes your western judgements and perceptions and turns them on their head. Then it takes everything you know about human nature and challenges you to apply that knowledge to this country’s past, present and hope for the future...and still not fully understand the psyche of this remarkable little nation of contradictions” (Cowley, 2013).



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



SOURCE: REUTERS

However, the tyrant of Cambodia is more predictable. He behaves like most dictators who are his contemporaries from this region like Suharto and Ferdinand Marcos. But they are all dead and gone. Hun Sen is not only very much alive, he is very much in power. He is currently the longest reigning national leader who was first elected Prime Minister on 14 January 1985.

But not too long ago, he took it one step further. Instead of resorting to the usual electoral fraud to maintain himself in power as he had repeatedly done in the past, he took the short cut and simply asked the supremely subservient supreme court to dissolve the opposition party since it was predicted to win, despite the manipulation of the ruling party.

And only in enigmatic, paradoxical, and predictably unpredictable Cambodia can someone as courageous, intellectually astute and steadfastly principled person like Mu Sochua can earn this rather discombobulating distinction, both noble, for her part, and ignoble, for the part of the rulers, at the same time. And that is, being the first woman to become Minister of the Ministry of Women.

Abhorred by tyrants, loved by her people, respected by her colleagues and recognized globally as a champion of democracy and women's rights, Sochua was invited to keynote the Oslo Freedom Forum on 29 May 2018. She started her speech with the story of her youth, then and now, forced to exile as matter of life or death—then, because of the genocidal Khmer Rouge, and recently, because of the tyrannical Hun Sen. Hun Sen himself is a remnant of the Khmer Rouge, the present being an unfortunate continuation of a tragic past.

"It was a warm afternoon of June 1972 when my sister and I left to study in France. We were young, we were scared but we were relieved that we could leave Cambodia. The Vietnam War was spreading into Cambodia very rapidly. From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer

Rouge took over Cambodia (which) became the Killing Fields...Close to two million lives were lost. My parents and relatives were among those starved to death or killed by those hardcore communists.”

Sochua grew up in a comfortable middleclass household in Cambodia. “My mother was the breadwinner despite having only three years of education,” Sochua narrated. She was in exile when her parents died. Five years after her mother’s disappearance, her father who used to be a businessman died of malnutrition in 1979. War is a great equalizer and in the case of the Khmer Rouge, the educated were specifically targeted. “I never knew how my parents died so there’s no closure in my life.”

“Her painful past drove her to want to help those from her war-torn country,” Berkeley Social Welfare noted. “Sochua did fieldwork at the Alameda County Health Care Services, Asian Program in Oakland during 1979 to 80. Her second-year placement was at the YMCA in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, with the Cambodian Project” (Berkeley Social Welfare, n.d.). After Berkeley, Sochua returned to Asia. According to the Heroine Collective, it was in 1984, while working with Cambodian refugees at border of Thailand, when she met her American husband, who was also working with refugees and eventually went on to work with the United Nations (Karlins, 2015). She and her late husband, Scott Leiper, have three daughters.

“In 1989 she moved back to Cambodia and with her newly acquired social work skills, started Khemara, an NGO dedicated to fighting for women’s rights (and) began tackling some of the most difficult issues plaguing Cambodian society, such as sex trafficking and domestic violence,” according to Berkeley Social Welfare. Khemara is the first Cambodian non-government organization working for the empowerment of women and children by engaging communities (Khemara Cambodia, n.d.) From civil society, a common background for many women featured in this book, she entered politics. She won a seat in the National Assembly in 1998, representing Battambang.



SOURCE: DINAMERICAN.WORDPRESS.COM



SOURCE: VICE.COM

As parliamentarian and minister, “Sochua fought to end worker exploitation, curb sex trafficking, and developed Cambodia’s first major legislation on violence against women. Moreover, in 2002, Sochua started a campaign to get women involved in politics. In form not traditionally seen, she traveled to the countryside, talking to villagers, face to face, encouraging rural women to run so that they could represent themselves and their communities. Largely because of her efforts, 25,000 women ran for office, and nine percent were successfully elected” (Robinson, 2018).

In 2005, Sochua was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to stop the trafficking of women in the Cambodian and the Thai sex trade; and in 2007, UC Berkley presented her the prestigious Elise and Walter A. Haas International Award. (Berkeley Social Welfare, n.d.) During the Human Rights Day of 2009, she received the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for leadership in human rights. These are just some of the many global awards that she has received. She is not lacking in international recognition, but it is the love, support, and conviction for shared principles of her countrywomen and men that keep her going.

This first met Sochua in January 2002 in Bangkok during the First Political Party Strategies to Combat Corruption Workshop, a joint project of the Washington DC-based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD). I was CALD Executive Director during that time but Sochua was not a CALD member as she was with another Cambodian political party, the royalist FUNCINPEC which was a member of the ruling coalition. Even then, I already sensed that she was too principled and too unwavering in advocacies close to her heart like democracy, human rights and gender equality for her to be associated for long to the tyrannical and misogynistic Hun Sen.

Disgruntled with massive government corruption, Sochua resigned as minister in July 2004 and immediately joined the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), a CALD member-party since 1999. Sochua would become Chair of the CALD Women's Caucus from 2009 to 2011. When I heard the news of her resignation from Hun Sen's cabinet, the words of the late Philippine President Manuel Quezon echoed in my mind: "my loyalty to my party ends where my loyalty to my country begins."



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

From being part of his cabinet, she became one of Hun Sen's most vocal and eloquent critics. Mild-mannered and soft-spoken, Sochua has always been convincing and credible. And here lies another paradox: in her firm but hushed voice, she becomes more piercing in her condemnation of the injustice and graft committed by the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Like the muted candlelight of the SRP logo, her words flicker in the dark.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Since the author met him in 1999, Sam Rainsy (2015) has always referred to Cambodia as “a façade of democracy” that is “ruled by one dominant political party that has little tolerance for dissent; media is restricted, and the freedom of peaceful assembly is often curtailed; and the electoral system is manipulated to favor the ruling party. The curtailment of human rights and civil liberties continues and done with sheer impunity—all in the name of national security.”

But such tyranny did not remain unopposed, not just by politicians but more importantly, by ordinary citizens. “In 2009, Hun Sen insulted me in public and I took him to court,” Sochua recounted during the recent Oslo Freedom Forum. “And he took me to court and I lost, of course. However, each day that I went to court, thousands of women and men marched with me to court and they mobilized funds to pay for my fine. Justice always prevails.”

These were ordinary citizens who braved arrest by merely showing solidarity with an oppositionist and though financially wanting themselves, they gave little of what they had for something as alluding as justice.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

On 17 July 2012, the Human Rights Party of Kem Sokha and the Sam Rainsy Party would merge as the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP). As Rainsy was in exile

during that time, CNRP was founded in Manila at the CALD office. Sochua who was at the Manila meeting would serve as Vice-President of CNRP until its dissolution on 16 November 2017.

On that day of infamy—November 16, 2017, the facade of democracy totally peeled off. Since then, Cambodia is under an undeclared Martial Law. “Democracy was on trial this week in Cambodia, and it lost,” Sochua wrote in *The Guardian* as she chastised the complete subservience of the Supreme Court to Prime Minister Hun Sen when it dissolved CNRP and banned more than a hundred of its members from elections in the next five years (Sochua, 2017).

“As the only opposition party capable of mounting a serious challenge to the ruling party in national elections – scheduled for July – the CNRP posed a threat to the continuance of more than three decades of Hun Sen’s brutal, strongman rule,” Sochua argued in the same opinion piece. “The mounting fear of losing in a genuine vote motivated this decision and spurred an unprecedented crackdown that has seen my party’s president, Kem Sokha, imprisoned; prominent NGOs and media outlets shuttered; and over half of CNRP lawmakers – including myself – forced to flee the country. In pursuing this course, Hun Sen has proved himself nothing more than a dictator bent on remaining in power, no matter what the costs.”

Hun Sen thinks and behaves like the archetypal dictator, whether real or fictional. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, it seemed that novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez was describing the Cambodian strongman when he talked about the General, his main character, “...as he discovered in the course of his uncountable years that a lie is more comfortable than doubt, more useful than love, more lasting than truth...”

Hun Sen came to power during the advent of people power movements that toppled tyrants in the Philippines, Eastern Europe, South Korea and Indonesia. He remains resilient and is likely approving of the resurgence of populism and even authoritarianism in the Philippines, Thailand, the United States and even Europe.

What now for Mu Sochua and Sam Rainsy who are both in exile, and Kem Sokha who remains incarcerated, trapped in the global political arena characterized by the plunging popularity of liberal democracy and the corresponding rise of populism and despotism, and exacerbated by the Post-Truth Era? What Archibald MacLeish famously said about seven decades ago still remains relevant today: “How shall freedom be defended? By arms when it is attacked by arms, by truth when it is attacked by lies, by faith when it is attacked by authoritarian dogma. Always, in the final act, by determination and faith.”

In his many travels to Cambodia, not just in the capital Phnom Penh or in touristy Siem Reap, and especially during assemblies and visitations conducted by the opposition, the author has observed something about the Cambodian. Majority of the Cambodians are poor, and as result, most of them received very little formal education. But he sensed in them this passionate yearning for democracy. They might be poor and impoverished, but

the first things they asked for were abstract concepts such as change, justice and freedom. The author was convinced and remains convinced that the Cambodian is innately aware of the correlation between democracy and development—both of which Hun Sen is incapable of delivering. Cambodians know they are poor because they are not free.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

Hun Sen's rallies have always been well organized—his supporters provided with transportation, food and even entertainment. Those who attend opposition rallies, on the other hand, go there on their own volition without anything given to them. Nothing but hope, and the distinct possibility of better lives.

"History has taught us that you cannot suppress an idea whose time has come, and more importantly, you cannot suppress that idea by the very means it is further nurtured," Rainsy asserted. "Every human being is born free, ought to be free and is willing to fight to be free. And that every society which consists of individuals who are free—whether in fact or in mere aspiration—will only be satisfied in a nation that is open, humane, inclusive, just and tolerant" (Rainsy, 2015).

"They can detain us physically, but they can never detain our conscience," Kem Sokha, prisoner of conscience, asserted.

"Democracy may have lost this week, but it was not a knockout blow. Democracy will not die in the hearts of the Cambodian people," Sochua was emphatic in her 2017 op-ed piece in *The Guardian*. "The government may have officially dissolved the opposition party, but it cannot do the same with the three million Cambodians who voted for change in

the last elections. It cannot erase the 1.5 million Cambodian migrant workers abroad, who long to return to a country that is democratic, prosperous and free. It cannot abolish the hopes and expectations of Cambodia's ten million young people, who dream of a promising future, free from corruption and oppression."

Again, during her Oslo Freedom Forum keynote address, Sochua cited an old, Cambodian proverb: "Men are gold and women are just a white piece of cloth." To this, Sochua rebutted, "I say, no way, we have to change this proverb to 'men are gold and women are precious gems.' (Women are) the gems of Cambodia."

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From Fearless Journalist to Peerless Newsmaker

EMILY LAU

Member of the Legislative Council, (1991-2016)

Hong Kong

The author got to interview Hong Kong's Iron Lady in a hotel café in Manila a few hours before the awarding of the Liberal International (LI) 2018 Prize for Freedom to Philippine Senator Leila de Lima. Emily Lau was to give her message of solidarity in behalf of the Women's Caucus of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD) at the ballroom of that hotel.

As expected, Emily was fiery and forthright. This is the Emily in the public stage that she is internationally renowned for: outspoken, determined, focused, eloquent and convincing. People may assume that her commanding stage presence to be typical of a politician in a public rally. But even for just an audience of one, as the author has had the privilege during his one



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES



SOURCE: ABS-CBN NEWS/ABNER MERCADO

on one interview with her, she is no different, just as passionate seated on the café chair as she is behind a podium. Yes, she can rile up her audience. But more importantly, she knows who she is and what she stands for—her messages consistent with her principles and not tailor-made depending on the audience for the day. And whether she is in front of a rally or just merely in a conference with a few people, she speaks with candor and candidness, her thoughts and emotions seemingly uncensored.

Expectedly during the Prize for Freedom ceremonies, she chastised the Duterte administration’s propensity for persecuting its political opponents like Sen. de Lima. But the audience—consisting of liberals, members of civil society and academia, and the more progressive sectors of Philippine society—did not escaped her admonition. “The Philippines used to be a beacon of democracy in Asia. What happened?” she asked. She was even applauded when she empathically said, “You deserve the government that you elect.” At the end, she was given a standing ovation.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

But her audience is not always appreciative nor open to critical discourse. She speaks her mind regardless whose ears her brutally frank words reach. And for this she has paid a price. “For almost thirty years now, I have been banned from entering China,” the recently retired veteran legislator narrated. “Ever since stepping down in October 2016, I never had a paying job. That shows you that if you are *persona non grata*, nobody will touch you.”

Napoleon was said to have described China as the sleeping giant that must not be disturbed lest she be awakened—an anecdote that is of doubtful historical accuracy. Nevertheless, China had long awakened and Emily Lau, by simply being true to her beliefs and principles—and by boldly expressing these in public, struck more than a few sensitive chords of the totalitarian world power. Emily had been poking the sleeping giant since the 1980s, even way before she entered politics. She has earned her spurs.



SOURCE: HKAPPLEDAILY

“I was a legislator for 25 years,” said the first woman to be directly appointed to the Hong Kong legislature in 1991. “I have stood for elections seven times. I have never lost elections, the first two times as an independent candidate.” She would later win under the Frontier, a political and human rights movement. In 2012 when the Democrat Party of Hong Kong (DPHK) and the Frontier merged, she became the first woman to chair of DPHK, the largest prodemocracy party in the legislative council.

But because of the system of functional democracy wherein almost half are indirectly elected, the pro-Beijing camp will always have majority in the legislature even when the DPHK gets more direct votes. “The whole



SOURCE: PEOPLE.COM

system is very, very complicated. But don't feel bad. If you go to Hong Kong, and ask anybody in the street, nobody will be able to tell you how the system works."

But because of the Basic Law, members of the legislative council cannot initiate laws; ironically and strangely enough, only the executive can sponsor laws. "But I am known to be able to work with people who are not on my side," Emily clarified. "In parliament we need a consensus to get things done. But to achieve that consensus, we need discussions, we need to compromise." She cited the eight-party coalition which she spearheaded to discuss measures to cushion the economic impact of the 9-11 terrorist attack on America as Hong Kong's economy is dependent on the United States. "But in 2004, Beijing put an end to this (coalition)."



SOURCE: EPOCHTIMES

Though not as well known, her career in journalism is equally stellar. After finishing primary school in Hong Kong, she went to Los Angeles where she graduated with a B.A. Journalism degree from the University of Southern California in 1976.

"When I went to America, at first I did not know what to study. Most Hong Kong students in America studied business administration and so I took courses in accounting and economics, and I found these very boring. I like writing so maybe I'll try journalism. But the most important thing that pushed me to journalism was Watergate. And of course, Woodward and Bernstein of Washington Post who managed to depose a president."

Adept in both print and broadcast media, she worked for the South China Morning Post and Hong Kong-TVB News upon returning to Hong Kong. In 1981, she went to the London School of Economics (LSE) graduating the following year with a Master's in International Relations. She immediately joined the iconic British Broadcasting Company (BBC) in London. She resigned from the BBC and returned to Hong Kong in 1984—the year of the signing of the joined declaration between China and the United Kingdom on the fate of Hong Kong in 1997. "The BBC was very surprised. 'Why do you want to leave?' they asked me because they had given me another contract. It's very difficult for Chinese to work for BBC."

After being jobless in Hong Kong for three months—an eternity for someone of Emily's caliber, she joined the Far Eastern Economic Review from 1984 to 1991 which enabled her to take a closer and more insightful look in the ongoing developments of Hong Kong during that crucial period. "Hong Kong is my home," Emily stressed, "if something big is about to happen, I want to be there. Why would I like to hide?"

In December 1984, after signing the Sino-British Joint Declaration, as a reporter of the Review, Emily famously asked British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Hong Kong, “Prime Minister, two days ago you signed an agreement with China promising to deliver over five million people into the hands of a communist dictatorship. Is that morally defensible, or is it really true that in international politics the highest form of morality is one’s own national interest?” (Maria Online, n.d.). Thatcher replied by saying that everyone in Hong Kong was happy with the agreement, and Emily may be a solitary exception.

After noting her successful career in journalism, the author asked Emily at what point did she decide to shift gears. It was apparently not a conscious or deliberate decision on her part.

“In 1990 less than a year before the elections, there was a dinner by the LSE alumni in Hong Kong—four or five tables. Everybody was talking about the elections next year. Then someone said, ‘Emily why don’t you stand?’ I said, ‘well, it’s possible.’ I did not say no, I did not say yes. Because I like politics so that was the time since before there was no elections, so no point in thinking. I thought about it and a few months later, I decided to stand. I resigned from the Review and as Chair of the Hong Kong Journalists Association because I don’t want any conflict of interest, any conflict of roles. I gave myself six months to run the campaign and I came up the highest number of votes in my constituency defeating the two united democrats.”



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

The author then inquired if there was any thought of entering politics even before that eventful LSE alumni homecoming dinner in 1990. “A few years before the elections, I was sent by the Review to London to interview the British Foreign Minister, Timothy Renton,” Emily recalled. “When I talked to Renton, and of course I berated the British for not producing democracy in Hong Kong earlier. I said the British are really nasty and all that. And he suddenly said to me, ‘Emily, would you stand for election?’ fully expecting me say ‘oh no, no...I just support democracy.’ But what did I say to him, ‘Yes, Minister. But where are the elections? You Brits are not giving us a chance!’ and that shut him up alright.”



SOURCE: JULIAN HO @ MEDIUM.COM

“That was in probably 1986 or 87,” Emily vividly continued with her narration. “At that time, there was no elections in sight. ‘Will you stand for election?’ and I replied, ‘Yes, Minister.’ Do you know the British television drama ‘Yes, Minister’?... But I did not really plan in a sense of finding a constituency and nurture it. But I knew when I decided to stand, I would win. Because in any country, if you go and stand for election and you have certain qualities, the voters will give you a chance. You have to be very hardworking. They have to see you all the time. You need to have very clear positions on things. I know some politicians who like to bully but many people don’t like bully politicians because they don’t know where they stand. And I am very outspoken, very loud. And I have no conflict of interest since I resigned from everything. So, if you have these qualities--of course, people will give you a chance.”

“We were asking the British to give us direct elections in 1988 and they refused. And, of course, it turned that they agreed with China not to allow direct elections to take place before the Basic Law, the future constitution of Hong Kong, is promulgated in 1990. To the Chinese, they feel that ‘ok you can have direct elections but make sure that you know that we gave it to you, not the British.’ The British were so disgraceful and even concocted a poll to show that most Hong Kong people do not want direct elections.” Emily explained that the questions asked were so convoluted; in the whole survey, there was not a single question asking the respondent if s/he wanted direct elections. The issue was raised with the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations, and an eminent jurist of the committee examined the surveys and told the British, “if someone would ask me these questions, my answer would be, I don’t know what you are trying to ask me.” Emily recalled, “The British were so humiliated.”

Aside from appeasing Beijing with this secret agreement, Emily argued that the British wanted to make sure that Hong Kong residents not get British citizenships as they did in the 60s and 70s. In the early 1980s the British changed the nationality law in parliament to downgrade the citizenship classifying Hong Kong residents as British Dependent Territory Citizens (BDTC) and later, in time for the handover, another classification was created—British National Overseas (BN(O)).

Emily is clearly neither pro-Beijing nor pro-London, she is pro-Hong Kong. She described the 1997 handover as a mere negotiation between China and United Kingdom, with the people of Hong Kong not having a voice in decisions that affected them most.

The author asked her to compare life in Hong Kong before and after 1997, the year of the handover. “It’s not that different because we never had democracy. The government was never elected by the people. Right now, the Chief Executive who is like the Governor is elected only by a committee of twelve hundred people. Again, from the functional constituency. I think in the last few years, people feel very bad because they think the government is under Beijing and the rich people. The city is very unequal, I’m sure it was unequal under British rule, but the level of awareness has increased so people are voicing their discontent more and more.”

The author then asked if this glaring inequality is an issue that is more important than the crackdown on dissent. “People never had democracy, so they don’t even know what a democratic Hong Kong would be like. (It was a transition) from a colonial Hong Kong to another colonial Hong Kong. But they enjoy freedoms, civil liberties, the rule of law—and these are mainly underpinned not by a democratic government which we haven’t got but by an independent judiciary and legal system. And because of that—personal safety which is very important and something you don’t get in many democracies. It is very ironic that in a city with no democracy, the level of personal freedoms and safety is much higher than say in the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar. The only places (in the region) that are okay are Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.”

The sense of social justice is eroded because of high property prices where people are forced to live in cramped housing that are fire hazards. “It seems no government is able solve the problem and some people think they are afraid of property developers. And the developers, they have several hundred votes for the election of the Chief Executive. And the developers are very rich, and Beijing only listens to the rich and not the rest of the people.”



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES



SOURCE: SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

“There is life after,” Emily said of retiring from politics. “I host an online television program where even pro-Beijing politicians come to my show despite my outspoken support for democracy. I am very fair, I will not humiliate anybody. I am on the board of directors of China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group and the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education. I spend time for the mentorship program of secondary and university students. And I attend overseas conferences like that of CALD.” It was Emily who insisted that the CALD Women’s Caucus do more than a statement on Sen. de Lima’s politically-motivated incarceration and actually visit her in detention—an event that drew media attention as well as the ire of the Duterte government.

When Emily decided to retire from politics, former lawmaker Cheung Man-kwong praised Lau's courage in defending her party's policies, even if they were unpopular. "Many politicians nowadays tend to please others and avoid controversy," said Cheung. "This has made Lau's courage and candour more precious" (Lam, 2016).

The last British Governor-General of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, regarded Lau as a "professional politician, handsome, well informed and dashing eloquent, who would have got to the top in any Western political system." But Hong Kong's Basic Law is neither Western, and certainly far from being democratic. But quite the contrary, Emily has reached the pinnacle—the moral high ground from where she could speak her mind, and act on her own free will.

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Patriot, Democrat, Progressive Thinker & Internationalist

BI KHIM HSIAO

Member of Parliament (2002-2008, 2012-Present)

Taiwan

The daughter of a Taiwanese father and an American mother, Bi-Khim Hsiao was born in Kobe, Japan, grew up in Taiwan, and studied in two of the finest universities in the United States before returning to Taipei. She speaks Taiwanese, Mandarin, English, Japanese and some Spanish. As a dutiful granddaughter, she acted as translator for her grandmothers who did not speak the other's mother tongue. As an adult, she had served as spokesperson for Presidents Chen Shui-bian and Tsai Ing Wen before she became president.



SOURCE: BI KHIM HSIAO WORDPRESS

But Bi-Khim is best known for speaking for herself. She became involved in student politics as an undergraduate in Oberlin College in Ohio, the oldest coeducational liberal arts college in the United States. She has not stopped since espousing her most passionate causes: liberal democracy, women empowerment, and the right of her beloved Taiwan to self-determination; and recently, the welfare of her constituency, Hualien County.

By both circumstance and by choice, she is an internationalist. During most of her youth, she was a dual citizen residing in two continents. After finishing her Bachelor in Asian Studies, she went to Columbia University in New York City for her Master's in Political Science. The Hsiao family values education. Bi-Khim's father, a pastor who came from a poor family, managed to earn his doctorate from Princeton University through sheer determination and hard work.

She returned to Taiwan and worked for the Department for International Affairs of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). She was no stranger to the party since she worked at DPP's U.S. Office while in America. In Taipei, it did not take long for the key leaders of the party to take notice of the young, intelligent, multilingual, charismatic, eloquent, well educated, attractive and highly motivated party worker. And equally impressed were the people engaged by the department in Taiwan and the rest of the world. Within a short period of time, she became the department's director, the youngest in the history of DPP.

The author first met Bi-Khim in early 1999 in Manila. He was just a few months with his new job running the secretariat of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD). On the other hand, Bi-Khim was just in her mid-twenties but she was already carving quite a niche in Taiwan politics.



SOURCE: NEWTALK TAIWAN

1999 to 2000 was a crucial period for CALD's member parties. For most of 1999, CALD had only seven full members and most belonged to the opposition. Only the Democrat Party of Thailand was in power as this was the period when CALD Cofounder, Khun Chuan Leekpai, became prime minister for the second time around (1997 to 2001). The Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), the main opposition party of Cambodia, became CALD's eight full member in late 1999. And after four months time since SRP joined CALD, the alliance had one less opposition party. But it gained a second party in power.

It was only the first meeting between Bi-Khim who was with two of her staff and the author. But in a matter of months, one of the agendas discussed in that meeting became a reality: a full mission attended by all CALD full members and associate members as well as partners and allies to show solidarity with the DPP during the 18 March 2000 Taiwan presidential elections. It coincided with the 164th **meeting of the Executive Committee** of Liberal International (LI) that took place at the iconic Grand Hotel in Taipei,

Taiwan, on 18 to 20 February 2000 and hosted by the DPP. Aside from attending the LI meeting, CALD had its own executive committee meeting and with LI, observed a few campaign sorties, and attended meetings at the DPP Headquarters and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among others. The main reception in honor of the international liberal delegation was keynoted by the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, no less. In less than a month's time, Chen Shui bian and Annette Lu will make history as the first president and vice-president of Taiwan to break the conservative KMT's one-party rule that lasted for more than half a century.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

The author saw her in action in Taipei at the beginning of the new millennium during that sea-changing moment in Taiwan's history. And for that particular international event so important for LI, CALD and DPP, she was clearly in charge. That event set the tone for the many succeeding CALD activities hosted and co-organized by DPP in Taipei, Kaohsiung and other parts of Taiwan: seamless organization, meticulous attention to detail, a clarity of purpose, and lasting impact for both the international delegates and the host party.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

At the beginning of the new millennium, many within her own party and still many more among the Asian and worldwide networks of liberals saw the young Bi-Khim as the epitome of the new Taiwan: confident, vibrant, promising, enthusiastic and prepared to take on the challenges of a new order in Taiwan, the region and the globe. It was the dawning of a new Taiwan emerging from the longest period of Martial law in history; a new Taiwan that could present itself as the living proof that human rights, democracy and economic development go hand in hand. And Bi-Khim was not only the face of this new Taiwan, she was its most convincing advocate, especially for those of us outside the party and outside Taiwan.

During those few days in February 2000 during the LI and CALD visit, Bi-Khim maintained her composure and was consistently congenial and most of all, she was engaging, able to discuss important issues with depth and substance. But one could also sense her exhaustion and apprehension, as anybody put to plan and execute such demanding tasks would inevitably experience. This certainly prepared her for even much bigger challenges as the party she was a crucial part of was given the task of running a nation of more than 22 million people and though economically wealthy, a nation constantly under threat from cross-straits conflicts.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

After the historic 2000 elections, the increasing demands of her party were compounded by the even more critical and greater demands of the new government. And yet, Bi-Khim was conscientious in attending the many overseas meetings and events of both CALD and LI. And more importantly, she dutifully accomplished her tasks both as CALD Secretary General and LI Vice President for three consecutive terms on top of her gargantuan responsibilities with DPP and the Office of the President; and later, as a member of the parliament.

It is important to note that Bi-Khim was the first woman Secretary General of CALD during the chairmanship of President Chen (2004-2005), the first incumbent president to become CALD Chair. And being the only Asian in the LI Bureau, she became the primary link between CALD and LI.

In the years and decade to follow after Manila and Taipei, the author would often meet Bi-Khim in majority of the capitals of East and Southeast Asia, a few times in Europe and once in Northern Africa. Though he was tired himself since many of those encounters were in events where he was the main organizer, they would greet each other with smiles and friendly hugs. And in Bi-Khim's eyes, he often saw lingering signs of fatigue. Ironically, he suspected that although she was busy in these events as she was always a dynamic delegate on top of being constantly asked to speak or chair sessions, these conferences became temporary respites for Bi-Khim, away from Taipei and the demands of the party, the executive branch of government and the legislature.

Simply put, she is one of the hardest working people the author has ever met. And what is endearing is that she is not motivated by self-interest. But what drives her are the greater good, her love for Taiwan and the people of Taiwan, and her steadfast commitment to her cherished democratic ideals which she shares with people of all races.

By both circumstance and by choice, she is essentially Taiwanese. She had long abandoned her U.S. citizenship to become solely Taiwanese. This is a testimony of her decisiveness during the most challenging of circumstances, truly a hallmark of genuine leadership.

She was a legislator of the 5th, 6th and 8th Legislative Yuan and is an incumbent of the ninth one. During her initial stint in the Legislative Yuan (2002-2005), she represented the overseas citizens of Taiwan. During the 6th Legislative Yuan (2005-2008), she represented Taipei City while she was part of the DPP's proportional representation in the 8th Legislative Yuan (2012-2016).



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

In a 2007 blog, Bi-Khim remarked, “ambition requires courage, the courage to pursue a goal relentlessly, the drive to be successful. Departing from the original track also requires courage, the courage to face the unknown, to be adventurous.”

Perhaps her most challenging campaign for office is her latest one: her successful bid to be the representative of Hualien County, a single-member constituency, that was represented by Wang Tin-son of the Kuomintang Party from 2010 to 2016 at the Legislative

Yuan. Wang is the son of a Hualien Magistrate and the Wang family had deeply entrenched itself in Hualien local politics down to the grassroot level.

Many people were surprised by Bi-Khim's strong showing during the campaign in the 2016 Elections and Ming-hsien Lee (Lee, 2016) explained why:

The answer lies in respecting popular opinion, long-term effort, and concerted efforts to promote public development...Having established her expertise in foreign affairs, she went against the common perception of DPP candidates that drop in for elections and just take off again when they leave, making people feel they've been "scammed for votes" by campaign promises. Not only did Hsiao never leave, she even set up a Hualien service office and set about working in the community. In the capacity of DPP legislator at large, she has kept close watch on issues important to locals, such as railway and road transportation, agriculture, and education... Her image as a woman with strong ethics and no particularly strong personal ambitions has helped break down the traditional divide between the Blue and Green camps...In addition, on the testosterone-laden political battlefield, her small stature, and reserved, even shy persona, is a refreshing change from the norm...Her unusual background also comes into play.



SOURCE: LTN NEWS TAIWAN

Having promoted Taiwan in the world stage, Bi-Khim is in the best position to promote her beloved Hualien.

Her passion for her Hualien is reminiscent of the adage “think globally, act locally”. From a visible figure on the world stage, Bi-Khim has gone full circle as her district representative where she can make a greater impact on the lives of a much smaller population, albeit people closest to her heart.

Bi-Khim has lived in two continents, she has friends of various nationalities, she speaks several languages, and she regales audiences in international conferences in every corner of the globe. Every stage of Bi-Khim's personal, social and political life has multicultural and multiethnic dimensions. Because of her experience, and more importantly—out of personal conviction—she is an advocate of tolerance and diversity.

Hualien County is populated by Minnan, Hakka, and aboriginal peoples and no one is better suited than “Multicultural” Bi-khim to address their concerns, to break barriers of ethnicity and to serve as a voice of unity and harmony (Bi Khim Hsiao Wordpress, n.d.).

Bi-Khim is passionate with local concerns affecting her district; she is a determined patriot dedicated to the democracy and prosperity of her native Taiwan; and she is a devoted internationalist. She is, by all accounts and purposes, a seasoned politician and experienced democracy advocate. These accolades are undisputedly well-deserved; the author is an eyewitness to her stellar career.

“Some people tell me they think I am very successful, that for my age I have achieved a degree of enviable success,” Bi-Khim once wrote. “Indeed, I have shaken thousands of hands and led rallies of hundreds of thousands of supporters. I’m high on the barometer of what many would consider successful in my work. However, the routine path on which we are tested election after election does not provide a standard for measuring happiness. All the hand-shaking and smiling brings about tremendous warmth from my people, but the momentum is not enough to push my mind to a higher level of wisdom and enlightenment.”

The author was in Taipei in 2004 for a CALD event when Bi-Khim’s beloved cat went missing. She told him how depressed she was with the uncertainty of her pet’s fate. He was simply astonished that this became part of national news. For a few days, he watched on television and read on the papers, the saga of Bi-Khim’s cat until it finally returned home. This was not only reflective of Bi-Khim’s popularity as a public figure but more so, this was evident of the empathy that she has established with the Taiwanese people, especially amongst her generation.

And the happy resolution of her cat finding her way home is reminiscent of the peripatetic globalist who found her way home to become what she had always been all her life—a Taiwanese.



SOURCE: LTN NEWS TAIWAN

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The Lawyer Who Gives More in Law to Those Who Have Less in Life

JAYANTHI DEVI BALAGURU

Malaysian People's Party Movement (PGRM)
Malaysia

The current Chair of the Women's Caucus of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) who previously served the Malaysian People's Movement Party (PGRM) as Member of the Central Committee, Secretary General of the Women's Wing (Wanita), Chair of Environment and Quality of Life Committee, and Vice Chair of the Law and Human Rights Committee is the only woman of the 16 profiled in this book who has not held any government position.

Many of the women profiled have proven that there is life after their incumbencies—Emily Lau's political activism has only intensified, Megawati Sukarnoputri remains the leader of her country's ruling party, and Anette Lu's prodigious talents are seen in both her prolific writings and advocacy work. Most of the 16 women in this book made their mark in civil society, academe, mass media, and law, among others, before being elected or appointed to public office.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

On the other hand, Jayanthi Balaguru is the living proof that there is life in politics even without a government post, and more importantly, one need not be a public servant, as the term is legally defined, in order to serve the public. Being in politics without necessarily being a politician and making an impact in politics even if politics is not one's cup of tea are both in the realm of possibilities.

During the last party elections, Jayanthi decided to voluntarily relinquish all her posts, all of which are important senior positions, and just remain an ordinary member. Her decision was based on her desire to concentrate more on her civil society work aimed at the development and empowerment of women, children and minority groups that remain vulnerable sectors in Malaysian society. Paradoxically, she believes that she can make an equal contribution, if not a greater impact, in serving the public as a private citizen.

Her closest thing to being a politician, in the traditional sense of the word, was her running twice for parliament, for two different constituencies, in 2013 and 2018.



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES



SOURCE: THE MALAYSIA TIMES

“She is the sole Indian female candidate in a bouquet of proverbial thorns,” the Malaysian Times described her candidacy during the May 2013 elections where 222 parliamentary seats were up for grabs, and of the 168 women contesting, she was the only one of Indian descent (The Malaysian Times, 2013.).



SOURCE: JAYANTHI BALAGURU BLOGSPOT

But for her, race was not, and should never be, a campaign issue especially since she was the candidate of a multiethnic party that valued diversity. “I joined the PGRM after I met the then chair of the party’s women’s wing at the Court of Appeal and she played a role in influencing me to join politics,” she narrated during my interview with her. “She was right that the hand and influence from political leaders would facilitate the assistance needed by families and women I was helping with housing and financial aid. I read up on the PGRM and its aims and objectives and I knew they were consistent with my beliefs and principles. The only way forward for a multiracial country is to be without discrimination based on race, religion or gender.”



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

“I didn’t believe in a race-based party because I always tell people that this is Malaysia and it is a multiracial country. I never felt that I am Indian and I am different from the others because all my friends were Chinese and Malays. We all grew up together. But until I went to London to do my Law, only then did I realise that people are racists and it was very painful. When I came back to Malaysia, I realised that I do have a different skin colour. But those were life lessons” (The Malaysian Times, 2013).

As for gender barriers, Jayanthi replied during the interview with the author, “As women in politics, it is a great challenge, indeed. There is a quota of 30 percent set aside for women participation in decision making and leadership positions. Though this in itself is a form of discrimination, we lag behind in the 30 percent itself. There needs much to be done to break the notion of the stereotypical woman. Women must be recognized on their merits and need not have to work double hard compared to their male counterparts to prove themselves.”

She knew why she had to run again in 2018 despite the fact the odds were stacked against her. “I was surprised to see living conditions of the people in villages in the constituency, I didn’t expect the condition to be that bad. I really understand how frequent floods had affected the lives of the ordinary people,” Jayanthi stated, reiterating her

and her party's desire to improve the socio-economic status of women, increase their employment prospects and continue its commitment to empowering women. "And in line with that, my first two action plans in the first 100 days... I would introduce a Bill in Parliament to standardise salary packages and benefits for women to be on par with men in factories that are not unionized. I hope to work with the union leaders to ensure the rights of women" (Arulldas, 2018).

"I will kick-start a sustainable livelihood program for single mothers from the low-income group. I will look (for the creation of) a distribution network to ensure their products are sold in the market. The aim of this project is to teach these women skills, create entrepreneurs, increase family income and make them financially independent. I aim to work with women's groups, NGOs and CSOs to make this possible" (Arulldas, 2018).



SOURCE: JAYANTHI BALAGURU BLOGSPOT

"I went into elections to get a better platform. There was already a tide for swing in the people's choice against Barisan Nasional which had been the ruling coalition for close to 60 years. With great power come great responsibility and I guess, all the ills too," she candidly said to the author.

Twice she lost the elections. She may have lost the opportunity to represent these two constituencies in parliament but she never ceased from serving them. In fact, now as before she sought an elective post, her constituents include those beyond Malaysia and even Asia.

Jayanthi obtained her Bachelor in Laws, with honors, from the University of Staffordshire, United Kingdom and her Master's in Law from the University of Malaya.

Aside from passing the Malaysian bar examinations, she has an arbitrator certification from the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators in London.

“I like reading and enjoyed Perry Mason and Nancy Drew. My sisters and I like watching Paper Chase and L.A. Law. My ambition started to take shape,” Jayanthi narrated when asked what started her interest in law and the legal profession. “I had an uncle who was a lawyer. As a young girl, I used to spend my school holidays with his family and followed him to Courts then not really understanding the law and these legal cases. Aside from an uncle and a cousin, there were not many lawyers in the family, now there is a fleet of them.”

“Aside from corporate and general litigation work, I do a lot of family matters which include child custody, divorce and maintenance.” But for Jayanthi, her law career was more than just for the sake of making a living.

The late Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay, after whom Asia’s Nobel Prize was named after, once famously declared, “Those who have less in life should have more in law.” And Jayanthi is doing exactly that, giving more in law to those who have less in life, especially women and children.

“I enjoy volunteering in Legal Aid and assist in cases of abuse against women and children. I do a lot of *pro bono* work for women and families who have been displaced, challenging for rightful ownership to housing for relocated estate dwellers,” the successful lawyer declared whose advocacies and spirit of volunteerism go beyond the courts of her land.



SOURCE: JAYANTHI BALAGURU BLOGSPOT

民主的力量：東南亞的政治與公民參與

Democratization in Southeast Asia: Experiences of Taiwan and Southeast Asia



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

In line with her legal advocacies and political party work with PGRM, especially its Wanita or women's wing, she is a civil society stalwart active in local community organizations as well as in international political networks. Jayanthi is an advocate for a fair and just society who believes that each voice needs to be heard and rights should be respected.

"I formed a couple of NGOs for the advancement of women. They assist single mothers to be independent by helping them start up small businesses to sustain their monthly family expenses," Jayanthi stated.

Thus, Jayanthi is on the right track: to empower women, you need to make them financially independent for them to be truly free and empowered. But there are other components of women empowerment, as well. "I conduct talks to raise the awareness of women about their human rights and the laws available to them against any form of violations."

Jayanthi is concerned by the extent that women are attracted to violent extremism as she explained in her article in the CALD Silver Lining Series (CALD, 2018). "Women appear to be succumbing to the gender stereotypes propagated by militant groups. Extremist organizations promote damaging gender stereotypes in recruiting young men and women – glamorizing men's engagement in violent activity and encouraging young women to join their cause through marrying fighters and bearing children. (The) presence as frontline activists, propagandists, and recruiters is increasing around the globe."

"At present, law enforcement and governments tend to focus on responding only to the terrorist acts, and fail to address intolerance as a root cause of radicalism. There is also no explicit government or inter-governmental framework or institutional mechanisms for recognising and supporting the role of women in preventing violent extremism in Malaysia or in the region," Jayanthi further lamented (CALD, 2018).

And consistent with her earlier advocacies, empowering women financially and through education and advocacy can help solve this problem. “Providing micro-finance support to women is another way, as it not only builds economic resilience, but also brings women of diverse religions and beliefs together to build dialogue and strengthen tolerance within communities” (CALD, 2018).

“We can also encourage fellow women to be politically active, and to ensure that there are opportunities put in place that allow them to be such,” Jayanthi explained. “We need to empower them to find their voice, to be involved in policy-making in their respective areas, even if it is as small as at a village level. We need women from diverse backgrounds to have this access to the decision-making process and in policy-making spaces” (CALD, 2018).

“By empowering women, we, in turn, empower their communities and change the dynamics of these spaces, leading to the promotion of peace, tolerance and respect. At the end of the day, this could potentially be the single most powerful counter to extremist interpretations of religion,” Jayanthi concluded (CALD, 2018).

Jayanthi is proud of the CALD Women’s Caucus which she currently chairs. “It has made its mark slowly and steadily and is now recognized across the world. The Democracy Forum in Taiwan for Women 2017 officiated by President Tsai was an experience in women coming together with the struggles and challenges they faced in from countries in Asia.”



SOURCE: CALD ARCHIVES

“We were outraged and horrified in the treatment of Philippine Senator de Lima,” Jayanthi continued. “We went to visit her in the Detention Center and made our stand clear in defending her against the charges filed against her. We supported her nomination to the Liberal International Prize for Freedom.”

In her Dispatch from Crame No. 146 (Senate of the Philippine, 2017), De Lima thanked the CALD Women for the visit: “Despite the relentless attacks and outright lies thrown against me by the evil Duterte regime to destroy my dignity and womanhood, I am grateful that many people have expressed and continued to vouch for my integrity. Last August 31, convenors of the CALD Women’s Caucus visited me to check on my condition as a prisoner of conscience and discussed with me the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.” Camp Crame, a military facility in the Philippine capital, is where the senator is detained.

“We saw the change, swing and stifling of power in the political control in our member countries,” Jayanthi lamented and another woman being stifled was her immediate predecessor, Mu Sochua, who left her native Cambodia because of continued persecution.

“Another milestone was achieved when the International Network of Liberal Women (INLW) officiated an Asia Chapter in Taichung, Taiwan in June 2018,” Jayanthi this time noted the more positive news. “The INLW has nominated me to take over as President of INLW in Dakar, Senegal end of November 2018. I believe our voices are being heard.”

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About CALD

The Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) was inaugurated in Bangkok in 1993, with the support of then Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and South Korea's Kim Dae-Jung. CALD, which offers a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation, is the only regional alliance of liberal and democratic political parties in Asia.

CALD was formed out of the recognition of leaders of like-minded political parties in Asia of the need for a dynamic forum promoting discussion and exchange of ideas regarding trends and challenges affecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the region. The chair parties of CALD since its inception to the present have been the Democrat Party of Thailand or DP (1993-1995, 2002-2004, 2016-2018), the Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan or DPP (1995-1997, 2004-2005), the Liberal Party of the Philippines or LP (1997-1999, 2005-2007), the Singapore Democratic Party or SDP (2007-2010), the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka or LPS (1999-2000, 2010-2012), the Sam Rainsy Party or SRP (2000-2001, 2012-2014), and the Civil Will Green Party (2014-2016).

The other members of CALD are the Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (PGRM), the Indonesian Democratic Party Struggle (PDI-P), and the Nation Awakening Party (PKB), while Hong Kong legislators Martin Lee and Sin Chung-kai are individual members. In 2010, CALD bestowed honorary individual membership to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and her party, the National League for Democracy is an observer party.

Through CALD, political parties, groups, and individuals have a continuing discussion on the developments occurring in the region. The aim is to assess the possibilities for liberal solutions to problems facing Asian democracies.

Accordingly, CALD organizes network meetings including those with its partners (Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Liberal International, Alliance for Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Alliance of Democrats, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs), international conferences on vital issues affecting the region, and regular workshops on communication, political party management, climate change, youth, and women in politics. It also sends missions for various advocacies, sponsors internship programs in its secretariat and in the European Parliament, as well as maintains a website, a social media accounts, and a weekly electronic newsletter.

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John Joseph S. Coronel was appointed as the first Executive Director of the permanent secretariat of the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD) in 1999. After resigning in late 2007, he remained a consultant and served as the editor of two CALD publications: *Vulner-Able: From Risk to Resiliency* (2013) and *Freedom to Organize* (2014), the organization's handbook on political party management which he also co-wrote. He was also the scriptwriter for several CALD audio-visual productions. He has served as consultant and/or writer-editor for the Friedrich Naumann Foundation of Manila, the Liberal Party of the Philippines and its then think tank, as well as liberal leaders from the region including Senator Francis Pangilinan, Secretary Neric Acosta and Sam Rainsy, MP. He is the Founding President of the Center for Liberalism and Democracy (CLD), a research and advocacy foundation associated with the Liberal Party.

He is a Knowledge Products Consultant of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Editor of the Foundation for the Philippine Environment (FPE) and the Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF), the country's biggest grant-giving agencies for biodiversity conservation and social entrepreneurship, respectively.





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