WOMEN’S ROLE AND POSITION DURING DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION PERIOD: A COMPARISON OF INDONESIA AND THAILAND

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Abstract

This paper observes the historical, cultural, political, and social aspects of Indonesian and Thai women to understand the progress of the women’s role and position in the two countries, especially during the democratic transition period. This is qualitative research that utilized library sources to collect information and data through various resources such as books, documents, historical books, and websites dated back from 1970s to 2000s in Indonesia and Thailand. Although there are similarities in development programs to address women’s role and position before democratization in Indonesia and Thailand as both of them mainly focused on “practical gender interests”. Interestingly, this paper reveals that during the democratic transition period, Indonesian women’s role and position in politics are one step ahead. This is due to the political stability, persistent commitment of the government to the gender equality agenda, and growing support from progressive Muslim leaders. In contrast, political turbulence due to often military coups which result in the government’s slow performance for women’s advancement combined with less support from Buddhist leaders slowed the progress of Thai women. This paper highlights the important role of the government policy on gender equality for women's advancement, political stability, and the role of the majority religion (Islam in Indonesia and Theravada Buddhism in Thailand) to support women's role and position in politics.

Keywords: Women’s Role and Position, Politics, Democratic Transition, Indonesia, Thailand, Government.

Abstrak

memperlambat kemajuan perempuan Thailand. Tulisan ini menyoroti pentingnya peran kebijakan pemerintah tentang kesetaraan gender untuk kemajuan perempuan, stabilitas politik, dan peran agama mayoritas (Islam di Indonesia dan Buddhisme Theravada di Thailand) untuk mendukung peran dan posisi perempuan dalam politik.

Kata Kunci: Peran dan Posisi Perempuan, Politik, Transisi Demokrasi, Indonesia, Thailand, Pemerintah.

Introduction

It is believed that Southeast Asian women (including Thailand and Indonesia women) enjoy equal economic privileges and the society is highlighted by the complementarity of men's and women's work/roles. The high status and complementary role of men and women in Thailand and Indonesia can be seen such as in the presence of bilateral kinship, as system of family lineage in which the relatives on the mother's side and father's side are equally important for emotional ties or for transfer of property or wealth. In Thailand, bilateral kinship is derived from the peasantry system in North and Northeast Thailand in which children regardless of sex will have an equal share of the property and land. In Thai society, mothers play central role as bearers, nurser, and socializers of their children, and women have a higher degree of control over their own childbearing and rearing behaviours and decisions. In Indonesia, for instance, women particularly those who live in rural areas also enjoy bilateral kinship in where mother manages money, such as in trade, and sons and daughters inherit the family possessions and the household goods.

Women's Studies Center Faculty of Social Science Chiang Mai University, 1997).


3 Amara Pongsapich, Occasional Papers on Women in Thailand (Bangkok, Thailand: Women’s Studies Program Chulalongkorn University, Social Research Institute, 1988), 60; Darunee Tantiwiramanond and Shashi Ranjan Pandey, “New Opportunities or New Inequalities: Development Issues and Women’s Lives in Thailand”, in Virada Somswasdi and Sally Theobald (eds), Women, Gender Relations and Development in Thai Society, 89. (Thailand: Women’s Studies Center Faculty of Social Science Chiang Mai University, 1997).


6 Cora Vreede-De Stuers, The Indonesian Woman: Struggles and Achievements (Paris: Mouton & Co’s Gravenhage, 1960), 24-30. Other kinship systems in the Indonesian archipelago are: the patrilineal system in which the wife generally follows the husband into his
While both Indonesian and Thailand women have similar kinship features, current developments shows Indonesian women’s role in politics are one step forward compared to Thailand women (hereafter called Thai women). Indonesia had the first female President Megawati Sukarnoputri in 2001-2004 earlier than Thailand which had the first female Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra in 2011-2014. In addition to that, in terms of representation of women in national parliament, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) as of 1st March 2022, Indonesia ranked 107 while Thailand ranked 138 worldwide.

Having interesting fact, this paper would like to seek further explanation of the relatively slow progress of Thailand’s women’s role and position in politics compared to Indonesian women. By doing so, this paper observes the historical, cultural, political, and social aspects of the two countries to understand the differences in the progress of the women’s role and position, especially during the democratic transition as an important period of providing the basis for gender equality for women’s political participation in democratization and contemporary era.

Here, I argue that Thai women’s progress in politics are slower than Indonesian women because of the unstable political conditions (often interrupted by military coups) which slowed the Thailand’s government effort to drive women’s advancement, combined with less support from Buddhist leaders. Meanwhile, Indonesian women’s role and position in politics are far more advanced due to political stability, continuous commitment from the government and to carry out policy on women’s advancement, and support from progressive Muslim leaders.

This paper defines the democratic transition period in Indonesia: from the fall of the New Order’s leader of Suharto in May 1998, to the 2004 General Election. This is an important period lying the foundation for the advancement of Indonesian women’s role in politics. In Thailand, it defines from the May 1992 democratic uprising as the critical moment that open the door for democratization, to the 2005 General Election, yet before the military junta that overthrew the government of Thaksin Shinawatra on 19th September 2006. The May 1992 democratic uprising in Thailand is an important event that aimed to get rid of the military intervention of General Suchinda Kraprayoon which lled up to the democratic election in September 1992 which marked the victory of pro-democracy parties and ended military domination.
Method

This is qualitative research that utilized library sources to collect information and data through various resources such as books, documents, historical books and website dated back from 1970s to 2000s in Indonesia and Thailand. The criteria for selecting the books and websites cited were those written by scholars on Thailand and Indonesia as scientific references on the role of women in the two countries from the 1970s - 2000s, and the website provides up-to-date information on this matter. All the resources and data are analyzed by using the descriptive analysis method with a gender perspective.

Result and Discussions

Women’s role and position in Indonesia and Thailand: before democratization

This section explores the notion of women’s role and position in Indonesia and Thailand before democratization period.

Before the democratization period of May 1998 in Indonesia, the New Order (Era Orde Baru) was a critical period in Indonesia since it acquired the longest political period (1966-1998) accompanied by political stability for the sake of economic development. Paternalism, which positioned women as a secondary element to support the state’s policy, highlighted the political-economy grand design of the New Order. The authoritarian rule of Suharto extended strong control over Indonesian women which he styled himself as the “Father of Development” (bapak pembangunan) and sought Indonesian women's loyalty through the devotion to their roles as mothers and wives.

The New Order developed a “state ibuism” gender ideology that demanded total devotion from Indonesian women and expected them to focus on their roles as wives and mothers in developing Indonesia. The gender ideology depicts women regardless of their social class, as mothers and wives who should take care of their families while actual power is controlled by men.

In observing the notion of women’s role and position in Thailand, this paper dated back to Thailand's absolute monarchy before 1932, when the sakdina system, in which the king derived power by controlling labor, was adopted. Within the sakdina system, men are the core who became representatives of the village community, whereas women were left at home caring for children and the family economy. The sakdina system provided a pattern of the sexual division of labor between men and women: men's responsibility was in the public sphere such as in corvee labor or military task, while women's responsibility

Literature”, in Jim Schiller and Barbara Martin-Schiller (eds), Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics & Political Culture, 98 (USA: the Centre for Interational Studies, Ohio University, 1997); Kathryn Robinson, “Indonesian Women—from Order Baru to Reformasi”, in Kathryn Robinson and Sharon Bessell (eds), Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity and Development, 141 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000).


was to take care of the economic well being of the family. The sakdina system also implies a pattern of the power relationship between men and women. The system justified men's power to represent the family concerning the state or to make a decision on behalf of the family, while women's power was restricted to their position as mother and wife. As a result, men in Thailand played a dominant role in the public sphere, while women were relatively marginalized from the public sphere.

Women's peripheral position in the public sphere can be found before King Mongkut, Chulalongkorn, and Vajiravudh's leadership, where women acquired a very low position as they did not have the right to participate directly in politics as well as the freedom to decide their lives.\(^{15}\) Thai women were the property of their fathers and their husbands, and their husbands could do anything including selling them, giving them away or inflicting bodily punishment, and practicing polygamy.\(^{16}\) At that time, Thai women did not have opportunities to expand their role and position in the public sphere.

The practices gradually disappeared since King Mongkut's proclamation issued in the 1860s, which abandoned husbands and parents from selling their wives and daughters; followed by King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) who abolished slavery, established education for women and men in elites' class, and King Vajiravudh (1910-1925) who forbade polygamy as well as prostitution and passed education Act in 1921 to provide a primary school for boys and girls.\(^{17}\)

Although in 1935 the monogamy law was passed in Thailand\(^{18}\) yet it still disadvantaged women since the wife could no longer act independently of her husband even concerning her part of a shared property.\(^{19}\) Polygamy is still found in contemporary Thailand mainly in the upper class as prestige-purpose and shows welfare status.\(^{20}\) In terms of education, it took 46 years from 1855 to 1901 for formal education to be available for the middle class and girls\(^{21}\) which indicates the slow progress of women’s education as an important basis for elevating their position. Although Thai women were granted the right to vote in 1932, they were banned from top positions in the village, district, and administrative levels until 1982.\(^{22}\)

As we understand the basic notion of women’s role and position in the two countries, what were the policy regarding women’s role in public sphere in the period before democratization?

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\(^{17}\) Tamara Loos, “The Politics of Women’s Suffrage in Thailand”, in Louise Edwards and Mina Roces (eds), *Women’s Suffrage in Asia: Gender*.
The government policy on women in Indonesia and Thailand: before democratization

During the New Order Indonesia (1966-1998), policy on women's role in politics was focused to control loyalty of Indonesian women to the state. Additionally, in order to promote a stable family, the New Order regime introduced the new Marriage Law in 1974 which promoted monogamy.23

The situation of Thai women is relatively similar to Indonesian women during the New Order. In Thailand, the development program for women began when Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram (1938-1944 and 1948-1957) imposed the National Cultural Development Act in 1942 as a cultural framework for Thai nation-building. Phibun's construction of Thai women's identity merely focused on upgrading women's appearance such as dress code according to western-style 24 and improving women's home-making role to support their husbands in the nation-building.25 To control women's roles as mothers and wives inside and outside the bureaucracy, women had to join the Women’s Cultural Club under the Bureau of Women’s Culture.26 Moreover, all women's organizations were united under the National Council of Women of Thailand in 1956 which aimed to promote better roles for mothers and wives within the nationalistic framework. 27 Here, I agree with Van Esterik,28 that (at that time) Thai women functioned only as icons to represent modern and civilized Thai women as mothers and wives, regardless of their marginal role and position in the public sphere. Here, we can see the similar framework of Indonesia and Thailand state to address women’s role in development before democratization.

To gain a deeper illustration, this paper observed various policy and program for women in both countries before democratization. By using Molyneux’s 29 concept of “practical gender interests” and "strategic gender interests", this paper discovers similarities in programs that focused on “practical gender interest” aims to optimize women's functions within specific contexts and goals, rather than “strategic gender interest” which addressed women’s subordination in society by creating pattern and structure of more equal relationships between women and men. There are two major programs to address “practical gender” interest in Indonesia 30 : firstly, introducing Family Welfare Guidance (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, PKK) which was mandatory for the wife of the governor, regency, municipal, and

26 Penny Van Esterik, Materializing Thailand, 101; Darunee Tantiwiramanond and Shashi Ranjan Pandey, By Women, For Women: A Study of Women’s Organizations in Thailand, 28.
27 Darunee Tantiwiramanond and Shashi Ranjan Pandey, By Women, For Women: A Study of Women’s Organizations in Thailand, 46.
28 Penny Van Esterik, Materializing Thailand, 103
30 Susan Blackburn, “Gender Interest and Indonesian Democracy”, in David Bourcier and John Legge (eds), Democracy in Indonesia 1950s and 1990s, 168-74 (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies Monash University, 1994).
head of a village in Indonesia\footnote{Calra Bianpoen, “The Family Welfare Movement: A Blessing or a Burden?”, in Mayling Oeygardiner and Carla Bianpoen (eds), Indonesian Women: The Journey Continues (Canberra, Australia: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS) Publishing, the Australian National University, 2000).} where women were given various skills to be good mothers and wives. The PKK became a channel for the state to control women either in rural or urban areas in Indonesia.\footnote{Norma Sullivan, “Gender and Politics in Indonesia”, in Maila Stivens (ed.), Why Gender Matters in Southeast Asian Politics (Australia: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, Aristoc Press, 1991) and Norma Sullivan, Masters and Managers: A Study of Gender Relations in Urban Java (New South Wales, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1994)} Furthermore, \textit{Dharma Wanita} was founded on 5 August 1974 to control the loyalty of urban middle-class women, which required all civil servants’ wives to join and show loyalty to the state.\footnote{KOWANI (Kongres Wanita Indonesia), Sejarah Setengah Abad Pergesakan Wanita Indonesia (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1978), 279.} 

In Thailand, since the 1970s under the initiative of Queen Sirikit, women were united to support their husbands and the state policy such as in the Association of Thai Women Farmers in 1976, the Association of Housewives to Protect Thailand, Wives of the Professionals, Army Housewives, Navy Housewives, and Air Force Housewives in 1984.\footnote{Darunee Tantiwiramanond and Shashi Ranjan Pandey, By Women, For Women: A Study of Women’s Organizations in Thailand, 30.}

Secondly, a program for controlling the population by introducing a family planning program. In Indonesia, it is called \textit{Keluarga Berencana} (KB), which was included in the second Broad Guidelines on State Policy (\textit{Garis Besar Haluan Negara}, GBHN) 1973.\footnote{Mayling Oey-Gardiner, “And the Winner is...Indonesian Women in Public Life”, in Kathryn Robinson and Sharon Bessell (eds), Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity and Development, 103 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002).}

Similarly, Thailand’s family planning program was also part of the Third Plan Development Program from 1972 to 1977.\footnote{Amara Pongsapich, Occasional Papers on Women in Thailand, 31; Darunee Tantiwiramanond and Shashi Ranjan Pandey, “New Opportunities or New Inequalities: Development Issues and Women’s Lives in Thailand”, in Virada Somswasdi and Sally Theobald (eds), Women, Gender Relations and Development in Thai Society, 110 (Thailand: Women’s Studies Center Faculty of Social Science Chiang Mai University, 1997).} Although the programs successfully controlled women’s roles as mothers and wives, it has a positive effect on women’s life. This happened as the average number of children per family dropped, women experienced better health and more time to enhance their lives which led to women’s life expectancy rising from 63 years in 1990 to 67 years in Indonesia in 1998,\footnote{Khofifah Indar Parawansa, “Institutional Building: An Effort to Improve Indonesian Women’s Role and Status”, in Kathryn Robinson and Sharon Bessell (eds), Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity and Development, 72 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002).} and at 74.9 years in Thailand 1997.\footnote{Bhassorn Limanonda, “Exploring Women’s Status in Contemporary Thailand”, 254.}

Furthermore, women took benefit also from the education program which has been introduced in the mid-1970s in Indonesia. As a result, the primary school participation rate of boys and girls aged 7 to 12, increased from 83 percent in 1980 to 94 percent in 1995 in Indonesia.\footnote{Kathryn Robinson, “Indonesian Women—from Order Baru to Reformasi”, 149.} In Thailand, by the 1990s illiteracy rates have decreased significantly although sex disparity remains with 9 percent of women and 5 percent of men illiterate.\footnote{Bhassorn Limanonda, “Exploring Women’s Status in Contemporary Thailand”, 255.}

All of the above programs for the improvement of Indonesian and Thailand’s women’s life and condition occurred at the same time with proliferation of the Women in Development (WID) approach. WID was triggered by Ester Boserup’s argument in the
1970s that development especially in Third World countries had marginalized women, modernization hardly considered and benefited women, and therefore women should be integrated into development.\textsuperscript{41} Boserup’s intellectual elaboration became the starting point for the Women in Development (WID) approach, which since the 1970s has been trying to integrate women in development. Boserup’s argument is echoed by scholars such as Barbara Rogers (1980)\textsuperscript{42} and Irene Tinker (1990).\textsuperscript{43} Further in its development, the integration of women in development continued with a holistic approach and placed men as partners through Gender and Development (GAD) approach since the 1980s.

Table 1 and Table 2 below presents the government policy on women’s role and position in Indonesia and Thailand before the democratization period which mainly under WID’s framework especially during the United Nation Decade for Women 1975-1985.

**Table 1. Indonesian Government Policy on Women During the New Order**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>The passing of the 1974 Marriage Law</td>
<td>To create uniformity in the marriage code, promoted equity rights for wives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Establishment of the Ministry for the Role of Women in response to the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985)</td>
<td>To develop women’s capacity in managing their dual role (peran ganda) in the domestic and public sphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>The 1978 GBHN (Gesundheit und Bildung)</td>
<td>To introduce the term ‘women’ in development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>The Law No.7/1984</td>
<td>To ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>The 1993 GBHN</td>
<td>To declare women as mitra sejajar (equal partners) in development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>The Decree No.17/1995 by the Minister of Home Affairs</td>
<td>To enforce district (kecamatan) and provincial governments to establish the Women in Development Management Teams (Tim P2W), to coordinate with various government departments on women’s programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Thailand Government Policy On Women Before 1992**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>National Executive Committee Ministry of Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Sub-Committee on Planning for Women and Child Development the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Interim Task Force on Women’s Development NESDB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Sub-Committee for Development of Women’s Affairs NESDB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>National Prime Minister’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: \textsuperscript{44}


Therefore, the combination of improvements in women's lives and the availability of the government policy to support women’s roles and positions become the basis for the progressive improvement of women’s role in politics after the reform era in Indonesia (after 1998), and after 1992 in Thailand. Nevertheless, the advancement of Indonesian women’s role and position in politics commenced in 1998 is more progressive, compared to Thai women since 1992.

This can be seen for example in the representation of women in the national parliament as a vital decision-making institution. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) statistics on 28th February 2005, Indonesia ranked 75 in the representation of women in national parliament worldwide compared to Thailand ranked 97. Furthermore, there were 927 (14 percent) women village heads of the 66,000 villages in Indonesia in 1991, compared to 2.4 percent of women village heads in 1999 in Thailand.

Although Thailand has started democratization early in 1992 and Indonesia in 1998, Indonesian women’s role and position in politics are advanced more compared to Thai women. Why is it so? The next section provides a plausible explanation of the different stages of advancement of women in both countries during the democratic transition period.

Women's role and position during democratic transition period in Indonesia and Thailand: enhancements and limitations

There are three factors contributing to the advancement of Indonesian women’s role and position in politics compared to Thai women during the democratic transition period:

First, there is significant support for gender equality from Muslim leaders in Indonesia, while there is relatively less support from Buddhist leaders in Thailand. In Indonesia, the decline of the "state ihuism" ideology of the New Order made room for other ideologies including Islam to dominate the discourse on women’s role and position in the reform era. In line with Megawati Sukarnoputri’s nomination as female president in 1999, the debate whether or not women could become president commenced at the Congress of Indonesian Muslims, 3-7 November 1998 which recommended the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Council of Islamic Scholars) to publish fatwa (an Islamic legal opinion given by a Muslim jurist scholar) on this matter. The growing debates among Muslim scholars about which aspects of power women are allowed to hold and which are prohibited confirms the rising influence

47 Mayling Oey-Gardiner, “And the Winner is…Indonesian Women in Public Life”, 107.
of Islam on gender and power in the reform era.

At this stage, we found the emergence of a new generation of Muslim leaders who propose a new interpretation of Islam such as Siti Musdah Mulia member of the Women's Empowerment Team of the Indonesian Religious Department (Departement Agama Republik Indonesia), who created Counter Legal Draft (CLD) to counter Compilation of Islamic Law (Kompilasi Hukum Islam, KHI) which has been used in civil and religious courts since 1991. The CLD proposes to reform KHI including Islamic Marriage Law, which according to Siti domesticates women's roles merely as mothers and wives, and thus seeks equal property rights between wives and husbands, and abandons polygamy. Although CLD was abandoned in February 2005, it provoked further discourse on KHI such as in Indonesian Women Human Rights Commission.

The growing demand to promote gender equality within Islam is reflected in the flourishing books which explore gender equality in Islam such as by Badriyah Fayumi, Nasaruddin Umar, and Zaitunah Subhan, as well as, the effort to scrutinize the Yellow Book (Kitab Kuning), a primary guide book of Indonesia’s pesantren which contains misogyny teachings.

Indeed, the emergence of Muslim women activists such as Wardah Hafidz who sought to promote the contextual approach in line with the effort to promote feminism and gender discourses in Indonesian Islamic thinking when the issue was still at the periphery has been witnessed since the early 1990s. The supporters of the contextual approach such as Ziba Mir-Hosseini believes that reading and interpreting the divine messages should not always rely literally on the text as it may not represent the original revelation. At the same breath with Wardah Hafidz are Siti Musdah Mulia and (late) Lili Zakiyah Munir. Siti Musdah Mulia endorses the contextual approach in reading Al-Qur’an so that the wisdom of the revelation, and justice as the primary principle of Islam, can be achieved. Similarly, Lili Zakiyah Munir, a leading Indonesian Muslim human rights activist, proposed a new interpretation of Islam such as by Badriyah Fayumi, Nasaruddin Umar, and Zaitunah Subhan.

51 Kathryn Robinson, “Gender, Islam and Culture in Indonesia”, 28-9. KHI has been used as formal guidance in deciding family disputes such as marriage, divorces, or inheritance.


55 Such effort was led by wife of the 4th Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Sinta Nuriyah Rahman, et.al., Kembang Setaman Perkawinan: Analisis Kritis Kitab Uqud Al-Lajayn (Jakarta: Kompas, 2005).

56 Wardah Hafidz, “Feminisme: Agenda Baru Pemikiran Islam (wawancara dengan Wardah Hafidz),” Ulumul Qur’an 6, no.3 (1995):113


58 For discussion about the influence of the context, status and gender of the transmitter and the role of women companion transmitter in the era of Prophet Muhammad in influencing their hadis transmission and see Zuny Nadia, “Peran dan Aktifitas Perempuan Era Muhammad SAW (Studi atas Hadis-Hadis Riwayat Sahabat Perempuan),” HUMANISMA Journal of Gender Studies 4, no. 1 (2020): 16-32.

59 Siti Musdah Mulia, Muslimah Reformic: Perempuan Pembarn Keagamaan. (Bandung: Mizan, 2005), 19.
boldly endorses the contextual approach arguing it will fulfill the intention of Al-Qur’an, namely justice.59

According to Bhassorn Limanonda, Theravada Buddhism is the predominant religion in Thailand which continues to exert a strong influence over social values, codes of ethics and day to day behaviour.60 I agree with Van Esterik that, Theravada Buddhism either beliefs or institutions must be considered in gender analysis because Buddhism is a key component of Thai identity.61 Indeed, subordination of Thai women can be found within Buddhism at least in two forms: firstly, Buddhist beliefs, such as women are regarded as lower beings compared to men62 and birth as women indicate bad ‘karma’ or demerit in the past lives.63 Secondly, in Buddhist institutions, in which women are not allowed to be a monk because women are considered lower status.64 According to Buddhism, the only way for women to achieve merit accumulations is through devotion to their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers by fulfilling their husband’s and son’s needs, as well as serving monks in the sangha (order of Buddhist Monk).65 Omvedt said that Theravada Buddhism helped to legitimize gender sexual division of labor in which Thai women may play a major role in the economy, yet men monopolize religious and political structure.66

Theravada Buddhism’s values and masculine institutions have been preserved since the absolute monarchy up to the present day.67 Peter A. Jackson provides an interesting explanation that Theravada Buddhism has been preserved as a “historical legitimation function” which provides legitimation parallelism between the symbolic religious domain and the secular power structure of modern Thailand.68 This can be found when the sangha is used to promote government programs such as national development and national integration program since the 1960s.69

Duncan McCargo’s research on Buddhism, Democracy and Identity in Thailand (2004) noted that: i) Thai Buddhism is highly intolerant of those who deviate from mainstream teaching, ii) while Thailand has been experiencing gradual political liberalization since the 1970s, not because of the prevailing religious climate, women to achieve merit accumulations is through devotion to their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers by fulfilling their husband’s and son’s needs, as well as serving monks in the sangha (order of Buddhist Monk).65 Omvedt said that Theravada Buddhism helped to legitimize gender sexual division of labor in which Thai women may play a major role in the economy, yet men monopolize religious and political structure.66

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but in spite of the deep conservatism of its Buddhist order. As day-to-day life and politics are greatly influenced by religious values, support from religious leaders in Thailand to advance women’s role and position in public sphere is imperative.

Secondly, there is a strong commitment from the Indonesian government to establish a legal framework to improve women’s role and position in politics, compare to Thailand.

In Indonesia, this can be seen in three stages: (i) In 1999, when (late) President Abdurrahman Wahid introduced Presidential Instruction No.9/2000 on Gender Mainstreaming to elevate women’s role and position in development including in BAPPENAS (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional, National Planning Agency). This was supported by Khofifah Indar Parawansa as Minister for Women's Empowerment who promoted institutional changes in the New Order programs on women and created networking with various NGOs. (ii) In 2003, the legal framework of the affirmative action or gender quota was enacted in section 65 of the General Election Law No. 12/2003. (iii) In 2004, the legal framework of the Elimination of Domestic Violence against Women was approved by Law No. 23/2004.

The above achievements are part of the proliferation of the Gender and Development (GAD) approach which was endorsed by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) to replace the WID approach in the 1980s. DAWN is a forum among women from Third World countries who realized that WID, in fact, marginalized women in Third World countries.

Table 3 below describes the Indonesian government policy on women which has shifted from “practical gender interest” during the New Order, to “strategic gender interest” in the Reform Era to facilitate the improvement of Indonesian women’s role and position in politics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Instruction No.9/2000 for Gender Mainstreaming</td>
<td>To increase men’s participation in the various program on gender equality. For example, the family planning program resulted in an increase in men’s participation from 1.1 percent in 1999 to 1.8 percent in 2000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revitalized the New Order P2W team as the Women’s Empowerment Team, and changes the PKK (previously is Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) into to the Family Welfare Empowerment (Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga)</td>
<td>To enhance women’s role in family and society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The approval of the affirmative action/gender quota rule in section 65 article</td>
<td>To support Indonesian women in parliament in the 2004 General Election.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Footnotes:


In Thailand, the three Prime Ministers after the 1992 democratic uprising in Thailand, namely Chuan Leekpai (1992), Banharn Silpa-archa (1995), and Chavalit Youngchaiyudh (1996), had to deal with a fragile base of government as they emerged from political parties' coalition and struggle to overcome critics and maintain power. Nevertheless, there were some institutional progress such as in 1994 the National Commission on Women’s Affairs proclaimed the National Declaration on Women including the Perspective Policies and Planning for the Development of women 1995-2015.

Thaksin Shinawatra’s Thais Love Thais Party (Phak Thai Rak Thai) won the majority seats in 2001, as well as, in 2005 which won 377 seats. However, Thaksin concerned more with popular issues such as rebuilding economic prosperity and poverty alleviation, which proved effective to increase public popularity and won the election. It seems that gender issues to promote women's advancement role and position in Thai politics have not been taken into account as a crucial agenda as it is not strategic to re-gain election victory. As a result, the improvement of Thai women’s role and position in politics may begin to be taken into account in Thailand's development programs, yet it is still on the periphery.

Moreover, there is no legal framework such as gender quota for increasing representation of women in parliament. In Indonesia, the gender quota in Indonesia (suggested a 30 per cent quota of women candidates) are legislated with the 2003 Election Law in the 2004 General Election, which getting stronger in the 2009, 2014, and 2019 General Elections required political parties to nominate at least 30 per cent of women in all electoral districts. The legal framework of gender quota in Indonesia as enacted in section 65 of the General Election Law No. 12/2003, resulted in an increase in the number of women in the national parliament, from 9 percent in the 1999 General Election to 11.6 percent of women following the 2004 General Election. The latest 2019 gender quota in Indonesia has contributed to the highest ever proportion of women elected to the national parliament or People’s Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR), with 120 (20.9 per

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74 Khofifah I. Parawansa, “Institutional Building: An Effort to Improve Indonesian Women’s Role and Status”, in Kathryn Robinson and Sharon Bessell (eds), Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity, and Development (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002).


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cent) of 575 seats as a result of the 2019 General Election.\textsuperscript{80}

In contrast, in Thailand there are only 36 women (7.2 percent) of 500 members of the House of Representatives following the February 2005 General Election\textsuperscript{81}, which decreased slightly from 44 women MPs in the 2001 General Election.\textsuperscript{82} Looking at the Law in Thailand such as the Organic Act on Political Party B.E.2550 in 2007 and the Organic Law on Elections Commission B.E.2550, do not mention any gender quota provisions.\textsuperscript{83} In 2014, the (military) Royal Thai Armed Forces led by General Prayuth Chan-o-cha seized power in a coup d’état and filled the newly established National Legislative Assembly (NLA) with its allies, and awarded women just 3% of the seats available.\textsuperscript{84}

The 2019 general election could have been an opportunity for more females into elected office. However, the military’s grip on power and attempts to limit the opposition’s electoral influence disproportionately affected female candidates, as noted by Yoshinori Nishizaki that several prominent female MPs were banned by the military junta from standing for election.\textsuperscript{85}

Furthermore, Punchada Sirivunnabood in explaining the situation of women members of parliament in the 2019 General Elections in Thailand said that women are underrepresented in government and in parliament in Thailand, and suggests to enhance the role of women in Thai politics by introducing a gender quota because so far, Thailand’s 2017 Constitution has no gender quota.\textsuperscript{86}

Thirdly, there is political stability which contributes to the continuous women’s policy in Indonesia (such as from the New Order, Reform Era, and post-Reform Era Indonesia). An advancement of Indonesian women’s role and position during the reform era has been contributed also by gradual improvement of women’s policy during the New Order as can be viewed: (i) the 1973 Broad Guidelines on State Policy (GBHN) incorporated women’s contribution in development by the establishment of the Ministry for the Role of Women in 1978. (ii) the 1983 and 1985 GBHN acknowledged women’s dual roles in private and public realms (peran ganda Wanita), followed by women as equal partners (mitra sejajar) in the 1993 GBHN. (iii) the 1995 GBHN


\textsuperscript{81} Inter Parliamentary Unions (IPU), http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif280205.htm

\textsuperscript{82} James Ockey, Making Democracy: Leadership, Class, Gender, and Political Participation in Thailand, 57.


\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., as cited by Oliver Ward. For interesting analysis explaining the background of the majority female members of Thailand’s Parliament elected since 1975 whom most of them are related, by blood or marriage, to former male MPs which have contributed to entrenching family-based rule politics, see Yoshinori Nishizaki, “New Wine in an Old Bottle: Female Politicians, Family Rule, and Democratization in Thailand”, The Journal of Asian Studies 77, no. 2 (2018): 375–403. doi:10.1017/S002191181700136


\textsuperscript{87} Mayling Oey-Gardiner, “And the Winner is…Indonesian Women in Public Life”, 103.
promoted the establishment of the Women in Development Management Teams (Tim P2W) to organize women's programs in the district and provincial government. (iv) the 1999 GBHN as the first GBHN during the reform era, marked an official introduction of ‘gender’ to address women’s issues in development. 88

In contrast, Thailand's political stability is often disturbed by a military intervention that prevented the government from implementing continuous programs. This corresponds with Bhassorn Limanonda's noted that instability of Thailand's government over the past several decades has obstructed the advancement of Thai women's role in politics. 89 A constitutional Monarchy since 1932, Thailand has moved between democratically elected governments and military dictatorships numerous times. There are at least 12 military coups in Thailand history since the country's first coup in 1932 to the latest military coup on 22 May 2014 by the Royal Thai Armed Forces.

For example, from the 1970s to the 1980s, there three major occasions affected political stability namely the 1971 coup by Field Marshal Thanom and Praphat, the 1973 civilian uprising to overthrow the military domination of Thanom and Prahat, and the 1976 coup by Thanom and Praphat. 90 Development of Thailand's women's programs occurred within those political fluctuations. In 1974, the Ministry of Education founded the National Executive Committee, which was then replaced in 1978 by the Sub-Committee on Planning for Women and Child Development under the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), it took three years to integrate women's issues under Prime Minister's office by promulgating National Commission of Women’s Affairs in 1981, yet it dissolved at the end of the year. 91 Eventually, the National Commission on the Promotion and Co-ordination of Women’s Affairs was set up in 198092, or eleven years after the Ministry for the Role of Women was set up in Indonesia in 1978. In situations of political fluctuation and conflict, it takes years to establish institutions such as the National Commission on the Promotion and Co-ordination of Women's Affairs in Thailand.

It is clear that, although both countries commenced attention to women in development in the 1970s, Thailand experienced political fluctuations and instability of the government resulting in the slow progress to elevate Thai women's role and position in politics from the 1990s to 2000s, compared to Indonesia.

Conclusion

This paper observed the situation of women in Indonesia and Thailand during the democratic transition period. The democratic transition period is important as it does not only signify the changing of political structure but also the changing of policy and social features for promoting women’s role and politics to deepen democratization in contemporary situation.

Although there are similarities in development programs to address women's roles...
role before democratization in Indonesia and Thailand as both of them mainly focused on “practical gender interests”. Interestingly, this paper reveals that during the democratic transition period (in Indonesia from May 1998 to the 2004 General Election, while in Thailand is defined from May 1992 to 2005), Indonesian women’s role and position in politics are one step ahead. This is due to political stability, the persistent commitment of Indonesian government for improvement of women’s role in politics, and growing support from progressive Muslim leaders and activists who promotes a new interpretation of Islam that support women’s role in public sphere.

In contrast, political turbulence due to often military coups, contributed to Thailand government’s slow performance for advancement of women in politics, combined with less support from Buddhist leaders.

Advancement of women’s role in politics in Indonesia and Thailand requires not only progressive government policy toward gender equality (especially for women’s advancement), but also political stability to ensure continuous completion of the policy. Moreover, it needs strategic support from the majority religion (Islam in Indonesia and Theravada Buddhism in Thailand) and religious leaders as their religious view on women’s role and position will predominantly shape the opinion and attitudes of ordinary people in dealing with women in their private lives to be brought into the public sphere.

Further studies are needed to analyze the development of gender perspectives in (Theravada) Buddhism in Thailand for advancement of women in politics. In addition, research on the effort of political parties, women, and gender activists’s to encourage a gender quota in Thailand is strongly encouraged.

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