

## Female President and Gender Equal Policies in Korea

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In Korea, the 18th presidential election was held on December 19, 2012. The winner was Ms. Park Geun-hye, becoming Korea's first female president with 51.6% of the votes.

On February 25, 2013, she was inaugurated as South Korean leader to manage the country for the next five years. In Korea, the presidency had so far been the exclusive possession of men; the president assumes the most important position in terms of both role and power. Also, on a global basis, it is rare to have or have had a female president, excluding some other countries such as Germany, Chile, Finland, and the Philippines (as of February 2013). This reality indicates that even in today's well-developed modern society, the social status of women is not so high, and that the political power of women is still much smaller than that of men.

The generation of the first female president in Korea is truly significant in Korean society, where there is still much gender inequality, as well as wide social and political gender differences. Some people are negative about President Park, insisting that she was able to win



the election thanks to her father's influence and image rather than to her own political abilities; her father, Park Chung-hee, was the country's 5th–9th President, administering the country for 16 years. While he achieved many excellent economic results, many people remember him as an oppressive dictator.

Amidst this situation, it is certain that many people are concerned about whether the female president can demonstrate her leadership and to what extent she has the interest and political will to take care of the issues of gender equality and the socially vulnerable. I think, however, that the generation of a female president in Korea will stir hopes and expectations for women to exhibit their abilities in various fields and play greater roles in politics and society at large.

In President Park's manifestos, a mainstay regarding women issues is the project of training 100,000 women as useful human resources. Other manifestos include a response to sexual violence against women, an increase in the employment of women, reinforcement of support for single-parent families, and provision of nursery services.

During President Park's tenure it is expected that in Korea these manifestos will lead to strengthening systems to increase the percentage of female managers in public organizations and private companies, as well as measures to protect and support victims of sexual violence.

I hope that this generation of a female president will not end as just a symbolic event, but act as a hope for many women living in Korea and serve as an opportunity for Korea to transform into a more gender-equal society.