

After #MeToo, Where Does Taiwan Go?

Wednesday 6 September 2023, by [LIU Shan-Jan Sarah](#) (Date first published: 14 August 2023).

Five years after the global #MeToo movement began, Taiwan has finally started its own. It began with a wave of sexual assault claims against several members of Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). While those alleged in the DPP have resigned, these claims led to allegations against others beyond the political sphere. Since May, [more than 100 politicians, activists, intellectuals, and celebrities](#) have been called out for their misconduct. The #MeToo movement has garnered much media attention and has [been discussed widely](#).

Taiwan is seen as one of the most gender-politically egalitarian countries in the world. It holds one of the highest representation of women in parliament (currently at 42%, which is significantly higher than the average of parliaments in other Asian countries, at 21%). Taiwan has implemented a reserved seats quota system for women and has had a woman president for two terms. It is also the first Asian country to have legalised gay marriage. These gender progresses should also lead to a gender-egalitarian society in other aspects, including a society where people feel comfortable speaking up about sexual assaults. So why did the #MeToo movement start so late? Where does Taiwan go after brave women being the whistle-blowers?

While Taiwan has been praised for its advancement of women's status, it is important to note that [Taiwanese women have a high political status but not social status](#). Women in Taiwan have [opportunities and access to participate in politics](#), but the advanced political status of women has not exactly translated to their other rights. At the same time, women's high position and visibility in the political arena give women much exposure and the disillusion that Taiwan has achieved gender equality. Like other societies where the men's rights movement has blossomed, a myth also exists in Taiwan - some reject the idea that men are more privileged than women and believe that Taiwanese women have more rights than Taiwanese men. In reality, only a select few women have attained power, while most women still struggle with gender-based discrimination and violence on a daily basis.

An example would be the women dancers being depicted as a gift for Wen-je Ko, the Chair of the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), at an event it hosted. The TPP hired women dancers to wear sexy flight attendant costumes to perform for a large audience of men. While the TPP has claimed that they do not intend to objectify women, the [Taoyuan Flight Attendants Union](#) and [the Awakening Foundation](#) have condemned the male gaze - the sexualisation of flight attendants. The male gaze certainly has invoked the patriarchal culture of the TPP and perhaps also that of the broader society. The TPP's hosting of the event as well as its [lack of apology](#) to women flight attendants are an example of men having power and having power over women as men can dictate what women wear, how women perform, and what role women serve in society.

Since the #MeToo movement in Taiwan, one might expect a political party with a candidate running for the presidency in the upcoming election to make more of an effort to dismantle patriarchy. The TPP's response is unexpected but not surprising. Many hold the misconception that gender equality has been achieved, which perhaps partially explains why Taiwan lags behind its neighbouring

countries, such as [South Korea](#) and [China](#), in its recent feminist movement.

As many people (mostly women and some men) have spoken up about being subject to sexual harassment and assault, not everyone's story is being believed. Not only do survivors of sexual harassment and assault risk being mocked for speaking up, but some even receive retaliation as the accused [might sue the accusers for defamation](#). The defamation lawsuits create a chilling effect, silencing even more women as the risks for speaking up are high, including the loss of jobs, income, reputation, and family and friends. Oftentimes, survivors re-experience trauma repeatedly when they share their stories and/or take legal action.

At the same time, the perpetrators, particularly if they apologise for their wrongdoing, receive much support from the public. Society is generally more forgiving of men, especially if they showcase a bit of remorse and regret. Society is also more concerned about the perpetrators' future. We saw such compassion for the perpetrators when the Stanford University student swimmer, [Brock Allen Turner](#), got sentenced to only six months of incarceration after raping an unconscious woman. The judge's lenient ruling showed his appreciation for Brock's humanity instead of the survivor's. Although many sexual allegations have not gone on trial in Taiwan yet, a general sentiment of support is present for these perpetrators, especially if they are fathers, and their wives. For example, [Mickey Huang](#), one of Taiwan's top TV hosts, was accused of sexual harassment. The public showed much sympathy for his wife and young daughter. Frequently, people believe that the perpetrators should be given another chance as they are loving husbands and fathers and have families to support.

Since the DPP was hit with allegations, it raced to lead the [passing of new laws](#). Passed in a special legislative session, the new laws broadly define sexual harassment, including using discriminatory or insulting language based on gender. Punishment of others for not accepting one's advances is also considered sexual harassment. The new laws mandate that all employers and schools establish official channels for reporting sexual harassment. Employers and schools are also required to investigate and report their findings to authorities. The new laws have also extended the penalty for sexual harassment and raised the fine; the new laws have also lengthened the statute of limitations, allowing the victims more time to take legal action.

While these legislative changes are welcome, the burden still falls on those who are abused to report. There are still practical concerns about how the laws can be implemented. For example, even if official platforms are set up for filing complaints, how safe might employees feel to report? Do workplaces have the capacity to hire and train their employees to investigate sexual harassment complaints? What happens when sexual harassment happens outside of the workplace and school? Do the laws stop society from blaming the victims? These are questions that Taiwan needs to think about when moving forward. Laws can work only if people actively seek to create a society free of sexual harassment and assault. Such a society will not exist unless patriarchy is dismantled. Thus, a good place to start, in addition to the legislative reform, would be to stop putting women in their place and blaming victims for dressing provocatively, for not saying no, and for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Shan-Jan Sarah Liu is a Senior Lecturer in Gender and Politics at the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh. Her research broadly focuses on the cross-national comparison of gender and politics, specifically the ways contexts – women's political representation, social movements, immigration in the media, and COVID-19 – shape the gender gaps in political attitudes and behaviour. She tweets from @DrSarahLiu.

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

Taiwan Insight

<https://taiwaninsight.org/2023/08/14/after-metoo-where-does-taiwan-go/>