

Why are Taiwanese politics and society still male dominated? Interview with scholar Jhang JhuCin

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Young men complain about the pressure to provide

As Taiwan is gearing up for its presidential and legislative [elections](#) in January 2024, Global Voices talked to [Jhang JhuCin](#) (江俊欽), a scholar and former politician, about gender relations in Taiwan, both in politics and in society at large.

Jhang is an assistant professor at the Global Health Program at National Taiwan University and a long-time gender equity and [tongzhi](#)/LGBTQ+ rights activist. She also served as Secretary-General of [Green Party Taiwan](#) from 2020-2021. Her podcast show Z Green Party ([Z Podcast](#)) provides social commentary on gender, sex, sexuality, and other social issues.

The interview took place over email after a meeting in Taipei. The responses have been edited for style and brevity.

Filip Noubel (FN) Taiwan will hold presidential and legislative elections in January 2024. So far, there is not a single presidential candidate who is a woman, though current President Tsai Ing-wen is a woman. How do you explain this?

Jhang JhuCin (JJC, Chinese name:): It's indeed a pity there are not any female presidential candidates, but for better or for worse, [Terry Gou](#)'s [independent candidate, formerly with the [Kuomintang](#)] vice president pick is a female, [Lai Pei-hsia](#) (賴佩霞). There is also talk about other candidates choosing female vice presidents on their tickets, such as Taiwan's envoy to the United States, [Hsiao Bi-khim](#) (蕭美琴), as Lai Ching-te's potential running mate [for the ruling [Democratic Progressive Party](#)]. [Ko Wen-je](#) [head of the [Taiwan's People Party](#)] also said he would pick a "female, from the south, and in the corporate sector" as his VP, so when he met with Rose Tsou (蘇貞宜), former Managing Director of Yahoo APAC, for a closed-door meeting in his October trip to the US, rumor has it that she might be his VP; of course, there's also Huang Shan Shan (黃珊珊), the former Taipei Deputy Mayor who is still considered a contender to be on Ko's ticket. So, there is still hope for a female in the Presidential Office even though nothing is certain.

Having a female in the highest office is indeed symbolically crucial to gender equality and women's rights, but tangible actions matter just as much. As much as President Tsai's contribution to women's status in Taiwan, it is essential to remember that the female cabinet member of her second term [2020-2024] reached a historical low at only four percent. I'm not saying Tsai does not care about women's representation or gender equality, but to reach gender equality takes more than having a female president.

Therefore, what's more important is that the next president continues creating space for women and that they all uphold democratic values. Lessons should also be learned from female presidents

engaging in anti-democracy and anti-equality behaviors, such as former South Korean president [Park Geun-hye](#) and former Chief Executive of Hong Kong [Carrie Lam](#).

In Taiwan, patriarchal logic is still the main organizing power, so we need to push harder and do better, so there are more women in powerful positions to amend the patriarchal logic for a more equal society.

FN: Taiwan had its #MeToo moment in 2023, yet misogyny is still part of the current political discourse. In your view, what has the Taiwanese #MeToo movement achieved and perhaps missed?

JJC: #MeToo only occurs because of the accumulation of violence suffered by women, violence that's only possible because of the widespread misogyny and patriarchy in our society. #MeToo is a severe allergic reaction to the illness called misogyny, not the remedy to it. The remedy is societal attitudinal and behavioral changes, and #MeToo in Taiwan does set in motion some of such changes, but changes are slow to come and encounter inevitable pushback.

Efficient support systems for change are crucial to prevent pushbacks that exacerbate misogyny. Men who feel attacked by #MeToo may grapple with confusion and guilt, potentially leading to a defense mechanism of increased anti-women sentiment. Constructive conversations to address these concerns are essential for societal transformation, but such conversation is lacking in many parts of Taiwan. #MeToo, as an organic, spontaneous, and decentralized movement, cannot single-handedly fix society. Even in the U.S. the #MeToo movement hasn't brought comprehensive change and is even believed to have widened social divisions.

However, it's important to remember that it's not fair to expect a movement that comes out of trauma, mistreatment, and oppression of people, especially women, to effect fundamental social change. Fundamental societal change necessitates concerted efforts across various sectors: policy, education, family, business, and entertainment, among others. Blaming victims and survivors for pushback is unjust. Instead, pushbacks should remind us of the need for genuine and meaningful dialogues, especially when several current presidential candidates have a history of misogynistic remarks.

FN: Many young Taiwanese — mostly men — feel societal pressure to perform economically to get married and/or have a family, yet average salaries remain comparatively low by regional standards. Can you unpack this situation? Are there realistic solutions to this situation?

JJC: I'm baffled by this conundrum myself; why is it so hard to raise wages? As someone with only a fundamental understanding of macroeconomic principles, I don't want to suggest any solutions. Still, I appreciate the chance to share my observations.

Young men complain about the pressure to provide, and young women also complain because the national wage level has stagnated for decades while housing prices and living expenses soar, but job opportunities continue to concentrate in the greater Taipei area, the most expensive place to live. The conversation about decentralization has been going on for decades, including moving some or all central government offices to central and southern Taiwan, which may encourage businesses to move and reach a more balanced development. However, this plan seems infeasible due to inertia, resistance, low incentives, and high cost. Other solutions include expanding social housing, raising taxes and mortgage interest rates for people owning multiple houses, incrementally increasing the down payment requirement for the 3rd housing onward, and levying luxury taxes on capital gain from short-term transactions. However, they are either ineffective or not adopted. Similar problems are

seen in the attempt to address wage stagnation, and any effective policy would take years to deliver results.

On top of that, patriarchal pressure makes men, and some women, believe men have to provide for the family. Ideally, a feminist turn of intimate relationship should set people free from such beliefs and encourage them to create a relationship where both parties contribute and share responsibility. However, such an ideal would only increase pressure when the material world does not support such an egalitarian relationship—the fact that wages are low, prices are high, women make less, and childrearing sets women’s careers back. The material reality and the patriarchal shackles could lead to young men misplacing their anger toward women, especially when there is any progress on women’s rights, exacerbating the “gender war” while diverting people’s attention away from the root cause of their suffering. The government should continue working on solving the material problem, while educators of any sort should encourage more conversation and learning to prevent misplaced anger and gender war.

FN: In your view, who are the most prominent feminists who are reshaping Taiwanese society? How are they achieving this?

JJC: There are many of them in various fields: NGO workers who work tirelessly to promote equality and provide services, politicians who use their platform to push for reforms, educators who incorporate feminist thinking into their teaching, and there are countless people doing their jobs and living their lives in feminist principles. Everyone devoted to the values of equality should all share the spotlight.

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