

**Special Section**

## Gender and Political Leadership

## ◆Interview with Mari Miura

## The Gender Parity Law in Japan: The Potential to Change Women's Under-representation

The special section, “Gender and Political Leadership,” features an interview with Prof. Mari Miura of Sophia University. Prof. Miura has played an essential role in mobilizing the *Law for the Promotion of Gender Parity in Politics* (政治分野における男女共同参画推進法, the Gender Parity Law). Upon the historical passage of the Gender Parity Law on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2018, the Journal interviewed her on the political process leading to the passage of the law, the role of women's groups, and the potential of the law for the enhancement of women's political representation in Japan.

**Q** The Gender Parity Law, or the Law to Promote Co-participation of Men and Women in Politics, was legislated on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018. This is a significant change with respect to women's representation in Japan. Can you explain the key points of the law?

**A** The law stipulates as a basic principle that political parties, while their freedom of political activities are secured, should aim at parity in the number of male and female candidates in national and local elections (衆議院、参議院及び地方議会の選挙において、政党等の政治活動の自由を確保しつつ、男女の候補者の数ができる限り均等となることを目指して行われるものとする)。Under this basic principle, the law places an obligation on political parties to endeavor to make voluntary measures such as the establishment

of numerical targets. That is, the Gender Parity Law encourages political parties to implement quotas in order to achieve the goal of gender parity.

The fact that gender parity in candidate nomination is stipulated as a basic principle in the law is significant. Even though the law is not compulsory and does not bind political parties, I believe that the enactment will have an impact and can change people's expectations.

In addition, the Gender Parity Law obligates the central and local governments to implement policy to achieve gender equality in politics. We can expect that the Cabinet Ministry and the Ministry of General Affairs conduct research to reveal various hurdles for women to run for office and promote institutional changes regarding formal and informal rules of assemblies and

elections.

**Q** The law was prepared by the all-partisan parliamentary group of women's political participation and empowerment (政治分野における女性の参画と活躍を推進する議員連盟). You are the academic advisor of the working team of the parliamentary group and became involved in the law-making process. Why didn't the parliamentary group aim to introduce a compulsory quota law? Wouldn't it be better to legalize quotas?

**A** The parliamentary group was indeed originally aiming at legislating a quota law. However, they think that a legal quota is unconstitutional, so they decided to make a non-compulsory bill. Is it really unconstitutional? I don't think so. But, this is the advice they received at that time. Laws related to the status of DMs (Diet Members) and electoral systems are usually proposed as private member's bills, drafted and proposed by DM, as opposed to government bills. Thus, a quota law needs to be proposed as a private member's bill. For private member's bills, the Legislative Bureau (LB) of the House of Representatives (HoR) or the House of Councilors (HoC) provides legal assistance. The LB participated in all the working-team meetings and checked the constitutionality and any contradictions with other laws and regulations. It thought that quotas were unconstitutional because they violate the freedom of association. That is, political parties have the freedom to recruit and nominate their own candidates. The

constitution also stipulates that people should not be discriminated against based on sex. Thus, the LB considers that legal quotas infringe upon men's freedom to run for office and this discriminates against men.

This is not just its own view. It has been the mainstream view of Japanese constitutional law scholars. The LB analyzed academic research by constitutional scholars and did not find any publications that strongly support the constitutionality of legal quotas. In spring 2015, I asked around in academia to find a constitutional law scholar who could back me, but I was not able to find one at the time. The quota issue was not yet a hot topic, and constitutional law scholars did not pay much attention to it.

**Q** How about amending the constitution to introduce quotas? Many countries have done that.

**A** The Japanese postwar constitution has not been amended even once and its amendment is a divisive issue in the Japanese party system. In fact, it is extremely difficult to amend. It is not as necessary to amend it compared to much longer constitutions, partly because it is very short, and the electoral system and many of the governmental structures are determined by laws and not by the constitution. Moreover, all the pro-amendment political forces so far are conservatives. They aim to amend it to limit civil liberties. So, the progressive camp has been put in a defensive position.

When we were discussing the possibility of a quota law at the parliamentary group, the Abe administration tried to forcefully enact the security bills, which many constitutional law scholars and citizens consider unconstitutional. At the constitutional committee of the HoR, a public hearing inviting three constitutional law scholars was conducted in June 2015, and Masahiro Nakagawa, the president of the parliamentary group, asked them about the constitutionality of the security bills. Much to the surprise of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), all the testimony, including that of the scholar the LDP had appointed, proclaimed the security bills unconstitutional. This became a turning point of civic activism against the security bills and the Abe administration. Since Mr. Nakagawa was the one who asked this critical question at the public hearing, there was no way that the parliamentary group would draft a bill, which could be unconstitutional.

I realized that it was too early to discuss legal quotas in Japan and I needed to have allies among constitutional law scholars. Now, Yasue Nukazuka, a constitutional law scholar who studies French parity law, argues that the partial introduction of compulsory quotas is not unconstitutional as long as, for instance, only proportional representation (PR) uses quotas and the single-seat districts (SSDs) do not (the electoral system of the HoR combines PR and SSDs).

Let me go back to the situation in May-June 2015. The parliamentary group gave up

on the idea of drafting the legal quota and instead aimed to introduce a principle law without any bidding measures. I thought that if the legal quota was impossible, the principle of “gender parity” should be stipulated and thus proposed in that way. Japanese government documents often used the term “women’s quota” (女性枠), but I thought quotas should be introduced for both men and women. I explained the spread of gender parity around the world, and all the members of the working team of the parliamentary group liked the idea.

**Q** I see. That is why gender parity was stipulated in the law. But, I have heard that the wording of the law was controversial. The final version says “equality in the number” or “*kintō*” (均等). Why is the word so controversial?

**A** The problem is how to translate the word “parity.” I proposed the principle of gender proportionality (性別比例原則). The population is composed of 50% women and 50% men. Well, actually, there are more women than men, but roughly half and half. Representation should be proportional to the gender balance in a society. That is gender proportionality. I did not use the terms “men” or “women,” but “gender” (性別), meaning that sexual minorities should not be left out. It might not be realistic yet, but eventually, a quota should be considered for anyone who transcends the gender identity of men or women. Proportionality comes from the terminology used in Taiwan. Quotas are usually translated

into “*wariate*” (割当) or “*waku*” (枠) in Japanese, but “proportionality” has more flexibility, allowing 40%-60% of representation as well.

The working team decided to use the term “the principle of gender proportionality” (性別比例原則) in the Public Offices Election Law which we also discussed amending. For the principle law, the legislative bureau of the HoR drafted the actual wording and used the “same number” of men and women (男女同数). Parity was then translated into exactly the same number. Some members of the working team hesitated to use such strong wording, but they accepted the wording because the law stipulated that political parties are obligated to “aim at” (目指す) this. The principle of gender parity is a normative goal so parties should be able to at least “aim at” this goal.

This was in August 2015. The members of the working team then had to negotiate within each party and obtain approval. At the time, none of them thought that the principle law would be controversial because it was not compulsory and parties would be able to just “aim at” parity.

There was no supplementary session of the Diet in the fall of 2015. The Abe government forcefully enacted the security bills in September, a day before the end of the ordinary session. Prime Minister Abe did not want to have another session in the fall, which would open up opportunities for opposition parties to continue to criticize the

government’s undemocratic attitude. DMs are not around when the sessions are off. So the discussions within each party did not move forward much. But we did not think that the principle law would be a problem, and the working team shifted its focal point to the Public Offices Election Law and the Political Parties Subsidies Law, which I will talk about later.

The ordinary session began in January 2016. Opposition parties approved the content of the Gender Parity Law, but it was not easy to push it on the formal agenda within the LDP. Ms. Noriko Miyagawa, a member of the working team, was a key actor in the LDP and talked to as many of her colleagues as possible to try to convince them. Eventually, in April, the LDP decided to hold a joint section (*bukai*) meeting of women’s empowerment and electoral systems. I was invited as a keynote speaker and explained the basic information of quotas and worldwide trends. Interestingly, some participants were very positive, even about legal quotas. However, some were strongly opposed. Some were positive to parity, but not quotas.

Ms. Miyagawa thought that the idea of parity would be more acceptable within the LDP. My explanation was that quotas are a “means” to achieve gender equality, but parity, or equal participation of men and women in decision-making, is a democratic “principle.” It is difficult to refute the equal participation of men and women when the ratio of men to women is roughly equal in a

society. As was the case in France, conservative camps are more likely to accept the differences between men and women. They understand that women's perspectives need to be reflected in decision-making because women differ from men. Moreover, some people do not like quotas simply because they don't know much about them. It is an endless process to demystify the concept and convince people of the merits. Ms. Miyagawa thus explained to her colleagues that the principle law is not a quota law, but a parity law.

The decision-making process within the LDP is bottom up and consensus-oriented (although there has been a significant change under Prime Minister Abe). If opposition voices are loud, they postpone decisions. It is unclear how many are actually positive or negative toward the bill, but the important thing is the atmosphere of the section meetings. Anyone can participate in such meetings. That is, if there is someone who is strongly opposed, that person can participate in a section meeting and obstruct law making.

In late May 2016, the LDP held the second joint section meeting, in which I also participated as an observer. Some participants supported the bill, but quite a number of them expressed their concerns. One of the senior DMs who is close to Prime Minister Abe said that "equal number" is too strong and instead proposed the term "balance" (*kinkō*). The section meeting then postponed the decision. The LDP proposed replacing "the same number" with "balance"

to the opposition parties but the opposition parties did not accept such a compromise.

**Q** Why didn't opposition parties refuse the use of the term "balance"? It sounds much weaker than "the same number," although in English "gender balance" does not sound that bad, either.

**A** In order to understand the opposition parties' reaction, I need to explain the history of the labor law. In the Japanese labor market, the gap between regular and non-regular workers is enormous. Most part-time workers receive low wages and benefits and contract terms are short. In order to ameliorate the situation, the Part-time Workers Law was enacted in the 1990s. Feminists wanted to introduce the principle of "equal treatment" (*kintō taigū*), but the government only accepted the term "balanced treatment" (*kinkō taigū*), which allowed for "discrimination based on rational grounds." So, when opposition parties, especially female DMs, heard the term "balance" (*kinkō*), they recalled the history of the labor law and reacted against the wording. In fact, "balance" sounds as if 30% is enough. The women's ratio at the HoR was less than 10% at the time. It does not come as a surprise if conservative politicians think that 30% is enough.

**Q** The final wording used is "equality" (*kintō*) in the number of men and women. Does this sound appropriate in Japanese?

**A** There is another term in Japanese meaning “equality,” that is, “*byōdō*.” The “*byōdō*” of men and women is stipulated in the Constitution and this is the term that the women’s movement prefers to use. However, the LDP has rejected the term. When the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in 1985, women’s organizations demanded *byōdō* law. But, the government used the term *kintō*. So, *kintō* already means something slightly less than *byōdō*. Nonetheless, in practical terms, there is not much difference between *byōdō* and *kintō*. It is more of a symbolic difference. So, it is not wrong to translate *kintō* as “equality.”

It was Kōmeitō’s initiative to forge a consensus between the ruling coalition and opposition parties. Ms. Michiyo Takagi proposed the term *kintō*, and eventually opposition parties accepted it. In fact, a women’s organization which lobbied for the introduction of quotas, the Association to Promote Gender Quotas, or Q no kai, is headed by Ryoko Akamatsu, a former Minister of Education. When the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted, she was the director of the Ministry of Labor in charge of the legislation. So, the use of the term *kintō* was not controversial within Q no kai. Moreover, the parliamentary group phrased it “equality in the number” (*kazu no kintō*) instead of just “equality,” which implies the same number. At the very least, opposition parties were able to interpret it that way.

**Q** Once all the parties had agreed on the term *kintō*, it should not have been too difficult to pass it, right?

**A** Yes, but the agreement arrived much later. In May-June 2016, the ruling parties and the opposition were confrontational as the election of the HoC was scheduled in July. They were incentivized not to make an easy compromise but to stick to their guns so that they could appeal to their supporting base. In February, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which was frustrated by the slow pace of the LDP, officially approved that it would propose the Gender Parity Law in a Diet session. This act signaled to the LDP that the DPJ might even propose it alone without the LDP. Since Prime Minister Abe had advocated the empowerment of women, the LDP did not want to give the impression to voters that his intention was not sincere. The DPJ’s decision pushed the LDP to hold section meetings that I talked about earlier. Then, as I said, the LDP proposed the term “balance” (*kinkō*) and opposition parties rejected it.

At the time, there was not much time left before the end of the session. The opposition parties wanted to claim that they submitted the bill to the Diet, while the ruling parties could not. So they proposed the original bill using the term “equal number” to the Diet. The ruling parties did not hide their fury, condemning the opposition that they had proposed the bill as if it was their own, although all the parties had prepared for it, including the ruling parties. Since the

election was approaching in a month, both sides were blaming each other.

**Q** So when and why did all the parties agree?

**A** It took a few months for everything to calm down. In the fall of 2016, Ms. Noriko Miyagawa and Ms. Seiko Noda worked hard to get approval from the LDP on the term *kintō*. During Prime Minister's "Question Time" in the Diet, Renhō, the then president of the Democratic Party, asked Prime Minister Abe about the Gender Parity Law, which I think hastened the LDP's decision. At the very end of the supplementary session in December, the LDP and Kōmeitō proposed their own law.

Now, two propositions were submitted to the Diet; one by the opposition using the term "the same number," and the other by the ruling parties using the term "equality" (*kintō*). Moreover, the ruling parties replaced the phrase that parties "are obligated to aim at" (目指さなければならない) with "should aim at" (目指すものとする).

The opposition parties prioritized the passage of the law, so they did not oppose the law drafted by the ruling parties. Eventually, the parliamentary group agreed that the chairperson of the Committee of Cabinet Affairs propose the bill. Customarily, when chairpersons of Diet committees propose bills, the deliberation process becomes simpler and the committee passes them on the same day that the bills are introduced.

**Q** But the bill was not voted on in 2017. Why?

**A** The ordinary session starts from January and lasts for 150 days if there is no extension. The Diet first deliberates the budget bill, which is usually passed by mid-March. Private member's bills are deliberated customarily only after all the government's bills are passed. If there is a controversial bill in a relevant committee, there is less likely to be time left for private member's bills. In 2017 this was not the case, but the Prime Minister's office avoided parliamentary deliberations because Prime Minister Abe was embroiled in a scandal involving a school land deal. The LDP did not hold sessions unless necessary. So, even though all the parties agreed on the Gender Parity Law and the chairperson of the Committee Cabinet promised to propose the law, he was not able to do so because the session was not held.

**Q** So, why was the bill passed in 2018?

**A** The parliamentary group tried to modify the custom that the Diet deliberates private member's bills only after all the government's bills are deliberated, arguing that the Gender Parity Law is exceptional, as it is directly related to Diet members. Mr. Nakagawa joined the Cabinet Committee in order to directly negotiate the scheduling and indeed he succeeded in moving the deliberation date ahead of the government's bills. The chairperson of the

Cabinet Committee proposed the bill and received unanimous support on April 11<sup>th</sup>. The plenary session of the HoR voted the next day. Then, at the HoC, the Cabinet Committee passed it on May 15<sup>th</sup> and so did the plenary session on May 16<sup>th</sup>.

Partly because all the parties had already agreed on the content and partly because the LDP needed to claim the credit for good law making amid numerous scandals, the law was enacted in May 2018.

Interestingly, at the Cabinet Committee of the HoR, Kimie Hatano (Japan Communist Party) was allowed to make a statement before the vote and stated that all the parties confirmed that “equality in the number” legally means the same thing as “the same number.” Her statement was officially recorded in the Diet minutes. Women in civil society can use it to demand 50:50 representation.

**Q** What was the role of women’s organizations?

**A** They are the most important factor in raising awareness in society. I mentioned earlier the Association to Promote Gender Quotas, which is simply called Q no kai (Association Q). It was created in 2013 with about 60 women’s organizations. Executive organizations include WIN WIN (Women in New World-International Network), AFER (Alliance of Feminist Representatives), BPW (National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs

in Japan), the Japanese Association of International Women’s Rights, etc. Q no kai has held numerous meetings at the Diet members’ building to invite and lobby interested parliamentarians. In 2014, during such a meeting, Mr. Masahiro Nakagawa proposed setting up a parliamentary group, and it was in 2015 that the parliamentary group was in fact created, with Ms. Seiko Noda as general secretary and Ms. Kuniko Kouda as executive director. So, it can be said that the parliamentary group was born from Q no kai.

Q no kai’s tactics basically concentrate on lobbying. Core members frequently visit parliamentarians’ offices and hand in their demand of legislating the Gender Parity Law. Some of the members are former parliamentarians, which gives it an advantage in that they know who to talk to, and when. Their frequent contact with DMs was definitely one of the factors of the legislation. On the other hand, advocacy and outreach to young women are the challenges that they face. They do have a Facebook page, but not a homepage nor a twitter account. Since it is a federation of the existing women’s organizations and an individual member cannot join, it is mostly run by senior feminists who are close to Ms. Ryoko Akamatsu.

**Q** Most women’s organizations in Japan seem to be facing big challenges.

**A** That’s right. Many of the women’s organizations suffer from a lack of

generational turnover and staff members. In order to compensate for their frugal resources, they often hold meetings at the Diet members' building to maximize their influence and draw attention from the mass media.

With respect to the quota movement, there has always been quite a lot of media attention. The publication of my edited volume, *Gender Quotas* (in Japanese; Akashi Shoten, 2014), was timely. It was the first academic book on the subject in Japanese and thus it contributed to the diffusion of the quota idea in Japanese society. Most journalists who interviewed me either read the book or my web essay that summarized the book. So, I believe that I was able to demystify quotas among journalists.

One of the reasons that the media keeps an eye on the issue is that the number of female journalists has increased recently. They also face the glass ceiling and difficulty in striking a work-life balance. They are personally keen on the issue of women's underrepresentation in politics.

In order to keep the media's attention, public events that they can report on need to be constantly held. *Q no kai* holds meetings at the Diet members' building on international women's day (March 8), Women's suffrage day (April 10), and usually the beginning and the end of each parliamentary session. I have also organized several events. The biggest one was to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's suffrage in Japan in 2016, with about 400

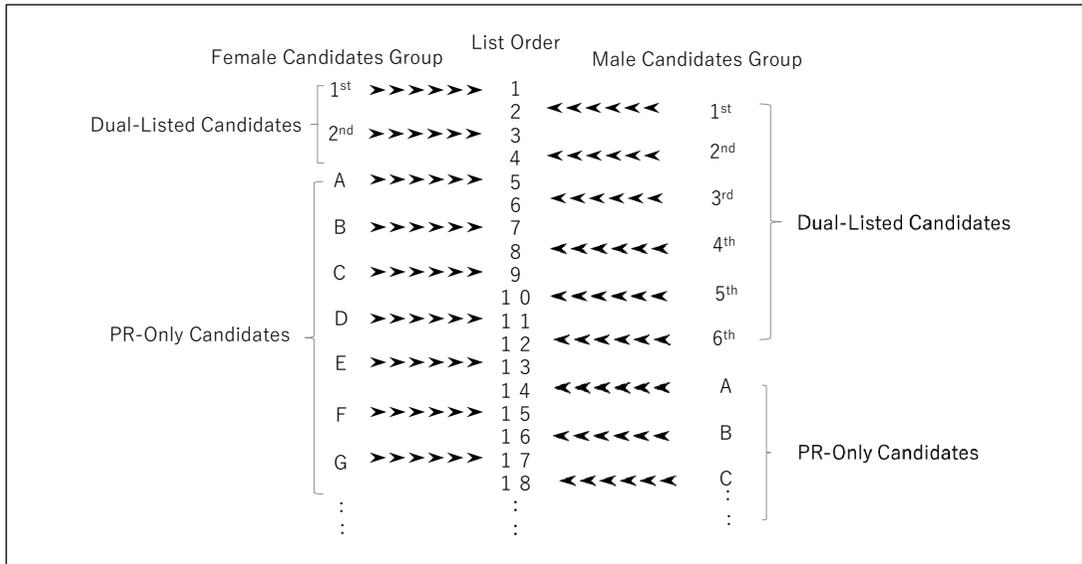
participants. The Institute of Gender Studies at Ochanomizu University has also organized several international symposia. So, at least every two months, there have been some public events related to quotas or women's underrepresentation, which I think have contributed to raising social awareness.

**Q** Could you also explain the amendments of the Political Parties Subsidies Law and Public Offices Election Law?

**A** The parliamentary group has also discussed these amendments. Japanese citizens, not voters, annually pay 250 yen for political party subsidies, which amounts to 32 billion yen. The total amount is distributed to parties with more than 5 parliamentarians and 2% of votes in proportional representation, depending on the share of elected officials at both the Upper and Lower Houses and of votes at the most recent elections. The Japan Communist Party (JCP) refuses to receive state subsidies, and its share is also distributed to other parties. My proposal was that half of the subsidies are distributed according to each party's share of male and female Diet members. The parliamentary group liked the idea, but the JCP did not agree to amend the law, as it only demanded its abolition. The parliamentary group gave up on pursuing the amendment in order to maintain the all-partisan nature of their activities.

The amendment of the Public Offices Election Law is a little complicated. The

**Figure 1. A Zipper System for Dual-listed and PR Candidates.**



lower house has 475 seats (reduced to 465 in 2017), including 180 seats under proportional representation (PR). The rest are the first-past-the-post system (FPTP) under single-seat districts (SSDs). In order to enforce the principle of gender parity, the most effective way is that a party alternates male and female candidates in its PR list. However, the dual candidacy system makes it difficult to make such a list.

Seventy to eighty percent of candidates run in both SSDs and PR blocs at the same time. Parties usually rank those “dual listed” candidates in the same position on the PR party list, often at the first or second rank. Those who won in SSDs are removed from the PR lists, and then the person who gets elected from the same rank on the PR lists is determined by the “best loser” provision. That is, the PR seats are allocated to candidates based on their performance in

their SSDs relative to the SSD winner.

A typical case is that a party lists 25 candidates—20 are dual-listed candidates and 5 are PR-only candidates. All 20 dual-listed candidates are ranked in first place, then PR-only candidates are individually listed from 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>; among 20 dual-listed candidates, 2 or 3 are women. If this party wins the election, there is a chance that PR-only candidates could also be elected. But, if not, seats allocated to the party will be taken by the best losers of SSDs. Therefore, the presence of PR is not of much help for women to be elected.

The simplest way to reform the Public Offices Election Law is to abolish the dual-listed candidate system. In fact, voters do not like it because it appears unfair that SSD losers come back like zombies under PR. The impediment lies in the regulation that allows

**Table 1. Four Scenarios of Gender Parity Regulation.**

	<b>Gender Order</b>	<b>Gender Ratio</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
The Results of 2014 Election	no regulation	no regulation	153	27
Scenario 1	Men, Women	no regulation	124	56
Scenario 2	Women, Men	no regulation	117	63
Scenario 3	Men, Women	50/50	106	74
Scenario 4	Women, Men	50/50	74	106

parties to rank a dual-listed candidate at the same position. If such a regulation is removed, parties are compelled to rank all their candidates and strategize the appearance and balance of their list. Moreover, quotas can be introduced here in an effective way.

Mr. Masahiro Nakagawa, the president of the parliamentary group, made it clear at the beginning of working-team meetings that he did not have the intention to amend the electoral system. I had to submit a proposal that would work under the dual-listed candidate system. I came up with the idea to alternate a male and female group of dual-listed candidates. If a party lists 16 male and 4 female dual-listed candidates, the first and third rank are the female group, and the second and fourth are the male group. Among each group, one person will be elected according to the best loser principle. This way, gender alternation among dual-listed candidates can be achieved. However, the problem is the gender disparity of SSD candidates. In this example, alternate placement can be undertaken only up to the fourth rank. The 5<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> ranks are taken by the male group, and so this does not help

women much.

It is thus important to enforce the same number of female and male candidates in the list. In order to compensate for men's overrepresentation in SSDs, parties must list female-only PR candidates to match the number of male candidates. If 16 are male and 4 are female, this party has to list 12 PR-only women candidates. Then, the gender alternation rule should be applied all the way through. The fifth would be female PR only, the sixth a male in a dual-listed group, the seventh would again be female PR only, and so on. Figure 1 shows this concept.

PR seats are divided into 11 regional blocs and small parties often get only one seat or so. Large parties might have an odd or even number of seats. Under this system, the gender with an odd-number rank will gain more seats. Table 1 shows a simulation using the 2014 election, which elected 153 men and 27 women in PR. Scenario 1 shows the case in which men take the odd ranking and the total number of male and female listed candidates is unequal, using the actual number. This way, 56 women would be elected, which is double the actual number.

However, a huge gender gap still remains.

The best case is Scenario 4, which places women at the odd ranking and ensures an equal number of male and female candidates. So 106 women and 74 men can be elected under this system. In the 2014 general election, 18 women were elected in SSDs. Combined with 106 women, the ratio of female members would be 26.1%.

**Q** It is really very complicated. How was your idea accepted in the parliamentary group?

**A** The opposition parties liked the basic idea. Mr. Nakagawa even called it the “Miura bill.” But, there were two hurdles. First, the idea of gender grouping was not that welcome. Some preferred group candidates based on “sex and others.” This allows parties to create a third group in which they list the candidates that they give special treatment to, such as male candidates who are likely to lose in SSDs. I do not think this is a good idea. The aim of the regulation would become vague and so no one would understand why parties have to create these groups. But the DPJ members of the parliamentary group considered a third group necessary to get approval from electorally weak male members.

Moreover, the legislative bureau of the HoR does not accept the alternation of dual-listed candidates and PR-only candidates. They argued that these two groups cannot be mixed up. According to them, all the dual-

listed candidates ranked at the same position should be treated as one bloc. Only when all of them are elected, then the PR-only candidate ranked at the next position can be elected, given that seats are available. In that case, it is difficult to rapidly increase the number of female candidates. Parties consider PR as a safety net for SSD losers. It is less likely that they will place a substantial number of PR-only candidates before dual-listed ones.

The ruling parties were not able to consider the amendment of the Public Offices Election Law because they were stuck with the Gender Parity Law, as I mentioned earlier. The DPJ officially approved its amendment plan mentioned above and submitted it to the Diet in 2016.

**Q** In what other ways do you think Japan can increase women representatives?

**A** It is important to keep raising public awareness about the actual situation of the gender gap. It is only quite recent that people came to realize that women’s political representation in Japan is very low compared to that of other countries. According to IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union), Japan was ranked 158th as of January 2018. Such simple data needs to be widely known. I launched a “parity campaign” in 2017 with young feminists to reach out to young women and to close the information gap in Japanese society.

In addition, training programs for female

political leaders need to get a boost. The Gender Parity Law, as amended by the ruling parties, includes a clause that “the central and local governments are obligated to endeavor to take measures to train and utilize human resources for the promotion of gender equality in politics.” So far, “political schools” run by prominent politicians function as a gateway to politics. Systematic training, both partisan and unpartisan, needs to be offered. Ki-young Shin, associate professor of the Institute of Gender Studies, Ochanomizu University, and I visited 14 training programs for women’s political leadership in the US in 2017 and also observed a well-established training program, “Ready to Run,” organized by the Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University, in 2018. We then

created a legal entity in Japan, the Academy for Gender Parity, this spring to offer training programs mainly to young women. Two programs are already planned to be held in the first half of 2018. We hope to incorporate what we learned in the US in our curriculum. I believe that academia can make a big contribution in the field, stimulating the young generation with research-based advice, such as how to tackle stereotypes held by voters and the media, where access points exist for young women to enter politics, or indeed how politics affects our daily lives.

The accumulation of these small steps will eventually form a “political will” that leads to legal changes.

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