

**Milly Hung**

### **“Gender Equality in International Negotiation”**

Women participating in international peace negotiations were often not noticed or kept at an informal level. Significant examples include organisations like Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace and Serbia’s Women in Black. However, women’s status in international negotiations is changing all over the world. When Joe Biden was confirmed to be the next president, a female Asian-American, Katherine Tai was nominated as the next US Trade Representative. Meanwhile, in the EU and Commonwealth countries, many ministers and heads of government are women.

This is, of course, a promising trend for anyone affected by diplomatic or legal negotiations. Ursula von der Leyen, the current and first woman European Commission President, is a major figure from the EU side of the conversations over the UK’s future relationship with its neighbours. She is considered the key player in breaking the post-Brexit trade deal impasse in December 2020. This led to a successful trade deal before the deadline while the UK was deemed to have made significant concessions. Indeed, a new study from the Graduate Institute in Geneva has shown that a recurring effect of women’s involvement in international peace negotiation processes is a final effort to commence, resume, or finalise talks at moments when it seems as if progress has stagnated.

Furthermore, this research has shown that women often contribute a special consensus-building approach to politics, diplomacy and law. It suggests that when women have the opportunity to take centre stage on matters of security, justice, economics and government, they may lend a focus on concluding talks and implementing agreements. Because of women’s position in society and the economy, they will tend to stand to benefit directly from any potential peace dividends that create jobs or improve public services.

Since women serve many different roles in their communities, I would argue that they have received diversified experiences which come in handy for breaking the ice at the negotiation table. The gender effect on negotiations can be illustrated by gender-based stereotypes. Men often expect women to act like “ladies” when bargaining. Correspondingly, they will make themselves more “gentlemanly”. To men, being aggressive and vigorous in the negotiations may be considered disrespectful to women. When a female negotiator applies a certain strategy, the male negotiator may find it harder to retaliate, thus leaving himself restricted to offering a bargaining advantage to the woman’s side.

To get a better cut in negotiations, one has to utilise every possible strategy. This includes adjusting the composition of a negotiating team to incorporate more women.

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