INTRODUCTION

In spite of the fact that women make up nearly half of the entire population\(^1\) and represent 45 percent of the labor force\(^2\) in Thailand, they participate in politics less than men.\(^3\) Women are usually involved in family decision-making and have important responsibilities within the family,\(^4\) but outside the family, Thai women have not been well-represented


\(^3\)Government of Thailand, p. 290.

in the community, district, provincial, or national decision-making arenas. Although Thai women, as well as men, have had the right to vote and to run for office since 1932, when Thailand acquired its first constitution, but it was not until 1949 that a woman was finally elected to the lower house of the Parliament. Since 1949 only twenty-seven women have been elected to the lower house of the Parliament; nine of them served in the lower house during the session 1979-1983. (There are also three women in the upper house, an appointed body that consists of 225 members.) It is significant to note, therefore, that more women served in the Parliament during the 1979-1983 session than at any other time in history. While still too few to cause rejoicing among "women's rights" activists, the presence of these parliamentarians does indicate movement toward greater participation by woman in Thai politics. One aspect of this participation is the focus of this research.

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5 Nantanee Jayasut et al., p. 4.

6 Ibid., p. 3.

7 From 1949 to 1978 only eight women were appointed to serve in the upper house. In the 1979-1983 session three women hold such posts.

8 This number does not include those women appointed in 1973, a year of temporary disruption in the usual process. In 1973, 2,347 people were appointed to serve in a temporary body, the "National Assembly." Of that number, 122 (or 5.2 percent) were women. Later in the year the total was reduced to 299 of which 16 were women. The following year Thailand reverted to the former Parliament system of 269 elected members. Only three women won election that year (only 1.1 percent of the total number).