



# MONASH University

**Women and Academic Leadership  
at Public and Private Universities in Mongolia**

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## Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of women's academic leadership in Mongolia, where women remain considerably under-represented in senior leadership positions at the more prestigious, public universities, but are equally represented as leaders at the less prestigious, private universities. As such, this study aims to create knowledge *for* rather than *about* women academic leaders in the Mongolian university field.

This study is located in Mongolia—a landlocked developing country situated in East Asia, and a former Soviet-style socialist country. Although Mongolia was never an official member of the Soviet Union, it was greatly dependent on and influenced by the Soviet Union—particularly Russia—in regard to its politics and economy. Mongolia's political and economic transformation from a socialist to a market-based economy in the early 1990s brought about several major political, economic, and social reforms in the country. One of the significant consequences of these reforms was that women as a group in the past three decades have received higher levels of education than men as a group. In contrast, men were expected to move into the labour force at an earlier age in order to earn much-needed income. Despite women being better educated than men, they experience differential leadership career opportunities at public and private universities in Mongolia. Despite having greater levels of education than men, women academics remain considerably under-represented in senior leadership positions at public universities, but are equally represented in relatively senior leadership positions at private universities. The reasons behind this phenomenon are unclear, and no research has been conducted in this area.

This study aims to investigate this phenomenon, employing feminist qualitative methodology and Bourdieu's conceptual tools—field, habitus, and capital—as part of a feminist ontology and transnational feminist epistemology. Bourdieu's concept of field denotes the Mongolian university sector. Notions of habitus are employed to examine the choices made as part of the life trajectories of the women academic leaders in this study. Notions of capital are utilised to examine the economic, cultural, social, political and symbolic capital which are legitimised in the Mongolian university field. This study posits a new contribution to Bourdieuan notions of capital—which draws on Mongolian traditions, philosophies, and culture—is crucial to understanding the development of women's academic leadership habitus in the Mongolian university field.

This study adopts a feminist qualitative comparative case approach, utilising qualitative interviews and secondary data documents to examine the development of the women's academic leadership habitus and its realisation in the Mongolian university field. By investigating the women leaders' habitus—comparing, contrasting, and connecting their interviews at different levels—this study reveals the various socialist, neoliberal, and traditional factors that construct the logics of gender and academic leadership at play. As a result, this study makes contributions to feminist research and theorising of women and academic leadership in the context of a postsocialist East Asian country—an area that remains considerably under-explored.

*Keywords:* Academic leadership, Bourdieu, feminist qualitative study, Mongolia, women's leadership, university sector.