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Gender Equality in Japan: Internal Policy Processes and Impact and Foreign Implications under Prime
Minister Abe's Womenomics

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This paper examines Japan's efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment, both at home and abroad, focusing on the implications of recently accelerated efforts since December 2012 under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Abe has fostered gender equality and empowerment through policy changes, including enhanced labor participation by women in Japan and women-focused development through Official Development Assistance (ODA). These initiatives are based on a foundation of almost thirty years of experiences and efforts toward gender equality in both domestic and foreign policies. What is the motivation for Abe to further strengthen Japan's effort towards gender equality and empowerment both at home and abroad? What are the implications of the simultaneous reinforcement of the domestic and international efforts?

This paper proposes and argues that both domestic and international efforts are fundamentally anchored by Prime Minister Abe's overall design of Japan as a strong nation both domestically and internationally through strengthening Japan's national power and enhancing its internationally influential position. Such an idea was expressed in Abe's Liberal Democratic Party campaign that "We will restore Japan" in the lead up to the 2012 December Lower House election and the 2013 Upper House election.

Thus, the domestic effort is strongly motivated by the practical reason of revitalizing the Japanese economy by incorporating women into the labor force and by addressing the declining birth rates. Japan's domestic effort is also designed to match international standards and to acquire international recognition. The international effort is part of the Prime Minister's goals to enhance Japan's role in the world, particularly with the notion of proactively contributing to a global peace that encompasses wider elements of health, economic and social welfare as well as security. Such international efforts of Japan, albeit with pragmatic calculations, have been supported by the long accumulated intellectual and practical achievements of Japan's foreign aid with a focus on human security and gender equality and women's empowerment.

While it is pointed out that the issue of comfort women and Japan's low international ranking in gender equality pushed Japan's domestic and international effort in order to deflect Japan's shame, the reality is rather that Japan has utilized lessons from both challenges proactively as normative foundations of Japan's domestic and international efforts. The former has provided the foundation for Japan's awareness of the need for women's protection from violence under armed conflicts and the latter has created a momentum to invigorate Japan's domestic and international efforts through recognizing the universal importance of gender equality with progressive implication for men.

Prime Minister Abe's Leadership both at home and abroad

Prime Minister Abe has taken the leadership to promote the status of women at home and abroad (Kameda 2015). In 2013, the government of Japan decided to cultivate the power of women as the greatest potential for the growth of the Japanese economy and to strengthen assistance to developing countries based on the principle that "a society in which women shine" will invigorate the world (MOFA 2013). The Abe cabinet in 2014 initiated a program calling for 30% of all leading positions in society to go to women and to rapidly expand the number of day-care centers by 400,000 by 2017 (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2014 a). In 2015, there

was a commitment by Abe to raise the number of men who take childcare leave to 13% since it was only 2.30 in 2014 and 2.65 in 2015 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2016) and to reduce the lengthy work hours required of the predominantly male work force, presumably to further increase men's role in the family (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2016 a).

Also in 2014, Prime Minister Abe initiated the World Assembly for Women to promote both domestic and international social awareness of gender equality and women's empowerment. It was organized by the Gender Mainstreaming Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs newly established in 2014. At the first Assembly held in 2014, attended by high profile women from Japan and abroad, Abe had a universal message that creating a society in which women shine "is one of my highest priority issues" (Testu 2016). One hundred male leaders of corporate Japan signed on to the "women shine" concept in a highly publicized media event. At these events, Abe stressed his concerns about Japan's record low birthrate in 2014 (Herd 2016), as well as a culture that encourages long working hours for men, and the aging society (Tetsu 2016). Prime Minister Abe also addressed late developing states' agendas of women's basic rights in health and education and protection from violence under armed conflicts (Abe 2014 b).

To reinforce efforts for women, Tokyo decided to open a liaison office for UN Women in April 2015 in Tokyo dedicated to women's empowerment in Japan and globally. It is the first such liaison office in Asia.¹ The collaboration between UN Women and Tokyo, enhanced particularly since Abe's September 2013 General Assembly Speech that Japan respects UN Women's activities, is an illustration of Japan seeking to position itself as one of the leading contributors to these activities and a close partner with relevant international organizations (Abe 2013 a). UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka's communications with Japanese leaders during her visit to Tokyo to attend WAW! Tokyo 2014 strengthened the relationship between Japan and UN Women, thus leading to the establishment of the Asia liaison office in Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo (Kameda 2015).

In 2013, shortly after his assumption of power, Prime Minister Abe pledged to provide more than three billion USD in development assistance over three years between 2013 and 2015 for women's empowerment and health care (Abe 2013 a). Accordingly, Japan's contribution to UN Women in 2015, almost nineteen million USD, was twice the amount of 2014 with focus on health, peace, and security concerns related to gender (UN Women 2015). In 2013, Prime Minister Abe set an agenda to address the medical and health needs of vulnerable people, particularly women, through the promotion of universal health coverage as part of the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals (Abe 2013 b). The 2015 revised ODA charter strengthened and widened the commitment for women's rights and empowerment in the issues of poverty reduction, human security, peacebuilding, and development (MOFA 2015 a).

Why Gender Empowerment in Japan?

¹ UN Women has liaison offices in Addis Ababa to the African Union, Brussels to the European Union, in Copenhagen to Nordic Countries as well as the Geneva and Tokyo liaison offices.

i . Womenomics: pragmatic motivation from the supply side

Abe's policy to revitalize women's contribution as workforce is underpinned by the pragmatic motivation that Japan needs to boost its economy by increasing labor force participation and tax revenue. Such policy has come to be widely known and called as Womenomics, mainly as a result of the series of policy analyses and reports mainly by Kathy Matsui at the Goldman Sachs Group, suggesting Japan's strategy for economic growth (Matsui. et al. 2005, 2010, and 2014). Japan faces a declining birthrate, a labor shortage in the workforce, and an aging society. The conservatives in the Diet were convinced that the demographic combination of the declining birth rate and the rapid growth of the aged population would result in a serious labor shortage and a chronic deficit in the social security fund, which was already suffering. However, unlike in many other advanced nations such as the United Kingdom and France, the Japanese government was still quite strict in maintaining a low number of foreign workers. Foreign workers have never been considered as an ideal solution to the labor shortage in Japan due to Japanese people's preference for de facto homogeneity.² One feasible solution, therefore, would be to further the incorporation of women into the labor market. Abe introduced a set of economic reforms, later dubbed Abenomics by the media, when he was elected as prime minister in December 2012. Abenomics represents a set of fiscal, monetary, and structural reform policies to revitalize the Japanese economy. In realizing Abenomics, the increase of birthrate and the increase of women as workforce are of vital importance. In the opening remarks of the UN Women's Liaison Office in Bunkyo Ward in August 2015, Abe stated that Abenomics is "Womenomics" (Tetsu, 2016). Abe's "Womenomics" saw three merits in the promotion of the female workforce: the expansion of the labor force in a society facing an aging society and declining birth rates; a well-educated and competitive work force in the global market; and the creation of a consumer-centered market through women's roles at the supply side as well as at the demand side of everyday life commodities (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2014 b). A focus on both an increase in the birthrate and an increase in the percentage of women in the workforce poses a huge demand on women. The contradiction was partially addressed through gender equality policy efforts to improve working conditions and increase the number of child-care centers.

ii. Gender Equality Law and other previous policies.

Japan has sought to address concerns about declining birth rates, shortage in workforce, and social insurance revenue, particularly since the 1990s, only with limited results. Under these circumstances, the Gender Equality Law was legislated in 1999. Conservatives' concerns about the declining birth rate, which reached 1.57 in 1989, 1.42 in 1995, 1.29 in the year 2004, and the record low of 1.26 in 2005, functioned as a major political factor to promote gender equality policies. For conservatives, the declining birth rate means declining national power and international competitiveness and particularly the necessity for foreign migration. At the time of the gender equality law's passage in 1999 the birth rate was 1.34 births per woman. The rate increased from 1.26 in 2005 to

² Japan's system of Technical Intern Training Program was officially designed as Japan's assistance to late developing states but it has become actually a source of foreign labor sources in the name of training in labor shortage areas such as agriculture, fishery, and dairy farming (Uebayashi 2014).

1.32 in 2006 and 1.32~1.33 in 2007. But these increases were due to births of the third-generation baby boomers in Japan, thus the trend of decline was expected to continue in the long run. The decline is due to the growing number of unmarried women, women who marry at an older age, and women who choose not to bear children. Of those who choose to have children, many have only one child although studies show that the perceived ideal number of children to have is two or more.³ The gap between the ideal and the reality is due to factors such as the high financial costs (child care, schooling etc.), as well as the perceived physical and mental burden of raising children (Cabinet Office, 2016). For those seeking gender equality in the workplace, having children was seen as an obstacle to full labor force participation.

Basic Laws, such as the Gender Equality Law in Japan, are intended to address fundamental issues of the state system and are presumed to take priority in relation to other laws in the same area. They are intended also to affect law making at the national and local levels (Gelb 2015). Therefore, the Gender Equality Law's principle mattered. While some viewed the law as vague, and primarily rhetorical, others saw it as leverage for changing future progressive policy. An initial "Vision" statement proposed by women's groups and their allies during the drafting process was very progressive in that it sought to correct gender bias embedded in social systems in Japanese society rather than to improve the status of women case by case (Osawa 2000: 7). This stance led to the idea of joint participation which could go beyond gender equality to a gender-free society in which policies and systems are eventually designed to minimize gender relevance (Council on Gender Equality 1996).⁴ Ironically, the progressive expression of joint participation was favored by the Japanese government which shied away from language of male/female equality. The new law which went into effect in June 1999 was titled *Danjo Kyōdō Sankaku Shakai Kihon-hō*, which in English is translated as the Basic Act for Gender-Equal Society. *Kyōdō Sankaku*, whose literal meaning in English is 'joint participation or co-participation of men and women in society,' not 'gender equality,' does not question the actual state and quality of 'co-participation' related to gender justice and fairness (Takeda 2015). As far as the Japanese title goes, *danjo kyōdō sankaku* (co-participation of men and women) rather than *danjo byōdō* (gender equality) could emphasize the equality of opportunity rather than that of outcome, thus pacifying the concerns of conservative politicians (Osawa 2000: 6). Still, the "Vision" statement included *danjo byōdō* in the content by defining 'joint participation' as part of a process toward attainment of 'genuine equality of men and women' (Osawa 2000: 7). The conservative concern over the framing, however, anticipated later backlash regarding the law and its implementation, as discussed below.

The law did have at least two major results. The first was administrative reorganization in 2001, establishing a Cabinet level office related to gender and the Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau headed by the Chief Cabinet Secretary, and in 2003 a Minister for Gender Equality under the Koizumi administration. The Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau equality has the goal of mainstreaming gender policy by monitoring,

³ It was 2.42 in the survey by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in 2010 (Cabinet Office 2016).

⁴ Several contents of the Vision identify the problem of gender bias in social institutions and in customs (as opposed to legal and political institutions) to be addressed and seek the policy goal of individual-based thinking, instead of household-based thinking in designing social systems, thus making concrete policy proposals such as an amendment to the Civil Code to give a married couple an option to use the same family name or not and correcting gender inequalities in spouse-related taxation.

coordinating, and providing opinions, among other functions (Osawa 2000; Gelb 2015: 213). A second was an effort to have government ministries set and meet goals for increased participation by women. One example was the proportion of women in governmental positions equivalent to or higher than the director level at Headquarters; it should be approximately 5 % by the end of fiscal year 2015 (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2015 a). Another was to increase women's roles in advisory committees and councils in ministries; as an example of success, as of 2015 the number rose to 36% from fewer than 20% in 1999 (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2016 b).

However, since its creation, the Bureau has been a relatively weak policy advocate on behalf of women by most accounts. The law was designed to be implemented by prefectural (provincial) and local governments who were to develop their own basic plans for gender equality. Administrative changes at the local level, and lack of follow up leadership at the national level, have caused these efforts to stall.

Initially, the Basic Law was off to a good start in terms of local level efforts to take positive measures to bring the gender equal society to fruition. As of April 2008, all prefectures and close to a thousand municipalities considered gender policy – building on an infrastructure of local women's centers (which exist in most Japanese local and neighborhood governments), female assembly members and women's and feminist groups. Some local governments requested record keeping and proof by private companies that they were complying with the new regulations (Hashimoto 2002). Others established new compliance systems to evaluate and mediate complaints. A number of targets were created for women on local advisory committees and in local office (Hashimoto 2002).

The result of the administrative reform of local governments in Japan since 1999, however, had a negative impact on the promotion of policies of gender equality under the Basic Law. As the number of local authorities in Japan has significantly decreased, from 3,232 in April 1999 to 1,719 in April 2011, with a corresponding fall in the number of assembly members, from more than 60,000 to just under 30,000, opportunities for women's advocacy and gender equality policy innovations similarly decreased. The administrative reform accompanied cuts in budget and personnel, thus resulting in inadequate gender equality policies particularly at the levels of towns and villages. As of 2015, while most cities have gender equality policies, only 52.6% of towns and villages do (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2015 b). The average rate of completion of policy making at the combined city, town, and village level is 70.3 %, while that solely at the town and village level is 48.7 % (Gender Equality Meeting 2014: 55). Efforts at the town and village levels, which have closer access to residents, are required for job opportunities and security for those who raise children and seek greater access to day-care services.

A backlash, which set in about two years after the Gender Equality Law was enacted, is also thought to have caused policy implementation to grind to a halt. The backlash was spurred on by hardliner conservatives and nationalistic forces who feared the destruction of the family and Japanese culture due to the implementation of gender equality policies. This is a legacy of the “good wife and mother” ideology which has permeated, albeit in a weakened form, the culture for almost 150 years since the Meiji period. It appeared as a distinctive movement in the activities of the group Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference), established in 1997, insisting that fundamental

differences between men and women be acknowledged. Advocates of gender equality were vilified as “Communists” and worse in the press (Gelb 2015: 217). Some local assemblies established statutes against the Basic Law (Nihon Josei Gakkai Jendā Kenkyū 2006). Prime Minister Abe himself is a member of Nippon Kaigi. About one-third of the Diet belong to this group and over 75 percent of Abe’s Cabinet ministers 2012-2016 are members, indicating Nippon Kaigi’s huge influence on Japanese politics (Kingston 2016).

In fact, Nippon Kaigi’s backlash against danjyo kyōdō was not directly against the promotion of women in the workforce. It was rather cultural and educational, such as resistance against the idea for separate family names for married couples and sex education at school. Womenomics is in keeping with these policy initiatives of work and employment and countermeasures to the declining birth rate based on the Basic Law since 1999. The announced numerical targets for gender equality in 2014-2015 under Womenomics, such as women occupying thirty percent of leadership positions, were actually the continuation of a similar policy proposed and initiated by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in 2003 (Economist 2014). However, the Japanese government has failed to make a significant difference. As one simple example, even as of 2015 it was reported that there were over 23,000 children on wait lists for day care (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2016 a).

Though in prior publications it has been argued that gaiatsu, or pressure to conform to standards articulated by the international community, including the UN and ILO, has been crucial in policy change, at least producing symbolic change (Gelb 2003), gaiatsu has not made significant impact on the working and child bearing conditions in Japan at the policy implementation level.

In fact, it is fair to say that Womenomics has not been working well. One year after the announcement of Womenomics, the targets for increasing women in managerial and leading positions were lowered. As for the initial proposal of 30% of societal positions going to women, these goals were lowered to 7% in the government and 15% in the private sector (Bureau of Gender Equality 2015 (b); Aoki 2015). The percentage of female leaders in various fields – defined as lawmakers, highly skilled professionals or corporate department heads and higher – remains much lower than the 30 percent target (Council for Gender Equality 2015 b), though there were a few limited gains in corporations in recent years; e.g., in 2011, 4.5 % of company division heads were female, up from one percent in 2011 (Economist 2014).

In this environment, Womenomics as Abenomics seems to have difficult cultural and practical obstacles to achieving substantial effects. It is fair to say that the poor effects are attributable rather to the general patriarchal notions widespread in Japanese society and institutional defects than to Abe’s rather hardline conservatism as shown through Nippon Kaigi.

A distinctive factor contributing to the poor performance of women’s empowerment in the work force is a widespread patriarchal notion in Japanese society of work style in the office related to the attitudes of men toward the responsibility of house chores and child upbringing, and cannot just be attributed to Nippon Kaigi’s hardline conservative thought. In 2015, the Cabinet Bureau set a target of having less than five percent of the workforce working more than sixty hours a week by 2020; this was the result of concerns over a negative trend. Whereas in 2010, 10% of employees exceeded the 60 hours mark (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2010

(b)), in 2014, 12.9 percent of male employees and 2.8 percent of female hires exceeded the sixty hours mark (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2015 (b)). Furthermore, the aim to encourage male employees to take child care leave and participate more in homemaking has been far from reaching the goal of raising the ratio of men who take the leave to thirteen percent, though it was up to 2.3 percent in the private sector in 2014 and 3.1 percent among civil servants in fiscal 2014 from the 1.72 % in 2011 in general (Aoki 2015; Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2015 (b)).

The permeating patriarchal work culture (MacNaughton 2015) is supported by the lack of confidence among women who are not sure of their abilities and thus may hinder efforts at change. This creates the lack of female role models in the workplace, creating a vicious circle. The effect of the lack of role models in what has been a high gender stratified work system, with women largely consigned to the clerical track, appears in statistics. Only 16.1% of female executives at larger companies said that they wanted promotion in contrast to 65.7% of men (Lewis and Ishikawa 2016). Long working hours and continued forced transfers supported by patriarchal systems that emphasize women's primary role as caregivers in the home based on the notion of motherhood (*bosei*) led to this hesitation.

Today the ratios of female workers in highly skilled positions are as follows: prosecutors, judges and lawyers stand at 21.4 percent, 18.7 percent, and 18.1 percent, respectively (Gender Equality Bureau 2015 c). In contrast, as of 2014- 2015, female directors comprised 3.5% in the national civil service, 9.2% of directors and 16.2% of section chiefs in private corporations (Council for Gender Equality 2016). Women in Japan hold just 3.1 % of board seats at major companies, in contrast to 19.2% in the United States and 20.8% in Canada (Holodny 2016). It should also be noted that the numbers of women increase at the lower levels of the corporate chain – at the assistant manager level they comprise 17% of the positions, while those the department manager rank remained just 6.2% as of 2015 (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2016 c).

Hiring and, particularly, promotion in areas not involving gender-neutral examinations are based on seniority and overtime work, so those who are not full participants in that system are held back. Although Japan has passed parental leave policies and arguably has more available public child care than the United States (though far from the number that are sought after, given extensive waiting lists for access), these policies have not altered the larger dire economic picture for female labor force participation as long as women are subject to major work place discrimination.

An additional million women have entered the labor force since Abenomics was announced in 2014. However, they tend to be placed in part time, low-paying jobs with few benefits such as pensions and job guarantees. The percent of female workers relegated to part-time jobs continues to rise (for men as well, but in lower proportions). It was 22.2% in 2012 and 19.8% in 2007 for men in the labor force while it was 54.4% in 2012 and 51.1% in 2007 for women (Assmann 2014)). Many women continue to hold low-level jobs with the attendant problems noted; the labor market continues to be highly stratified by gender.

The so-called “M” shaped curve, partially influenced by cultural norms, continues to exist, though the “M” has moderated a bit in recent years. The “M” shaped curve refers to the entrance of often well education women

into the labor force after graduation from school, followed by a steep drop after marriage and /or children when cultural norms reinforcing the “good wife and mother” tradition are invoked. 70% of women stop working for a decade or more, in contrast to just 30% in the United States (Economist 2014). If women wish to return to the labor force when their children are older, they have already surrendered their places in the hierarchical, seniority based economy and little is left for them other than the part time positions which lack benefits, decent salaries and security mentioned above. Women comprised 77% of Japan’s part time and temporary work force as of 2012 (Economist 2014). Although the “M” shaped curve has been modified somewhat, in the main women’s labor force opportunities remain highly constrained.

Institutional drawbacks under Womenomics, on top of patriarchal notions, can be addressed. In fact, many women do aspire to pursue careers and get promoted. Of particular note is that the occupations based on gender-neutral examinations show higher positions held by female workers than in government and in the private sector. This testifies to two things: (1) women’s willingness to seek highly skilled jobs and (2) social and institutional obstructions to women’s career pursuits and promotion. As one example of such obstructions, in urban areas, in particular, wait lists for day care access may be long and it may be difficult to gain entry to these public sector institutions. One goal of the new 2015 Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality is to decrease the number of children waiting on day care lists (as of 2015 averaging 23,000) to zero by 2017. Abe has promised subsidies and tax incentives for complying institutions.

In addition to the factors of patriarchal notions and institutional defects discussed above, experts attribute the trends related to an ineffective gender equality policy to spousal tax deductions that discourage many married women from earning more. The tax rules keep women’s earning low by treating men as the “head of the household” and permitting women to earn 1.3 million yen without paying premiums and still being eligible for the national pension. As of March 2017, efforts for tax policy change at the Diet have stumbled.

The situation remains similar in political representation. At the time of this writing in 2017, women comprise only 9.5 % of Lower House representation (the more powerful house) in 2014– though it is up from 8% a couple of years ago – and 20.7 % of the Upper House, the latter arguably perhaps the highest such total in Japanese history (International Parliamentary Union 2016). Five women served in the second reshuffled Abe cabinet from September to December of 2014 – two resigned almost immediately due to conflicts of interest. In the third Abe cabinet from October 2015 to January 2016, there were three female cabinet members – at least one of whom was hardliner nationalist with reluctance toward gender equality issues.

The success of gender equality and women’s empowerment policies depends on whether such layers of patriarchal cultural, institutional, and taxation issues can be addressed. Effective institutional and taxation reforms require a change in patriarchal culture and in disinterest in gender equality issues.

Japanese Foreign Policy – Why does Japan strengthens international cooperation for gender equality and empowerment?

As mentioned above, Prime Minister Abe had both domestic and international initiatives for gender equality and women's empowerment. Along with Abe's pledge with the three billion USD in ODA between 2013 and 2015, the doubled financial contribution to UN Women in 2015, the Foreign Ministry of Japan expressed its assistance for developing countries in the field of women's health care as a part of its strategy for global health diplomacy (MOFA 2016). The new Development Cooperation Charter of 2015 is more in keeping with gender equality and empowerment in wider issue areas of poverty reduction, human security, peacebuilding, and development.

Such an active stance is backed by Abe's diplomacy in line with "Proactive Contribution to Peace," which represents Japan's stronger determination to work more proactively for the peace, security, and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the world with greater sense of responsibility. In practice, for the purpose of organically linking the Development Cooperation Charter with this new Abe diplomacy principle, the Japanese government set up the "Development Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" in March 2016, which seeks the promotion of women's rights, the building of women's and girls' capacity to reach their full potential, and the advancement of women's leadership (MOFA 2016).

The principle of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" has the norms of the rule of law, freedom, and democracy (Abe 2014 c). Thus, the peace for which Japan works more proactively encompasses diverse meanings, including protection from global threats of climate change, terrorism, poverty, and natural disasters as well as from instability as a result of changing power balance and missile and nuclear threats in Asia and (Cabinet Office, 2013). Japan's participation in diverse aspects of peacemaking and peacebuilding, particularly women's roles in peacebuilding, is one of the important pillars (Cabinet Office, 2013). In his speech at an intergovernmental security dialogue arena, the Shangri-La dialogue, Abe mentioned the contribution of three Japanese female lawyers and prosecutors in assisting Cambodia in establishing a civil code and civil procedural code. He also emphasized the effort of Japan to have sustainable peace in civil-war stricken Mindanao in the Philippines, by establishing a job occupational training school/center for women in Mindanao so that women can be economically independent (Abe 2014 c).

Though the "Proactive Contribution to Peace" might be misunderstood as Japan's revived prewar unilateral assertiveness, it is rather Japan's active contribution to diverse contemporary meanings of peace through diverse ways through international cooperation. Most importantly, it is based on Japan's reflection of the past. Abe's speeches on the "Proactive Contribution to Peace" in the Australian parliament in July 2014 (Abe 2014 d) and the U.S. Congress in April 2015 (Abe 2015 b) acknowledge that prewar Japan made the wrong choice and emphasizes Japan's pledge that Japan today contribute to the maintenance of international order based on peace, human rights, and democracy in the principle of international cooperation.

It is argued that Prime Minister Abe's leadership in women's empowerment is to deflect attention from the stigma with regard to Japan's handling of the comfort women issue (Coleman 2017; Hasunuma 2017). The issue refers to the Japanese government's responsibility to and reconciliation with former comfort women who were recruited mainly from Japan and Japan-colonized Choson (the Korean peninsula) to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers and officers.

Surely, Japan pays attention to its reputation. Historically, during the post-War period, Japan itself has long paid attention to its status and reputation in the international community, as expressed in the preamble of the Japanese Constitution: “We desire to occupy an honored place in international society.” The 1997 ODA report affirms the importance that Japan assumes the cost for the peace and prosperity of the international community for that desire (MOFA 1997). Prime Minister Abe’s idea of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” is in response to the expectation of Japan’s larger role for international peace and security from international society and it is natural to interpret that its intention is to enhance Japan’s reputation.

However, it is more accurate to assert that his motivation is to enhance the overall leadership role of Japan in the world within the context of the historical lessons from the past, rather than to deflect attention away from the comfort women issue or Japan’s low world ranking on women’s status. First of all, the Japanese government itself faced, instead of avoiding, the issue of the comfort women starting in the early 1990s when the issue appeared with the first public testimony of a former Korean comfort women in August 1991. The Japanese government acknowledged the wartime Japanese authority’s involvement in the establishment and management of comfort stations and the sufferings of many comfort women, thus making apologies to former comfort women in the Kōno statement in 1993 and the Japan-Korea agreement in December 2015. In the meantime, the Japanese government consistently performed its moral responsibility through the atonement projects by the Asian Women’s Fund for former comfort women in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Netherlands from 1995 to 2007 (Kumagai, 2014). In fact, Japan’s efforts went through often heated debate involving fierce hardline conservative resistance against any recognition of former comfort women as victims particularly in the 1990s. Still, Japan’s understanding of the plight of former comfort women and foreign policy has come to see the importance of women’s rights. The Asian Women’s Fund developed the historical lesson of the issue of comfort women into a progressive Women’s Dignity Project for women’s human rights, based on Japan’s past reflections, to address the contemporary issues of domestic violence, sexual violence, and women’s and children’s rights in Japanese society and to address the sexual violence in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Thus, Japan has faced the issue and made efforts for the healing and dignity of former comfort women and utilized the lesson for the improvement of contemporary women’s rights in Japanese society as well as in the world (Asian Women’s Fund 2007).

Abe carries the spirit and achievements of the Asian Women’s Fund. The Abe Statement on the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war clearly renewed Japan’s acknowledgement of the importance not to forget the plight of women behind the battlefields whose honor and dignity were severely injured and must respect women’s human rights (Abe 2015 a).

Abe’s “Women Shine” notion clearly intends Japan’s international leadership in gender equality and women’s empowerment efforts across countries. The “World Assembly for Women (WAW) in Tokyo” in 2014 was a kick off. It was the first Japanese prime minister-led world conference for gender equality and women’s empowerment with the participation of leaders in politics, academia, business, and non-profit sector from all over Japan and around the world and with numerous related events both in Japan and abroad.

Still, WAW under “Women Shine” is Japan’s unique leadership that Japan and other states cooperate together and mutually assist for each state’s own challenges in gender equality and empowerment. First, WAW renewed the awareness of the universal importance of “Women Shine,” across states with different cultural and development situations, and sought to share wisdom and discover solutions from their cooperation (Abe 2014 a; Abe 2014 b). Secondly, Abe acknowledges Japan’s own domestic challenges and required efforts; Japan itself is still at the beginning stage for the society where women shine (Abe 2014 a). WAW 2014 had two main agendas, one for the role for women in economic activities, of course Japan’s agenda, and the other for global agendas of many developing states such as peace, education, and health. This initiative seems to shift from the discourse over Japan’s poor record in women’s empowerment and to refocus Japan’s leadership role in a global movement to empower women (Coleman 2017). However, it does not, though Japan was surely ranked 111th out of 144 countries in the World Economic Forum’s gender gap index in 2016 (World Economic Forum 2016).

The universal idea of “Women Shine” contains a distinctive and wide benefit for gender equality and women’s empowerment not only for women but also for peace and well-beings in the world (Abe 2013 a). It is a reaffirmation and revitalization of the long-held idea of the mutually reinforcing linkage of development, peace, and equality, as has been already acknowledged by Japanese women’s suffrage leader Fusae Ichikawa in the early twentieth century, by the UN in the 1975 International Women’s Year, and by the “Vision” statement as foundation of the 1999 Gender Equality Law. “Women Shine” would bring social harmony and economic development. Furthermore, the idea of “Women Shine” progressively means changes and benefits for men. The WAW meeting in 2015 took the catchphrase of “WAW! for All” so that both men and women cooperate to create a society in which it is easy for both to have more fulfilled lives as individuals and in their families and communities (Abe 2015 c). The main themes were to change corporate working culture of male-centered long working hours and to facilitate men’s participation in child rearing and household chores. “Women Shine” enriches men’s lives as well.

Abe’s wish to enhance Japan’s position in the world can be known also from setting Japan’s pursuit for international recognition for its gender equality as part of its domestic gender equality policy (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2016 a). First, Japan’s domestic efforts should seek to achieve the international standards of norms on gender equality, as those set in the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Second, Japan’s international cooperation for gender equality and women’s empowerment should have international recognition (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau 2016 a). The Japanese government set the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in September 2015 (MOFA 2015 b) to implement the 2000 United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325) in response to the United Nations Secretary General’s strong persuasion (United Nations Secretary General 2010) and to criticisms from former Deputy Secretary-General, Anwarul Karim Chowdhury (Fukase 2010). The resolution is to promote the protection of women under armed conflict and the participation of women in peace process. The National Action Plan established the mainstreaming of women in the monitoring and reviewing processes of Japan’s efforts for conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding.

Such initiatives concerned with international recognition might seem hasty preparation with empty contents but they are also supported by the intellectual and normative anchor based on the experiences and achievements

of Japan's women-focused international development assistance. Japan's ODA, over sixty years old, has paid attention to the importance of women in development particularly since the 1990s. The 1992 ODA charter reflected the Women in Development (WID) initiative, though it was under peer pressure from more progressive members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) under the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Itō 1998). WID, having emerged in the 1970s from Washington-based groups of female experts on development (Tinker 1990: 30), sought to integrate women into national economies to assist development efforts based on the notions of social justice and equity for women, and efficiency for economic development.⁵ The 1992 ODA Charter had three primary efforts in education, health, and social and economic participation (MOFA n.d.). The ODA has sought to provide literacy training, training of teachers, and textbook and educational materials which meet the needs of girls' education, to reduce maternal and infant mortality, to emphasize family planning, and to provide basic information on sanitation and nutrition. The ODA in the case of women's economic and social participation assisted job skills training and development of micro-enterprises to gain access to financial facilities. The UNDP/Japan Women In Development Fund was established in 1995 in the UNDP for sustainable development and poverty reduction for women.

The ODA later strengthened gender-oriented development assistance by incorporating the new approach, the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, as suggested in the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing to include gender mainstreaming in all areas of policy-making, including both government and business (United Nations, 1995). The GAD addresses gender inequality within social contexts and structures and seeks to change stereotyped rules, institutions, and systems that bring gender disparity and inequality (Razavi and Miller 1995). Reflecting the GAD, Japan's revised ODA charter in 2003 gives full consideration to the active participation of women in development as well as to the securing of benefits for women from development (MOFA 2003).

Japanese aid's attention to women was reinforced by the people-centered approach, as represented in the notion of human security, which pays attention to people particularly in vulnerable conditions. "Human Security Now," a report from the Commission on Human Security, co-chaired by Sadako Ogata, who later served as the president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan's main agency of bilateral ODA, sets the importance of protection and empowerment of people under insecurity (Commission on Human Security 2003). The 2003 ODA Charter set human security as one of the main principles and situated assistance in peace-building and humanitarian reconstruction as one of its development assistance priorities. In the face of widening disparities in the course of economic growth in developing countries, the JICA sought inclusive and dynamic development, emphasizing the importance of dynamic development that benefits all people (JICA 2011: 10). The 2015 Development Cooperation Charter, seeking development that leaves no one behind, sees women as the vulnerable to be protected and empowered under human security for poverty eradication, peace, and security (Cabinet Office 2015).

⁵ For example, WID was strategically linked to mainstream development concerns during the United Nations Decade for Women from 1976-1985. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women includes equal access to credit and marketing facilities as well as women's rights to education.

Secondly, behind Japanese aid's growing devotion to human security and women lie also the experiences of Japan's engagement in the reconstruction of post-Taliban Afghanistan. Afghanistan after the fall of the radical Taliban regime in November 2001 and under the continued war on terror since September 2001 was the first country in which the Japanese government paid special attention to gender equality issues in peace building and humanitarian/reconstruction assistance under JICA's ODA (Tanaka 2012: 188). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) had six priority areas of reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. One of these was women's empowerment in the issue areas of education and health care (Tanaka 2012: 193).

There was an institutional mechanism to have comprehensive intellectual inputs into JICA from the Advisory Council on the Assistance to Women in Afghanistan, which was established in February 2002 by Japanese chief cabinet secretary and minister for gender equality Yasuo Fukuda as his private advisory body in response to the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan held in Tokyo in January 2002 (Tanaka 2012: 192). The Council recommended concrete measures to direct ODA policy makers more responsive to gender issues in peace building and then to assist Afghan women in six specific issue areas: political and institutional capacity building, education, reproductive health and medical care, economic empowerment and employment, social and economic infrastructure, peace and security, and measures for monitoring and evaluating Japanese assistance efforts from a gender perspective (Gender Equality Bureau Office 2003). JICA utilized the Council's recommendations to launch a project to enhance the capacity of Afghanistan's Ministry of Women's Affairs. The Cabinet Office itself also proactively engaged by organizing a "Meeting on Assistance to Women in Afghanistan" in July 2002 (Gender Equality Bureau Office 2003).

The lessons learned from the gender mainstreaming efforts in Afghanistan had important implications for the wider field of Japan's ODA and transnational foreign aid, emphasizing and raising awareness about particularly the relation between gender and peace building across the gamut of agencies (Tanaka 2012: 199). This was reinforced by the increasing and consolidating voices of gender and human rights-related NGOs, both domestic and transnational, with their growing capacities in domestic politics since the 1990s along with the legal and government institutional reforms (Lancaster 2012: 50-51), notably the 1998 NPO Law, a legal system to set an incorporation system to support and promote volunteer and civil society activities, partly pushed by the rapid rise of volunteer activities in Japanese society as a result of the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 (Japan NPO Center).

Thirdly, Japan's initiative for international cooperation with an aim toward international recognition incorporates Japan's accumulated gender equality experiences in its own peacekeeping cooperation. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for UNSCR 1325 includes Japan's efforts for enhanced female participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations in the phase of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Such promotion is anchored by Japan's experiences in making contributions to women's participation and empowerment in personnel on the ground of peace building activities. Japan started dispatching female Self-Defense Forces to UN peacekeeping operations since 2002 (UN Information Center, 2013). Since then to the end of 2011, fifty female personnel were dispatched to the missions in East Timor and South Sudan (Cabinet Office, Bureau of Gender Equality, 2011). Japan also promotes awareness to gender sensitivity in human resource development and capacity building by providing pre-deployment education and training on

gender issues, including sexual violence and women's care, for Japanese and foreign PKO personnel (MOFA 2015 b).

Prime Minister Abe's international initiative for gender equality and empowerment surely represents his wish to restore Japan's international position. First, it is by means of an active ODA contribution that is more inclusive and gender sensitive under the principle of "Proactive Contribution to Peace." Such a stance is not for deflecting Japan's concern about how its reputation suffers from the unresolved issue of the comfort women (Coleman 2017; Hasunuma 2017). Rather it is supported by Japan's reflection upon the wartime past. Secondly, the effort was through the "Women Shine" initiative by launching the WAW in 2014, which has sought Japan's wide-reaching cooperation with diverse states and business and non-profit sectors to tackle both Japan's and the world's challenges. Japan's leadership was based on guidance and collaboration. The message of the universal importance of "Women Shine" has renewed and reinforced the awareness of both developed and underdeveloped states and contained the progressive aspect that "Women Shine" contributes to peace and well-being in society and thus benefiting men. Thirdly, Japan's pursuit of international recognition of its own international cooperation has been responsive to international voices of encouragement and criticisms, as in Japan's prompt setting of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in response to external pressures. Still, the Action Plan is anchored based on Japan's accumulated efforts of female participation in peacekeeping operations so far.

Overall, Japan's pursuit of international recognition of its own international cooperation mainly goes beyond nominal promotion toward genuine action. Japan's reinforced ODA and international gender initiatives particularly in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations have been anchored by Japan's long-held people-centered and gender-centered ODA practices, particularly humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, and Japan's practices of gender-focused participation in peacekeeping operations.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed that the background of Japan's recently enhanced domestic and international efforts for gender equality and empowerment policy, particularly under Prime Minister Abe's administration since December 2012. It argues that it is attributed to Japan's pursuit of national strength and enhanced international position. Domestic efforts represent pragmatic motivations to strengthen the Japanese economy, and the continued and renewed efforts to address long failed gender equality and empowerment policies, many of which failed to come to fruition due to mainly traditional patriarchal culture as well as drawbacks in social institutions and the taxation system.

Japan's strengthened international efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly through ODA, have effectively linked with Japan's diverse measures to enhance its international positions and its new diplomacy based on the "Proactive Contribution to Peace," accompanied by the universal notion of "Women Shine" with the new launch of the WAW annual meeting, and reinforced by Japan's pursuits of international recognition through international norm implementation in peacebuilding. These processes had normative, institutional, and practical foundations to transcend mere face-saving pragmatic gesture. Rich experiences of

gender-oriented and human security-focused ODA and peacebuilding and Japan's practices of past reflections kept the foundation for strengthened ODA for gender equality and women's empowerment. Even-footed intellectual cooperation among states for gender equality and empowerment faced Japan's challenges and has demonstrated the insights into the organic linkage of gender equality with peace and well-being in society and with the enrichment of men's lives. The Action Plans for women's protection and empowerment in security was based on the experiences of female participation in peacekeeping operations. All these international efforts, albeit with the pragmatic purpose of Japan's enhanced international status, have held firm grips on Japan's wartime past, current challenges, and Japan's accumulated intellectual and practical experiences in gender-oriented foreign assistance in peace and development.

Japan's simultaneous domestic and international efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment have been under the same theme of Japan's pursuit for enhanced position in international society. Still, the latter efforts have had substantial normative foundations of the linkage of gender equality, peace, and development. Japan's pragmatic domestic efforts which have faced the thick wall of the deep-seated patriarchal traditions in Japan could receive a normative backing from Japan's long-accumulated normative international effort. In this sense, Abe's worldwide conference of "Women Shine" embraces a possibility to serve as a reference point for Japan to relearn the benefit of gender equality for men and for women through enhanced peace (social harmony) and development (well-being).

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