

Towards a “Society in which all Women Shine”: Determinants
of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Shift Towards
“Womenomics” and a Liberal Feminist Policy Agenda

Olyvia Rebeccah Christley
Charlottesville, VA

Bachelor of Arts, University of Virginia, 2011

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand why Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe shifted from a conservative gender policy agenda in his first administration to a liberal feminist gender policy agenda during his second administration. I argue that, in addition to prior work that has emphasized the importance of international norms in shaping Japanese gender policy, the difference in policy preferences across the two administrations cannot be understood without also taking into account the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) extended period as the opposition party between 2009-2012 and the role LDP party member Yuriko Koike played during this time in pushing for "womenomics" to become part of the LDP's long term economic policy. I also argue that the rise of "womenomics" is best understood within the context of Japan's long history of state feminism and preoccupation with the falling birth rate. As a result, I posit that Japan's most recent effort to create a "society in which all women shine" is neither unique nor revolutionary when viewed through a historical lens.

On September 26th, 2013, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave an address to the Sixty-Eighth Session of The General Assembly of The United Nations, wherein he proposed to refortify Japan's economy with a theory called "womenomics", which is the idea that as more women become involved in the workplace, the economic growth rate of a country will improve. Abe continued his remarks by saying he hoped to create a "society in which women shine," and went on to discuss Japan's various efforts at promoting gender equality and an end to gender-based violence throughout the world (Japan 2013b).

"Womenomics" was hardly a new theory, and Abe conceded as much in a Wall Street Journal essay he published to coincide with his speech to the United Nations. He cited the now famous 1999 Goldman Sachs report "Women-omics: Buy the Female Economy", by Goldman Sachs strategists Kathy Matsui, Hiromi Suzuki, and Yoko Ushio, who argued that, if Japan would just get more women into the workforce, it could increase its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by as much as 15% (Abe 2013a) (Matsui et al. 1999). Just two months prior to his United Nations address, Abe had also met with Sheryl Sandberg, the Facebook executive who became famous for her book urging women to "lean in" to the corporate workplace. During a speech at the World Economic Forum in Tokyo, Sandberg argued that if "Japanese society does not get more women into their economy, they cannot grow, [a]nd they know that and it is part of Prime Minister Abe's three-point plan" (The Tokyo Times 2014).

What was most surprising about Abe's speech on womenomics was not the concept itself, but the fact that he was the one promoting it. Indeed, Abe's reputation up to that point had been that he was conservative, nationalistic, and embraced "traditional" Japanese family values. This reputation was cemented during his short-lived first term as prime minister (2006-2007), during which he promoted more patriotism and morality in public schools and expanded Japan's

Defense Agency to a Defense Ministry (Coleman 2016:13) (Nikkei Weekly 2007). What was conspicuously absent from his first administration, however, was any type of agenda for dealing with gender inequality or any issue that could be defined as “women’s.” This is despite many of the longstanding problems associated with the low Japanese fertility rate (a frequent vehicle through which Japanese gender equality policy is framed) continuing to impact the nation. Why then would Abe incorporate “womenomics” into his second administration’s policy agenda, given his previous term as prime minister, his membership in the same political party, and the presence of the fertility rate crisis in both terms?

In this thesis, I will argue that the shift in policy preferences between the first and second Abe administrations was, at the micro level, the result of work done by LDP party member Yuriko Koike on a special committee devoted to gender issues during the period when the LDP constituted the opposition government. I will also argue that this shift in policy preferences should not be seen as something novel or particularly groundbreaking in the struggle for Japanese gender equality. On the contrary, it represents a continued pattern of response by the Japanese government to calls for greater gender equality that dates to the post-World War II occupation period. In the face of pressure from the international community to conform to Western gender norms, the Japanese government has repeatedly turned to its gender bureaucracy and its brand of state feminism in response to its own domestic gender woes. Whether or not these actions have led to improved gender equality in Japan is the subject of ongoing debate; indeed, there are considerable arguments to be made that efforts to improve gender equality over the last two and a half decades have come about primarily over economic concerns related to the falling birth rate. The main takeaway from this is that we cannot ignore how macro (the international community), mezzo (Japan’s gender bureaucracy), and micro level (Yuriko Koike)

structures have shaped and continue to shape the Japanese state's response to gender inequality, be it through its policy preferences or otherwise. By advancing this argument, I seek to contribute to a growing literature on the varying mechanisms behind gender policy outcomes and provide a possible explanation for why we might see shifts in policy preferences in the absence of existing explanations in the literature, such as the presence of a strong, autonomous women's movement.

The primary method I employed while conducting the research for this project was process tracing. The outcome¹ I wish to explain is the change in preferences between Shinzo Abe's first and second administrations as prime minister of Japan from a conservative policy agenda towards "womenomics" (or a liberal feminist policy agenda). Using historical narratives and documentation from throughout Japan's history and both Abe administrations in question, I reconstructed a causal process and causal chain wherein this shift in policy preferences could be explained². During this process, I identified two key explanatory³ variables: the opportunity for a shift in policy preferences created by LDP's loss of power in 2009, and Yuriko Koike's work as a member of a special committee within the party on gender relations during the LDP's time as the opposition party (2009-2012). The presence of both of these variables are crucial for understanding why Abe chose to pursue "womenomics" during his second term. My decision to use process tracing was the result of my desire to explain a within case phenomenon.

The primary data I used for this project came in the form of English-language publications of Japanese news articles, press releases and newsletters published by the Liberal

¹ Or dependent variable.

² Ackerly & True (2013) define process tracing as "a compelling narrative drawing together a range of evidence [that] reveals some data to be prior, that is, the cause, and other data to be its effects", the goal of which is to produce thick causal inference in qualitative work (196).

³ Or independent variables.

Democratic Party during their time in the opposition⁴, and from the international press publishing on Japanese topics. For the history of the international community's role in Japan, as well as its history of gender bureaucracy and state feminism, I relied on the original work of three dissertations, two of which were later published as books.

Before proceeding, it is important to define several of the terms that will be used frequently throughout this thesis. I take my definition of "*liberal*" *feminism* from Zehra Arat, who argues that liberal feminism is a reformulation of classic liberal philosophy through which women are acknowledged as rational beings capable of being men's intellectual equals if they are privilege to the same opportunities; therefore, women should receive the same rights that men do. Liberal feminism is translated into policy through its demands for equal opportunity and integration into all areas of public and private life. Most importantly for this thesis, it "seeks gradual change through legislative reform and antidiscrimination laws [and] it considers the state an apparatus that can be used to create equal opportunities for women and to establish gender equality (Arat 2015: 676). Under this definition, most if not all of the policies outlined in womenomics can be considered part of a liberal feminist policy agenda. Therefore, when I say that Abe chose to pursue a "liberal feminist agenda" in his second term as prime minister, I am alluding to womenomics, and vice versa.

Another important term that deserves clarification is the concept of a "*women's policy*". Conflating the term with "equality policy" or arguing that women's policy should serve "women's interests" is fraught with challenges due to the difficulty in defining what exactly "equality" or "women's interests" are. Both of these definitions can and do vary widely across

⁴ These documents were translated from their original Japanese by the author using machine translation.

time, space, socioeconomic status, race, religion, etc. Therefore, I choose to define “women’s policy” simply as a policy intended to improve women’s access to society and/or advance their status within it. This leaves open the door for policies ranging from Japan’s requirement that employers provide female workers with the option to take menstrual leave, to policies in other countries enacting quotas that reserve a certain number of seats in a representative body for women.⁵

Lastly, my use of the term “political opportunity structure” is slightly different from how it has been traditionally used in political science literature. Sidney Tarrow defines a “political opportunity structure” as a “consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—[signal] to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements” (Tarrow 1996: 54). With this definition in mind, the term is most frequently used to describe the conditions that are most or least favorable to collective action and social movements. I employ the term with the same general intent, but do not restrict it to the formation (or not) of social movements. Instead, I argue that a political opportunity structure can be taken advantage of by a variety of political actors both within and outside the government in ways that do not necessarily require the backing or involvement of a larger social movement. Indeed, I will argue that the LDP’s loss to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in 2009 signaled an opening in the political opportunity structure *within the party itself* that allowed for a political actor/entrepreneur in the form of Yuriko Koike to step in and advance a liberal feminist policy agenda.

⁵ It does not include policies like restricting abortion or access to birth control, which neither improve women’s access to society nor advance their status within it.

The rest of the thesis will be organized as follows. I will provide an overview of the history of international pressure in enacting and influencing gender policy in Japan, Japan's brand of state feminism, and explain the argument for why many of Japan's recent gender policies might actually be economic policies attempting to reverse the falling birth rate "in disguise." I will then examine the first Abe administration, the role of Yuriko Koike as a key political actor in advancing a "womenomics"/liberal feminist policy agenda during the LDP's time as the opposition party, and then conclude with a brief discussion of the second Abe administration. Lastly, I will finish with a summary of gender inequality in the country today and emphasize that this shift in policy preferences, while perhaps the most progressive shift to date, is not unique in Japan and will therefore be unlikely to remedy Japan's gender inequality problems without further societal changes.

Existing Literature

A broader gender politics literature has recently tried to grapple with why we get certain gender policy outcomes⁶ and not others. In their large-N analysis looking at predictors of government action (via policy adoption) to redress violence against women, Htun and Weldon 2012 find that a strong, autonomous feminist movement has the most "consistently significant" effect on government responsiveness towards violence against women. They also find positive, significant results for effective women's policy machineries (i.e. state feminism) and the diffusion of international norms (Htun & Weldon 2012: 562-563). In subsequent work, the authors found further evidence for the importance of the *combination* of both women's

⁶ I use the term "outcome" broadly here to encompass any type of political action vis-à-vis gender policy including policy preference shifts, policy adoption, implementation, or effectiveness. This thesis is primarily concerned with the first item: understanding the reasons behind shifts in policy preferences regarding gender issues.

organizing and activism and support from the “international and international intergovernmental authorities” in advancing “women’s legal status and rights in most areas” (Htun & Weldon 2014:

3). Across their analyses, Htun and Weldon find consistent and compelling evidence of the importance of a strong autonomous women’s movement, either alone or in tandem with other interested parties, for taking gender grievances to the state and subsequently advancing gender policy.

The problem with the Japanese case, however, is that women’s movements in the country have been historically weak. Joyce Gelb famously compared gender policy outcomes across Japan and the United States and found that although Japanese women’s movement are active and vibrant in many parts of society, they “have tended to be localized, single-issue oriented, and fragmented,” which has led to roadblocks in policy change due to lack of coordination and joint-efforts (Gelb 2003: 28-29). Where a Japanese women’s movement has been active (such as in the passage of Japan’s Equal Employment Opportunity Law), Gelb also emphasizes the indirect external pressure in the form of the *international women’s movement* in helping Japanese women’s movements achieve their gender policy goals.

This thesis then seeks to better understand how gender policy preferences shifted between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s two administrations in the absence of key variables such as pressure from a strong, autonomous women’s movement, which the literature suggests is critical. Part of my argument, the influence of international norms, is supported by Htun & Weldon’s work. I seek to make an additional contribution by highlighting the role that key agents can play in pushing a new agenda if the opportunity presents itself⁷.

⁷ Specifically, Yuriko Koike’s work during the LDP’s time as the opposition party in the early 2010s.

Prior scholarship that has attempted to unravel the Abe policy puzzle includes Liv Coleman's 2016 paper "Will Japan "Lean In" to Gender Equality?"⁸. Coleman argues that in both administrations, Abe was attempting to grapple with Japan's long, post-occupation history of catering to international norms (Coleman 2016: 6-7). While I do not deny this argument, I find it underdeveloped. Coleman does not demonstrate why Abe would suddenly choose to prioritize liberal international norms in his second administration over the conservative international norms he favored in his first. By only acknowledging the larger policy atmosphere that has defined Japan for decades, Coleman fails to look at mezzo and micro level conditions that contributed to this shift, including the importance of the Liberal Democratic Party being in the opposition for several years, the impact of state feminism in Japan, and the role that Yuriko Koike played in making "womenomics" a pillar of LDP economic policy during that time. My argument therefore differs from Coleman's in that it provides a more nuanced picture as to why the two administrations favored such different policies, and extends her underdeveloped point regarding Japan's long history of "leaning in" to Western trends regarding women's issues and gender equality (Coleman 2016: 5).

A Legacy of International Influence & State Feminism

The story of the modern Japanese state and its relationship to gender equality is closely tied to the United States' occupation of the country after WWII. The occupation left a dual legacy for the struggle for gender equality in Japan as the broad attempts to "modernize" Japan

⁸ Yuki Tsuji (Tokai University) has a draft paper (that she requests not be cited) that also seeks to address this question. Unlike Coleman, she does acknowledge the LDP's loss of power and the role of Yuriko Koike. However, she argues solely from an angle of intra- and interparty competition theorizing and does not address the role of the international community or Japan's history of state feminism in influencing this policy shift. Therefore, my project can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between Coleman's and Tsuji's work.

based on Western norms coincided with the creation of a state bureau for women's issues. I argue in this thesis that current Japanese gender policy cannot be understood outside the confluence of these international norms and a history of state feminism that originated within the women's bureau.

Prior to the U.S. occupation, there was no institutionalized government mechanism for promoting gender equality or women's policy within Japan. The creation of the "Bureau of Women and Minors" (BWM) in 1947 was one component of a broader effort by the U.S. Supreme Commander for Allied Forces (SCAP) to promote democracy in the country through the "improvement of Japanese women's social status" (Kobayashi 2004). Prior to the war, the dominant ideology surrounding the status of Japanese women was that they would be "wise wives and good mothers". Although this ideology had its roots in Confucianism, it did not become an integral part of Japanese culture until the Meiji Restoration. Meiji leaders, seeking a way to unify the country, began connecting the role of women to the responsibility of "raising up" the next generation of strong, nationalistic citizens. In this reimagining of the Confucian principle, women were defined as important to Japanese society in the context of their role as mothers (Sechiyama 2003).

SCAP attributed Japan's "prewar militant political system" to this patriarchal, gendered division of labor that kept Japanese women out of the public sphere. Because reforming that militancy and instituting democracy was SCAP's primary goal during the allied occupation, "women's emancipation" became the first of five pillars in SCAP's "Five Reform Plan for Democratization of Japan" in 1945 (Kobayashi 2004). This was the inaugural moment in Japan's history of responding to international pressure on gender equality (although in this case reform was enacted more through force than pressure).

Initial reforms under the plan included expanding women's legal status under the new Japanese constitution, including the right to vote for the first time and enacting the Labor Standards Law, which included special protections for working women⁹. SCAP's biggest legacy, however, came with the establishment of the Bureau of Women and Minors (BWM) within the Ministry of Labor in 1947. This was done with the support of low-ranking female officers within SCAP itself as well as women within the Japan Socialist Party, who were eventually able to persuade the conservative political elites that a Women's Bureau was necessary (Kobayashi 2004: 158). It is the first example of domestic actors in Japan using international influence to exert pressure on party elites to enact policy change on behalf of women. Although the BWM's effectiveness was severely curtailed due to its subordinate position within the (also low-ranking) Ministry of Labor, its creation still signaled the beginning of a unique brand of Japanese state feminism and the solidification of a legacy of international influence on the subject of women and equality in Japan.

Yoshie Kobayashi notes that, while state feminism is strongly influenced by liberal feminism, it "mainly attributes gender inequality to the state's activities and institutions" while also acknowledging that society at large is rife with gender inequality. The primary difference between liberal and state feminist theory, however, is that state feminist theory argues that the state must institutionalize feminist interests within a society via public institutions, particularly a women's agency staffed by feminist friendly activists, and integrate women throughout the bureaucracy and legislature. From here it is believed that feminist interests will travel

⁹ These protections included caps on how many hours women could be forced to work, exempted women from performing certain tasks, late night work, holiday work, and underground work, and included childcare and menstrual leave. Many of these provisions (particularly menstrual leave) would become huge sources of contention between various Japanese women's movements later in the century (Kobayashi 2004).

throughout the government and bring about policies and legislation that promote gender equality (Kobayashi 2004: 13)¹⁰. State feminism in Japan differs, however, from some Western conceptualizations for several reasons – primarily because it lacks ties to autonomous feminist groups. Japan’s women’s bureaucracy is not made up of “femocrats” (as is the case in Australia), nor are its bureaucrats politically appointed (as many are in the United States). The bureaucrats within the Women’s Bureau in Japan were simply your average Japanese bureaucrat recruited through a competitive exam process at the start of their working career, and therefore less likely to have specific connections to a feminist movement or agenda¹¹ (Tanaka 2009) (Kobayashi 2004).

Because of its weak mandate and lack of enforcement measures, the BWM was largely ineffective for several decades after its inception. Despite the fact that some women bureaucrats were interested in addressing gender inequality in employment, there was very little international or domestic political space to enact the policy changes they were most invested in. This changed in the 1970s, when the United Nations held its International Women’s Year, its First World Women’s Conference, and announced that 1976-1985 would be its “Decade for the Advancement of Women.” Seeing an opportunity to bring an international eye to Japan’s gender struggles, particularly in the area of employment, members of the BWM participated extensively in the women centered UN activities, which opened the door for greater dialogue between the Japanese state, the BWM, and Japanese women’s groups. These collaborations would lay the

¹⁰ Kobayashi is also careful to emphasize, however, that state feminism does not preclude working with outside women’s groups, only that there is a danger of cooptation rather than cooperation (23). This is worth noting as it is usually taken for granted that the cooptation would be coming from the state, not the women’s group.

¹¹ This does not mean there were no feminist bureaucrats in the ministry, only that the pathway for feminists to enter was not as clear cut as it might have been within gender bureaus in other countries.

groundwork for Japan to expand the gender policy machinery in Japan¹², be a signatory of The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980 and pass the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEO) in 1986 (Kobayashi 2004).

It is important to note, however, that both the BWM and other activists effectively used the specter of “international shame” to finally convince the Japanese government to sign CEDAW. They emphasized the embarrassment that would come from sending delegates to the women’s conference but not signing its signature document (Kobayashi 2004: 105). Since CEDAW was the gateway for the BWM to press for the EEO, this provides another example of international pressure coalescing with state feminism within Japan to bring out gender policy change.

Both international norms and state feminism Japan’s would continue to influence Japanese gender policy in the 1990s. In 1993, the UN declared that “women’s rights are human rights” at the World Conference on Human Rights, and once again Japanese bureaucrats and women’s groups worked to integrate that message into Japanese society (Chan-Tiberghien 2004). Three years later, a policy paper titled the “Vision of Gender Equality: Creating New Values for the 21st Century” (VGE) was drafted by the Council on Gender Equality (see footnote five) and included an explicit connection between women’s rights and human rights within Japan for the

¹² The BWM would be joined by a “national machinery” in 1975 that included the Headquarters for the Planning and Promotion of Policies Relating to Women, the Office for Women’s Affairs, and the Advisory Council to the Prime Minister on Women’s Affairs. The Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality and the Council for Gender Equality (located in the Prime Minister’s office) would replace this machinery in 1994. The most current iterations of these national policy machineries are the Council for Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Bureau within the Cabinet, both of which were created in 2001 (Chan-Tiberghien 2004). These two offices now oversee all gender-equality and women policy in Japan. The BWM was later renamed the Women’s Bureau and was eventually dissolved (and its responsibilities transferred to the aforementioned national machineries) when the Ministry of Labor was merged with the Ministry of Welfare (Kobayashi 2004).

first time. By 1997, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro had proclaimed that “gender equality” would be a main pillar of societal and political reform in Japan (Chan-Tiberghien 2004: 42). The VGE would pave the way for the passage of the “Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society” in 1999 and the Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2000 Basic Plan) in 2000. Both of these documents put in place procedures for implementing gender equality throughout Japanese society, but doubts remained over their true intentions and effectiveness.

A Hidden Agenda? Recent Gender Equality Policy & The Fertility Rate

The enactment of these gender policies of the 1990s and early 2000s appeared like watershed moments for gender equality in Japan; however, scholars have argued that Japan’s recent goals for a “gender equal society” are not necessarily motivated by a commitment to “gender equality” – particularly in the wake of the growing Japanese fertility crisis¹³. Although the Japanese total fertility rate (TFR) experienced a significant drop off as far back as the 1950s (when the TFR went from to 4.54 to 2.04 children per woman), it stayed at replacement levels up until the mid-1970s, at which point it began to plunge again. By the early 1990s, Japanese policymakers were starting to grasp the societal implications of further decline, and began trying to implement policies that they believed might encourage childbearing. A combination of rising female education and employment, economic recession, delayed marriage, increased divorce rates, fewer children per couple, and changing societal norms regarding gender roles were all identified as factors that were contributing the fertility drop off (Osawa 2003).

While the policies related to the fertility rate in the early 1990s were framed from a child angle (policy names included “Creating an Environment for Rearing Healthy Children” and

¹³ Huen 2007, Coleman 2016

“Childcare Leave Scheme”), framing around fertility policy quickly shifted to a gender angle by mid-decade. Indeed, the 1996 VGE stated in its introduction:

“Japan’s socioeconomic environment is at a historic turning point, experiencing changes at an unprecedented rate, including the lower birth rate, the progress of an aging society, the maturation and internationalization of economic activities, and the sophistication of info-communications. Such socioeconomic changes raise the need to swiftly achieve a society with gender equality.” (Huen 2007)

As mentioned previously, the VGE was followed by the Basic Law and the 2000 Basic Plan, as well as a Second Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2005 Basic Plan) in 2005. Each of these plans came on the heels of reports put out by Japan’s Ministry of Health and Welfare (MHW) between 1997 and 2000 that linked the fertility crisis to Japan’s lifetime employment system and current gender norms. They argued that norms expecting women to bear all the responsibility at home while men devoted their lives to their employment made it almost impossible for women to stay in the workforce after having children or restart their careers once child-rearing was over. The “price” for women to bear children in Japan, according to the argument advanced by the MHW, was becoming too much to bear. They then drew attention to data from the OECD that linked a more gender-egalitarian work environment with higher fertility rates. The message was clear: in order to raise fertility rates, Japan needed to push for gender equality in the workforce and across society (Schoppa 2010: 423).

Therefore, while there was much for gender equality activists to appreciate in each of these gender equality documents, they have been criticized for advocating for a “gender-equal society” rather than “gender equality”, which is a critical distinction (Huen 2007). The explicit references to Japan’s tenuous socioeconomic situation and falling birthrate in each signaled that there was an agenda beyond true gender equality. As Huen argues, “[s]ince the pursuit of gender

equality is a means to boost the birth rate, when there is a contradiction between these two goals, the former will be conceded” (Huen 2007: 13). In addition, Kobayashi points out that while the government uses the term “gender equality” in its English documents, the Japanese version does not convey the same message. Instead, a phrase meaning “cooperative participation in decision-making by the two sexes” is used in lieu of the literal word in Japanese for equality (“*byodo*”). Other words that translate to “equivalence” and “equal opportunity” are also used instead of equality, implying that “in the Japanese political setting, the term ‘gender equality’ is still a taboo word” and that equal opportunity, rather than equal outcomes, is an easier proposition (Kobayashi 2004: 170).

The evidence above suggests there is reason to believe that the recent history of gender policy in Japan is at least partially tied to concerns over the falling birth rate and subsequent concerns over Japan’s economic future given the birthrate reality. While this does not completely invalidate my previous argument about the importance of international pressure and state feminism in guiding gender policy, it provides context for the types of gender policies the Japanese government will be most likely to adopt today *given its broader economic concerns vis-à-vis the falling birthrate* and reaffirms my argument that womenomics is not terribly unique when compared to Japan’s prior gender equality policies¹⁴. Just like the Basic Law, 2000 Basic Plan, and 2005 Basic Plan, “womenomics” appears to be an effort to boost fertility disguised as gender equality policy – despite its liberal feminist overtones. It is here then that I turn to a discussion of Abe, Koike, and the current landscape of Japanese gender policy.

¹⁴ Although given that “economics” is literally embedded in the word “womenomics”, I acknowledge that this connection is much less explicit when analyzing earlier policies.

The First Abe Administration

Shinzo Abe's traditionally conservative stance on gender issues cannot be fully understood outside the context of the LDP's history vis-à-vis women and gender equality. In keeping with its status as the conservative party of Japan, the LDP has a longstanding reputation for espousing traditional views on women and their place in Japanese society. It has continually supported legislation that upholds the gendered division of labor by crafting a taxation system that strongly encourages married women to work part-time or not at all. The party's attitude towards the gendered division of labor was and is still in many ways shaped by the mother ideology leftover from Meiji Japan (i.e. the idea that women's primary role is to be caregivers in the home); therefore, bringing women into the workplace is seen as incompatible to their central role as mothers. In bolstering the idea that the business (and therefore "public") world is for men and that the home (and therefore "private") is for women, the Japanese government under the LDP helps to perpetuate gender stereotypes that prevent crossover between men and women in the public and private spheres (Huen 2007: 372-73, Jaquette 2001: 117-18). With this in mind, it is largely unsurprising that an LDP candidate for prime minister would trend towards supporting more traditionally conservative policies concerning the family and women.

In his first press conference¹⁵ since becoming prime minister in 2006, Abe framed his response to the falling birth rate from a perspective that emphasized the family unit and family values. Although he said his administration would "promote reform of working habits and styles to support child-raising", he did not provide details on what these reforms would entail. He closed his comments on the birthrate by saying his administration would "make efforts toward raising awareness so that the joys of child-raising and family values can be shared by the whole

¹⁵ Which was given in order to outline his administration's basic policies.

of society.” Later in his speech, Abe emphasized family values again during his discussion of education reform, announcing “we will immediately engage ourselves in rebuilding education, to nurture people who value their families, their communities, and their country, and who are filled with rich humanity, creativity and discipline” (Japan 2006). Although women were mentioned in passing in this press conference and in subsequent policy speeches to the Diet, it is clear that tackling gender inequality or promoting women’s issues was not at the forefront of Abe’s agenda.

Abe’s primary policy goal during his first Diet session was to reform the Fundamental Law for Education that had been in place since 1947 and was part of the United States’ broader efforts to democratize Japan and foster the principles of individualism, human rights, and gender equality. Abe’s administration argued that these policies had served their intended purpose but now needed to be updated to reflect Japan’s current societal needs. The Revised Fundamental Law for Education created Japan’s first National Family Day, and emphasized home education and parental responsibility. Abe believed that reforming Japan’s educational system would “restore” traditional Japanese family norms (Coleman 2008; 281, 286). This repeated emphasis on “tradition” would be a far cry from Abe’s tone six years later at the dawn of his second term.

Coleman argues that the LDP’s (and in turn Abe’s) family policy priorities up to this point were also influenced by international norms, albeit *conservative* norms that emphasized traditional family values and a united nation. She points out that while Japanese bureaucrats were more receptive to international norms emphasizing the connection between gender equality and economic prosperity (which aligns with the argument I presented earlier), social conservatives within the LDP were more likely to be inclined to favor norms that emphasized traditionalism and pro-natalism (Coleman 2008: 16-19). Clearly the LDP’s conservative

preferences did not always win the day, but the interplay between the two norm preferences can be seen in policies like the Basic Law, which linked efforts to improve gender equality with increasing the birthrate.

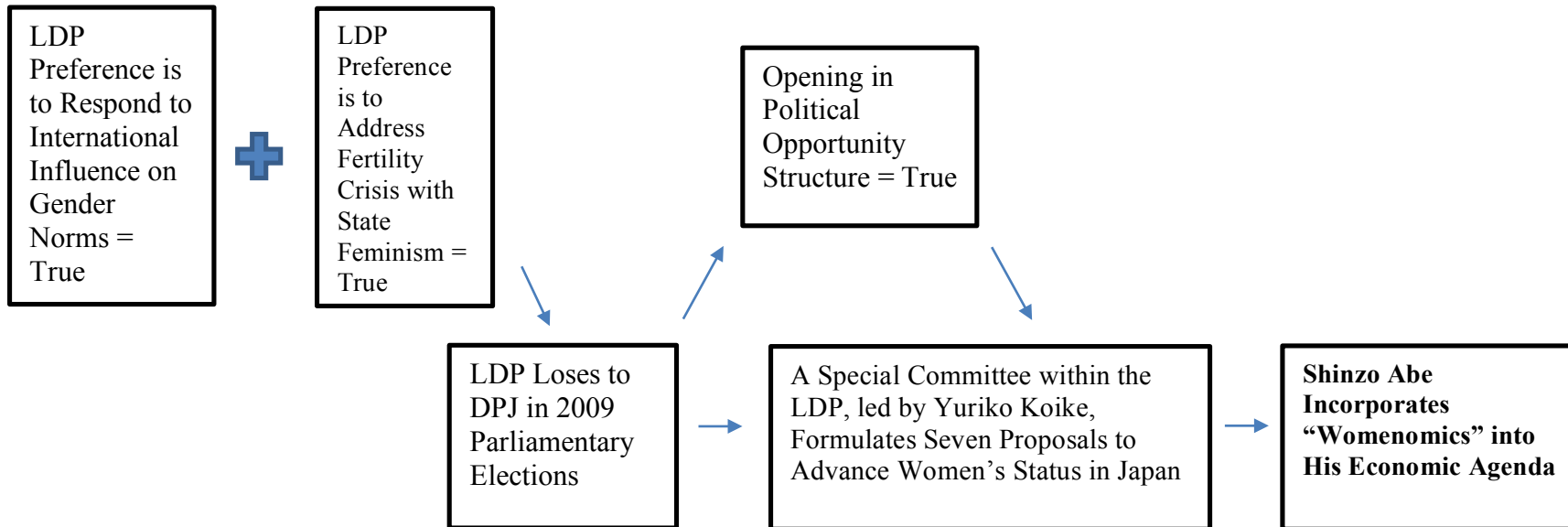
Although the LDP and the bureaucracy were not always completely at odds, Shinzo Abe's first administration seemed to draw a clear line in the sand in terms of his social policy preferences. Abe repeatedly emphasized during his first administration that it was "normal" for the state to prioritize family values (Coleman 2008: 284). Why then would he make such a remarkable turn in his second administration and begin publicly espousing policies that he had previously eschewed during his first? Why would he distance himself from the LDP's social conservative wing and his reputation as a traditionalist on family and gender issues to pursue "womenomics," which has many liberal feminist features?

It is here that I turn to process tracing to explain the events that would follow Abe's first term as prime minister¹⁶. In keeping with best practices in process tracing, I have constructed a causal graph and historical timeline (Waldner 2016) to better represent the argument I am advancing in this thesis. The bottom portion of the graph is the historical timeline, which connects directly to the causal graph above. Each piece of the graph and timeline corresponds to a specific argument that I am advancing in this thesis. I should note, however, that the nodes in the graph expressing the LDP's preferences for responding to international gender norms and addressing the fertility crisis are not covered extensively in the pages to follow as I have already taken steps to outline these preferences in the previous section on international influence and

¹⁶ It is important to note that I am not covering the two years between Abe stepping down and the LDP losing to the DPJ. My reasons for doing so are simple – they do not include any random events or historical features that I deemed critical to the causal graph and historical timeline.

state feminism. All the arrows on the graph lead to the outcome on the bottom right hand corner:
Shinzo Abe's adoption of womenomics in his second term as prime minister.

Causal Graph and Historical Timeline



The LDP's Historic Loss/An Opening in the Political Opportunity Structure

Everything changed for the LDP in 2009, when the Democratic Party of Japan took control of the Diet in a landslide victory. Women's representation in the legislature, which had also risen after the LDP lost in the mid-1990s, reached an all-time high of 11.3 percent in the aftermath. This win, however, was not achieved due to a partnership between the feminist or the women's movement and the DPJ. Instead, the DPJ won primarily because of the public's dissatisfaction with the LDP's failures, and not necessarily because the DPJ was seen as the better alternative for women or the country as a whole (Campbell 2013: 1009). Indeed, in the wake of the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and ensuing nuclear disaster in Fukushima, the DPJ quickly lost favor with the Japanese people, and the LDP returned to office in 2012. With their return, the percentage of women in the legislature dropped to 7.9 percent (Shin 2015:346-347) (Campbell 2013: 1004).

The three-year period the LDP was out of office should not, however be dismissed. Up until that point, the only other time when the LDP could be considered the "opposition party" was for a ten-month span between 1993 and 1994. This loss, and the LDP's subsequent time in the opposition, was unprecedented for the party. This event resulted in what I am arguing is a *unique political opportunity* for the LDP to reorient its policy and be influenced by ideas that might have previously failed to gain political traction among the party's leadership. Yuriko Koike was someone who recognized this opportunity and used it to advance proposals that would later become part of Abe's "womenomics."

The Rise and Influence of Yuriko Koike on "Womenomics"

Yuriko Koike's journey to the Tokyo governorship (the elected office she currently holds) was unorthodox for any Japanese politician, let alone a woman. She was born to an

oil executive, and as a result spent much of her childhood traveling to the Middle East. She left Japan after high school to study sociology at Cairo University, and became fluent in Arabic. A thoroughly “global” woman, she returned to Japan to work as an interpreter and eventually a news anchor, which made her a household name in many Japanese homes. She was picked up as a potential candidate for the Japanese diet in the early 1990s after conducting an interview with the leader of a nascent political party, and has been involved in Japanese politics to varying degrees ever since, earning the reputation of a “migratory bird” and the nickname “Madame Conveyor Belt Sushi” for the way she bounced between various political parties (Rich 2016). This “party hopping” ceased in 2003, when Koike left the struggling New Conservative Party to join the LDP, which she has remained a member of ever since (The Nikkei Weekly 2003).

Koike’s reputation for being something of a “rogue agent” is important, because it implies a sense of fearlessness and willingness to take risks that helps shed perspective on some of her efforts to address gender inequality in Japan. Indeed, she was quoted lamenting the status of Japanese women as early as the late 1990s. As a member of the Shinshintō (New Frontier Party) in the Diet, Koike warned *The Daily Yomiuri* in September 1997 that “Japanese politics would increasingly lag behind other countries because of its neglect of female politicians” (*The Daily Yomiuri* 1997). She would also be involved in a high-profile battle within the party over controversial legislation. In 2003, Koike was serving as the Environment Minister and State Minister for Okinawa and the Northern Territories under Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi when he asked her to run against a fellow member of the LDP who had voted against his postal privatization bill. Koizumi would later be criticized for choosing “glamour” or “assassin” candidates to run against his political rivals, since his

picks were a far cry from the stereotypical, conservative male candidates the LDP usually fielded (The Daily Telegraph 2005). Meanwhile, Koike and eight additional women would garner the nickname “lipstick ninjas” for their efforts to assist Koizumi in ridding the Diet of his alleged “enemies” and break up the “good ol’ boy’s network” that the LDP was associated with (Faiola 2005). Koike would go on to win the seat and retain her prior cabinet positions (The Daily Yomiuri 2005a, The Daily Yomiuri 2005b).

Koike was tapped to serve as Japan’s first female defense minister during Abe’s first administration (a largely unsurprising appointment given her hawkish foreign policy views). Her time there would be short lived, however, as she stepped down after only two months in the wake of leaks regarding a defense system and a feud with the Chief Cabinet Secretary over a potential Vice Defense Minister replacement (The Daily Yomiuri 2007). Clearly unshaken by the departure, Koike would reemerge a year later in 2008 to run for president of the LDP – the first woman to ever do so. During her campaign, she emphasized her desire to address women’s issues as the party’s leader, saying “I want to deal with women's issues on a cross-party basis. That will unleash the potential energy of women and make Japan an energetic country" (Reynolds 2008)¹⁷.

Despite having the backing of the still popular Koizumi¹⁸, Koike failed to secure the party presidency and in turn the post of prime minister. She remained active in politics, however, and became the chair of the party’s Public Relations Headquarters after their loss to the DPJ in 2009. In 2010, she was appointed chair of the party’s General Council by the

¹⁷ She also remarked on the challenges Japanese women faced in politics with the comment "Hillary [Clinton] used the word 'glass ceiling' ... but in Japan, it isn't glass, it's an iron plate" (Sieg 2008).

¹⁸ It should be noted that Koizumi had supported Abe in 2006, but was somewhat marginalized politically by 2008.

LDP's president, over the objections of numerous veteran LDP lawmakers. She thus became the first woman ever to hold one of the party's three key posts (The Nikkei Weekly 2010a, 2010b). It is here that she would lay the groundwork for what would become "womenomics" in Abe's next term as prime minister in 2012.

In 2011, Koike and other party members formed a special committee (which she would also chair) within the party in order to begin deliberating on policy ideas that would improve the status women in Japan. The committee's belief was that a "country where women live comfortably is a better country for everyone." In one press conference about the special committee, Koike was careful to emphasize that her committee's purpose was not solely to address the declining birth rate (in fact there was another committee established for that specific cause), but to address all aspects of life from a woman's point of view, including marriage, nursing care, pensions, the economy, politics, etc. (Political Investigation Chairman Toshiki Motegi 2012a). However, she argued in another interview that "it is impossible to stop the birthrate decline unless we do something to eliminate anxiety about the future and develop an environment where women can give birth to children and then nurture them with confidence" (Liberal Democratic Party No. 2505). With this statement in mind, it is clear that concerns about the failing birthrate were not absent from the special committee's considerations.

Between April 2012 to August 2012, the committee interviewed experts and engaged in numerous policy discussions before announcing seven policy proposals to the party:

1. Achieving the goal set under the Koizumi administration of having women make up 30% of leadership positions throughout society by 2020
2. Increase diversity in the government procurement process (i.e. favor contracts

with companies that employ female managers and promote a friendly work environment for women, etc.)

3. End a culture of “after-hours” work
4. Create a quota for female candidates and members of the Diet
5. Create mechanisms to encourage female physicians to return to work after childbirth and childrearing
6. Increase the number of women holding leadership roles in academia
7. Encourage localities to create communities where family life and employment can coexist

During the press conference to announce the seven proposals, Koike emphasized that if the LDP would harness the “power” of women, the Japanese economy would reap the benefits (Liberal Democratic Party No. 2521). She also pointed out that, compared to many other countries, Japan was lagging far behind in female representation in parliament (Political Investigation Chairman Toshiki Motegi 2012a). This framing would set the stage for some of these policy proposals to be incorporated into a broader economic agenda, as opposed to just stand-alone gender equality legislation, and also called upon Japan’s longstanding attention to international norms when addressing women’s place in Japanese society. Lastly, Koike clearly believed that these policies would improve the image of the LDP with the general public. She stated that “the administration must transmit policies that will resonate with the people” and argued “the LDP should incorporate more grassroots voices and female voices than ever and reflect it in its policy. Is this not the role of a national party? We must fulfill the expectations of the people in politics” (Political Investigation Chairman Toshiki Motegi 2012b).

After the proposals were presented to the party, the committee submitted them to the General Election Consideration Committee and asked the party's presidential candidates to incorporate them into their election pledges (Political Investigation Chairman Toshiki Motegi 2012a, 2012b). One of those candidates was Shinzo Abe, who won the election in September 2012 and announced in his first press conference after becoming prime minister "[t]he mission of the Abe administration includes creating a country in which women are dynamically engaged and in which it is easy for them to raise children" (Japan 2012).

The Second Abe Administration

Abe returned to office in 2012 keenly aware of his former time as Prime Minister and of the LDP's struggles to foster consistency in the party's leadership. When questioned by a reporter about these two facts, Abe responded:

First of all, let me address the question of why the prime minister has changed so much over these last few years. I am Japan's 96th Prime Minister but I was also its 90th. I believe that it simply will not do for us to go back again to the beginning and have the same thing happen once more. Therefore, I feel great responsibility as the person in charge of an administration that had no alternative but to finish after a year. At the same time, I would like to make good use of my experience of both having led an administration in the past and having suffered a setback. I intend to conduct political administration in a way that does not again bring such unease to the Japanese people. I believe that now, our mission is to carry out stable political administration, also in order to "put a stop on political confusion and stagnation," something which is truly called for now (Japan 2012).

Here Abe demonstrates an explicit commitment to remember his first term and learn from both his mistakes and those of the party as a whole. With this in mind, Abe reappointed Koike to her former post as head of the LDP's public relations headquarters as well as two other women to important party posts (policy chief and General Council chair). Koike

wasted no time speaking to the press about the importance of women in revitalizing Japan's economy. In a statement, she emphasized that "to mobilize women would create a breakthrough in Japan's economy. This itself would change the paradigm of Japan's economy and ought to be ensconced as part of our growth strategy." She also warned that voters would remember if the LDP backed away from its promise to jumpstart the economy: "The fact we included this in our platform shows that it is the intention of the LDP. If we cannot achieve it, we will face criticism for violating our manifesto" (Sieg 2013).

Four months into his new term, Abe unveiled the "three key words" of his economic growth strategy (which would later be nicknamed "Abenomics"). The third key word of his strategy was "women", and the proposals associated it closely mirrored the policy report formulated under Yuriko Koike and the special committee. Abe called for a "Japan in Which Women Shine" and said that women constituted the "core" of his growth strategy. He reaffirmed the "30% by 2020" women in leadership goal, called for an end to childcare waiting lists, and emphasized the importance of women being able to re-enter the workforce or start their own businesses after childbirth (Japan 2013a). In the end, the complete list of womenomics policy proposals included:

1. Increasing the targets for women's participation and advancement in the workforce
2. Increasing access to day-care and after-school care for children
3. Encouraging promotions for women in the private sector (and asking for data on said promotions)
4. Encouraging recruitment and promotions for women within the government
5. Expanding child care leave benefits

6. Reviewing Japan's tax and social security systems that create disincentives for women to participate in the workforce
7. Allowing foreign housekeepers to work in special economic zones¹⁹

Although not all of Koike's committee's proposals were included in the final version of womenomics, the connection between the two is evident. Koike had succeeded in putting womenomics on the agenda, but would womenomics solve Japan's gender inequality woes?

Gender (In)Equality in Japan Today

The state of gender equality in Japan is as timely as topic in 2017 as it was when Abe addressed the United Nations in 2013. Indeed, Japan dropped from 101st to 111th (out of 144) on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Report for 2016. Upon being questioned about this news, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshide Suga remarked, "[t]he government is promoting female power as the biggest potential driver for economic growth. Under the government of Abe, about one million jobs have been created for women, and the number of female board members of companies listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange has more than doubled." (Thomas et al. 2016).

Although Suga is clearly speaking to part of "womenomics" in his comments, the continued emphasis within the Japanese government on the connection between job market participation and gender equality speaks to government's continued conceptualization of what gender (in)equality actually is and what needs to be done to address it. Despite their low gender equality ranking, Japanese women actually outpaced American women in terms of working age labor force participation in 2015 (64% versus 63%) (Paquette 2015).

Meanwhile, the United States ranked 45th out of 144 in the Global Gender Report 2016

¹⁹ Embassy of Japan 2014, Chanlett-Avery et al. 2014

(Leopold et al. 2016). Although these statistics tell only part of the story, they imply that there is more to Japan's ongoing gender inequality woes than a lack of jobs for Japanese women.

It is becoming increasingly evident that merely getting more women into the Japanese workforce will not change longstanding socio-cultural and business values that prioritize long working hours, exempt men from childcare and housework duties (all while assuming that there is a woman at home to perform them), relegate women to “non-regular”, “low on the totem pole” positions that keep them out of Japan's traditional corporate environment, and turn a blind eye to workplace harassment directed towards women because of their maternity status or lack of power relative to their superiors (Ogawa 2017, Macnaughtan 2015: 20, Ferragina et al. 2014: 17, Estévez-Abe 2013: 95, McDonald 2006: 505). Japan's enduring conceptualization of who belongs in the workplace (the unburdened male) and who belongs in the home (the caretaking female) is therefore a continued roadblock to reconciling the need to increase women's labor force participation and encourage childbearing - despite the goals of womenomics.

History Repeating Itself

Does “womenomics” represent a new era of Japanese state feminism and gender equality, or does it represent more of the same – i.e. fertility policy masquerading as gender equality policy? I argue for the latter, while acknowledging the implications that Yuriko Koike's influence has had and may continue to have in changing the way the Japanese state responds to these problems. Japan has a long history, dating back to the American occupation, of establishing government bureaus and enacting policies relating to gender that appear compelling on paper. However, they have so far failed to translate into real equality

between Japanese men and women. In addition, Japan has, for the last two and a half decades, repeatedly tied these policies to concerns over Japan's falling birthrate and its economy. With these two factors in mind, the appearance of womenomics seems like more of the same. Although it represents a clear shift in policy preference between Shinzo Abe's two administrations (from more conservative to liberal), it does not break new ground in the way gender equality policy arises in Japan. It was brought about under the influence of international norms and state feminism, and includes a reference to economics in its name. In many ways, what appears like the real intentions of the Japanese government – improve the economy via a higher birthrate – have never been more explicit than they are in this current iteration of its gender policy.

Koike continues to press against the establishment, but it is unclear what role, if any, she will play in the future of womenomics. Her run for the Tokyo Governorship in 2016 was not supported by the LDP, with one party member going so far as to suggest that it “be wrong to elect a woman who wore too much makeup.” Instead she ran as an Independent, ultimately winning in a landslide against the LDP's lesser-known, male candidate, and becoming the first woman in Japan to hold the position. Her victory was attributed to her being an outsider who was unafraid to tackle Tokyo's biggest challenges, including promoting transparency after the resignation of two previous governors in the wake of financial scandals, and preparing for the 2020 Summer Olympics (Washington Post 2016). Today she is the most popular politician in Japan, with her approval ratings topping 86%. Although she remains relatively quiet at present on the subject of gender (in)equality in Tokyo and Japan at large, one of her goals as governor is to secure access to more kindergartens for Japan's working mothers, a policy that would fit right in with

“womenomics” (Harding 2017). It remains to be seen whether she will make another bid for prime minister, or become more active in advocating for women’s issues and/or greater gender equality. What is clear, however, is that she has made a name for herself by using the current political landscape to advance her career and achieve her policy goals.

My argument about Koike raises several interesting implications for the study of gender policy. Prior research has demonstrated that a strong, autonomous feminist movement is a critical factor in bringing about policy change, and that global norms are unlikely to have an impact on domestic policy unless an autonomous, domestic women’s movement is active as well (Htun & Weldon 2012, 2014). While my analysis here does not invalidate these claims, it does suggest that there may be alternative pathways for getting policy change when the domestic women’s movement is weak (as is the case in Japan) or perhaps even nonexistent. Yuriko Koike took advantage of a unique political opportunity (the LDP’s rare position as the opposition party) and Japan’s longstanding practice of state feminism to advance a liberal feminist agenda (womenomics) that may not have gained as much attention otherwise. In this sense, she was an active “political entrepreneur” who was cognizant of the fact that the LDP’s unprecedented situation represented a new opportunity to potentially change policy. In the end, it was the combination of this key political actor advancing international norms of gender equality, rather than an autonomous women’s movement advancing those same norms, that helped prompt the LDP’s embrace of womenomics in Abe’s second term.

Although the lack of a strong, autonomous women’s movement may not have prevented the emergence of womenomics, its absence may still hurt the socio-cultural and business fight for gender equality in Japan. Leonard Schoppa argues that Japan’s gender-

egalitarian labor market policies will do little to reverse Japan's declining fertility policy because of the ability of Japanese women to easily "exit" or opt-out of motherhood in favor of the workforce. His argument rests on the idea that the movement and "voices" needed to prompt change in the unequal power structure between men and women in the private sector never formulated because Japanese women gained control of fertility options (in the form of birth control, access to abortion, etc.) before they entered the workforce (Schoppa 2010: 431). What Japanese women may have gained in terms of controlling their fertility may have come at the cost of a broader movement that would have made women's choices over that same fertility seem less black and white in civil society. Therefore, while the Japanese government may continue to search for new ways to advance gender equality from within the state, the lack of an effort within Japanese civil society to press for that equality may continue to pose a roadblock for state implementation for years to come.

In this thesis, I have argued that Shinzo Abe's turn towards "womenomics"/liberal feminism in his second term as prime minister was the result of two key factors: 1) The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan's historic loss to the Democratic Party of Japan in 2009, creating a unique political opportunity within the party for change and 2) Yuriko Koike's role on a special committee within the LDP that called for improving the status of women in Japan. In addition, I have argued that this new policy preference should not be considered new or revelatory in the Japanese context. Instead, I posit that Japan has responded to international pressure regarding women and gender equality a number of times dating back to the U.S. occupation after World War II, and that this response has been tied to concerns about Japan's falling fertility rate for the last two and a half decades. Therefore, gender equality and women's rights activists should be cautious when assessing the potential impact

of policies coming out of womenomics and making predictions about the status of women in Japan as a result. While this latest iteration of gender policy may be considered by some to be Japan's most progressive to date (and a welcome change from Abe's first administration), the status of women in Japan has improved only marginally throughout history in the wake of similar policy proposals. As has been emphasized repeatedly in the literature on gender and Japan, until the gendered division of labor is completely overhauled from multiple societal perspectives, Japan is unlikely to achieve the "society in which all women shine" that it seeks.

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