
Womenomics, ‘Equality’ and Abe’s Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine

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By international measurements, Japan fares poorly on gender equality. With the second largest gender pay gap and the worst record for women’s political representation among OECD countries, Japanese women have limited access to positions of power and influence. The government has begun to address these inequalities with a raft of policies that attempt to bridge these chronic gender gaps, with the recent policies of the Abe administration being referred to as ‘womenomics’. Heralded by many as an important step in the right direction, womenomics has also been criticised as a misguided co-optation of feminism. This Survey discusses the implications of the ‘long-working-hours’ culture on gender equality policies and the implementation of womenomics within a climate of neo-liberal management practices justified through chronic economic stagnation. Far from the empowering outcomes it rhetorically espouses, this evaluation suggests that womenomics is further exacerbating the bipolarisation of Japanese women into two groups: a small elite minority capable of assimilating to masculinised working patterns versus the vast majority of women ghettoized into insecure underpaid ‘non-regular’ work that denies access to crucial benefits.

Key words: *womenomics; women’s economic participation; gender equality; Japan*

1. Introduction

For many years, Japan has fared poorly in international measures of gender equality. The country ranks 101 out of 145 countries in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index (GGI).¹ As Stephanie Assmann (2014) points out, Japan fares well when it comes to equality between the sexes in education and access to health, but does badly according to international indices of gender equality in the areas of empowerment through political and public life, and employment. Table 1 indicates the gravity of the situation.

In this article, I pursue the doubts many have expressed regarding the benefits of recent government policies intended to empower women, including ‘womenomics’. I explore the background to the policies that comprise womenomics and the possibilities of their goals being achieved. I do this by examining the current employment situation for women in Japan in the context of rapidly shifting socio-demographic topographies. I first provide a brief explanation of the evolution of ‘womenomics’—where did it come from and why has the Japanese government embraced it so fervently?

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1. The GGI measures the gap between men and women across four areas—economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment.

Table 1. Proportion of Women in Positions of Economic and Political Power.

Diet members	12%
Governors	6.4%
Mayors	1.8%
Heads of companies	7.2%
University professors	14%
Researchers	14%
University presidents	7%
Lawyers	18%
Practising doctors	20%
(Wage gap between men and women)	(27%)

Sources: [Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office \(2013\)](#); The Economist website.

2. The Origins of Womenomics

‘Abenomics’ is the ambitious economic plan named after Prime Minister Abe Shinzo that seeks to revitalise Japan’s long-depressed economy. It consists of three pillars: a massive fiscal injection into the economy in early 2013, expansionary monetary policy that also began in early 2013 and continues today, and a bundle of structural economic reforms. The third pillar includes ‘womenomics’—prioritised and focussed policies to increase the number of women in the workforce, facilitate their ability to stay in the workforce and boost the number of women in leadership positions in a wide range of sectors. The importance of addressing the enduring gender inequality evident in [Table 1](#) is now on the political agenda. Womenomics includes the introduction of gender targets to increase the number of women appointed to senior positions in the private sector, targets to encourage men to take childcare leave, increased childcare availability and the expansion of childcare benefits ([Chanlett-Avery and Nelson 2014: 4–5](#)). A widely reported element of womenomics is the target for having 30% of all decision-making positions in society occupied by women by 2020. First tabled in 2003 by the Koizumi government, this target was revised down at the end of 2015 ([Aoki 2015](#)), indicating that policymakers realised it was an impossible goal.

As others have pointed out ([Sechiyama 2014; Ueno 2014](#)), neither the term ‘womenomics’ nor the policies it encompasses are the brainchild of Abe, or the Abe government. The term ‘womenomics’ was coined by Kathy Matsui, chief Japan strategist for Goldman Sachs. Matsui and colleagues wrote a report called *Womenomics: Buy the Female Economy* in 1999, which argued that Japan needed to take advantage of women as an untapped resource in the labour market. The 1999 report was followed by three more reports—*Womenomics: Japan’s Hidden Asset* (2005), *Womenomics 3.0: The Time is Now* (2010) and *Womenomics 4.0: Time to Walk the Talk* (2014). In these reports, Matsui and others argue that if women entered the workforce at rates similar to the rest of the industrialised world, Japan’s economy would improve—an argument adopted later by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 2012, the IMF issued a report that suggested Japanese GDP (Gross Domestic Product) would increase if more women participated in the workforce. Specifically, the IMF predicts that if the female labour force participation rate increases from 63% in 2010 to 70% by 2030—which would bring it to the level of other G7 countries—the GDP would increase by 4% ([Steinberg and Nakane 2012: 5](#)).²

2. The report goes on to predict that if the female labour force participation rate was to increase even further, to that of northern European countries, GDP would increase by a further 4% ([Steinberg and Nakane 2012: 5](#)).

The same report noted that increasing the female labour force participation rate was crucial to counter the problems of an aging population (Steinberg and Nakane 2012: 26).

The IMF report received a significant amount of attention in the mainstream media. Increased enthusiasm towards women's 'empowerment' in policymaking circles and the media can be understood in the broader context of the declining fertility rate. Japan's fertility rate declined gradually for decades after the second baby boom of the early 1970s. 2005 saw the lowest average number of babies born per women, at 1.26, after which it began to rise, settling at around 1.4. The population replacement level is 2.1, so the current situation means that the Japanese population is predicted to shrink significantly if current conditions continue. By 2060, it is predicted that 27% of the population will be 75 or older (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2012). The common sense argument about the problem of the low number of women in the workforce is that women need to be able to juggle work and family and the inability to do this in Japan is one of the primary causes of women dropping out of the workforce. This is tied to the low fertility rate. According to Inoguchi Kuniko (cited in Inoguchi and Katsuma 2007: 42–44), a member of the ruling LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) and former State Minister for Gender Equality, all advanced democratic countries have experienced a drop in fertility as a result of women's increased education and workforce participation rates. Some countries, including Holland, Norway and France, have reversed the fertility decline by implementing social and labour policies that to some extent enabled women to work and raise families at the same time. Japan is amongst a handful of countries that have been unable to do this. It is worth noting that the significant contribution of immigration to countries that have avoided serious drops in fertility is rarely acknowledged by policymakers in Japan.

According to official logic, by having more women in the workforce, not only will the GDP rise, the fertility rate might also rise, and the problems associated with a declining working population resulting from the ageing society will also be addressed. The official interest in gender equality occurring within the corridors of Japanese bureaucracy and industry should be viewed within this context. As early as 15 years ago, Osawa Mari (2000: 4) observed with some irony that the Japanese government's increasing enthusiasm for gender equality policies was due to the fact that 'gender equality is good for business'. Viewed against the backdrop of broader international interest in women's participation in corporate Boards, gender equality has been increasingly seen to be beneficial to both economic growth and corporate image. It was in the late 1990s that the 'smart economics' framework—whereby women were constructed as a fundamental source of growth—developed primarily in international development discourses, but also more generally in discourses on business and economic efficiency (Roberts and Soederberg 2012: 950).

The term 'womenomics' therefore is not new, and neither are many of the policies the term encompasses. Rather, these policies can be traced back to the late 1990s. The Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society (hereafter the Basic Law) was implemented in 1999 and reflected the government's growing enthusiasm for pursuing gender equality through the implementation of a variety of policies. Specifically, it was then that we began to see the focused implementation by the government of policies to increase the number of women in decision-making roles. The Basic Law encourages businesses and local councils to establish gender targets in decision-making bodies. The Basic Plan, published in December 2000, sets out actions to support the law. It is in the Basic Plan that we start to hear about the 30% target, although at this stage it is vague. This was made more concrete under former prime minister Koizumi's cabinet in 2003 with the report issued by the Council for Gender Equality, 'Measures to support Women's challenges'. Subsequently, the Second Basic Plan, adopted in 2005, focused on positive action measures. According to the Basic Plan, in order to raise the number of women holding 'leadership positions' to 30% by 2020, "Positive Action"/Temporary Special

Measures” and other approaches will be promoted’ ([Gender Equality Bureau 2007](#): 27). Item Three of the Basic Plan, which is concerned with ‘equal opportunities and treatment between women and men in the field of employment’, states that ‘the ratio of companies engaged in positive action will be raised to 40 percent by Fiscal Year 2009 (29.5 percent in 2003)’ ([Gender Equality Bureau 2007](#): 20).

‘Womonomics’ might not be a new concept, but the prioritised focus the government seems to be placing on policies is worthy of scrutiny. The importance of increasing the number of women in the workforce—and more pointedly, in higher positions—is now receiving a lot of attention in policy-making circles. It is certainly receiving more publicity. The first womonomics report in 1999 received only one response from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. This is a far cry from the media, corporate and official interest in womonomics in recent years.

A significant development in womonomics occurred on 28 August 2015 when the Law to Promote Women’s Employment (*Josei Katsuyaku Suishin Hō*) was passed by the Diet to take effect on 1 April 2016. Companies and employers with over 300 employees are obliged to create, implement and publicise ‘Action Plans’. The law is not binding and there are no penalties for companies who do not follow the law. One of the four ‘basic items’ to be explored in ‘step 1’ of creating an Action Plans is working hours, and specifically, the average number of overtime hours worked each month by employees ([Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare n.d.](#)). The gendered implications of the long-work-hours culture prevalent in many workplaces will be discussed further below.

But first, I will outline the working conditions for women in Japan today to suggest that the goals of womonomics are élitist and somewhat incongruous with the material reality of many women’s working lives.

3. Women and the Japanese Workforce

To contextualise women’s position in the contemporary workforce in Japan, I will briefly trace the path women have taken since an increasing number began to enter the workforce during the era of rapid urbanisation and increased professionalization. In the 1960s and 1970s, an increasing number of women were successful in suing their employers for sexual discrimination and so gradually the labour force became more welcoming to women. This helped to create conditions that were conducive to implementing an anti-sex discrimination law. This, combined with domestic pressure from women’s groups and external pressure on Japan to create an anti-sex discrimination law in order to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), led to the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1986. The EEOL was the merging and revision of the 1975 Working Women’s Welfare Law and the 1947 Labour Standards Law. The original law was revised twice and has gradually become more enforceable. Some of the revisions to the EEOL were positive, including the acknowledgement of the notion of ‘indirect discrimination’ and the introduction of positive action measures in 1997.

The EEOL (and its revisions in 1997 and 2010) was successful in dismantling the most obvious types of discrimination. Another, less positive, effect it had was a further bipolarisation of working women as they were forced to choose between full-time work conditions equivalent to men, and non-regular work that offered some flexibility and shorter working hours, but lacked job security and other benefits. Most Japanese women have eschewed the working style demanded of full-time workers, and this was the argument of women’s groups in the lead up to the enactment of the EEOL ([Mackie 2003](#): 182–183). The feminist movement in the 1970s campaigned for better conditions for all workers, both male and female. The discussions surrounding the implementation of the law were characterised by an ideological battle between big business and the government on one side

and women's groups and labour on the other, captured in arguments surrounding the 'protection' of women workers. The protection provisions in the Labour Standards Law included provisions for menstrual leave and prohibitions on women from working excessively long hours or at night. Many women's groups argued that protection was not incompatible with equality and in fact, the protection provisions in question should be extended to all workers. The women's groups lost this fight to big business and the EEOL created conditions under which women were now granted permission to engage in male-style working practices. These practices include unattractive conditions, such as very long working hours and reassignment to different parts of the country. These unattractive conditions are ostensibly compensated by attractive conditions such as the security of full-time and permanent work, a career path with increased responsibilities and relatively high pay. Despite these ostensible new work opportunities for women, most women did not take up the offer, for three main reasons. The first one I have already mentioned—women have generally been averse to working under such conditions. The second, and related, reason is that gendered social roles in Japan mean that women shoulder the lions' share of family care responsibilities so engaging in male-style working practices is practically impossible. Married women, particularly if they have, or if they want to have children, are expected to limit their career aspirations to within areas that accommodate their primary role of caring. The third reason can be found by looking at employment and recruitment trends since the mid-1980s. The largest growth in jobs for women since the EEOL was implemented has been seen in part-time work. In the decade from 1986 to 1996, part-time employment accounted for 93% of the growth in women's employment (Gottfried 2008: 184).³ In fact, a climate of enduring economic recession has been used by management to make decisions that ensure there are fewer full-time permanent positions being offered to either men or women. The rise in 'non-regular' work is one of the defining characteristics of Japan's labour market story of the past two decades (see Gordon, this issue). Non-regular work includes part-time, casual and dispatch work. It offers little or no career development, less stability and lower pay than regular work. Figure 1 demonstrate the enormous gulf between the wages of non-regular and regular workers. Non-regular workers are also often ineligible

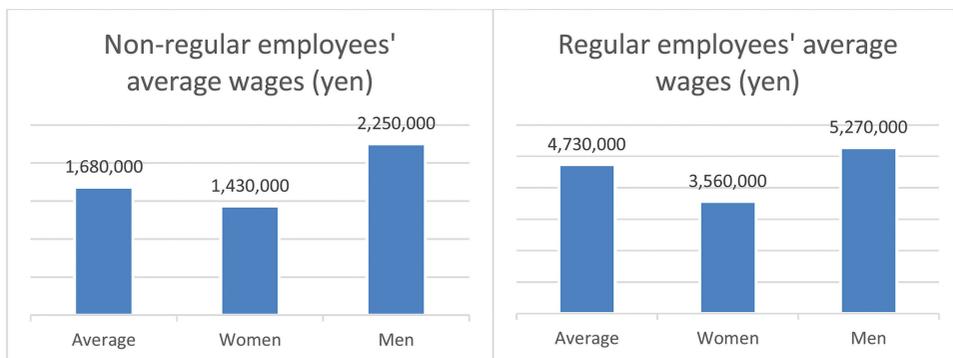


Figure 1. Gender break-down of non-regular and regular workers' wages.

Source: National Tax Agency (2014: 12).

3. The Temporary Workers' Law (*Haken Rōdō Hō*) was also enforced in 1986. This enabled employers to employ some workers on a more flexible basis. It was heavily criticised by feminists because of its disproportionate effect on women workers (Kaji 1986: 34). It is true that many workers like the choice of flexible employment but there are also many who would like to move from their current 'flexible' working arrangements to something more secure. Employment 'flexibility' is more likely to benefit employers than employees. (See Gordon, this issue, for a more detailed discussion of this.)

for many of the benefits available to regular workers. Childcare leave, for example, is only available to workers who have worked continuously for a year. Workers whose contracts fall short of a year are ineligible to apply for childcare leave (Takenobu 2014: 27).

The deregulation of the workforce since the 1980s has affected both men and women, but women workers have been most affected by the explosion of irregular work. Prior to 1984, 78.4% of women workers were ‘regular’ workers; by 2002, this figure had dropped to 50.9%. By 2012, the figure was 42.5%. In contrast, 93.4% of male workers were ‘regular workers’ in 1984, and this figure had dropped less than 10% by 2002 to 85.1% (Statistics Bureau, cited in Seiyama 2004: 7; Statistics Bureau 2013: 7). In 2012, this figure was 77.9%. More than half of all women workers, therefore, are ‘non-regular’ employees (Statistics Bureau 2013: 7).

Today, most Japanese women participate in the workforce throughout their lives, but the majority spend their child-rearing years out of it, or in part-time or casual positions. Once women leave the workforce for family and/or childcare reasons, they rarely return to full-time, secure positions. On top of this, it is rare for Japanese corporations to have senior positions filled by part-time workers, meaning that opportunities for women to become managers are limited. In fact, only one quarter of regular workers in their 40s and 50s (considered prime managerial age) are women (Takeishi 2015: 4). Non-regular and marginalised work continues to characterise women’s working patterns in Japan. In other words, women continue to be used as a valve and their working lives depend very much on the health of the market. Japan’s economic development has always depended on women’s work in the peripheral labour market, from when women worked in the textile factories in the late 1800s and early 1900s to today when women work in non-regular and insecure positions across all sectors. As Chelsea Schieder (2014: 57) notes, while women have repeatedly been referred to by government and industry leader as an ‘underutilised resource’, they have in fact been an exploited resource throughout Japan’s modern history.

How then does womenomics address the large number of women non-regular workers in a labour market that seems to place little value on part-time or casual workers? A reading of specific policy documents suggests that these women are outside the target of womenomics. For example, in 2014, the Equal Employment, Children and Families Bureau in the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare introduced a financial reward of 300,000 yen to medium- to large-sized companies and 150,000 yen to small companies that had satisfied certain positive action requirements. The money was awarded to companies who: set and publicised numerical targets for ‘the expansion of women at work’ or ‘the promotion of women managers etc.’; held training programs; and achieved the set numerical targets within three years (Rōdō Kijun Kōhō 2014). The women to be targeted in this positive action scheme must be ‘ordinary workers’ (*tsūjō no rōdōsha*). The definition provided of ordinary workers essentially points to women who are employed directly by the company (that is, they are not dispatch workers) and are regular workers or receive the same treatment and benefits that regular workers receive. This suggests that non-regular women workers fall outside the scope of this scheme. There are two ways one might interpret this—one could be to argue that this might have the effect of encouraging companies to employ or at least treat women as regular employees. A less sanguine interpretation is that the policy excludes non-regular women workers, who, as I have mentioned, form a large bulk of the female workforce. On this point, some claim that while womenomics might appear to target women, the beneficiaries of the policies are stakeholders in corporate Japan and certain politicians rather than women themselves (Steele 2016).

While non-regular workers face uncertain futures, a lack of benefits and low pay, the working lives of women who have ‘regular’ jobs are not necessarily without problems. One of the main hurdles facing women regular workers is the long working hours expected of them.

4. The Long-Work-Hours Culture

Many women are unable or unwilling to participate in the masculinised long-work-hours culture that characterises corporate Japan. The long hours that men work are considered a trade-off for lifetime, stable employment. In order for a company to succeed, it is taken for granted that managers must and will sacrifice their time and private and family lives: 'Overwork is a gendered marker of the ideal worker and women are seen as incapable or unwilling to work long hours' (Nemoto 2013a: 160). The results of Nemoto Kumiko's research into organisational constraints on women regular workers in companies (those with between 900 and 9,000 employees) suggest that women face many difficulties and much discrimination in the corporate sector. The depth and scope of sexism amongst men in corporate Japan would appear to be an enduring problem. Nemoto demonstrates that the belief that women are not as capable as men remains deeply entrenched. This is usually expressed not in biologically deterministic terms, but rather as a belief in the unavoidable consequences of women's responsibilities at home. Nemoto argues that the 'separate sphere' ideology, whereby work and home are clearly demarcated, is the foundation upon which corporations create and maintain masculinist and sexist cultures. For the men whose voices we hear in Nemoto's research, corporate culture has no place for idealistic notions like work-life balance, part-time work with responsibility or respect for women (or men) who take time off to care for their children or parents. Long working hours are necessary for the productivity of these companies, and women apparently do not have what it takes. This particular way of working is gendered masculine and the men who partake in this culture seem territorial about it, as the following quote from one of Nemoto's male informants demonstrates:

You must pay yourself, to get the business done.... Those who really contribute to the company need to sacrifice themselves in many ways, such as working long hours and paying as necessary. As far as I know, I have never met a woman who works like me (cited in 2013b: 519–520).

Women who strive to be ideal workers in Japan are therefore under pressure to work the long hours that men typically work. This follows a common pattern seen when women enter male-dominated organisations—the emulation of existing cultural norms is the path to 'success' and is the taken-for-granted assumption for equality. Moira Gatens argues that the only way women can achieve 'equality' in institutions governed by male norms is to emulate the men who created and maintain those norms. She makes this argument as part of her critique of 'equal opportunity', saying that offering equal opportunity to women in workplaces dominated by male norms is akin to urging them to work like men, disregarding their corporeal and social differences (Gatens 1999: 230–231). Japanese and non-Japanese feminists have long argued that if equality means striving to emulate male working patterns, then women should be wary of being enjoined to aspire to it (Kaji 1986: 35; Ueno 1988: 183; Greer 1999: 296–309; Ogasawara 2004: 248).

As we will see, recent gender equality policies that are underpinned by this brand of gender equality that encourages women to participate in a culture of excessively long work hours do not necessarily satisfy the needs of many women in Japan. They are perhaps better understood as targeting a minority of women.

5. Support for the Elite

Some argue that Japanese women—unlike women in the West who took up the fight to be 'equal' to men by working like them in their quest for economic independence—have never desired to have their identities revolve around their careers (Ueno 1988). Borovoy (2001: 86–87) argues

that within the cultural context of dependence, Japanese women are raised to understand that one day they will become mothers and wives and this will be their primary identity. Aspiring to financial independence is not necessarily a part of women's socialisation. As women, they will move from their parents' house into their husband's, thus never having the need to be fully financially independent. More recently, the shift between parents' home and husband's is occurring less seamlessly as women and men marry later and later. The background to and consequences of this for Japanese society have been well documented and are beyond the scope of this article. But the fact that most women are ambivalent about having 'careers' in Japan is an important point and one that does not seem to be adequately reflected in the Abe government's approach to gender equality. A women council member in Narita city revealed that many mothers and wives in her constituency feel somewhat threatened by recent gender policies, believing that their way of life is now frowned upon and that they are being told to get to work (personal communication 2015). The majority of Japanese women work in insecure and poorly paid jobs. Many of these women might not be happy with their situations but that does not necessarily mean they aspire to male-style working patterns, or desire the work-centred lifestyles that many men have. Womenomics appears to target elite women—women who are in secure, full-time jobs and have career paths, and women who want and feel able to carve out careers like salaried men. As [Okada \(2014: 63\)](#) notes, the Abe administration might be publicising its attempt to create a 'society where women shine', but most women remain in the dark, out of the spotlight. In other words, the majority of working women are not in positions to shine—they are working for low hourly wages in menial jobs. The woman working at the local supermarket earning 900 yen an hour is probably not the target of 'womenomics'. Furthermore, single mothers—some of the most economically marginalised women—do not seem to benefit from womenomics. Today in Japan, 54% of single parent households, most of which are headed by women, live below the poverty line. The average annual salary of single mothers is 1.8 million yen, and many have to work two jobs—mostly non-regular and insecure ([Brasor and Tsubuku 2015](#)). [Ueno \(2014: 12\)](#) contends that current gender equality policies are creating a bipolarisation between women—a small privileged minority who can thrive in the workplace and the remaining women who are not in positions to benefit from the policies.

As [Macnaughtan \(2015\)](#) argues, there is ambivalence within society regarding gender equality coming from the 'top-down'. The imposition of 'gender equality' and 'women's empowerment' onto Japanese women as defined by the Abe government is misguided. Indeed Japanese working women seem acutely aware of this: a working woman who adjusted her working style for her son is suspicious of the policies that encourage women to work to the detriment of their families, particularly the recently flagged proposal to open up Japan to foreign domestic workers⁴: 'This policy seems to be aimed at freeing us up to work more [...] I think the government should be looking at policies to help everyone work less and get a better work-life balance' (cited in [Reynolds and Shimodoi 2014](#)).

4. The US Chamber of Commerce has urged the Japanese government to allow the entry of foreign domestic workers which would apparently allow Japanese women to participate more in the workforce. It has proposed that Japanese nationals and permanent residents who have a household income of 7 million yen or more be permitted to sponsor a domestic worker ([Reynolds and Shimodoi 2014](#)). During his speech at the 2014 World Economic Forum, Prime Minister Abe noted that 'foreign workers' to help with the 'housework, care for the elderly, and the like' would facilitate the plan to have 30% of leading positions occupied by women by 2020 ([Abe 2014](#)). Despite this, in general, the government seems to be resistant to the US Chamber of Commerce proposal. Indeed, one wonders if there is really domestic demand for it, given cultural resistance to the idea of strangers looking after one's children, and given the typically cramped living areas of most people's homes in urban centres ([Reynolds and Shimodoi 2014](#)).

This is not the first time the Abe government has demonstrated how unrepresentative it is of Japanese women. The Abe government's 2013 proposal of a women's notebook (*josei techō*) is an example of this. Its ostensible purpose was to educate women about their fertility—to remind women that falling pregnant becomes increasingly difficult after a certain age. This was criticised by women's groups for bordering on being coercive and being too intrusive in women's personal lives (Femiren 2013). The criticism from the public was so widespread the government eventually dropped the idea. Another example that demonstrates the Abe cabinet's distance from the public on the issue of women's needs is the 'three-year maternity leave' policy proposal (Ueno 2014: 7). This too has received extensive criticism for misrepresenting women's needs. Women's groups have long argued that what is needed is childcare for babies and toddlers between the ages of zero and three. The waiting lists for this age group in urban centres continue to be very long and recent promises by the government to increase the number of childcare centres has been welcomed but also criticised as inadequate (Ueno 2014: 8).

6. Conclusion

Statistics demonstrate that when it comes to economic empowerment, Japanese women face an uphill struggle. While the policies of womenomics might appear to potentially benefit women because they enable women to access to more empowering employment opportunities, the arguments presented in this article suggest that the premise of womenomics is misguided. Japan has a long and unhealthy tradition of male policymakers and male politicians deciding what is best for women. Perhaps, as many Japanese women have long argued, what is needed is a move away from the push for equality, in its current impoverished bureaucratic form, and a shift towards liberation—liberation for both women and men from long working hours and punishing labour conditions in general. For this to happen, a drastic revision of labour conditions and employment structures and cultures is required. In particular, the long-working-hours culture that characterises the private and most other sectors in Japan is detrimental to the empowerment of women. Without a shift in this culture, womenomics seems destined to benefit only a small minority of women, while the needs of the majority of women who exist on the periphery of the workforce and struggle to make ends meet continue to occupy a blurry place in a far-distant corner of the political agenda.

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