“Womenomics”
The Political and Economic Policies for Women’s Emancipation?

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“In Japan we have an expression ‘a single fleck of red’, which means a single flower blooming beautifully amidst all the green, implying a sole woman amidst a sea of men.”

Shinzo Abe.
Abstract

Although there has been substantial progress toward gender equality, great disparities still persist. Across the globe, women face widespread gender gaps in the division of household responsibilities, economic resources, limited access to educational opportunities, and legal and political barriers to political power. Japan is one of the countries that has been falling behind, and has for several years been facing criticism from major international organisations for the persistent gender gaps in its economy, politics, and society. Furthermore, Japan has for a long time been influenced by Confucian tradition where the emphasis has been on strong gender norms and division. In 2013, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe launched new economic policies to restart and stimulate Japan’s economic growth. He encourages an increase of active inclusion of women’s participation, and his policies came to be widely known as “Womenomics”. The ambition of this paper is to discover Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s view on women’s role in his new policies, and to conduct a dimension analysis on “Womenomics”. The analysis is based on the theoretical framework of Confucianism and Liberal Feminism, to see whether one can discover elements of Confucianism and/or Liberal Feminism in “Womenomics”. The results indicate that the prime minister consider women’s role mostly in regards to economics, and the policies and the view on women’s role are foremost aligned with the political ideas of Liberal Feminism.

Key words: “Womenomics”, Liberal Feminism, Confucianism, women’s role, private sphere, public sphere, women’s participation, Shinzo Abe
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1. Introduction
Women’s underrepresentation in politics has long been documented. Women’s political participation and representation vary dramatically between countries, and women across the world have to contest established beliefs that politics is a man’s domain (Paxton et al, 2007:264). Gender equality became a major issue on the global agenda during the late twentieth century and the UN initiated the integration of women into development projects, triggering the formation of thousands of women’s organisations. *The Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women* in 1995, adopted a platform seeking to promote and protect the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women. Although there has been substantial progress toward gender equality, great disparities still persists. Across the globe, women face widespread gender gaps in the division of household responsibilities, economic resources, limited access to educational opportunities, and legal and political barriers to political power (Inglehart and Norris, 2009:3f). The Beijing Conference was a big keystone of the world’s leaders determination and commitment for women’s empowerment. Equality between women and men was discussed as a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice, but also a fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace (UN Women, 1995).

Around the world, there is a rise of a more inclusive gender perspective in policy making within states and governments. In order to bring about changes, gender mainstreaming has become a rising practice. Gender mainstreaming proposes to introduce gender sensitivity at all levels of the policy process (Krizsán and Zentai, 2006:36). The UN General Assembly endorsed gender mainstreaming in 1996, and is now official policy for the UN organisation and also for most governments and the international system as a whole (True and Mintrom, 2001:31ff).

1.1 Background – The case of Japan
Across the world women have become increasingly more influential and inclusive in politics, especially among industrialised countries. Japan, however, has and is falling behind despite the acknowledgement and increased evidence that women are becoming more important in formal and informal politics (Freiner, 2007). Japan has for several years faced increasing criticism from major international organisations, such as the World Economic Forum, the OECD, and the UN, for the persistent gender gaps in its economy, politics, and society. For a highly developed economy with well-educated women, the percentage of working women remains low, especially after women marry and have children. These international
organisations have published reports and Japan has often times been ranked near the bottom the indices for gender equality and women’s participation in the labour force (Hasunuma, 2015:89).

When analysing United Nations Development Programme on Human Development from 2016, Japan ranks 17th on the indicators. Japan scores significantly good when it comes to the Human Development Index (HDI), as it measures the standard of living, education and health among the populace of the countries. Japan is doing exceptionally well when it comes to women’s human development, where women have access to education and good health (UNDP, 2016). According to the report from OECD Better Life index, Japan performs among the top in personal security and above the OECD average in income and wealth, education and skills, jobs and earnings, personal security, and environmental quality. However, when it comes to gender equality and conditions in work environment, Japan ranks among the lowest (OECD, 2017). Furthermore, women’s political participation in Japan, the country is the fourth lowest in the ranking, with women only take 15.8% of the parliament seats (OECD, 2014). World Economic Forum and their global gender gap report from 2017, which measures and tracks gender-based disparities on a number of dimensions, indicates that Japan ranks 114 out of 144 countries overall. When it comes to women’s political empowerment, the country scores among the poorest, with the ranking of 123. Furthermore, when it comes to female economic participation and opportunity, the ranking maintain the 114th place out of 144, the lowest amongst OECD countries (World Economic Forum, 2017).

1.2 Problematisation, Aim and Research Question

When Prime Minister Shinzo Abe came to office in Japan 2013, he launched economic policies – widely known as “Abenomics” – to restart Japan’s economy and stimulate economic growth. One of Prime Minister Abe’s reforms is a strategy to persuade more Japanese women to join the workforce and to advance higher on the career ladder (Chanlett-Avery and Nelson, 2014:411f). Prime Minister Abe has Japan embarked upon a high profile, “Womenomics”, foreign policy agenda to highlight Japan’s official development assistance (ODA), and gender-empowering domestic agenda, for a call for female empowerment.

The conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has dominated Japan’s political landscape since after the Second World War. What is interesting is that the prime minister, who belongs to the conservative LDP, is using a more gender sensitive rhetoric, which is a turnaround. In 2005, the previous government was taking steps towards greater equality but Mr Abe was adamant about and warned of the damage to family values and to Japanese
culture that could result if men and women were treated equally. Therefore, Mr Abe’s change of approach is interesting (Economist, 2014). Japanese conservative groups, intellectuals, the mass media, and policymakers have been critical of feminism and those women who deviated from the traditional motherly roles since the early 1970s (Osawa, 2011:10). The dilemma here is that Japan has long been a conservative country, and Prime Minister Abe is now purporting to adopt a more women-friendly, liberal approach to his politics. Therefore, the main purpose is to examine how Liberal Feminist or Confucian his new “Womenomics” policies are.

Scholarly research on gender and political participation in Japan has expanded in recent years, however, it is still a field which has been understudied. Therefore, it is important to shed some light and contribute to the feminist research and literature about gender, and women and politics in Japan. Women’s emancipation in regards to social and political spaces will always be of relevance and important. As Japan has long been influenced by traditional customs, Confucian traditions are a big part of Japanese society. For Prime Minister Shinzo to declare a shift from traditional values to a more Liberal Feminist agenda, the main research question is therefore as follows: How is women’s role depicted in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s “Womenomics”? The follow up question is: Are there Liberal Feminist or/and Confucian elements in his policies?

2. Method – Research Design
This section strives to present the general design of the paper. Firstly, the chosen methodology for this study will be discussed, which is idea analysis – specifically dimension analysis. Secondly, the discussion of case and material selection is presented, followed by a description of time frame and restrictions of the paper. The presentation of the study’s dimensions is to follow, and the concluding indicator of the section is a discussion regarding a pragmatic interpretative study.

This present paper will be of a qualitative and descriptive design, with a case study on Japan, more specifically on Prime Minister Abe’s political and economic policies – “Womenomics”. It is difficult to explain a phenomenon without having to describe it first, and descriptive conclusions are a necessary step towards the causal. A descriptive analysis is therefore the building blocks in causal research and has its own intrinsic value (Teorell and Svensson, 2007:7f). Therein, this study will try to contribute a descriptive perspective on “Womenomics” to then add to the possibility of further study on the causal mechanism of Prime Minister Abe’s political and economic reforms. In addition, this study can be considered as an interpretive research, hence the focus here is to analyse a specific context
rather than seeking a generalised meaning to be applicable to general situations. Moreover, this paper has forsaking the idea of conducting a comparative analysis, as here it is argued that there is no room or time for such extensive comparative research.

2.1 Idea analysis and Dimension analysis

Political ideologies and arguments are formulated in political debates, policies and literatures. Discussions regarding what the state should and should not do, what freedom and justice are, why policies and laws should be changed, are competitions between political ideas. Political ideas shape people’s belief, sympathies and aspirations, and this has profound impact on the development of the society. Therefore, it is of relevance to analyse and criticise political statements and ideas which are presented and promoted. The methodological tool which is going to be utilised in this paper is idea analysis. It is a suitable method to analyse political statements, messages and tidings. Idea analysis can have either a descriptive, explanatory or normative purposes (Beckman, 2005:9). Idea analysis as descriptive purposes is either to analyse how political ideas in debates or in a particular political issue are formed, or follow specific groups or actors and their political ideology (Bergström and Boréus, 2012:145f). In this paper, there will be a focus on the descriptive analytical interpretation of political statements and ideas – in this case, Prime Minister Abe’s political ideas regarding women in his political and economic policies. Furthermore, with idea analysis it is important to decide if one wants to conduct an idea-centred analysis, or actor-centred analysis. With idea-centred analysis, the intention is to examine the arguments, the viewpoints and ideologies of the actors (Beckman, 2005:9ff). Hence, the analysis will be more of an idea-centred idea analysis, where the paper will study and analysis Prime Minister Abe’s political and economic ideas of “Womenomics”.

According to Bergström and Boréus (2012), there are two different analytical tools within idea analysis when studying political ideas: ideal types and dimensions. Dimensions as an analytical tool entails that one have to analyse and compare different ideologies; i.e., different ideologies’ view on class and ethnicity, individuals and families etc. Questions regarding private and collective ownership tell us about the society’s economical organisation. “View on human beings,” “societies’ important entities” and “economic organisation” are other examples of dimensions (ibid, 2012:156ff). Dimensions can be used to differentiate political statements and claims, as well as distinguish different definitions or ideas in one political statement. Therefore, one can formulate one’s analysis apparatus as dimensions to capture the different political ideas in debates, literature and statements (Beckman, 2005:25f). To
illustrate the use of dimensions as an analytical tool in idea analysis is an example of the
differentiate view on economic ideals between the Conservatism ideology and the Liberal
ideology – the dimension would be *economic ideals* and can be categorised as either
economic collectivism (Conservatism) or economic individualism (Liberalism) (Bergström
and Boréus, 2012:157). In conclusion, in order to answer the research questions the method
will be more specifically *dimension analysis*.

2.2 Case and Material selection

Japan is scoring low when it comes to female labour participation and political representation.
As it has been mentioned previously, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been reluctant about the
idea of policies making women being treated equal to men. However, when he came to office
in 2013, he announced a more women-friendly political and economic policies with his
“Womenomics” (Economist, 2014). Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s interest in this question is
new and therefore, the choice of case will be the prime minister’s political and economic
policies promotions and statements – more specifically “Womenomics” in his economic
growth strategy “Abenomics”.

The empirical materials for the analysis are strategically selected and will be derived from
a limited amount of sources related to the questions of the paper. As the paper will examine
the ideas and arguments of Prime Minister Abe’s “Womenomics”, the data will foremost be
extracted from the prime minister’s own speeches about his political and economic policies
from the *Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet* website, as well as the Japanese
government’s website – *JapanGov – The Government of Japan*, where one can find the
government’s explanation of “Abenomics” and “Womenomics”, and sections regarding
*Women’s Empowerment*. These websites have documents translated from Japanese to English
to make it accessible for an international audience. Moreover, the selection of materials will
be based on the relevance of the questions and theme of the paper. The political and policy
statements that the analysis will be focusing on are the materials where “Womenomics” and
women’s role are the central topics.

2.3 Time frame

The time frame in which the paper will be emphasising on is important to establish. The first
mentioning of “Womenomics” internationally by Prime Minister Abe is when he made a
speech at *The Sixty-Eight Session of The General Assembly of The United Nations* in
September 26, 2013. Thus, this will be the starting point of the study. Lastly, the end period of the analysis will be speeches, policy statements regarding “Womenomics” and women’s role that are up to date. The materials will be limited to the availability of documents which can be found on the websites of Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, and The Government of Japan.

2.4 Limitations
The official language in Japan is Japanese, therefore it is most likely that there are data which are not accessible if one cannot read or speak the language. This can create limitations while conducting the analysis as the materials can only be derived and based on translated documents from Japanese to English. However, translations can further constitute uncertainties as some important aspects or key messages could be left out or lost in translation, or that there are no sufficient translations to words or phrases used in the Japanese language. This constraint needs to be aware of when one reaches the final conclusion.

2.5 Dimensions
As this paper will conduct a dimension analysis, the next step is to establish what dimensions the study will build its foundation on. The arguments for what dimensions the paper will be looking into are to be presented below.

The selection and motivation of dimensions need to be of relevance to the research question. The question of “dimension of what” needs to be answered, and the dimensions chosen for this particular paper has to be related to the questions of the paper. Furthermore, the categories within the dimensions should be regarded as two poles in a spectrum. The dimensions needs to be consist of and chosen based on the possibility of finding similar factors from both Confucian and Liberal Feminist theories, as well as their feasibility and essentiality of the paper and the questions. The following dimensions will be focused on and will serve as the framework for the analysis:

- Economic Participation
- Private versus Public Sphere
- Ontological Views (collectivism or individualism)
- Gender Views
- Power Relations
An operationalization, its analytical schema, and a more extensive explanation and definition of the chosen dimensions will be discussed after the presentation of the theoretical framework.

2.6 Pragmatic interpretive study

Before one commences the analysis, it is important to denote the influence of the human factor on the results of the study. The ones’ who conducts research are humans, and the authors’ interpretation, and sometimes motivations and intentions can have an effect on the outcome and results of the study. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to be transparent and clear that the analysis is based on the author’s own understanding and interpretation. One must recognise that the intersubjectivity of the researcher shapes the ways in which how the world of study is analysed. Qualitative research is heavily dependent on choices made by the author. Therefore, one should not neglect the human biases that have an effect on the study, and one needs to be conscious of, analyse and reflect upon the social realities which one lives in (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012).

3. Previous Research

One of the reasons behind Japan’s low female participation rate is the so-called “M-curve” phenomenon. While in most developed countries, the labour participation rate is relatively high throughout the productive life of a woman. Japan’s rate notably drops between the age of 30-44 as women exit the workforce in order to raise children (Matsui et al, 2005:8). In most countries, women’s participation in the labour force dips around the years when they marry and have children, and then it recovers. This M-shaped curve is however, much more pronounced in Japan than in most other affluent countries (Economist, 2014). Women participate in the workforce at significantly lower rates than Japanese men. In 2012, around 95% of Japanese men were working compared to around 70-75% of women. Moreover, in Japan there is a clear gender difference when it comes to regular versus irregular work. While 75.3% of all male employees are regular workers, only 41.9% of female employees fall into this category. Women are far more likely than men to be employed as non-regular workers, with 58.1% of women falling into this employment category in 2011, compared to 24.7% of men (Macnaughtan, 2015:7ff).

Japan has been facing decades of economic stagnation and a rapidly aging population. The current Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his political and economic strategy –
“Abenomics”, is to restart and stimulate Japan’s economy, and one of goals in the agenda is to narrowing the gender gap as a potential source for economic growth. The Abe administration considers “Womenomics” as the reforms to close the gender gap and to revitalize the economy after years of slow growth. Therefore, the government has come to promote structural reforms boosting economic growth through policies to encourage the participation and advancement of women in the Japanese labour market (Chanlett-Avery and Nelson, 2014:411ff).

Japanese society emphasises different sex roles. Traditionally, it is the male who works and the female who stays home to care for both house and children. The prevailing traditional gender-role attitudes in Japan are strongly associated with the division of household labour between men and women. Furthermore, different attitudes to women in the labour force can be associated by the idea of employment status. Women with anti-work perspective argue that work should not be an important element of life for women. To understand why some women have this view of women in the workforce is due to limited opportunity for women in Japan to have full-time jobs and opportunities to be promoted, and thus, women might not consider their work-lives as valuable. Therefore, it might be easier to understand why significant numbers of women and men in Japan still have traditional gender identities, as the opportunities for women in the labour market are limited (Yamaguchi, 2000:83ff).

Despite becoming an economic power, Japan’s gender practices continue to manifest the patriarchal orientation. Gender consciousness is what sustains Japan’s exceptional division of family work. According to North (2009), negotiation between spouses is a necessity for a new division of labour to emerge, however, the discussion of the husband’s family work participation is restricted by traditions of “natural” male rights and female obligations in marriage. The persistence of traditional family roles in a society where Japan’s dominated gender culture is particularly heavy, dense and widespread, and limits the room for bargaining when it comes to the division of family work, which also results in limiting and restricting the emergence of a new division of labour. Japanese women’s inability to negotiate equality at home has, as mentioned previously, been seen as a product of limited labour market opportunities (ibid, 2009:24ff).

The persistence of the dip that shapes the M-curve in Japan which marginalise women’s future prospect to full-time employment are due to two reasons. The first reason is due to social norms, which continue to encourage women to shoulder the main reproductive and caring roles within the family, with women assuming key responsibility for housework, childcare and care of aging parents. Contributing to this is a lack of early childcare centres
which increases the inability of working parents to combine work and childcare. An additional pressure is the notion of *sansaiji shinwa* (the three-year-old myth), a conventional belief that mothers should be the ones to take care of children until the age of three, and an on-going pressure on mothers to be the family member committed to their child’s development and education. The second reason deals with how corporate culture not only encourages men to leave domestic and childcare responsibilities to women, but also focus on continuous employment as a determinant of career and promotion opportunities, which makes it extremely difficult for women to fit back into a demanding working culture after taking childcare leave. In addition, the spousal tax system in Japan legitimises the male breadwinner as the core workforce within the Japanese employment system. It encourages employers to focus core compensation packages around male breadwinner needs and cap the income of married female employees; this increases pressure on Japanese men. The spousal tax model assumes that married woman is primarily a housewife and therefore only requires a “supplementary” income, as her husband can be the primary earner (Macnaughtan, 2015:13ff).

There is a distinct set of expectations toward men and women. Men have often been characterised as aggressive, independent, objective, dominant, competitive, confident, and are expected to be leaders, risk-takers, and decision-makers. Women in contrast, are characterised as being tactful, gentle, affectionate, sensitive and quiet. These sex-typed personalities have been considered to reflect “normal”, healthy adjusted personalities in Japanese society (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2000:311ff). It is well known that a strong gender role division prevails in Japan, where a care giving role like housework and childcare was attributed to women, while the breadwinner’s role was attributed to men (Fuse, 2013:1024ff).

One of the important factors in terms of gender roles and gender-attitudes in Japan is its Confucian tradition which stresses the importance of stable families for a stable society. The emphasis in Japanese society on the family rather than individual family members took its toll among women. A hierarchy between provider role and housekeeper role, or that between men and women existed in Japan like most other countries. However, even if women are in paid work, rarely do they hold “career” jobs with promotional opportunities. Their wages are much lower than those of men even after several years of experience, and early “retirement” either at the time of marriage or the birth of the first child is encouraged. Furthermore, the lives of women and men in Japan are highly segregated. Confucian ethics emphasise gender differentiation, with a sharp distinction between “male” and “female” spheres in social
relations. In places of employment, men and women are rarely “colleagues” of equal or similar ranks (Kamo and Warner, 1997:204ff).

4. Theoretical Framework
In this section, the theories of Confucianism and Liberal Feminism are to be presented, which will serve as the theoretical framework of the analysis. What is to follow is the operationalization of the theories in the dimensions, and the analytical schema.

4.1. Confucianism
Originally a matriarchal society, Japan turned to patriarchal rule through the strong influence of a highly patriarchal China in its early history. Confucianism was the underlying thought of a strong patriarchal ideal in China and stressed a hierarchical society where strong male dominance was assumed. The establishment of ie system institutionalised a gender division of labour and a power imbalance between men and women. Under the law, only men could inherit family property and the family name, and they had power over the family members, whereas women did not have a right to own property or to participate in matters outside the home. The long and strong influence of Confucianism and the ie system ruled and influenced the Japanese society, and established a firm basis for a gendered division of labour and an idea of androcentrism. Furthermore, Confucian ethics emphasise gender differentiation, with a sharp distinction between “male” and “female” spheres in social relations. Men form the primary work force and are expected to work outside the home for long hours, whereas women stay at home and take care of the household and children. Japanese society has long strongly believed and practiced a gendered division of labour in which a man’s place is at work and woman’s place is at home (Sugihara and Katsurada, 2000:310ff).

In Japan, Confucianism was being used politically and socially as conservative ideology concerning the state, the economic system, and gender relations. One of the legacies of Confucian ethics is the principle of “Three Bonds” – the authority of the ruler over the minister, the father over the son, and the husband over the wife. The order underlines the hierarchical relationship as an inviolable principle for maintaining social order. The primary concern is not the well-being of the individual persons involved in these dyadic relationships, but the particular pattern of social stability which results from these rigidly prescribed rules of conduct. In a hierarchic and patriarchal society, it must seem convincing that the ruler or the husband, should be the interpreter, the executor, and the judge of the moral code, for he assumes full responsibility for the stability and harmony of society. If the inferior challenges
the superior, or the wife dominates the husbands, the moral fabric of society will be damaged. This male-centred perspective can be subsumed under the category of gender – since the female under no circumstances should assume a dominating role, she must practice the art of “following”. The value of obedience practiced by the son, the minister, and the wife play large part of the ideology of the “Three Bonds” (Tu, 1998:122ff).

The Japanese version of Confucianism (Neo-Confucianism) was developed, systematised, and institutionalised during the Tokugawa era (1603-1867). The primary human relation from the Confucian point of view is that of parent and child, most significantly, father and son. The secondary relation is between a man and a woman. One of the main characteristics of the Confucian gender ideology is its structural emphasis on the roles and statuses of men and women as an integral part of an overall social order, which in turn is embedded in the law of the universe. Man and woman are supposed to relate to each other through the complementary rights and obligations attached to their structurally assigned roles and statuses. The dichotomy in role spheres in Confucianism is that women’s foremost role should be that of a good wife and wise mother, and her role sphere should be domestic, “inside”, and backstage, clearly set apart from the male sphere, which is opposite; public, outside and on stage. If a woman participates in the male sphere, she is obliged to do so only as a surrogate for her husband, son, or other male kin, or invisibly form the backstage. Through this dichotomy, woman and man are expected to enjoy harmony based upon role interdependence (yin and yang). Man is placed above woman and this asymmetry involving female inferiority, subordination, and vulnerability ties in with jural patricentricity in property ownership, household headship, and succession (Sugiyama Lebra, 1998:209ff). Moreover, another defining characteristic of the husband-wife relationship is the underlying spirit about division of labour where the idea of the wife, rather than the husband, should be the homemaker (Tu, 1998:122ff).

The principle of yin and yang is considered a necessary part of Confucianism. Between the two principles that govern the universe, yang is superior and yin is inferior. Therein, between the husband and wife, the husband is superior and the wife inferior. This idea became prominent in Neo-Confucianism, as it is advocated in the “Three Bonds”. Lin Yutang acclaims that Confucianism also gives the wife an “equal” position with the husband, somewhat below the husband, but still an equal helpmate, necessarily complementing each other. In retrospect, Confucianism does not deemed women’s rights outside of home as important compared to her position in her household (Li, 2000:188).
4.2 Liberal Feminism

There are of course a profound and extensive quantity of research and theories about feminism, female empowerment and gender equality. However, in this paper, the emphasis will be on Liberal Feminism due to its suitability and restriction of space and time.

Liberal Feminism has its roots in the eighteenth century and is characterised by a persistent believe in reason and rationality. Contemporary Liberal feminists are unified in the argument that the values (life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness) and structures of liberal democracy have the potential to allow for the end of the oppression of women if women were allowed to fully participate in these values and structures. Liberal feminists want women fully empowered and emancipated into the social system of corporation, government, economic and education, and work to end gender segregation and discrimination in all areas of public life and gender-based laws (McHugh and Leaman, 2007:72f).

Liberal Feminism looks at the structures in the society but hinge on the individual when searching for solutions. It sees the individual in the social structure, and work to combat an oppressive male dominant and patriarch society. The structures contribute to women’s constraint in opportunities, discrimination and subjugation (Leijonborg, 2011:13ff). To uncover the individual in the structure, is to empower the individual woman so she can have the opportunities and capabilities where she can independently decide over her own existence and daily life (Öfverberg, 2001:123ff). To uncover the individual in the structure, is to empower the individual woman so she can have the opportunities and capabilities where she can independently decide over her own existence and daily life (Öfverberg, 2001:123ff). To uncover the individual in the structure, is to empower the individual woman so she can have the opportunities and capabilities where she can independently decide over her own existence and daily life (Öfverberg, 2001:123ff). To uncover the individual in the structure, is to empower the individual woman so she can have the opportunities and capabilities where she can independently decide over her own existence and daily life (Öfverberg, 2001:123ff). Therefore is female empowerment the main principle, and needs to be executed in all levels. According to Liberal Feminism, the economic domain is in need of female empowerment. Wage disparities between men and women need to be combated, and equal pay has to be implemented. Another area, which needs female empowerment, is the domestic sphere; equal division of responsibility. Moreover, there is a need of understanding that women have power over their own body and health. Women have to have power over their own future and there is a need to battle against domestic abuse (Leijonborg, 2001:13ff).

The fundamental idea of Liberal Feminism is humanistic individualism – every human being has the right to equal respect, dignity and consideration. One of the most famous Liberal feminists is Mary Wollstonecraft. According to Wollstonecraft, if you first try to uncover women’s subordination in the private sphere, one can try to work for equal treatment for women. One has to analyse the society and the private sphere through gender perspective lenses, and thereafter can one try to treat everyone as individuals, beyond gender differences (Öfverberg, 2001:114ff). The Liberal Feminist theory also emphasises that female empowerment not only in the private sphere but also in the public sphere. Women have long
been excluded spaces which are considered to be “male oriented”. There is female underrepresentation and subjugation when it comes to politics, military, education and economic participation (Öfverberg, 2001:123ff).

For Liberal feminists, empowerment has meant extending the options of women beyond the domestic to the public sphere. This focus sought to extend to women certain “rights” which typically were assumed to be granted to males. The vehicle for such empowerment was legal and constitutional action (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea, 1991:605f).

Furthermore, Liberal feminists hold that freedom is a fundamental value and insist on the freedom for women to decide her own life. The theory conceives of freedom as personal autonomy – living a life of one’s own choosing, and political autonomy – being co-author of the conditions under which one lives. Liberal feminists hold that the exercise of personal autonomy depends on certain enabling conditions that are insufficiently present in women’s lives, or that social arrangements often fail to respect women’s needs and interests are insufficiently reflected in the basic conditions which they live. Those conditions lack legitimacy because women are inadequately represented. Furthermore, women’s access to options is frequently and unfairly restricted due to economic deprivation and unfairly reduced options for women are stereotyping and sex discrimination in education and employment. The gender system leads also to women being underrepresented in influential forums (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2013).

Liberal feminists argue that women must be included in areas of public life previously denied them. Liberals start from the assumption that women share the same capacity for reason as men, and so on equality grounds should not be excluded from any of the important elements of the public sphere. Empirical information about women’s roles suggests that within governments and international institutions, women remain highly underrepresented. Where women are present, they are still largely relegated to support work. Often times, the reasons why women may be excluded from public or political activities could be that women have differential access to education or other opportunities needed to gain access to public life; they may face discrimination and subtle forms of exclusion when attempting to become more active; sometimes also the burdens of their private lives may make it more difficult to become involved. For Liberal feminists, the barriers to women’s participation need to be identified so they can be removed, in this way permitting those women who are interested in equal opportunity to take on the challenge of political and public life (Whitworth, 2008:393f).
4.3 Definition/Operationalization of Dimensions

The operationalization of the dimensions needs to be based on the theoretical framework and analytical questions; what kind of questions needs to be asked to the data while searching for the dimensions in the materials? Example of questions that are being asked is: How are gender roles depicted? How is the division of labour between men and women? Are women depicted to belong in private or public sphere? What is to come next is the operationalization of the theories within the chosen dimensions.

**Economic Participation:** According to Confucian ideas, the underlying spirit about division of labour is that the wife should be the homemaker. Men form the primary work force whereas women stay at home to take care of the household and children. For Liberal feminists however, women need to be given the opportunity to economic participation and is part of the labour force. Furthermore, there is a need of equal distribution of responsibility at home – equal division of labour.

**Private versus Public sphere:** Confucianism emphasises that the woman’s role is domestic. If a woman participates in the male sphere – which is public – she is obliged to do so only as a surrogate for her husband, son or other male kin. Women traditionally belonged to the “interior” (domestic domain) while men were associated with the “exterior” (public domain). Liberal Feminism views that there is a need for a call for female empowerment in the “private sphere”, but also in the “public” sphere. Women do belong in the space of economy, politics and other forums which are considered to be “male oriented”. The idea is that women have to be extended beyond the domestic to the public sphere.

**Ontological Views:** Confucian traditions underline collectivism and family rather than individual for a stable society. The primary concern is not the well-being of the individual persons. Liberal Feminism has opposite views, and emphasise the individual well-being – the individual woman.

**Gender Views:** Confucianism argues that women and men have distinct and fixed gender roles. There is a sharp distinction between “male” and “female” spheres in social relations. The woman should be a good wife and wise mother – a homemaker. Females should not assume a dominating role and have to practice being obedient to her husband. Liberal feminists would argue that gender roles are fluid and is based on the individual’s own choice. The individual freedom is much emphasised.

**Power Relations:** The Confucian ideas are based on a dyadic relationship between a man and a woman. The man is the superior and the woman is inferior, and the husband has the authority over the wife. Liberal Feminism talks about equal treatment for women and men,
and advocates for political and individual equality.

The analytical schema of the dimensions for the analysis is as followed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>CONFUCIANISM</th>
<th>LIBERAL FEMINISM</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Participation</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Labour force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private vs. Public Sphere</td>
<td>Private Sphere</td>
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<td>Ontological Views</td>
<td>Collectivism</td>
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<td>Gender Views</td>
<td>Fixed gender roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power Relations</td>
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<td>Equal</td>
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Table 1.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1 Economic Participation
In order to lift the Japanese economy out of deflation, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has promoted policies known as “Abenomics”. Due to the declining of birth rate, which is leading to an aging society, the working population is diminishing. The solution to this problem is according to the Abe administration “Womenomics”. Compared to other developed countries, Japan has much to be desired when it comes to the promotion of active female involvement in the labour force. Policies announced to promote the active participation of women’s part of the growth strategy is one, which is to provide more opportunities for integral involvement, and provide strong support to women. The Abe administration is working to expand female participation in the workforce, and aims to increase female employment among 25-44 years old from 68 percent in 2012 to 73 percent by 2020, and to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions to 30 percent. The Abe administration claims to taking measures to support women’s careers in various of ways; by providing strong support for women raising children; provide tax and incentives to companies that support active female participation and a balance between work and family. Moreover, the government will expand the range of services offered by job centres to mothers who wish to return to work while raising their children (JapanGov, 2014).

The key objective is the promotion of women, along with changing men’s consciousness. According to the prime minister, encouraging the dynamic engagement of women and
supporting female entrepreneurs to realize a society in which all women can take on challenges at any stage in life. Key policies in motion consist of: securing additional child care capacity, increase child care leave benefits, further encouraging recurrent education for women away on maternity leave, provide female candidates with executive leadership training programs and select and promote enterprises that encourage women’s success in the workplace (JapanGov, 2018b). “Womenomics” is described as the policies that have become one of the most important policy pillars for sustainable economic growth in Japan. It is designed according to the Japanese government, to empower women to achieve their maximum potential by reforming the labour market, encouraging companies to embrace diversity, promoting vocational skills and expanding availability of child care services. In Japan, the number of women joining the workforce increased by about 2 million, and more women are taking leadership roles in all facets of the economy (JapanGov, 2018ab).

In 2014, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attended the 19th International Conference for Women in Business held in Tokyo. At this conference, he conveyed his vision and thoughts on women in society. The prime minister addressed the issue of Japan’s low capacity of providing childcare facilities.

The progress of opening more day-care centres has made it possible for a large number of women to decide to begin new jobs. I also stated that the Government is aiming for 30 percent of leadership positions in a variety of organisations to be filled by women by 2020. (Abe, 2014d)

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attended the opening ceremony for the UN Women Japan Liaison Office held in Tokyo 2015. He said in his address:

"Abenomics" is “Womenomics”. Over the last two and a half years, I have consistently promoted the dynamic engagement of women. Over this time, some one million women have newly entered the labour market, while the number of female corporate board members has also increased by roughly 30 percent. [...] Japan intends to make the 21 century a century with no human rights violations against women. (Abe, 2015b)

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attended the reception for the Executive Program for Women Leaders in 2017, and in his address he aimed to create a Japan in which women can fully unleash their talents. Since the inauguration of his administration, the government has been advancing initiative such as measures to increase the capacity of childcare facilities and improve the employment conditions of childcare workers. The prime minister argued that over the years, the numbers of women working in Japan has increased, however, there are
many among those women who are irregular workers. Another issue for his economic policy to tackle is increasing the number of female officers at companies, and the number of female officer has increased steadily (Abe, 2017a).

After the general election in Japan 2017, the once again appointed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held a speech at the World Assembly for Women 2017, where he hoped that the Abe Cabinet has shown the level of commitment to enhancing women’s participation and advancement in society as a part of his Growth Strategy. He stated that:

I have made all-out efforts to create an environment in which it is easy for women to work, including preparing childcare arrangements. The results of this have been 1.5 million more women joining the workforce. […] The number of female board members in Japanese companies has more than doubled during these five years. […] “Womenomics” has become a major force driving Japan’s economic growth. […] I believe that women have the power to break through the walls of “common sense” created by men and carve out a new era. […] New businesses that resolve social issues using sensibilities that men don’t typically have. Businesses that put forth values that have not existed until now, taking advantage of viewpoints particular to women. […] We will expand throughout the world the network for enhancing women’s participation and advancement in society. When women around the world rise up, we will surely be able to resolve poverty and various other issues facing the world. Japan is determined to continue to raise high the flag of enhancing women’s participation and advancement in society and demonstrate strong leadership around the world. (Abe, 2017b)

Prime Minister Abe addressed the Executive Women Symposium Reception in 2016, where he revealed that the active participation by women is the core of the betterment of the world and society.

"Abenomics" is “Womenomics”. Creating a society in which all women shine is essential for growth. The biggest barrier facing Japan […] is its male-centred working culture premised on long working hours. […] We will spread a corporate culture where working efficiently within a limited time is valued, and where husbands also actively take childcare leave, and both partners in a couple share the housework and childrearing. We will make this the norm for Japan. (Abe, 2016a)

It is to conclude that the political view of Prime Minister Abe on women’s role and female participation in the labour market is aligned with Liberal Feminists theory in the dimension of economic participation. The prime minister frequently emphasises female participation in workforce and setting goals to increase female employment. Furthermore, in order to increase female participation, the Abe administration has presented concrete measures; the increase of childcare facilities and granting taxes and incentives to companies who actively support
female participation in their companies. The prime minister mostly discusses the necessity to support women when they want to come back to work after childrearing, and considers the importance of paternal leaves for fathers as well; that both parents share housework and childrearing. This idea of shared division of labour domestically is important and is a Liberal Feminist argument. It is interesting to see that the LDP has becoming more aware of the issue of unequal domestic distribution of labour, and have proposals to counter it.

5.2 Private versus Public Sphere

On the website of Government of Japan, the government came out that the “Power of Women” has the greatest potential in Japanese society, where it is essential for a vibrant and growing society is to create an environment where women can demonstrate their power to the fullest extent. Therefore, the facilitation of women’s active role has been positioned as an important element of “Abenomics” – Japan’s Revitalization Strategy. Prime Minister Abe addressed his believe of creating “a society in which women shine”, which will bring vigour to the world. The government has stated that:

We believe that creating a society where “women can shine” is not just a social issue, but an economic issue. The government aims to achieve diversity by expanding the role of women and creating an embracing environment in the workplace. But it requires participation of both women and men. It calls for business to change work styles built on traditional values. (JapanGov, 2018b)

In 2013, the prime minister invited leaders of three economic associations to the Prime Minister’s Office, and ensured that all publicly listed companies in Japan have at least one female member on their board of directors.

Over the last one year, women have steadily been appointed as directors in sectors like finance or trading, which until now have been considered the domain of men. […] During the heat of summer there are no doubt a large number of women out there pursuing their dreams and trying hard to find employment. Many of these women will likely become key decision makers of corporate Japan and of ministries and agencies. (Abe, 2014d)

At the Economist Japan Summit 2014, the prime minister aimed to promote further dynamic engagement by women. He confessed that an area that must be improved is they way of thinking that tends to be male-oriented in virtually all aspects.

“Womenomics” tell us that a society in which women are dynamically engaged will also have a higher birth rate. I intend for us to tackle urgently the expansion
of day-care facilities and other such areas necessary as the foundation for such society. (Abe, 2014a)

At the Open Forum, World Assembly for Women in Tokyo 2014, the prime minister opened his speech by expressing that his “society in which women shine” is one of his highest priority issue since his inauguration. He claimed that:

Women’s ideas are beginning to be utilized in product development at Japanese companies as well. […] Women bring to corporate management certain perspectives that only women can provide. Diversified organizations are able to provide society with new types of added value. (Abe, 2014b)

Female directors have emerged one after another at financial institutions and other business categories which have previously been considered male workplaces. Prime Minister Abe exclaimed that he would make various efforts to support the dynamic engagement of women. Many women wish to continue to engage in satisfying work as long as possible. A large number of women are also working hard to be active within their companies in pursuit of promotion. […] There are also those who quit their jobs for the time being in order to raise their children but wish to work again. […] I wish to support women who are following with confidence the path they chose. I will work to take on all issues that hinder women’s active engagement. (Abe, 2014b)

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addressed at the High-level Partnership Dialogue: Mobilizing Women’s Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction, with the speech that power of women is essential for disaster risk reduction and reconstruction. According to Prime Minister Abe, in Japan, predominantly men participated in disaster risk reduction, however if a massive earthquake were to strike during the day, most of the people at home would be women. A woman’s perspective is therefore essential for community disaster risk reduction efforts.

[…] women possess the wisdom and knowledge needed to protect their families from disasters. […] The power women is absolutely indispensable for restoring communities that have been devastated by disasters. […] we believe that women’s leadership is indeed essential in order to stand up to disasters. (Abe, 2015d)

He claims that the government is creating a structure in which women will be participating in the decision-making processes regarding disaster risk reduction. The prime minister further his speech by promoting the launch of projects internationally, where the Japanese government will be supporting women and ensure that women can restart their work after a
disaster, and assist women in returning to their jobs. He ends the address with emphasising the importance of women playing a leadership role and to make women the driving force behind the creation of a society that is truly resilient and withstands natural disasters (Abe, 2015d).

On the 19th International Conference for Women in Business, the speech by the prime minister entailed that:

I believe that all women value their careers and their private life. As such, as the number of women in workplaces grows and they become responsible for making important decisions, these organisations will begin to achieve a work-life balance. […] One of my greatest undertakings is to seek to create a society in which all women shine. (Abe, 2014d)

In addition, Prime Minister Abe discussed the influence of male-centric viewpoint by stating:

[…] eliminating such viewpoints that are inhibiting the active role of women we will be able to achieve a society in which all women shine. However, these efforts cannot simply end here in Japan. […] This will mark the start of “Womenomics” together with women who are already thriving of women. (Abe, 2014d)

Statements such as the power of women and to promote the dynamic engagement by women, indicates with an interpretation that the political view of Prime Minister Abe lies close to Liberal Feminist spectrum when it comes to the dimension of private versus public sphere. He acknowledges the public spaces (such as corporate management and leading positions) have mostly been dominated by men and with male-centric views, and that such views must be countered. The prime minister emphasised on the promotion of making women participate in decision-making processes (when it comes to disaster risk reduction for example). As he argues for a society where “women can shine”, indicates the assumption of the Abe administration of putting women out to the public where they are to be seen and engaged. It is clear that the government wants make women visible in the society and in the labour market, in retrospect the view on female empowerment in the private sphere (such as women’s power to negotiate domestically) has not been much discussed.

5.3 Ontological Views
Prime Minister Abe at The Sixty-Eight Session of The General Assembly of The United Nations discussed the issue of economic stagnation in Japan. In order for Japan to realize
economic growth, the prime minister declared that the factor for and outcome of growth is to mobilize the power of women.

[…] asserts that the more the advanced of women in society is promoted, the higher the growth rate becomes. Creating an environment in which women find it comfortable to work and enhancing opportunities for women to work and to be active in society is no longer a matter of choice for Japan. It is instead a matter of the greatest urgency. (Abe, 2013)

The prime minister admit that this is a work to change Japan’s domestic structure, but his quest for a “society in which women shine” stretches beyond the domestic, and this will also guide Japan’s international diplomacy.

[…] a matter of outrage that there continues to be sexual violence against women during times of armed conflict even now, in the 21st century. Japan will do everything possible to prevent such crimes against women and to support both materially and psychologically those people who unfortunately become victims of such acts. (Abe, 2013)

Prime Minister Abe continues with that Japan will submit a draft resolution that gives careful consideration to women in natural disasters, as they are likely to be vulnerable. The prime minister continues with his speech by giving concrete examples of individuals to clarify Japan’s development concept aimed at bringing about a “society in which women shine”. Prime Minister Abe gave the example of the case of Ms. Tokiko Sato, who was responsible for improving maternal, newborn and child heath in a remote village in Jordan.

Ms. Sato’s tenacity gradually transformed this traditional idea into a mindset that values the health of women. (Abe, 2013)

He also took the example of Ms. Nilufa from Bangladesh and emphasised that due to her ”Poly-Glu” project she became a salesperson and instruction. To be able to send her children to higher education, in addition of earning her professional title and agency, the prime minister concluded that Ms. Nilufa has acquired self-esteem, which is of outmost importance. At the end of his speech, Prime Minister Abe emphasised the:

[…] necessity of promoting women’s participation in society and of the empowerment of women. […]Japan intends to make efforts towards measures that will ensure the participation of women at all stages, including the prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as peace-building, and that will also safeguard the rights and the physical well-being of women who are exposed to danger in times of conflict. […] In closing, if we were to follow the wisdom of
“Womenomics” mentioned earlier, our development concept under which we focus on cultivating the power of women would engender more peace and well-being in the world. I wish to bring about a “society where women shine” [...]. (Abe, 2013)

At the Opening Session of the High Level Round Table, World Assembly for Women in Tokyo 2014, the prime minister addressed the assembly by concluding that across the globe, there is still lamentable situations in which women are deprived of opportunities to be self-reliant and are unable to have access to medical care, education, or other basic services merely because they were born women. He stated that he is determined to make the 21st century a world with no human rights violations against women.

[...] in order for women to lead lives full of pride and hope, I consider it essential for them to acquire the ability to be economically self-reliant. [...] We are assisting women around the world so that they can acquire skills and then use them to support family finances and become economically self-reliant. [...] Last year I pledged in my address at the UN General Assembly that Japan would implement assistance in excess of three billion US dollars over three years that places women at the centre. (Abe, 2014c)

As it has been mentioned previously, during the Executive Women Symposium Reception in 2016, Prime Minister Abe addressed that the active participation by women is the core of the betterment of the world and society. Therefore, in order to create a society in which all women can shine, which is also essential for Japan’s economic growth, is to tackle the male-centred working culture and to promote shared responsibility between couples on housework, childrearing and paternal leave. He furthers argue the necessity of reforming the mind-set, including that of men, of the prevailing styles of work and careers. By doing so, in addition to increase the number of women executives, there is a need to create an environment where both highly productive work and fulfilling lives can comfortable co-exists.

Through a positive cycle of women’s promotions and reform of work styles, we will change the approach of companies, the government, and society as a whole. [...] I will convey my wish for women to participate more actively, not only in Japan but also internationally. [...] We will advance the international momentum on advancing discussion in all fields on what should be done so that women can participate more actively – in other words, “mainstreaming”. (Abe, 2016a)

To assert the data selected, it is to say that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe considers the individual woman as the most important. The well being of women nationally and internationally, as well as the promotion of women’s participation, indicates a sense of view
where women are put first and at the centre. Furthermore, the emphasis on women’s opportunities in society and economic forums (to become self-reliant), as well as the mentioning of the importance of women’s self-esteem and shared division of labour in housework and childrearing indicates the Liberal Feminist view when it comes to dimension ontological view, where it can be interpreted that the individual woman and her aspirations, needs, participation and power are emphasised for the growth of Japanese economy and the “betterment of the society”. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also concludes the need of ensuring women’s well-being and rights, and the need to tackle all crimes against women.

Furthermore, to explicitly declare a promotion for a “society which women can shine” holds with the idea of a society is better when individual women’s position and role are improved. Moreover, Prime Minister Abe most of the time only mentions women in his speeches, which underscores the view on women’s importance and not the collective family or the man as Confucianism argues for.

5.4 Gender Views

At the 30th Anniversary Tokyo Conference of the Center on Japanese Economy and Business of Columbia Business School, the prime minister stated that by shifting the active participation of women out of the arena of social policies and into the arena of economic policies over the course of his administration, the Abe Cabinet have taken an “issue for only women” and made it into the “issue of everyone across Japan”.

I absolutely want to see success on this, including success that incorporates Japanese men, who are notorious for not doing much housework. I myself do the cleaning around the house and take the trash out fairly often. […] I often pitch in with the housework. […] We are also constructing a new socioeconomic system, that we are referring to as a “society in which all citizens are dynamically engaged”, in which everyone can play an active role, including both men and women […]. (Abe, 2016b)

As it has been mentioned previously, at the Open Forum, World Assembly for Women in Tokyo 2014, the prime minister opened his speech by expressing that his “society in which women shine” is one of his highest priority issues since his inauguration. He claimed that:

Women’s ideas are beginning to be utilized in product development at Japanese companies as well. […] Women bring to corporate management certain perspectives that only women can provide. Diversified organizations are able to provide society with new types of added value. (Abe, 2014b)
He furthers the speech that there are many women who have dreams of starting a business or being of service to society at large, the Abe administration will provide tailor-made support from the time of start-up until the business is running smoothly. However, in the next section:

Beginning in fiscal 2015, as a part of strengthening our support for childcare and child-rearing, we will introduce a new professional qualification of “childcare supporter” so that at childcare facilities these people are able to make use of their child-rearing experiences. Raising a child is also a wonderful career. I am hoping to see many women take up the challenge of undertaking such businesses as childcare or child-rearing support based on their experience. (Abe, 2014b)

He ends the section with a promise of working to bring about by 2020 a society in which all women can try to achieve their dreams at any life stage. The prime minister did bring up the issue of transforming the division of roles based on gender, which he admits is ingrained in the society. He explains this by:

Creating a society in which women shine does not mean hanging up a signboard saying “Women Actively Promoted Here”. It means changing the consciousness of each individual. It means incorporating the unique perspectives of women into corporate management. Women will come to shoulder important decision-making. They will also change the way we work. So it means changing the rules of the game that penetrate society. (Abe, 2014b)

He concluded the speech by stating that there is a need to bring about world in which all people, both women and men, shine (Abe, 2014b).

Open Forum, World Assembly for Women in Tokyo WAW 2015 – The Abe administration believes that true reform will not come about unless women become leaders in their organisations, in addition to changes in men’s consciousness. The government also declares that they will support women in starting business. When it comes to international efforts:

A society in which it is easy for all people, both women and men, to live. I will spare no effort to create that kind of society in Japan and also in the world. […] Over the next three years, we will implement ODA (Official Development Assistance) of more than 42 billion yen toward high-quality education for women and girls so that they will be economically independent and able to determine the course of their own lives through their own volition. (Abe, 2015a)

On 19th International Conference for Women in Business, Prime Minister Abe envisioned the promotion of women’s career at companies.
I believe we can all contribute to society in our own way. To every extent possible I would like to support those women who are passionate about fulfilling their dreams. [...] There is no way we will be able to realize a society in which all women shine if we simply pursue the promotion of women’s careers in name only. We need to incorporate the fresh perspectives of women in corporate management, which in turn will change our work styles. (Abe, 2014d)

The prime minister further declared that on 24th of June 2014, a Cabinet decision was made on the Growth Strategy, and a major pillar was to facilitate women’s active role. However, he stated that:

I would like homemakers, who have rich experience in childcare activities, to harness their abilities and to continue to play an even more active role. We will create a new certification so that these women can play an active role on the frontlines of day-care centres and other facilities as childcare support workers. (Abe, 2014d)

The prime minister argues for the support of women who wish to follow the path they choose in one of his speeches. Furthermore, the prime minister has also stated that women who have dreams of starting their own business or being of service to society at large, and to enable those to be as dynamically engaged as they wish, the Abe administration will be there to support. Moreover, Prime Minister Abe furthers state that the government promise to work to bring a society in which women can try to achieve their dreams at any life stage. The view of active engage of women in society can be interpreted as women get the chance to decide their own life and participation, and not on a fixed set of rules. In addition, the need to transforming the division of roles based on gender was also stated. These political views, interpreted in his statements, are to be considered part of Liberal Feminist ideas of gender roles being fluid, and women have the power to decide their own roles. In retrospect, Prime Minister Abe likewise stated that in other speeches that he wanted to work to facilitate women’s active role, but expressed that “homemakers” who have experience in childcare activities can play a more active role, and that these women can be the frontlines of childcare support workers. Furthermore, declaring that career in raising children falls automatically to women fuels to an ambiguity to his view. This indicates the presumption of women having a set of “attribute” and “skills” which is only can be found in women, and that he does not considers men to have the same skillset, which is something that can be found in Confucianism. However, it can also be interpreted that Prime Minister Abe have this perspective due to the long history of traditional norms in Japan where women usually stayed at home and did the child-rearing, and that most childcare takers are female. Yet, the prime
minister stated in other occasions that he wishes to incorporate unique perspectives of women into corporate management and that there are only certain perspectives which women can provide. The interpretation of these declarations should be taken with caution, and should not entirely be based on Confucian theory of gender views. However there are some intonation of distinct gender attributes that separates women and men from each other. Furthermore, it needs to be mentioned that some feminist theories do emphasise unique perspective of women in i.e. politics, which only women can contribute.

5.5 Power Relations

Open Forum, World Assembly for Women in Tokyo 2015 – Prime Minister Abe declared that:

Japan’s men are also starting to change. Since last year, male corporate managers […] have declared they will take actions that enable women to demonstrate to the greatest possible extent the potential they hold, and they have been engaged in on-going efforts to expand the circle of acceptance. […] This is a message of women and men alike cooperating to create a society in which it is easy for both women and men to live. (Abe, 2015a)

The prime minister continues that Japan wants to emulate how successful Northern European countries in reconciling economic growth and rising birth rates under the banner of active participation by women. But to emulate this, the biggest barrier according to Prime Minister Abe is the working culture that endorses male-centred long working hours.

If men themselves do not awaken to this fact and take action, we will not be able to eliminate this bad practice. First of all, we will expand a corporate culture that values working efficiently within a limited number of hours. Husbands will also actively take childcare leave and couples will share responsibility for household chores and child rearing. We will make this the ordinary practice in Japan. When this happens, both men and women will be able to make highly productive jobs compatible with their bountiful daily lives naturally while they are able to lead more fulfilled lives as individuals, as well as within their families and communities. The dynamic engagement of women will also enrich men’s lives. (Abe, 2015a)

Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at Global Leaders Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Since he became the prime minister of Japan, the fundamental pillar of his policy has been the realization of a society where women shine.

[…] last month Japan enacted a new law to promote the active engagement of women in society. With this, Japan aims to create a society where it is commonplace for both men and women to share responsibility for work,
household chores, and child rearing. [...] It is also important to secure high quality education for women and girls so that they can become financially independent and freely determine how they want to live their own lives. [...] Japan will continue implement further actions and initiatives toward resolving challenges for gender equality, development, and peace through the protection of women’s rights, the promotion of women’s participation and empowerment. (Abe, 2015c)

He ended his address by believing in a world where gender equality and women’s participation become standard and both women and men shine naturally and equally (Abe, 2015c).

When it comes to dimension power relations, it appears to be that Prime Minister Abe has the view of equal status and positions in society between men and women. He addressed actions for gender equality, women’s participation and empowerment, and that a standard where both women and men can shine equally is to be desired. Furthermore, he emphasised on how women and men should cooperate in creating a society in which it is easy for both women and men to live. This exclamation indicates the view of the spectrum towards Liberal Feminists theory in regards to power relations. Moreover, to acknowledge and be aware how the working culture in Japan is male-centred and that husbands likewise need to take childcare leave and share responsibility for household chores and child rearing, is an indicator where Prime Minister Abe view the political idea of gender equality and power relations between male and female as a Liberal Feminist perspective on individual equality, and equal treatment between men and women.

6. Conclusions
How is women’s role depicted in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s “Womenomics”? Are there Liberal Feminist or/and Confucian elements in his policies? This paper set out with the ambition to answer these questions. The analysis suggests that Prime Minister Abe foremost depict women’s role as an economic factor for his plan to revive and stimulate Japan’s economy. Women have become one of his catalysts for his economic growth strategy, and promoting concrete actions in order to reach certain goals, such as increase women in leadership positions 30 percent by 2020 or increasing day-care facilities in order for women to go back to work after child-rearing. Furthermore, the results suggest that “Womenomics” is mainly influenced by, and has elements of Liberal Feminist theory.
While analysing the prime minister’s political ideas in terms of dimension Economic Participation, it suggests that Prime Minister Abe regards women’s role as an integrated part of Japanese economy. He strives for more active participation and opportunities for women in the labour force. This indicates elements from Liberal Feminist theory, which argues for an end of female oppression in regards to economic participation.

Moving on to the dimension of Private versus Public Sphere, it is clear to assume that the Abe administration is set to realize a “society in which women can shine”. The idea of expanding the role of women in society as well as promoting women’s increased participation in decision-making roles, especially in corporations (which has historically been seen as a male domain) indicates similar ideas which are align with Liberal Feminism; women in leading positions and not with support work. Liberal feminists have long battled for women to be allowed to participate in the public sphere, which has long been (and still is) dominated by men. Although Liberal feminist scholars often argue for an emancipation of women in the public sphere, it is also as important to gain female empowerment in private sphere. Prime Minister Abe does mention in his speeches the need of men sharing responsibility domestically, but a more profound discussion needs to be taken. It seems that female participation and women’s role are mostly discussed in connection to women’s emancipation in public sphere, not as much when it comes to female empowerment domestically. Here it can be argued that it is not enough to only create more opportunities for women to participate in public space if the negotiation power of women in the domestic space is not empowered.

When it comes to the dimension of Ontological Views, it is perceived that Abe Cabinet is emphasising the improvement of women’s situation and well-being. He mentioned in a speech about the importance of women’s self-esteem and that his goal is to support women in their challenges to become self-reliant. Liberal Feminism is promoting for the realization and freedom of women to live as her own choosing, and her pursuit of happiness. This can be analysed as being connected to Prime Minister Abe’s political idea of putting women’s health, opportunities and participation in focus.

In regards to dimension of Gender Views, it is evident that Prime Minister Abe supports the dream of realizing a society where women can try to achieve their dreams. This is considered to be a fluid view on gender roles, which is argued by Liberal Feminist theory; women have the freedom to individually chose their own path, which is opposite of Confucianism where there is a set of fixed gender roles. But what is to be discussed now gives an ambiguity of Prime Minister Abe view on gender roles. The prime minster has claimed women as “homemakers”, and that they possess a unique perspective which only women can
provide. This statement can be interpreted as being influenced by Confucian idea of women and men have certain set of attributes; where women are most suitable to take care of the household and children. To declare that women are “homemakers”, and career within child-rearing automatically falls to women indicate this assumption; it seems that men are ruled out to be considered as day-care workers. Lastly, it is peculiar of the prime minister to state that he “also pitch in to do the house shores and taking out the trashes” with the believe that this act of consideration would diminish gender gaps. However, this is not going to defeat the structural injustice in the domestic domain in the long run.

Finally, in the dimension of Power Relations, it seems that the Abe administration considers the need of realizing a society where both women and men can “shine equally”. The emphasis on gender equality and that shared responsibility of child-rearing and parental leave, indicates the view on putting both women and men on the same power position. This aligns with Liberal Feminist theory of making the society where both women and men have equal opportunities.

The final analytical schema is as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>CONFUCIANISM</th>
<th>LIBERAL FEMINISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Participation</td>
<td>Not present</td>
<td>Increase female labour participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private vs. Public Sphere</td>
<td>Not present</td>
<td>Women in leading positions – put at the centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontological Views</td>
<td>Not present</td>
<td>Women’s well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Views</td>
<td>Women as “homemakers”</td>
<td>Freedom to choose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Relations</td>
<td>Not present</td>
<td>Men and Women shine equally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.

6.1 Final Discussion

This paper is of a descriptive design, where the ambition is to give a more profound and extensive view on what kind of different political ideas manifest during debates, policies, statements and literature. This study did not however, discuss the reasons why “Womenomics” came to be. The article “Japan’s Womenomics Diplomacy: Fighting Stigma and Constructing ODA Leadership on Gender Equality” by Liv Coleman (2017) discusses
stigma as one of the factors which pushed the Abe Cabinet to include a gender perspective in their new economic and political strategy. Furthermore, another indicator could be the case of gender mainstreaming, where most governments adopt a more gender sensitivity on all level of policy making and processes. This could indicate that the Abe administration is following the international political norm (see Krizsán and Zentai 2006; and True and Mintrom 2001).

One important aspect that needs to be addressed is the absence of discussing struggles facing single fathers. As Japan has been influenced by a long history of traditional social norms, it is thereof likely that single father is facing stigma. Moreover, it seems that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sometimes when talking about women, puts that in relation to couples; therein the lack of inclusion for single mothers as well.

His economic strategy is in accordance to Liberal Feminist view of female participation, however, here it is argued that there is a lack of diversity and inclusion in the policies. The prime minister is adamant to increase female employment, but fails to come out with adequate measures to tackle irregular workers. It is not enough in the long run to only increase female labour participation, if majority of them are irregular employees. In addition, the stigma surrounding women in work environment and women who wants to pursue a career needs to be even further discussed. There is a need to create an environment where women want to stay in their job and see a future of full time employment. Furthermore, Prime Minister Abe did not address the issue of wage disparities and the power for women to decide their own work situation, which is very much argued among Liberal feminists.

It is interesting to see what dimensions of women’s role and empowerment which are the most significant to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Liberal Feminist ideology strongly advocate for political emancipation and empowerment of women. Even though Prime Minister Abe rather discusses women’s participation in regards to economics, there is not much discussion regarding female political participation. The lack of addressing the profound issue of female political underrepresentation indicates where the prime minister views what aspect is most important when it comes to gender equality and women’s role. This reflection is noticeable while doing the analysis, when it is apparent that the economic aspect dominates his speeches. Other dimension such as power relations is less elaborated. However, it is understandable why an economic perspective dominated his view, as “Womenomics” policies are economic policies, but in retrospect, they are also political ones. In addition, Prime Minister Abe is adamant of expressing his support and measures for women in the public sphere, but does not elaborate the issue of the private sphere as much. It seems that Prime Minister Abe does not fully succeed to uncover the structural injustice women face both domestically and politically.
To conclude this final discussion, is a proposal of further step to move forward with this study. An interesting alternative to incorporate and compliment the subject is by conducting an empirical analysis to see if the goals of “Womenomics” are achieved; did Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reached his promises of creating a “society where women can shine”? Furthermore, to complement even further, is to examine if women were included (co-authors) in the formation of “Womenomics” as the policies are said to be for women.
References

Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


Teorell, Sven and Svensson, Torsten (2007), *Att Fråga och att Svara*. Malmö: Liber AB.


