

Nuances of Womenomics: Continuity and change between Abe and Kishida's economic policies for women

Jiani Tian—COL & WH 2024

Mentor: Dr. Ayako Kano—East Asian Language and Civilizations

Funded by: PURM

Introduction

Japan has long presented the paradox of being an economically advanced nation with consistently low rankings in gender equality—placing 116th out of 146 countries in the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report. In comparing the policies surrounding gender equality under Abe Shinzo and Fumio Kishida, fruitful observations can be made regarding the magnitude of the shift away from the patriarchal Japanese society that has been achieved in the last couple of decades

Shinzo Abe's "Womenomics"

Background:

Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" featured three pillars, known as the three arrows, which involved fiscal consolidation, aggressive monetary easing, and structural reforms to boost economic growth. The third arrow of economic growth highlighted greater female participation in the economy as a critical point for achieving said economic growth.¹ Abe has expressed on multiple occasions that unleashing the full potential of Womenomics is integral to the overall growth of Japan.

Key Components of Womenomics:

Abe's Womenomics plan involved bringing as many women into the work force as possible. To achieve this, the government pushed out policies which made childcare more accessible and motivated more men to take on an active role in the household to alleviate childcare burdens. Abe had pledged under his "Womenomics" plan to increase the percentage of women who return to the workforce after their first child to 55% by 2020. A core part of this plan was **decreasing the number of children on the childcare waiting lists** down to zero (when it reached a shocking number of 23,167 children in 2015). During Abe's term, his cabinet pushed the idea of "work-life balance" and made initiatives such as "Society in Which Work-Life Balance Has Been Achieved". Under this plan, the goals for the government involved increasing the hours spent by men with children under six years old for childrearing and household tasks from one hour to two and a half hours per day.² Additionally, the "work-life balance" plan also sought to **encourage more men to take paternity leave**, increasing the percentage of men taking childcare leave from 2.63% to 13% by 2020.³

Fumio Kishida's "New Form of Capitalism"

Background:

When Fumio Kishida stepped into the Prime Minister position in 2020, one of the key components of his platform was his economic plan, coined the "New Form of Capitalism". This policy was publicly acknowledged as a clear shift away from Abe's aggressive economic growth policies. Kishida's plan featured four key policies, one of which is the "Realization of a Society Where Everyone Can Feel a Sense of Purpose". This initiative considers gender equality and women's success crucial components.⁴ Kishida is also working with the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality after the "30 by 20" plan failed to be achieved—the previous goal was to increase the number of women in managerial positions to 30% by 2020.

Key Components of Kishida's Policies

Kishida's women empowerment policies also focused heavily on childcare and paternity leave, similar to Womenomics. Very recently, on June 15, 2022, the Diet enacted a bill to set up an **agency for children and families**. Declared as a "signature policy" of Kishida's term, the agency aims to eliminate bureaucratic walls and assemble sections across multiple agencies to carry out children-related initiatives—childcare centers will undoubtedly be the main focus.⁵ In the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality, the government aims to increase the male childcare leave-taking rate to 30% by 2025. In June 2021, the government under Kishida passed **legislation amending the Child and Family Care Act** which went into effect in April 2022.⁶ Several notable amendments make childcare more feasible and appealing for men and women. Firstly, beginning in December of 2022, employees taking paternity or maternity leave will be compensated with paid leave of up to four weeks on top of the childcare leave they were initially entitled to. Furthermore, fixed-term employees can now take childcare and family leaves more flexibly.

Results and Conclusions

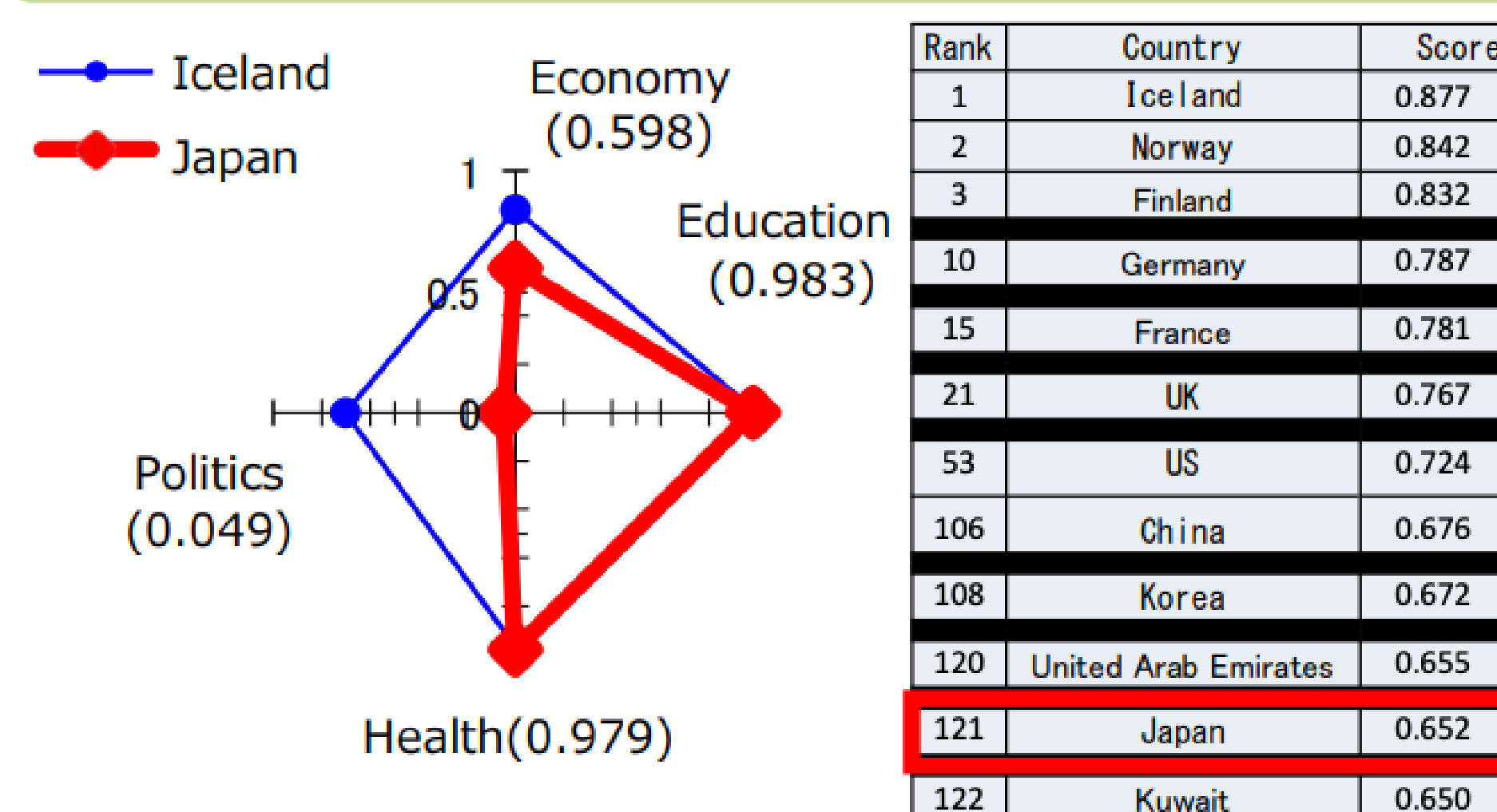
Kishida seems to be shifting away from the **underlying profit-driven spirit of Abe's Womenomics** and is **willing to sacrifice economic efficiency for equality**.

- The Child and Family Care Act amendments under Kishida demonstrate the more detailed attention placed on women in the workforce.
- Kishida has also publicly recognized the importance of improving the treatment of female workers in the medical and welfare sectors.⁷

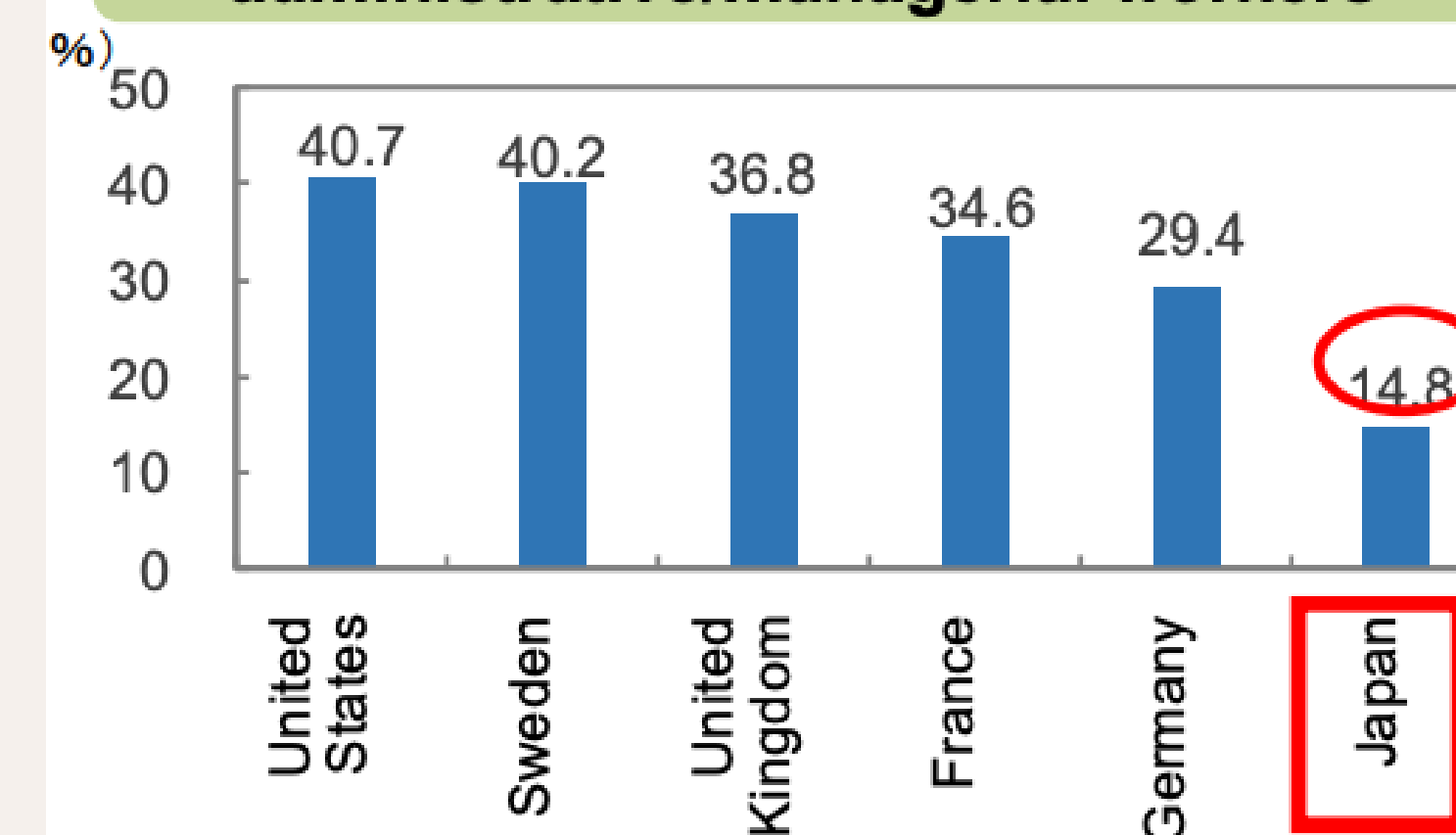
Compared to Abe's Womenomics, where **profit-driven shortcuts** were taken to achieve goals for increasing childcare.

- The number of privatized childcare centers grew, creating a vast gap between the private and public sectors in childcare.⁸

Ranked 121st out of 153 countries in Gender Gap Index 2020



Proportion of women administrative/managerial workers



(Source) Figures for Japan are from Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, "Labour Force Survey." Figures for other countries are from ILO, "ILOSTAT" (as of November 2020). Figures for all countries are for 2019.

Literature Cited

- 1 Abe, Shinzo. "Shinzo Abe: Unleashing the Power of 'Womenomics'; our Goal in Japan is to Boost Women in the Workforce significantly by 2020 and Reduce Pay Disparity." Wall Street Journal (Online), Sep 25, 2013.
- 2 Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, "Society in Which a Work-Life Balance Has Been Achieved" (Government of Japan, 2016).
- 3 Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, "Male Leaders Efforts to Promote Women's Active Role in Japan" (Tokyo: Government of Japan, August 2015).
- 4 "未来を切り拓く「新しい資本主義」," 首相官邸ホームページ, accessed July 4, 2022.
- 5 "Japan Enacts Bill to Create Agency for Children, Families," nippon.com, June 15, 2022.
- 6 Lockton Global Compliance, "Japan to Increase Child Care Leave," Lockton Global Benefits (blog), December 30, 2021.
- 7 "Kishida's Lofty Economic Plans Lacking One Thing: Details | The Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis," The Asahi Shimbun, accessed July 4, 2022.
- 8 Weathers, Charles. "The Contradictions of the Womenomics Campaign: Abe Shinzō's Employment Reforms and Japan's Public Service Workers." U.S.-Japan Women's Journal 53 (2018): 47-71.