

Has Japanese Foreign Policy Become Feminist Too? An Analysis of the “Women Shine” Foreign Policy of the Second Abe Administration

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Abstract:

In recent years, an increasing number of states have been upholding gender equality norms as a guiding principle of foreign policy, with some of them labeled as feminist foreign policy (FFP). While many emphasize the ethical and transformative aspects of FFP, this paper highlights how a nationalist government with strong sentiments against liberal gender norms pursued power by strategically engaging with the tide. By examining the case of the pro-women diplomacy of the second Abe Administration of Japan (2013-2020) under the banner of “A Society in which Women Shine”, this study argues that the rise of FFP provided the government with an opportunity to mobilize ambiguous pro-women discourse in asserting its status as a protector of women and “universal values”, assuring the international community that its militarized masculinity meets the appropriate standard of modernity, while at the same time escaping state responsibility to address large scale gender inequality and past military sexual violence.

Keywords: *feminist foreign policy, pro-gender norms, masculinity, comfort women*

1. Introduction and Research Questions

For a long time, foreign policy has been the domain of men, who, as rational agents of a sovereign state, seek to maximize national interests and power, without caring much about ethical values, especially gender equality. However, in recent years, an increasing number of states are upholding gender equality or the empowerment of women as a guiding principle of their foreign policy, with some even explicitly declaring the pursuit of “feminist” goals through foreign policy.

Sweden was the first state to openly adopt a feminist foreign policy (FFP) in 2014, as then Minister of Foreign Affairs Margot Wallstrom committed to addressing structural gender inequality through the 3Rs – Representation, Rights and Redistribution. This “radical” turn was followed by Canada, when the Trudeau administration adopted a Feminist International Assistance Policy in 2017, further declaring to make the G7 summit it would host in 2019 “feminist”. According to Thompson et

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al. (2021), France, Luxemburg, Spain, Mexico and Libya had also publicly adopted FFP by July 2021. Moreover, there are many other states that have similarly upheld a commitment to gender equality as a major principle of their foreign policy (FP), without publicly declaring it “feminist”, which include Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, the USA, Australia and South Africa (Skjelsbæk and Tryggestad, 2020; Hudson and Leidl, 2015; Lee-Koo, 2020; Hastrup, 2020).

Japan, in failing to address the large gender gap and the issue of military sexual violence in the past war, seems to be having nothing to do with this “growing, global trend” (Thompson et al., 2021, 1). Feminism has remained at the margin of Japanese politics, and has never gained the status of a policy priority. However, this does not mean that Japan has been able to continue to keep its non-feminist FP irrelevant to the rise of international gender equality norms. In fact, as one of the world’s largest international donors, it has supported the global promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, despite its own poor domestic record. Furthermore, in 2013, the conservative administration of Shinzo Abe abruptly upheld “a society in which women shine” (hereafter, Women Shine) as “a thread guiding Japan’s diplomacy”, pledging increased international aid for the empowerment of women and the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Should it be considered a sort of FFP? Why did the state leader who had been known for his conservative gender ideology pursue “women-friendly” diplomacy so actively? Did it reflect an increasing commitment to pro-gender equality norms in Japanese FP?

This paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of academic research on the rise of feminism or gender equality norms in FP, by considering the case of the second Abe Administration of Japan (2013-2020) that was the least likely to adopt FFP. While much of the existing literature is concerned about how much and in what sense “feminist” FFP is based on cases of some leading states, I will rather focus on how a conservative government with strong sentiments against liberal gender norms found an opportunity to advance its FP goals by strategically engaging with the international tide of FFP. Through the post-structural feminist lens on the identity construction process in FP, I examine the context, discourse and practice of Japan’s quasi-FFP, to highlight how the Japanese government attempted to reassure its allies, especially the US, that Japan meets the appropriate standard of modern masculinity required for a bearer of international order, while at the same time managing tensions between international liberal gender order and nationalist gender ideology.

In the following sections, I will first review the literature on the recent surge of feminism or pro-gender norms in FP and set an analytical framework for the study. Next, I will discuss the context in which the idea of “Women Shine” was upheld by a state leader who had hitherto been known for his anti-feminist nationalist agenda, and then I will move on to examine this “pro-women” FP in detail.

2. Literature on Feminist Foreign Policy

1) What is FFP?

Some scholars and NGOs have highly appreciated the development of FFP as a significant departure from the conventional FP that pursues narrowly-defined national interests and security, towards more ethical, inclusive and transformative state engagement with global gender equality based on cosmopolitan values, (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, 2016; 2019; Aggestam et al., 2019)¹. Yet

1 An increasing number of NGOs are also actively advocating for FFP. See for example the website of the Center for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP), an international NGO. <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/>

others hold more cautious views about whether this emerging FFP truly represents a radical challenge to existing international power hierarchies and if the state can be an agent for feminist transformation for peace and security, (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018; Duriesmith, 2018; Scheyer and Kumskova, 2019). Especially, national security and defense policy is the area where consistency with feminist principles is questioned. Sweden and Canada are both criticized for making arms deals with Saudi Arabia, and former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s approach of placing women’s rights around the world within US national security concerns, the so called “Hillary Doctrine”, was severely criticized by anti-militarist feminists as “imperial feminism” (Hudson and Leidl, 2015, 48-62).

Part of the controversy may stem from the fact that there is no single agreed definition of what constitutes FFP. Most notably, Aggestam et al. (2019) attempt to theorize FFP as a practice of international ethics that is guided by feminist-informed “ethics of care” that commits to the care and nurturing of distant others². However, although sharing a commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment around the world, there are considerable differences in the “feminist” approaches of the states pursuing FFP, (Thompson et al., 2021; Thompson, 2020), which reflects different thoughts and approaches in feminism. One of the major critiques is that most of the existing FFP based on the liberal feminist approach that focuses on representation, participation and empowerment of women in the existing institutions fails to address the interlocking power structures of gender, race and sexuality, dealing with gender as the single most important category of analysis (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018). Alternatively, there are attempts to define FFP with an explicit intersectional feminist perspective, which pays close attention to intersections of gender and other oppressions (Thompson et al., 2021).

Probably an important question is not so much what a “real” FFP should look like, but what kind of identity is produced through committing to “feminist” values. The ethical argument by Aggestam et al., (2019) emphasizing “good international citizenship” as well as many case studies suggest that upholding feminist values through FP is a practice to imagine and present oneself as a “good” nation to be separated from not-so-good “others”, or to be associated with like-minded good nations, such as Sweden as a “humanitarian superpower” (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, 2016, 3), or Canada as “compassionate and generous” (Parisi, 2020, 169), or Norway as a “gender-equal and peace-promoting nation” (Skjelsbæk and Tryggestad, 2020). Yet, publicly declaring “feminist” is a “bold value statement” (Skjelsbæk and Tryggestad, 2020, 190) that could distance others who would not do so, thus some governments like Australia or Norway may opt to practice pro-gender norms in FP “by stealth” (Lee-Koo, 2020).

Rather than another normative definition of FFP, Aggestam and True define “pro-gender norms” in FP as the inclusion of one or more of the four following types of commitments: (1) gender mainstreaming within and across FP domains; (2) international development aid targeting gender equality; (3) commitment to a WPS agenda; (4) other concrete mechanisms for gender equality in FP (Aggestam and True, 2018, 2). This definition can capture the broader ways states engage with gender equality norms, including the Women Shine diplomacy of Japan.

2 For a critique on liberal cosmopolitan feminist approach to FP from a critical feminist care ethics perspective, see Robinson 2021.

2) How to Explain the Rise of Pro-Gender Norms?

Another critical question is how to explain the rise of feminism or pro-gender norms in FP and how this impacts the development of international politics, where there has also been a global trend towards the “remasculinization” of states after 9/11 (Stachowitsch, 2013).

Some feminist FP scholars have argued that greater gender equality in domestic politics would bring about less violent or more humanitarian FP practices (Brisk and Mehta, 2014; Hudson et al., 2012; Williams, 2017). In fact, many states taking the lead in FFP have advanced gender equality at home with the strong support of civil society and feminist policymakers and bureaucrats. Yet, even for those states, the advancement of gender mainstreaming in global governance has served as a crucial opportunity to advance pro-gender norms in FP areas. Especially, the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) as well as subsequent resolutions that are collectively called the WPS agenda have provided an important framework to incorporate gender equality norms into national security, as the commitment to the WPS agenda constitutes the central feature of the FFP of many states.

However, as much critical feminist research has revealed, the development of the WPS agenda and gender mainstreaming in broader global governance cannot be simply understood as an advancement of gender equality or feminist ethics. Although the adoption of Resolution 1325 was hailed as a feminist success as it stipulates women’s equal participation and representation in formal decision-making and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence under conflicts for the first time, the challenge to militarism that had been the very core of the feminist peace movement was dropped through the negotiation process between NGOs and the Security Council and women’s participation was instrumentalized as a useful resource for maintaining, rather than dismantling, the dominant power structures of the conventional international security (Cohn, 2008; True, 2011; Pratt, 2013).

Indeed, incorporating gender is increasingly regarded by states as a “smart thing to do” to effectively achieve the goal of security or economic growth under neoliberal global governance (True, 2011; Basu, 2016). Importantly, Parashar et al. (2018) suggest that the rise of pro-gender norms in some liberal states as well as sometimes violent backlash against gender equality should be considered in the global process of the remaking of the state that is inherently gendered. While “state in retreat” was widely discussed in the face of globalization in 1990s, the roles of the state have never been less significant in the face of increased security threats and the deepening of the financialized neoliberal global economy. While patriarchy that was the constitutive foundation of modern states and international relations is being challenged, gender continues to play an essential role in redrawing the boundaries of public/private and legitimate/illegitimate, and reconstituting the subjects of international politics and the global economy (True, 2018; Stachowitsch, 2013; Roberts, 2015).

Thus, a critical feminist international relations (IR) and a political economy approach to the state suggests that the rise of pro-gender norms is a part of the dynamic process of changing gendered power relations in global political economy and state restructuring, which should affect states like Japan too, while they may also actively respond to it. In order to understand the differentiated state response there will be a need for a more comprehensive and systemic comparative analysis to trace continuity and change in FP as Aggestam and True (2018) point out. I would further like to draw on the rich contribution of the post-structural approach to state FP as a process through which the sovereign identity of the state with unambiguous boundaries is constructed through the discursive construction of gendered, sexualized and racialized others (Ashley, 1989; Campbell, 1998; Weber,

2016). Ali Bilgic’s postcolonial feminist analysis of Turkey’s ontological insecurity in relation to the West is particularly suggestive in understanding Japan’s deeply held fear of feminization and obsession with proving its masculinity through strengthening its military alliance with the US. This constructed militarized masculinity of Japan needs to be an appropriate one in the eyes of the US, the upholder of standard or hegemonic masculinity, since othering as “not one of us” in gendered international hierarchy may occur through hypermasculinization as much as feminization (Bilgic, 2016).

In the following section, the paper will consider how the conservative government of Japan strategically responded to the challenge of the global tide of pro-gender norms by examining the context, discourse and practices of the Women Shine diplomacy. It will focus on how “women” are mobilized to serve the national interest and the security of Japanese state, what kind of identities were constructed through discursive practices, and how tensions and contradictions between liberal gender norms and nationalist ideology were exposed and managed.

3. The Context in which the “Women Shine” Diplomacy was Pursued

1) “Women’s Power” as “the Most Important Agenda”

When Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) returned to power in a sweeping victory in the December 2012 election after three years as an opposition party, it was well expected that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe would pursue his nationalist agenda to rewrite the Constitution even more vigorously as he had sought to do during his first administration in 2006-07. However, instead of pursuing this divisive ideological agenda, Abe successfully gained popular support for an ambitious economic growth strategy known as “Abenomics”. Abe further surprised many by upholding “*josei katsuyaku*” (activating women’s power) as a major pillar of Abenomics. The “Strategy for Revitalizing Japanese Economy” in June 2013 called for increasing the participation of women in the labor force as well as in management positions, stating: “Women’s power is the greatest potential that Japan has and activating that power is vital for the sustainable growth of the national economy, (Government of Japan, 2013a)”. The “Act on the Promotion of Female Participation and Career Advancement in the Workplace” legislated in 2015 included measures to support women to continue their jobs and increase the number of women in management positions. The government further extended the call for “women’s power” from economic policy to the government-wide initiatives called “creating a society in which women shine” as the “top priority” of the Abe administration. A new ministerial position in charge of women’s empowerment and headquartered under the prime minister’s office was established in 2014. Abe further promoted women’s participation in politics by appointing five female ministers in September 2014, and legislating the “Act on Promotion of Gender Equality in the Political Field” in 2018.

Furthermore, Abe presented the Women Shine agenda in his speech at the UN General Assembly session in September 2013 as “a thread guiding Japan's diplomacy”. On this most important diplomatic stage, Abe spent almost half of his speech highlighting “women’s power”, mentioning the names of three individual women: Ms. Tokiko Sato, a Japanese expert of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) who had worked hard for improving maternal health in Jordan; Nilufa Yeasmin who had acquired income and self-esteem by becoming a salesperson for a made-in-Japan water purifier; and Islam Bibi, an Afghan police officer gunned down by unknown assailants. The stories of these empowered women were intended to effectively represent Japan’s contribution to women’s

causes globally, as Abe pledged over \$3 billion ODA to support women around the world, the formulation of a national action plan to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS, and support for international institutions like the UN women and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. (Abe, 2013b).

This unprecedented performance to present “women-friendly” Japan was so successful that it was highly appreciated by then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, which further elevated the importance of the Women Shine diplomacy in the FP of the administration (Suginohara, 2015, 295-296). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) newly established a Gender Mainstreaming Division and opened a webpage dedicated to women’s empowerment. The MOFA has also started organizing a lavish annual international event called the World Assembly for Women (WAW) since 2014, inviting business and political leaders from around the world. Abe was nominated as one of the Heads of State Champions for *HeforShe*, a UN campaign for gender equality in 2016.

2) The “Pro-Women” Policy of an Anti-Feminist State Leader

Such active promotion of women’s empowerment by the Abe administration has drawn much interest inside and outside of Japan, since Abe had been known for his very conservative gender ideology. Abe rose to power as the leader of the rightist nationalist group in the LDP, with strong ties to the history revisionist movement that denies state responsibility over the so-called “comfort women” or imperial military sexual slavery during the Asia-Pacific War, and the “gender backlash” movement that rose up in early 2000s in reaction to the advancement of state gender equality policies. Furthermore, his major political goal to revise the post-War Constitution was also very much related to gender order. The LDP’s draft of new constitution was to weaken the liberal principles embedded in the present Japanese Constitution altogether, including the article speculating on the dignity of individuals and gender equality in family (LDP, 2012)³.

As Abe himself stated that women’s empowerment was not a social policy but the core of the ambitious economic growth strategy (Abe, 2013a), such emphasis on women’s power was largely instrumental. As feminists have pointed out, the relative decrease in women’s labor participation rate in their late 20-30s reflects difficulties for women with young children to continue their careers due to the unequal division of unpaid labor at home as well as long working hours at the workplace. However, the government’s efforts to increase women’s labor participation were to save the Japanese economy which had been faced with a serious shortage of labor, rather than to address the gendered division of paid/unpaid labor in Japan⁴. At the same time, the Women Shine policy was carefully crafted not to depart from the conservative family values and gender norms of the LDP. The government rejected some of the biggest demands of the feminist movement, including closing the large gender pay gap, strengthening public care services, and allowing spouses to keep their surnames after marriage. Even though the administration legislated the law to increase women’s representation

3 The LDP’s 2012 draft of new constitution inserted the following sentence in Article 24 on family and marriage stating: “The family shall be respected as the natural and fundamental unit of society. Family members must support each other” (LDP, 2012).

4 The Women Shine policy was mocked as encouraging women to “die”, as many women regarded it as increasing pressure on them to play double burdens of paid and unpaid work. The government responded to this criticism with market-friendly measures including deregulation of childcare services and allowing migrant domestic workers, rather than addressing gendered structure of Japanese labor market (see Crawford, 2021).

in political parties in 2018, it was not legally binding and the LDP has remained a party with the lowest rate of female candidates until the latest election in October 2021.

In fact, words like gender equality or women’s rights that are associated with feminist goals were carefully avoided in speeches or policy documents on the Women Shine policy. Also, in an apparent difference between the states pursuing FFP, the Women Shine diplomacy lacked a cohesive policy document with clearly stated goals and approaches. That is why many observers regarded the Women Shine diplomacy as a tactic to improve the negative image of Japan as failing women as shown in the “comfort women” issue and its poor ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index (Coleman, 2017; Hasunuma, 2017). In fact, the second Abe administration actively deployed public diplomacy to sell its flagship policies like “Abenomics”, “Proactive Contribution to Peace” and “Women Shine” to the international audience.

However, I argue that the Women Shine diplomacy was not just a PR strategy to improve the image of Japan, nor was it a natural extension of the domestic Women Shine policy. The top priority of the Abe administration’s FP was the stable enhancement of its security alliance with the US through the establishment of the National Security Council and the legislation of the security bills that enabled the exercise of collective defense, which would also be the cornerstone for expanding strategic alliances globally. The rhetorical upholding “women” should be considered as a part of this “value-based FP”, which was to present Japan as a protector of the liberal international order led by the US, that shares “universal values” such as liberty, democracy, the rule of law and basic human rights. “Active engagement with diplomatic issues related to women” was thus incorporated as a part of the strategy to enhance the alliance with the US (Government of Japan, 2013b).

It should be remembered that the first Abe administration ran into an unwanted conflict with the US over the draft resolution presented to the US House of Representatives to urge the Japanese government to apologize and take responsibility over the suffering of the “Comfort Women” victims in 2007. The resolution reflected concerns for Abe’s nationalist agenda to revise the liberal post-War Japanese constitution and revisionist ideology to justify the past aggression of Japan including its military sexual slavery. Diplomatic efforts by Abe to prevent the resolution from passing using a revisionist and sexist argument that there had been no evidence of coercion by the Japanese state, invited strong criticism even among the US policymakers who otherwise prioritized strengthening security ties with Japan. Diplomatic failure was obvious, as similar resolutions were passed in Netherlands, Canada and the EU, following the US (Tai, 2020).

When Abe’s LDP was back in power in December 2012, the Obama administration of the US was pursuing the “Hillary Doctrine” and the UK was just launching the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiatives, which put violence against women at the center of its pro-gender FP. Japan should not be regarded again as turning its back on the liberal international order, for the sake of pursuing the administration’s most important goal, strengthening the security alliance with the US. It is interesting to compare this strategic commitment to women’s empowerment of Japan as a way to associate itself with the US, with Canada’s launch of FFP in 2017. Parisi argues that the rise of FFP in other states provided Trudeau administration with a window of opportunity to rebrand Canada as a “good international citizen”, while distancing itself from both the former conservative government and the US, then under the Trump administration (Parisi, 2020, 169-170; see also Smith and Ajadi, 2020). In both cases, commitment to gender norms played a role as an essential identity marker to strategically associate with/distance from the gendered figure of the hegemonic US, while “women” to be saved or empowered continues to serve as an object of “good will” of the states with a purified past (Smith and

Ajadi, 2020).

However, there are obvious contradictions in the Abe administration's display of commitment to such liberal values, as the rejection of individual dignity and gender equality are so central to the nationalist ideology and conservative family values of Abe and his constituency, as well as the rejection of international human rights norms that deem the "comfort women" as military sexual slavery and a serious human rights violation, requiring a state apology and compensation. How were those tensions exposed and managed? I shall now move on to an examination of the Women Shine foreign policy, focusing on three areas: economic development, peace and security, and wartime sexual violence.

4. The Discourse and Practice of Women Shine Diplomacy

1) The Economic Power of Japan and the Empowerment of Women

In his 2013 UN appearance, Abe spent the last half of his speech making an impressive presentation of the Women Shine diplomacy by telling the stories of three individual women. In the first half of his speech, though, Abe stressed his determination to revive Japan's economic growth, saying "my obligation first of all is to rebuild the Japanese economy to be vibrant, and then to make Japan a dependable 'force' that works for good in the world (Abe, 2013b)". What is constructed here is a masculine image of a Japanese nation that asserts its "regained strength and capacity", aspiring for the privileged status of a permanent member of the Security Council. "Power of women" is then called for to assure that its "force" is good and dependable:

Everything will begin with refortifying Japan's true abilities and its economy once more. The growth of Japan will benefit the world. Japan's decline would be a loss for people everywhere. So how, then, does Japan aim to realize this growth? What will serve as both a factor for and outcome of growth will be to mobilize the power of women, a point almost self-evident at this gathering.

Drawing on "women's power" at home as a resource and abroad as an outcome, and presenting the administration's economic growth strategy as if it was guided by the "development concept under which we focus on cultivating the power of women [which] would engender more peace and well-being in the world", the speech attempts to give legitimacy to Japan's assertion of power and international privilege.

In the following years on the international stage at the UN General Assembly and the WAW organized by the Japanese government, Abe kept praising women as valuable human resources that have a "certain perspective that only women can provide" (Abe, 2014a), "sensitivities that men don't have" (Abe, 2017) or "flexible leadership" (Abe, 2019), which should be the key for the economic prosperity of Japan. These words were clearly an imitation of the model discourse of neoliberal feminism widely shared by international institutions and the business sector, but served to produce an identity for Japan as a country that shares the same values with other actors leading the global economy.

In practice, the number of women who participate in labor market did increase by 2.8 million, but the majority of jobs produced for these women were unstable casual work with meager pay. Without concrete measures to address the structural marginalization of women workers, economic

empowerment remained as unfulfilled slogan. The vulnerability of female casual workers became dramatically apparent when Abe abruptly declared the closing down schools in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic in Spring 2020, since many female workers had to withdraw from the labor market in order to cope with the burden of unpaid childcare at home (Zhou, 2021).

2) Militarized Security and the 1325 NAP

As with the FFP of other states, a major pillar of Japan’s pro-women diplomacy was a strengthened commitment to the WPS agenda that promotes women’s rights in international security, through the formulation of the National Action Plan of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (hereafter 1325 NAP). While Japan had supported the implementation of the WPS agenda since the adoption of Resolution 1325 in 2000, it had been reluctant to take any domestic action to formulate the 1325 NAP until 2012. As discussed above, the abrupt announcement in March 2013 to formulate the NAP was a part of security strategy aimed at emphasizing shared “universal values” with its allies. “Expanding the role of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as well as promoting the social activities of women” was particularly mentioned in the strategy as the most important one of the “diplomatic issues related to women” in this context (Government of Japan, 2013b: 28).

Active engagement in international security including the formulation of the 1325 NAP was heralded as another critical pillar of Japan’s international cooperation besides economic cooperation, under the banner of a “proactive contribution to peace”, as Abe proclaimed at the UN General Assembly:

Japan will newly bear the flag of a “Proactive Contribution to Peace”, anchoring on the undeniable records and solid appraisal of our country, which has endeavored to bring peace and prosperity to the world, emphasizing cooperation with the international community (Abe, 2013b).

Japan has been, is now, and will continue to be a force providing momentum for proactive contributions to peace. Moreover, I wish to state and pledge first of all that Japan is a nation that has worked to eliminate the “war culture” from people’s hearts and will spare no efforts to continue doing so (Abe, 2014b).

These words suggest that a “proactive contribution to peace” is some kind of continuation of the “human security” approach that Japan has advocated since the 1990s to enhance the socio-economic security of individuals mainly through non-military measures⁵. However, in reality, the concept rather represents a major shift away from the conventional security policy under the anti-militarist Japanese Constitution. With a “proactive contribution to peace based on international cooperation” as the guiding principle, the National Security Strategy formulated in 2013 articulated a wide range of measures to protect the “national interests” of Japan, including expanded use of its military forces, development of the defense industry, and the promotion of patriotic education, (Government of Japan, 2013b). While the MOFA formulated the 1325 NAP between 2013 to 2015, the government took various measures to strengthen militarized security, including the “Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets”, lifting the ban on arms sales, and allowing military use of ODA funding.

5 The Japanese approach to human security has been pointed out as emphasizing “freedom from want” compared to the Canadian approach which emphasizes “freedom from fear” (Remacle, 2008)

Especially controversial was the legislation of the security bills in 2015 to enable the exercise of the “collective right to defense”, effectively lifting the constitutional ban on the use of military force except in the case of self-defense.

Although the MOFA had initially planned to formulate the 1325 NAP within several months with minimum civil society consultations, feminist groups and civil society organizations strongly demanded an open and accountable process. As a result, the formulation process was prolonged with the informal drafting group consisting of relevant government officials, experts and civil society representatives, consultation meetings across the country, and all the relevant documents and meetings made open to the public⁶. This can be said to be a remarkable case of participatory policymaking among the mostly top-down “women shine” initiatives. As has been discussed elsewhere, (Motoyama, 2018), it became a rare opportunity where different meanings of peace, security, and women/gender in the context of Japan were exposed and negotiated. The MOFA shared the mainstream understanding of the WPS agenda as being issues related to women living under conflict-affected situations and thus basically a matter of external aid.⁷ On the other hand, the civil society network insisted the agenda should also be relevant to the domestic context of Japan from a feminist-informed understanding of peace and security. The civil society network also strongly opposed the reference to a “proactive contribution to peace” in the NAP, being well aware of the risks that the WPS agenda might be used by the nationalist administration to legitimate further militarization in the name of helping women without addressing its past military sexual violence (Motoyama, 2018).

Eventually, the final agreed draft considerably reflected the proposals from the civil society network, as it included references, albeit weakened, to the past violence against women by Japan in the Preamble, as well as domestic issues such as the erasure of issues of hate speech against minorities, sexual violence by US forces stationed in Japan, the gender-sensitive response to refugee seekers in Japan, and gender-sensitive peace education. However, the final 1325 NAP presented by the government was severely altered from the agreed draft, excluding the above-mentioned issues and weakening the roles of civil society in the monitoring and review process. Even the word “gender” was erased from Japanese language text.

At the UN General Assembly in September 2015, Abe listed Japan’s various efforts for peace and the well-being of women around the world under the flag of a “Proactive Contribution to Peace”, including the formulation of the 1325 NAP that had excluded critical feminist voices as well as the legislation of the security bills despite the massive opposition, reasserting that Japan should be granted the privilege of becoming a permanent member of the Security Council. While actively constructing a masculine Japan that is capable of exercising its economic and military force to lead the UN and the world to greater prosperity and peace, Abe referred to two individual women, a mother from a Palestinian refugee camp who held a handbook distributed by Japanese aid, and a Japanese female aid worker who works hard training the police force in the Democratic Republic of Congo:

Of all the mothers who, glancing through the heights and weights written down in this handbook,

6 Records of consultations and relevant documents are on the MOFA website: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/fp/pc/page1w_000128.html

7 An apparent difference in Japanese MOFA’s approach to the WPS agenda from other governments was that it proposed to include natural disaster situations as a security concern that Japanese NAP should cover, as a part of Japan’s emphasis on human security. The Civil Society Working Group eventually agreed to this proposal.

smile sweetly at their child’s growth, who on earth would wish for that same child to become an apostle of fear once grown up? This Handbook is a record of the prayers of the mother, wishing for her child to grow up healthy. It takes on power, the power of making the mother wish that the child’s life not be squandered. We have distributed Maternal and Child Health Handbooks in refugee camps in Palestine, Syria, and Jordan, wishing that a mother’s love could transform the soil that sometimes creates despair and fear.

Since two years ago here at the General Assembly I have emphasized to you that Japan’s new flag is that of a “Proactive Contributor to Peace based on the principle of international cooperation”. The woman I just introduced to you is among those Japanese individuals devoting themselves to this cause on the front lines (Abe, 2015b).

The two female figures were called upon to cover up the forceful face of a masculine Japan that pursues a military alliance with the US asserting the controversial right to collective defense rather than enhancing the collective security system of the UN. While the figure of a refugee mother struggling to protect her children well represents feminized victims who need the help of Japan, the other female figure plays an even more crucial role. By representing Japan’s international contribution to building peace and helping women elsewhere, she serves to construct an appropriately gendered identity of Japan as selfless, caring and brave.

3) Violence Against Women Under Conflicts and the “Comfort Women”

Besides the promotion of women’s participation in peace-building and peace-keeping, an important pillar of the WPS agenda is the prevention of, and protection of women from, sexual violence under conflicts. Besides the formulation of the 1325 NAP, the Abe administration also committed to supporting the office of Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the UK program for Preventing Sexual Violence Initiatives, expressing its commitment to halting sexual violence against women under conflicts:

It is 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, 2013b).

This strong commitment to the international norms against sexual violence was delivered even while the Japanese government has been taking a more aggressive attitude toward its own conduct regarding the “comfort women” issue. The redress movement has expanded outside Asia, as shown in the resolutions passed in the US and Europe during the first Abe administration in 2007 as well as increasing number of memorial statues erected. In response, the Japanese revisionist movement has embarked on what they call “history wars” against anti-Japan campaigns targeting the international audience, especially in the US. Under the second Abe administration, these “wars” are fought with the active involvement of the government apparatus (Yamaguchi et al., 2016).

One of the ways that the Japanese government engages with the “history wars” is through its public diplomacy. While the second Abe administration has actively deployed public diplomacy since its beginning in December 2012 to counter negative reporting by overseas media on Japan’s history, territory, diplomatic policies or other matters” (MOFA, 2014, 9), it further strengthened these efforts in

2015 by doubling its budget, just as disputes between Republic of Korea and China over history and territory escalated and the world marked the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, (Kuwahara, 2017). The administration's diplomacy to counter the international pressure could take more aggressive forms. For example, MOFA publicly requested McGraw-Hill, an American publisher, to delete a description of the "comfort women" in a textbook in 2015, which led to protests by the publisher and prominent American historians. MOFA not only protested but even demanded the removal of memorial statues erected or exhibited around the world. A memorial statue erected by a civil society group in Manila, Philippines, in 2017 was removed after protest by Japanese government (Japan Times, 2018).

Furthermore, the government has taken an increasingly aggressive stand against UN human rights bodies. In 2014 MOFA demanded the UN Human Rights Commission to correct the 1996 report by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women on the "comfort women" arguing that the report was based on fabricated information (Yoshida, 2014). It further repeated historical revisionist arguments at meetings of human rights bodies in 2016 and 2018 that international criticism of Japan was unfounded. At those meetings, the representatives of the Japanese government emphasized that the Abe administration was making great contributions to women's empowerment around the world, suggesting that the large financial contribution to the UN under the banner of Women Shine was a part of strategy to gag international criticism (CEDAW, 2016, para. 6; MOFA, 2018).

Despite refusing to take any responsibility for Japan's own conduct of military sexual slavery in the light of the universal standard of human rights and gender justice, Abe repeatedly claimed that Japan stood as a protector of women under conflicts and the universal norms of the international community:

Japan seeks to be a country that walks alongside such women throughout the world. We intend to encourage and support throughout the world the self-reliance of women whose hearts have suffered grievous harm. We intend to make in the 21st century a world with no human rights violations against women. Japan will stand at the fore and lead the international community in eliminating sexual violence during conflicts (Abe, 2014b).

This self-image as a sympathetic and compassionate supporter of women who suffer from sexual violence under conflicts was of course not only to sanitize its own past as a perpetrator of large-scale wartime sexual violence but also to reassure the international community that the reestablished militarized masculinity of Japan from the rubble of the post-War constitution is neither the same kind of hypermasculinity found in the past imperial Japan nor akin to the perpetrators of sexual violence under conflicts today, who are the sexualized and racialized "others" of the international community⁸. It was also a strategy to handle the conflicting national identities of Japan, between a champion of universal norms of the international order and a proud nation unapologetically shaking off unfounded guilts imposed by the postwar liberal order.

The tension is particularly apparent in Abe's speech to mark the 70th year since the end of World War II. While reassuring that the position articulated by the previous cabinets that have "repeatedly expressed their feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for their actions during the war" would

8 For a discussion on how international discourse on sexual violence under conflicts reproduces a racialized and sexualized figure of the perpetrating men, see Baaz and Stern, 2013.

remain unchanged, he also asserts that “[w]e must not let our children, grandchildren, and even further generations to come, who have nothing to do with that war, be predestined to apologize”. What Japan should really regret, according to Abe, is the fact that:

Japan ended up becoming a challenger to the international order. Upon this reflection, Japan will firmly uphold basic values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights as unyielding values and, by working hand in hand with countries that share such values, hoist the flag of a “Proactive Contribution to Peace”, and contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world more than ever before (Abe, 2015a).

This obfuscating behavior of overwriting the negative past with a positive commitment to the future is repeated in terms of violence against women too:

We will engrave in our hearts the past, when the dignity and honor of many women were severely injured during wars in the 20th century. Upon this reflection, Japan wishes to be a country always at the side of such women’s injured hearts. Japan will lead the world in making the 21st century an era in which women’s human rights are not infringed upon. (Abe, 2015a)

Although violence against women in the past was recalled, it is not made clear who perpetrated it. By extending its hand to women suffering around the world in a benevolent and paternalistic manner, Japan constructs itself as innocent and legitimate holder of the masculine power of protection.

In December 2015, Japan concluded a “landmark” agreement with the then Park administration of the Republic of Korea to settle the “comfort women” issue, backed by the Obama administration, which was hailed as diplomatic victory for Japan (Tisdall, 2015). Yet this would not cease the tension, partly because the revisionist standpoint taken by the administration which does not meet with the international human rights standard would inevitably keep failing to persuade the international community or to settle the conflicting identities of Japan.

5. Conclusion

Most of existing research on the rise of feminism or pro-gender norms in FP emphasizes the ethical and transformative aspects to challenge patriarchal power relations in international politics by focusing on the cases of states taking the lead in this international tide. Instead, this paper has examined how a nationalist government with strong sentiments against liberal gender norms pursued power and national interests by strategically engaging with the tide. The pro-women diplomacy of the Abe administration was obviously not a reflection of any structural changes in domestic politics towards gender equality, nor was it a coherent and sustainable change in foreign policy being advocated, nor were there clearly articulated policy documents. The vague concept of “a society in which women shine” and the avoidance of words like “women’s rights” or “gender equality” indicates an intended distancing from feminism, and an escape from any kind of state obligation and accountability that had been articulated under the UN system and the relevant international laws. Indeed, the rise of pro-gender norms in neoliberal global governance and national foreign policy in recent years created an opportunity for Japan to utilize gender issues for its national interests, rather than a pressure to make substantial changes towards gender equality as the development of an

international human rights mechanism such as the CEDAW did; a pressure which the Japanese government resisted quite forcefully.

I have indicated that the active upholding of international women's issues by the Abe administration was pursued as a part of the security strategy to strengthen military ties with the US. To be recognized as a valuable ally by the US and as qualified to claim the status of a permanent member of the Security Council, Japan must reconstitute its masculine self that is capable of exercising not only economic power but also military force, lifting the ban imposed by the post-War Constitution. Upholding "universal values" including liberal gender norms was necessary in order to reassure others that this masculine Japan with military force is not the "challenger to the international order" from the past, but a legitimate co-protector of the international order, with the appropriate standard of modern masculinity. Needless to say, what those "universal values" or pro-women norms could mean is always arbitrary. The practice of Japan that mobilized ambiguous pro-women discourse as a "universal value" in asserting the status of the privileged few in the international order suggests that the rise of pro-gender norms in global governance and in the FP of the states in the Global North may reproduce, rather than transform, the existing hierarchical relations in the international politics.

The priority of the Women Shine agenda in the Abe administration significantly declined after 2016. It is probably because the administration had successfully achieved its most important political goals by 2015, the legislation of the security bills, and the 70th anniversary of the ending of the Asia-Pacific War, which would revive the image of an aggressive Japan, thus requiring a pro-women discourse to counter this. The election of Trump as the US president in 2016, replacing Obama, also reduced the importance given to gender in Japan-US relations. Nonetheless, the rise of pro-gender norms in global governance and state FP is a growing international tide, which could continue to provide opportunities for the state. There is a need for a more comprehensive study as to what elements of the Abe administration's Women Shine diplomacy would continue or change in the subsequent administrations taking into consideration the involvement of businesses and NGOs or changes caused by the global pandemic, which should be addressed by subsequent research.

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