

Women in Japanese Culture and Gender Diplomacy: The Evolution of Women's Roles in Japan's Foreign Service and Its Influence on the Regional Agenda

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ABSTRACT

Given the growing importance of gender equality on a global scale, gender diplomacy has come to be seen as an important measure of a state's foreign policy legitimacy and efficiency. In light of this, this research explores the trends of the inclusion of women in terms of their leadership roles and policy-making capacities in Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Gaimushō) from 2015 to 2024, assessing its implications for the regional diplomacy of East Asia. Based on qualitative methodology, the analysis relies on secondary sources collected from the data of the MOFA, OECD, and WEF and assesses the application of "Womenomics" and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) initiative within the framework of traditional Japanese gender norms, which are reflected in the culture of the *ie* and *Ryōsai Kenbo*. As the results of the research reveal, even though the number of female participants in the Japanese labor market rose to 74.1% in 2024, women are still poorly represented in diplomatic positions, occupying just 5.1% of ambassadorial positions in 2023. These statistics demonstrate the persistence of institutional and cultural obstacles in the Japanese diplomatic service.

Keywords: *Gender Diplomacy; Japan; Foreign Service; Womenomics; WPS; Ryōsai Kenbo.*

INTRODUCTION

Japan presents a paradox regarding gender equality: although it is a major economy and a G7 member, it consistently ranks near the bottom of global gender indices. The World Economic Forum (WEF) placed Japan 118th out of 146 countries in its 2024 Global Gender Gap Report and 118th out of 148 in its 2025 report, the lowest among G7 nations. This contradiction is further highlighted by Japan's active promotion of gender-oriented diplomacy on the international stage, including initiatives such as Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's Womenomics and the 2015 National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security (WPS). The present study examines the contrast between these external initiatives and the persistent domestic gender norms and representation gaps within Japan's foreign service.

The *ie* system and the Meiji-era *Ryōsai Kenbō* ideal confined Japanese women to domestic roles, limiting their access to diplomacy and influencing recruitment and promotion in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Postwar gender equality laws have not fully resolved these cultural legacies within public-sector leadership (Agusta & Dewi, 2023, pp. 77-89).

Transformation became significant in the 2010s after the implementation of the Womenomics policy in 2013 and the WPS-NAP in 2015. Statistics show that there was a steady increase in the involvement of women at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA/*Gaimūshō*). For instance, the percentage of women in this institution rose from about 30% in 2015 to above 40% during the late 2010s. As of 2022, over half of the newly recruited officials were women. Nonetheless, high-ranking diplomats continue to be mainly male. For example, women accounted for only 5.1% of ambassadors in Japan and 7.1% of senior diplomats in 2023. New reports released by the UN regarding Japan's gender equality policy highlight the continued existence of such disparities (Flowers, 2022).

According to this research, there is a lack of parity in terms of gender diplomacy commitments externally compared to those domestically within Japan, highlighting the conflict between institutional modernization and cultural tradition. The analysis of staffing trends and policy approaches between 2015 and 2024 demonstrates how progress made in terms of increasing women's involvement happens against the background of institutional and cultural obstacles. The purpose of this research is to reveal how these obstacles affect gender diplomacy in the region and why it is important for Japan to combine domestic and international policies in order to move forward.

The academic literature analyzing women's engagement in Japanese public affairs tends to emphasize culture's endurance. According to Gao (2023), the Confucian tradition – as illustrated in the *I Ching* and *Analects* – creates gender inequality by placing women as yin opposite to men, yang. The concept is further elaborated upon in the “three obediences and four virtues.” Koyama (2012) and Iwanaga (2008) describe how such ideas were transformed during the Meiji era with *Ryōsai Kenbō*—“good wife, wise mother”—and the *ie* family organization. Even though these ideas were rejected in 1947, they remain important as corporate and bureaucratic standards that explain the current M-curve phenomenon regarding female workforce participation. Ellis (2025) frames the process in the East Asian context. Thus, the Meiji regime skillfully employed the category of womanhood as the barometer of civilization in its reaction to Western expansionism, thus nationalizing gender reforms and removing them from the rights-based discourse.

In the second strand of literature, there is a tendency to analyze women's involvement in diplomatic work. Specifically, Aggestam and Towns (2019) describe three approaches – diplomatic history, descriptive representation, and institutional gender – and call for more systematic and longitudinal research focused not only on Europe and North America but on Asian countries as well. In turn, Azzahra and Latifah (2021) consider the development of women's involvement in foreign services since the 1920s and observe that despite UN Security Council Resolution 1325 about Women, Peace and Security (WPS) passed in 2000, women still occupy low ranks and face continuous issues of legitimacy all over the globe.

Most studies on Japan have focused on policy tools. As noted by MacNaughtan (2015), Womenomics would increase labor supply in Japan. Later, Crawford (2021) was skeptical about it since Womenomics meant using equality to promote economic growth without structural cultural transformation. This contradiction is empirically evident from MOFA. Flower (2018) states that the diversification process at *Gaimushō* started in the late 1990s. In 2018, there were 42% of women among employees at headquarters; however, the majority worked in administration positions. According to OHCHR (2024) data in 2024, there is progress in terms of recruitment; over 40% of employees and over

50% of new employees were females. Still, there were only ten female ambassadors (5.8%), and 7.1% of senior diplomats held high positions.

There were 42% of women among the employees at headquarters in 2018, but most of them worked in administration. Gender equity serves as a "force multiplier" for democratization and international legitimacy, allowing small countries to expand soft power and develop rights-based foreign policy (Cameron, 2017). The situation is completely different in the case of Japan; there is a combination of large international commitment to Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and to Womenomics.

This study provide evidence that establishes the following three crucial premises:

- 1) Cultural persistence of *Ryōsai Kenbo* and Confucian patriarchal culture.
- 2) Global shift toward gender-sensitive diplomacy and foreign policy.
- 3) Statistical evidence of Japan's lack of senior-level representation.

Nevertheless, none of these studies explore in detail a systematic link between cultural persistence in Japan and the actual performance of gender-sensitive foreign policy and diplomacy during the 2015-2024 timeframe, as well as a possible effect that the internal struggle could have on Japan's regional reputation in the East Asian region. In light of the identified research gap, the current study proposes to fill it through the analysis of relevant variables.

The proposed methodology will address this gap through a comparative cultural analysis of *Ie* and *Ryōsai Kenbo* norms as related to actual policy performance in 2015-2024. Specifically, it will examine the effect of domestic cultural resistance on the implementation of Japanese policies including Womenomics, Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and ambassadorial appointments. With the aid of a systematic analysis, the study will strengthen its theoretical framework as well as create an appropriate metric for assessing the effect of domestic reforms on regional commitments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I.e., System and Ryousai Kenbo : Cultural Foundations

The *ie* (家制度) is a patriarchal family system encoded into Meiji law and that was responsible for Japan's social structure until its formal end by the constitution of 1947. In this system, women continued to be subservient to the family patriarch (*Kachou*), and expected to dedicate themselves entirely to domesticity and procreation. (The History of Japan's Postwar Constitution, n.d.) According to Iwanaga (2008), the tradition of the *ie* system continued to influence Japanese politics and bureaucracy long after the system's formal termination, thus forming barriers against women entering public sector jobs.

The *Ryōsai Kenbo* (良妻賢母) an ideology meticulously crafted as a tool of national unity during the Meiji era, depicts femininity through two fundamental roles: one being that of a wife who supports her husband and the other a mother who teaches her children to be efficient members of society. According to Anzai (2025), despite the term being considered a "dead word" (*Shigo*) in the current Japanese lexicon, the core principles continue to be observed in company culture and the pressures that come with the working lifestyle of women in Japan (Women's work patterns and the M-shaped curve, 2001).

"Managing Women" (2021) examines *Ryōsai Kenbo* both as an ideology and as a tool for business management: initially, the first businesses used family authority to govern the work of women, setting an example that is relevant even today when regulating gender dynamics within organizations. The application of this model in diplomacy includes practices like the informal "resignation after marriage" at MOFA until 1987 (Koyama, 2010).

Womenomics: The Instrumentalization of Gender Equality

Womenomics theory was coined by the Goldman Sachs analyst Kathy Matsui in 1999 and later integrated into national policy by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe from 2013 onwards. Macnaughtan (2015) attacks the instrumentality of the policy, stating that while Womenomics did not respond adequately to calls for gender equality but instead addressed Japan's population crisis by mitigating labor shortages caused by aging workers. One of its main objectives – reaching 30% participation of females in leading roles by 2020 – was extended to 2030 due to the target being out of reach (Government Target of 30% Female Managers Still Far from Achieved in Japan, 2021). According

to Crawford (2021), who systematically evaluates Abe's Womenomics Policy from 2013 to 2020, the results were quite modest, as the percentage of women occupying management roles grew from 12.6% in 2015 to 15.7% in 2023. In addition, according to the IMF (2024), using SVAR and OLS regression methods, the three structural challenges are: cultural expectations of women performing caregiving tasks, a long-hours work culture in Japan, and inadequate daycare facilities. Taken together, Macnaughtan and Crawford both agree that Womenomics managed to increase labor market supply but failed to change gender power dynamics in any significant way. This conclusion is supported by Brysk (2020) through his comparative analysis, which states that greater feminist institutional reforms in Taiwan generated more democratic and soft power.

Women, Peace and Security: The Diplomatic Dimension

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of the year 2000 provided the conceptual framework for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda by declaring the importance of female participation in efforts aimed at conflict prevention, negotiation of peace, and peacebuilding. According to Aggestam & Towns (2019), there is a phenomenon called "the gender turn in diplomacy," and the statistics of 2014 show that 85% of all ambassadors globally were males while only 9% of all negotiators were women. In addition, 2.5% of chief mediators in peace processes were female. Aggestam & Towns claim that it is not just about numbers because women's lack of involvement leads to the perpetuation of the institutionally masculine culture that consistently undervalues human security approaches (Aggestam & Towns, 2019, pp. 9–28). The first National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP-WPS) was developed in Japan in 2015. The revision was conducted in 2019, and the current third NAP for 2023–2028 features innovation by including disaster risk reduction due to lessons learned from the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake (MOFA, 2024b) (National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, 2024). CSIS (2024) reports an impressive boost during the tenure of Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko, who prioritized WPS as one of the pillars of Japan's foreign policy (Nagatomi, 2024). On the other hand, Azzahra & Latifah (2021) critically supplement this information with another observation regarding the unresolved history of gender-based injustices related to the issue of the Comfort Women.

Women in Japanese Diplomacy: Empirical Studies

Flower (2018) notes that traditionally, the Japanese diplomatic service was populated predominantly by men who graduated from the Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo. Initiatives aimed at diversifying the diplomatic corps, such as the inclusion of more women and scientists in their ranks, started to be implemented systematically in the late 1990s (Flower, 2025, pp. 509–534). According to figures from 2018, 42% of Tokyo headquarters employees were women; nonetheless, this percentage includes many administrative employees and contractual workers, and the number of women in career diplomats' ranks is significantly smaller (Women and Men in Japan 2018, n.d.).

The OHCHR (2024) statistics gathered from the CEDAW session provide a more detailed picture of the current situation: as of 2024, there are 10 women ambassadors and 6 consuls general in Japan, and 40% of all MOFA employees are women, which percentage is expected to increase further. Furthermore, 50% or more of new MOFA employees are women. Despite these developments, only 7.1% of senior diplomats are women.

Research Gap and Novelty

However, despite the richness of the existing literature, it is evident that there is a glaring omission – no study has ever systematically investigated the relationship between the cultural structure of Japan domestically (Ie and Ryōsai Kenbo) and the empirical impact of its gender diplomacy, or how this dualism of domesticity and internationality shapes the regional agenda of East Asia (Koyama, 2013). This study attempts to fill this gap through a comprehensive analysis of culture, trends (2015–2024), and policies in an effort to explain the “gender diplomacy paradox” of Japan.

METHODOLOGY

The selected research methodology utilizes a qualitative descriptive approach to explore changes in the representation of women among Japan's foreign service employees and their significance for the region's diplomatic strategy. The design is suitable for describing trends, explaining correlations, and interpreting patterns of representation rather than testing hypotheses about causal relationships through experiments.

Secondary sources were used to collect data, and such a decision is warranted by the existence of reliable long-term datasets provided by institutional actors. Sources of primary data are as follows: series MOFA Diplomatic Bluebook (2015–2024); OECD Employment database; WEF Global Gender Gap Report (2015–2024); ILO Modelled Estimates database (ILOEST); UN OHCHR report on the proceedings of the CEDAW Committee session (2024); and IMF Selected Issues Paper – Japan (2024). Academic sources were chosen based on the following criteria: publication in peer-reviewed English-language journals; connection to key variables (gender, diplomacy, Japan, culture-related norms); and preferably recent, no older than ten years ago (unless cited in the context of theory or history, e.g., Koyama, 2012; Aggestam & Towns, 2019).

Three stages will be involved in the analysis of the collected data. First, temporal trend analysis will be conducted to detect any changes that took place between 2015 and 2024 in quantitative measures of representation (female labor force participation rate, percentage of managers among diplomats, number of female ambassadors appointed, and ranking in the WEF survey). Second, content analysis will be used to estimate the extent and consistency of policy commitment expressed in relevant documents (Japan NAP WPS, Diplomatic Bluebook, institutional reports, etc.). Third, comparative interpretive analysis will be performed to identify and discuss discrepancies between Japan's international stance in the area of gender diplomacy and actual representation domestically with consideration to the theoretical perspectives on Ryōsai Kenbo, institutional gender dynamics, and the WPS framework.

Among limitations is the reliance on secondary data and inability to obtain personal experiences of diplomats or institutional representatives of MOFA. Projections or estimates, as opposed to final statistical figures, were made for two latest data points (2024 and 2025) of some indicators. Also, attribution of certain changes in the representation of women to particular policies is impossible without the ability to perform causal experimentation. The use of different types of data in triangulation will partly counter these problems, while distinctions will be made between exact data and estimated ones at all times.

DISCUSSION

Japanese Women's Labor Force Participation Trends (2015–2024)

Data shows a clear trend of substantial increase in the participation rate of Japanese women in the labor force during the last ten years. Particularly, the participation rate for women aged between 15-64 grew from 66.0% in 2015 to 74.1% in 2024 surpassing the average for the OECD of 66.1% in 2023 (OECD, 2024). However, the most significant change is observed among women aged between 25-44 years old—those who constitute a key part of career building and are most influenced by the negative slope of the M-curve—and reached an increase from 68.0% in 2015 to 77.2% in 2024. In other words, the weakening of the M-curve effect indicates that labor supply effects of the Womenomics era can be achieved, yet with certain cultural transformation.

Table 1. Development of LFPR and Managerial Positions of Japanese Women (2015–2024)

Year	LFPR (15-64) %	LFPR (25-44) %	Management Positions%	WEF Ranking
2015	66.0	68.0	12.6	101/145
2016	67.4	69.8	13.1	111/144
2017	68.5	70.9	13.8	114/144
2018	69.6	72.1	14.3	110/144

2019	70.9	73.4	14.6	121/153
2020	71.3	74.1	14.8	120/156
2021	72.0	74.8	15.0	120/256
2022	72.8	75.5	15.4	116/146
2023	73.3	76.0	15.7	125/146
2024	74.1*	77.2*	16.0*	118/146

Source: OECD Employment Database; Statistics Bureau Japan; WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2015–2024.
(*estimate)

Table 1 above shows that there is a paradox which confirms the criticism of Womenomics by Crawford (2021). Even though there has been a great increase in LFPR for women, their presence in management roles is negligible since there was only a slight increase from 12.6% to the projected 16.0% level, still way behind the 30% goal. The most alarming fact is that WEF ranking fell from 101st to 118th place during the same period, indicating that while more women in Japan become involved in the labor market, they are doing so in circumstances where they cannot be structurally equal to men. According to PMC NIH (Journal of the NIH/National Institutes of Health, 2016), over half of the women working in Japan are on irregular contracts (either part-time or contract) jobs and the trend persists until today (as of 2024). This data quantitatively proves the assertion of Gao (2023) that cultural values grounded in Confucianism continue to work through secret yet effective means in contemporary East Asia, guiding women to unstable jobs.

Women's Representation in Japan's Foreign Service

In the *Gaimūshō*, Table 2 below shows that there was an emerging pattern that matched with the labor market dynamics, which had seen substantial growth in entry-level jobs but slow progression among senior officials. In 2015, the share of women in the MOFA workforce was about 30%, with only five women ambassadors making up just 3.8% of the total workforce posted in Uruguay, Brunei, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Iceland (MOFA, 2015). The share of female employees was estimated to be above 40% by 2024, and the recruitment of women into MOFA jobs exceeded 50% (OHCHR, 2024). However, the share of women ambassadors did not change much and still stood at ten, which accounted for 5.8% of the total workforce.

Table 2. Women's Representation in Japan's Foreign Service (2015–2024)

Indicator	2015	2020	2023	2024
Total MOFA staff (% women)	~30%	~35%	~40%	>40%
Female Ambassadors (%)	3.8%	4.5%	5.1%	~5.8%
Number of Female Ambassadors	5	7	9	10
Female Senior Diplomats (%)	~5%	~6%	7.1%	~8%

New Recruits (% women)	~25%	~28%	>50%	>50%
Japan UN Staff (% women)	n/a	n/a	n/a	63.1%

Source: MOFA Diplomatic Bluebook 2015–2024; OHCHR/CEDAW 2024; IMF Japan 2024. (*estimate)

Table 2 illustrates specifically the “glass ceiling” challenge facing the diplomatic service of Japan. Despite the fact that women occupy a majority of new positions in the service since 2022, only about 5.8% of the ambassadorial posts are occupied by women, a disparity that cannot be explained merely by an insufficient number of women in the pipeline. Indeed, this form of structural discrimination conforms to the observations made by Aggestam and Towns (2019) on the gendered institutional setting of ministries of foreign affairs. Here, the combination of informal social networks, mobility-based career trajectories, and implicit cultural scripts tends to preclude women from occupying senior positions (Jezierska & Towns, 2025). Multilateral institutions paint a very different picture since 63.1% of the Japanese professional workforce in UN agencies is female, demonstrating that Japanese women have the necessary qualification and capabilities for international jobs (MOFA Japan, 2024).

Implementation of Womenomics and WPS: Between Rhetoric and Reality

The goals set out in the context of Womenomics were quite high-level: female labor force participation of 73%, the number of women in leadership roles being 30%, and eradication of the childcare waitlist until 2017 (Groysberg et al., 2017). According to Crawford (2021), of these three, only one goal – LFPR – was actually attained, albeit largely due to the increase in the number of non-regular workers and not due to any substantial progress in terms of career success for women. The 30% leadership goal was then postponed until 2030, and according to the statistics reported by Sylff (2024), only 159 of the 3,915 listed Japanese firms met the standard (Annual Report 2024-25, n.d.). IMF's (2024) econometric findings suggest that in addition to policy measures, there should be cultural change towards unpaid care division, long working hours culture, as well as access to quality childcare services. Such conclusion is consistent with Macnaughtan's (2015) critical stance that viewing women as means, instead of rights-bearing individuals, produces structural change which is unable to help overcome cultural roots of gender inequality discussed by Gao (2023) and Ellis (2025).

As regards the WPS, it is worth noting that Japan shows more consistency in its international efforts. Specifically, there are three national action plans on WPS (from 2015 to 2018, 2019 to 2022, and from 2023 to 2028). Each of these documents covers wider topics and includes greater emphasis on gender mainstreaming in Japanese foreign policy. Currently, under the administration of Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko since September 2023, WPS became one of the main foreign policy pillars of Japan, and the country was praised for becoming a “global leader” in terms of WPS initiatives at the recent Global Women Leaders Summit on WPS (CSIS, 2024). Additionally, Japan ranks seventh in terms of total government contributions to UN Women (USD 17.65 million in 2019) (UN Women Annual Report 2019–2020, n.d.). However, an obvious paradox emerges after the 2024 Noto earthquake, where there were no women leaders of regional disaster management organizations – the problem that should have been already addressed under the auspices of WPS. This inconsistency, similar to the Comfort Women case as per Azzahra and Latifah (2021), is another example of a pattern emerging around Japan's policies.

The Legacy of *Ie* and *Ryōsai Kenbo* in the Contemporary Diplomatic Context

Indeed, the objectives set out in Womenomics included 73% participation of women in the workforce, 30% representation of women in leadership positions, and the elimination of the waitlist for child-care facilities by 2017 (Groysberg et al., 2017). According to Crawford (2021), out of the above goals, only one has been attained, specifically, the LFPR goal, although the achievement is mainly due to growth in non-regular employment instead of women's career advancement. Subsequently, the 30% leadership goal has been pushed forward to 2030; however, according to Sylff (2024), among 3,915 listed companies in 2023, only 159 (4.1%) have attained this milestone (Annual Report 2024-25, n.d.). IMF's (2024) econometric modeling has established that not only policy interventions but also cultural transformation, redistribution of unpaid care, long-hour work culture change, and improved access to

childcare are required. Such a conclusion is coherent with the view of Macnaughtan (2015) that the treatment of women as economic resources rather than as right bearers has resulted in structural reform that cannot tackle the cultural origins of gender inequality pointed out by Gao (2023) and Ellis (2025).

Regarding the issue of WPS, it can be observed that Japanese multilateral efforts have been more consistent than in other spheres of feminist diplomacy. There have been three consecutive National Action Plans on WPS for periods 2015-2018, 2019-2022, and 2023-2028, whereby the scope and degree of gender mainstreaming in foreign policy have been expanding. The new Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko who took office in September 2023 has further emphasized the role of WPS in Japan's foreign policy. At the WPS Global Women Leaders Summit, Japan became acknowledged as a "global leader" (CSIS, 2024). According to the UN Women Annual Report 2019-2020, Japan ranked seventh in the world in terms of contributions to UN Women (\$17.65 million in 2019) (n.d.). However, there is a paradox: despite the high level of Japan's involvement in WPS international politics, the lack of women in leading positions at subnational levels became evident after the Noto earthquake in 2024. It can be noticed that the problem of the internal inconsistency of Japan in advocating the WPS norms is consistent across different registers as Azzahra & Latifah (2021) also note in regard to the Comfort Women case.

Influence on the Regional Diplomacy Agenda

Nonetheless, despite its domestic difficulties, Japan's increasing involvement in gender diplomacy has brought about important implications for the regional agenda. Aggestam and Towns (2019) found out that female diplomats focus more on human security than on the traditional concept of hard security, which is consistent with Japan's foreign policy strategy (Aggestam & Towns, 2018). Japan has used its WPS principles to establish itself as a regional leader in human security-related gender issues, such as ensuring the safety of women and children in conflict zones, empowering women in post-disaster rebuilding, and preventing gender-based violence during emergencies in East Asia. The JICA course on "Gender and Diversity in Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change" has become an example of soft power that reflects Japan's approach in the region (Nagatomi, 2024).

According to CSIS, with Kamikawa at the helm, WPS is gradually becoming embedded in Japan's security framework, thus providing an opportunity for the creation of an alternative model for fostering regional trust against the backdrop of growing tensions in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait (Nagatomi, 2024). At the same time, Japan's reputation as a regional leader in gender diplomacy is limited by the country's own performance. As seen from Azzahra and Latifah's (2021) case study of the Comfort Women and the recent Noto earthquake incident, Japan's commitment to gender policies in the international arena will have a stronger impact if it can prove to be true in practice. Indeed, it seems paradoxical for the Japanese female representation to be 5.1% among the ambassadors and 63.1% among the United Nations personnel.

Synthesis

Taken together, these five dimensions of the analysis lend support to an overarching argument: there exists a structural contradiction in Japanese gender diplomacy between progressive international policies and deeply rooted cultural traditions in the country. Despite the fact that both Womenomics and WPS have provided opportunities for increased female participation in the ranks of diplomats in Japan, the continued prevalence of both the ie institution and the doctrine of Ryōsai Kenbo functions as a glass ceiling, preventing representational equity at higher levels. In light of the econometric analysis undertaken by the International Monetary Fund (2024), suggesting that cultural change needs to accompany policies in order to effect any changes, and given examples from both Brysk (2020) and Aggestam & Towns (2019) of other countries where such policies worked successfully, it is safe to argue that Japan's current approach is inadequate in addressing the problem.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The present study focuses on the evolution of women's representation in Japan's diplomatic corps throughout the period 2015–2024, as well as its significance for Japan's gender diplomacy policy framework. Three main conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, there was an increase in women's participation in the workforce from 66.0% to 74.1% and the

share of MOFA employees exceeded 40%; at the same time, women accounted for only 5.1% of Japan's ambassadors in 2023. Thus, while some progress has been made, the glass ceiling remains intact and results not from lack of talent among female employees but from the legacy of the traditional roles associated with Ryōsai Kenbo and ie ideology. Secondly, although Womenomics helped to address the labor supply issue, it did not succeed in meeting the leadership challenge: both the IMF (2024) and Crawford (2021) state that without reforms targeting cultural practices, Womenomics' achievements are insufficient for dismantling the existing hierarchies. Thirdly, Japan's WPS policy is not just a declaration but rather a practical tool used to pursue the country's diplomatic interests; still, its credibility as a gender diplomacy leader is damaged by gaps in implementation, exemplified by the gender-based incompetence in the 2024 Noto earthquake response and lack of women in top bilateral position. On the basis of these conclusions, four specific suggestions for closing the gap in Japan's gender diplomacy policy framework are proposed: (1) introducing binding targets for female ambassadors and other senior diplomats along with the necessary monitoring tools; (2) changing the structure of diplomatic careers so as to facilitate the posting abroad for employees taking care of their children, including providing childcare services in the respective embassies; (3) developing objective criteria for evaluating Japan's WPS policy implementation domestically, for example, measuring the share of women leading disaster response efforts; and (4) promoting long-term public education campaigns that challenge Ryōsai Kenbo norms, involving male citizens as facilitators of cultural changes, similarly to feminist scholars' approach to transformative gender diplomacy.

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