Abstract
The phrase ‘gender equality’ is a troublesome connotation in Japanese politics. This phrase had been increasingly prevalent in Japanese feminist circles and academia since it arrived at Japan in the early 1980s. However, it also confused the government policy-making and stimulated a group of rightists to be involved in a backlash against the concept of gender and feminists acting for gender equality. The backlash began in the early 2000s, when the idea of gender equality, becoming known to society, spread into government policies. In the case of Japan, backlashers reacted to gender equality for fear of cultural destruction rather than anxiety about women surpassing men’s progress. The Japanese backlashers conceive the Japanese traditional culture superior to any other and their mission is to protect it from Western influence. They are hostile to democratic social progress – thus, I call them the ‘the old guard’. This paper focuses on a dispute over the term ‘gender’ between feminists and the old guard in Japan, investigating how the term ‘gender’ has been accepted and rejected in Japan. In doing so, the paper elucidates the extent to which the concept of gender has infiltrated Japanese society. The paper consists of three parts. The first part sheds light on Japan’s reaction to the newly arrived term ‘gender’ by contrasting academia and feminist circles with the government. In the second part, I discuss the old guard’s condemnation of the concept of gender, in which they distort its significance to diminish the impact on society. I then explore what causes the old guard’s attack on gender equality. My finding is that the old guard believes gender equality, which provides women with opportunities for self-realization, demolishes traditional Japanese culture. Through highlighting legislative debates about the term gender in policymaking, the final part argues that an effective collaboration between feminist legislators, scholars/experts and activists contributes to constraining the old guard. The paper concludes by suggesting that gender equality is gradually penetrating Japanese society.

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Introduction

In her best-selling book on the backlash against women in the US, Susan Faludi (1991) demonstrates that women’s success in socio-economic and political advancement spurred an undeclared attack on women. Faludi (1991: xix) notes that in American history, backlashes against women have not happened randomly, but “have always arisen in reaction to women’s “progress” and have been caused by ‘specific efforts of contemporary women to improve their status.’ Inspired by Faludi, Japanese feminists call the attack on gender equality that has emerged in Japan a ‘backlash’ or ‘bakkurasshu’ in Japanese (Asakura, 2012: 3–4). The backlash in Japan began in the early 2000s when the idea of gender equality, becoming prevalent in society, spread into government policies. During the following decade, Japanese backlashers have persistently attempted to impede government policymaking in support of gender equality and prevent feminists from calling for gender equality. In the case of Japan, backlashers reacted to gender equality for fear of cultural destruction rather than anxiety about women surpassing men’s progress.2

The Japanese backlashers are comprised of a group of rightist women and men who conceive the Japanese traditional culture superior to any other and whose mission is to protect it from other cultures’ influence, specifically from the West. The group is hostile to democratic social progress – as such, I hereafter refer to them as the ‘the old guard.’ Anne Phillips (2007; 2010), who disenchant the myth of multiculturalism, points out that ‘multiculturalism’ is predominantly invoked in regards to non-Western or minority cultural groups. According to Phillips (2007), the behavior of individuals coming from non-Western or minority groups is often reified as ‘culture.’ As a result, ‘culture’ becomes the catch-all explanation of their attitudes and activities. Phillips (2010: 22) also maintains that ‘cultures are not monolithic, are always in the process of interpretation and re-interpretation, and never immune to change.’ However, the tension between gender equality – or a representative of Western culture – and a non-Western or minority culture exaggerates differences and manufactures dissonances, although such differences and dissonances do not exist (Phillips, 2010: 4).

Notwithstanding the old guard’s emphasis on its uniqueness, women’s traditional virtues under the patriarchal family system are not original to Japan. In particular, the norm of women’s subordination to men, established in Japan’s late nineteenth century, was a historically constructed custom common to most countries.

The term ‘gender’ is originally a noun that expresses a grammatical sex, such as male and female. However, the term, differentiated from the word ‘sex,’ was given a new meaning by feminists in the 1970s and became an important socio-political concept both theoretically and practically. Whereas sex is almost unchangeable and irreversible, gender is characterized by plasticity because of its socio-cultural construction. The distinction between gender and sex is crucial in our understanding and practice of social equality for two reasons. First, gender equality means that women and men possess not only equal rights but they also share power and responsibility equally in

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2 Joyce Gelb (2008: 83–87) discusses the backlash in Japan in terms of feminist progress.
The English word 'gender' contributes to constraining the old guard's raison d'être. 

In this paper, I focus on a dispute over the term 'gender' between feminists and the old guard in Japan. As Quentin Skinner (1988: 128) suggested, a dispute is not merely a linguistic matter but has the potential to cause a substantive social change. Skinner (1988) termed such dynamism of verbal dispute 'speech act potential.' William E. Connolly (1993: 6) also argued that 'conceptual contests are central to politics' and 'they provide the space for political interaction.' In this way, politics is a process of contestation involving instability and changes. Whenever we witness a change in politics, we recognize that a concept surrounding this change has been changed as well. James Farr (1989: 24–25) stated that '[t]o understand conceptual change is in large part to understand political change, and vice versa.' This paper will investigate how the term 'gender' has been accepted and rejected in Japan by examining changes in its usage and meanings in Japanese politics. In doing so, I will elucidate the extent to which the concept of gender – through this dispute – has infiltrated Japanese society.

The paper consists of three parts. The first part will shed light on the country’s reaction to the newly arrived term ‘gender’ – contrasting academia and feminist circles with the government. I will demonstrate that while academia and feminist circles immediately understood the importance of the term and the need to establish it as a key concept of social science and humanity, the government was reluctant to use the term and changed its meaning to a more modest and less influential connotation. In the second part, I will discuss the old guard’s condemnation of the concept of gender, in which they distort its significance to diminish the impact on society. I will then explore what causes the old guard’s attack on gender equality. My finding will be that the old guard, whose goal is to protect the traditional Japanese culture that is presumed to contain the essence of the Japanese people, believes gender equality demolishes traditional Japanese culture. In order to inquire whether Japanese feminists could overcome the old guard’s attack, the final part will highlight legislative debates about the term gender in policymaking. My answer to this inquiry will be affirmative, as I note that an effective collaboration between feminist legislators, scholars/experts and activists contributes to constraining the old guard. The paper will conclude by suggesting that gender equality is gradually penetrating Japanese society.

How the term ‘gender’ has been accepted in Japan

The English word ‘gender’ translates into Japanese as ‘shakaiteki seisa’ (social differences between the sexes); yet, the original English is commonly used among Japanese pronounced as ‘jenda’ in
Japanese. Why has the generalized term been used rather than the Japanese translation? The reason is that the original English immediately spread through Japanese scholarly circles before it was formally translated into Japanese. Even after the Japanese translation was formulated, Japanese scholars preferred the original English because the Japanese translation could not adequately express the essential meaning of gender, which was reduced to simply social differences between the sexes. The scholarly usage was circulated to wider society via the media.

The first appearance of the term gender in Japan was in a book translated from English to Japanese, titled Sekai Kodomo Hakusyo (The White Paper on Children Worldwide), in 1980. The book included discussion about gender equality/inequality. In the early 1980s, Ivan Illich’s work on gender was introduced by Japanese scholarly commentary and a Japanese translation of his book. Illich, in his critique of contemporary civilization, uses gender as the key concept, but his concept of gender is different from that of feminists in his praise for gendered roles differentiated between the sexes. Illich’s concept of gender rapidly became popular in Japanese academia; however, it was soon replaced by that of Western feminists.

In 1984, four original Japanese articles (Wakai, 1984; Shimada, 1984; Mitsui, 1984; Soeda, 1984) were published introducing the term gender from Western feminist perspectives. By the end of the 1980s, 45 articles relating to gender had been published. In 1989, the first original Japanese book on gender titled Jenda no Shakaigaku (Gender in Sociology), was published by six sociologists. The book emphasizes the notion that gender not only involves social problems but also enables people to widen their views to see a subject synthetically (Ehara et al., 1989). The Japan Sociological Society (JSS) was the most active in tackling gender issues among Japanese scholarly societies. The JSS took up gender as the main topics for its annual meetings for three years from 1986. These annual meetings established gender as one of the most important subjects in Japan’s sociological community (Meguro, 1990: 13). In the mid-1990s, gender studies were disseminated into other academic fields such as history, literature, economics, phycology, international relations and health science. The term gender spread throughout Japanese higher education.

Many women’s studies courses established in colleges in the 1980s changed their titles to ‘gender studies’ in the mid-1990s (Ida, 2006: 207). In 1996, for example, Ochanomizu University, a

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3 Non-translated loanwords are spelled by one of two kinds of the Japanese cursive syllabary, called katakana.
4 The book is written by James Grant with the original title of The State of the World’s Children and translated by the Japan Committee for UNICEF.
5 This commentary, titled Keizai Sekkusu to Jenda (Economic Sex and Gender), is written by Tetuji Yamamoto and was published by Shinhyoron (Tokyo) in 1983.
6 Illich’s book, Gender, is translated by Yoshiro Tamanoi and was published in 1984. The Japanese title is Jenda: Otoko to Onna no Sekai (Gender: The World of Women and Men), published by Iwanamishoten (Tokyo).
7 Illich contrasts ‘vernacular gender’, in which women and men engage in different tasks by different tools and represent different speech styles and gestures, with ‘unisex’, in which women and men work in the same way and there is no difference between them in their cognition and attitudes. He criticizes unisex for its wreck of modern civilization.
8 Sources from Japan’s Scholarly and Academic Information Navigator (CiNii). See CiNii’s books search (http://ci.nii.ac.jp/books/search).
9 Throughout the 1990s, gender became a vigorous research field in the social sciences and humanities as approximately 1500 articles and 300 books on gender were published See CiNii’s articles research (http://ci.nii.ac.jp/articles/search).
leading national women’s college in Japan, changed the name of its research institute from the Center for Women’s Cultural Studies\textsuperscript{10} to the Center for Gender Studies to extend research perspectives from limited women’s issues to the relationship and interaction between the sexes (Ritani, 1998: 3–4). However, the university board hesitated about naming one of the academic facilities ‘gender’ because the term gender (\textit{jenda}) was not Japanese, nor was it authorized as a concept (Ritani, 1998: 3) despite the most influential Japanese language dictionary, \textit{kojien}, recording gender (\textit{jenda}) as a Japanese word in its fourth edition published in 1991. The term also appeared in news about the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, in the summer of 1995 (Ritani, 1998: 4).

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women held on September 4–15, 1995 in Beijing accelerated media attention to ‘gender.’ According to the \textit{Asahi Shinbum} archives (Asahi Newspaper),\textsuperscript{11} the first article on gender appeared on October 4, 1984. The article described that the reason Walter Mondale, the US Democratic Presidential candidate at the time, was less popular among female voters than his opponent, Ronald Reagan, was because of his reference to the ‘gender gap’ (\textit{jenda gyappu}). Although Asahi Newspaper carried only 49 articles referring to gender before 1994, its gender-related articles increased to 479 between 1995 and 1999. Of the 479 articles, 143 were related to the Beijing Conference. In parallel with reports on the Conference, the newspaper ran articles on women’s action groups working for gender equality that were preparing to participate in the conference. These articles interested feminist activists and contributed to circulating the word gender among many more feminist circles.

To most Japanese outside of feminist groups and scholarly circles, however, ‘gender’ remained an unfamiliar loanword. National polls on public recognition of the word gender showed that a large gap existed between feminist/scholarly enthusiasm and public tepidness in adoption of the word. A nationwide survey, conducted by the Cabinet Office, which attaches to the cabinet and takes responsibility for its administration, in July 1995\textsuperscript{12} showed that only 2.2% of respondents had heard or seen the word gender (\textit{jenda}). The survey also revealed that many Japanese did not know about the upcoming Beijing conference – just 13.1% of respondents knew that the Fourth World Conference on Women would be held in Beijing.

The Japanese government was itself worried about the treatment of ‘gender.’ At the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi on July 15–26, 1985, gender emerged as an important keyword for promoting the status of women. The conference action plan, entitled ‘Forward-Looking Strategies,’ recommended that member countries should revise previous policies for women to

\textsuperscript{10} The Institute had been established in 1975 to collect materials on women’s issues to contribute to developing women’s studies. Although its original name was the \textit{Women’s Culture and Information Library}, the name changed in 1986.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Asahi Shinbum} is a leading nationwide newspaper in Japan. The news archive can be accessed by the online database, called \textit{yomiozo} II, \url{https://vpn.hosei.ac.jp/+CSCO+00756767633A2F2F716E676E6F6E6D722E6E666E77762E70627A++/library2/main/start.php}

\textsuperscript{12} The questionnaires were distributed to 5000 people aged 20 over and selected nationwide randomly; 3459 (69.2%) responded to the questionnaires. See \url{www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h07/H7-07-07-05.html}. 
eliminate gender-based discrimination, gender bias and gender stereotypes. To meet the Nairobi Strategies’ proposal, the Japanese government drafted the New National Action Plan toward 2000 in May 1987; however, the government did not refer to the word gender (jenda) in this plan. Furthermore, the government avoided using the Japanese word for ‘equality’ (byodo) and instead employed ‘co-participation’ (kyodo). The phrase ‘co-participation’ was changed to ‘cooperative decision-making’ (kyodo sankaku) in May 1993 to emphasize that women should not be passive participants but active players engaged in decision making on all levels of the public sphere. Since then, the government has expressed gender equality (jenda-byodo) by the phrase ‘cooperative decision-making between the sexes’ (danjo kyodo sankaku) (Iki, 2011).

Unlike gender, the term ‘equality’ has long been familiar to the Japanese government as its Japanese translation of ‘byodo’ is prevalent in society. The most important usage of this word is found in Article Fourteen of the Constitution, proclaimed in November 1946, which prescribes that all Japanese ‘are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin.’ Nevertheless, the government refused to use language explicitly referring to women’s equality with men in the titles of public documents and agency names. This was exemplified by the government’s drafting of a bill to redress the unequal treatment of women in the labor market according to Japan’s ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In this bill, the government used the phrase ‘proportional opportunities’ (kikai kinto) rather than ‘equal opportunities’ (kikai byodo). The drafters of the bill, including bureaucrats and advisory council members, thought their task was to develop a program to eliminate discrimination against women in employment and used the phrase ‘equality between the sexes in employment’ to express this goal. However, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government eschewed this straightforward language in its bill, instead naming the bill the ‘Law for Proportional Opportunities between the Sexes in Employment’ (danjo koyo kikai kinto ho) (Iki, 2011).

All five opposition parties opposed the LDP government’s bill and put forward alternatives. These opposition parties proposed alternatives, named the ‘Law for Equality between the Sexes in Employment’. However, because of the LDP’s dominance in the Diet (the national parliament in Japan), the government bill was finally passed on May 17, 1984, and the name of this new employment law retains the strange phrase, ‘proportional opportunities’ (Iki, 2011).

Why was the LDP government reluctant to use the term equality (byodo)? The LDP is the most powerful conservative party in Japan. It was organized in 1955 to oppose socialism, communism and dictatorship, and to establish an autonomous nation respecting the traditional Japanese culture. Although its anti-communist/socialist aspect has faded since the end of the Cold War structure, the LDP continues to maintain that socialist-oriented public policies damage public self-reliance. According to LDP’s interpretation, equality is associated with socialism rather than democracy. The
party is composed of various ideological factions including right, center and liberal. Members of the rightist faction took a stand not only on anti-communism/socialism but also on advocacy for the traditional Japanese culture. In the rightists’ belief, the traditional Japanese culture included women’s virtue of being good wives and wise mothers. Naturally, this traditional viewpoint is at odds with the concept of gender equality. Such anti-socialist legacy and traditional culturalism might have contributed to the LDP’s reluctance to readily admit equality between the sexes.

However, the LDP was forced to enact the law to eliminate sexual discrimination because of two factors. One was international pressure. As mentioned above, the law was triggered by ratification of the CEDAW. The government had to follow the international rule. Another factor was a neo-liberal stream of economics that was influential on Japanese business executives and economists in the 1980s. Neo-liberalism is inconsistent with the traditional gender division of labor: it encourages women to participate in a competitive labor market insofar as they assimilate into a male-defined working style but hardly favors state regulations to protect women’s reproductive health. While the business groups supported women’s participation in the labor market, they did not agree with state regulations to facilitate women’s equality with men in the labor market. The business groups, as major backers of the LDP, had a strong influence on LDP policy. Their support for women’s labor market participation affected the LDP’s enactment of law, while the disagreement with state regulations was convenient for the party (Eto, 2012).

The LDP government thus avoided the term ‘equality’ because of the neo-liberal influence and the party’s own ideological stance. For the same reasons, the LDP replaced the phrase ‘equality’ with ‘cooperative decision making’ in the New National Action Plan, transforming equality into an entirely different concept. The idea of cooperative decision-making or proportional opportunities alone does not enable genuine power sharing between women and men grounded upon their equal relationship at any level in society. The concept also does not seek to rectify unequal relations between women and men in the private sphere, as it urges women who desire an active life outside the home to adopt men’s lifestyles and customs. The LDP-defined conception of equality, therefore, would contribute to sustaining inequality rather than improving it (Eto, 2012).

**Attack on the concept of gender equality**

In the general election of August 1993, the LDP lost power and eight opposition parties organized a coalition government. This coalition government was dissolved 11 months later and the LDP returned to power by forming a three-party coalition government together with the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) and the New Party Sakigake or Party Harbinger in June 1994. The ruling three parties nominated SDPJ leader, Mr. Tomichi Murayama, as Prime Minister. Under the leadership of the socialist prime minister, the conceptualization of gender equality in Japan progressed slightly. Prime Minister Murayama asked the advisory council for cooperative decision-making between the sexes to draft an all-encompassing vision of how women and men equally share benefits and responsibilities in the twenty-first century. He nominated feminist
economist, Mari Osawa, Professor of Tokyo University, as its core member. In the discussion, Osawa proposed a new conception of ‘gender-free’ (jenda-furi) to express a way of liberating women and men from gender stereotypes. The phrase ‘gender-free’ (jenda-furi) became the impetus for an attack on gender equality (Osawa, 2000a).

Japanese feminists’ ideas of ‘gender-free’

The phrase ‘gender-free’ emerged in Japanese feminist circles in mid-1995. As inspired by Barbara Huston’s article on gender and public education, psychologist Kazuko Fukaya (1995: 7) first introduced the idea of ‘gender-free’ that connoted behaviors liberated from and unrelated to differences between the sexes. However, Fukaya was criticized for her misunderstanding of Huston’s viewpoint on gender-sensitive education and confusion of ‘gender-free’ with ‘gender-sensitive’ (Sasaki, 2007: 237). Huston herself, according to Tomomi Yamaguchi (2004: 21), who conducted an interview with her, thought that gender-sensitiveness was indispensable in the realization of gender equality but ‘gender-free’ was an inappropriate approach to gender equality in education. Some feminist scholars declined to recognize this phrase as feminist terminology. Chizuko Ueno (2011: 302–303), for instance, noted that Japanese feminist scholars who were used to reading English literature on gender and had participated in exchanges with their English-speaking counterparts did not use this phrase because of its Japanese-style English. Yamaguchi (2006) criticized the phase for its excessive consciousness-raising nature; it aims not to reform socio-political institutions and policies but to diminish public stereotypes or gender-biased attitudes. This criticism implies that a mere consciousness-raising policy cannot contribute to the realization of gender equality.

Nonetheless, the phrase ‘gender-free’ was established as a key in calling for a gender-equality policy and quickly became widespread throughout feminist circles. The reason for such immediate feminist acceptance of the phrase is that it expresses both gender problems and solutions simply and clearly, and it is a convenient term for communication between feminists in different fields. Moreover, the phrase spread through wider society because the English word ‘free’ is a familiar loanword to most Japanese and is pronounced as ‘furee.’

Osawa’s proposal for the concept of ‘gender-free’ was a reflection of the feminist consensus on this phrase. Employing her proposal, the advisory council made up its final report titled *Vision for Cooperative Decision-Making between the Sexes: Creating New Values in the Twenty-First Century*. The report still retained the LDP’s odd phrase, but it defined ‘cooperative decision-making between the sexes’ as ‘liberation from socio-culturally constructed sexual differences (gender or jenda) so that people can behave spontaneously based on their primary personalities.’

The report was not only the first government document that included the term ‘gender’ (jenda) (Ueno et al., 2001: 10), but it also suggested the ideal of gender equality (Osawa, 2000a: 2–12).

Socialist Murayama stepped down as prime minister and was replaced by LDP President

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Ryutaro Hashimoto in January 1996. In this replacement, the LDP, the SDPJ and the Party Harbinger agreed to enact a law to develop a cooperative decision-making society between the sexes based on the council’s final report as well as the platform for action resolved by the UN Fourth Conference on Women. The LDP, in response to the agreement, proposed a bill, the Basic Law for Cooperative Decision-Making in Society between the Sexes (hereafter, the Basic Law), to the Diet. The bill was passed on June 15, 1999. The Basic Law includes neither the terms equality (byodo) nor gender (jenda). However, Osawa (2000b: 78–100) maintains that the law reflected the essence of the council’s final report, because it was framed by gender perspectives and its goal was to accomplish substantial gender equality. Many feminist scholars share her perception (e.g., Ida, 2006: 175). Ueno, a feminist sociologist, evaluated the law positively, explaining that Japanese feminists were able to achieve substantive progress in gender equality through abandoning the need for straightforward language (Ueno et al., 2001: 20). In other words, to feminists, other egalitarians and social reformists, the Basic Law would be a potential base for advancement in gender equality and social justice.

The Basic Law prescribes that national and local governments must make action plans to realize what the law prescribes as practical policy programs. Following the national action plan issued in December 2000, local governments formed their own action plans to carry out a means of implementing the law in their regions. In their planning, local governments set up advisory councils to discuss their drafts, modelled after the Advisory Council for Cooperative Decision-Making between the Sexes established in the national government, and often invited feminist researchers and activists to their advisory councils (Yamashita, Hashimoto and Saito, 2001: 2–3). These feminists adopted ‘gender-free’ as a key concept in local plans (Asahi Shimbun: November 1, 2004). Some local plans in urban areas were more radically oriented in seeking changes in social customs than the national plan, but there was no contradiction between national and local plans in the basic principle, ideas and logic.

The old guard’s reaction to ‘gender-free’

The rapid diffusion of the concept of ‘gender-free’ and the possibility that it brought for social reform even in small towns and villages stimulated the old guard to react against gender equality. The old guard challenged democratic values and social development that Japanese society had fostered in the post-Second World War (post-war) and intended to restore pre-war Japanese values and culture, which, they believed, constituted the essence of Japan or ‘being Japanese.’ When the Basic Law was enacted, the old guard might have underestimated its impact on society, as they expected that it was merely nominal without any substantive effect (Ueno et al., 2001: 29–30). The law, in fact, was passed in the Diet with one assent. Yamaguchi (2012: 55) demonstrated that the old guard paid no attention to the enactment of the Basic Law based on her own interviews with some rightist activists. Despite their expectations to the contrary, more than 3200 local governments15 engaged in planning

15 The Japanese local governments consists of a two-tiered system, namely, prefectural and municipal levels. Prefectures,
Progressive local plans became targets of the old guard’s attack. In order to be authorized as active plans that would take effect, local government plans must be passed through relevant local assemblies. When drafts were discussed in the assemblies, rightist assembly members opposed the gender-free draft, violently condemning it for its view of a ‘dangerous’ feature on the local plans (Hayano, 2002: 12). These assembly members insisted on deleting the wording of ‘gender-free’ and relevant provisions to ‘gender-free.’ They specifically problematized provisions that were aimed at a gender-equal society in which women themselves could decide their reproductive rights and life courses, and provide all people the space to exercise their abilities regardless of gender. If governors or mayors denied their requirements, the rightist assembly members proposed their alternative plans to eliminate the word ‘gender-free’ and their unfavorable provisions. They explained the reason for their opposition to ‘gender-free,’ an idea put forward by local government administrations, as being inconsistent with individual freedom because of intervention into the private sphere (Asahi Shimbun: February 26, 2003). The old guard local politicians’ reaction against local plans became widespread in many religions where local governments drafted plans that included the idea and words ‘gender-free.’ These local governments were attacked not only by their rightist assembly members but also by grass-roots activists outside the assembly. The old guard activists put pressure on local governments to eliminate the phrase by means of letters, telephone calls and direct visits to local government offices (Yamaguchi, Saito and Ogie, 2012).

The old guard combined their attack on ‘gender-free’ with their hostility toward publicly provided sex education. In 1992, the Ministry of Education released guidelines for sex education to be a part of mandatory programs and distributed a booklet of these guidelines to primary schools, proposing that teachers use the booklet as a sub-textbook in health and science classes. Schoolteachers, education scholars and experts welcomed the Education Ministry’s new policy because they thought it was crucial for primary pupils to learn proper knowledge about sex to develop their self-determination of sex (Asai, 2006: 3–4). The old guard, in contrast, thought sex education was unnecessary and risky based on their prejudiced understanding that children would be taught how to engage in sexual intercourse and to use condoms. They alerted society to the risks of sex education, which, they maintained, encouraged innocent children to have immoral sex (Asai, 2006: 3–4).

The reason for the old guard’s identify sex education with ‘gender-free’? This is because they believe that the traditional Japanese family system, which was historically and culturally constructed, is the anchor of Japanese culture (e.g., Watanabe, Hayashi and Yagi, 2000; Nishio and Yagi, 2005; Yamatani, 2010). In their opinions, family members bond by strong kinship, patriarchal hierarchy and a traditional gender division of labor: a senior male member holds the power that rules the family,

numbering 47, play a role in supervising municipalities. They almost correspond to counties. Municipalities are basic administrative entities. Although the number of municipalities had kept around 3200 by 2004, it has decreased due to a new policy that merged small municipalities since 2005. At present, the number has decreased to 1727.
while female members devote themselves to caring for other members as wives, mothers and daughters or daughters-in-law (Nishio and Yagi, 2005). Above all, they praise motherhood as the highest virtue of Japanese women (Hayashi, 1998; Yamatani, 2010). Both the concept of ‘gender-free’ and sex education, they maintain, deny the traditional family system and motherhood through liberating women socially and sexually (Watanabe, Hayashi and Yagi, 2000; Nishio and Yagi, 2005; Yamatani, 2010). According to the old guard, women who enjoy sexual activities and determine their own reproductive rights go against normative roles, thereby becoming a factor that would ultimately destroy the traditional Japanese culture (Nishio and Yagi, 2005).

It is then unsurprising that sex education and the idea of ‘gender-free’ threatened the sensibilities of the old guard. Moreover, the old guard feared that schoolteachers taught their pupils the concepts of gender or gender equality. Since compulsory education is the basis for creating ‘Japaneseness’ or the essence of being Japanese, in their thinking, gender education would be the most effective demolisher of Japanese culture. As with sex education, the old guard distorted the meaning of ‘gender-free,’ choosing to interpret it as a dangerous idea that sought to arbitrarily abolish the biological differences between women and men (Nishio and Yagi, 2005: 9). For instance, a leading ideologue of the old guard, Shintaro Ishihara, a former LDP Diet member who had served as Tokyo Metropolitan Governor for 13 years starting in 1999, characterized ‘gender-free’ as an extreme and grotesque idea that denied the concepts of masculinity and femininity and rejected Japanese cultural traditions such as gendered decorations at girls and boys festivals (Tobari and Fujita, 2007: 274). Toshiaki Koga, a member of Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, also defined ‘gender-free’ as an idea that damaged a common Japanese virtue of male toughness and female modesty (Tobari and Fujita, 2007:267). They argued that if local government implemented plans including ‘gender-free,’ schoolchildren would share the same dressing rooms, meaning that girls would be naked in front of male teachers and boys (Tobari and Fujita, 2007: 267).

The old guard members are divided into three groups of politicians, activists and scholars/journalists. The three groups play different roles in their movement of opposing gender equality. Politicians have attempted to block gender equality policies in their assemblies. As mentioned earlier, they had energetically disturbed local planning and the disturbances soon shifted to the Diet. On June 27, 2002, 78 Diet members of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the largest opposition party, organized a group that aimed to protect children from ‘gender-free’ and sex education. The members of this group constituted 42% of all of the DPJ’s Diet members. The DPJ was established in 1998 by the merger between several parties and was composed of ideologically different politicians. Several rightist politicians including an outspoken female old guard, Eriko Yamatani, initiated this anti-gender group. Most members were less active in opposing ‘gender-free’ and were opponents in name only, or simply following their seniors. Ms. Yamatani was the most energetic agitator. She raised this issue three times in the 154th ordinary Diet session and once in the
155th extraordinary session, held between October 18 and December 13, 2002.\textsuperscript{16} Raising the same questions, Yamatani asserted that the goal of ‘gender-free’ was to destroy decent Japanese virtues and culture by neglecting the biological differences between the sexes and, in effect, supported the common cause of the old guard.

The LDP’s old guard was more serious in opposing ‘gender-free’ and sex education than the DPJ. They formed a project team to investigate the actual conditions of excessive sex education and ‘gender-free’ education in March 2005.\textsuperscript{17} Yamatani, who changed her party affiliation from the DPJ to the LDP in 2003, also played a prominent role on this LDP project team. The project team members conducted their own survey on the actual circumstances of ‘gender-free’ and excessive sex education between May 10 and June 6, 2005. According to their findings, there were 3500 cases in which schoolteachers practiced excessive sex education and instructed their pupils to disregard traditional Japanese family values. However, Chiki Ogiue (2006) revealed that the LDP project team falsified the data with exaggeration: first, the 3500 cases were not individual cases but respondents; of those 3500 respondents, 1214 referred to something about sex education or ‘gender-free,’ but not all of them were negative references. In fact, 250 respondents thought their cases were ‘excessive’ examples of sex education and only 50 respondents considered their ‘gender-free’ cases as harmful factors in children’s growth. Despite such fabrication, the team put forward a proposal to eliminate not only the phrase ‘gender-free’ but also the word ‘gender’ from the upcoming second national plan.

Activists were involved in direct actions with the goal of forcing local governments to withdraw plans that would develop gender equality. The activists, meanwhile, staged aggressive demonstrations against feminists speaking out about ‘gender-free’ or fighting for gender equality. For instance, the activists tried to disturb feminists who planned to lecture in public places and pushed public libraries to remove feminist publications on gender. Thanks to activists’ strong pressure on lecture organizers and librarians, feminists were forced to cancel their lectures and their publications were removed from public libraries (e.g., Ueno, 2011).

The most serious case was an attack on Mariko Mitsui, a feminist activist, who was dismissed as director of the Women’s Center at Toyonaka City, known as ‘Step,’ in Osaka Prefecture. Since starting her job in 2000, Ms. Mitsui had dedicated herself to disseminating the notion of gender equality to Toyonaka citizens. Although her dedication was highly appraised by many citizens and she was successful at her job, in March 2004, her reappointment was rejected by the Toyonaka City government due to the old guard activists’ pressure. When Mitsui refused the city government’s decision to discontinue her job, her public activities were disturbed by activists’ extreme demonstrations in which they yelled near her office, calling for her resignation, and she was eventually compelled to leave her post. However, she sued the city government for unjust dismissal

\textsuperscript{16} In this paper, Diet discussions are quoted from the Diet Records provided by Japan’s National Diet Library. The data can be accessed at http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/

\textsuperscript{17} The present Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, was one of leading members of this team. By installing the Chief Cabinet Secretary on 31 October 2005, he spearheaded the old guard’s attack on ‘gender-free’ and sex education.
in December 2004. Mitsui’s suit became a symbol of feminist fight-back against the old guard. Mitsui finally won her suit at the Supreme Court in January 2011 (Mitsui and Asakura, 2012).

**Specious logic in the old guard’s attack on gender equality**

The old guard scholars and journalists contributed to spreading distorted interpretations of gender equality in the wider society through publications and media appearances. The scholars concentrated specifically on theorizing the old guard’s arguments against feminism and gender equality. In their theories, feminism is identified with communism. They maintained that the Basic Law is based on Marxist ideology, which is at odds with traditional Japanese values and culture (Nishio and Yagi, 2005). However, they made their remarks on feminism without a correct understanding of it. The scholars’ main purpose of combining feminism with Marxism was to label both as having the same dangerously rooted ideologies, thereby denying Japan’s post-war democratic regime. They disagreed with the judgments in Japan’s war crimes trials in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, in which 28 military and political leaders in Japan were convicted of major war crimes – a conspiracy to undertake and wage war – and several thousand Japanese soldiers were charged with conventional war crimes. The old guard condemned the tribunal as a ‘winner’s trail,’ demanding that the verdicts be invalidated and retried (Fujioka, 1997).

The old guard also argued against the Japanese Constitution for their beliefs that the US government drafted to sweep away the Japanese pre-war regime and transform the country into a modest nation without armed forces. The old guard, in this regard, does not favor the US or its influence. Yet they hardly expressed their hostility toward the US explicitly; instead, their enmity was directed at Marxism or communism, because the old guard understands that Japan owes its success in economic growth to its alliance with the US.

Why does the old guard regard Marxism as the enemy? There would be two reasons. In their thinking, first, Marxism erodes the Japanese ethos of mutual aid that one cares about others as one cares for oneself as one is often willing to sacrifice oneself for others and society (Watanabe, Hayashi and Yagi, 2000). To them, the human liberation that Marxists envision is a selfish idea in which one seeks to put one’s own interests above others or society. They fear that Marxist influence dissolves strong bonds between the family, community and society. Second, the old guard uses Marxism to impress their objectives on the general public in a positive way. The old guard believes that many Japanese hate or fear communism. Thus, by inflaming the threat of communism, they elicit more people to support their cause. More importantly, the old guard opposes not only Marxism but also Western socio-political ideals such as liberty, equality, human rights and democracy, and these ideals, they believe, are inconsistent with the traditional Japanese ethos. The old guard’s true enemy is Western values, which they believe will demolish traditional Japanese culture. In other words, the old guard represents their xenophobia or exclusionism through hostility toward Marxism.

The most serious threat feminism poses to the old guard is destruction of the Japanese family system as noted above. Shoichi Watanabe, Michiyoshi Hayashi and Hidetsugu Yagi (2005), the most...
active old guard scholars, state that feminism legitimatizes women’s selfishness in which wives and mothers abandon their husbands, children and other relatives to liberate themselves. In their theory, the traditional Japanese family system is centered on Japanese culture (Watanabe, Hayashi and Yagi, 2005). Therefore, the old guard finds it unacceptable that women prefer development of their social careers or self-realization over caring for their family and relatives. However, it is questionable whether the family system is actually a part of Japanese culture.

The traditional family system of Japan or ‘ie-seido’ was established by the Meiji Civil Code in 1898. Japan opened the country to the world as a result of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. By adoption of a Western socio-political system, the Meiji government drove Japan’s modernization. Through this process, the government invited Western scholars to provide instruction and advice in relevant fields. One of these scholars was a French jurist, Gustave Émile Boissonade de Fontarabie. Dr. Boissonade played a key role in drafting the Meiji Civil Code, composed of two parts, property and family laws, and infusing the draft with progressive Western modern themes of civil liberty and equality (Yano, 1997). However, Japanese jurists criticized Boissonade’s draft for its progressiveness and claimed that it was inconsistent with the Emperor System. As a result, the Meiji Civil Code was modified based on the Prussian legal system, which was more familiar to Meiji government officials – who had previously belonged to the samurai or warrior class – than Boissonade’s progressive ideals (Hoshino, 1994). In parallel with the Prussian influence, the family law in the Meiji Civil Code was modelled on women’s status in the samurai/warrior class in the Edo period, the Japanese feudal age between 1603 and 1868, before the Meiji modernization. In the Edo period, people were divided into four classes – samurai, farmers, artisans and merchants – and the samurai class ruled the other three classes.18

The family law, which prescribed the rules of matrimonial relations and parent-child relations, conceptualized the traditional family system of Japan through two principles. The first was that a senior male family member ruled the other members of this family and his ruling power passed to his legitimate first son. The second was female subjection to male power in the following ways: wives had no legal competence; only wife’s adultery was criminalized; child custody predominantly attached to fathers; and women charged with killing of their ascendant relatives were more severely punished than men (Hoshino, 1994). Different from the old guard’s understanding, such patriarchal traditions were not unique to Japan and were common in the West, as Western first-wave feminist movements demonstrated. In England, for example, the Coverture had prescribed the legal status of married women in which wives did not enjoy legal rights for several centuries until the mid-nineteenth century – husband and wife were regarded legally as one person. A wife was dependent on her husband and her legal status was represented by him. In Japan, the first principle – the rule of a senior male member and male succession to a house established in the mid-twelfth century – had pervaded from the upper classes, aristocracy and samurai, to the lower classes –

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18 The Emperor and aristocracies, who had lost power due to the emergence of the samurai/warrior regime in the late twelfth century, shared only a handful of the Edo population and took a ritual role.
farmers, artisans and merchants – in the Edo period (Yamanaka, 1988). However, the second principle – women’s subordination to men – had not always been the case before pre-Meiji Japan.

In the Edo period, most women, except those in the samurai class, had enjoyed freedom in their marriage (Takagi, 1999). Edo women were able to obtain a divorce much easier than women living under the Meiji Civil Code, as the divorce-ratio proportion in the Edo period was 4.8 (per 1000 people) (Nawata, 2006: 94). Divorce rates declined remarkably (see Fig. 1) compared with rates before the introduction of the Meiji Civil Code in 1898. Figure 1 shows the dramatic effect of the family law on women’s circumstances.

Most Edo women in lower social classes such as farmers, artisans and merchants were actively engaged in their family businesses in cooperation with their husbands, and some women were successful in businesses as substitutes for their husbands. These lower classes shared more than 95% of the Edo population. In the ruling samurai class, whose population shared less than 5%, the custom was for women to be confined to home as assistants to men. Most Edo women, however, were not always subordinate to men. In addition, the customs in samurai households were very similar to Western feudal patriarchy rather than the most popular customs of Japanese households at that time. To catch up with Western socio-economic developments, the Meiji government wanted to build a hierarchical nation-state that placed the Emperor at the peak in order to push industrialization and reinforce military forces in one body of the diverse classes. The Code, specifically the family law, forced most Japanese to obey a new family order that they were not used to. However, it was necessary for Japan to create a new social norm that was not at odds with modernization and to
bridge a gap between the two different worlds (Nishikawa and Matsumiya, 1995). The family law helped to modernize Japan with new Westernized norms. In 1890, the Meiji Government proclaimed the Imperial Rescript on Education that aimed to underpin the Emperor system as it was taught in schools. The Imperial Rescript, like the family law, was described as granted on the traditional Japanese culture. In short, the traditional family system of Japan was a creature of the Meiji government with a seemingly old cover.

Although the traditional family system of Japan appeared only a hundred years ago, the old guard blindly believed that it had been socially and culturally constructed since the time of ancient Japan, 2000 years ago, without sincere examination not only of the history of the Japanese family but also feminist studies of patriarchy worldwide. More importantly, rather than pre-war values, the Japanese people supported Western democratic values such as human rights, equality and self-determination during the post-war period. Above all, Japanese women significantly changed their gender consciousness. This is exemplified by opinion polls conducted by the Japanese government on the notion of the gender division of labor that men should go out to work and women should stay at home to look after their family. The proportion of female respondents who disagreed with this notion was 10% in 1972, 39% in 1992 and 51% in 2002, while that of men was 10% in 1972, 29% in 1992 and 41% in 2002. Gender consciousness of the Japanese public has changed year on year. Although the pace of change is modest, women’s changes have been significant – surpassing men at a rapid pace. In spite of the old guard’s expectations to the contrary, the notion of gender equality has begun disseminating into Japanese society.

Feminist collaboration in problem solving
The attack on ‘gender-free’ intensified in local governments as their basic plans approached completion. Many local governments then withdrew their progressive plans and replaced them with moderate ones. The old guard, gaining momentum by local governments’ submission, undertook intervention in the second national basic planning. The Basic Law requires renewing the plan according to socio-economic changes every five years. The first national basic plan needed to be renewed in 2005. The old guard’s Diet members intended to prevent the second national plan from not only using ‘gender-free’ but also ‘gender.’ The dispute over gender equality moved into national politics, where Diet members acting for gender equality confronted the old guard.

Legislative debates on gender equality
The percentage of women’s presence in the Diet – composed of two houses, the Lower House or House of Representatives and the Upper House or House of Councilors – is extremely low, lagging not only behind other developed countries but also far behind many developing countries (Eto, 2010). In April 1946, Japanese women stood in their first general election. Of the 79 female candidates, 39

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were newly elected as the first women parliamentarians in the Diet, which corresponded to 8.4% of all the Diet members at that time. In the following election of April 1947, however, the number (or proportion) of elected women decreased to 15 or 3.2%, and the record of that first election remained unbroken until the general election of August 2005. In the heyday of the backlash against gender equality, the proportion of female Lower House members was 4.6% in 1996, 7.3% in 2000, 7.1% in 2003 and 9% in 2005. The percentage of women in the Upper House, on the other hand, was a little better with 16.7% in 1996, 15.9% in 2000, 14.9% in 2003 and 12.4% in 2005. As a result of such modest proportions, there were only a few feminists in the Diet. However, these few Diet feminists made substantial efforts to refute the old guard’s distorted interpretation of ‘gender-free.’

In the Lower House, the Education and Science Committee meeting was held on February 26, 2003. Ms. Keiko Yamauchi of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) first raised a question about an interpretation of ‘gender-free’ and suggested that this phrase be defined as liberation from consciousness of stereotyped gender roles. Seven other women argued against the old guard’s remark on ‘gender-free’ in the Diet sessions. Some of these women were skilled inquirers. Ms. Hiroko Mizushima of the DPJ, for instance, elucidated that ‘gender-free’ could be rephrased as liberation from gender stereotypes but the phase never assumed any implication in the abolition of sexual differences in the Lower House Budget Committee meeting held on February 27, 2003.

Through her question about a substitute word for ‘gender-free’ in the Upper House cabinet committee held on March 26, 2003, Ms. Yoko Tajima, an independent, elicited the important view that ‘gender-free’ corresponded to gender equality in English from Ms. Mariko Bando, the head of the bureau in charge of the Basic Law. Moreover, Ms. Chinami Nishimura of the DPJ stated that she perceived ‘gender-free’ as not inferring in the elimination of sexual differences but of socio-cultural differences between the sexes. Nishimura then asked the minister in charge whether her perception was appropriate for government policy in the Lower House Budget Committee meeting held on March 2, 2004. A substitute for the minister, Ms. Haniwa Natori, affirmed Nishimura’s perception.

In other Upper House sessions, likewise, Ms. Sachiko Kawahashi and Ms. Yoriko Madoka of the DPJ and Ms. Mizuho Fukushima of the SDP were involved in debates on ‘gender-free’: Kawahashi performed her inquiry four times on July 16, August 8, November 26, 2002 and April16, 2003, while Madoka and Fukushima spoke each once, on November19 and 30, 2003, respectively. Ms. Yoko Komiyama, DPJ Lower House member, spoke out in favor of ‘gender-free’ as a significant equivalent of gender equality on October 12, 2005. Feminists are not restricted to women. Indeed, there was a male Upper House member who acted for women. Mr. Takahiro Kuroiwa, an independent, spoke up in the Upper House Cabinet meetings held on July 10 and 17, 2003. He criticized the old guard’s view on ‘gender-free’ as misunderstanding this phrase, pointing out that the idea of ‘gender-free’ was not inconsistent with biological differences between the sexes.

These Diet feminists succeeded in demonstrating that the phrase shared the same idea as gender equality. Their legislative deliberation was crucial not only as political discourse that influenced policymaking but also as a symbolic representation affecting public attitudes. Thus, this action might
have spurred the old guard’s desperate interruption to the second national basic plan. The old guard began to make an issue of ‘gender’ per se, in addition to ‘gender-free.’ In the Upper House Budget Committee meeting held on May 4, 2005, Ms. Yamatani asked the government to remove the word ‘gender’ from the second national basic plan. In the first plan, the word ‘gender’ was defined as ‘socio-culturally constructed sexual differences’ and it was used 13 times. The plan specified that the government should review social institutions, customs and consciousness from gender perspectives and based on gender research. Yamatani argued that the word gender was not only incomprehensible to ordinary people like her but also harmful in school education because it burdened children with the idea of abolishing sexual differences between women and men. Yamatani’s logic in condemning ‘gender’ was the very same logic used against ‘gender-free.’

The Cabinet holds the responsibility for planning, and the dispute over gender in the second basic plan was handed over to the ruling LDP; above all, it was left to two Diet women, Kuniko Inoguchi and Yamatani. Ms. Inoguchi, a newly elected LDP Lower House member in the general election of September 11, 2005, was further appointed as Minister of Cooperative Decision-Making between the Sexes during Koizumi Junichiro’s third administration on October 31, 2005. Since Inoguchi had contributed to developing women friendly policies as a member of the Advisory Council for Cooperative Decision-Making between the Sexes from 2001 to 2002, her installation as Minister in charge of planning was good news to supporters for gender equality. However, the same supporters were wary of the installation of Yamatani as the parliamentary secretary who had assisted Minister Inoguchi. One may wonder why such ideologically opposite women cooperated in taking the initiative in the second national basic planning. These incompatible appointments were a reflection of the LDP’s ambiguous position on gender equality. As discussed earlier, the LDP supported women’s participation in the labor market in terms of economic neo-liberalism. The party, meanwhile, included old guard politicians, whose actions were influential in inner-party politics. Prime Minister Koizumi, who was a leading advocate of the neo-liberal economy, approved women’s active participation in the labor market; thus, he never disagreed with gender equality despite having to listen to the old guards to maintain his relationship with them. His nominations of Inoguchi and Yamatani to the two top posts were a compromise to maintain balance between the two different LDP positions.

Whereas Yamatani acted for those who intended to prevent gender equality from moving forward, Inoguchi represented those who wished to develop gender equality. Immediately after her installation, Inoguchi undertook campaigns to rally public support for her cause. For instance, she held public meetings in five regions – Osaka, Fukuoka, Akita, Okayama and Tokyo – to inform people about the significance of gender equality and to engage in dialogue with women from diverse backgrounds (Asahi Shimbun: December 13, 2005). There were 1477 participants in all meetings. Public interest in this planning could not be underestimated. In June 2005, the government invited the general public to send their comments and opinions on the second national plan to the Cabinet Office by post, facsimile and Internet, and 5941 messages arrived at the government office. Although
some messages were opposed to ‘gender’ or ‘gender free,’ most were in favor of gender equality or felt it was acceptable to use the word in the plan. Such public support encouraged Minister Inoguchi to retain the idea of gender.

The disputes between Inoguchi and Yamatani became fierce as the deadline approached. In a press conference on December 13, 2005, Inoguchi announced that she planned to save the word ‘gender’. Yamatani, meanwhile, told news reporters that she did not plan to save ‘gender’ (Asahi Shimbun: December 14, 2005). However, Inoguchi was supported in her fight for gender equality not only by those in feminist circles but also by other Diet members. Ten newly elected Lower House members of the LDP, including men, passed Inoguchi their statement in which they requested that the ideal of gender equality be established based on a correct definition and understanding of ‘gender’ (Asahi Shimbun: December 14 and 21, 2005).

On December 27, 2005, the cabinet council approved the second plan. The word gender remained, although this came with a concession to the old guard. Whereas ‘gender’ had been defined as ‘socio-cultural differences between the sexes’ in the first plan, the definition used in the second plan was changed to ‘social differences between the sexes,’ omitting the word ‘cultural.’ Yet the second plan attempted to correct the old guard’s distorted phrase, stating that cooperative decision-making in society between the sexes is inconsistent with the rejection of the differences between the sexes or the sexual neutralization of human beings using the phrase ‘gender-free.’ To avoid frequent usage of the term ‘gender,’ the phrase ‘cooperative decision-making between the sexes’ came to be used as a substitute for ‘gender’ (Tanaka, 2011: 326).

The second plan includes the phrase ‘gender perspectives,’ defined as awareness of socially constructed differences between the sexes that cause social discrimination or stereotyped division of labor between the sexes, which did not appear in the first plan. Despite its relatively modest definition, this concept is a crucial point of the second plan. In the Upper House cabinet committee meeting held on February 24, 2006, when Yoko Komiyama asked how gender was conceptualized in the second plan, Minister Inoguchi offered a more precise explanation: in the second plan, gender is conceptualized in such a way as to promote gender equality that redresses sexual discrimination, stereotyped gender norms and bias in the gender division of labor, and removes social obstacles impeding women and men from exercising their capacities.

_Collaboration between legislators, scholars and activists_

Of the 10 Diet feminists introduced in the previous section, five belonged to the DPJ, two to the SDP, and one to the LDP, while two were independent. Party ideology with which these feminists were affiliated might have affected their attitudes to the matter of gender (see Eto, 2012). Here, I attach more importance to gender consciousness and involvement in feminist action groups.

As noted above, Minister Inoguchi has been working for gender equality. Before her participation in the Advisory Council for Cooperative Decision-Making between the Sexes, Inoguchi served as the sole woman member of the advisory council for administrative reform between 1996
and 1998, where she acted to promote gender-equality policy by putting forward a proposal to establish the national machinery that brought all ministries together to integrate gender issues (Asahi Shimbum: August 30, 1997). Inoguchi’s proposal, based on an idea originally proposed by Osawa and supported by feminist scholars and activists, was realized as a new bureau for cooperative decision-making between the sexes inside the Cabinet Office in 2001 (Ueno et al., 2001: 53).

Inoguchi, a professor of international relations, had not been an expert on gender issues or worked for women until she was involved in the Advisory Council for Administrative Reform. However, her instalment to the advisory council seems to have inspired her to act as a feminist because she was the only female member of the council influential in making government policies. Throughout her service to the two advisory councils, Inoguchi made friendly connections with feminist circles, which might have contributed to her work for the second national plan.

Similar to Inoguchi, other Diet feminists had been linked with gender equality or social justice before they entered politics: Yamauchi had spearheaded a teachers union; Mizushima had worked as a psychiatrist focusing on adolescent disorders and family relations; Tajima had been a university professor teaching feminist studies; Nishimura had worked for an international non-governmental organization; Kawahashi had worked for women’s issues as a bureaucrat in the prime minister’s office; Madoka had worked as an expert on marriage and family matters; Fukushima had been a lawyer acting for women and children; Komiya had been a commentator on family and child problems at the Japan Broadcasting Corporation; and Kuroiwa had been influenced by his feminist mother. Each person’s experiences helped to facilitate the group’s successful achievement of substantial representation for women.

The four women, Kawahashi, Madoka, Fukushima and Komiyama, were members of a feminist action group called the Beijing Japan Accountability Caucus (Beijing JAC), which emerged from the UN Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing. At the conference, Japanese women participants, including activists, journalists and legislators, encouraged Japan’s non-governmental caucus to communicate and exchange information. On September 23, 1995, a week after the UN Conference ended, core members of the caucus set up Beijing JAC to put forth policy proposals to improve women’s status and lobby for women’s demands. The membership of Beijing JAC, which totaled 200–300, was comprised of women with different backgrounds such as activists, journalists, policy experts, scholars and legislators (Saito, 2000: 253–254). Another group, the Women in the New World, International Network (WINWIN, uin uin), also motivated women legislators to act for women. Following in the tradition of Emily’s List in the US, WINWIN was founded to financially support women candidates in national and local elections regardless of their party affiliation. WINWIN provided women candidates who met its criteria with a portion of their campaign funds. The most important WINWIN criterion was whether the applicant seriously approved of gender equality and how much the candidate would contribute to promoting women’s rights (Eto, 2008: 130–131). Of the 10 Diet feminists, eight – Mizushima, Tajima, Nishimura, Kawahashi, Madoka, Komiyama and Inoguchi – were recommended by WINWIN. Their connection with feminist action
groups that are based in civil society, as well as their previous experiences, facilitated their advocacy of gender equality in the Diet.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have explored the dispute over gender equality in Japan. First, I described that while the newly arrived term ‘gender’ was quickly disseminated into feminist circles and academia, it troubled the government and a group of rightist politicians, scholars/journalists and activists, whom I have called the old guard. Subsequently, I focused on the old guard’s attack on gender equality and examined their means and motives. My finding is that the old guard distorted the Japanese feminist idea of ‘gender-free’ owing to their fear of Japan’s social change toward a more Western-style democracy. In the final section, I discussed the contribution of Diet feminists to problem solving through demonstrating that Diet feminists argued down the old guard’s unreasonable discourse. I also examined the backgrounds of these feminists, which were behind their actions for gender equality.

The paper might hold three implications. First, the so-called traditional culture is not always old or historical but is sometimes created arbitrarily and artificially: the traditional family system of Japan could not be characterized as original Japanese culture, but rather, the Meiji government established this system to catch up with Western modernization. Culture, furthermore, never ceases to move; it continues to evolve by exchanges with other cultures often resulting in an original culture. This is exemplified by a gradual dissemination of gender equality among the Japanese people. Gender equality will be a part of Japanese culture one day – perhaps in a couple of hundred years. Second, even a small number of female legislators could act for women insofar as their close-knit relationships with gender equality agencies and feminist action groups. This implies that feminist activism in civil society is important for achieving legislatively substantive representation of women such as descriptive representation. A harmonious link between electoral representation and participatory activities is a necessary condition for upholding the correlation between descriptive and substantive representation.

My final implication is that disputes provide us with an opportunity for socio-political development. In the case of Japan, the dispute between the old guard and feminists contributed to the dissemination of gender equality into the wider society, as illustrated by a letter from a 17-year-old high school girl, Memori Nakahara, to Asahi Newspaper. Ms. Nakahara is from Miyazaki Prefecture, located in Japan’s southern islands, and she writes of her recognition of gender equality as follows:

I went to listen to a talk by a male high school teacher. The teacher was the first man who enjoyed parental leave among high school teachers in Miyazaki Prefecture. Although he took the leave unintentionally, the teacher said, it gave him the opportunity to consider the significance of gender (*jenda*). He stated that we must overcome socio-cultural pressure on men and women, which has oriented us toward stereotyped masculinity and femininity….The Basic Law for Cooperative Decision-Making in Society between the Sexes took effect eight years ago, but Japanese society has not changed that much.
The proportion of men who have taken parental leaves is extremely low, only 1.56%, not just because this policy is not well known but also because men themselves as well as their companies do not recognize the importance of childcare. …The ‘cooperative decision-making in society between the sexes’ means that there are no stereotypes of masculinity/feminine or prejudice to control their attitudes. …Women are active in participating in the labour market, so men should be encouraged to stay at home with their families right now. (Nakahara, 2008: 17)

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