TELEVISED FEMINISM AND CONSUMABLE SOLUTIONS: JAPANESE FEMINISM THROUGH THE LENS OF FEMALE ORIENTED WORKPLACE DRAMAS

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ABSTRACT

Television dramas are an influential form of popular culture in Japan. A growing number of Japanese television dramas is tackling feminist issues, such as sexism in the workplace, or more specifically, sexual harassment. Programs, such as Age Harassment (2015), feature strong female protagonists standing up to their male supervisors, urging gender equality in the workplace. These female oriented workplace dramas are said to raise awareness of sexism. At first glance, these programs are progressive for featuring Western feminist ideals, which value individual freedom over harmonious group dynamic. These programs are unconventional because they actively defy an important cultural ideal in Japan – wa, often translated as harmony in English. In a sense, wa is a form of social control, through which individuality is suppressed for the sake of the collective harmony.

Upon closer examination, however, this thesis proposes that these seemingly progressive programs actually develop a wa oriented narrative pattern that ultimately prioritizes group harmony over self-actualization, especially through the use of forced harmonious resolutions. For instance, the aforementioned protagonists choose to stay at their companies despite all the gender based discriminations they have encountered. By exploring these television dramas, this thesis argues that the wa oriented narrative pattern reflects the idea of “group-actualization.” It also reveals the conundrum that Japanese feminism faces – the self versus the group.

Employing an archival research, a qualitative content analysis, and a textual analysis of television dramas, this thesis aims to demonstrate a type of feminism that is unique to Japan.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to my mother, Wu Jing, and my father, She Guangfu.

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Love,
Yasheng She
Japanese Names

In this thesis, all Japanese names are written according to the Japanese order, with the family name preceding the given name.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Japanese Feminism and Television Drama Series

A group of men sit around a room-sized conference table while four women in blue uniforms are serving them tea. The subject of the meeting is, ironically, female empowerment in the workplace. The director, a middle-age Japanese man, tells his subordinates that the goal is to make women “shine.” Antagonized by his statement, a young woman walks over to the director and bursts out “if you really thought so, you wouldn't be using those phrases! It's not about ‘making’ women shine, it's about women shining. You men are doing this for your own achievements,” she irritably adds, “Shame on you!”

This is a scene from a Japanese television drama, produced in 2015, titled Age Harassment. The statement made by the young Japanese woman, as describe in the scene above, is a criticism of the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe’s social campaign that aims to create a “society in which all women can shine”\(^1\) (Ito Online). Though progresses towards gender equality are crystalized as policies, it is difficult to make the argument that there is actual progress to help women to “shine” (The Economist Online).

The message of the young woman’s angry outburst echoes de Beauvoir’s ideal that liberation is women’s work, in the sense that only women can liberate women (723). In other words, a Western feminism packaged into a Japanese television drama. As powerful as these feminist declarations might be, this emotive scene is far from the real Japan because no one would actually do something like this in real life. Japan is a culture that highly values manner and order, no one would dare to publicly confront their boss in such way.
The question here is why there is a need for such controversial portrayal of Western feminist issue on Japanese mainstream media? Before answering this, it is necessary to state that the aforementioned scene from *Age Harassment* is not an isolated case.

I argue that there is an emergence of female oriented workplace drama that aim to tackle sexism on the small screen in contemporary Japan.

This, however, is not to say that all progressive ideas meet progressive ends. In this thesis, I conducted a qualitative content analysis on six television drama series featuring working women combating sexism at work, and found that by the end of these dramas featuring working women, there is a forced harmonious resolution. For instance, the abovementioned rebellious young Japanese woman who calls out the irony of her boss decides to stay at her company by the end of the narrative. Despite her discontentment with her working environment, which is made explicit through her angry outburst, she decides to comply to authority by continuing working in that environment. Resolution at the end of a television series is not unique to Japan, most of American television shows follow the same formula (Rosenberger 97). Regardless, I aim to argue that it is the harmonious endings that make these narrative distinctively Japanese. The idea of harmony also extends to feminist ideas featured in these narratives.

1.2. Overview

In order to further examine links between *wa*, Japanese television drama’s narrative patterns, and feminism in Japan, I will divide my thesis into six chapters. In the following chapter, I will provide a definition of *wa*, often translated as harmony in English, and its sociocultural significance in terms of gender expectations and how Japanese people, more specifically women, conceive happiness. In a nutshell, ensuring *wa* is the key to happiness, and women often shoulder the responsibility to nurture *wa* in any given group dynamic. Consequently, women often are
expected to sacrifice self interest for the sake of *wa*. Some of the scarifies women constitutes as sexism, not only in home but also at work. In short, I argue that because of the inherent collectivist nature of *wa*, happiness of any individual is not achieved through self-actualization, but rather what I like to call group-actualization.

In chapter three, I will explore how Japanese television drama series, as a medium, reflects and shapes public understanding of feminism through its unique narrative pattern. Japanese television dramas, as the most consumed media, become the medium for creating narratives that evoke empathy. I constructed a timeline in chapter two to provide a comparison between feminism in real life Japan and portrayal of women on Japanese television from the 1950s to the 2010s. Furthermore, I conducted a content analysis on Japanese television drama series from 2000 to 2010 in order to show the increasing portrayals of working women on television.

In chapter four, drawing on a cultural studies approach that prioritizes close textual reading, I will explore how two television dramas, *A Restaurant with Many Problems* and the abovementioned *Age Harassment*, construct narrative around sexism in the workplace in the context of *wa*. At the end of this chapter, I will examine how a forced harmonious resolution is applied to both shows and why this application has significant social implications.

Chapter five will expand and scrutinize the *wa* oriented narrative pattern that is mentioned at the end of chapter four through a qualitative content analysis using six Japanese television drama series. These selected dramas feature working women fighting against workplace sexism. The findings suggest that all six shows employ the same narrative pattern, which begins with the protagonist’s discontentment of her environment, transforms through at least one angry outburst carried out by the protagonist, and ends with total compliance to authority. The second half of this
Chapter will evaluate the effectiveness of this narrative pattern considering all the findings of the study.

Chapter six concludes with my contention that the concept of *wa* is pronounced in Japanese television drama series despite the fact that they tackle controversial social issues. Furthermore, I will argue television drama series are a vehicle of social control to maintain *wa* in a society through its unrealistic and convenient solution to real problems.
Chapter 2: Wa, Women, and Happiness

2.1. Wa in the Home

Creating identity is the most problematic task of any individual. Identity is a reference for any action taken and a justification for any decision conceived. Identity does not, however, exist solely at an individual level. Any group or nation has an identity that has been formed in history and reaffirmed through education. Identity is relational in its essence. Hegel maintains that identity is formed through mutual affirmation carried out by two self-conscious entities (230). Again, Hegel’s idea extends to nations as well. When Japan first sought out recognition from neighboring countries in the fifth and sixth centuries, China stood out as the most developed and therefore most ideal candidate (Hane 27). The Hegelian master-slave dialectic aids to illustrate the outcome of this exchange. China assigned a graphic derogatory transcription 倭，which stands for "dwarf/submissive people," for Japan. In the eighth century, Japan replaced the kanji (“Chinese character”) of 倭 (dwarf) with 和 (harmony) as a protest against China’s pejorative view of Japan (Carr 6).

Nevertheless, 和 (harmony) is the cultural foundation of Japan’s national identity (Rice 57). Wa is still prevalent in contemporary Japan. Japanese food is referred to as 和食 and Japanese style is called 和風. Wa underscores the significance of the collective by regulating individualities within a group. Therefore, Japanese culture is not a culture that values individualism, rather a culture that values harmony of the collective. In this sense, wa is a form of social control, through which individuality is suppressed for the sake of the collective. Wa cultivates a strong non-
confrontational tendency in Japanese society, and individual behavior reflects an aversion to opposition (Iwao 10). As long as wa is preserved in a group, any individual within the group can progress together with the group.

Though popularly translated as harmony, wa is much more nuanced than the Western idea of harmony. Wa signifies a perfect balance between two binary oppositions. Similar to the Daoist balance between yin (“negative”) and yang (“positive”), wa juggles two Japanese words, uchi and soto, which literally means “inside” (uchi) and “outside” (soto). The uchi/soto dynamic is most evident in the Japanese writing system, there is romaji – romanization of Japanese, kanji – Chinese characters, hiragana – often used to represent ideas that are indigenous to Japan, and katakana – often used to represent ideas that are foreign to Japan. The boundary between uchi/soto is, however, fluid and can be easily changed according to context (Tanaka 22). Romaji is outmost soto because it is Western whereas the other three are uchi for they are Eastern. Kanji, the Chinese writing system, becomes soto when compared to hiragana and katakana, which are of the Japanese writing system. Lastly, hiragana remains as the innermost uchi for it represents Japanese ideas whereas katakana is used to refer to foreign ideas. The closer to uchi something or someone is to the subject, the higher level of intimacy.

Uchi is a space of empathy and familiarity. When someone or something is in your uchi space, you can more readily achieve intimacy with the person or object, because you are able directly to see, listen, touch, smell, and taste (Makino 11).

Japanese linguist Makino Seiichi maintains that uchi-soto has a much more specific connotation than its literal translation (10). Uchi, on some level, shares meaning with ie, which literally means households. “Ie represents a quasi-kinship unit with a patriarchal head and members tied to him through real or symbolic blood relationship” (Sugimoto 164). Although the ie system has changed following the nuclear family structure was introduced postwar, the ideology of ie persists. For instance, the family registration system, or koseki system, is still employed in
contemporary Japan, often appoints the man of the house as the household head and women as the support of the family (Sugimoto 165). A ie is sustained by the division of labor, which also translates to gendered duties in a family setting. Theoretically wa can be achieved when a division of gendered duties is maintained. Since women have the ability to give birth, they are typically associated with the nurturing role. This tradition is not unique to Japan but universal. Simon de Beauvoir maintains that pregnancy is both a gift and a curse, which grants new lives at the cost of the pursuit of self-actualization that is outside the domestic (de Beauvoir 550).

Of course, both Japanese women and men are keepers of wa through their roles according to the uchi/soto dynamic. Since their specific duties are conditioned in line with different context, both men and women can be considered on the inside or the outside depending on situations (Rosenberger 96). As long as a level of balance is kept in a specific context, all members could benefit from it. This is the reason that division of labor is significant in a group dynamic. Division of labor in terms of uchi/soto does not, however, means equal. One of the examples resides in language:

(A couple) would refer to (not address) each other in hierarchical terms of shujin “husband” (literally, master) ad nyōbo or kanai “wife” (literally, inside the house). These terms signal their hierarchical relationship as operators of the household and representatives to other groups relating to the household (Rosenberger 97).

Division of gendered duties helps to maintain harmony. In Japan, a woman’s highest realization is as ryōsai kenbo (“good wife, wise mother”). In fact, Nakamura Masanao, a Japanese educator and leader, coined the term ryōsai kenbo to describe the virtue of any woman in the 1870s (Holloway 10).

This is not to say wa is sexist in its nature. Women who play the role of ryōsai kenbo can obtain more power compared to women in the individualist culture, especially in the domestic sphere. For instance, though Japanese housewives are not considered as working members of the
society, especially by Western standards, housewives control the finance at home. A survey conducted in 1998 suggests that “40 percent of full-time housewives think of themselves as economically independent” (Iwao 4). Since women dominate uchi, they are the more powerful party at home. One of the most influential feminists in Japan, Ueno Chizuko, maintains that the power women gain through their conventional gendered duties, however, “is not a form of power recognized by non-Asian feminists” (Buckley, Ueno Chizuko 278).

Japanese women believe, as do their American counterparts, in equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity, and so on. What appears to be different in their concepts of equality is that in Japan equality is not sought on principle and part-time working women and full-time housewives in particular consider themselves equal to their professionally or vocationally employed husband, at least as far as their status in the household is concerned. Not only do women see themselves as equal to their husbands but their husbands willingly admit their dependence on women (in a sense, their inferiority) (Iwao 3).

Yamada Haru maintains that, wa is preserved by interdependence, in the sense that individuals depend on each other through the roles they perform in a group (Yamada 29). This interdependence becomes gendered duties in the family dynamic. In fact, I will employ a scale to illustrate the balance between men and women and that between uchi and soto (see Figure 1.1).

In short, balance or wa is maintained in a household as long as both men and women perform their duties accordingly. That said, the changing social and economic landscape of Japan has revised this equation, especially when more and more start to join the workforce.

2.2. Wa at Work

In 1991, women constituted 40.8 percent of the labor force in Japan, and progressive working women began to claim a place of equal to men in the business world (Kawashima 271). Despite the fact more women were joining the workforce, it was still common for working women to prioritize their domestic responsibilities over their work outside (Kawashima 271). In 2016, women constituted 43.4 percent of the entire workforce, and 66 percent of all women between
fifteen and sixty-five years of age are engaged in waged labor, which is the highest employment rate on record since 1968 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (Sōmushō) Online). Even with more women in the workforce, a survey conducted in the same year by the Japanese government shows that 40.6 percent of people support the proposition that “men should work outside and women should stay at home,” while 54.3 percent oppose it (Cabinet Office (Japan) Online).

So what is so controversial about the idea of working women? Working does not simply remove women from the domestic sphere, or uchi. It shoulders them with responsibilities and expectations of both uchi and soto (See Figure 1.3).

Despite working in the realm of uchi, women are still expected to perform their housewife duties. Both the father and the mother can be the breadwinner of the household, “but it is the mother who watches over the health and well-being of each member of the family, runs the household, and keeps the family bonds strong” (Iwao 126). Working women, consequently, face the problem of working a “double shift” with no personal life whatsoever. This problem, in turn, drives women away from the desire to push for equality at work.

equality is all very well, but if it means having to work so hard that individual pleasure and private fulfillment are not permitted, they (women) are content to do without it. Men’s lives in Japan today are confined and regimented by their jobs to an extreme; they are alienated from their households and deprived of time to engage in culturally enriching pursuits, this is not a model women think worthy of emulation (Iwao 15).

Thanks to this model of division of labor, Iwao maintains that, “many women, in fact, do not want to shoulder the heavy responsibilities that men are, based on the belief that the husband’s salary will go to sustain the household while that of the wife can be used for incidental or nonessential purposes” (191).

Furthermore, working women are expected to be nurturing both at work and at home. The reason for this is that a Japanese workplace is treated as a family, so the rules of a family still apply
Traditionally associated with *uchi*, women are maternal figures, such as mother and wife. A working woman is expected to perform the same nurturing duties when she is at work.

Dorinne Kondo’s ethnography illustrates, in great detail, the *uchi-soto* balance in a workplace. Even though Kondo examined a small family business rather than a large corporation, most of her observations of gendered labor remain valid in a corporate environment. Kondo maintains that, “because women are associated with *uchi*, they are constantly reminded with the cultural definition of femininity – forgiving and nurturing… women are defined by their commitments to *uchi* and how they are also connected to the company through their important position in the labor process” (293). According to Kondo, women act as surrogate mothers in the workplace, where “they provide the young men with a humanized work atmosphere, a source of support and care” (295).

These subtle gender nuances retain women in the role of *uchi* in the realm of *soto* - the workplace (see Figure 1.2).

Another unintended consequence of such division leads to the reason for women’s reduced chances of attaining higher positions. Not only women lock themselves into the roles of *uchi* as I stated earlier, male colleagues also lock their female counterparts into traditional female roles and expect them to go home early to take care of household’s affairs (Iwao 193). Even if this begins with good intentions, it still socializes women to believe that they simply do not have the same capacity or stamina to work like their male counterparts.

The *wa* at work locks women into the role of *uchi*, but takes away the associated power. A full-time housewife, for instance, controls finance and internal affairs of the household, whereas working women, serving as the surrogate mothers and wives in the workplace, do not have such
power. It is fair to suggest that Japanese Feminist Ueno Chizuko’s statement about the power women gain via gendered duties in a domestic sphere does not apply in a working environment.

2.3. *Wa and Happiness*

In his 1943 paper “A Theory of Human Motivation,” Abraham Maslow proposed the idea that humans have a hierarchical list of needs, which he organized into the shape of a pyramid. Maslow describes these needs as “physiological,” “safety,” “love/belonging,” “esteem,” and “self-actualization.” Self-actualization ranks as the need on the top of pyramid, for it is difficult to achieve. According to Maslow, self-actualization is “what a man can be, he must be” (91). The idea here is that self-actualization is one’s need to fully utilize her potential to achieve a sense of fulfillment and, ultimately, happiness.

Happiness is not, however, entirely defined by self-actualization for Japanese women. Iwao Sumiko maintains that, “Japanese women consider their own happiness to be closely tied to that of their families – so much so that they will restrain their personal feelings to an extent an American woman might not be able to tolerate. It is common practice to forgo personal fulfillment and desire for the sake of nurturing and maintaining the harmony and happiness of the group that is so highly prized” (10).

Hence, I argue here that Japanese women forgo self-actualization for the sake of “group-actualization.” The loss of self in the process is compensated by the happiness yield from group harmony. Since women are linked to *uchi*, they are responsible for maintaining the *wa* of any group. Those who abandon the practice of “group-actualization” for personal fulfillment will be considered selfish. In Japan, independence has a dangerously close connotation to selfishness. For women who wish to gain self-actualization through their career like their male counterparts, friends and relatives would tell her that her life choice makes her look *wagamama* (selfish).
*Wagamama* is a personality trait that is looked on with scorn, especially for women (Aronsson 203). *Wagamama* also extends to married women with children. *Kagikko* (“latchkey child”) is a term coined in the 1970s used to describe children who are left alone in the house after school and waits for parents’ return form work (Mackie 151). Though the term seemingly put both parents in the wrong, *kagikko* particularly arouses guilt in working women (Mackie 151). Even with solutions such as babysitting services, mothers who use such facilities are sometimes treated as “selfish” and “weak” in the eyes of both men and women (Imamura 70). This is because childcare is expected to be the mother’s responsibility (Imamura 70). Women’s as the maternal figure locks them into the nurturing role.

Japanese women’s responsibility as the nurturer in the domestic sphere extends to the workplace as well. As stated earlier in the section on *wa* in the workplace, Japanese businesses foster *wa* in the workplace by offering a variety of rewards and after-five social gatherings (Genzberger 155). The social context of the Japanese workplace makes the reasons Japanese women work different from their American counterparts. Iwao maintains that “the latter usually choose one job over another because it offers better pay or better professional experience that they can build on in obtaining their next job. Japanese women of all ages lack this kind of goal orientation. they are more concerned with a pleasant or friendly work atmosphere” (165).

In short, as long as the harmonious atmosphere remains in a workplace, women are happy with their situation. They even take on the personal responsibility to maintain such atmosphere by playing their roles as protector and nurturer of *wa*, and others come to expect such role for women.

That said, what happens when the burden of group-actualization, or nurturing *wa*, becomes detrimental to the self? For instance, when women feel the need to fight back against normalized issues such as sexual harassment.
2.4. Wa and Sekuhara

The term sekuhara is a Japanized phrase for sexual harassment. Sekuhara gained widespread usage in 1989 through an broadly publicized “poll of 10,000” conducted by suburban feminists (Hada 266). The concept of sexual harassment was imported from the United States, but immediately became a public issue in Japan and ignited several policies and attitude changes around this subject.

Once an issue is brought to attention, it often catches on like wildfire. Ochiai Keiko, a Japanese feminist, talked about the issue with chikan (“pervert”), men who grope women on crowded subways, in the 1970s and 1980s. In her talk, Ochiai explained why cases of sexual harassment were identified at such rapid rate. Ochiai maintains that “once you extend the concept of sexual harassment beyond overt physical harassment to include psychological harassment on the basis of gender, and even innuendo, then you are dealing with the very fabric of Japanese society” (Buckley, Ochiai Keiko 233). She states that women tolerate the harassment for the sake of group harmony, and adding men’s ignorance to the detrimental effect of harassment, what is considered harassment is normalized in the society. Furthermore, popular culture such as comic books deepens such normalization. Ochiai maintains that, “once a campaign was started, things change quickly. This issue is awareness” (Buckley, Ochiai Keiko 233).

As Ochiai stated, the issue is awareness. Yamada Haru makes the observation in her book, 7 keys that women-only cars were introduced in the early 2000s in order to combat groping on commuter trains at crowded times. "The Tokyo Metropolitan Police and the East Railway Company reported that two-thirds of women in their twenties and thirties were groped on trains, and poster campaigning failed to reverse the incidences” (Yamada, Kelm and Victor, 55).
After the introduction of the term *sekuhara* in 1989, awareness of this issue was further increased by a court case in December 1990. The case condemned and sentenced a male supervisor who had engaged in “wrongful conduct” (Hada 266). Two years later after the first success, the second case on sexual harassment found that there was a “hostile environment” and awarded the plaintiff $150,000 in damages (Hada 266).

In 1995, a company president was found guilty and fined $15,000 in damages to a nineteen-year-old female employee, whom he had pestered for sexual favors. This was the first time a sexual harassment court case did not involve touching or defamation (Gelb 44). Sexual harassment, with the growing media attention, was written in law to protect women.

Sexual harassment has been interpreted broadly in the guidelines issued pursuant to the 1997 amendments, so that “workplace” harassment includes after-hour contact. Indicative of increased awareness of sexual harassment, perhaps in response to the heightened attention provided in the revisions to the EEOL, is a huge increase in complaints brought to prefectural-level employment equality offices, from 850 in 1994 to almost 9,500 in 1999 (Cabinet Office (Japan) 19).

Furthermore, in 1998 “a $34 million settlement was obtained against Mitsubishi Motors and $10 million settlement against Astra, a Massachusetts pharmaceutical company” (Gelb 44). These are the largest sexual harassment suits and resulted in companies drafting guidelines for procedures for reporting and preventing sexual harassment (Gelb 44).

With the rise of feminism, two types of *sekuhara* are identified. Type 1 is the “retaliation,” “in which women who have resisted and/or reported male sexual approaches are dismissed, demoted, or subjected to pay cuts” (Sugimoto 186). Type 2 is the “environment,” “in which photographs of nude females, sex jokes, and sexual innuendo in the workplace adversely affect the moral of female employees and de-value their achievements” (Sugimoto 186).

These efforts contributed greatly to gender equality, yet they violate the number one rule of *wa*. Though both women and men tend to shy away from confrontation, it is more unforgiving
for women to be the perpetrator behind any conflict since they are associated with the role of *uchi*,
or as the nurturer:

To nurture is to shoulder the other’s burdens, relieve stress, and create a calm environment. Anger and confrontation are thus antithetical to good caregiving (Long 162).

Accordingly, to preserving superficial harmony, women sometime have to tolerate sexual harassment. This point is portrayed in a television drama, which I will discuss in chapter 3 with greater detail, through a job interview. “Why aren’t you married? Your age is getting up there” Yumi, in *A Restaurant with many problems* (2015) episode two, is confronted with this question during her interview. When she cannot answer the question, the interviewer continues, “if you were asked by the client the same question, what are you going to do?” Obviously Yumi fails the interview, and this perfectly presents the convenient idea that the company is not sexist but you need to endure sexual harassment if you want to work with clients, whom are most likely will ask sexist questions.

Moreover, Iwao maintains that “if Japanese women suffer discriminatory treatment, they become annoyed and voice complaints, but as long as other women are subject to the same discriminatory treatment, they are likely to accept the situation and be unlikely to move to combat it, having little desire to disrupt the harmony of the workplace” (Iwao 166). Women’s aversion to disturb *wa* encourages the normalization of sexual harassment (Painter 51). Women face a double bind between having to laugh at a male coworker’s sexist jokes to protect superficial harmony or risking jeopardizing the *wa* in the workplace through head-on confrontation about sexism. Gender based discrimination is so prevalent that it forestalls women’s aspiration to self-actualize through career.
In general, happiness for Japanese career women still involves negotiation between the self and the group. These women try to avoid confrontation and tolerate minor harassment for the sake of the group harmony, or wa, yet the same harassment prohibits them from advancing.

2.5. Chapter Conclusion: Group-Actualization

Wa, or harmony, underscores the significance of the collective by regulating individualities within a group. Wa is a form of social control, through which individuality is suppressed for the sake of the collective. Wa symbolizes a harmonious balance between two other Japanese words, uchi (inside) and soto (outside). When this dynamic is translated to gender difference, women become associated with uchi and men with soto.

In the domestic sphere wa is achieved through women playing maternal and nurturing roles, or uchi, and men as the provider, or soto. In this form of division of labor, both parties gain equal power in the relationship. This dynamic is challenged when more women are moving out from the domestic to work outside, and women began to shoulder the responsibility of soto. Besides financial motivations, Japanese women want to achieve self-actualization through their careers. This change does not mean women are treated equal at work. Since Japanese women are locked into the roles of nurturer and protector, or uchi, they end up performing similar roles in the workplace – as supporter to their male counterparts.

I argue that Japanese women forgo self-actualization for the sake of “group-actualization.” The loss of self in the process is compensated by the happiness yield from the cultivation of group harmony. This new uchi/soto arrangement is, by no means, perfect. Because women play the role of uchi, they are responsible for maintaining wa of any group. Those who abandon the practice of “group-actualization” for self-actualization will be considered selfish. This prohibits women from speaking out about issues such as sexism at work, which eventually prevents them from career
advancement. Because women are locked into the role of protector and nurturer of *wa*, they are less likely to fight against inequality if it put group harmony in jeopardy. Even with sexual harassment prevention guidelines for women to report sexism, they choose to endure sexism for the sake of the collective.
Chapter 3 Women, Television, Happiness

3.1. Television Drama Series’ Formula for Constructing Happiness

The Japanese broadcasting system consists of the public sector and the private sector. NHK (Japanese: 日本放送協会 Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai), AKA Japan Broadcasting Corporation, is the public sector. NHK is publicly owned and funded by viewers’ television license fee (NHK Online). The private sector is comprised of numerous commercial broadcasting companies, yet the majority of all programs are provided by five private stations: NTV (Nippon Television Network Corporation), TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System Television), Fuji-TV (Fuji Television Network), TV-Asahi (TV Asahi Corporation) and TV-Tokyo (TV TOKYO Corporation). Though independent commercial companies such as WOWOW and SKY PerfecTV gain their popularity through satellite television and cable television, only NHK and the five aforementioned commercial media conglomerates are considered as nationwide networks. These nationwide networks provide a variety of contents, including news, anime, and television drama series.

Japanese television drama (Japanese: テレビドラマ terebi dorama) is commonly known as dorama in Japanese. Television drama series often have approximately ten to twelve episodes, yet single-episode dorama, often referred to as TV Specials, are also produced, either for special occasions or as teasers for a potential longer series (Clements and Tamamuro xxxii). There are four seasons for dorama in Japan, winter (January–March), spring (April–June), summer (July–September), and fall (October–December). Television dramas aired in the morning or afternoon are generally broadcast daily, but the majority of dramas are aired weekly in the evenings. Television dramas that air between 20:00 and 23:00 are also known as primetime dramas. Despite the fact that television dramas are produced frequently and abundantly, regular programs often last one season. Of course, hugely successful series can run for more than one season, such as TV
Asahi’s *Aibō (Partners)*, which ran for fifteen seasons. Even so, multi-season television series are considerably rare, compared to the situation in the United States.

Considering the emergence of new media, we might assume that television, a traditional medium, would lose its luster when juxtaposing countless new media outlets. For instance, the recent data from Nielson reveals that there are fewer and fewer people watching television in America (Luckerson Online). Yet TV viewership remains high in Japan. The NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, which is founded and managed by the Japanese government, conducted a survey on the public opinion on Japanese television in 2010. The findings of this survey suggest that, “television continues to maintain its position as the sole form of media that more than 90 percent of people access daily” (Hirata, Morofuji and Aramaki 36). In the same research, results of a multiple answers survey reveal that TV dramas are the third most frequently watched program, following News and weather forecasts (Hirata, Morofuji and Aramaki 16).

Another conclusion drawn from this survey indicates that television consumption is an important actor for socialization. Television dramas, through repetitive representations of certain values, “have the power not only to influence one’s perceptions of others, but also one’s perceptions of oneself” (Mithani 4). Forum Mithani maintains that television dramas offer commentaries on reality and even suggestions on how to improve the current situation (Mithani 4). Women’s issues are, of course, a reoccurring topic on the small screen in Japan. Women, as the main cohort of television viewers, are influenced by television. Hilaria Gössmann maintains that “many female viewers watch television dramas not just for entertainment, but also to learn about life” (207).

Kelly Hu supports Gössmann’s thesis that television drama is a medium for “learning about life” (Gössmann 207). Hu identifies that television drama develops a formula, which is intended
to evoke self-reflection (195). She coins this formula as a narrative pattern that prioritizes “reflectivity” (195). Reflectivity “is especially concerned with complicated and sensitive psychological mappings of the inner self, the interaction of the self with the other, and the self coping with dilemmas in social settings” (Hu 195). Reflectivity is achieved through “voice-overs, conversations, monologues, reflective thoughts” (196).

Hu adds, “Japanese dramas usually contain ten to twelve one-hour episodes and are broadcast on a weekly basis. Therefore, the four annual drama seasons, and the dramas, which are rarely rebroadcast, are packaged to be consumed accordingly. As a result, the story must be told in a precise way” (197). Because of the short duration of Japanese television dramas, they are actually a little different compared to American television dramas. Jane Feuer, a television scholar, defines American network television as either “episodic” (a resolution is provided at the end of the episode) or “continuing” (is motivated by constantly changing plot development) (106). In both cases, however, there is no fundamental change of the characters. Characters of continuous series “perpetuate the narrative by continuing the same mistakes” (Feuer 112-3). Whereas in episodic series “by the end of each episode, the specific ‘enigma of the week’ would be resolved with the underlying social problem (usually involving racial or feminist issues) retained as an ‘absent cause’ for ensuring series episode” (Feuer 107).

Japanese programs, instead, features changes as a result of reflectivity. Hu maintains that, because of reflectivity, motivation for TV viewing goes beyond entertainment in Japan, it also includes an understanding of self, other, and the pursuit of happiness (198).

Other studies have examined Japanese television dramas’ narrative pattern that centers around happiness. One of the most popular genre of television dramas, “trendy drama” formulates the happiness narrative. This genre gained its mainstream status in the 1980s. Trendy drama often
features love, friendship, and working in urban settings (Iwabuchi 4). What makes the narrative so compelling is its blurry line between reality and fantasy (Ōta 77). Ōta Tōru is a producer at Fuji TV. He has produced some of the most influential television drama series and some of them even became staples of Japanese television drama, such as *Tokyo Love Story* (1991) and *The 101st Proposal* (2006). In a speech he gave in 2003 at Tokyo Christian University, Ōta urges his actors and writers to be “5cm away from reality,” by which he meant that the fictional story should be fantastical yet within the grasp of reality (77). Thus, crafting relatable stories, encapsulating real emotions, and adding a sense of realism by using real locations are crucial. For instance, according to Ōta, almost all fictional stories in this genre take place in Tokyo because people “…want to go to Tokyo, fall in love, get a cool job, and get happily married” (77). Television drama functions as a guidebook for those who wish for happiness in their lives as suggested by Poerwandari, De Thouars, and Hirano (177).

Consequently, it is significant to examine how women are being portrayed in television dramas and how the narrative of happiness is constructed. It is also meaningful to ask what do the audience actually learn? Saito Shinichi maintains that, “at least with regard to attitudes toward gender roles, television tends to decelerate social change by cultivating traditional views among many viewers, although the medium also seems to liberate the most conservative people (527)” I argue that the seemingly polarized effects mentioned by Saito is the purpose of television drama – a form of social control, through which the polar opposites are pulled to a common ground. Through their tailored narrative pattern, Japanese television dramas evoke empathy. This empathy helps to construct a common ground between polarized opinions in attempt to ensure harmony, or *wa*, in society.
Gender equality in a harmonious society, however, faces constant renegotiation and redefinition. Television drama series is a perfect medium, through which narratives are engendered to reflect these negotiations. I will accordingly construct a timeline in the following section using research that has been done by many scholars who have examined the role of Japanese primetime television dramas in gender negotiations.

3.2. Changing Representations of Women in Japanese TV Dramas

The portrayal of femininity on the small screen in Japan is an extensively studied subject. Studies on feminism and gender construction through television dramas emerged in the 1970s (Muramatsu 72). Muramatsu Yasuko, a pioneer in Japanese women’s studies, began her study of portrayals of women in 1974, and documented chronological changes up to 1994. Many gender studies are based on her initial research in the 1970s. I will now construct a timeline of changes of gender representations of women on television based on previous studies.

1950s

Laura Dales, a scholar on Japanese feminism, maintains that “the Allied (American) Occupation of post-war Japan (1945-1952) brought changes to the official state treatment of women and women’s affairs” (Dales 16). Specific terms of these governmental policies encourage women to work and be as socially and politically active as their male counterparts.

Along with the adoption of democracy, television broadcasting began in Japan in the 1950s (Gotô, Sata and Hirahara 5). Primetime television dramas in the 1950s propagated the concept of home because Japan aimed to establish a democratic government and reform the traditional family system, from large family to small nuclear family structure, by mirroring America (Gotô, Sata and Hirahara 111).
Therefore, Japanese TV stations in the 1950s often aired American TV shows that featured American nuclear family structure, such as *I Love Lucy, Lassie, Father knows Best, and My Three sons* (Gotô, Sata and Hirahara 112). There are also several Japanese programs modeled after the popular American TV shows such as, *Otōsan no Kisetsu (Father’s Season)* (NHK 1958), *Mama Chotto Kite (Mama, Come Here a Minute)*, and *Manmosu Kazoku (Mammoth Family)* (Fuji, 1962) (Gotô, Sata and Hirahara 113). These TV shows were created to advocate a new family system – a nuclear family with a father and a family as a unit (Gotô, Sata and Hirahara 111). Though change of family system from patriarchy and patrimony to the nuclear family system theoretically lauds gender equality, the reality was that women and men were assigned with different duties. The rapid economic boom drives men outside home to work leaving all domestic responsibilities and power to women (Gotô, Sata and Hirahara 116). This social change manifests the *uchi*-women and *soto*-men balance illustrated in Figure 1.1.

**1960s**

The 1960s saw the rise of the second-wave feminism, in which women challenged the traditional ideals of women, such as endurance and suffering (Mackie 167). Primetime television dramas responded to the increasing attention on women’s issues by pushing women onto the center stage of home dramas (Gössmann 208). Though home dramas heavily featured mothers in the storyline, they did not address any feminist issues raised by the second-wave feminism.

Muramatsu categorizes primetime television dramas from the 1950s to the 1970s into “home drama” and “dramatic drama” (Gössmann 208). As the Japanese cultural concept, *uchi/soto*, entails, home drama deals with *uchi*, or domestic matters, whereas dramatic drama deals with *soto*, anything that is outside the family situation. This division of drama genres also creates a division on how women are portrayed in *uchi* and *soto*. Women portrayed in home drama are mostly happy
whereas women outside the home environment are not (Muramatsu 73). Though these television dramas feature women in both *uchi* and *soto* context, Muramatsu maintains that two genres share one core message – as long as women are staying at home, they will be happy (Muramatsu 73).

**1970s**

By the 1970s, the Japanese economy has grown exponentially. A growing number of women were out working and housewives were turning into activists. The 1970s sees the rise of a unique type of feminism called “housewife feminism” represented by groups such as *Agora* (from the Greek work for public meeting place) (Mackie 150). Though feminism existed before the 1970s, in fact, one of the first instances of socialist feminism took place in the 1880s (Mackie 32), the 1970s marks the beginning of feminism in Japan that we see today. Groups like *Agora* were bolstered by the feminist press and support from countries all over the world (Mackie 152). These housewives advocated feminism in Japan and voiced their feeling of unjust at home and at work. Television accordingly reflected this reality.

Hilaria Gössmann maintains that viewers in the 1970s found the harmonious family settings, constructed on TV, detached from reality (208). With this sentiment, harmonious portrayal of home came to an end (Gössmann 209). Television dramas started to feature unhappy married women in the mid 1970s (Gössmann 208). I observed that his trend is still prevalent today. For example, a hugely popular television drama, titled *Hirugao (Morning Glory)* in 2015, shares similar plotline with *Kishibe no Album (Album of Kishibe)* introduced in 1977: an unhappily married housewife seeks out an extramarital affair but ends up going back to her family for her children. In 1977, Muramatsu conducted another study on drama contents and female audiences’ reading of texts. Muramatsu sent out questionnaires to female TV viewers about their perceptions on work/family balance. Muramatsu’s findings suggest that, “women who were not satisfied with
their situations, but had given up trying to improve them, watched more shows. Women who were not satisfied and were preparing to change watched the least number of shows. It seemed reasonable to argue that women in career preparation watched fewer shows because they had less time” (75).

**Late 1980s to 1990s**

1985 is a milestone of modern feminism. The Japanese government signed “the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and introduced legislation to abolish discrimination against women in all fields” (Nakano 257). This change marks a new wave of gender negation on the *wa* balancing scale. Women were encouraged to work outside their home, which marks women’s partial departure from *uchi*. To be a woman no longer means just a mother, but also a working individual (see Figure 1.3).

This trend manifested as an increasing volume of working women in primetime television dramas. Gössmann summarizes two characteristics of the trend of gender representations in the 1990s – “demonic mothers” and “working wives and family-oriented fathers” (Gössmann 209, 213). Demonic mother themed television dramas play around the “extreme closeness in mother-child relationships, especially in the case of the mother-son bond” in Japan (Gössmann 209). Gössmann coins the term “Fuyuhiko Syndrome” based on the male protagonist in a TV show called *Zutto Anata ga Suki Datta (I've Always Loved You)* aired in 1992. Fuyuhiko is a man who struggles to escape the control of his mother and fails to be an independent person. Gössmann maintains that though this shift portrays women in a negative light, it marks a “fundamental shift in depictions of men and women in Japanese TV dramas” (Gössmann 211). Programs in this era also feature gender role switching, depicting working wives and stay at home husbands. She claims
that this gender role switch indicates television dramas were actively promoting progressive feminist ideologies.

There is another genre of dramas that emerged in the 1990s – *ren'ai dorama* (Love drama). *Ren'ai dorama* “privileges romances of young, heterosexual individuals in contemporary, urban settings” (Tsai 45). Tsai maintains that these *ren'ai dorama* offer women an empowering space where they are “able to successfully bring private and intimate issues, such as love, to a commercial arena” (Tsai 51). There is a significant rise of female protagonists in Japanese TV dramas in the 1990s, however, women’s issues featured on the small screen often revolve around their love and family relationships, while giving little attention to their career development. Though many working women were portrayed on the small screen in the 1990s, their depictions still uphold traditional gender expectations in the sense that women cannot be considered without the influence of men.

**2000s**

Female oriented workplace dramas began to gain its popularity in the 2000s. Tania Darlington maintains that several TV dramas produced in the 2000s were based on primarily on women’s comics, known as *josei* (“women” or “female”) manga (Darlington 28). These programs focus on “successful, independent, educated twenty-something women pursuing glamorous careers who attempt to negotiate work and love against an urban backdrop that represents their stylishness and ability to break free from suburban domestic traditions” (28). Darlington sheds lights on the *josei* drama’s formula, suggesting that, “without a doubt, *josei* dramas represent the progress women have made and continue to make in the Japanese workforce… women can be happy and successful working instead of staying at home – sometimes even more successful than their male counterparts” (Darlington 35). Though this seems to be a huge step up from the trend
in 1990s, the moral lessons of these dramas are still somewhat traditional. Darlington suggests that despite the increasing depictions of working women in primetime dramas, the fixation on women’s personal life and romantic failures actually sustains the status quo rather than challenging it (31).

Alisa Freedman and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt conducted a case study on a drama that is closely related to the genre Darlington describes – Arafō (Around 40). Arafō tells the story of a single working woman’s, who is reaching her 40s, struggle with her place in the society. She is a successful independent woman but is defined, by her peers, as a failure due to her single status. The narrative of Arafō makes the statement that being childless is not necessary a crime for single women in their forties as long as they are productive members of the society (Freedman and Iwata-Weickgenannt 309). Featuring strong independent female protagonists, these television dramas encourage “female viewers to imagine new options opening up for them in Japan, while showing them the painful limitations of having freedom of choice” (Freedman and Iwata-Weickgenannt 309-10).

Iwao argues that “this skewed tendency (of television dramas) indicates that, for women, youth is of significant value, which might, in turn, strengthen traditional attitudes about gender roles.” Iwao notes that with recent changes on television, “female characters were not necessary portrayed only in traditional stereotypical gender-role positions (515).” However, even with changes in television dramas, evidence Saito drew from other studies done on female images on TV (Arima 2003; Nobushima; 1998. M. F. Suzuki, 1995) indicate that “Japanese television conveys messages that support attitudes in favor of traditional gender roles at the aggregate level” (516).
Forum Mithani maintains that, starting in 2010, there is an “emergence of a new, strong-willed heroine, who refuses to compromise her principles in order to conform to social norms expected of women” (19). She notices that television programs such as *Mother* (NTV 2010) and *Single Mothers* (NHK 2010) feature a strong female cast with almost no male actors (Mithani 13). These programs, on the surface, share similar plotlines as the ones in the 2000s. The difference between the two is that female dramas in the 2010s focus more on women’s self-actualization and feminist ideas that are contradictory to Japanese traditions. These television dramas are unique in the sense that the female characters “are building their own family structures and support networks, consisting only of women … emphasize the strength of women when they are united and pointedly dismiss men as unreliable, unstable and unnecessary in any aspect of their lives” (13).

### 3.3. Career Women on the Small Screen – A Growing Trend

In order to further examine the increase of portrayals of women in television dramas, I conducted an archival research sampling all television drama series aired between 2000 to 2017 using online databases, including www.jdorama.com and ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/日本のテレビドラマ一覧_(年代別).

For the purpose of this study, only primetime serial television drama series are taken into consideration. This means that the sample pool consists of television drama series that have more than one episode and aired between 20:00 and 23:00. Furthermore, since cable and satellite TV channels are not accessible to everyone, programs that are produced and aired by satellite and cable stations like WOWOW and SKY PerfecTV are excluded from the sample pool. But, if a television
drama series was aired on both a terrestrial television network (such as NHK) and a cable network (such as WOWOW), it would be taken into the sample pool.

Two types of data were extracted based on two different measures. Type A looks at female representation in general, which indicates the annual percentage of the television drama series, featuring a female lead, out of all the programs produced. The only condition for Type A is that the main protagonist is female, which is also indicated by a female actor’s name appearing at the top of the cast list. One factor needing to be clarified is that a lot of programs present a male and a female protagonist in an equal fashion, but I identified the main protagonist through the cast list – the first name appear on the cast list is the main actor. My findings are presented in Figure 1.4. My findings show a steady increase in dramas in general and the relative equal representation of female protagonists. Though there has been several ups and downs, there is no significant increase or decrease in female representation in the leading role.

For Type B, I employed a different coding scheme. In order to evaluate TV’s representation of working women as examined in Poerwandari et al.’ and Gössmann’s studies, I applied these following conditions to the sample.

1. The main protagonist is female, which is also indicated by a female actor’s name appearing at the top of the cast list;
2. The setting of the story has to be realistic, which means genres such as fantasy and science fiction are not considered;
3. The main protagonist, or a member of the ensemble, has the financial means to support herself, which means dramas that portray full-time housewives are excluded;

Though as discussed in chapter 2.1, Japanese fulltime housewives have more power in a domestic environment. Some of these powers are demonstrated through women taking control of
the household finance (Iwao 4). Despite this, I aim to demonstrate the transition of women being portrayed as housewives to working women in television dramas and, therefore, fulltime housewives are not considered in Type B. There are a lot of series that take place in schools, but since students are not fulltime workers, female students in leading roles are also not considered. Furthermore, some characters’ occupations are not made explicit in the narrative, so these programs are excluded. Lastly, the year, season, station, genre, and airtime of the television dramas are recorded.

Since I am the sole coder liable for the coding process, margins of errors are expected. Nevertheless, the findings, as shown in Figure 1.5, suggest that there is an increase in working women being portrayed in the dramas with a female lead. Most prominently, working women is only at 31 percent of programs with female protagonists, but it goes up to 54 percent in 2016.

My findings also suggest that most popular series, those that ran for more than one season, are of detective and medical genres. Medical series like Doctor X ~ Gekai Daimon Michiko (Doctor X ~ Surgeon Michiko Daimon) which tells the story of a female surgeon, has four seasons and a special. The average viewership for Doctor X is 21.70%, which is considered top rating in Japan. A staple of TV Asahi, a detective series titled Kasōken no Onna (Female Forensic Scientist) ran for sixteen seasons and with the same female protagonist (played by Sawaguchi Yasuko) throughout the entire series. Despite the success of these series, they are too removed from the norm as medicine and forensics are not part of the majority of the workforce.

To further examine the rise of female oriented workplace drama series and their narrative patterns, I conducted a qualitative content analysis in chapter 5. The reason for a qualitative content analysis is that there is an invisible trend hidden within the data presented here. There is an increasing number of workplace dramas that feature almost solely workplace issues, other than
more romantically focused. The issues center around sexism at work, more specifically, there is a growing number of television dramas that feature sexual harassment and sexual discrimination at work. They have a specific narrative pattern to resolve controversial topics, such as sexual harassment, using wa principles. To take a closer look, the following chapter employs a textual analysis focusing on two television drama series that heavily portray sexism in the workplace.
Chapter 4: Anti-wa Themes meet Pro-wa Treatment

4.1. Sexism in The Workplace – Division of Gendered Labor under Negotiation

I will be contributing to the timeline constructed in 3.2 through my exploration of female oriented dramas that depict sexism in the workplace. Given that female characters on the small screen have been portrayed in a relatively conventional manner, this new trend appears to a big leap from the traditional view of women.

As discussed in chapter 2.4, sexual harassment is one issue that is currently under public scrutiny for undermining women’s self-actualization at work. Women are expected to perform gendered duties at work through their role as protector and nurturer of wa at home. Specifically, women are expected to deal with internal affairs and behave “maternally” in the presence of men. By doing so, the gender dynamic fosters a new harmonious wa in the workplace (see Figure 1.2).

This new wa, achieved via a new uchi-soto arrangement, is by no means equal. Division of gendered labor in the workplace holds women back from attaining what is expected of a working man. There is an ongoing negotiation of such duty division in contemporary Japan - a discussion on sexism in the workplace. As I stated in chapter 2.4, since women are expected to be the protector and nurturer of wa, they face a double bind between going along with sexism to protect superficial harmony at work or risking being treated as inconsiderate to group dynamics in the workplace by confronting sexist comments and advances. Sexism in the workplace is most common in the form of sexual harassment.

“Despite 1997 amendments to the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) that imposed penalties for sexual harassment in the workplace, the problem largely persisted, necessitating further amendment and stronger sanctions in 2006” (Darlington 34). Sexual harassment in the workplace is now one of the core issues that working women are facing. Through
addressing these issues head on, primetime television dramas like *A Restaurant with Many Problems* (2015) and *Age Harassment* (2015) give women an alternative narrative for situating themselves in a workplace.

These two programs are, by no means, pioneers in raising awareness of sexual harassment. Screenwriter Nakazono Miho is one of the most prolific female screenwriters in recent Japan. She helped to create a popular medical series *Doctor X ~ Gekai Daimon Michiko* (*Doctor X ~ Surgeon Michiko Daimon*) on TV Asahi, which tells the story of a female surgeon who dares to challenge the hypocritical bureaucracy of the medical system.

Nakazono also wrote a television drama titled *Dear Woman* (TBS) in 1996, which “pioneered the trend of educating female employees about gender-based discrimination in the workplace” (Lukács 153). *Dear Woman* helps identifies behaviors, such as judging a female according to her looks and pressuring older female employees to quit and get married, as sexual harassment (Lukács 153). Even though Dear Woman tackles feminist ideas, the plot is pushed forward by the romantic relationship between the male and female protagonists.

*A Restaurant with Many Problems* and *Age Harassment* raise awareness of this issue almost twenty years after *Dear Woman* was aired in 1996. This time with more attention to gender based discriminations as the plots of these two programs revolve around sexism in the workplace. But why has this problem still not been addressed properly so that it needs to be brought up again on the same medium twenty years later?

As discussed in chapter 3d, *wa* is the prerequisite to a well functioning workplace in Japan, therefore, *wa* must be preserved at all costs. Dominated by men, the Japanese workplace is still in many ways a patriarchal system. In addition, these television dramas bring up issues of sexism at work again and through tailored narratives, aim to address these issues in a semi-realistic fictional
context. Through detailed personal narratives of the female characters, these shows attempt to evoke empathy for women and between women. They aim to unveil a divide between women who choose careers and those who choose family. And through detailed representations of interactions between women in different positions, these programs aim to mend that difference.

**A Restaurant with Many Problems**

*A Restaurant with Many Problems* is one of the recent television drama series that features a strong female cast. Unlike many popular dramas, such as *ren’ai* dramas in the 1990s or *josei* (“women” or “female”) dramas, *Restaurant* is not based on any novel, manga, or anime. The show’s screenwriter, Sakamoto Yuji, is a highly prolific screenwriter in contemporary Japan. Sakamoto’s original screenplay dates back to 1992, and the majority of his works are adopted by one of the largest commercial TV station in Japan – Fuji TV. His screenplays focus on a wide range of topics, from romance to social justice. Sakamoto’s works have been adapted into films, stage dramas, anime, video games, and most notably TV dramas. Sakamoto’s TV dramas have earned him several awards throughout the years.

An interesting pattern can be found amongst his most popular works – they all tackle social issues such as single motherhood (*Mother*, NTV 2010), high divorce rate (*Matrimonial Chaos*, Fuji TV 2013), and the hardship of urban life (*Love That Makes You Cry*, Fuji TV 2016). Sakamoto’s success comes from using detailed portrayals of social issues through characters in his screenplays. Sakamoto capitalizes on social issues to gain popularity for his own work, while offering the audience a glimpse of these social issues through the lens of personal narrative. This feature is, however, not unique to Sakamoto. It is a formula of what Kelly Hu has termed “reflectivity” (195).
Show producers, screenwriters, and directors of Japanese TV dramas often take moral stands on social issues through the shows they make. A popular producer Setoguchi Katsuaki was inspired to create a television drama about women in their forties called *Around 40*, the plot of which is discussed in the timeline, because he constantly heard dissatisfaction from women entering their forties (Freedman and Iwata-Weickgenannt, 308). These TV dramas not only gain popularity from tackling social issues, but also deliver the makers’ attitudes towards these issues.

*Restaurant*, indeed, follows the same the formula. *Restaurant* airs every Thursday on the Fuji TV channel, the same as many of Sakamoto’s works. Though not as successful as Sakamoto’s other work, *Restaurant* still manages to generate debates about gender equality in Japan. The show is divided into ten episodes, with one main plotline and several side stories centering on six females and one gay male. *Restaurant*’s set-up of seven misfits is an homage to the legendary film maker, Akira Kurosawa’s Seven Samurai. Though the main cast features almost all females, the set up is not unique to its time. Japanese media and gender researchers Alisa Freedman and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt argue that female characters on television are often presented to “hold jobs with a freelance element or associated with creativity, including detectives working on their own or leading a force of misfits (for example, *Anfea* (2006, Fuji, Unfair)) and *BOSS*, 2009, *BOSS2*, 2011, Fuji (Freedman and Iwata-Weickgenannt, 308)”. As they pointed out, *Restaurant* features women in an unconventional workplace.

*Restaurant* progresses by telling stories of each character. This format gives the audience a chance to explore the personal narratives of these misfits and the discrimination they face. Due to the relative short length of the show, the seven protagonists have stereotypical traits of certain misfits.
The main protagonist, Tanaka Tamako (played by Maki Yōko) works for a company in the restaurant business. After discovering her friend from high school, Fujimura Satsuki (played by Kikuchi Akiko), who also works at the same company was forced to strip naked as a form of apology, Tamako left the company and opens her own restaurant “Bistro Foo” across from the new high-end restaurant, “Symphonic,” opened by her old company. Tamako summons five of her friends to join her business. Nitta Yumi (played by Nikaidō Fumi) is a former employee of the same company with Tamako. Yumi is the accountant of Bistro Foo. She has an B.A degree at Tokyo University, the top university in Japan. Ameki Chika (played by Mayu Matsuoka) is the chef, and daughter of the main antagonist, Ameki Tarō (played by Sugimoto Tetta) who is the president of the company for which Tamako used to work. Chika claims to hate all people, and she is a fan of anime, manga, and video games. Chika represents a type of antisocial misfits in Japanese society who are addicted to the fictional world, popularly known as Otaku (a young person who is obsessed with computers or particular aspects of popular culture to the detriment of their social skills) or Hikikomori (reclusive adolescents or adults who withdraw from social life, often seeking extreme degrees of isolation and confinement). Morimura Kyōko (played by Usuda Asami), a recent divorcee with a child, is the sous-chef. She used to go to the same high school with Tamako and Satsuki. Kyōko represents both housewife and single mother. Karasumori Nanami (played by YOU) is the sommelier. Nanami used to work with Tamako as a vendor. Before that, she used to be a lawyer, who eventually quit due to gender discrimination at work. Oshimazuki Haiji (played by Yasuda Ken) is the pastry chef. A stereotypical portrayal of a gay man who also like to cross-dress. Lastly, Kawana Airi (played by Takahata Mitsuki) used to work for the rival restaurant, Symphonic. After being harassed by a co-worker, she joined Bistro Foo as
a waitress. Airi represents the stereotypical popular girl who chases after boys and is disliked by girls.

*Restaurant* depicts these characters’ individual struggles under the overreaching struggle of their restaurant business. The restaurant business becomes a metaphor of the protagonists’ fight against homogenous social and gender expectations. The main plotline centers around Tamako’s fight for her friend, Satsuki’s, justice. Tamako plays the mother and savior role not only for Satsuki, but also for other protagonists in the show. The main plotline is resolved with Nanami acting as Satsuki’s lawyer, fighting in civil court for her sexual harassment suit. The show ends with Bistro Foo closing down for a safety issue, and then opening up again near a seashore.

**Age Harassment**

Aired in the same year as *Restaurant*, *Age Harassment* was produced by TV Asahi. The screenplay was written by a prolific female writer, Uchideta Makiko, based on her novel of the same name published in 2008. The screenplay is different from the novel as the protagonist is changed from the part-time worker who is jealous of the new comer to the young pretty new employee. Though the script features a strong female cast while broadcasting anti age discrimination message, the act of replacing the older female lead with a young lead is, ironically, an act of age discrimination. Japanese gender and media studies scholar Saito Shinichi maintains that by featuring women mostly in their 20s, television dramas help to shape the idea that youth is of significant value, which might, in turn, strengthen traditional gender expectations (Saito 512). Nevertheless, the show places workplace harassment issues in the limelight, an issue that is rarely discussed on an entertainment based medium – television.

The plotline centers around the female protagonist Yoshii Emiri (played by Takei Emi). Emiri begins work at a general trading company, and hopes to become an executive one day.
Unlike in the U.S., new employees do not apply for the jobs they want, but are sent to different departments decided by the management. Instead of the textile department where Emiri wishes to enter, she is sent to the general affairs department. The general affairs department’s work entails low level jobs such as changing light bulbs, ordering business cards, and other maintenance work. Nonetheless, she decides to stay in the company and work hard to pay off her father’s debt, whose farm is in jeopardy due to mismanagement.

Emiri then finds herself entrapped in complex office politics. Her boss Oosawa Yuriko (played by Inamori Izumi), also female, used to work for the textile department. She is transferred to the general affair department after giving birth. Yuriko is dissatisfied with her own situation. She also starts to resent Emiri when she discovers that her former coworker and current lover, Hoshina Akihiko (played by Koizumi Kotaro), has expressed interest in dating Emiri.

Meanwhile, the male employees enjoy working with Emiri, because they need an attractive woman for matters like entertaining clients while offering her no serious work. Emiri, who appears popular among the male employees, soon becomes an outcast among the senior female employees.

Tired of unfair treatment from both male and female peers, Emiri decides to take actions to fight for herself.

The show is divided into nine parts. Each episode ends with Emiri’s signature angry outburst about a certain type of workplace harassment. Emiri’s outbursts and reflective thoughts at the end of each episode serve as the moral lesson of that episode. The show also features men and women of different ages and titles to illustrate the hierarchy of workplace politics, which thus exposes the hypocrisy of the corporation.
4.2. *Anti-wa themed Female Oriented Workplace Dramas*

Remarkably, these female oriented workplace dramas are not products of *wa*, or at least not in the beginning. They actively challenge *wa* to highlight the values of Western feminism in their discussions of gender, which of course leads to numerous controversies. Uchideta, the writer of *Age Harassment*, states in an interview that writing for this show was difficult due to the polarized public opinion, in that some found feminist content relatable and others see it as too distant from reality (Oricon Style Online). Indeed, although Saito maintains that television’s main function is social control, stability, and maintenance of the status quo, these television dramas skew this function and prompt polarized public opinions.

I will argue, however, these television dramas, despite progressive portrayal of Western feminist ideals, revert back to the concept of *wa* through their *wa* oriented narrative pattern. Consequently, I propose three hypotheses:

1. These television dramas feature anti-*wa* themes, more specifically western feminist ideas, to address gender discrimination in the workplace;

2. The *wa* oriented narrative pattern, especially the forced harmonious ending, adopted by female oriented workplace dramas aim to provide a justification for working women to find contentment in their current situation.;

3. The harmonious endings are means to make the anti-*wa* themes palatable for Japanese audiences, yet *wa* oriented narrative pattern only functions as a form of a social control.

Anti-*wa* themes in these programs mainly appear as several Western feminist ideas. Simone de Beauvoir’s women’s liberation and her exploration of motherhood. Furthermore, the feminist interpretation of the double bind. Lastly, the divide between women caused by feminism
is also addressed through the exploration of personal narratives. The following close reading will examine how these Western ideals are portrayed to combat gender discrimination founded on traditional *uchi-soto* models of gender. Ueno maintains that, generally speaking, the power Japanese women obtain through their conventional gendered duties “is not a form of power recognized by non-Asian feminists” (Buckley, Ueno Chizuko 278). I, however, intend to argue that this form of power is no longer valid in a Western-style workplace.

An important observation is that despite these progressive television programs, which feature Western feminism, the aforementioned two television dramas depict a group of women’s struggle for liberation and how they have collaborated to achieve that instead of putting only the protagonist under the limelight, most of them learn to be content with their initially unsatisfactory situation.

**Women’s liberation**

As a means to renegotiate gender roles at work, these two TV shows suggest a new narrative in which women seek treatment at work equal to their male counterparts. The opening narration of *Restaurant*, delivered by the main protagonist of the show, Tamako, illustrates this idea perfectly:

> I want to do good work. I just want to do good work. I want to feel excited. I want to experience a moment that makes my palm sweat and even makes me forget to breath. Life certainly is not about status, fame, or money. I think life is decided by how deeply that person's soul was moved.

This is also the re-occurring thesis throughout the show. Instead of focusing on gender differences, this statement underscores self-actualization through working. Though this monologue is inoffensive, it forms an incongruous contrast with the visual scene, in which the protagonist is taken away in a police vehicle due to a recent arrest. Tamako is arrested because she attacked her former supervisor who has sexually harassed her former female colleague. This
incongruity foreshadows different forms of gender-based discrimination portrayed in the drama, such as sexual harassment at work, discrimination against transgender people, and unreasonable expectation of a housewife.

De Beauvoir maintains that women can only gain true power through women, not through men (de Beauvoir). A scene in the second to the last episode of Age Harassment echoes this idea. The head of the company decides to let Yuriko, the female leader, be the “fall guy” for a mistake made by the company. As punishment, the director decides to promote Hoshina, a young male employee who used to work under Yuriko, because they believe that promoting the incompetent Yuriko will set a bad example for female empowerment. The director explains,

Female staff ought to be shining. We were thinking a woman should be Oosawa's replacement if she fails again, people will say it's because she's a woman. Which is why this crisis management committee consisting of all male employees and we decided we want women to shine. We want this system for women to shine brightly...

The director’s statement constitutes as an irony in contrast with the situation in the meeting room. The board of directors is made of all males, sitting around a giant conference table. The conference table is surrounded by women from the general affair department, in light blue uniforms, whom are serving men drinks. The only woman not in a blue service uniform is the person being blamed, Yuriko. Though Yuriko has been portrayed to be obedient to her supervisors in previous episodes, she eventually confronts the director by rejecting at his comments and shouting, “WE DO NOT WORK TO JUST ‘SHINE!’” She adds,

Men and women are equal. We both work for a living, both for our families and for ourselves. Then why do you keep attaching the word "shining" to women only? Aren't you looking down on us? It's our decision whether we want to be like that or not. It's none of your business! Please stay out of it!

Yuriko’s statement is a political commentary on President Abe Shinzō’s declaration to make a society that makes women shine (Ito Online). The idea that liberation can come only from women echoes de Beauvoir’s ideal that liberation is a women’s work. Yuriko’s outburst receives
acceptance and support from all of the female employees in the room, and the scene ends with the group of women walking out of the room together in a heroic and determined manner.

These dialogues, coming from strong female protagonists, indicate strong Western feminist ideologies, which champion individual actualization rather than collective harmony. This alone is an anti-wa act. Yet the group mentality represented by this group of women tells the story that feminism can only be achieved through a collective effort.

Age Harassment includes storylines that center around conflicts between women, but the fact that the program features end scenes where all women stand together against men implies that women can only achieve liberation when they work together.

Restaurant expresses similar ideas as well. The main protagonist, Tamako, has a strong personality and personal conviction. Her personality stands out in comparison with her male counterpart, Monji Makoto (played by Higashide Masahiro) who is the chef of “Symphonic” – the rival restaurant. Makoto is portrayed as cold and disinterested in things other than his work. In episode 6, Makoto is present during a fight, which takes place in “Symphonic,” between women from “Bistro Foo” and managers of “Symphonic.” Though knowing that a fight is happening, Makoto chooses to listen to music while focusing on perfecting his dish. Tamako, stunned by his indifference, displays her objection towards Makoto’s apathy through a story of the “umbrella thief.” Tamako says,

There are vinyl umbrellas in the umbrella stand. First, an umbrella thief comes along and takes one of those umbrellas and leaves. After that, another person comes, and leaves with an umbrella. But that's not that person's umbrella, since that person's umbrella was already stolen. The next person who comes along also takes someone else's umbrella without realizing it. The next person and the person after that also take someone else's umbrella and leaves. Until finally, there's no more umbrella left for the last person. Despite bringing an umbrella, the last person has to go home getting soaked in the rain. I think that the second and third person who came along, although not intentionally, are umbrella thieves as well. I won't say they're responsible. I won't say they should apologize. But they should
have verified whether that umbrella was really theirs. They should've thought about the person who went home soaked in the rain.

Seeming to understand the story Tamako is telling, Makoto asks,

Are you trying to say that I'm the second or third umbrella thief?
Tamako replies,

It's not only you. We all are. Me too.

Through this interaction with Tamako, Makoto becomes aware that his indifferent attitude actually has an obstructive impact on gender equality. This story also directly addresses the male audience of the show, making a clear statement that women’s liberation is also men’s work. This interaction between Makoto and Tamako quietly hums the melody of *wa*. It brings the anti-*wa* theme back to *wa* by establishing the need for men’s involvement in gender equality. This, again, rings the significance of *wa* in a collective.

**Motherhood**

The power that comes with being a mother in a household is common in Japan. Does this form of power, however, remain valid in another family like environment, such as the workplace? Dorinne Kondo’s ethnography rejects this notion, as women who perform solely the role of mother in the workplace, thereby limit their development as a worker (293). Indeed, although being a financially independent woman seems to become a marker for liberation, it drives a wedge between working women and fulltime housewives. In any case, regardless of a woman being a housewife, a career woman, or both, they are bound to play the nurturing role.

Both *Age Harassment* and *Restaurant* examine a divide between working women and fulltime housewives. This wedge can also be interpreted as a tension between women who value individual freedom and those who value collective harmony. This tension generates several discussions about what it means to be a mother in *Restaurant*. In *Restaurant*, there are two major
maternal roles, Tamako as the surrogate mother of all female characters and Kyōko as the recently-divorced mother.

Kyōko seeks out Tamako for shelter and temporary employment after her divorce because she wants to be financially responsible for her child. Knowing Tamako is struggling financially with her restaurant, Kyōko offers her savings to help. Tamako and others, however, kindly refuse the gift, since Kyōko has to use that money to take care of her son. Kyōko, however, misunderstands their refusal as a questioning about the ownership of her money. She claims that she made the money on her own, and she thinks others are treating her like a useless housewife. This interaction reveals the deep misunderstanding between career women and fulltime housewives, regarding the choices they make. Moreover, Kyōko often makes commentaries about how working women must look down on fulltime housewives. Kyōko, in a lot of senses, represents the traditional housewife and mother. Tamako, though has no family of her own, can also be considered as a maternal figure but in a different way. Tamako is an interesting character in the sense that she is both the champion and caretaker of other members of the restaurant. She has the image of a tough and nurturing mother who knows how to cheer one up as well as fight against one’s bullies. Accordingly, Tamako is the nurturer of others, or in other words, a mother on a bigger and generalized scale.

This forms an interesting contrast between the two maternal figures. The misunderstanding mentioned earlier is resolved by Tamako, acting as Kyōko’s surrogate maternal figure, helping Kyōko confront her husband about his traditional gender expectations. Through a both literal and figurative negotiation on traditional housewife duties, Restaurant attempts to refine womanhood.

The third episode of Restaurant centers around Kyōko and her fight for custody of her child. There is a scene depicting Kyōko, accompanied by Tamako, confronting her ex-husband in
a café. As the mediator, Tamako keeps a cool and stern demeanor throughout the conversation, while making direct eye contact with Kyōko’s ex-husband. Kyōko, however, seems to be intimidated by her ex-husband’s presence.

Kyōko’s ex-husband explains that an imbalance in their marriage is the reason for the divorce. This imbalance is caused by Kyōko’s failure to perform as a housewife. This is a commentary about division of labor in a domestic environment. Since the ex-husband is the breadwinner, he expects Kyōko to do what he thinks is appropriate and required for a housewife. He makes several remarks to demonstrate Kyōko’s incompetence as a housewife, and doubting that her ability to raise their son, Hiromu, on her own. The ex-husband’s reference of a good mother is his mother, who he believes is mistreated by Kyōko. He describes to Tamako how Kyōko is by stating that,

This one here was terrible. Not to mention her cooking and housekeeping skills. Let her do housework, and she loses my important documents. Laundry and ironing take twice as long as normal people. It takes her 30 minutes to make appetizers to go with my evening drink. I sit down at the table because she says dinner’s ready, but she keeps me waiting for another 10 minutes.

But again, the biggest problem Kyōko has, according to him, is that she mistreats his mother. The ex-husband compares Kyōko with his mother by telling the hardship she had gone through. At this point, Kyōko is filled with guilt and shame, because she knows she is not the wife her husband expects.

This conversation illustrates two important aspects of traditional domestic gendered duties. The first is that housewife’s work often goes under recognized by men. The second is that domestic duties are assumed to be easier work compared with men’s jobs. These two assertions pose the question: what do women get from doing *uchi*-related work? The answer is the happiness of having a good family. Iwao Sumiko maintains that, “Japanese women consider their own happiness to be closely tied to that of their families. It is common practice to forgo personal fulfillment and desire
for the sake of nurturing and maintaining the harmony and happiness of the group that is so highly prized” (10). Consequently, the very thought of associating a mother’s job with money is unnatural and unthinkable. As Kyōko’s ex-husband explains,

My mother got married when she was 18. My father was hard-headed, so he made her do things like put on his socks and change into his pajamas. My mother did everything. She woke up before him, and went to bed after him. It was nothing special. When my father's company went out of business, my mother went out to work part-time. When my father became bedridden, my mother took care of him without even sparing time to sleep. My father died, and I got a job. Just when we were talking about taking a trip together, my mother fell ill too. My mother dedicated her life to my father and me. That's something that can't be converted to money. That was unconditional love.

Ironically, Kyōko’s ex-husband does not realize that what he is doing to Kyōko is the same thing his father once inflicted upon his mother. By honoring his mother for enduring the pain of abuse, he attributes forgiveness as a virtue of women.

After hearing the story, Kyōko finally expresses her opinion of this story, which is told by her husband repeatedly.

I think the story about your mother is very heartwarming. But heartwarming stories sometimes kill people, you know. It's hard for someone like me to understand how your mother felt. Perhaps it was a heartwarming story, just as you said. But, you know, as soon as you push it down someone's throat, it's no longer a heartwarming story. The story about a wife who devotes her whole life to her husband was nothing more than a curse to me!

Kyōko’s reflection here is a criticism of tradition. After all, traditions are passed on in the form of stories. Stories that portray housewives as martyrs is a form of social control. They urge women not to complain about their situation because their hard work will one day be rewarded by their children. The word “curse” here resonates with de Beauvoir’s “curse”:

The curse which lies upon marriage is that too often the individuals are joined in their weakness rather than in their strength, each asking from the other instead of finding pleasure in giving. It is even more deceptive to dream of gaining through the child a plenitude, a warmth, a value, which one is unable to create for oneself; the child brings joy only to the woman who is capable of disinterestedly desiring the happiness of another, to one who without being wrapped up in self seeks to transcend her own existence.
This challenges the idea of motherhood and questions its associated power. Yet the relationship between Kyōko and Tamako highlights both Japanese feminism, which values women’s power through their relations to the group, and Western feminism, which advocates individual freedom. Furthermore, these shows seem to campaign Western feminism, rather than collective harmony by Kyōko and Tamako challenging traditional expectations for housewives. Interestingly, Kyōko’s liberation from her husband is only made possible by another nurturing maternal figure – Tamako. Through the dynamic of the two maternal figures, the show seems to encourage the women’s nurturing quality.

These depictions of motherhood imply that while traditional ideals of women are harmful, being nurturing towards others, like a mother, is a key to gender equality. Again, this is a case of Western feminism made Japanese.

**The Divide between Women and The Double Bind**

In 1956, anthropologist Gregory Bateson, along with his colleagues, introduced the idea of the double bind (Bateson, Jackson and Haley 251). The basic definition of the double bind is that the subject receives two contradictory messages and will be punished if she fails to fulfill either one of the expectation. This idea is explored by feminists such as Kathleen Hall Jamieson in her book, beyond the double bind: women and leadership. Some of the manifestations of double binds are “women who speak out are immodest and will be shamed, while women are silent will be ignored or dismissed,” and “women who are considered feminine will be judged incompetent, and women who are competent, unfeminine” (Jamieson 16).

Episode five of Restaurant centers around the stereotypically “girly” character – Airi. Airi is called “the ear” because others observe that whenever she targets a man, she tugs her hair behind her ear. This episode addresses the fact that she is constantly sexually harassed at work, yet she
chooses to stay quiet. The following scene takes place after she is sexually harassed by a drunk man on the street. Tamako, accidentally witnesses what happens to Airi, decides to take her back to the restaurant, which is symbolized as a sanctuary for women.

After being taken back to the restaurant, Airi decides to show her gratitude by revealing the “secret that can help them to win the competition.” Airi suggests that since every member in the restaurant is female, everyone should wear swimsuits at work so to attract more customers. Of course, everyone silently rejects Airi’s suggestion, which Airi finds condescending. She says,

Why don't you all wear swimsuits? I always wear a swimsuit inside. I won't say anything even if someone touches my butt. I graduated from a training school that taught me to feel nothing when someone touches my butt. Even when someone tells me, "Men don't like that kind of clothes," I graduated from a training school that taught me to respond, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'll be more careful." I also went to a training school that taught me to smile and play dumb when someone says "Lose weight" or "Let me have a piece." My wallet is stuffed with certificates. If you get groped by a pervert, it's my fault for wearing a skirt. Refusing an invitation for dinner from a man you don't like is a no-no because you'd look like a snotty delusional woman. If you get sexually harassed, that person only wanted a sense of warmth, so let's forgive him. He didn't mean any harm so letting it go and accepting it is the right thing to do. Do you know why Shizuka-chan (character in Doraemon) is always friends with a loser guy, a cocky rich guy, and a guy who gets violent? Do you know why she doesn't stay angry for long even when someone takes a peek when she's taking a bath? Do you know why she doesn't have any girl friends? I think she must have a lot of certificates too. Women who live smart and strong aren't bothered, forgive, and accept.

Airi’s monologue illustrates an interesting concept that feminism drives a divide between women. Similar to the idea of the double bind, contemporary women’s behaviors are judged by other women. On the one hand, women are encouraged to be more independent and say no to situations, in which they do not feel comfortable. On the other hand, women are judged by other women for being too independent, because independence can be seen as a sign of selfishness. Airi’s annoyance towards the other women in the restaurant rings true what Iwao maintains about sexual harassment:

If Japanese women suffer discriminatory treatment, they become annoyed and voice complaints, but as long as other women are subject to the same discriminatory treatment,
they are likely to accept the situation and be unlikely to move to combat it, having little desire to disrupt the harmony of the workplace (Iwao 166).

To Airi, Tamako and others are disrupting *wa* because they refuse to get the “certificate” of tolerating sexism for the sake of group harmony. To others, Airi’s behavior perpetuates gender based discrimination. Again, this double bind is solved by Tamako’s nurturing and forgiving nature. Airi is comforted by Tamako, who insists that she needs to stop letting men do whatever they want to her body. Tamako says:

You cannot let them touch you. Your body, including your hair, breasts, and butt belong to you alone. You cannot let anyone who you don’t like to touch your body. Here, here, and here (Tamako pointing to different parts of Airi’s body) are connected to your heart, they are yours and only yours. You cannot let anyone you don’t like to touch you. People who say “don’t worry about being touched” to you, they are trying to kill your heart.

“*Heart*” here symbolizes a woman’s independence and her autonomy over her own body.

This interesting exchange about sexual harassment between the two characters shows that women need to understand each other to stop sexism. The concept of *wa* is presented here through the mutual understanding between the female characters. Tamako again, acts as a surrogate mother, mends the divide between women by cultivating a harmonious environment for Airi.

4.3. *Chapter Conclusion: Harmonious Resolution*

Even though *Restaurant* and *Age Harassment* tackle sexism in the workplace and heavily campaign for Western feminist ideals, they all return to the concept of *wa* through their treatment of controversial topics. The return to *wa* becomes most pronounced by the end of plot development. I argue that the harmonious resolution at the end constructs a *wa* narrative pattern, which is in sharp contrast to the controversial topic that it covers.

For instance, there is an angry outburst in *Age Harassment* that takes place in the penultimate episode, but what happens at the finale? There, Akihiko, who is at the center of the love triangle between Emiri and her former boss Yuriko, proposes to Emiri. This form of resolution
is common in television dramas that feature working women (Darlington 31). Emiri, despite traditional expectations, refuses Akihiko’s proposal. Here is the conversation between the two,

Akihiko: So why do you refuse?
Emiri: When I see you being so passionate about the company, I realized something on my own too. I don't want to marry someone great as you. I joined this firm to do great things like you.
Akihiko: That's the best answer.
Emiri: I'll become the General Affair female warrior (literal translation: “female strong individual”).
Akihiko: Female warrior?
Emiri: I read it in a magazine when I visited a beauty salon. In China, a beautiful and strong career woman is called a warrior. It's a much cooler name than "Career woman". I was touched.
Akihiko: General affairs warrior, huh... My proposal was declined and yet I'm happy.
Emiri: In order to become the Female Warrior of Teitou Trading, I have to work a lot.
Akihiko: You've already become one.

This conversation underscores Emiri’s desire to be treated equal to her male counterparts.

Emiri uses a Chinese phrase 女強人, which literally means “female strong individual,” to describe her aspiration to become a working woman. This phrase originates from China, but it is often used, along with the phrase 剩女 (leftover women), as a pejorative term to describe working women, implying that they are intimidating, selfish, and unsuitable for marriage (Hong Fincher 14). Ironically Age Harassment seems to not understand the pejorative layer of meaning.

Despite the fact that Age Harassment displays a strong understanding of Western feminist ideals, especially those of Simone de Beauvoir, it fails to comprehend that the term “female strong individual” contradicts the concept of female empowerment. 強人 (“strong individual”) is a
gender natural term, but using 女 (“female”) to modify the phrase only underscores how outside-the-norm it is for a woman to be considered 强 (“strong”).

This irony becomes absurd when Emiri decides to become a strong person by staying at her current position, where she has witnessed sexism. At the end of the show, Emiri, who resents how the company treats women, decides to stay in her current department – the department of general affairs. The last scene depicts Emiri running towards the end of a hallway, implying that she is working hard towards becoming a capable worker.

Nevertheless, Emiri’s decision to stay at her position as a support for the company resonates with housewives in Japanese home dramas in the 50s and 60s who choose to go back home after a separation from their husbands.

Restaurant is similar in its ending’s message. The ending weakens the female rebellion by establishing women’s fragility in the face of bureaucracy. The restaurant, which is located on the rooftop, is shut down for a safety violation. The reason for closure is because a fork is dropped to the group from the top of building. The reason seems lazy and weak as a plot device.

Knowing that the restaurant will be forced to close the next day, women of the Bistro Foo are determined to make the last the best day of working. On the last night the girls decide to stay in the apartment under their roof-top restaurant, drink and talk about everything: work, dreams, stress, and boys. One after another falls asleep, and Tamako is the last one to go. Before drifting into dreamland, Tamako whispers “we did great work today,” which resonates with her opening monologue.

In Tamako’s dream, she is working as a hostess in the opposing restaurant, Symphonic. The sequential shots show women from Bistro Foo and men from Symphonic working together.
The company head, who is the main male antagonist, comes into the restaurant to check up on his employees who are all working together harmoniously. Tamako’s dream implies the desire for harmony without making it explicit. Tamako’s dream again resonates with her opening monologue:

I want to do good work. I just want to do good work. I want to feel excited. To be held breathless by the thrill, I want to encounter a moment like that. Life probably isn't about status or prestige. I think life is decided by how deeply that person's soul was moved.

The monologue focuses on work rather than gender. The contraction between the dream and the reality shows that the show makers value harmony over confrontation, group-actualization over self-actualization.

These endings pull the Western feminist ideals portrayed earlier back to the realm of wa. Therefore, how strong are these television dramas in terms of changing the situation for working women if they all employ harmonious resolution at the end? And how many television dramas feature a wa oriented narrative pattern? The next chapter will explore the effective of such endings through television dramas of the same theme.
Chapter 5: Wa and Television

5.1 Women Who Stayed: Working Women Find Contentment in Their Workplace

In this chapter, I will demonstrate the wa themed endings as well as the wa oriented narrative pattern in six television drama series that tackle sexism in the workplace. Based on Hilaria M. Gössmann’s study on television dramas, I conduct a qualitative content analysis of six television dramas.

Gössmann conducted a content analysis on twelve renzoku (“serial”) television dramas that are centered on married couples between 1992 and 1995 (213). Her findings suggest that most housewives portrayed on television in the 1990s are often not satisfied with their marriage. The image of unhappy housewives forms a sharp contrast to those portrayed in the 1950s and 1960s (Gössmann 215). Not only the themes are unconventional to the wa traditions, Gössmann also find that some of these unhappy women refuse to play the nurturing role.

Though there is a significant increase in televised representation of married women with jobs outside, women are still shown as the caretaker of the family, and some of them even give up their jobs for the sake of family (Gössmann 215). Gössmann maintains that “the message here seems to be that the professional career of a married woman is acceptable as long as it does not interfere with her family duties” (215). In short, narratives of these dramas seem to display an ambivalent attitude towards women’s role as uchi. On the one hand, they suggest that women should leave their marriage if they do not feel happy. On the other hand, these dramas draw the line on women’s maternal and nurturing figures as non-negotiable.

As stated in the end of chapter 4, working women who choose to stay at a company that has mistreated them represent the same implications and assumptions as those unhappy married housewives who choose to stay with their husbands. The underlying message here is that women
should learn to be content with their assigned roles, and even if they cannot find contentment, they should still make the best of it.

To further the analysis and discussion of harmonious resolutions, I will examine six renzoku dramas that depict working women in a conventional workplace. All programs aired between 2007 and 2016 on nationwide commercial networks (Fuji TV, TV Asahi, TBS, NTV, and TV Tokyo) during primetime.

As discussed in chapter 3, television dramas of the legal, medical, and detective genre featuring a female lead are common, however, they are distant from reality, since the majority of working women work in an office building. Furthermore, unlike lawyers, doctors, teachers, and detectives, those who choose white collar professions often cannot choose their role in the company. Rather, their position is assigned. For this reason, it is easy to show a protagonist’s discontentment, since her power and freedom to choose are taken away at the beginning. Nevertheless, this is a common plotline for workplace drama.

Of course, the same is true of men, especially at the entry level and lower levels for seniority dictates one’s position in the company hierarchy (Painter 50). Male-oriented workplace drama series employ the same narrative pattern by depicting men combating evil or struggling to climb the corporate ladder (Satake 142). Nevertheless, this is a common plotline for workplace drama. This pattern is only later adapted with female protagonists since women are previously presented with issues other than just climbing the corporate ladder (Satake 142). This is especially because of that though both men and women are ranked according to seniority, women have to “juggle two kinds of subordination, whereas men have to only deal with one” (Painter 50). Consequently, this analysis only focuses on dramas that take place in a conventional workplace.
Moreover, also as I have discussed in chapter 3, most female oriented workplace drama series women focus more on their romantic endeavors than their actual work. That said, programs such as *Working Man* (2007) and *Chief Natsuko Kira* (2016) have a more balanced portrayal between family and work.

Regardless, for a focused analysis, I will only examine dramas that employ work-related issues as plot devices. More specifically, television drama such as *Date ~ What is Love ~* (*Date ~ Koi to wa Donna Mono Kashira~*) (Fuji TV 2015), which depicts a career woman, but the plot is only pushed forward through her romantic relationships. In this case, *Date* is not considered for this study. I choose to emphasize women’s relationship with their workplaces. Through analyzing these women’s choice to stay at their positions, I aim to reveal the underlying narrative pattern that teaches happiness for women in the workplace.

The findings indicate a common narrative pattern, where the protagonist finds herself in an unfriendly work environment, then through angry outbursts and forgiveness, she is able to find harmony in her workplace.

Dramas 1 and 2 as shown in Table 1.1 are of the earliest portrayals of working women that are not solely centered around their romantic relationships. Unlike their predecessors, such as dramas 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the same table, the subject of sexual discrimination/harassment is not made explicit, though it is heavily implicated. For example, the protagonist of *Working Man (Hataraki Man)*, Matsukata Hiroko (played by Kanno Miho), expresses her desire to live her life as both a man and woman through her monologue that emphasizes the statement, “although I want to work like a man, I want to be a woman.” Her monologue sheds light on the dilemma of contemporary working women, in which they want to exercise self-actualization while wishing to be in love and/or married. There are several occasions, for instance, where Hiroko is teased by her male
colleagues for being “non-marriage material.” These comments constitute as sexual harassment but are not taken seriously in the drama. Nevertheless, Hiroko is portrayed an independent and ambitious journalist working for a magazine called “Jidai” (“time” or “era” in Japanese). The audience is constantly reminded of her dream of become a editor-in-chief before she turns 30 (Darlington 32). As a capable worker, Hiroko is sought after by another magazine called “Speak.” Speak offers Hiroko the position of the deputy editor-in-chief, which is Hiroko’s personal goal. When Hiroko is about to walk into the interview for the position in the new company, she receives a call from Jidai. Instead of taking the interview, Hiroko runs to help with a time-sensitive news story for her Jidai. After successfully completing the task that saves Jidai, Hiroko returns to her old position where she announces that she has changed her dream from “becoming an editor-in-chief” to making “Jidai as big as Speak.” Her new goal marks the transformation from self-actualization to group-actualization, a marker for happiness for Japanese women as discussed in chapter 2. The message here is that a successful career woman is both a good worker and a protector of wa in the workplace.

Drama 2, *The Pride of the Temp (Haken no Hingaku)*, also features a similar moral lesson. Unlike the other programs in Table 1.1, the protagonist of *Haken no Hingaku* is not a full-time employee but a part-time worker. Part-time workers, sent by the temp agencies, are often tasked with miniscule and time consuming work that are left by the full-time employees. Because part-time workers, or *haken*, are excluded from the mainstream worker’s union, they are easily subject to discrimination and mistreatment (Mackie 186). For instance, part-time workers are expected to perform administrative and miscellaneous work on top of their actual assignments. Discrimination against part-time workers is even more pronounced for female workers. A survey conducted by
the Japanese Health Welfare and Labor ministry shows that 48.7 percent of part-time female workers reported to have encountered sexual discrimination and verbal abuse (McCurry Online).

*The Pride of the Temp* reflects these issues through the two female part-time workers. Ōmae Haruko (played by Shinohara Ryoko) is a strong willed temp, her hourly rate is higher than a lot of full-time employees because she is known to be extremely capable. Haruko becomes the role model of her fellow temp, Mori Miyuki (played by Kato Ai). Miyuki realizes she is not as capable as Haruko, so she takes on miscellaneous tasks to ensure her job security. Haruko, in contrast, plays by her own rules and refuses to do any work that is outside her job description, which is somewhat an unrealistic portrayal of a temp’s work. Though Haruko performs impeccably at work, she is frequently questioned and harassed by her supervisors, especially by Shouji Takeshi (played by Oizumi Yo). Instead of further the discussion on gender discrimination between Haruko and Takeshi, the show romantically links these two characters. They are able to gain understanding and respect of each other’s work through their romantic linkage.

By the end, Haruko forms deeper ties with her coworkers whereas Miyuki becomes more capable at her job. Miyuki passes her test and is on her way to become a full time employee. Haruko, instead, stays as a temp but comes back to the company in order to help Takeshi to achieve his dream of wining the “President Award.” Though both temps face discrimination based on their work status and their gender, they choose to stay in the company.

The drama’s constant comparison between Haruko and Miyuki seems to propose a midpoint between the two female workers. Haruko is too concerned with self-actualization, so she is written to become more like Miyuki, as demonstrated through her return to the company to help Takeshi achieve his dream. Miyuki lacks the skills to be considered as a good worker, so she is written to be more like Haruko while not losing her virtue as a good supporter in the company.
The Pride of the Temp appears to suggest an ideal working woman, who is both caring and capable, an expectation that is rarely placed on men.

Furthermore, the only thing the show asks for men is to be understanding and respectful towards women. The reward of such behavior, implied through Takeshi, is women’s romantic interest and support.

As I stated earlier in chapter 4.1, workplace drama has a common narrative pattern. All protagonist of dramas 3, 4, 5, and 6 in Table 1.1 are assigned to a department that is initially against their aspirations. The narrative patterns of Hanasaki Mai Speaks Out (Hanasaki Mai ga Damattenai No 3), Age Harassment (No 4), and Pretty Proofreader (Jimi ni Sugoi!～Kouetsu Girl Kouno Etsuko No 5) are exceedingly similar. Three heroines all express intentions to work in a specific department, but are assigned with uchi-related tasks. These miscellaneous tasks are often maintenance or quality control related, a more of behind-the-scene type of role, which is in contrast to more glamorous tasks to which the protagonists initially aspired. For instance, instead of editor, the protagonist is assigned to be a proofreader in No 5; instead of the textile department, the protagonist is appointed to perform administrative or general affairs work in No 3; and instead of working at sales, the protagonist is assigned to work for the internal investigative unit in No 4. These portrayals encapsulate one essential Japanese work ethic namely, that any small or even invisible job is critical to the integrity of a company. This is idea is even crystalized in the Japanese title of Pretty Proofreader, Jimi ni Sugoi!～Kouetsu Girl Kouno Etsuko, in which Jimi ni Sugoi translates as “plainly amazing.” Assigning women with jobs that ensures internal function of the company, these programs imply that these uchi-related tasks are fit for women.

From a uchi/soto perspective, there are two types of jobs in a Japanese company: one that deals with external matters or soto, including interacting with clients and competitors, and one that
deals with internal affairs or *uchī*, including HR and general affairs. All three female protagonists request *soto* jobs but are asked to perform *uchī* related tasks. Moreover, all three protagonists face some level of questioning about their capability based on their gender, which constitutes as sexual discrimination or even sexual harassment. Unlike dramas in the 2000s, these three protagonists all fight back against discrimination through a passionate, emotional, and heated monologue about injustice near the end of their narratives.

Despite all of these factors, three protagonists of three different shows all learn to love their current work, and two of them are even offered to work at their initially-desired department, however, they chose to stay by the end of the plot development. Two reasons are offered to explain their stay: the first is that they enjoy the relationship they have cultivated in the environment, or in other words, forms a family like relationship with their coworkers. The second reason is that they are able to find meaning in their seemingly minuscule tasks, although this is often a result of complacency.

The question remains, why stay regardless of these conditions. Iwao Sumiko maintains that “Japanese women seldom evaluate their workplace in terms of only one criterion, such as sexual discrimination” (166). Women are more likely to value the environment of the workplace over the substance of their tasks (Iwao 166). “In other words, sexual discrimination may be something that can be tolerated if the other factors make it worthwhile” (Iwao 167). Iwao’s book was written in 1998, and it seems that television dramas in the 2010s still uphold this observation about working women in the 1990s.

In this regard, I argue that the lesson here seems to be that one should learn to love and find contentment in the jobs that she is assigned.
Drama No 6, Chief Natsuko Kira (Eigyou Buchou Kira Natsuko), not only reverberates the underlying messages of all aforementioned dramas, but also makes a troubling conclusion about a controversial public issue through its ending. The issue here is “maternity harassment” or matahara, which is an abbreviation of the phrase mataniti harasumento (“maternity harassment”). Matahara, also known as pregnancy discrimination, occurs when pregnant women are discriminated due to their pregnancy (McCurry Online).

Matahara takes different forms, and this issue was even depicted in a legal drama titled, Women won’t allow it or Onna wa Sore o Yurusanai (TBS 2014). The first episode of the drama tells the story of a female employee who comes back from her maternal leave but finds herself relocated to a distant office, and the intention of her relocation is her ultimate resignation. The two lawyers, both are female, successfully sue the company on behalf of this woman on the basis of Matahara.

Intriguingly, what happens to the client in Women won’t allow it is exactly what happens to Kira Natsuko (played by Matsushima Nanako) in Chief Natsuko Kira (No 6). Natsuko is transferred to a different department after returning from her maternal leave. When Natsuko confronts her male supervisor regarding her relocation and asks to be transferred back to her old department, Natsuko’s supervisor says, “your promotion is for show.” He adds, “the company made you, who just returned from maternity leave a manager (of a new department), just so that we can promote the company as woman-friendly.” But instead of fighting for her desired position or seeking legal action, Natsuko decides to make the best of her situation by staying at the new department.

By the end of plot development, Natsuko forms a family bond with her subordinates and decides to remain in her assigned position. This family concept is made explicit through the ending.
Natsuko is tormented between family and work, and her time at work makes her domestic responsibilities exceedingly overwhelming. When she is about to quit her job to become a full-time housewife, her coworkers make a video to remind Natsuko that she is an irreplaceable member of the work family. With her family’s approval, Natsuko keeps being a working mother.

Through presenting women working while having a family, *Chief Natsuko Kira* takes a progressive and feminist approach to working women’s issues. Yet the story of Kira Natsuko seems to express stipulations for a working wife/mother. A successful working woman, like Natsuko, not only has to play the role of *uchì* at home but also at work. Women can do both, but not playing the nurturing role is non-negotiable. This moral lesson is made clear through Natsuko’s transformation of her career goal. At her old job in the advertisement department, she is independent, ambitious, and indifferent towards her subordinates’ feelings. She is a total incarnation of a *wagamama* (selfish) woman as discussed in chapter 2. By the end of the show, Natsuko changes her definition of career success from personal achievement to the survive of her assigned department. This transformation of her personal goal is made clear through her choice at the end where she goes to argue with the board of directors about her department instead of presenting at a commercial bidding event. Natsuko at the end is compassionate, empathetic, and responsible for all her colleagues, she acts as a nurturing and protective surrogate mother. Natsuko is portrayed to be a sales manager, whose main responsibilities are *soto* in nature, which include making deals and signing contracts. Yet even as a manager, Natsuko is required to be the protector of *wa* in the workplace.

In conclusion, dramas in the 2000s explore women’s struggles to balance work and love, whereas dramas in the 2010s are more focused on their self-actualization through work. That said, women’s roles in the realm of *uchì*, as the nurturer of *wa*, are still non-negotiable in these narratives.
All the female protagonists, through their role as the nurturers, cultivate a family-like structure at work. This narrative pattern constructs a dual standard for working women: not only do they have to be good at their jobs, but they also have to protect *wa* in the workplace – even if it is against their personal interest. The number one sin in a collective society is to prioritize self over the group, and it is even more heinous when a woman does so. The harmonious ending of female oriented workplace dramas raises questions about the capacity of these narratives to combat sexism in the workplace.

Are these narratives actually beneficial for encouraging women to join the workforce? Of course, this is a complex question with many factors needing to be considered. As discussed earlier, the structure of the Japanese workplace is tough for both women and men. Though working women might face the “double shift” at home and at work. They can opt out by becoming a fulltime housewife. As Iwao stated, maybe women simply do not want to shoulder the same responsibility at work as their male counterparts (191). To women, happiness might be easily achieved through their family than work. But for those who wish to find fulfillment through their career, can they find solutions or encouragement from these narratives?

5.2. *Secret Formula to Lucrative Television Drama Series*

Besides the television dramas examined in the previous section, a considerable number of Japanese television dramas achieves massive success by featuring strong working females. As discussed in Chapter 3, series like *Doctor X*, which tells the story of a female surgeon, has four seasons and a *TV Special* (single-episode program). The average viewership for *Doctor X* is 21.70%, and is a staple of TV Asahi’s television drama series. Also a staple of TV Asahi, a series titled *Female Forensic Scientist (Kasōken no Onna)* has six seasons and two *TV Specials*. The remarkable achievements made by these television dramas with a female lead prove to be as
progressive as they are lucrative. The lucrative nature of female oriented workplace drama encourages productions of similar narrative with familiar faces. For instance, Kanno Miho, who portrayed the main protagonist in Working Man, is cast as an independent working woman in The Woman Who Never Compromises (NTV 2010) and then again in Wonderful Single Life (NTV 2012). Not only actors, but also writers and producers of popular television dramas often participate in similar programs with similar messages, but this is especially true for actors.

Actors are referred as tarento in Japanese, which is a Japanized English word for “talent.” For consistency, tarento often have a defining characteristic and coherent message they publicly uphold. Tarento’s characteristics are branded. The on-screen personalities of public figures forbid them from expressing different personalities as Walter Benjamin maintains that an actor is subjected to a series of optical tests and, therefore, given a fixed on-screen persona (Benjamin 228). Tarento are exploited by the culture industry and exposed to the audience through programs not just television dramas but also variety shows to enhance their on-screen personalities. Tarento’s exposure to viewers’ constant gaze adds the convincing element to the narrative in television dramas (Lukács 46). For instance, actors who play strong willed women are often cast in similar roles.

Amami Yūki is a former Takazura Revue (an all-female musical theater troupe) stage actor turned television and film actor. Because Amami was casted in male roles in her time in Takazura Revue, she is often cast as the strong female lead in television series. For example, Amami played a chief detective in Boss (Fuji TV 2009) and its second season Boss 2 (Fuji TV 2011). Moreover, because Amami is single in real life, she is often cast in the same role – an aging single career woman who is constantly contemplating her happiness. Amami plays a 39-year-old single woman who is trying to find happiness in being single in Around 40 (TBS 2008), a single woman in her
40s who is trying to feel happy with being unmarried in *Wonderful Single Life* (Fuji TV 2012), and again as a 45-year-old single woman who fakes a marriage with a gay man to help him with his mother’s dying wish in *Fake Couple* (*Gisō no Fūfu*, NTV 2015). These television dramas feature similar characters with similar topics, in attempt to illustrate modern women’s issues with happiness. As long as women’s quest for happiness is not over, television drama series about women’s search for happiness will continue to exist.

As discussed in chapter 3, scholars such as Hu, Darlington, and Gössmann find that Japanese television drama series have a unique formula to encourage women to think about happiness. Also as seen in the timeline I constructed in chapter 3, television dramas in the 1950s to 1980s are mainly concerned with women’s relationships to family, since their happiness is defined by their family. The 1980s and 1990s see the rise of working women being portrayed on the small screen as women who are trying to find happiness through self-actualization at work. This trend of depicting working women progressed into the twenty-first century, yet they still focus on women’s romantic relationships. The reason is that many producers worry realistic portrayals of workplace will antagonize viewers who only wish to watch entertaining content after a long day of work (Lukács 156).

Moving into the 2010s, more and more dramas are featuring workplace sexism. These programs note sexual discrimination as the main issue while championing public support and understanding for working women. These programs are produced as a means ensure women’s path to happiness through their career. Considering the fact that there are more television dramas produced in the 2010s (such as dramas 3,4,5 in Table 1.1) than the 2000s (such as dramas 1 and 2 in Table 1.1), workplace television dramas featuring female leads in the 2010s have lower rating (yield around 10% average viewership) than those in the 2000s (yield around 20% average...
viewership) is understandable. When, however, compared to male oriented workplace drama, aired in the same decade, such as *Hanzawa Naoki* (TBS 2013) that has an average rating of 29.07%, workplace drama featuring female lead are not well received. The question remains: what is the reason for the mediocre reception?

Since the 1980s, young Japanese women have become the most sought-after television consumer cohort, and the growing number of unmarried woman has produced a “single market” (Lukács 129-30). To cater to this market, attempts like *Age Harassment* (TV Asahi 2015) aim to provide solutions for young women who are doubting their career pursuit. These women often find the bureaucratic and hieratical working environment intimidating and fighting for sexism at work seem to be a troublesome and difficult task. The solution advocated by these female oriented workplace dramas seems to be an angry outburst followed by complete compliance.

I found that protagonists in dramas 3, 4, 5, and 6 in Table 1.1 show at least one angry outburst is carried out by the protagonist by the end of narrative. *Age Harassment’s* protagonist, Emiri, even has outbursts about unfairness or sexism at work per episode. Though decidedly unrealistic, these outbursts symbolize a realization of freedom because they challenge the patriarchal system. By this logic, a show like *Age Harassment* should be more popular than it actually is, especially when it is compared with similar shows in the same genre, such as *Working Man*.

So what went wrong? why are these television dramas not as popular as they should have been based on how important and popular the subject, with which they are concerned? Figure 1.6 shows a decline in viewership in female oriented workplace dramas that tackle sexism in the workplace.
Lukács maintains that workplace dramas mobilize “against hierarchical and highly bureaucratic institutional structures,” meanwhile granting the consumer a sense of agency (Lukács 162). The sense of agency, as far as Lukács concerns, only exist on an individual level. Through projecting their own struggles onto the television protagonist, the audience would reach some level of actualization since the protagonist perseveres by changing herself.

What remains the same from the beginning to the end is the corporation, which is treated as the ultimate evil at the beginning. The contrast between the transformation of a protagonist and the bureaucratic inertia of the corporation suggests that the responsibility of equality belongs to the individual not the corporation. This underlying message further strengthens wa through prioritizing the group over the self.

Translating this message into feminism, it aligns exactly with what Iwao has discovered, “head-on confrontation can be so ugly that it prevents constructive progress toward a solution” (Iwao 15). Head-on confrontation is quick yet ineffective in Japan because it values self over group whereas slow and patient protest is slow yet effective for it abides the ideal of wa. The solutions to combating sexism at work, which these television dramas seem to suggest, are too far from reality. Angry outbursts at work, even with justified reasons, will most likely result in the loss of one’s job. Television dramas, like Age Harassment, act as quick and easy solutions to the slow progress of gender equality in Japan. Instead of waiting for real changes to take place or fighting for equality, women consume televised solutions as a quick fix to discontentment generated by real problem. Eventually, “consumption is one of the few means that they (young women) have at their disposal to express and realize themselves” (Lukács 128).
Of course there are other possible reasons why television dramas like *Age Harassment* are not as well received as its predecessors such as *Working Man*. An obvious answer could be that female oriented workplace dramas have lost their luster since it is no longer a new topic. Another might be that direct articulation of anti-wa themes in female oriented workplace dramas, such as *Age Harassment*, are too upsetting to the Japanese audience to stay till the end. An additional reason might be that issues such as sexual harassment are uncomfortable so that they are not something people want to watch after a long day of work.

Regardless of the reason, these television dramas provide a fantastical solution to an actual issue. In other words, a consumable solution. If a viewer who is actually experiencing sexism at work watched these dramas, she would feel empowered after watching the episode, but would find herself powerless against sexism the next day at work because she still faces the double bind. A bind between angry protest against her boss at the risk of being fired and seen as selfish and being a team player at the expense of continuous endurance of sexism at work. Moreover, the absence of portrayal of the change of the corporation places the responsibility of gender equality on the individual instead of the institution. This becomes a suppressing agent that forestall women to fight the system for the system is portrayed as immutable.

That said, Japanese feminist Ochiai maintains that the “issue is awareness” (Buckley, Ochiai Keiko 233). If these television dramas are raising the visibility of gender issues, are they not also helping to fight sexism? In a way, there is certain validity to this argument. In January 2017, the Japanese government decided to oblige businesses in Japan to further the prevention of gender based discrimination and harassment – a law that includes specific terms that prohibit *matahara* (The Japan Times Online). As long as issues are visible, there will be efforts made to push changes in the system.
Though it is challenging for this thesis to accurately assess the contribution of workplace television dramas in fighting sexism at work, *wa* oriented narrative pattern, especially the forced harmonious ending, weakens the feminist ideology they are trying to present. The harmonious ending reflects the idea of group-actualization instead of self-actualization. It also reveals the conundrum that Japanese feminism faces: self versus group. Unlike the fictional strong individuals portrayed on television, real women are left stranded between unrealistic (but much needed) angry outburst and realistic (but unproductive) compliance to authority.

That said, the *wa* oriented narrative pattern, as a manifestation of the Japanese culture, is inherently Japanese. *Wa* ensures a group’s functionality and when the group is successful, so is everyone inside the group. It might be hypocritical to assume that the only way for working women to achieve liberation is through what Western feminism embraces, and the nurturing nature is detrimental. Maybe there is nothing wrong with women being nurturing, maybe the requirement is that men should be nurturing as well.
Chapter 6 Conclusion

I started this project because I noticed two Japanese television drama series that tackle sexism in a workplace. They are Age Harassment and A Restaurant with Many Problems. This was surprising to me for two reasons. First reason is that, Japan only ranks the 20th among 49 “very high human development” nations on the Gender Inequality Index in 2015 (Human Development Reports). The ranking suggests that Japanese media is making an actual effort to deal with issues such as sexual harassment. The second reason is that explicit portrayal of social issues, such as sexual harassment, violates the fundamental rule of harmony in Japan. This idea of harmony is also known as wa in Japanese.

Japanese culture is not a culture that values individualism, rather a culture that values harmony of the collective. In this sense, wa is a form of social control, through which individuality is suppressed for the sake of the collective. As discussed in chapter 2, when wa is translated into gender dynamics, women are mostly assigned with the responsibility of uchi and men of soto. When two genders perform exactly what are expected, a level of wa is achieved and both parties gain power through this arrangement. When the group advances, everyone within the group advances as well. The power that women gain through gendered duties yet, as Japanese feminist Ueno Chizuko maintains, “is not a form of power recognized by non-Asian feminists” (Buckley, Ueno Chizuko 278).

But does this form of power still exist in the setting of a workplace? As discussed in chapter 2.2, workplace is also considered as a group dynamic, in which uchi/soto balance must be kept. In the contemporary workplace, women are still expected to perform uchi related jobs, including administrative affairs and customer service, whereas men are associate with soto jobs thanks to the preexisting social norm. I argue that in this setting women lose their power they would have gained
through the division of labor. They are surrogate mothers and wives at work without the power that often come with such role in a family environment. This imbalance becomes sexism when it is left unattended.

I discovered that Japanese television drama is the perfect medium to reflect and influence public understanding of these social changes. To further examine these issues, an archival research is conducted in chapter 3. It reveals an increasing volume of working women is placed under the limelight. In chapter 5, employing a qualitative content analysis, I examined the narrative pattern of six female oriented television dramas that tackle sexism in the workplace.

Through examination of six workplace dramas’ narrative patterns, I argue that these dramas provide improbably but easy solutions to real problems. Iwao has maintained that “head-on confrontation can be so ugly that it prevents constructive progress toward a solution” (Iwao 15). Head-on confrontation is quick yet ineffective in Japan because it values self over group whereas slow and patient protest is slow yet effective for it abides the ideal of wa. The solutions to combating sexism at work, which these television dramas seem to suggest, are too far from reality.

On the one hand, the preservation of wa, as illustrated through Japanese television dramas, might be the biggest obstacle to social progress. On the other hand, Japanese feminist Ochiai maintains that “this issue is awareness” (Buckley, Ochiai Keiko 233). If these television dramas are raising the visibility of these issues, are they not helping to fight sexism? Nevertheless, the wa narrative pattern weakens the feminist issues portrayed in these television dramas. The harmonious ending reflects the idea of group-actualization instead of self-actualization. It also reveals the conundrum that Japanese feminism faces, self versus group. Unlike the fictional strong individuals portrayed on television, real women are left stranded between unrealistic (but much needed) angry outburst and realistic (but unproductive) compliance to authority. Moreover, the absence of
portrayal of the change of the corporation places the responsibility of gender equality on individual instead of the institution. This becomes a suppressing agent that forestall women to fight the system for the system is portrayed as immutable.

As Ōta, a television producer, maintains, a “5cm distance” is kept between reality and onscreen narrative (77). With this regard, how real can a televised solution can be? Female oriented television drama, pull polar opposites to a common ground through forcing a harmonious ending onto a controversial beginning. Consequently, television dramas became a form of social control, only evokes empathy while not offering solution.

That said, the wa oriented narrative pattern, as a manifestation of the Japanese culture, is inherently Japanese and that is not negotiable. It might be hypocritical to assume the only way for working women to achieve liberation is through Western feminism, and the nurturing nature is detrimental. Maybe there is nothing wrong with women being nurturing, maybe the requirement is that men should be nurturing as well.

*Future Studies*

There are certain limitations to this study. Since gender equality is the goal not only of the Japanese society not also for the maintenance of wa, it is necessary to examine the position of men in television narratives. A research on the male oriented narrative pattern is significant for examining whether the aspect of wa is present in the genre. Furthermore, a research on audience reception is significant to understand how these narratives are decoded and how they negotiate with the fixed narrative.
Appendix A: List of Figures

Figure 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uchi</strong></td>
<td><strong>Soto</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td>Breadwinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother &amp; Forgiving Wife</td>
<td>of the house</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1.2

- **Uchi**: Nurturing & Forgiving Assistants
- **Soto**: Decision Maker and Leader
Figure 1.3

- Women
  - Soto
    - Breadwinner of the house
  - Uchi
    - Nurturing Mother & Forgiving Wife
- Men
  - Soto
    - Breadwinner of the house
Figure 1.4

Women on TV

- Number of All Programs
- Female-Lead TV Series
- Percentage
Figure 1.5

Working Women on TV

- Female-Lead Programs
- Female-Lead Programs Featuring Working Women
- Percentage

Data from 2000 to 2016 shows a fluctuation in the percentage of programs featuring working women. The trend includes a peak in 2008 at 41%, followed by a decline to 20% in 2011, before rising again in 2015 to 61%.
Program Ratings

- "The Pride of the Temp" (Haken no Hinkaku) - 20.20%
- "Working Man" (Hataraki Man) - 12.11%
- "Hanasaki Mai Speaks Out" (Hanasaki Mai ga Damattenai) - 16.00%
- "Age Harassment" (Eiji harasumento) - 8.83%
- "Pretty Proofreader" (Jimi ni Sugoi! ~ Kouetsu Girl Kouno Etsuko) - 12.40%
- "Chief Natsuko Kira" (Eigyou Buchou Kira Natsuko) - 7.01%
## Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>TIME SHOWN</th>
<th>DRAMA TITLE</th>
<th>NETWORK</th>
<th>RATINGS</th>
<th>DISCONTENTMENT AT THE BEGINNING</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENT BY END</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2007 January - March</td>
<td>&quot;The Pride of the Temp&quot; <em>(Haken no Hinkaku)</em></td>
<td>NTV</td>
<td>20.20%</td>
<td>protagonist works as a temp at a company that constantly diminishes her work</td>
<td>protagonist continues working in her assigned department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2007 October - December</td>
<td>&quot;Working Man&quot; <em>(Hataraki Man)</em></td>
<td>NTV</td>
<td>12.11%</td>
<td>protagonist has a hard time balance work and romance and her work is diminished because of her gender</td>
<td>protagonist gives up her dream job and stayed at her old company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2014 April - June</td>
<td>&quot;Hanasaki Mai Speaks Out&quot; <em>(Hanasaki Mai ga Damattennai)</em></td>
<td>NTV</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>protagonist is assigned to a department other than her first choice</td>
<td>protagonist continues working at her assigned department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2015 July - September</td>
<td>&quot;Age Harassment&quot; <em>(Eiji harassment)</em></td>
<td>Asahi</td>
<td>8.83%</td>
<td>protagonist is assigned to a department other than her first choice</td>
<td>protagonist continues working at her assigned department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2016 May - July</td>
<td>&quot;Pretty Proofreader&quot; <em>(Jimii ni Sugoi! ~ Kouetsu Girl Kouno Etsuko)</em></td>
<td>NTV</td>
<td>12.40%</td>
<td>protagonist is assigned to a department other than her first choice</td>
<td>protagonist continues working at her assigned department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2016 July - September</td>
<td>&quot;Chief Natsuko Kira&quot; <em>(Eigyou Buchou Kira Natsuko)</em></td>
<td>Fuji TV</td>
<td>7.01%</td>
<td>protagonist is assigned to a different department after maternal leave</td>
<td>protagonist continues working at her assigned department</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Works Cited


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<http://www.nhk.or.jp/corporateinfo/>.


1 「女性が輝く社会」: a society that all women shine

2 Though science fiction and fantasy genre are not considered in this thesis, there are a considerable number of television dramas in these genres featuring strong female leads. Series like *Trick* and *Spec* are hugely successful and ran for more than two seasons.

3 *Doraemon* is a Japanese manga series by Fujiko F. Fujio. The story revolves around a robotic cat named Doraemon, who travels back in time from the 22nd century to aid a pre-teen boy named Nobita. Shiizuka, who in the future marries Nobita, is the only female character amongst the main characters.