The Japanese Women Figures of Different Time in Different Television Drama

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ABSTRACT

As a narrative language and a form of mass entertainment, television drama has a distinctly reproductive character, making it an important area of cultural studies. This study examines four Japanese urban dramas from 2012 to 2022 and explores the changes in the portrayal of women in them. The study found that women are gradually becoming independent modern workers from traditional dependents, achieving economic independence, emotional freedom, and participation in important jobs in society. Overall, the status of women in Japanese society has improved.

Keywords：*Women Figures*，*Television Drama*，*Social Structure*，*Traditional Culture*

1. INTRODUCTION

The economic base determines the superstructure. In Japan today, women are more involved in the workforce than in the family, which means they have gained more economic independence. As a result, they have gained a more equal status in family and gender relations. This is reflected in many Japanese movies and TV shows. Unlike the urban dramas before the new century, which portrayed women and family relationships with great intensity, films about women in the 21st century show a more mature and stable style of pursuing gender harmony more objectively and rationally, and show more of women's struggles in the double grip of patriarchal culture and consumerism. The purpose of this research is to analyze how Japanese women have become more independent through an analysis of the changing image of women in Japanese television dramas, and to analyze specific aspects of how they have been influenced by the trend of independence. This study will help us to review the process of breaking out of tradition and embracing the feminism in Japan in the last decade, and will also help us to better understand the feminist trend that has emerged in the international community.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Changes in the social structure of Japan

2.1.1 Workplace Culture in Japan

Japanese society has a distinct hierarchical division. First, vertically, the relationship between superiors and subordinates, seniors and juniors is very clear, and this is reflected in the use of honorific words in Japanese. Second, Japanese society is characterized by a distinction between "inside and outside" relationships, where people in the same company, school, or community have a strong identity with the organization and reject people outside the organization, which is also reflected in the TV series. The Japanese people's strong sense of community comes from their employment system. Thirdly, Japanese companies usually adopt the lifetime employment system, the annual merit sequence system and the intra-community combination system. (Yan 2020) The lifetime employment system means that the company continues to employ employees until retirement without any special circumstances. The annual merit sequence system means that employees' salaries and positions will gradually increase as their age and years of service increase. An intra-company combination system is a joint group of employees who belong to different departments and positions within the company, with the participation of the company's managers and supervisors.

The existence of the three major systems in Japanese companies ensures that employees can work with peace of mind and grow in a step-by-step manner within the company, which has a positive effect on the unity within the company and thus strengthens the Japanese people's perception of the difference between "inside" and "outside" in the workplace. At the same time, since age and length of service are the main criteria for advancement, young employees have to go through long periods of basic work and wait for promotion based on seniority, thus making the distinction between superiors and inferiors in the workplace more distinct.

To sum up, there are two main characteristics of the Japanese workplace: collectivism and hierarchy. Their relevance is reflected in the fact that collectivism is the essence and hierarchy is the appearance. The Japanese workplace environment also contributes to the long-standing inequality between the status of men and women.

Japan's lifetime employment system is skewed in favor of men, so women are marginalized in the workplace. In Japan, the figure of the besuited urban, white-collar office worker/ business executive 'salaryman' (or, in Japanese, sarariiman) came to be associated with Japan's transformation from a war-devastated society in the years following defeat during World War Two to the world's second largest economy within a period of three decades (Dasgupta 2013). A salaryman is typically a graduate from the ranks of an elite university who is employed by a large corporation where he works continuously until retirement (Charlebois 2014). In the corporation, employers expect their absolute loyalty, diligence, steadfast dedication, and self-sacrifice (Charlebois 2014). Salaryman are expected to dedicate their lives to their companies as kigyo senshi 'corporate warriors' (Charlebois 2014; SturtzSreetharan 2017). As a reward, they will have access to the 'three treasures' of lifetime employment, a seniority system of promotion, and company unionism (Charlebois 2014; SturtzSreetharan 2017). After the collapse of Japan's "bubble economy" in the 1990s, social shifts and the rise in the status of women influenced the salaryman model. For example, paternity leave was encouraged; media campaigns were formed urging men to (re)consider their role as a father and husband, and TV dramas placed more women in employment and men in the kitchen (Muramatsu 2002). This new masculine model has come to be called the ikumen (SturtzSreetharan 2017).

While salaryman does not represent the majority of Japanese men, the term nevertheless continues to provide a template for notions of hegemonic masculinity (Dasgupta 2013). The masculinity embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Also,

it signifies the man's power and authority over other men and also sustains men's collective dominance over women (Nemoto 2016). In sum, hegemonic masculinity is formed through hierarchical relationships between men and women, between masculinity and femininity and among men (Messerschmidt 2012).

2.1.2 An overview of women's lives in Japan

In terms of family relationships, on the one hand, Japanese women need to experience the patriarchal prejudices of traditional families. On the other hand, they need to bear the burdens of life in their original family. The family system is usually an important field for dramas to represent women's personal lives, and some dramas focus their narratives on the generation gap they encounter in their families and the conflict between family assets and affection, highlighting women's sense of independence with the fateful tragedies and realistic struggles caused by their original family.

In Japanese films and dramas, the constraints of the original family on women's urban life are a relatively common pattern of conflict. It is often more difficult for women than men to break away from their families of origin, and the price they pay is often higher than that of men. When women enter the city, in addition to their personal growth, they have to take responsibility for their families and bear the pressure from them. They are the "other" in the city, but at the same time, they cannot find comfort in their hometown or family.

In general, the economic independence of Japanese women is improving. People's lifestyles have themselves become diversified in postindustrial society. Lifestyle rhythms have become individualized and the proportion of women confined to the home as housewives has decreased（Yoshimi 2003）

In terms of social relationships, Japanese dramas present a solidification of women's friendships and interactions. Female friendships are often based on the identity of classmates or mothers, but rarely due to common career aspirations and interests. This still follows the traditional gender concept of "male works outside, female does the housework" , which locks women in a small social circle, making it difficult to have deep and strong emotional ties. Moreover, the content of their communication is limited to their private life. By limiting the portrayal of women to a private narrative space and failing to place them in a broader social, economic and cultural context, it indirectly denies women's voice and autonomy in a male-oriented social and cultural environment. Moreover, female friends mainly share their emotional experiences, family entanglements and intimate feelings, and this kind of private association with self-exposure and intimacy is extremely vulnerable and easy to disintegrate because of vanity, comparison, jealousy and narrow-mindedness,

making female friendship full of instability and still prone to cognitive bias towards femininity, making the narrative of frenemy rationalized, and discrimination against femininity further dissevers the female community.

In terms of the workplace, women's workplace identities are always limited. It is not difficult to find that the professional status of women in popular Japanese TV dramas is mostly limited to women's products, education, health, and service industries.

2.2 The Image of Women in Japanese Media

2.2.1 The Changing Image of Women

Stereotypes of both genders exist in Japanese advertisements. In the postwar period, the housewife image emerged as an active subject in the domestic sphere in the late 1950s. At almost the same time, ads in the 1960s pushed the image of Japanese technological power, especially the image of the pre-eminent ability of Japanese engineers, to the forefront. These two images of the technological subject are structurally correlated. The crucial aspect of this correlation is gender differentiation.

As people's thinking progressed, they began to oppose the filming of advertisements with gender stereotypes. In 1975, HOUSE had this ad for instant noodles: "I (female) am the one who cooks, I (male) am the one who eats", and this ad was taken off the air. This was because it was criticized for encouraging gender stereotypes. It caused dissatisfaction among consumers (especially women) and made them not buy the goods, and rather than achieving the purpose of the advertisement, it caused a negative impact. Therefore, it is inappropriate to produce advertisements that associate women with domestic work.

After entering modern society, women have also become involved in economic production. Gender is no longer an important criterion that binds the status of women, and money has become another criterion. The concept of consumption in modern society has influenced the self-perception of Japanese women. The utilitarian thinking of the world of consumption has changed people's values and outlook on life, and the symbolic meaning of consumption and the value of exchange are used to position social classes. Women in this world, along with their bodies, easily become objects of consumer culture, filling themselves with "things" other than their own, which are poor in content, and realizing the empty "false self".

In the face of the impact of consumerism, women are also growing up. TV dramas focus on the shaping of the female image of the self-subject, which not only reflects the creator's deep psychological understanding of the female collective but also makes the interactive analysis of the internal and external reasons for the formation or the realization of "self" of the female image, through the self-exploration in the mirror in TV dramas. The interactive analysis will effectively create a spiritual collision between the characters and the audience, cause emotional resonance, and mobilize women to participate in the spiritual construction. We will look at the broader natural world and realize the value and meaning of ourselves with the power of love and devotion in the interaction with the surrounding environment.

2.2.2 Reasons for the change in female image

In 1960, American mass communication researcher Joseph Klapper proposed the theory of audience choice, arguing that "people's pre-existing opinions and interests, and more generally their established tendencies, significantly influence their behavior and the effect of mass communication on them. In general, people tend to be exposed to mass communication content that is consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and interests. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, they avoid communications of the opposite tone. If they are exposed to content that is inconsistent with their preconceptions, they do not pay attention to it, either by reinterpreting it to fit their existing views or by forgetting about it more quickly than if it were consistent. These self-protective behaviors are what we know as selective exposure, selective understanding, and selective memory." This means that when audiences receive communication messages, they often consciously or unconsciously pay attention to those messages that match their original ideas, attitudes and values, and reject or avoid those messages that are contrary to their ideas and attitudes. Therefore, any work needs to reflect the current situation of the time. In Japan today, gender equality has become a trend, and to meet the changing values of the public and to get better sales and reviews for their works, directors of Japanese TV dramas tend to produce dramas that reflect women's independence, love and hate.

However, the image of women in Japanese TV dramas is still confined by traditional thinking and culture, and there is still a distance between them and equal gender relations in Europe and America. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s ranking of "gender equality" in 2021, Japan ranks only 120 out of 156 countries and regions, which is still the lowest among developed countries. The plight of women has also inspired Japanese film and television producers to create works that depict the current situation of women in Japan from different perspectives and reflect women's issues in recent years. For example, Hannbunn, aoi (Half, blue) in 2018 tells the story of a woman who comes to Tokyo to pursue her dream and eventually becomes an outstanding businesswoman; Queen in 2019 tells the story of a female lawyer who helps women in her professional position; Oomameda Towako to sannninn no motootto (Oomameda Towako and Three Ex-husbands) in 2021

tells the story of how a woman who has gone through three divorces faces gender relations and the evaluations of the secular.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To explore the changes in the image of women in the Japanese trend of thought, we used the image of women in Japanese TV dramas as an entry point. In the order of the timeline, we selected four dramas in order: Nigeru wa hajidaga yakunitatsu (Shame but Useful to Run Away) or Nigehaji (2016), Koi no tsuki (The Moon of Love) (2018), Nagi no oitoma (The Short Holiday of Nagi) (2019), Raisei dewa channto shimasu (I'll Live Well in the Afterlife) or Raisei chann (2020), and the second season (2022). The reason for selecting these four dramas for the study is that all four dramas show women's personal growth, their changing roles, and status in both relationships and the workplace. These dramas can be viewed on the Chinese video site bilibili.

Bilibili (https://www.bilibili.com/) is a cultural community and video platform with a high concentration of young Chinese generations, with many TV series and animation resources imported from Japan. As of November 2021, bilibili's monthly active users reached 267 million.

4. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Changes in gender relations

By combing through the four dramas through the timeline, we find that the status of male and female protagonists in the dramas becomes more and more equal, and the trend of women becoming independent individuals from being dependent on men becomes more and more obvious.

In the drama Nigehaji, Mikuri meets Hiramasa through a contractual marriage, and eventually, they fall in love with each other and become a real couple. The TV series shows the traditional gender division of labor which is "Men work outside, women do the housework", where the Mikuri has no regular job, her main task is to do housework, and her source of income depends mainly on her husband.

And in the 2018 drama Koi no tsuki, the heroine Wako is no longer a housewife who only needs to stay at home and do housework, but has a job in a movie theater. In addition, she is at the age of thirty-two, which in the traditional view should be an age to consider a stable married life. However, she breaks through the confines of traditional thinking and decides to break up with her boyfriend who was previously ready to get married to her, and choose someone she truly loves and pursue a career that interests her. This kind of women's financial independence in relationships and freedom to choose a

lover on their own is a part that was not shown in the previous drama. Similar to Koi no tsuki, Nagi no oitoma (2019) tells the story of the heroine Nagi who discards her job and boyfriend she doesn't like to pursue what she wants to do and her true love, also showing the image of women who are brave enough to give up a stable life and a fixed partner. The first and second seasons of Raisei chann, airing in 2020 and 2022, present a modern, open relationship. The heroine Momoe does not have a constant boyfriend but has five sex partners, and she satisfies her physical needs and desire for love by enjoying sex with them.

Another finding is that the fluidity of relationships has increased and women beginning to liberate themselves from stable relationship that is set in stone. This means that modern women have more rights to choose their partners and have more opportunities and space to adjust their current relationships. Rather than being confined to a relationship for a long time, women can adjust and change their partners as often as they like. This coincidentally reflects the changing social landscape in Japan today. According to the Japan Marriage Statistics Bureau, the 2021 Japan Vital Statistics Survey shows 193,253 divorced couples, very close to the record high of 200,000 couples set in 1995 (during the economic bubble). Such a high divorce rate reflects the increased mobility of relationships and the rising economic status of women.

4.2 Changes in social relations

The four dramas present diverse models of family relationships in terms of the structure of the original family, and these models can be divided into three categories. The first category is open and warm family relationships, such as in Nigehaji (2016) , which shows a cozy scene in which Mikuri, as an only daughter, eats and chats with her parents. Also, she has a close relationship with her aunt, which is like that of a close sister. The second category is family relationships where there is a generation gap. For example, Koi no tsuki and Raisei chann both show the conflict between the heroine's concept of marriage and her family. In these dramas, the family members often ask the heroine about her marriage when they're getting in touch with her, and the heroine feels helpless in response to such inquiries. The third category is the uncomfortable family relationship, such as in Nagi no oitoma, where the mother constantly exerts mind control over Nagi and often asks for money, while Nagi tries to escape from such control.

Combing the four dramas according to the timeline, it can be found that the access of women to society has become closer and social relationships have become richer. In 2016's Nigehaji, the main character is only shown as a wife, a member of the family, and a friend of others. In contrast, in 2018's Koi no tsuki, the image of the heroine as a company employee was added, but the

heroine still bears prejudice from the company leaders and employees. 2019's Nagi no oitoma shows not only the heroine's family, gender, and workplace relationship, but also her deep friendship with her neighbors. 2020's Raisei chann shows the image of the heroine who is closely connected to society. The heroine no longer endures prejudice in the workplace and has a cordial relationship with her colleagues. Also, in addition to female friends, the number of male friends of the heroine has increased compared to the previous dramas.

4.3 Diversification of work and improvement of social status

In the four dramas, we can see that women's jobs have become more diversified, breaking away from the previous restrictions of industries such as service. Mikuri in 2016's Nigehaji first works as a domestic helper and then becomes a professional housewife, in line with the traditional Japanese image of women's careers. Wako in 2018's Koi no tsuki eventually opens her own movie theater and becomes a female entrepreneur. Nagi in 2019's Nagi no oitoma has a dream of opening a laundromat. Momoe in 2020's Raisei chann works for a game and animation CG company. Traditionally, such companies have a larger proportion of men, but this job for Momoe shows the diversity of modern women's work. Following the time order, women in Japan have transformed from working primarily in the service industry to becoming more involved in the tertiary industry, such as culture and technology, which is the lifeblood of the country's economy. This indicates that women are taking on more important jobs in society and that they are being recognized for their work abilities.

The four dramas also show the rising status of women in society. On the one hand, the economic status of women has improved. In Nigehaji, Mikuri's financial resources still rely on her husband after they get married. In Koi no tsuki, Wako not only has an independent financial source but is also able to take out funds for a movie theater venture. In Nagi no oitoma, Nagi still has enough savings when she quits her job and goes to the countryside for a vacation. In Raisei chann, the heroine has a salary that is above the social average. On the other hand, the status of women in the workplace has also improved. In Koi no tsuki, Wako faces prejudice about her age and gender from the interviewer when she applies for a job, and is subjected to a lot of comments by her colleagues in the workplace because of her private life after she joins the company. In Nagi no oitoma, Nagi's workplace has the phenomenon of female employees ganging up on each other, and male leaders at the top often doing sexual harassment to female employees. In Raisei chann, the workplace where the Momoe works is very friendly, and people in the studio are good friends with each other. There is no gender bias, and people do not judge others' private lives maliciously.

4.4 Women's mobility

Next, this article will analyze women's mobility from three aspects: spirit, material, and social relationships.

On the spiritual side, women change partners more frequently and women's relationships are more fluid. In Nigehaji, Mikuri has a stable partner and gets married to him. In Koi no tsuki, Wako meets someone she likes and then decides to break up with her long-term boyfriend who is not compatible with her personality, and chooses the one she likes. In Nagi no oitoma, Nagi rejects the confessions of her ex-boyfriend and her neighbor, and chooses to live her life alone and find the person she likes. In Raisei chann, Momoe has no fixed partner, but instead has a variety of emotional entanglements with her sex partners and the man in her company who has chemistry with her.

On the material side, women change their residence more frequently and become more physically mobile. In Nigehaji, Mikuri and Hiramasa have been living together since their contractual marriage. In Koi no tsuki, Wako moves to a newly rented house after breaking up with her ex-boyfriend. In Nagi no oitoma, Nagi quits her job, moves out of the house she lived in with her ex-boyfriend and enjoys a vacation in a rented house in the countryside. In Raisei chann, Momoe rarely spends the night in her own house but spends nights of passion in the home of her sex partners or a hotel.

In terms of social relationships, women's careers often change. In Nigehaji, Mikuri has a job of planning merchandise fair and writing scripts as a side job after becoming a housewife. In Koi no tsuki, Wako's job changes from being a worker in the movie theater, to a company employee, to a movie theater manager. In the process of changing careers, Wako saves enough money and discovers her dream. In Nagi no oitoma, Nagi quits her job as a salesperson and has a dream of opening a laundry. Ume, the second female character in Raisei chann, is working as a computer graphics artist while developing her side business as a manga artist.

The increased mobility of women in the three dimensions means that women have more autonomy to choose and more rights to live freely in society.

5. CONCLUSION

There are many ways to characterize an era. Novels, songs, movies, buzzwords, plays, etc. Television dramas can sometimes fulfill the hopes and dreams of the viewer which are difficult to reveal on the surface and are sometimes perceived as not noble voices of the heart. In such dramas, characters vicariously achieve what viewers cannot do in the real world, express their unspoken thoughts, make their unfulfilled dreams come true, and they also praise the viewers for their ideas and lifestyles.

Thus, an analysis of the dramas has the potential to uncover the hidden true emotions of this generation.

By sorting and analyzing the four dramas according to the timeline, we found that the image of Japanese women has changed in many ways. First, in terms of gender relations, there is a growing trend for Japanese women to become independent individuals apart from men, and the fluidity of gender relations has increased. Second, in terms of social relationships, Japanese women have more diversified family relationships, social relationships have become richer, and women are more closely connected to society. Third, in terms of workplace positioning, women's workplace status has been enhanced, and their jobs have become more diversified, away from the traditional constraints of the service industry. Fourth, women are more likely to change partners, careers, and accommodations as they wish, and their mobility in terms of spiritual, material, and social relationships has increased.

Japanese women are in the process of transition from traditional society to modern society. The interweaving of traditional and advanced ideas among Japanese women has created a "liminal space". In 1909, Van Gennep used the term "liminal space" to emphasize the state of being in between two stages. In the late 1960s, Turner developed the concept, suggesting that liminal space is a state between socially established scopes or a state of being set aside or even trapped between two different sets of role expectations. The person in a liminal state escapes from a defined state and position in cultural space and thus there is an implicit possibility, openness, non-deterministic, and tentativeness of a resistance structure(Huang 2021). On the one hand, Japanese women are still influenced by traditional concepts. Taking Momoe in Raisei chann as an example, although she takes pleasure in having sex with different people, she is keen to satisfy the fetishes of those men to please them as a way to self-identify herself as attractive. Although she has earlier embraced individualistic values, emphasizing her own freedom, enjoyment and equality in sex, she lacks alertness to male-centrism and remains confined within the traditional heterosexual framework. Moreover, in dramas, heroines are often anxious about their age, worrying about not having a suitable marriage partner when they reach marriageable age. On the other hand, Japanese women subscribe to the idea of freedom and equality between men and women in modern society. For example, in Nagi no oitoma, Nagi is brave enough to get rid of her work colleagues, boyfriend and family of origin that she dislikes, and instead of seeking self-confidence by pleasing them, she pursues the life she likes and thus realizes her value.

Through the study, we have gained a deeper understanding of Japanese women in the new era, the social context in which they live, and feminist thinking in Japanese and international society. However, there are still shortcomings in this study. This study only selected some typical television dramas as the research subjects, and did not cover all Japanese television dramas. And also, the image of women in television dramas may be somewhat different from the image in real society. Therefore, the research results may have some deviations from the social reality. In addition, this research only focuses on the advanced changes in women's thinking, and did not examine the struggle of women in the obstacles such as masculinity and consumer culture in detail. On this point, we can look forward to future research.

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