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'Yamato Nadeshiko'

The ideal of Japanese Women

MARTA PLAZA BALAGUÉ

NIU: 1362877

TUTOR/A

BLAI GUARNÉ CABELLO

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**Universitat Autònoma
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Dades del TFG

Títol (en català, castellà i anglès, o una tercera llengua):

‘Yamato Nadeshiko’ com a ideal de la dona japonesa
‘Yamato Nadeshiko’ como ideal de la mujer japonesa
‘Yamato Nadeshiko’. The Ideal of Japanese Women

Autor/a: MARTA PLAZA BALAGUÉ

Tutor: BLAI GUARNÉ CABELLO

Centre: UNIVERSITAT AUTÒNOMA DE BARCELONA

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Ryōsai kenbo, Madame Butterfly, Occidentalització, Llar, Nova Dona.

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Ryōsai kenbo, Madame Butterfly, Westernization, *Ie*, New Woman.

Resum del TFG

Aquest treball de final de grau tracta sobre la figura de les *Yamato Nadeshiko* com a l’ideal de la dona japonesa. A través del treball es descriuran els rols de gènere a través de diferents èpoques al Japó fins a la modernitat i s’analitzarà l’estat actual de l’ideal de la dona al Japó a través de la cultura popular actual així com d’experiències personals.

Este trabajo de final de grado trata sobre la figura de las *Yamato Nadeshiko* como a ideal de la mujer japonesa. A través de este trabajo, se describirán y analizarán los roles de género en distintas épocas en Japón hasta llegar a la modernidad. Además se intentará analizar el estado actual del ideal de la mujer en Japón a través de la cultura popular actual así como de experiencias personales.

This graduation thesis deals with the ideal of Japanese women as *Yamato Nadeshiko*. Throughout this capstone project, gender roles will be described and analyzed within different historical periods until modern times. Moreover, answers will be searched in order to establish the current situation of the ideal of the Japanese woman through popular culture as well as personal experiences.

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1 Introduction

Some years ago I happened to stumble upon a Japanese *dorama* called *Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge* where a Japanese singer and actor I like performed the lead role. In that drama four boys who lived in a shared house were requested by the owner to transform her niece into a perfect *Yamato Nadeshiko*. If they were not to succeed, they would be kicked out of the house. In the beginning, I did not understand what a *Yamato Nadeshiko* girl was and I remember asking myself “what is that?” “What is this girl supposed to do that she is not doing yet?” “Why does she need to change?” As the *dorama* went by, I started to grasp what the meaning was. She was out of the norm for a Japanese woman and she needed to fit according to the stereotype and to what it was demanded from her according to Japanese society. She needed to be a perfectly educated and mannered girl who knew how to behave in public, to be feminine and good at the house chores and taking care of a man and family.

Years later, I started studying my Bachelor’s degree in Eastern Asian Studies in Barcelona and I finally got to understand the standards on Japanese women according to Japanese society. Suddenly it all made sense to me.

This is mainly the reason why I decided to choose this topic for my graduation project. I wanted to explore the stereotypes of Japanese women and how they developed throughout the years till we could fully understand what being a *Yamato Nadeshiko* is. In order to do so, specialized texts and media, along with *doramas*, movies, and music have been consulted and analyzed so that I could have a better grasp of how the role of women is perceived also nowadays and in Japanese popular culture.

Women are nowadays an indispensable part of the labor force in this globalized world. However, is it the same in Japan? When one thinks of Japan the images of samurai, geishas, anime and manga flood our minds but if we try harder to analyze Japan and its society we will soon realize that this country is much more than this image that many referred to as “Cool Japan”¹¹. If we think in terms of gender, probably the first image of Japan that comes up to our minds is that of a *geisha*. Why is it so? Well, it might have to do with the image Japan wants to portray and export of itself and of its own women. The image of a *geisha* is intrinsically related to some traditional values

¹¹ A form of soft power by which Japan tried to shape the image portrayed abroad through culture and

that are still in vogue in nowadays Japan. If we analyze the image of a geisha we find a woman in a traditional Japanese gown, a *kimono*, with a specific hairdo and make up on. As for the behavior, a *geisha* was supposed to be in charge of men and entertain them as well as care for them while in their company. They were educated girls in the traditional arts such as dancing, singing or poetry, to set some examples. If we extrapolate this image to contemporary gender roles, Japanese women conserve some of these old traditional virtues that *geishas* seemed to have within them. Thus, the recurrent image of a *geisha* to exemplify Japanese women does not fall so far from the stereotyped image of Japanese women that we might find in current times.

It is interesting though the journey that Japanese women have undergone in this country. If we look back in history, Japan had very powerful women in very powerful positions, empresses, samurai women, sorcerers, priestess and poets are amongst some of the most influential women until the Kamakura regime (1185 – 1333) was established. It is in that moment that the patriarchal system was founded in Japan and when women were demoted to a secondary role and relegated from power and decision-making positions. Their role shifted to that of a wife and mother. Circumstances were not that different after the Kamakura regime, and in especial when the Edo or Tokugawa period (1603 – 1768) started. The Edo era was set upon the standards of Confucianism and as such, women were mere instruments of their male relatives, especially their fathers and husbands. Women were educated to become good wives and to transmit family traditions to the following generations, as well as, satisfy their families' ambitions since they were no more than a bargaining chip by which families would establish alliances and become more powerful. Therefore, this study will start by depicting women's gender roles starting from Edo period until modernity and our current times and will try to find the reasons why some of these very old traditional values are still of the utmost important for Japanese society nowadays.

2 Yamato Nadeshiko, its origins

The role of women since the Edo era until current times will be exposed and analyzed in this first section of the capstone. What was their role? Is it still the same? Has it changed? These are some of the questions for which I will try to find answers in the following lines.

Throughout this capstone project there will be two terms that will constantly be appearing and referred to: the Madame Butterfly myth and the *Yamato Nadeshiko* myth. However, the capstone project is supposed to be focusing on the *Yamato Nadeshiko* myth so one could say that there is incongruence in the development of this project. I argue that they are both the same but used from a different national point. Whereas Madame Butterfly is a Western term adopted by and from a Western work, *Yamato Nadeshiko* might be its equivalent in Japanese. Maybe it could be seen as a nationalist effort to make the myth truly theirs since after all it is related to Japanese women. Thus, it would be more suitable to have and make use of a Japanese term for it instead of a Western one. So, from herein after, both terms will be used in this thesis to refer to the stereotyped Japanese woman with the certain characteristics further detailed and analyzed below.

Tokugawa or Edo era (1603 – 1868):

Girls who were born and raised within samurai and high-class merchant families needed,

to be prominent in the “Four Virtues” (shikō) of a woman ready to be recognized in society. These were: feminine virtue (futoku, the various virtues a woman had to display); feminine speech (fugen, the language used by a woman); feminine form (fuyō, appearance, dress, and deportment proper to women); and feminine skill (fukō, the practical skills appropriate to a woman). The cultivation of futoku, the feminine virtues, was considered particularly important, and a great number of instructional texts for girls were published to help accomplish this (Koyama, 2013: 12).

These instructional texts can be sorted in two different groups: the ones edited and printed in the early Edo period and the ones published in the mid-Edo period.

The first ones were heavily based on Chinese writings concerning women morals. In these, Buddhist philosophy and the authors' recollections were added as well. However, they were very long and difficult to understand for its readers.

The second group, were known as *ōraimono*, which were texts to study handwriting and reading. They were easier to understand and shorter making them more accessible and thus, more popular. These were used in schools as well as private homes for learning calligraphy and reading. The *ōraimono* had a lengthy life since they continued to be printed even after the Meiji restoration.

Among the *ōraimono*, we can distinguish between different types of texts according to their final purpose and its importance in shaping the minds and society of the time.

According to Ishikawa Matsutarō, there were about 1.200 different types of *ōraimono* created specifically for girls. Their content can be divided broadly into the following categories: moral education; correspondence (teaching proficiency in letter-writing and the like); society (using as instructional material information on social know-how, customs, public events, and worthwhile hobbies); and knowledge (teaching knowledge about geography, industry, and other subjects). (Koyama, 2013: 13)

Moreover, Ishikawa made a new division among the most important *ōraimono* choosing *Onna Imagawa*, *Onna jitsugokyō*, and *Onna daigaku* as the most important ones. Surprisingly, all these books were divided into different statements enumerating different types of virtues basically related to their roles as wives and/or daughters-in-law (Confucius ideals). However, virtues related to motherhood were rarely mentioned with the exception of the *Onna daigaku* ones. Within this group we find the *Shinsen onna Yamato daigaku* where the importance of prenatal care. There is one passage that states, “if the mother is modest and humble (*tsutsushimi fukaki*) the child will be intelligent. The quality of the child depends on the mother's modesty alone” (Koyama, 2013: 15). Thus, what we find here is again a portrayal of women as just bearers and whose responsibility is to bring “excellent quality” progeny. Like Koyama asserts,

“the ideal woman was one who would serve her husband as one served a feudal lord and obediently perform her duties as a daughter-in-law for her mother- and father-in-

law.[...] The expectation at the time was not for a ‘good wife and wise mother’. But only for a ‘good wife’” (2013: 16).

Another reason why motherly virtues are merely contemplated in these texts is due to the fact that during the Edo period the content of the education expected for daughters was that of the four virtues, which their mothers could teach. However, mothers were ignorant of the things that needed to be taught to boys. These were trained into martial arts, formal greetings, manners and etiquette, letters, etc. which their mothers had no knowledge of. Educating children at that time fell into the male hands and male authors were in charge of writing most of the books related to raising the children².

Meiji era (1868 -1912)

During the Meiji era traditional class distinctions were abolished and the government implemented education for all children independently of their social background. It was during this time that two movements appeared. On the one hand, the Enlightenment movement surged which was influenced by the West. On the other had, the Freedom and People’s Rights movement emerged and claimed for political participation for both genders and a constitution. Meiji’s government had two clear goals to achieve, which clashed with the objectives of those movements. The first goal was towards national strength and security; the second one was focused on obtaining international recognition as a modern nation. Following the desires to achieve these goals and in order to prevent any hindrance, the Law on Associations and Meetings (*Shūkai Oyobi Kessha Hō*) was passed in 1890. According to this law, women were subject to fines or imprisonment for organizing a political association, joining a political group or attending a political meeting. Moreover, in 1900, Article 5 of the Public Peace Police Law (*Chian Keisatsu Hō*) was enforced too in order to maintain women away from politics. The Civil Code of 1898 established the family system (*ie*), which made emphasis on the authority of the household over the individual and placed women in a subordinate position within the family. The code restrictions involved issues such as only men could claim posterity, they were the only ones legally recognized persons, married women were not able to

² Men used to teach in many cases their sons in order to take over the family head and businesses in the future. Girls were to become part of another family so they did not need to be instructed in such ways.

bring legal action independently, they were classified in the same category as the ‘deformed and the mentally incompetent’, husbands were totally free to dispose of their wives’ property as they liked, adultery was punishable offense only in the case of wives. Thus, women were almost left with no power unless they resourced to the role the government wanted them to have: “good wife, wise mother” or *ryōsai kenbo*.

The Meiji feminine ideal was that of the “good wife, wise mother”. This was the main goal in women’s education. The “good wife, wise mother” incorporated the image of the “Confucian-inspired, submissive, self-sacrificing mother and wife, the woman who contributes to the nation through her efforts in the home, and the national homemaker”. (Koyama, 2013: 34)

This image caused a division amongst women. On the one hand, “some viewed “good wife, wise mother” as a sign of modern progress. Women were assigned a public –albeit domestic– role that required a commitment to women’s education, however narrowly defined” (Koyama, 2013: 36). On the other hand, more radical women saw “good wife, wise mother” as yet another way by which the current government was limiting women’s activities in the name of national well being.

As previously stated, Japan was in a quest to find its place in the modern and developing world. While it gained territories and international recognition through the Sino-Japanese War (1894 – 1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904 – 1905), it seems that Japan was still trying to figure out and build its own national identity.

As for the texts being used to educate women during the Meiji era, the texts used during the Edo period are still being used but their importance decreased. Now there are texts dealing in depth with virtues related with motherhood. This change made it possible for women to change how they were perceived since their role shifted from being merely “borrowed wombs” (*hara wa karimono*³) to educators, mothers and wives.

According to these writings now the responsibility of educating children relies on both men and women and they even make special remarks about early childhood period. However, what is found in real life is women taking care of the education of the children as previously stated. Moreover, now women besides being the wives and daughter-in-law are responsible for the management of the household. These traits are currently still in vogue nowadays.

³ “A woman’s womb is just something that is borrowed”. Japanese saying.

20th Century Women in Japan: Taishō Democracy (1905 – 1932)

It was during the Taishō Democracy (1905 – 1932) that (male) political participation was expanded, social reform took place, increased educational opportunities for both sexes implemented, and the growth of the media and an urban middle class characterized it. However, Meiji's legacy of censorship, the barring of women from politics, and the confining marriage and family systems survived as well. (Lowy, 2007: 5) Nonetheless, it is during these times that there seems to be a shift from self-sacrifice to self-awareness, which provided the optimum conditions for the "New Woman" debate.

"New Women" distinguished themselves from other women by "resisting the "good wife, wise mother" standard and the concept of separate spheres it supported and by pursuing their own self-interest". (Lowy: 2007, 58) Like Lowy states in her book *The Japanese "New Woman"*,

as Japan entered the twentieth century, the government and various intellectuals worked actively to (re)define acceptable gender roles as part of a continuing effort to create a strong national identity. The resulting debate in the government, schools, and media over the proper role of women in the family and in society was referred to as the "Woman Problem". (2007: 1)

As had previously happened, only men initially started the revision of the gender issue. However, soon after, some women became actively involved in it as well. Their activism was evident when some of them founded the group *Seitōsha* who were responsible for the publication of *Seitō*, which was oriented to women. This publication was the means of communication by which women could express themselves as well as deal and challenge old stereotypes and arising gender issues. These women became the representatives of Japan's "New Women".

The term "New Woman" however, was internationally used and it referred to the new found and raising awareness of the "self and of gender distinction, which led to changing views on such issues such as marriage, sexuality, and fertility." (Lowy, 2007: 2) In Japan the situation is specially complicated since the country is under a process of

industrialization and modernization as well as Westernization. Thus, Japan as a country is trying to build the Japanese as people and as a nation but is also seeking to be recognized as a civilized and modern state by the West. This leads to the problematic of gender since women were supposed to be receptacles of tradition and “good wives and wise mothers” (*ryōsai kenbo*) whereas men were to adopt Western appearance, thought, and statesmanship. Through these differentiated views, both sexes were supposed to support the state. However, this generated a conflict in regards to the type of modernity women desired for. On the one hand, “government officials, educators, and intellectuals prioritized the family system, the emperor, and imperialist expansion. [Thus,] women needed to know their role in the family and produce and raise sons to serve the nation”. (Lowy, 2007: 2 – 3) On the other hand, “other intellectuals and artists contributed to the debate as a result of their experimentation with Western concepts of the self and individualism”. (Lowy, 2007: 3) There were two other factions within this debate who “encouraged the activities of New Women as a way of legitimizing new space and freedoms for themselves” (Lowy, 2007: 3), and who believed in “equality of the sexes as fundamental modern quality” (Lowy, 2007: 3) respectively.

“New Woman” was a product of this modernizing process and Japanese women benefited from the new access to education and expansion in the public media. The “New Women” debate brought to light “the tensions and insecurities inherent in the modernizing project as the Japanese were trying to create a modern identity while preserving a Japanese essence”. (Lowy, 2007: 126 – 127)

WW II's aftermath and women (1945 – 2000s)

After Japan's surrender during World War II, the SCAP⁴ took control of the country and tried to impose a democracy alike. The new Constitution and amendments of 1947 meant for women a big development in their fight for equal rights. They finally gained their right to vote and could “freely” participate in politics. This was a huge development for them and for the country itself, a country that was undergoing great changes socially, politically and economically. The fact that women gained their right to vote and were finally recognized as equals to the males, also meant a shift in the family

⁴ Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers.

system as the roots for the Japanese. The *ie*, was somehow substituted by the conjugal unit formed between a man and a woman, which was at the same time a challenge to the old and traditional patriarchal system that had sustained Japan until then. From that moment on, there were no differences between the rights and duties of men and women; they were equal before the law. However, this was not a reality in their everyday life and in many cases remains even now in the same way. What resulted from this imposed new system is a kind of hybrid between the *ie* and the ideal Western conjugal unit. It seems very hard for Japanese society to get rid of the patriarchal trend in thought since its roots are very old and very deep.

3 The evolution of the Japanese woman stereo-type until current times

Before moving to the myth of Madame Butterfly, we need to set the context that propelled its appearance. It all developed from the opposing notion between West and Orient during the 1800s and that Edward W. Said baptized as Orientalism⁵. This new trend of thinking was what made Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa define Japan as a country of “enchantment and magic” and which Guarné moreover described as a country made of “casitas de té, farolillos, sombrillas y cometas de papel, de pipas humeantes y licores helados de esencias de flores, un mundo en miniatura transitado por muñequitos y *bibelots*, la ‘sorprendente patria de todas las extravagancias’ sumida en el intenso ‘rumor de las cigarras’”. (Guarné: 2014, 92)

It is within this trend of thinking that Pierre Loti created *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887). In Loti’s work we find his two main characters Cho Cho-san and Commodore Pierre Loti. They get married despite their differences in social status and customs and culture and even though they coexisted for half a year their relationship does not portray the usual feelings of affection between loving couples. This is especially clear towards the end when he leaves Japan to never come back but there is no sadness nor guilt respectively in any of these characters. The novel portrays very efficiently the inequality of the colonial situation in Japan bringing up to light the binary opposition between terms such as western and oriental, colonizer and colonized, man and woman. Like Guarné states this is the reason why Japanese women are seen as “una libélula herida, cuyos brazos extendidos dibujan con las mangas del kimono la frágil silueta de las alas de una mariposa que, en un giro poético y desgarrador, reencontramos en el primer acto de la ópera de Puccini”. (2014: 93) This portrayal of the Japanese woman, which involved a perfect blend between reality and myth, was the desired portrayal by the Japanese government of that time. The disseminated ideal of women at that time was that of the “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*) which involved the old Confucian virtues of obedience and respect. Women were to remain at home and take care of it along with its members under the patriarchal regime established at that period.

⁵ It is a term created by Professor Edward Said (1935 – 2003) in order to define the West’s imposed thoughts on Eastern countries and its cultures. He wrote a whole book (1978) with the same name to discuss and challenge the imperial views of the West over the East.

However, this image clashes with the reality of the era where women were more than half of the working force in industry. (Guarné, 2014: 93) The Civil Code established in 1898 set the base for the new social model in which the man was the head of the family and had total authority and legal responsibility over its members and properties. Thus, women were relegated to that role of the “good wife, wise mother” who was abnegated and devoted to serve her husband and to the care for the members of the family, specially the elderly and to educating the heir with virtues such as loyalty and obedience not only towards the family but also towards the empire.

When Japan opened its borders during the Meiji era, it made possible for foreigners to finally have direct interaction with Japanese people. It is through this interaction and at this time when the myth of Madame Butterfly was developed. According to many foreigners who travelled to Japan in order to establish, in most cases, trading connections or businesses in the islands, they rarely had contact with Japanese women except for those who were mostly in the lower ranks of society, such as service and prostitutes.

At that time, prostitution was legal in Japan. Thus, many Westerners had the opportunity to fully enjoy circumstances prohibited in their home countries. When doing so, the interaction they had with Japanese women was similar to that of a *geisha* girl, women who were objectified and who carried a sexiness concept. So they saw Japanese women as “being vulgar and sexually promiscuous” (Ma, 1996: 19) whereas they considered their own women “virtuous, virginal [and] holy-mother”. (Ma, 1996: 19)

The Japanese however, did not perceive Japanese women with such low qualities and actually started writing to counteract the Western opinion over their women. Thus, they resourced to medieval writings and the samurai code in order to find Japanese women true characteristics and show them to the Western world.

It was with this purpose that Japanese scholars such as Nitobe Inazo portrayed “Japanese women as being loyal, subordinate, and self-sacrificing in his classic work *Bushido, The Soul of Japan* [...]. The women, in Inazo’s words, where the ‘keepers’ of the moral code”. (Ma, 1996: 21) Another scholar who tried to reverse the image portrayed by the Westerners was Shingoro Takaishi. He published “a new interpretation

of *Onna Daigaku*⁶, which was set of instructive precepts written for the Japanese woman in the late feudal period (1600 – 1800)”. (Ma, 1996: 21) Takaishi seemed to establish a connection between the Japanese moral code for women and the Victorian times. To him, Japanese women were no different from Victorian women in England. Nonetheless, the inflection point on the perception of Japanese women was possible thanks to Lacadio Hearn, an Irish-Greek journalist who established himself in Japan and even married a Japanese. He described Japanese women in his works as “being unselfish, obedient figures tied to their social duty by strict Confucian codes”. (Ma, 1996: 21) In that sense, he went beyond and was able to change the idea of Japanese woman as “mysterious and sensual *geisha* girl to the selfless woman who would do anything to help her family” (Ma, 1996: 21) and added the concept of “moral charm”. He presented Japanese women with traits such as “delicacy, [...] child-like piety and trust, [...] exquisite perception of all things around her”. (Ma, 1996: 21) This new presentation of Japanese women, however, only made the Westerners more interested in them.

Without a doubt, the role model for this portrayal was Puccini’s Cho Cho-san from his masterpiece *Madame Butterfly*. Puccini portrayed Cho Cho-san a selfless, dedicated wife once she married an American Naval officer. She was previously working as a geisha and once she married him in Japan, she moved into the perfect Japanese woman stereotype. Like Ma asserts in her book *The Modern Madame Butterfly*, “this classic portrayal has no doubt had a long-lasting effect on the psyche of Western males. The compliance and gentleness attributed to Japanese women have long struck a responsive chord in men used to self-assertive, confrontational, and independent Western women”. (1996: 22)

It is interesting to see though, how the image of the other as an underprivileged being and somebody who needs to be rescued by the Western is applied to Japanese women even in no so distant cinematic adaptations. This can be seen in movies such as *Shogun* (1975) or even *Karate Kid II* (1986). Ma continues to state that this condescending view towards Japanese women by the West is far from being changed and that even in more recent times is still prevailing. “Contemporary literature pumped out by Western writers repeats the well-worn theme of virtuous Japanese women

⁶ Translated in English as “Greater Learning for Women”.

rescued from cold, licentious Japanese husbands and boyfriends by righteous, romantic white boyfriends”. (1996: 24) Nonetheless, *Miss Saigon*, (Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg, 1991) based on Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*, goes a step back and presents again “the stereotype of the destitute, helpless, and ultimately disposable Asian woman who pins her only hope on a foreign lover”. (Ma, 1996: 24)

Japan has rarely fought back the Oriental views posed on them by the Western world. Thus, it has helped establishing this stereotyped view of Japanese women. Even though, nowadays there are more women in positions of power as it could be the case of the new governor of Tokyo, Yuriko Koike, and the appearance of more female TV announcers on magazine programs or the news,

“women are [still] frequently exploited sexually on late-night television, [...] the comic books read by men in their early twenties to forties are also full of sexually explicit illustrations, [...] daytime soap operas targeted at housewives continue to extol the ideal woman who knows that her proper place is at home”. (Ma, 1996: 25)

Despite portraying Japanese women in such a stereotypical manner, “in reality [...] there is a vast discrepancy between today’s Japanese woman and the officially endorsed model image that continues to meet the public eye”. (Ma, 1996: 26) Following this idea, Sumiko Iwao from Keio University, said that Japanese women have ever since become “aggressive, desire gratification of their own, know their minds, and can express themselves clearly”. (Iwao, 1993: 269) Women’s priorities have changed and no longer want to become like their mothers and grandmothers. Women are better educated and also want to pursue a professional career and do not want to be relegated to homemakers/carers right away or in many cases at all. Like Ma very eloquently stated, “the labor shortage of the late 1980s and the Equal Employment Opportunity Law enacted in 1986 have also worked greatly in their favor, boosting their status to a new high”. (Ma, 1996: 35)

On a different tone but still related to the Orientalism and its imprint on the West, Ma talks about a case of a multinational marriage between an American businessman and a Japanese woman. He was led to think that a Japanese woman would make the perfect wife he was looking for. He thought of the stereotyped Japanese woman and wrongly assumed that she would be dutiful, less materialistic and more

compromised than American women. However, to his surprise his Japanese wife was “as materialistic as can be, [and] she was also unbendable like steel” (1996: 36). He also stated “once you are married, everything is different. It becomes *kakādenka*⁷”. (Ma, 1996: 36) Thus, the whole portrayal of the Madame Butterfly icon is only on the surface.

Nowadays, women seem to have shifted away little by little from this stereotype. Many women nowadays are more career oriented and do not see the need to give up their jobs in order to become housewives. It is possible to carry on with their professional careers and fulfill their duties at home with the help of their husbands. However, there are still women who think that their duty is to get married and take care of their husbands and children forsaking their personal desires or goals. They attend university with the sole idea of making a better match and not for professional reasons. In this sense, a study that was conducted by Pilar Garcés García in the beginning of the 2000s in Japan becomes very illustrative. She asked her students at Nihon University questions related to their expectations in regards to university, future career, what female roles were desirable for them in order to obtain social recognition, marriage and whether they would be interested in pursuing postgraduate studies. She states that 85% of the answers from her students stated that they just wanted to have fun and maximize their free time because they had money to spend on whatever they wanted since they had, in most cases, a part-time job. Regarding their career goals, 73% asserted that they would never work in anything field-related to their studies since they were aware that in order to work in the international relations field, they would have to move to a bigger city or abroad. Therefore, their studies at university only allowed them to have more leisure time before getting married and have children. Perhaps it also enhanced their chances of getting a husband. The last 15% wanted to work in something related to their studies and were even willing to moving overseas or getting married to a Western man in order to gain more independence. A 12% openly recognized that were not interested in university and that the only reason why they were there was in order to find a husband. As for the female roles they admired, the 65% chose the *ryōsai kenbo* model and only a 5% chose women such as Tanaka Makiko, the former Minister of Kiozumi’s government. The rest they preferred to have as a role model a woman who could get

⁷ A family where the husband is bossed around.

into a marriage that would bring them material benefits. (Garcés García, 2008: 586 – 587) Garcés García states then that girls were left with a great dilemma when she asked them if they would rather be like their mothers or their fathers. Apparently the unanimous answer was that they neither wanted to be in the shoes of their mothers and be slaves of housework and their children, nor they wanted to work as much as their fathers had been doing. They also believed that women who abandoned the idea of marriage in order to prioritize their career were not happy. Moreover, only 2% of the interviewed students wanted to continue with postgraduate studies. (Garcés García, 2008: 587) These women who do not wish to get married are criticized by Japanese society as not fulfilling their duties and not wanting to fit within the already established Japanese system. Thus, what we see here once again is a dualism. While a Japanese woman is young, she has freedom to do more or less what she wants, however, when they become of marriageable age (late twenties), this idea shifts and the pressure for them to find a husband, get married and have children becomes a reality they must confront. Once at this stage, women are asked to relegate their professional career in order to fulfill their societal duty. The government has a great role in this portrayal of the Japanese woman. Even though laws have been approved in order for them to have a more egalitarian system, especially at work, the truth is that the government blames women for the last decades decrease in natality in the country. Their incorporation to the labor force seems to have a direct impact in birth rate in the eyes of the government. Thus, from the government traditional arts such as ikebana are encouraged upon women. By doing so, they are also contributing not only to the stereotype of the woman who remains at home to take care of the family but also to export this image of Japanese femininity. (Garcés García, 2008: 594) Both, media and government offer a stereotyped portrayal of the Japanese woman depending on gap ages. The idyllic situation then is what it is called *onna tengoku*, a woman who has an advantageous marriage and does not have to work and can do volunteer work for the community and enjoy her leisure time. In this regards and similarly to what Garcés García did with her students and in line with some of her conclusions, I conducted a series of talks with friends and acquaintances of mine many of whom would be labeled as *onna tengoku*. They all have completed their undergraduate studies and worked for a while before getting married. Nowadays, none of them work but do volunteering work for their children's schools or

neighborhoods and travel often to other countries or attend concerts and events by famous Japanese or Korean idols. When one asks them whether they feel proud of the life they are leading, unanimously said they do. In other words, they have fulfilled their duties as Japanese women towards society and their families. In their view, they take care of their husbands, children and homes but at the same time they have the perks of being able to do as they please with their husband's income as home administrators and their free time. The ironic point is though, that many times these housewives –not stating that this might be their case– are not aware that their husbands have two bank accounts. In many cases, their companies offer them the possibility to split their income based on incentives and their base salary. Thus, they keep the incentive money for themselves instead of giving it back to their wives to administrate as part of the household income.

In another session with friends from a different background, my unmarried girlfriends in Japan, it came to my attention that even though most of them are also in their mid-late 20s and early or mid 30s, they do not seem to be in a rush to get married. They all say that they will eventually do but they want to enjoy a little bit more being only responsible for themselves. They are all aware that once they will get married, children will soon come after and in many cases they will stop working or reduce their working hours to a part-time job in order to keep a balance between their professional career and their duties at home. It was very interesting though to see that among my friends, the ones who have studied and lived abroad –especially in Western countries– were of a different mind. They would get married but without putting a hold on their professional career. They considered that household chores were to be a shared duty between husband and wife and not an only responsibility of the woman. They are aware that many Japanese men still expect them to take care of the house chores and children by themselves but they also stated that this have finally started to change and younger generations of men are more willing to share those duties with their partner. Thus, they do not agree with the *ryōsai kenbo*. They also think of a *Yamato Nadeshiko* in terms of beauty, purity and tradition but not necessarily linked with the *ryōsai kenbo*. They said that it is more an image nowadays that a gender-role. An image of a young girl dressed in *kimono* gives this impression of a *Yamato Nadeshiko*. Thus, nowadays the notion of

Yamato Nadeshiko has become an archaism and lost part of the original values that it conveyed.

4 Today's myth and its perception in Japanese pop culture

Yamato Nadeshiko seems to be a recurrent term in Japanese modern pop culture to refer to the stereotype of the ideal of the Japanese woman. This term can be easily be found in music, cinema or *doramas* and even in sports. However, does this also imply the *ryōsai kenbo* values or is it more of the aesthetic of the *Yamato Nadeshiko* that media and show business appeals to?

Arashi⁸'s 2015 album, *Japonism*, made use of this term in their release single “kokoro no sora”. The song as well as the whole album is a celebration of Japan and what it means being Japanese. Japanese instruments and characteristic sounds make most of the album too. The references towards Japan are huge and *Yamato Nadeshiko* as well as samurais, etc. are included in the lyrics and even hinted in the visuals of this album and later of their live tour. The lyrics⁹ of “kokoro no sora” say:

“Me wo tojite ryoute wo hiroge
Kaze wo dake jiyuu no tsubasa
We are samurai Yamato nadeshiko
Mai odore honoo no you ni”

“Close your eyes open your arms
Embrace the wind, riding on wings of freedom
We are samurai men and the beautiful women of yamato nadeshiko
Dance, like flames flutter about”

Samurai offer the image of strong and loyal men whereas women are relegated to just as beautiful *creatures*. Since *Yamato Nadeshiko* has always being linked to purity and

⁸ Japanese idol group who debuted in 1999 under Johnny's Entertainment. They are considered as the most popular male idol group nowadays and have been the top selling artist in Japan for the last 5 years in a row. See Annex, pp. .

⁹ Translation taken from Yarukizero Live Journal: <http://yarukizero.livejournal.com/197892.html>

beauty it is not strange that the lyrics of the song refer to Japanese women as beauties dancing around to be admired as if a traditional dance would be taking place.

Another song that makes direct reference to *Yamato Nadeshiko* is the opening song of the anime *Seitokai Yakuindomo*, “Yamato Nadeshiko Education”. Part of its lyrics¹⁰ say:

junjou karen de are uruwashiki koujoushin	Be innocent and pretty, with a lovely
gutto mune ni kizande	aspiratin,
maegami SUKAATO no take kousoku	engrave all that firmly to your chests.
junshu shimashou	Your bangs and skirts' length must
PIN to shisei tadashite	abide by the school regulations,
	Correct your pose and make sure you
	stand straight.
seijitsu ni uketsugitai wa	I want to faithfully inherit
ririshii oshie wo	the awe-inspiring teachings.
genzai kako mirai nadeshiko no makenai	Present, past, future, the maidens'
PORISHII	"I won't lose " policy.

Once again we have a direct link between purity and beauty and *Yamato Nadeshiko*. It is all about the looks. It is about the image that is portrayed towards the outside world and how it is perceived. There is also a reference towards teachings in reference to tradition and the past as well as the present and the future. It is ironic though that this opening has very little to do with the contents of the anime itself besides the fact that it talks about a co-ed school that till a year ago was a women's school where now there are two new male students surrounded by girls. It has to do with education but not directly to the education a *Yamato Nadeshiko* should receive but more about the opposite. Maybe this is the irony of altogether. The purity, naïve image that these girls seems to portray from the outside and their real interests and ways of talking and acting while they are with their inner circle of friends is totally opposed to the *Yamato Nadeshiko* values.

Also related to music, I would like to make a especial mention towards *Enka*. *Enka* music is presented as Japanese culture and represents old Japan, traditional Japan. It is a romanticized view of Japan that brings you to a memory of its origins. In this way

¹⁰ Lyrics from: <http://www.animelyrics.com/anime/yakuindomo/yne.htm>.

the portrayal of female *enka* singers is very peculiar and even though *enka* singers seem untethered by the traditional *ryōsai kenbo*, a link can be established through the songs that talk about their mothers: “mother is also a bearer of national tradition, the keeper of the household in which Japanese citizens are molded”. (Yano, 2003:175) Once again *ryōsai kenbo* appears as symbol of the traditional Japan. Let us not forget either that in most cases female *enka* singers dress in *kimono* and with settings that reminds of old traditional Japan.

If we pay attention to doramas, we will see that it is also a recurrent topic to engage the audience on TV. The drama *Yamato Nadeshiko* that aired in 2000 on Fuji TV is a good example of it. The main female character, Sakurako is a stewardess who a priori shows all the signs of being a *Yamato Nadeshiko*. She is beautiful and young, attentive and kind, and very dutiful towards passengers on the planes and on the *goukon*¹¹ she attends in order to find a rich husband. However, that is only her exterior portrayal. She has a hidden agenda. In her mind, she pictures herself as a well-established lady in society and in order to achieve her goals she intends to do a good match, marrying a rich guy that would solve her life. In other words, to become an *onna tengoku*. The portrayal that this drama offers is that of men looking for this very specific qualities in women. Therefore, women try to improve themselves in order to fit the needs and expectations of their possible marriage partners. It is also shown how married women are relegated to a secondary position. They are in charge of the housechores and take care of children and their husbands but are excluded from their husbands matters¹².

In 2000, the manga *Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge* (ヤマトナデシコ七変化) was published with great success. Due to its popularity the manga was made into anime in 2006 and into a *dorama* in 2010 by TBS¹³. The story goes around a girl called Sunako who is not what Japanese society expects of a typical Japanese lady. Due to a childhood trauma she changed into a weirdo obsessed with darkness, horror movies and blood. She is incapable of looking into the face of other people even less if they are beautiful. It causes her great distress. When she was younger, the boy she liked told her

¹¹ It is an arranged meeting for dinner between a group of males and females. One person from each group calls friends to attend together and there is the same amount of participants in each side. Appendix, image 1, pp. 31.

¹² See Appendix, image 2, pp.33.

¹³ Tokyo Broadcasting System.

she was ugly what made her retreat and locked herself within her and do not communicate with others. Her best friend since then is but a skeleton she found in the street and named Hiroshi-kun. Due to the fact that she isolated herself from the rest of her classmates, propelled her to be bullied, which caused her even deeper wounds. Her aunt is a very wealthy woman, a widow with one child, who is very fond of Sunako. This woman has a pension where four very young and handsome guys live taking care of Takeru, her son. However, the owner tells them that she will kick them out unless they accept but one condition: to turn her niece into a *meiko*, a perfect *Yamato Nadeshiko* lady. The boys are left with no other option to accept the deal if they want to continue living there at such a low cost. It is curious how in these first scenes of the first episode of the *dorama*, two terms deeply related to Japanese gender stereotypes are mentioned so casually. Men are referred to as *Hikaru Genji*¹⁴ and women as *meiko* or *Yamato Nadeshiko*¹⁵. Therefore a parallelism is established between the four boys and Sunako from the very beginning. The four beautiful and noble like boys –qualities than Hikaru Genji were said to possess– will try to transform this poor girl into a beautiful and proper Japanese lady.

Sunako and Kyohei's characters are actually very similar despite going through very different circumstances. Both seem to have a hard time being accepted but by opposite reasons. Sunako thinks of herself as ugly and that is the main reason why she cannot be accepted. On the other hand, Kyohei is very handsome, the ideal of *ikemen*¹⁶, and is followed around by women. He hates being judged only by his face. Thus, their physical appearance is an obstacle for both of them. They rather want to be judged for what it is within them than what people can only see in the outside. Their physical appearance is not who they truly are. Kyohei says a very insightful line that will set the tone for the rest of the *dorama*, "you should worry more about having an ugly heart more than an ugly face"¹⁷. However, Sunako's quest to become a *Yamato Nadeshiko* goes on. In episode 2 she eventually turns into a perfect lady becoming very girlish and

¹⁴ He is the main character of *Genji Monogatari*, one of the oldest novels in Japanese literature that narrates the life of Hikaru. It is believed the main character to have been based on some historical figures such as the prince Minamoto to Toru. Hikaru Genji is defined in the story as a very handsome man and the second son of an Emperor.

¹⁵ See Appendix, image 3, pp. 34.

¹⁶ Good looking men. The closest equivalent to a metrosexual man in Japanese culture.

¹⁷ See Appendix, image 4, pp. 34.

performing the house chores as she is meant to as a Yamato Nadeshiko¹⁸. This, however, will be not new. Since her arrival she will be in charge of the house: cooking, groceries shopping, budget, etc., in other words, what a regular Japanese housewife is expected to be. However, in episode 2, after transforming she becomes very bad at performing those kind of tasks.

There are references throughout the whole *dorama* about what a good Japanese lady should be and not only regarding Sunako's character. In episode 1 and 3, Mari talks about how a woman in her 30s has it so hard in life if they have not previously settled down before... she has been taking cooking lessons in order to fulfill her future husband's expectations¹⁹. The *dorama* moves little by little from the *Yamato Nadeshiko* purpose and ends up with Sunako accepting herself and being accepted by the rest the way she is. This could be aligned with what Japanese society is undergoing where a priori the traditional values in women are not of such an importance anymore.

Lastly, I would like to pay especial attention to the Female National soccer team of Japan or otherwise also known as "Yamato Nadeshiko" or "Nadeshiko Japan". Why was this name chosen to refer to the female national team? Women playing soccer, is this feminine? Do they reflect the stereotype that *Yamato Nadeshiko* carries within? The truth is that the name was chosen by the fans after a public contest was proposed by the JFA²⁰ to select a nickname for the national team. "Nadeshiko Japan" was selected because according to its voters is the ideal Japanese woman and these women represented this ideal through their tenacity, hard work and dedication.

As seen, even though it might have become an archaism to many, the *Yamato Nadeshiko* ideal is still alive in the minds of Japanese people. Otherwise, it would not have a place within Japanese pop culture nowadays. For some it may only make reference to purity and beauty, for others it is still linked to the *ryōsai kenbo* values, but one thing is true, in one way or another it is still there.

¹⁸ See Appendix, image 5, 6 and 7, pp. 35 - 36.

¹⁹ See Appendix, images 8 and 9, pp. 36 - 37.

²⁰ Japanese Football Association.

5 Conclusion: Women's role within Japanese society

It seems that the position of women in Japanese society has been such of a roller coaster. Throughout history there have been very powerful women but this ended with the establishment of the Kamakura and Tokugawa's regimes. Women's role changed back then and it is still tainted by those changes. The establishment of a patriarchal system and its longevity in Japan until very recently, made of women a mere instrument in the service for their families, especially their fathers and husbands who through them sought alliances to improve their network and become more powerful. Women were only tools for procreation and to transmit the traditional values to the following generations. During Edo period, women were supposed to be prominent in the so-called Four Virtues: feminine virtue, feminine speech, feminine form and feminine skill. Women were educated into being a woman and were able to pass their knowledge from generation to generation but only to the female descendants. The education of male heirs fell into the hands of their fathers since women knew nothing of the teachings needed for them to become exemplary men such as martial arts or etiquette.

It was when the Meiji restoration took place that there was a slight change in the role women had within society. The ideal of the Meiji government stood by famous *ryōsai kenbo*, which incorporated the idea of good wife, wise mother and gave more importance to women in the education of their children. However, women were still relegated to a secondary position and the new family system (*ie*) was imposed even making this more evident. Nonetheless, from that moment on, women's education would also be important and educational texts would be published with instructions of how to become a good wife and a good mother. It was very important for women to follow those teachings since they were responsible for the next generations and the outcome of the new Japanese citizens who would be in charge of the future. Moreover, like previously stated, women were in charge of passing along tradition which was deeply related to the nation's values. So they were teaching the new generations who would give shape to the nation. It was very important for women to be considered good wives, and wise mothers since the "quality" of their children would be intrinsically related to their mothers. If their mothers were the best, their children would be so too. Women now were also in charge of the education of sons and not only of daughters as it

had been previously happening as well as became the household managers which is still a recurrent image in nowadays Japan.

This idea though starts changing a little bit with the Meiji restoration when Japan opens its borders again and the Western thought reaches the islands. Some women became then aware of the existence of different ways of thought in the West and started a quest for equal rights that it is still on going. This new quest for equal rights became a stronger desire during the Taisho Democracy. This supposed an added problem to the already troubled Japan who was still in a process of modernization but reluctant to set aside the traditional Japan. The country was in very much need to find its own place within the new world order dominated by the Western countries. It is then that the New Women movement appeared refusing to stand by the values of the *ryosai kenbo*.

After WWII and Japan's surrender, the U.S. administration took control of the country and tried to shape it to its own. Thus, in the new constitution women's rights were finally recognized and finally achieved their right to vote. Moreover, the *ie* system was also substituted by the conjugal unit formed between a man and a woman, which was at the same time a challenge to the old and traditional patriarchal system that had sustained Japan until then. However, this was not a reality in their everyday life and in many cases remains, even now, in the same way. The patriarchal system and the secondary role of women in Japanese society has such deep roots that even with the new constitution and new laws, many men and women still think nowadays that the main role of women is for them to manage the household and education of their children. Even still in the younger generations the ideal of the *ryōsai kenbo* persists. The only difference sometimes is the timing for girls to get married and start a family. Nowadays, most girls complete higher education and do not want to get married as young as their grandmothers and mothers did. Instead they prefer to enjoy their spinsterhood for a bit longer since it is a newfound independence for women. However, they do not want to fall out of society and in most cases they will follow with the common imposed trend on women: get married and stop working to dedicate themselves to their new family and the house chores. In many cases, they will go back to work once their children are grown up but it is very hard for them to land a high rank position because of the many years they have been absent from the working environment and the competition for it.

Only a small percentage of women prioritize their professional career and goals over what it is expected from them by society which make them be criticized and harshly judged by it.

In another tone, it is interesting to see the evolution of the archetypes in Japanese women in contrast with the Western view. In order to do so, one must talk of Pierre Loti and his *Madame Chrysantheme* that later on would inspire Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. What Western authors do is create an idealized, romanticized, image of Japan and in special of its women towards the Western audiences by comparing Japanese women to Western women. They impose their Western thought over the East resulting in what Edward Said named as Orientalism. Following this trend, they preached how wonderful Japanese women were compared to those in the West. Japanese women were docile, dutiful and homemakers amongst other qualities which made them an ideal for Western men.

Following the Western view of the East we get from Japan its own response through "Cool Japan". This is part of the modern pop culture and the image that Japan wants to export of itself. *Yamato Nadeshiko* seems to be one of this images that Japan would like to be associated with. Even though for many, especially the younger generations, it seems as an archaism to be using this term in current times, *Yamato Nadeshiko* still retain the values of beauty, youth and purity and some sense of tradition in the form of *kimonos*. Perhaps for the older generation *Yamato Nadeshiko* still has all the imaginary that was designed with and for these people the values of beauty and purity cannot be separated from those of the *ryōsai kenbo*. Nonetheless, it is very easy to find this archetype on current TV, manga, anime, music and even sports. It seems to have its own spot within mainstream media despite the changes in society. After all Japanese women were shaped after these values for many centuries, and they were the transmitters of traditions and values to the following generations that at the same time gave shape to what Japan is nowadays.

This might be very well in line with the government's agenda in regards the role it wants women to play. Despite new laws and right that guarantee women "egalitarian" rights and treatment, it seems clear to many that the government does not really want a real change within the family unit and the consequences that it may bring. They pass new laws to guarantee equality but at the same time they would like women to have

more children in order to put a stop in the aging of its population. In order to do so, women need to stop working and bear children. Thus, they incentivize women through stereotyped images to perpetuate the system that has been ruling Japan for almost two centuries despite little improvements and new laws.

In conclusion, Japan and its women need to decide what role do they want to play within Japanese society. There seems to be a real conflict coming up with the new generations being more exposed to the exterior due to globalization. It is a fact that Western thought has reached Japan and has exerted influence in the shaping of what Japan is nowadays. However, Japan has always been good at keeping its own Japonism despite outer threats. The case of the *Yamato Nadeshiko* ideal might be one of these. Despite Western culture reaching the shores of Japan and despite modernizing efforts, the ideal is still there. Maybe at the back of their heads for many, but it is still there. They only need to decide what to do with it, especially women, whether to embrace it or fight it back, or perhaps find another option. However, I personally believe that it is more a matter of whether society will let women do the choosing or society will do it for them.

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7 Appendix



Image 1. Yamato Nadeshiko (2000), episode 1. Screen capture from Youtube. Sunako is in a goukon with her coworkers and rich men. She deceives men by implementing a perfect performance of a Yamato Nadeshiko during dinner. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEmR6rCWcjs>



Image 2. Yamato Nadeshiko (2000), episode 1. Screen capture from Youtube. Mariko is requested to leave the men alone so they can discuss important matters. She is relegated to a secondary role. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEmR6rCWcjs>



Image 3. *Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge* (2010), episode 1. Screen capture from KissAsian.com. Sunako's aunt telling the boys to turn her niece into a perfect Japanese lady. <http://kissasian.com/Drama/Yamato-Nadeshiko-Shichi-Henge>.

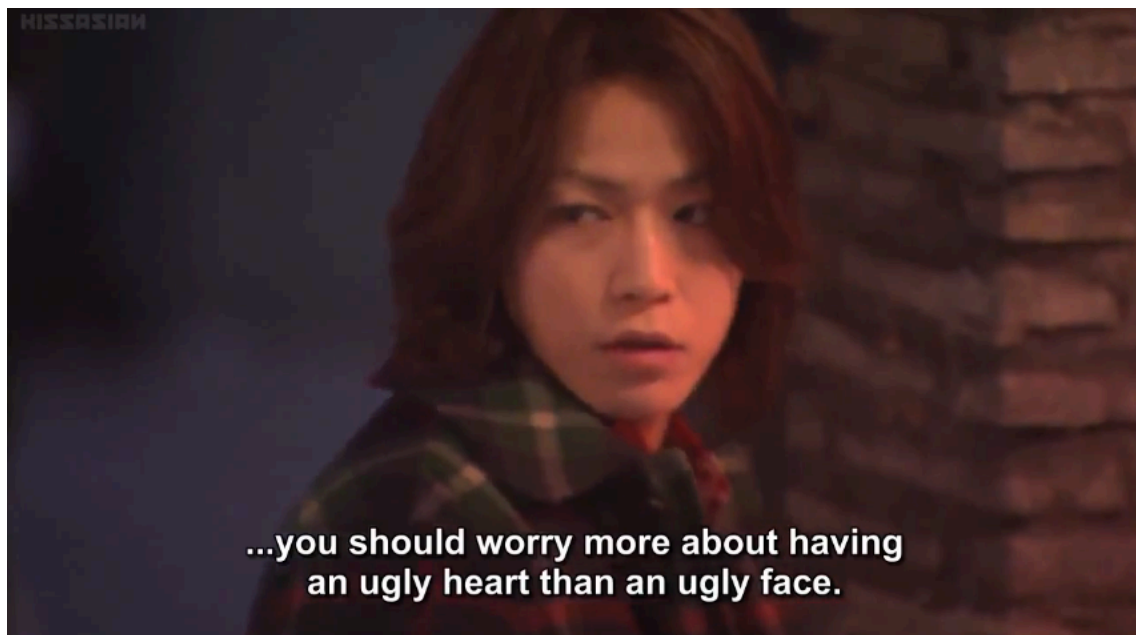


Image 4. *Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge* (2010), episode 1. Screen capture from KissAsian.com. Kyoko telling Sunako that what is really important is within you. <http://kissasian.com/Drama/Yamato-Nadeshiko-Shichi-Henge>.



Image 5. *Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge* (2010), episode 2. Screen capture from KissAsian.com. Sunako has become a true Japanese lady after eating some type of mushrooms. <http://kissasian.com/Drama/Yamato-Nadeshiko-Shichi-Henge>.



Image 6. *Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge* (2010), episode 2. Screen capture from KissAsian.com. Sunako has become a girly and suddenly interested in her looks. Her tone while talking has also changed. <http://kissasian.com/Drama/Yamato-Nadeshiko-Shichi-Henge>.



Image 7. *Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge* (2010), episode 2. Screen capture from KissAsian.com. Sunako becomes very embarrassed after finding men's underwear when she is folding clothes as part of her house chores as the lady of the house. <http://kissasian.com/Drama/Yamato-Nadeshiko-Shichi-Henge>.

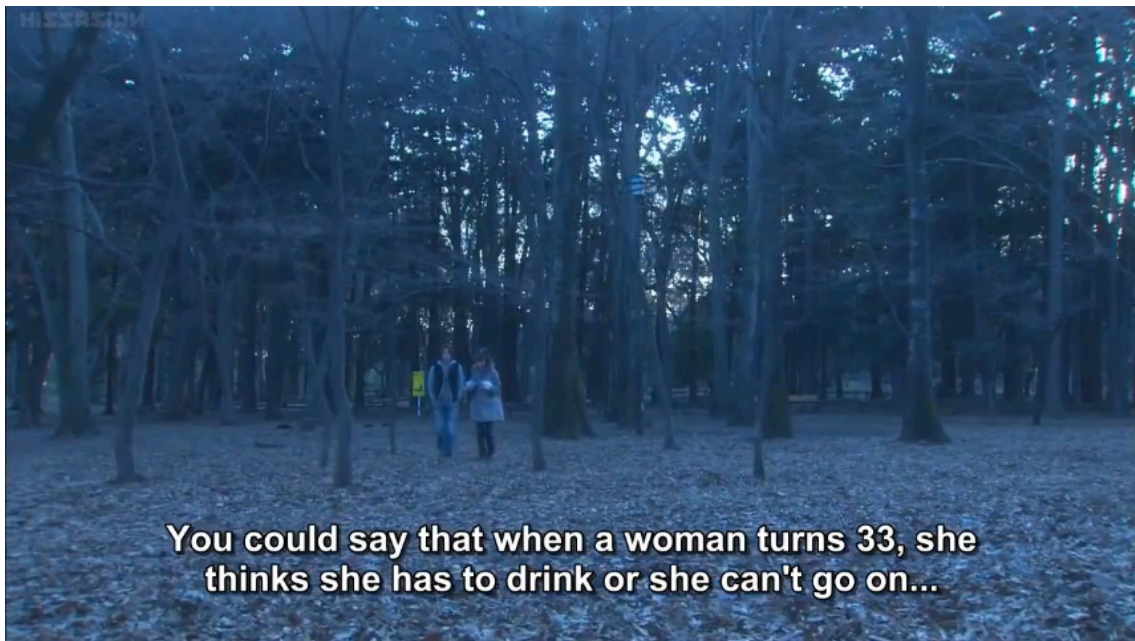


Image 8. *Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge* (2010), episode 1. Screen capture from KissAsian.com. Mari telling Kyohei about the hardships of women in their 30s. <http://kissasian.com/Drama/Yamato-Nadeshiko-Shichi-Henge>.

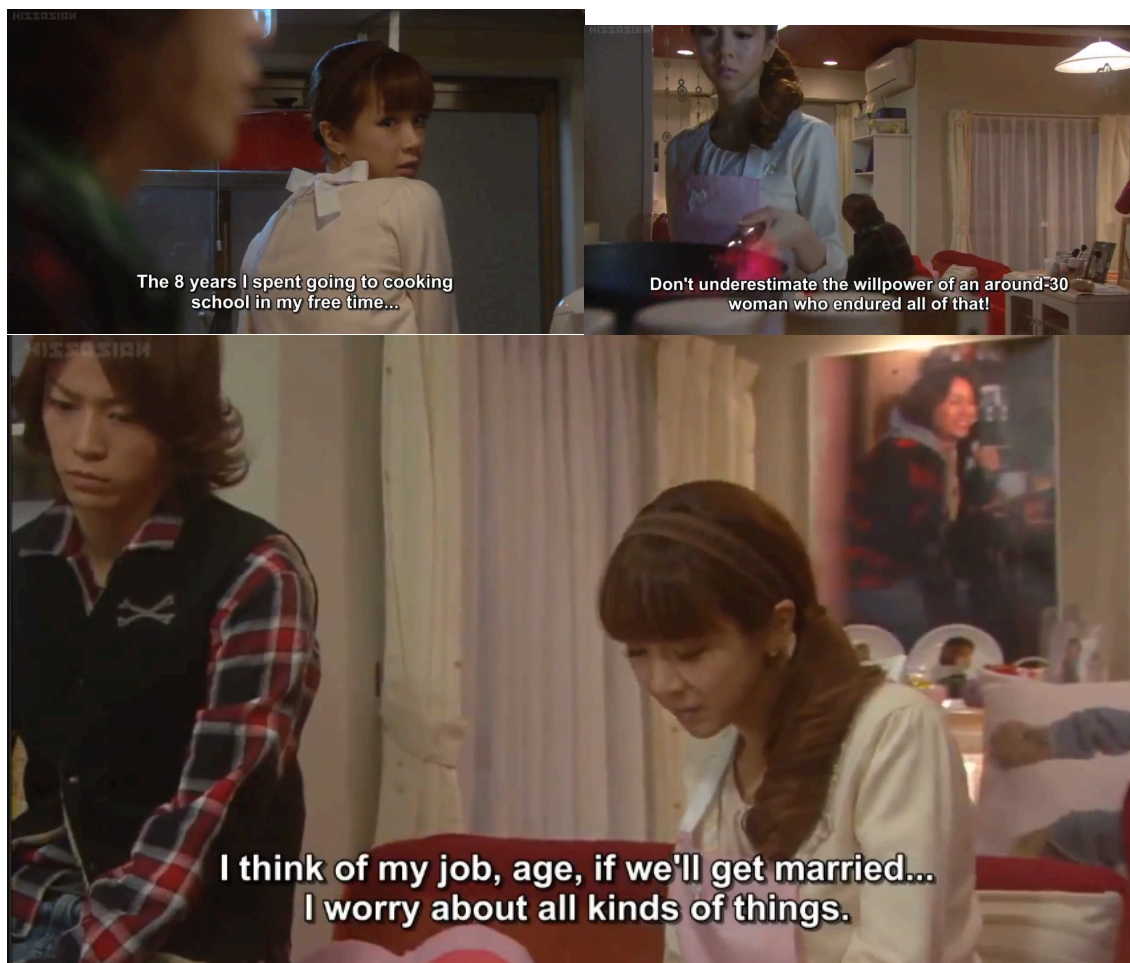


Image 9. Yamato Nadeshiko Shichi Henge (2010), episode 3. Screen capture from KissAsian.com. Mari talking about how she has been learning cooking for quite a lot of time in order to get a man and how she worries now that she is 30 about ageing, work or whether she will ever get married.
<http://kissasian.com/Drama/Yamato-Nadeshiko-Shichi-Henge>.