

A Feminist Cinematic Reflections: Challenging Patriarchal Norms in Japanese Workplaces

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Abstract

Women's representation in Japanese TV dramas has increased over the last decade, with women portrayed not only in subordinate roles but also as agents of rebellion against patriarchal society. In Japanese culture, women are still perceived through the values of *ryōsai kenbo* and masculine organizational structures, making this a compelling topic for critical analysis. This research examines female resistance in two Japanese dramas, *Doctor X: Surgeon Daimon Michiko* and *Legal V: Ex-Lawyer Takanashi Shoko*, and explores how patriarchal discourse is constructed and rejected. This qualitative study combines Krippendorff's content analysis with Sara Mills' Feminist Discourse Analysis. Data comprise scene fragments, dialogues, and narratives depicting women's subordination and resistance in the workplace. Analysis involves coding characters, interactions, and narrative structures, focusing on subject-object representation, agency, and power relations. The findings indicate that the protagonists, Daimon Michiko and Takanashi Shoko, represent women who experience subordination but actively resist patriarchy. Structurally, both encounter patriarchal organizational practices, including power harassment and objectification. Discursively, however, they exercise agency by rejecting organizational norms, negotiating professional positions, and reversing power dynamics. Thus, both dramas subvert patriarchal norms and create space for counter-narratives that affirm women's autonomy in the workplace.

Keywords: Female lead; Feminist discourse analysis; Japanese patriarchal norms; Woman Resistance

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1. Introduction

Japan is an East Asian nation recognized as a leader in global popular culture, boasting a substantial fanbase worldwide (Bourgogne, 2023). Prior to World War II in 1945, Japan was recognized as a fascist nation with a formidable military and was implicated in crimes against humanity. The Fukuda Doctrine was introduced in 1977, presenting the Heart to Heart notion

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as a facet of Japanese foreign policy, which evolved into Japan's soft power for fostering international relations (Y. Uchiyama et al., 2024). Since that time, Japan has adopted softer approaches in its international collaborations to transform its image from one of brutality to that of a more friendly and peaceful nation (Sugimoto, 2014).

The process of transforming one's image takes a long time, one approach utilized by Japan is the usage of popular culture (pop culture), such as anime, manga, drama, video games, Japanese cultural festivals, and so on. Popular culture is credited with successfully changing the image of Japan and the public's impression of it as a *kawaii* (cute) and friendly country, thereby considerably influencing worldwide entertainment trends (Noonan, 2025). In addition to boosting the economy, popular culture allows Japan to restructure its national identity on the international stage, one of which is to counteract the dominance of American popular culture in Japan (Pellitteri, 2018). At its peak, Japan, which had seized the success of popular culture, ultimately established a policy framework in the shape of the 'Cool Japan' program, which packaged popular culture as a cultural diplomacy instrument for economic development (Iwabuchi, 2015).

One of Japan's significant cultural products is television drama, also known as *terebi dorama* (テレビドラマ), which covers drama, romance, and comedy genres. The creation of *dorama* began as a response to a shift in demand for local television in the mid-1980s, when popularity and ratings for dramas with family, history, and mystery themes declined (Bourgogne, 2023). Television introduced new celebrities, known as *tarento*/talent (タレント), who have a broad influence on different forms of entertainment, including as game shows, ads, and dramas. Since then, romantic and comedy dramas have regained popularity in Japan (Terrades, 2023).

The global spread of Japanese popular culture has led to a new understanding of cultural interchange, with storylines that address current social issues and appeal to a wide range of people (Pan, 2024). *Terebi dorama* can be used to depict social phenomena in society, such as the emergence of strong social norms, issues in the community, or conflicts in the residential environment. However, during the last decade, an oddity has formed in which *doramas* starring female main characters (MC) primarily highlight challenges related to career gaps, societal prejudices of women, and even workplace dangers (Sim, 2020). Female characters are always depicted as identical to 'home' (*ie*/家) in accordance with the gender narrative that 'home' is an extension of the state ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother), where 'home' is a metaphor for the state and the husband is the president, so whatever men say is law (Dewi, 2024). Women's disobedience to their partners can be figuratively linked to disobedience to the state, hence women (wives) are expected to obey their husbands' every order (Anzai, 2025).

From the 1920s until the 2000s, Japanese cinema frequently depicted male supremacy over women and *ryōsai kenbo*, or obedience to men (Laird, 2023). Women are frequently portrayed as creatures dependent on men, and they are expected to be housewives who bow to their husbands after marriage (Adriani & Minandha, 2021). However, some post-2010 *terebi doramas* featuring female MCs in the workplace have begun to challenge patriarchal conventions through strong and autonomous female characters. These films, viewed via a feminist lens, not only illustrate the changing roles of women in the workplace, but also serve as cinematic reflections on how women in Japan confront and dismantle patriarchal conventions (Wing-Fai, 2024) (Tsukamoto, 2025).

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Japanese dramas portray female MCs as feminist characters in two *terebi dramas*, '*Doctor X: Gekai Daimon Michiko*' (2012-2021) and '*Legal V: Ex. Lawyer Takanashi Shoko*' (2018). Both MCs who face oppression at work want to challenge the patriarchal organizational system dominated by men. The drama Doctor X follows the narrative of Daimon Michiko, a female 'super doctor' who works as a freelance surgeon at a university hospital in Japan. As a woman and a freelancer, she is viewed as a danger to the traditional organizational hierarchy system. Michiko is always eager to conduct high-risk surgeries that other male surgeons do not, and she refers patients to other doctors when they are declared inoperable. Despite the significant dangers, she prioritizes her patients' health over completing first-rate medical treatments or creative techniques, and she is able to adapt appropriate surgical approaches on the spot as needed. This practice frequently puts her in confrontation with other doctors (TV Asahi, 2013).

Meanwhile, *Legal V* explores the narrative of Takanashi Shoko, a former lawyer. Her legal license was suspended after she became the target by her male supervisor while working on a top-secret case. Despite giving up, Shoko encouraged a university lecturer who was also a lawyer to start a law business. Later she worked as a freelancer and behind the scenes at the company. To that purpose, she hired a lawyer and a legal assistant to work for the law company. Finally, she employed the firm to win a civil action for her case, which resulted in her dismissal as a lawyer, sue the Law Association organization, and restore her good name in the public domain (AsianWiki, 2019). Both of these dramas portray dominant women who face negative stereotypes and verbal discrimination that are inherent in the patriarchal structure in the workplace, but struggle to resist using their masculine performing qualities while maintaining a feminine style.

The perception of women in *terebi drama* will be analyzed using Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis concept, often known as Feminist Discourse Analysis. The concept focuses on how gender representation, particularly women, emerges in speech. In meaning, Mills focuses on women in discourse, which may be defined as either subjects or objects formed in the text (Mills, 2004). Expanding on prior research of (Rosyida & Bhakti, 2023), this study investigates how the two MCs are portrayed as strong, dominant, and heroic people against the system that oppresses women in the workplace. While the previous study focused on comparing female representation and workplace positioning, the current research narrows going deeper into the formation of patriarchal norms, female resistance, and gender power relations. It also contrasts in the depth of its feminist perspective, rather than just highlighting female domination, this study investigates how female characters navigate and resist patriarchal systems in the Japanese workplace. Both MCs operate in sectors dominated by men, such as doctors, attorneys, and journalists, which require masculine attitudes, therefore their existence as women with masculine characteristics is an anomaly in the organizational system (Rosyida & Bhakti, 2023). In close, their coworkers and superiors attempt to supply negative stereotypes and power harassment (*pawāhara*) in response to the two MCs' masculine views, reinforcing the patriarchal system and perpetuating power dynamics. Feminist discourse analysis may identify forms of unfairness, gender prejudice against women, and confirm the position of the two MCs as subjects in the text, which is also used as an analytical technique in solving the issue formulation in this study (Savitri et al., 2025). As a result, the purpose of this research is to examine the form of women's resistance in Japan's organizational system through the viewpoints of the two MCs in the two films.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of human and social issues, necessitating comprehensive and detailed information and data (Fadli, 2021). The data utilized comprises primary sources, specifically fragments and texts from the television dramas Doctor X Seasons 1-7 and Legal V Episodes 1-12. The chosen texts focus exclusively on aspects that emphasize the liberation or resistance of the main character to the patriarchal system and norms within the workplace. This study will utilize secondary data, including scientific articles from accredited journals and reputable websites, focusing on feminism and various forms of oppression and subordination of women in the workplace. This reliance on secondary sources represents a limitation of the material in this research.

Data analysis techniques encompass the coding of five fundamental components of content analysis as outlined by Klaus Krippendorff. These components include: (1) Analysis Unit, which consists of the text or media under examination, such as scenes, dialogues, visuals, characters, or narratives; (2) Recording Unit, A specific segment within a film that is isolated for coding or counting, consist of a duration of time, dialogue text, or a camera shot; (3) Context Unit, a background to the scene or broader narrative to understand the meaning of the recording unit so that researchers do not misinterpret; (4) Referential Unit, a particular object, concept, symbol, or stereotype referenced by visuals, dialogue, or music in a film, even though the form of appearance varies; and (5) Analitical Unit, the final assessment of the message structure, ideology, or depiction of the film as a whole is based on the theory used.

This research using sampling refers to the selection of specific portions of the text to be utilized as data samples (Recording Unit). Coding refers to the process of categorizing textual elements into specific codes for analytical purposes (Context Unit)). Inference involves drawing conclusions from coded data while considering social, cultural, and historical contexts (Referential Unit). Validation serves as a confirmation process for the analysis, ensuring that it reflects valid and legitimate meanings, supported by validation tests with other theories or concepts (Analytical Unit) (Krippendorff, 2019). Applying content analysis techniques together with Sara Mills' CDA theory allows media products to influence the perception of patriarchal power dynamics in relation to women (Hamlen, 2025).

In the book of Feminist Stylistics, founded by Sara Mills (1995, 2002), is a feminist extension of Critical Discourse Analysis. While classic CDA investigates how language reproduces power and ideology, Mills focuses on how these linguistic mechanisms create gender hierarchies and perpetuate patriarchal regimes. By integrating stylistics and CDA, her method provides a realistic "toolkit" for interrogating texts rather than regarding language as neutral. This study uses this paradigm to examine how female characters traverse Japanese workplace narratives, including participants, process types, agency, control, and passive constructs that frequently conceal institutional bias (Noviana & Wulandari, 2017). As a result, applying Feminist Stylistics to a CDA perspective enables us to track not only how organizational patriarchy is perpetuated via everyday interactions, but also how women negotiate, resist, and subvert these dominant institutions (Mills, 2002).

This study will use scene cuts, dialogues, visuals, characters, and narratives as the Unit of Analysis in the drama series Doctor X: Gekai Daimon Michiko Seasons 1-7 (2012-2021) and Legal V: Ex. Lawyer Takanashi Shoko (2018). The sampling selection from each film consists of 10 data points related to the oppression and resistance of the two MCs against

patriarchal domination and organizational systems. These data points are subsequently coded by categorizing elements of the text for analysis based on the observed data. This methodological framework allows for an understanding of the forms of resistance demonstrated by the two MCs in their disapproval to the patriarchal organizational system.

3. Result and Discussion

This analysis uses the feminist discourse framework established by Sara Mills, a feminist scholar and discourse theorist, which emphasizes gender representation in texts and discourses (Asheva & Tasyarasita, 2022). Understanding the construction, maintenance, and limitation of women's subject positions within patriarchal discourse is essential. Mills claims that women are frequently objectified in discourse and narrative, consistently viewed from a masculine standpoint (Mills, 2002). Mills' feminist discourse facilitates deeper engagement in addressing the issue of women oppressed by environmental gender bias (Bodis, 2014). This study employs Mills' equality set to analyze the representation of the two primary female characters, Daimon Michiko and Takanashi Shoko, in the Japanese dramas *Doctor X* and *Legal V*, as counter-subjects in a male-dominated field. The series addresses women's working lives and examines resistance to controlling systems through the perpetuation and chronicling of structural pressures.

3.1 Character Representation in '*Doctor X: Surgeon Daimon Michiko*' and '*Legal V: Ex. Lawyer Takanashi Shoko*'

The characters Daimon Michiko in *Doctor X* and Takanashi Shoko in *Legal V* clarify strong, independent women who confront the firmly established patriarchal norms within the Japanese workplace. Both MCs demonstrate their resolve under pressure, evident in their conflict resolution strategies and their performance in a male-dominated environment. Daimon Michiko is depicted as an independent surgeon affiliated with Kanbara Agency, characterized by a stylish appearance and a strong sense of fashion, which can occasionally be perceived as overly lavish for a medical professional. Daimon, known as Doctor-X, is a highly skilled physician distinguished by her exceptional medical abilities and her willingness to challenge perceived injustices in authority. Consequently, she is not constrained by the hierarchical structure of the hospital in which she is employed. She demonstrates courage by frequently challenging the procession of doctors who traverse the hospital each morning. She engages in debates with her superiors regarding disease diagnoses and advocates for high-risk surgeries, in contrast to her colleagues who typically comply with their superiors' decisions to mitigate surgical risks or seek alternative scapegoats. Daimon consistently asserts the motto 「私は失敗しないので」, translating to 'I will not fail', during each surgical operation in the episodes. This is evidenced by her surgical failure rate, which stands at 0%. Daimon, as the sole female surgeon in her department, exemplifies a symbolic resistance to traditional norms that dictate women's submission to authority and male-dominated hierarchies.

Takanashi Shoko, featured in '*Legal V: Ex. Lawyer Takanashi Shoko*,' is a former lawyer and a *densha otaku* (railway enthusiast), pointed out for her fashionable style and interest in rare, hard-to-obtain items. She operates as a freelancer at the Kyogoku Law Firm, following the cancellation of her license by the Law Association due to allegations of accepting bribes from clients. She operates independently as a solo lawyer, performing behind the scenes as a shadow lawyer at the Kyogoku Office. Despite having her lawyer's license revoked, she

continues to advocate for justice in an unofficial ability at the law firm. She recruits senior professors and amateur lawyers to establish Shoko's law firm, fulfilling her requests without coercion. Shoko, as a freelancer, effectively persuades two male lawyers to take on several significant cases by claiming that her license has been revoked. In the course of her work, she frequently encounters intimidation and manipulative conduct from former colleagues at the Felix & Tenma law firm, along with threats from the Law Association to disband her law firm (Episode 8, minutes 08.00-08.20 and 06.23-06.50). Shoko persists in her efforts against the highest authority, advocating for all cases within her firm to secure victory.

The portrayal of both MCs illustrates the challenges women face in securing high-risk roles or strategic positions, as well as in sustaining their role in the workplace, commonly referred to as the 'glass ceiling' (ガラス天井) in male-dominated environments (Espinosa & Ferreira, 2022). Both MCs demonstrate the independent nature of female dominance and challenge the communal norms of the organizational system, which contrasts with the traditional values of Japanese society, where women are expected to be gentle, unobtrusive, and obedient to their superiors (Suzuki & Naka, 2022). In feminist discourse, both MCs serve not only as figures within the narrative but also shape the reader's perspective to support women's empowerment against male dominance in a patriarchal work environment.

3.2 Feminist Discourse in '*Doctor X: Surgeon Daimon Michiko*' and '*Legal V: Ex. Lawyer Takanashi Shoko*'

This analysis examines both films through the lens of Sara Mills' feminist discourse, which examines the construction of gender representation within patriarchal discourse, focusing on the portrayal of women as both subjects and objects in the text. It also explores how to navigate these roles within an organizational system influenced by patriarchal values in Japan.

3.2.1 *Organizational Patriarchy and the Subjection of Women*

At first, it is crucial to recognize that the narrative techniques of the two films diverge significantly. The Doctor X series is consistently begun and concluded with a male narrator asserting his identity as an autonomous super-doctor who despises the system, accompanied by a scene transition featuring Daimon Michiko adorned in extravagant high heels and vibrant attire befitting a doctor. In the contrary, Legal V does not support the use of a narrator or a first-person perspective. The existence of a narrator is fundamental to the positioning of women as subjects or objects in this film. Sara Mills differentiates between the narrator, who recounts the story, and the characters inside the narrative, emphasizing the significance of determining if the narrator embodies the prevailing voice and how women are portrayed. In the Doctor X series, the narrator is a male who, in accordance with societal norms in Japan, adheres to patriarchal beliefs, perceives women in the workplace as *shokuba no hana* or 'office sweets', and employs language and attitudes that objectify women. Conversely, the narrator always characterizes Daimon Michiko as an exceptional physician with superior ability, who is autonomous and detests the hierarchical structure that mandates her compliance with regulations.

Daimon frequently encounters verbal objectification that underscores the perception of her subordinate status, along with prejudice and criticism from colleagues who regard her as a threat to systemic stability. For instance, a senior female nurse designates her as 組織のガン

or 'cancer within the system' (Season 3, Episode 3, minutes 46.02-46.39) and a contagion across the company (Season 3, Episode 7, minutes 18:10-18:30). This term metaphorically illustrates how the existence of independent and self-assured women is perceived as a threat within a regimented, masculinity-oriented culture. Daimon, as a freelancer, is frequently misinterpreted by her male counterparts as a 怠けるバイト or indolent part-time employee (Season 2, Episode 4, minutes 16.45-16.52), perceived to be motivated solely by financial gain, lacking loyalty or a sense of corporate culture. Naturally, Daimon disputes this, bringing up the terms "freeter" or "フリーター," which refer to individuals who are solely concerned with making money (Cook, 2013). This discrimination exemplifies the patriarchal framework that obstructs women's attainment of complete autonomy in their professional capacities, rendering Daimon's status as an object in patriarchal discourse not only a constraint on her mobility but also a strategy to undermine her standing in the workplace.

Daimon Michiko's character in the Doctor X series exemplifies the two-faceted condition of women as both oppressed objects and autonomous persons confronting patriarchal oppression in their professional environment. Daimon, as a marginalized individual, is subjected to mockery from her colleagues who frequently devalue her status, both as a woman and as a freelancer inside a hierarchical and male-dominated hospital environment. She is frequently dismissed by the hospital director for declining to execute procedures deemed politically advantageous for the director's standing (Season 2, Episode 7, minutes 33.20-33.25). This step implies that women and subordinates are mere instruments for fulfilling the personal ambitions of their superiors, while also demonstrating an effort to restrict Daimon's autonomy and professionalism in his medical practice. Sara Mills' viewpoint elucidates that this conduct constitutes an effort of subordination (Gershoni, 2023), wherein male colleagues reinforce their authority by undermining Daimon's position, who resists adhering to customary norms. Daimon exhibits remarkable resolve and consistently resists succumbing to pressure to adhere to standards that seem unjust. Her bravery in doing the difficult procedure and her dedication to patient welfare transcend the constraints imposed by the patriarchal structure within the institution. She boldly confronts the hospital director to advocate for a patient's recovery and defends a nurse dismissed due to the physician's carelessness, while other nurses are compelled to comply due to coercive pressures (Season 7, Episode 5, minutes 25.42-27.14). Daimon's character embodies the concept of a female hero who challenges corrupt and patriarchal power, demonstrating that women's strength and independence may rival or even exceed male dominance.

In contrast to Doctor X, the Legal V series eliminates a narrator and any character perspective, resulting in a more impartial storytelling style. The portrayal of women's subordination within the system is exemplified by the character Takanashi Shoko, who is instructed to reemerge in public after a year of absence following the revocation of her lawyer's license by the Law Association (Episode 1, minutes 00.59-02.35). Shortly thereafter, she enlisted other individuals to establish the Kyogoku Law Firm and operated covertly as an unlicensed freeter. Upon closer examination, Shoko's termination was orchestrated and executed by her former colleagues at the Felix & Tenma office, where she was intentionally designated as the scapegoat to conceal information that could expose Mr. Tenma's personal secrets or the collusion between lawyers and the *yakuza*. Throughout the narrative, Mr. Tenma, as a duplicitous character, persistently accuses Shoko of seeking retribution against him for allegedly dismissing her from his workplace (Episode 9, minutes 48.10-49.17). The conflict

between the two characters in this series illustrates the supremacy of the organizational structure and the patriarchy within the workplace, as depicted through Mr. Tenma, while Shoko represents the oppression of women. Shoko encounters the objectification of Tenma's conduct through *pawāhara*, as Tenma attempts to manipulate his colleagues inside the office and the Law Association, or employs *yakuza* to obstruct the investigation of the case managed by Kyogoku Law Firm (Episode 3, minutes 29.20-29.36). In addition to Shoko, Mr. Tenma's female secretary, Nakazawa Atsumi, and the female lawyer in his office, Shiratori Minako, also endure verbal and behavioral abuse from Mr. Tenma, which undermines their confidence in the workplace (Episode 2, minutes 58:57 - 56:03, and Episode 6, minutes 16:19 - 16:22). This conduct constitutes power harassment (*pawāhara*), wherein a superior issues threats, either verbally or through demeanor, towards subordinates. *Pawāhara* is influenced not only by the workplace culture but also by the psychology or subjective emotions of an individual, which subsequently incites the environment to target specific individuals or groups (Rosander & Nielsen, 2024).

Tenma, as a depiction of the organizational structure, illustrates a power dynamic that confers complete authority to men and leaders over subordinates. Tenma employs *jōge kankei* (superior-subordinate interactions within the organizational framework) to show authority over Shoko, exercising the power to terminate, intimidate, and coerce her as a manifestation of female oppression. *Jōge kankei* is a hierarchical framework in Japanese society predicated on age, experience, and organizational rank, which affects how superiors provide directives, feedback, and cultivate relationships in the workplace. Tenma's dominant position inside his office and the Law Association establishes an unassailable status quo, thereby conditioning his subordinates to exhibit respect, loyalty, and collaboration in pursuit of the organization's principles. Consequently, Shoko is regarded as a threat or adversary that must be eradicated to preserve Tenma's position and status, rather than as an equal colleague striving for elevated standing.

From feminist discourse perspective, both Daimon and Shoko, the two main characters, can serve as subjects and objects of repression in the film. They are portrayed as risks to the organizational system, both receiving *pawāhara* and harassment from their superiors through verbal or behavioral means that may jeopardize lives. In Japanese society, characterized by its community nature, there exists a proverb, *deru kugi wa utareru* (a protruding nail must be hit), which parallels a social norm inside organizations that prioritizes collective harmony, discourages individuality, and diminishes personal accomplishments. Oppressive behavior in the workplace is not an inherent trait of men or a natural occurrence; rather, it is influenced by communal Japanese social norms that prioritize cooperation and suppress individual interests in favor of collective objectives (Arifin, 2021). Ultimately, women, as a secondary societal group, will be the most adversely impacted by bullying and *pawāhara*, resulting in diminished opportunities for professional advancement and perpetuating gender inequity (Nagase, 2024).

3.2.2 The Domination and Resistance of Women

Despite being portrayed as subjugated entities, both MCs also function as agents who aggressively oppose patriarchal values in their professional environments. Daimon's character exhibits significant independence in her behavior and is persistent in negotiations concerning her role as a freelance physician at the hospital. She proposes a contract prohibiting any activities that do not necessitate a medical practice permit, including refraining from assisting

her superiors with research writing for academic papers, attending academic conferences, participating in *nomikai* (drinking for socialize) both online and offline, concealing romantic relationships within the hospital, accompanying superiors to the golf course, attending morning roll calls, participating in year-start or year-end parties, visiting branch hospitals, addressing online meeting issues or aiding with remote computer problems, facilitating Wi-Fi connections for remote meetings, and engaging in hospital administration (Season 7, Episode 1, minutes 26.37-28.43). This conduct indicates that her judgments as a physician are constrained by professional standards aligned with medical ethics and patient safety. Her decisions that contradict the hospital hierarchy exemplify a rejection of control aimed at constraining her autonomy as a professional woman, resisting the pressure exerted by her gender-biased coworkers and superiors. Daimon Michiko affirms her role as an agent wielding authority over her expertise as a domineering woman.

Similarly, the character Takanashi Shoko endures persecution and power harassment from her former coworkers, who endeavor to undermine her both personally and professionally, hence perpetuating the prevailing masculine status quo inside the organizational framework. Nevertheless, she retaliates by enlisting law professors, former prosecutors, and novice attorneys, ultimately securing a legal victory to annul her attorney's license. Takanashi preserves her negotiating leverage by resisting intimidation and persistently employs a plan to rehabilitate her reputation and legal rights, positioning herself as the primary advocate against oppression related to her identity as a woman and a professional. Mills' perspective portrays Takanashi as an individual who persistently resists her position as a subordinate entity within a gender-biased legal framework. Both MCs portray women as defiant subjects who reject patriarchal norms and as catalysts for change that challenge the hierarchical structure of the organization, serving as primary agents of patriarchal conduct. Daimon and Takanashi's opposition to objectification and systemic pressure fortifies their status as autonomous individuals striving to assert authority over their professional endeavors. Sara Mills' CDA perspective illustrates that both MCs question gender preconceptions in the workplace and advocate for women's professional authority within a patriarchal system. The Doctor X and Legal V series illustrate the mechanics of patriarchal discourse in the workplace while serving as cinematic depictions of women's efforts to uphold professional integrity in the face of gender-based institutional barriers.

3.3 Feminism as Subversion of Patriarchal Norms?

The prevalence of masculinity in the workplace or organizational framework is particularly clear in these two series. The prevailing notion of masculinity that positions men as infallible leaders, combined with the *jōge kankei* system that legitimizes power and sexual harassment towards subordinates, and societal values that emphasize conformity, reinforce power dynamics favoring men over women. These ideals do portray women as objects or victims within a patriarchal framework, but they also show women as persons who actively oppose conventional standards. This dynamic is not purely fictitious; it mirrors larger empirical truths. According to the World Economic Forum in 2023, Japan remains relatively low in gender equality, particularly in economic participation and opportunity, demonstrating the persistence of patriarchal systems inside professional organizations.

The characters emerge as deviations inside the corporate framework, demonstrating masculine self-efficacy, professionalism, and self-assurance, thereby challenging patriarchal authority. This approach is critical for understanding how female characters act as agents who

defy traditional objectification and stigma (O'Reilly, 2023). Through the lens of Sara Mills' Feminist Discourse Analysis, these characters can be regarded as inhabiting contradictory positions, a resisting objectification while recreating themselves as authoritative subjects in discourse. Their assertiveness and autonomy challenge the normative gender order that has traditionally limited women to passive roles.

From the feminist discourse standpoint, both MCs are portrayed as activists fighting for equal rights and professional parity with males. The presentation of both MCs as freelancers is intentional, highlighting their superior talents to those of their male colleagues, resulting in better compensation than permanent male employees within the story. This is in stark contrast to the real-world reality that women earn 40% less than males at comparable structural levels (Liu, 2024). According to OECD data, Japan continues to have a considerable gender wage gap, indicating long-standing structural disadvantages such as limited access to leadership posts and discriminatory labor practices.

This suggests that women face economic and structural barriers in the workplace, symbolized by the glass ceiling, that impede their pursuit of equal rights. As a result, major steps are required to disrupt the established traditional norms in their respective fields (Yamada, 2024). In this regard, the narrative stance of the two major characters serves as a counter-hegemonic discourse, with their professional success and freedom symbolically breaking down institutional barriers. Their resistance is both personal and institutional, exposing and contesting systemic injustices ingrained in workplace cultures.

It is critical to emphasize that the characters of Daimon and Takanashi break the common stereotype of Japanese women, who are frequently portrayed as fragile, overly emotional, and inferior. The text's linguistic choices, as well as the portrayal of masculinity in both main characters, effectively deconstruct women's perspectives on patriarchal myths. This not only promotes gender inequity in societal institutions, but also frames them as feminist actors working to undermine patriarchal systems in professional contexts. Within feminist discourse, this series manifests as a framework of the dominant narrative of patriarchy juxtaposed with the counter-narrative of resistance, emphasizing the voices of women who challenge hegemonic narratives in their quest of workplace rights (Mardikantoro et al., 2022).

4. Conclusions

According to this study, the two MCs, Takanashi Shoko (Legal V) and Daimon Michiko (Doctor X), are portrayed as feminist subjects who oppose the patriarchal and masculine standards of the organizational system. Applying Sara Mills' Feminist Discourse Analysis framework, one can discern that both dramas portray women not merely as objects subjugated by the system, but also as dynamic agents who resist and challenge patriarchal dominance within the workplace. The portrayal of women within the text is consistently biased, as both dramas depict them as objects through the lens of the narrator's perspective, narrative framework, and societal standing. On one side, feminist discourse provides a platform to illustrate that women, as subjects, possess the capacity to challenge and resist these subordinate portrayals. In this study, this is exemplified by the two MCs who deviate from the conventional gender norms in Japan, which are deeply embedded in the principles of conformity and superior-inferior (*jōge kankei*) relations. The portrayal of both MCs serves as a critique of the stereotype surrounding traditional Japanese women, who are often depicted as perpetually

submissive to men. This representation highlights a dynamic of subordination, wherein men may exert power through harassment—whether physical, verbal, or behavioral—rendering women powerless and subject to male expectations.

By resisting the values of relations and demonstrating strong self-confidence, both MCs want to break free from this stereotype. They do this by fighting oppression in the workplace with the same performance abilities as males and by declaring their independence from the organizational structure. This illustrates that women's resistance is not always executed overtly, but rather with strategic finesse, demonstrating intellect, composure, and the capacity to guide within a collective. This resistance embodies the values of Japanese feminism, challenging patriarchal norms and opposing the stereotypes associated with traditional Japanese women. It intertwines these principles with a feminine aesthetic in clothing, serving as a manifestation of liberated thought and self-acceptance, free from male oppression. To put it differently, within the framework of Japanese traditional way of relationship, both MCs emerge as subversive figures that challenge conventional norms.

In the realm of popular culture, Sara Mills' feminist discourse illustrates that *dorama* serves as a significant platform for constructing counter-discourse in opposition to patriarchal dominance. The portrayal of these two MCs serves as a form of symbolic defiance against the entrenched patriarchal system, while simultaneously offering the audience an opportunity to reconsider the status and function of women within contemporary Japanese society. Consequently, *dorama* transcends mere entertainment, serving as an ideological tool capable of shaping a novel social consciousness concerning women's rights and gender equality within both public and professional realms. Consequently, both *doramas* serve as a visual expression of resistance feminism in Japan, reinforcing the notion that women are not merely passive participants in the workforce, but rather active agents capable of shaping and redefining the realms of male dominance in contemporary society. In conclusion, these findings are anticipated to offer both theoretical and practical insights within the realm of gender and media studies in the East Asian context, particularly in advancing popular culture as a vehicle for structural resistance, patriarchy, and other significant concerns.

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