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## Rules for Becoming a Graceful Woman: Rhetorical Analysis of the Japanese Self-Help Book *Grace of Women*

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**Rules for Becoming a Graceful Woman:  
Rhetorical Analysis of the Japanese Self-Help Book *Grace of Women*  
Kaori Yamada**

***Grace of Women: Working with Femininity***

People buy and read books to gain something they lack in their lives. One might read a novel to have fun, one might read a philosophy book to rethink his/her worldview, or one might read a how-to book to learn an easy process for self-improvement. Self-help books, in particular, are explicit instruction manuals for achieving personal and relational well being (Zimmerman, Holm, and Haddock 122). By analyzing popular self-help books, one can discover what people believe they might be lacking.

*Ichigaya Economic Newspaper* reports that the book *Grace of Women* earned the title of the number one best selling book in Japan for 2007. According to the newspaper, 2,700,000 copies of the book had been sold through the end of 2007, and 85% of the book's readers were women. The book, targeted at an audience of Japanese women, is composed of seven chapters focusing on manners, ways to talk, fashion, living standards, relationships with others, daily behaviors, and how to live. Its catch-phrase is "Sixty-six rules to become strong, kind, and beautiful women" (Bando book jacket, translated by author). Bando, the author of the book, employs gentle words and a narrative style, speaking to the readers much like an elderly aunt to a young niece.

One might criticize the title of the book because it indicates only women should have grace; however, the author anticipates such criticism and explains three reasons why she wrote this book:



First, regardless of substantial changes of women's life styles and roles, a new living standard has not been established and some misunderstandings, such as the use of rude or violent words, exist among women. Second, women should not pursue respectability from authority or economic benefit like men have done. Women should advance in society with femininity, which values humanity. Third, new challenges from the incidents like global environment, developing countries, an aging society, or advanced technologies require reconsideration of how our society should be and how we should live. The grace of women is necessary on the global stage. (Bando 5-6, translated by author)

Bando has no intention of enforcing a traditional oppressive sex and gender role on women readers. Instead, she encourages them to embrace traditionally feminine values and skills even when in the traditionally masculine workplace. She discourages women from becoming masculine, even when pursuing a career. Therefore, the primary purpose of the book is to empower today's working women by encouraging them to embrace and enact feminine values. This is not like liberal feminism, which just adds women to existing male-dominant systems, but is more like cultural feminism, where feminine virtues need to be valued to counter masculine rules.

Bando's perspective is similar to cultural feminism. Cultural feminists celebrate female nature which they define as nurturing, loving, and egalitarian (Echols 38), and often assume a biological basis exists for sex and gender differences (Echols 37). Bando



encourages feminine values, and assumes women and men have different values. She calls for only women to work and live with feminine values.

Feminine values Bando supports are traditional Japanese feminine values. For instance, she writes, “Japan has been blessed with nature and Japanese people have enjoyed many kinds of flowers and trees ... Women who know the names of flowers and trees are modest and attractive” (Bando 110-111, translated by author). Modest and attractive women know flowers’ names and this is based on the Japanese traditional flower arranging culture.

*Grace of Women* targets Japanese women readers. It is obvious because Bando assumes that her readers speak Japanese. She insists that “It is indispensable for women with grace to be able to use proper Japanese, as long as we are Japanese” (Bando 66, translated by author). The proper Japanese she mentions is the version of the Japanese language used to communicate with other mature Japanese people, which place a heavy emphasis on the correct usage of *keigo* (honorific expressions).

Target readers of the book seems Japanese working women; especially in executive position. In other words, the book ignores women who are economically poor. For advice on fashion, Bando suggests that “simply-designed and good quality skirts and pants are worth ordering custom-made” (Bando 72, translated by author). This advice is clearly not meant for economically disadvantaged women or women in non-executive positions. Thus, Bando gives advice to women readers who are Japanese-speaking and with enough financial freedom to practice the book’s advice.



A book targeted at working women provides revealing insights into sex/gender in Japan because these women represent a cohort that mostly challenges normative social expectations about woman's appropriate place. I refer to gender/sex here, not gender or sex respectively because gender and sex are closely tied and influenced upon each other. There are many behaviors and experiences "tied to *gender*, one's psychological identity (feminine and masculine), and *sex*, one's biological identity (genital, hormones, and chromosomes)" (DeFrancisco and Palczewski 4, emphasis original). This distinction among gender, sex, and gender/sex is important to examine how *Grace of Women* describes women.

Discovering how gender norms produce people's identities often is difficult because one's identity is intersectional, composed of many ingredients, like race, nationality, or position in society (DeFrancisco and Palczewski 8). The book ignores diverse ways to performing gender by focusing on economically privileged Japanese women. This paper explores how this self-help book for Japanese working women produces standards for being a woman, and how the book describes relationships between women and men.

To analyze gender in contemporary Japan, this paper first outlines my theoretical perspectives and then describes the present Japanese social atmosphere which has favorably accepted this book. After introducing the social background surrounding *Grace of Women*, I analyze the contents of the book in detail. My analysis identifies Bando's assumptions about gender/sex. I also examine what are the standards to be a graceful woman according to this book and how these standards create an ideograph of <women>.



This paper also focuses on the portrayal of men in the book and analyzes what is suggested to establish an ideal relationship between men and women. Based on the analysis of ideal relationships, I suggest a possible answer why the title of the book is accurate, appealing to the *Grace of Women*, not the grace of humans.

### **As a Japanese Feminist and Positionalist**

My own perspective as a scholar and as a woman frames my analysis. Every publication, even highly scholarly articles, cannot escape from an author's subjectivity. It is impossible to insist my analyses are objectively true; however, what I would like to discuss here is not a universal truth of *Grace of Women*, but rather, a possible critical interpretation of it. As a Japanese female student who is studying communication in an academic institution of the United States, I read the Japanese self-help book *Grace of Women* with a critical gendered lens.

I employ feminist criticism because it is the best method to examine how gender norms are constructed within artifacts. As Foss argues: "Feminist criticism is the analysis of rhetoric to discover how the rhetorical construction of gender is used as a means for domination" (157). By utilizing feminist criticism, I examine the rhetoric of *Grace of Women* and discover how the rhetoric constructs invisible expectations and standards of being an ideal woman. Uncovering hidden ideologies is crucial because when these ideologies seem natural, people cannot question them. Foss explains that "in feminist criticism, then, the focus is on the rhetorical process by which these qualities come to seem natural and ways in which that naturalness can be called into question" (157). These perspectives form the basis of my analysis.



I also employ a positionalist perspective, which analyzes broader cultural contexts beyond artifacts. A rhetoric scholar Condit distinguishes situational perspective and positional perspective. Situational perspective focuses on “an individual rhetor and the rhetor’s immediate audience” (208) and therefore tends to assume “the context, as viewed from the perspective of the speaker or the immediate audience, is the *full* context” (209, emphasis original). In contrast, positional perspective focuses on “broader historical contexts and more numerous rhetorical agents” (209), therefore from this perspective, “the immediate audience is not the end point of the event. Instead, the greatest importance rests in the habits of vocabulary that are either created or reinforced by the speaker and the fit of such usages within the entire score of the public vocabulary” (209). A positionalist perspective tries to look at not only a text and its intended audience, but its historical and social contexts which make the existence of the text possible.

Based on Condit’s perspective, Ramsey insists recognizing broader cultural contexts surrounding artifacts is important for a feminist criticism because they are an “‘invisible’ part of our history that feminist rhetorical scholars may fail to consider” (353). This idea helps the feminist criticism of *Grace of Women* because “the positionalist perspective aids our ability to understand the complex relationship between gender roles, language, and cultural role(s) proscribed in, dominant representations of ‘women’, as well as the ways that those representations influenced the everyday lives of women” (Ramsey 364). Following this perspective, I analyze not only contents of the book but also social contexts surrounding the book.



Research on self-help books has mostly focused on books published in Western countries, especially the United States. Simonds's book, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, assumes readers are U.S. women, and indicates: "Self-help books are a distinctly American phenomenon"(4) because of the self-centeredness of people in the United States. In the other scholarly articles, self-help books have been described as "a part of fabric of American culture" (Zimmerman, Haddock, and McGeorge 56). Additionally, self-help books' focus on the self participants in an "individualism [that] reflects a Western, white, male capitalistic view of the world" (DeFrancisco and O'Connor 224). However, these researches come to these conclusions without studying self-help books published in other, non-Western countries. I, as a Japanese feminist scholar, will challenge the assumption that self-help books are unique to Western or U.S. culture by analyzing the Japanese self-help book *Grace of Women*.

### **Feminist Analyses of Self-Help Books for Women**

Feminist critics should examine self-help books. These books target mainly women because women tend to look for a means to encourage self-reflection (Simonds 6). Based on this interconnection between self-help books and women as readers, most scholars who analyze self-help books utilize a feminist perspective. Feminist critiques of self-help books are important because they uncover mechanisms used to disguise entrenched social and political oppression of women (Grodin 125). Actually, feminist scholars find that self-help books legitimize the idea that it is women's responsibility to sustain relationships with men, but do not mention any responsibility for men



(DeFrancisco and O'Connor 217). The self-help books justify patriarchal society and discipline women to abide by strict gender role as a form of advice.

Self-help books attract women readers. Scholars have found that women readers buy self-help books because they want to understand the standard by which women are measured. Grodin explains that readers of self-help books inquire how women should act according to social and gender norms, and how they can apply the norms to themselves (129). Self-help books provide models for women to perform proper gender roles. This seeking for standards for being women is crucial because self-help books gain popularity by reproducing authoritative discourse (Ebben 120). Self-help books portray standards for women and the standards work as authoritative power.

The most fundamental problem of self-help books is their failure to analyze the social structure. Self-help books attribute women's problems to them as individuals. Ebbens argues from a feminist perspective that "this privatization of dysfunction thus centers change at the personal level. As a result, the possibility of according equal value in human relationships is depoliticized" (118). Also, Grodin claims that "the [self-help] books clearly are less effective in pointing to the cultural oppression of women as one root of the problem" (132). These scholars criticize self-help books because the books ignore social structures or cultural oppression. Advice in self-help books hides the social oppression of women and blames only women for relationship problems between women and men. Gerson suggests seeing gender as an institution with a critical perspective, which she calls as a gender lens (12). This perspective also explains individual issues related to gender are not just personal matters but always are influenced by gender as a



social structure. Given these critiques, my analysis explores not only the contents of the book but also the social structures which encourage women to perform feminine roles.

### **Contextual Analysis: Criticism of Japanese Working Women**

Based on the positionalist perspective, I examine the social context surrounding *Grace of Women*, focusing on contemporary Japanese social expectations for women. This contextual analysis helps understand why *Grace of Women* has been accepted among Japanese people. Analyzing only the book might invite a superficial understanding of gender in contemporary Japan because the book cannot exist alone. It always exists within a particular social and cultural context.

Legally, Japanese women have achieved equality with men. The Japanese Diet adopted the Law for Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment in 1986 (Kamio 86). The Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society, enacted in 1999, promotes the family-work balance of women and men, the abandonment of violence and the creation of institutions to enforce equality between women and men in workplace (Fusae Ichikawa Memorial Association 59). Women and men enjoy legal equality in Japan.

Despite these legal declarations of equality, de facto sex inequality still dominates Japanese society. Japanese women can gain employment outside the home now, but their jobs tend to be ones that support men. The word *shyokuba-no-hana*, which means office flowers, is used to describe women in the workplace and discourage them from working when they get older. Kamio illustrates typical Japanese workplace discrimination toward women: hiring based on women's age, physical appearance, and ability to commute from



their parents' homes; assigning women to short-term, supplementary chores; paying women lower wages; limiting fringe benefits; restricting promotions; and requiring retirement upon marriage (89). Although the employers cannot engage in these discriminative acts openly, unspoken expectations encourage women to perform feminine roles. Actually, *The Washington Post* reports the vast majority of Japan's 27 million female workers encounter a system of corporate discrimination based on sex (Faiola A09), and only 10.7% of senior corporate and political positions are held by women (Faiola A09). Complete equality between women and men is still an illusion in Japan.

At the social level, Japanese people worry about their aging society and believe that its main cause is the recent increase in women delaying marriage. Japanese people fear that women with life-long careers and their aspirations for work will prevent them from getting married and having children. A decline of the fertility rate is due to a decline in the marriage rate, and the low marriage rate is attributed two main changes. First, the number of women who never marry has increased, and second, the age of first marriage has risen over the last 30 years and this has led to a decline in the number of births within marriage (Rebick 113). The whole responsibility of this social issue is attributed to women who choose not to marry or not to have children. In Dana Cloud's term, the social issue is "privatized" and "agent-centered rather than scene-centered" (391).

Here, I introduce two Japanese words that represent women's position in Japanese society. The phrase *make-inu-no-toboe*, which means howl of the loser dogs, was recognized as a one of the most influential new Japanese words in 2004. The word was first used in a book written by Junko Sakai, a female essay writer who is popular



among Japanese working women. The author uses this word to signify working women who are over thirty, single, and child-free. The happiness of women who succeeded in careers invites people's antipathy because such women do not embrace traditional feminine roles. She suggests the loser dogs, including the author herself, can live with such antipathy if they accept the negative label (Sakai, translated by author). As a joke, some recent Japanese non-marriage women call themselves as *losers*. This creation of the new phrase spotlights women who were socially ignored because of their non-marriage and child-free status. However, these women do not resist against Japanese society which blame their choice of not to marry or not to have children, but just accept the situation as *losers*.

Hakuo Yanagisawa, the Japanese ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare at that time, used the word *umu-kikai* in January 2007, which means child-bearing machines, to describe women in his statement about aging the society ("More Bad News" *The Japan Times*). Although he claimed he did not intend to objectify or devalue women, his word stirred up a nation-wide dispute over women's rights and the policy solution to the aging society. His words clarify a Japanese tendency to criticize working women as the cause of an aging society. Despite the fact that children are born as a result of collaboration between women and men, only women are forced to have responsibility for their social issue. Apparently, men have nothing to do with the creation of children.

These phrases---the howl of the loser dogs and child-bearing machines---describe women, especially working women within Japanese society. Although laws guarantee women's rights and women can choose to work instead of getting married and



having children, the negative assessment of these choices persists and women struggle not only in their careers but also with traditional gender expectations.

### **Contextual Analysis: Grace with Social Anxiety**

The word *hinkaku*, which means grace or dignity, recently has become a prominent term in Japan. A book titled *Kokka-no-Hinkaku*, meaning The Dignity of a Nation, was one of the best-selling books in Japan in 2006 (“Traditional Sense of Value” *The Daily Yomiuri*). *The Times* introduces the book as “the Japanese return to their home grown Bushido samurai spirit” and “the alternative is for the Land of the Rising Sun to become a US-style abomination -a hideous mire of terrorism, economic polarization and unfettered market capitalism” (“How the World Book” *Times*) Masahiko Fujiwara, the author of the book, appeals to classic Japanese values; however, his arguments are so radical that not all readers completely agree with him. Despite his radicalism, the top selling status of the book might imply people’s interest in a value shift in Japan. Not a small numbers of Japanese people feel sympathy with the author because they share the anxiety about the westernized, individualistic, and capitalist values that have permeated the country.

People tend to readily accept theories based on stereotypes because “these ideas preserve the status quo and do not demand that either social or individuals change” (Hare-Mustin 23). People tend to buy books which support their own value. *Grace of Women* builds on the wave of success of the word *hinkaku*. People’s anxiety about losing traditional gender/sex roles might influence on the popularity of the book.

### **Analyzing Rhetoric of *Grace of Women***



As the title of the book clarifies, *Grace of Women* focuses on women and assumes women are inherently different from men. A cultural feminist perspective helps to explain *Grace of Women*. Evans explains two types of cultural feminism: strong cultural feminism and weak cultural feminism. Strong cultural feminism insists that women's characteristics and values are for the good and, indeed, are superior to men's (Evans 76). Weak cultural feminism also celebrates female characteristics; however, it does not hold these characteristics as exclusive to women (Evans 91). Weak cultural feminism is most similar to the ideas of Bando's book because Bando mentions that "some men with grace I met had masculine decision making, courage, and responsibility, and also feminine kindness" (Bando 5, translated by author). Bando insists on the importance of feminine values; however, judging from her statement, men also could adopt femininity to some extent.

My analysis of the book utilizes the terms *exclusive polarization*, *heterosexism*, *working with femininity*, and *imaginary standardization* as my heuristic vocabulary that enables "the conversation to veer off into interesting directions" (Palczewski 388), which progress good criticism.

With these vocabularies, I utilize the concept of ideograph, which is "an ordinary-language term found in political discourse" and "a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal" (McGee 15). As such "liberty" or "rule of law" McGee suggests as examples (7), ideographs are terms which people in a community conditionally share the meanings. The concept of ideograph is useful to examine *Grace of Women* because



“ideograph analyses allow critics to draw connection between rhetoric and ideology (Dubriwny 96). Following other studies of ideographs, I use < women> when I intend to mean women as an ideograph. The four vocabularies precisely examine how the book standardizes Japanese women and create <women>.

Bando’s ideograph of <women> is based on traditional Japanese womanhood, which became consolidated as *ryoosaikembo*, a good wife and wise mother, from the beginning of nineteenth century (Inoue 60). Because of rising nationalism in that age, the principle of educating women was to be wise mothers and good wives for the nation, which was along with the traditional virtues of subservience, modesty, obedience, chastity, and strict self-restraint (Suzuki 187). Such traditional woman’s role could be seen in Japan as recently as 1989 when 71 percent of surveyed Japanese women agreed with the statement “women take care of the household; husband work outside of the home” (qtd. in Gelb and Palley 6). This chapter examines how Bando recreates the traditional standards to be a woman and also how transforms it within present Japanese social and cultural contexts.

First, *exclusive polarization* highlights the binary conception of gender/sex. My analysis identifies two ways that exclusive polarization exposes the assumptions of the book: 1) the book describes women and men as opposite sexes and does not distinguish gender and sex, 2) the book assumes that women must have femininity and excludes others who do not fit this binary such as lesbians, transgender, and bisexual people.

Bando writes the book based on the assumption that gender/sex divides humans into two types: women and men. This gender/sex binary appears in Bando’s advice



concerning the polite way of speaking. She deplors “some young, working women imitate masculinity in a generation ago, like using men’s violent words. Women can adopt good points of admirable men but should not imitate wrong points of bad men” (Bando 64, translated by author). Bando regards violence and violent words as old masculinities, which men in a generation ago used. Women who perform such old-styled masculinity are unacceptable for her. Recent research by Okamoto shows Japanese young women are not averse to making use of the sentence-final particles *zo* and *ze*, which are vulgar and strongly masculine in conversations among friends (qtd. in Ohara 222). Bando’s preference of women with femininity is a result of disagreement to such recent tendency. She disallows women who intentionally perform such masculinity and assumes all women should talk in feminine ways. She excludes women who intentionally performed old-styled masculinity, and readers of the book have no room to consider women who do not fit Bando’s expectations of women.

Moreover, Bando cautions that “it is suicide as a woman not to take care of your appearance even if no one looks at you” (Bando 167, translated by author). Women must spend time on their appearance. This attention for appearance is an advice women should always be conscious of others’ gaze, especially, men’s gaze. The reason only women with femininity need to take care of their appearance is only women with femininity are objects of gaze. Men with masculinity gaze women with femininity. Bando again assumes all women should perform femininity, in this case, focusing on appearance.

Based on the above analysis, I conclude that Bando believes the fixed relationship exists between sex and gender. A person with a biologically female body



should behave femininely. This excludes people who do not fit this typical sex/gender identity. The word *women* the book uses has a narrow meaning. It refers to adults who were born with biologically female bodies, and have performed femininity in proper ways. The book never describes women with masculinity as graceful women. The word *women* in this book assumes women with femininity and works as an ideograph of <women>, which fails to include women who do not perform femininity.

Second, *heterosexism* depicts the assumption women love men and men love women, which ignores homosexual or bisexual people. Bando uses the word *women* with the assumption that all women are heterosexual. In the chapter about personal relationships, she indicates that “it is happy to be loved by friends or persons of the opposite sex whom I also love, but it is not so happy if I was loved by a person of the opposite sex whom I did not like” (Bando 190, translated by author). The author assumes people have romantic relationships with the opposite sex. The book does not mention women who love persons of the same sex or both sexes, even though they also can be called women. The word *women* in this book refers to heterosexual women and works as <women>, which fails to include women with homo/bisexual orientations.

Third, *working with femininity* describes the double-standard for women suggested in the book. The book encourages women to work outside the home for vitalizing their lives. On the other hand, the book also encourages women to perform a traditional feminine style. As a good woman’s role, Bando explains the importance of a wife’s assistance for her husband’s business in today’s society. She indicates the old value, which forces women to stand behind their men, is not useful anymore (Bando 198,



translated by author); however, her advice is still based on the traditional binary of gender roles, for example, she insists “a woman who keeps silent about her husband’s business gains respects from people” (Bando 198, translated by author). That means she assumes women’s husbands stand in a higher economic position than their wives, but she does not mention women who earn a higher salary than their husbands.

Bando tries to describe women with grace as women who are free from the oppressive gender roles, which force them to stay home and support men, and no word on the book pushes women to such roles directly. Her career as the first female Consul General working in Australia convincingly proves her contribution as a pioneer for working women. However, her respect for traditional feminine values indirectly encourages women to keep performing the traditional feminine role. According to Bando, women are not able to become graceful women without maintaining their femininity. She advocates that women should work, but working as women should entail femininity even within masculine workplaces. She does not argue men should change workplaces but insists women with femininity can improve present masculine workplace (Bando 6, translated by author).

Forth, *imaginary standardization* depicts the standards to become the ideal women that the book suggests. I use the word imaginary because although almost no women can meet the standards, the book presents these as requirements for being women. No standard for becoming women exists in reality but the book creates imaginary standards and encourages the women readers to perform and reproduce them. Butler explains such performance and citation of gender reproduce gender norms (14). The book



describes standards for being a graceful woman, but only providing these standards does not work as an ideology or norm. Through reiterating performance of the standards by women readers, these potentially come to work as norms, which all women should follow.

In advertisement, a publisher of the book highlights seventeen requirements of graceful women among the 66 outlined in the book. Graceful women write thank-you letters, can greet in a formal way, cherish long term relationships, do not pursue trends, stand in an upright position physically, do not get fat, know flowers' names, cherish memorials, do not take free-items [like free samples], cook some great meals, do not curry favor with a person, do not pry into the affairs of others, become women who love rather than are loved, do not confess love immediately, and raise graceful men (Bando book jacket, translated by author). This advice is a representation of the whole book, and also, are requirements which a majority of contemporary Japanese women cannot completely fulfill. The selection of the seventeen might have been a good commercial strategy because women may be induced to feel anxiety by reading these expectations which they cannot meet. I analyze these requirements here because these might be the main appeal for readers to decide to buy the book.

These requirements can roughly be categorized into 1) traditional Japanese custom; 2) housekeeping skills; 3) physical appearance; 4) relationships with others. In the first category, Bando requires women to be familiar with Japanese traditional customs, such as thank-you letters or flowers' name. In the second, being graceful women needs to do housekeeping job well, like cooking. In the third, taking care for



physical appearances like posture and fatness is expected. In the fourth, cautions to establish good relationships with others, like currying favor with others and prying into the others' affairs are presented. The last three requirements of the seventeen, which recommend becoming women who love, do not confess immediately, and raise graceful men, are part of the fourth category but especially focus on relationships with men. These three pieces of advice seem different from other categories. Although other categories celebrate Japanese, traditional, and feminine roles, the last three describes women who have initiative for establishing relationships with men. Cultural feminism helps for understanding this strong women model toward men. Women and men are different and women values are superior to men's. I analyze this ideal relationship between men and women suggested by Bando later.

Despite Bando's requirements for being graceful women, it is obvious that the majority of Japanese woman, especially young women, cannot meet all of the requirements completely. As discussed in the contextual analysis, Japanese society and environment surrounding women has been changing. Gradually, Japanese traditional feminine values have not been taught to women. Women started working and such feminine values were useless if they want to get promoted because workplaces are still male-dominated.

Overall, the gender/sex binary and heterosexuality bind the book and make women who do not fit the norm invisible. Also, Bando puts priority on the traditional women's roles in spite of her encouragement for women to work. This seems contradicted; however, her suggestion is working with femininity and women with



feminine value can change workplaces. The lists for being a graceful woman standardize women although most of contemporary Japanese women cannot meet the requirements.

With the above analysis of *Grace of Women*, I would like to identify what an ideograph <women> means in the book. As an explanation of why visual images can be ideographs, Edwards and Winkler describes four features of ideograph, which are ordinary term in political discourse, abstraction representing collective commitment, warrants power/guides behavior, and culture-bound (297-302). I argue Bando's usage of the word *women* applies all the four and can be called as <women> ideograph.

First, ideograph must be "an ordinary language term found in political discourse" (McGee 15). Bando's use of *women* qualifies as an ordinary image because it appears in her popular self-help book. The best selling record of *Grace of Women* proves Bando's *women* is language for ordinary people, not the political elites. McGee encourages examining a particular ideograph in "popular history" (11), such as novel, films, plays, or songs. The particular use of *women* in a popular self-help book fulfills this expectation.

Second, ideograph must be a "high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal" (McGee 15). The ambiguity is necessary because it allows ideograph to be "more inclusive of groups that might otherwise feel excluded" (Edwards and Winkler 299). Although Bando's usage of *women* indirectly excludes women who do not fit her feminine expectation, it works ideographically because the word *women* is ill-defined in the book. Bando never explains what women means. This lack of clear definition allows women readers to feel



they are included *women* Bando talks about. Even though a woman reader cannot fulfill all requirements offered by Bando, she is still within Bando's *women* because she has a possibility to be able to achieve all requirements as long as she is a woman. Making efforts for fitting Bando's expectations, which qualify only women, make readers feel they are one of the *women*.

Third, an ideograph "warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable" (McGee 15). Bando proposes the importance of feminine value for working women. This perspective guides image of working women as masculine to feminine, which is more acceptable and laudable in Japanese society. Bando's framing of women thus works as ideograph <women>, which "excuses behavior" (McGee 15) of working women, which "might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial" (McGee 15) as like accuses of non-marriage, child-free, and over-thirty working women as a causality of an aging society.

Fourth, ideograph must be "culture-bound" (Edwards and Winker 302) because members who do not "respond appropriately to claims on their behavior warranted through the agency of ideographs" will experience social penalties (McGee 15-16). Bando's *women* is strongly bound to Japanese culture. As I discuss through this paper, Bando emphasizes traditional Japanese feminine value. This connection between Bando's *women* and Japanese culture also suggests *women* in her book can be called as an ideograph.



Bando's usage of *women* satisfies the four features of an ideograph, thus, I conclude it works as an ideograph <women> in present Japanese society. Dubriwny contends in her explanation of Laura Bush's use of <women and children> ideograph that "phrases referring to material objects can function as ideographs" (98), and "the phrase <women and children> refers less to actual women and children than to an ideological understanding of the rhetorical meaning of women and children" (98). As like her analysis, I argue Bando's use of <women> refers less to actual women but rather to rhetorical meaning of women as ideology. The book established <women> as Japanese adults who have biologically female bodies, heterosexual, embrace traditional feminine values but work outside the home, and have power to take initiative to establish relationships with men. Although this <women> does not include all types of people who can be called women, the <women> ideograph can penetrate readers' consciousness. Ideographs exist in real discourse (McGee 7).

### **Ideal Relationships and Women's Role in *Grace of Women***

Bando frames ideal relationships with others in *Grace of Women*. She emphasizes the importance of listening to others (144-147, translated by author), not complaining about others (147-150 and 153-155, translated by author), praising others (150-152, translated by author), and showing appreciation to others (156-158, translated by author). The others here include friends, families, co-workers, and a husband or a boyfriend. I focus on the ideal relationships between men and women Bando suggests because she focuses on women's responsibility and capability to maintain the relationship.



Bando describes women as caregivers. She insists “women choose and nurture men” (202, translated by author). This phrase has two distinct implications. First, it encourages women’s right to choose their partner, unlike the Japanese traditional family system that forced women to marry a man her father had chosen. Japanese patriarchy does not bind the author in this sense. Second, it requires women to play a mother’s role for their partner. The ideal relationship is not that women and men equally live together but is that women nurture their men and only women have a responsibility to do so. Bando does not mention men’s responsibility to nurture women.

Bando also requires women to be primary caregivers for their children. She mentions “women’s wishes for having healthy and brilliant children and a partner who helps women’s child care have not changed” (204). This view regards women as primary caregivers for children and men are described as just supporters. Bando assumes child-bearing is women’s role although her expected readers are working women. The ideal relationship the book suggests is not women and men take care of their children equally, but women take primary care for their children. Bando does not mention men’s responsibility for primary care of their children.

Such caregiver expectations expand to the social level in the book. “To make a graceful Japanese society, it is very important that women have eyes to evaluate graceful men, see graceful men as good men, and select graceful men as a boyfriend or a marriage partner” (205, translated by author). According to Bando, only women have good evaluating criteria to select men because “men, including male animals, have unclear standards to select women. Men are less choosy to women” (205-206, translated by



author) and “the society will change if women select men carefully” (206, translated by author). Although the book is mainly based on a weak cultural feminism that celebrates femininity which is applicable to women and men, strong cultural feminism can explain this idea of women as selectors. Bando emphasizes women are superior to men for evaluating potential partners. Only women can change the society by selecting proper men.

The Above analysis of the book reveals the ideal relationship between women and men Bando promotes. Women are caregivers for their male partner and their children. Only women have ability to select a proper partner and to nurture graceful men. As other feminist scholars have criticized self-help books for women, *Grace of Women* also places the responsibility to build good romantic relationships only on women. However, the reason why only women have the responsibility is not the book blames individual woman’s inability for maintaining relationships. *Grace of Women* place the responsibility only on women because only women are capable to select and nurture men, and moreover, to make social changes. This analysis leads to an answer for the question about why the book should be titled *Grace of Women*, not grace of human.

Graceful women are featured because Bando believes only women can have responsibility to construct good relationships and good society. Japanese society is anxious for loosing traditional values. Women, especially working non-married women, are blamed for a decline of the birth rate. *Grace of Women* encourages working women in such a social context by celebrating women’s superiorities like cultural feminists have done. Only women can act upon the social issue. Only women with femininity can



change masculine workplaces, and possibly, the society. Only women can be graceful and make the world better. This Bando's positive expectation for femininity makes the title of the book *Grace of Women*.

### **Conclusion**

This research analyzes the Japanese best-selling self-help book *Grace of Women*. This book was published in contemporary Japan, where working women still struggle with expectations based on sex/gender. The author Bando encourages women to work with femininity and suggests only women with femininity can change today's male-dominated workplaces and the society. This attitude is similar to cultural feminists, who regard women and men are different and celebrate femininity.

In a form of advice, *Grace of Women* establishes standards for being women and creates an ideograph of <women>. These standards and ideograph ignores women who do not fit Bando's expectations. By analyzing Bando's words, I found she assumes women must have femininity, must be heterosexual, and must be capable for establishing better relationships with men. The book suggests requirements only for women because Bando believes only women with femininity are capable for changing the world.

Although this research uncovers hidden ideologies which force women to embrace femininity, further research is imperative for understanding sex/gender construction in Japanese self-help books. Quantitative and qualitative research may investigate how *Grace of Women* actually constructs standards for being a woman and how readers actually perceive an ideograph of <women> through reading this book. Also, Bando's next book titled *Grace of Parents* can be another text for analysis. I hope this



research stimulates conversations within feminist criticism of self-help books by introducing the Japanese, non-Western self-help book. I also hope the concept of an ideograph <women> in this study provides a new description of McGee's ideograph. As McGee argues, the meaning of an ideograph shifts (13-14). Conversations about sex/gender, self-help books, and ideographs also shift. Conversations never end.

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