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## Critical Reflections: Interpretation and Analysis of Japanese Women's Settlement Experiences

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## Critical Reflections: Interpretation and Analysis of Japanese Women's Settlement Experiences

### Abstract

In this paper, I discuss how I came to call into question the way in which I interpreted interview data in my dissertation, which investigated the migration and settlement experience of Japanese women who are married to Australian men and reside in Australia. Through critical reflections, I realized the way in which the positionality of researchers and their experience, values, and beliefs may influence interpretation of data. The translation process of the interview data reminded me of the similarity with the data analysis process. I illustrate how such possible impact changed the meaning of data through sharing my reflections.

### Keywords

Data Interpretation, Translation, Feminism, Japanese Women, Qualitative Research

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## **Critical Reflections: Interpretation and Analysis of Japanese Women's Settlement Experiences**

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*In this paper, I discuss how I came to call into question the way in which I interpreted interview data in my dissertation, which investigated the migration and settlement experience of Japanese women who are married to Australian men and reside in Australia. Through critical reflections, I realized the way in which the positionality of researchers and their experience, values, and beliefs may influence interpretation of data. The translation process of the interview data reminded me of the similarity with the data analysis process. I illustrate how such possible impact changed the meaning of data through sharing my reflections. Key Words: Data Interpretation, Translation, Feminism, Japanese Women, Qualitative Research.*

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In this paper, I discuss a reflective personal account of my research process. I explore how my positionality influenced analysis of my research interview data. It has been argued that positionality of researchers can influence the research process in various ways: the selection of research topics; relationships with the research participants; and data interpretation (Louis & Barton, 2002; Sanghera & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008). The researcher's personal experience, values, and beliefs also have the potential to influence decisions made about the research process (Louis & Barton, 2002; Sword, 1999). Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert (2008) define positionality as "the way in which *others* position the individual identity and affiliations he/she may have" (p. 553). The concept of positionality situates race, gender, class, and other socially significant identities as markers of our relational position; positionality is not a fixed concept, but rather it is fluid and contextual (Alcoff, 1988). Understanding positionality sheds light on the way our knowledge is constructed and situated within power structures (Sanghera & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008). Recognizing positionality allows researchers to be more conscious about how knowledge production is influenced by their own positionality (Chacko, 2004) intertwined with his/her own experience, values and beliefs. In my research, the way I analyzed and interpreted interview data were initially informed by my position as a Japanese male, with experience studying and living in western countries, and with values and beliefs influenced by the second-wave feminism.

I investigated the migration and settlement experience of Japanese women who are married to Australian men and dwell in Australia in my doctoral research. In analyzing settlement experiences of the participants of my research, it turned out that most of the participants in my research became full-time homemakers and even those who had paid employment outside the home worked only part-time after migration. There were no participants who had full-time jobs. In the understanding of gender equality as argued by second-wave feminists, the role of full-time homemaker is viewed

as a disempowered status of women (Friedan, 2001). My initial analysis of the interview data was highly influenced by such ideology of “second-wave” feminism, which emerged in Western countries and called for women’s liberation and emancipation. I was exposed to such western social values through living in western countries and I came to support the second-wave feminist notion of “gender equality” in the institution of marriage. My conviction was also influenced by masculine notions of power grounded from my male gender identity and values.

However as my research progressed I came to question the way I analyzed women’s marriage and migration experiences. Reading Nicole Constable’s (2003) book, *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and “Mail Order” Marriages*, in which she investigated international marriage between women from Philippines and China, and American men, I came to a point where I needed to reconsider my positionality as a Japanese male, my values and beliefs influenced by second-wave feminism, and my understandings on “gender equality” in marriage. In her book, Constable (2003) points out how non-Western women, who are in an international marriage, and the legitimacy of their marriage, are scaled by the Western yardstick. She further continues to state the debate on being “liberated” amongst Western women; “the liberated women” in the West as ones who gain access to occupations, rights, and benefits. Such a concept of liberation of women was familiar to me as my social milieu of the Western women influenced my attitude toward women’s liberation.

My way of understanding gender equality in the institution of marriage reflects a dichotomization of the Western and non-Western perspectives, oppressor and suppressed, empowered and disempowered, liberated and non-liberated and advanced and backward. Such an understanding blocked and limited the possibility of multiple understandings of gender equality in the institution of marriage. I came to realize that my belief and value itself was a Euro/North American-ethnocentric view and, more specifically, reflected the second-wave of feminism that highlights women’s oppression and men’s dominance in marriage as well as in broader social institutions. Contemplating this dilemma on the notion of marriage and its gender equality across cultures, considering the translation process between two languages, English and Japanese, enabled me to understand this complication.

As I translated my data from Japanese to English, I faced many dilemmas trying to find the appropriate equivalent meanings for the subjects, words, expressions, opinions and thoughts. This process challenged me to reconsider my way of interpreting the interview data as I wrote my dissertation and I came to realize the interpretation of data constitutes a parallel process. Both the interpretation and translation of data can have possible multiple meanings. I became eager to tackle the complexity of this issue and to explore alternative interpretations of the data from a more contemporary Japanese woman’s perspective.

This paper is organized as follows. First, I introduce the research setting and context. Second, I comment on the discourse in Western literature regarding the consequence of gender in the institution of marriage. Third, I introduce literature on Japanese women overseas. In the fourth section, I discuss the unanticipated gap in my original assumptions and expectations about the interviewees’ narratives. In the fifth section, I draw on excerpts from interview data to examine meaning and interpretation of women’s liberation. In the sixth section, I discuss how the translation process challenged

me to question my own way of interpreting interview data and my thinking about gender equality. In the final section, I discuss the complex process of interpreting women's experience across cultures. I conclude the paper by discussing the significance of interpreting the experiences of a diverse group of women without universalizing them. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the anonymity of informants.

### **The Research Context**

I investigated international marriage between Japanese women and Australian men focusing on migration and settlement experiences of Japanese spouses and what these mean for understanding transnationalism. The main research questions are: (a) why do Japanese women marry western men, (b) why do Japanese women migrate and settle overseas, (c) What are their experiences of migration and settlement, (d) How do they maintain connections to their families back home? This research received ethical approval from the affiliated university; an information sheet was provided to all participants and informed consent forms were signed by all participants of this research.

The phenomenon of international marriage is becoming a significant part of Japanese migration to Australia. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2009), Australia is ranked as the country having the third largest number of Japanese residents outside of Japan after the United States and China. In the three year period between 2005-2008 the number of Japanese residents in Australia increased more than 25% in various cosmopolitan areas including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Cairns, and Perth; it has been suggested that international marriage was the main cause of this increase in the Japanese population in Australia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan [MOFA], 2009). The term *working holiday brides*, which refers to Japanese women who marry Australian men during their working holiday in Australia (Mizukami, 2007), illustrates the commonality of international marriage between Japanese women and Australian men. Working holiday visas allows young people from arranged countries to have an extended holiday while engaging in a short-term employment (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010).

This study applied qualitative research. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore in-depth accounts of research subjects focusing on small samples rather than large samples (Ambert, P. Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). Qualitative research is appropriate when researchers attempt to investigate the understandings and perceptions of the people they research, and how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives (Berg, 2004). Therefore, it was well suited for this research because it aimed to interrogate unquantifiable as well as in-depth accounts of Japanese women's experiences of international marriage, migration and transnationalism.

This research used an in-depth interview method. In-depth interviews are useful for examining sensitive or complicated subject matters (Gilbert, 2008). This type of interview method allows interviewees to express themselves in their own frame of reference and thus it draws attention to interviewees' point of view (May, 1999). It enables researchers to gain rich accounts of respondents' lived experience and understand their perceptions and meanings of their situation (Punch, 2003). In-depth interviews were well suited to the study due to the nature of this research: interrogation of the personal accounts of participants' lived experiences.

Participants were initially recruited through acquaintances and an advertisement placed in the Japanese community newspaper. The population of interest in this study was Japanese marriage partners of Australian men. The study sought to obtain a broad sample of participants by age. A total of nine Japanese women, whose ages ranged between 20 to 80 years old, were interviewed. At the time of this interview, their status was: married (5), widowed (1), divorced (2) and de facto relationship [relationship between two adults who are living together] (1). The fieldwork was conducted in Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast in South East Queensland, Australia, where there is high population of Japanese residents. Interview questions focused on reasons for their marriage, and their migration and settlement history. Interviews lasted from 40 minutes to two hours and were conducted in Japanese at various locations including: a library, a café, on-campus, or in the participants' home. Eight interviews were voice recorded and one participant declined to be recorded but agreed to interview notes being recorded. Interview data was translated by the researcher from Japanese to English. Field notes were documented during and after all interviews. In keeping with the nature of semi-structured in-depth interviews a number of themes emerged during the course of the interviews.

### **Influenced by “Feminism”**

For my initial literature review, I examined not only international marriage literature, but also scholarship on marriage because it was necessary to understand the definition and the meaning of marriage in order to examine international marriage. Literature on such studies is largely written in English and is mostly from the United States, Canada, Australia and the UK. Thus, the perspectives of industrialized Western countries dominate the literature.

Gender inequality is often a key theme of the literature. Gender is viewed as “sets of traits or behavioral dispositions that people come to possess based on their assignment to a particular sex category” (Wharton, 2005, p. 7). According to Wharton (2005) gender creates and maintains inequality between men and women not only on the individual level but also in the broader social structure. Insights from publications by eminent feminist scholars such as *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer (2008), *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett (2000) and *The Dialectic of Sex* by Shulamith Firestone (1993) highlight the gender divisions of labor in the institution of marriage where men are located in the public sphere and women are positioned in the private sphere.

The unequal consequence of such an arrangement of gender roles can disempower women while empowering men. Jesse Bernard's (1972) argument highlights this feminist perspective. For Bernard there are two versions of marriage, *his* and *her* marriage. She states that marriage is more of a shock for women than men, applying the term “shock theory of marriage.” Women are the ones who traditionally change their last name and experience becoming *Mrs* instead of *Miss*. Whereas men receive great benefit from marriage, women are more likely to gain less than men do. This marriage structure works as an advantage for men and a disadvantage for women. Oakley (1974) stated a similar point in her study on British women. Oakley reported that most couples followed “traditional gender roles,” which placed each gender into assigned space: men for public and women for private sphere.

These arguments call for an egalitarian stance and emphasize gender equalities. Arguably, these points represent the perspective of “second-wave” feminism and support the rights of women to fulfill and emancipate themselves. I used these examples from literature to guide the framework for my analysis of interview data. Furthermore, I developed a respect for the egalitarian view of marriage and began to challenge my own thinking about women’s position in patriarchal societies such as Japan. However, after reading a great deal of literature on women’s experience across different cultures, I came to question how my positionality, experience, values, and beliefs influenced my data interpretation.

### International Japanese Women

After reviewing marriage scholarship, I examined literature particularly focused on international romance and marriage between Japanese women and Western men (Kelsky, 2002; Ma, 1996) and also research on Japanese women overseas (Habu, 2000; Ichimoto, 2004), which show the reasons why Japanese women are motivated to leave Japan.

The most significant work in this area is Karen Kelsky’s (2002) groundbreaking study, *Women on the verge: Japanese women, Western dreams*. Kelsky pointed out that Japanese women tend to idealize Western society and culture; and believe that the West provides a level of gender equality that is not possible in Japan. Therefore, Japanese women admire the West and believe that escaping to the West allows them to free themselves from the patriarchal constraints of traditional Japanese culture and they can find their “true self” in the West. They are what Kelsky called as “internationalist women.” These Japanese women supported and longed for Western gender equality and sought Western men who were often perceived as sensitive. In this context the women believed that international marriage with Western men not only facilitated women’s relocation to the West—global mobility—, but also promised gender equality in both public and domestic sphere.

Kelsky’s (2002) participants were ambitious, highly educated career women who held managerial positions in large international corporations or organizations. Her participants were critical of Japanese society as well as of Japanese men because of male patriarchal gender oppression. Their narratives typified the aspirations of second-wave feminism—emancipation and fulfillment. Japanese women in Kelsky’s research reflect those so called *kyaria uman* [career women], which the term was used in Japan during the 1980s to depict a new generation of women, who were more career oriented than the previous generation. This was triggered by *Danjo Koyou Kikai Kintouhou* [Gender Equality Law], that was enacted during the 1980s. The regulation promised equal opportunity for women in the work force and enabled more women to engage in managerial posts, although its practice was limited. This was somewhat sensational in Japanese society. Prior to the 1980s women were usually positioned in a non-managerial position because it was assumed that women would leave from companies upon their marriage (Tanaka, 2008). Japanese women’s international mobility was enhanced around this time supported by the appreciation of the Japanese *yen* (Kelsky, 2002).

Some studies examined this international mobility of Japanese women. For instance, Habu’s (2000) research on Japanese women in Britain demonstrates why

Japanese women sought education in Britain. Habu found both pull and push factors in Japanese women's motivation for studying abroad. The push factor is to disengage from gender constraints and difficulties in Japan such as "marriage pressure," which echoes gender relations in Japanese society. The pull factor is to improve their English and gain degrees from the UK. Another study of Japanese female students in Australia by Ichimoto (2004) points out that one of the motivations to study in Australia was to escape from gender constraints embedded in Japanese society, which also reflected Habu's research results. These studies demonstrated Japanese women's dissatisfaction with Japanese society, and their critical attitude toward traditional gender relations in Japan. Relocating to, and residing in, Western countries enabled them to escape Japanese cultural patriarchal traditions.

### Unexpected Encounters

Prior to conducting research interviews, I assumed that the participants of my study would be like *career women* who advanced or wished to advance their career and would enjoy *gender equality* in Australia (i.e., Western space). When I met the participants of my study who were in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, I was expecting to hear of their advanced career experience because of relocation to a Western society or their future career plans and ambitions. I was also expecting to hear their critical remarks on Japanese society in terms of gender inequality, the way in which Japanese women are treated unfairly in Japan. However, what I heard during the interviews was completely unanticipated. Namie was in her late 20s. She came to Australia to study English in 1996 soon after completing her high school education in Japan. In response to the question of why she came to Australia, Namie said:

I did not know much about Australia. You know, if studying abroad, the choices are usually the USA, or Canada, right... My mother's friend knew a couple here, so that is why I came here. Until then, I had been thinking of going to the US.

In this statement, there was nothing about gender equality in Australia or critical comments on Japanese patriarchal society, which I expected to hear from Namie. The reason why Namie chose Australia was that she knew an Australian couple whose friend knew her mother. The couple offered her a home stay so that Namie came to Australia to stay with them. In her motivation to come to Australia, thus, seeking fulfillment or emancipation was not indicated at all.

In response to the question of her image and opinions of Australia, Namie said, "My initial image of Australia was large and greenery... Australians are friendly and I also thought Australia is multicultural society." The statement did not reflect what Australian society can offer in terms of gender equality or career prospects for her. A similar response with Namie was found in other participants' interview data. None of the participants strongly stated their concerns on gender equality or their career prospects, and also they did not discuss the inequality of women's position in Japan. For instance, Akiko was in her 30s and previously worked for a company in Japan that promoted international education. At the time of this interview, she was a full-time homemaker.

Akiko's perception of Australia was that it was a large and fun place with a warm climate. Akiko also emphasized the relaxed atmosphere of Australia and in so doing, contrasted life in Australia with life in Japan. She said, "Japanese people work too much, long working hours. Even when they get to travel overseas, it is only 4 or 5 days." Once again, the statement did not present her concerns on women's liberation or the egalitarian aspect of Australian society.

When, for the second time, I interviewed Arisa who was in her 40s working as a part-time tour conductor, I asked more specifically gender related questions, which I could not do in the initial interview. First, I asked about gender equality in Japan and Arisa said:

The problem of unequal gender relations in Japan is because Japanese women's consciousness is too low. As women in Japan have been in lower position so it needs a great effort to change such a condition. But Japanese women's consciousness is not high enough to create such a big change.

Arisa did not criticize Japanese men, she instead pointed out issues with Japanese women. I was shocked to hear her critical attitude toward Japanese women. Arisa further continued to say, as another issue of Japanese women, that there is *ijime* [bullying] amid women criticizing other women. I further asked about her opinion on gender relations in Australia. Arisa told that she felt that Australian women created reverse discrimination against men by trying to overpower them. For that reason, she does not agree with some of the feminist attitude in Australia.

Thus, both Namie and Akiko did not say much about either Japanese patriarchal society or gender equality in the West. In discussing why they moved to Australia, and perceptions of Australia, they did not touch on anything about their careers or ambitions. Other participants as well did not concern much on these matters. Arisa critiqued Japanese women instead of Japanese men and she even pointed out some women's critical attitude toward men in Australia.

### **Liberated?**

Gaining both career and financial independence was emphasized in the second-wave feminism. Such gains promise women's emancipation and independence. Interestingly, most participants were full-time homemakers in my research and their views of homemaker status emerged in several interviews. For instance, after I interviewed Tomomi, I thanked her for her participation, and she said "*watashiwa hima na shufu desukara...*" ["I am just a dull housewife"]. Her status as *senkyou shufu* [full-time homemaker] did not suggest independence or empowerment, from my perspective that was influenced by the second-wave feminism. Initially not having their own career or financial independence appeared to restrict women's agency.

In terms of limited women's agency, the lack of women's engagement in the migration as well as other decision making process was identified in their narratives. The tendency of women's automatic relocation to their male partner's homeland, Australia,

received my attention. For instance, Sakura's story illustrates this account. Sakura was in her late 30s had lived between Australia and Japan in the last decade:

When I was thinking about going to Australia, I met David who was a working holiday-maker in Tokyo... We became friends through teaching each other Japanese and English. When David was going back to Australia, I was about to come here as well, so our dating in Japan continued in Australia. Even though David was from Brisbane, I wanted to live in Sydney, so we moved to Sydney together. We did not really think about what we should do after one year, but I got a job and applied for a de facto visa, which enabled me to work. We lived in Sydney for 3 years and I was thinking to continue living in Sydney, but then David said that he wanted to try living in Japan. So, we moved back to Japan and lived there for five years. He was teaching English there, but it was not his real occupation and he found that teaching was not for him. So, he was not planning to do it for a long time anyway. I guess he could not imagine living in Japan for good, so he told me he wanted to move back to Australia.

Supporting David, Sakura moved back to Australia again. Considering that international migration influence people's life in various ways because it removes individuals from family and also familiar social and cultural surrounding (Skrbiš, 2008), I was rather struck by the fact that migration decision was always made based on David. This is more so considering their frequent moving back and forth between Australia and Japan. Sakura simply followed David and such behaviour reflects an image of a traditional wife in a Japanese marriage who had limited autonomy (Yoshizumi, 1995).

Another participant, Yoko, illustrated a similar account with Sakura's. When Yoko was talking about her wish to relocate to Japan to spend some time with her family, her narrative projects her subordinate role in her relationship with her partner Jerry:

I am thinking to relocate to Japan and live there for two or three years... Anyway it is up to Jerry because he is a breadwinner. The main income is Jerry's income so it is up to Jerry. Thinking like that, Jerry's career will advance more, but possibility of my career advancement is less than his...

This Yoko's comment reflected dependency on her partner and it did not appear her active agency or power. This was not what I expected to hear from a Japanese woman in an international marriage who crossed a national border and married a Western man in Australia. Yoko's comment rather manifested her traditional gender roles: perception of her male partner as a breadwinner. She did not only view her partner as a main earner, but also what she wanted to do—residing in Japan—was up to her partner's decision. Such consciousness of Yoko portrayed what second-wave feminism would point out as women's limited autonomy and did not appear to be "liberated".

Even though I initially interpreted the experience of the participants of my study as constraints of their agency and power, later I re-considered my way of interpreting

Japanese women's experience. This realization was triggered by reflecting on my process of translating the data from Japanese to English.

### Translation from Japanese to English

Knowing both Japanese and English languages and handling these two languages in my research process prompted me to reflect on the concept of gender equality, namely, liberation of women and the notion of the feminist argument across nations and cultures. It moreover enabled me to reflect the way in which I interpreted the experience of women. In academia, awareness of the complicated process of both translation and representation of data has been discussed (Birbili, 2000; Kamler & Threadgold, 2003; Muller, 2007; Pena, 2007; Temple, 1997, 2005; Temple & Young, 2004). For instance, Temple and Edwards (2002) argue that "the same words can mean different things in different cultures and the words we choose matter" (p. 5). Therefore, words or expressions in one language do not automatically transfer to other languages. Even the same word in different languages may connote a distinct meaning depending on the history attached to the word and also the social and cultural context. Wagatsuma (1977) points out the issue of the translation process, phenomenon X can be explained by a single term in language x, but language y may have no equivalent word or have more multiple words, to depict phenomenon X. Consequently, it is complex to translate one concept into different languages. The concept of "individual" in the United States may be different from "*kojin*" (individual) in a Japanese context since the concept of "individual" in a non-collective society, the United States is different from "*kojin*" in Japanese society where collectivity or conformity are practiced. Consequently, people with different languages conceivably interpret the social world in a different manner (Temple & Young, 2004).

In my research, when I was translating Yoko's interview data, discussed earlier, I faced this complication of translation. In the interview excerpt, she used a Japanese word "*daikokubashira*" to say that her partner, Jerry is the main income earner. While the English word "breadwinner" refers to "a person who earns money to support their family, typically the sole one" (Breadwinner, 2010), the Japanese word *daikokubashira* projects some different connotations than simply signifying a main income earner of a family. According to Yamada (1993), the literal translation of *daikokubashira* is "central pillar" (p. 59) in a traditional Japanese house. The metaphor of this term is important or key person in an organization and often used to refer to "the head of the family". It is argued that most Japanese people think *daikokubashira* in a family is a father although the word does not only apply to a male father figure in a family. This tendency is due to Japanese history. From the Meiji era (1868-1912) to the end of the Second World War, the emperor was regarded as *daikokubashira* for the nation, "father of the Japanese" who raised and educated the Japanese people. This image echoed within the Japanese family as well where father was the main figure who protected the rest of the family. Therefore, the term *daikokubashira* only referred to the father, and even today such an image is still strong (Yamada, 1993). At the same time, the term "*daikokubashira*" also reflects the historical Japanese male patriarchal society where men overpower women. Thus, this term and the English equivalent term "breadwinner" have different connotations. It needed careful consideration in the translation process and indeed I faced complexity to present Japanese data translated into English.

Understanding such complexity and ambiguity in translation between different languages assisted me in re-considering the notion of marriage and gender equality as well as the ideology of the liberation of women in the West and Japan. As the concept of women's liberation comes from Western nations, it may not find the same meaning in another language.

### **Revising Data Interpretation**

In discussing the translation process, Temple and Edwards (2002) note that "applying our own set of views about the world to other people who may hold alternative beliefs sets up an over-arching and supreme framework for understanding" (p. 5). The remark, made by Temple and Edward, mirrors the condition where the certain Western feminist values are imposed on women from other parts of the world as it can be identified as a situation similar to the translation process. Constable (2003) illustrates such a condition:

Often lacking in this critique of marriage and gender relations was an appreciation of the variety of ways in which women in different sociocultural contexts might define liberation. To work for a wage might be liberating to a middle-class American women, but not to a woman who has worked in fields or a factory for subsistence since childhood. (p. 65)

Constable's argument highlights the diversity of women's experience and raises cautions of universalizing their experiences. This universalization of women's experience shows a similarity in a forced translation process that places a solely lexical meaning from one language onto another ignoring the cultural, historical, political, and social aspects that attach to each word.

The following example illustrates why it is complicated to transfer one concept or notion in a society to another in relation to feminism. In her article, "Why I Am Not a Feminist," Marody (1993) points out the presence of feminism in the United States in relation to non-presence of such a concept and movement in Poland, grounded in her own living experience in both nations, and demonstrates why feminist ideology exists in one society and not in another. Marody argues that although there is inequality between men and women in Poland, the inequality is not perceived as being due to the "socially determined gender inequality" (p. 857), but as grounded from biological difference. Within the post-communist regime Poland, achieving civil rights was the highest priority; hence, claiming for gender equality was less important as such gender equality is not be sought without first having civil rights (Marody, 1993). Marody further asserts that, in Western society, individuals compete with others for his or her rights, yet in Poland, the civilians are in opposition to the state so that individuals aim to cooperate against the government but not to compete against each other. Marody's argument demonstrates that social movements and concepts do not automatically transfer to other nation-states since each nation retains its own local, social, historical, cultural, and political context.

Complication, difficulty, risk, and impossibility in translation between languages reflect the way in which I was interpreting my interview data based on arguments of second-wave feminism. I came to realize that overlooking the contextual understanding

of the notion of marriage, gender equality, and women's liberation could cause possible misinterpretation of my data. In feminist epistemology, individual difference and their diverse interpretations of the same phenomena and experience are recognized (Ogoshi, 2000). Fujieda and Fujimura-Fanselow (1995) elaborate this point further:

While the presence of gender ideology is universally observed, the ways in which it is constructed, reproduced, and reinforced, or even hidden, vary from culture to culture. Therefore, women's studies, which is primarily concerned with gender issues, must in effect be culture specific in many ways, although it shares commonalities across cultures. (p. 155)

As Fujieda and Fujimura-Fanselow (1995) stated, research on women needs to be conducted with attention to specific cultural understanding. Without such caution, it leads to treating women as a homogeneous group ignoring women's diversity in nationality, race, culture, and sexuality.

Moreover, interpretation of migrant women's experience is a sensitive and complex process because migration process adds extra complication to their lives. There are multiple interpretations of migrant women's experiences of empowerment and disempowerment, and upward and downward mobility. In studies of the labour market participation of migrant women it has been argued that there are both gains and losses (Foner, 1998; Park, 2008). No matter what the employment context, earning wages empowers migrant women to some extent, allowing them to be financially independent and to gain personal autonomy; at the same time, labour participation constrains women's time for their family. Taking a waged job can be regarded as disempowering if, as in the case of Park's (2008) study of Korean migrant women in the US, they feel forced to take low-status, unsafe or unlawful jobs. The women in Park's study interpreted their involvement in waged labour as downward mobility since they had the luxury to be full-time homemakers in Korea, but upon migration they were no longer able to do so. Although the first jobs of most women were recognised as being in a devalued occupation without the requirement of qualifications, their interpretation of their work shifted some years later towards a more positive interpretation of the benefits of being a wage earner.

For Japanese women, while having a career is viewed as empowerment for career-oriented women, for those who seek to be full-time homemakers—a desire grounded in post-World War II ideas about Japanese family life in which the husband works and the wife stays at home (Ochiai, 1994)—it indicates disempowerment. Hence, Tomomi's full-time homemaker status may not necessarily mean disempowerment, but possibly be an empowerment. Indeed, the analysis only highlights her employment status, not other parts of her life. Her life with her husband and child may be far more important than having financial independence for Tomomi. Therefore, her family life may outweigh being "career women". Also, Yoko's dependency on her husband may mean happiness to her if she desires to be in a subordinate role in her marriage. Sharing life with her partner may mean more than gaining financial independence for Yoko. In fact, the status of full-time homemakers in Japan was originally regarded positively. According to Kanbara, Sugii, and Takeda (2009), *sengyoushu* [full-time homemaker] emerged around 1910 among urban middle class family in Japan. Nevertheless, such

status was not common because it was limited to only a small population of family whose husband's income was enough to support a whole family. Full-time homemaker was conceived to be a new role that enabled women to focus on caring family and educating their children, which was not available for most women at that time. As a result, full-time homemaker was perceived positively because it highlighted what women could do at home instead of focusing on women's unemployed status outside home. Finally, in the case of Sakura, following her husband may have fulfilled her happiness instead of questioning her autonomy. Also, in her mind, who makes the decisions or which partner earns money to support the family may not be her primary concern and also may not translate into a deciding factor on the balance of power in their relationship.

### **Conclusion**

Through my research, I came to realize how my positionality, and personal experience, values, and beliefs informed the way I interpreted interview data. In my data analysis, particularly the perspective of second-wave feminism highly influenced my interpretation of women's experience. The process of translation triggered me to realize such implication of myself on data interpretation.

Second-wave feminists grappled with issues and produced fruitful advancement of women's equality by promoting women's voice and rights. Achievement grounded in the second-waves of Western feminisms led to a positive impact on other women in different parts of the world as well as across generations. Arguments in the empowerment and disempowerment between men and women in the marriage institution raised important concern in gender relations. However, this is of concern if when applying such arguments to different cultural contexts. It may be understood as a disempowerment in second-wave feminist perspectives, but it may be regarded as empowerment in different cultural contexts.

Japanese women's tales in the transnational sphere may illustrate disempowerment and loss of agency by being a full-time homemaker or not gaining their own financial independence and security in Australia. However, the possibility of alternative interpretation of women's experience in a different cultural context addressed by Constable (2003) enabled me to expand my scope to comprehend women's experience beyond what I could understand by utilizing only the perspective of second-wave feminism. This point is addressed by the third-wave feminists (Christian, 1997; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1981; Lorde, 2007) and post-colonial feminists (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997), which alert homogenization of women and their experience. It is necessary to have a careful approach to interpret women's experience to avoid losing multiple perspectives on women's lives. Furthermore, it is important to have holistic approach to interpret women's experience instead of focusing solely a single part of their lives.

Finally, it is also essential to note that Japanese women's position in feminist discourse where they do not fit into second-wave feminism, post-colonial or third-wave feminism. Japanese women may share some experiences with women in the West because of being women in industrialized society, however cultural distinctions generate different experiences for Japanese women and Western women. In addition, post-colonial feminism as well as third-wave feminism may not fully account for Japanese women's experience because of the distinction of women's experience in colonized nations or in

less industrialized society. Butler's (1999) arguments on gender encapsulate this point. Butler states that women's experience is not homogeneous because of diversity of *women* based on class, race, sexuality and other markers create different experience. Hence, women's experiences cannot be argued without considering multiple perspectives because prejudice and discrimination are formed through unique ideology and systems in each culture and country, thus, feminism as well needs to be examined for each unique case (Ogoshi, 2000).

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