The Association of Japanese Geographers
http://www.ajg.or.jp

Geography of Gender and Qualitative Methods in Japan: Focusing on Studies that have Analyzed Life Histories

YOSHIDA Yoko
Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nara Women's University; Kitauoyanishi-machi, Nara 630–8506, Japan. E-mail: yoko@cc.nara-wu.ac.jp
Received October 15, 2015; Accepted June 28, 2016

Abstract This article tries to advance the discussion of the efficacy of qualitative methods often used in the geography of gender in Japan, in particular by focusing on narratives obtained through interview surveys and analyzed using discourse analysis. It can be said that around the year 2000 was a turning point in Japanese geography for research methods such as life-history research. The life-history research made it possible to hear the voices of subjects who have been placed in minority positions and have not been able to easily speak and to deepen the study of geography from various standpoints and to include the perspectives of minorities. Analyzing narratives in informants’ life histories encouraged geographers to clarify the structures of space/place by focusing on gender relations acted out as power. The studies which adopted the life-history research could be positioned with the field of gender studies in geography, as all of them reveal the social relations in local communities and of groups within particular spaces—which is to say that they demonstrate the gender relations preserved by the patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. With geography, it has become possible to point out issues that are found only “here” and cannot easily be generalized by questioning “where,” including micro-scale spaces that cannot be mapped or visualized. This can be called “local knowledge” that is generated from the perspective of a “somewhere” that is rooted in people’s lives, as proposed by McDowell (1993).

Key words geography of gender, feminist geography, life history, qualitative method, Japan

Concern and Purpose of This Study

Momiyama, a female geographer, interviewed Oda, a male geographer who was the leading expert in the field of historical geography in Japan; this interview was reported in the magazine Chiri (Geography) (Oda and Momiyama 1976), a magazine read mainly by geographers. At the end of the interview, Momiyama asked Oda as to his estimation of female geographers. He replied that the number of female geographers had remained small due to the unpopularity of geography among female students; however, he expressed a hope that it would be possible for female geographers to play important roles in field surveys in rural areas and data analysis. Although his reply comprised only part of the interview, it can be said that taking up the issue of the relationship between geography and female researchers was significant at the time. At the beginning of the 1990s, Chiri (Geography) planned a series of essays on the theme of “Ethnicity and Gender.” While the series discussed issues pertaining to gender that Ota (1990) and Niwa (1992) indicated they had encountered in their everyday lives, the resulting publication revolved largely around the issues of ethnicity alone. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of the contributors were male merely served to demonstrate the predominance of male researchers in Japanese geography. In the field of Japanese geography, with its background of male predominance, an article by Yoshida (1993) was the first article referring to gender to appear in an academic journal. The article provided an introductory overview of the debate over issues concerning female employment in local labor markets within English-language economic-geographic research. While the article was not built around the concept of gender, it was likely significant in providing a perspective that hinted at the future of gender studies in geography in Japan.

How have gender studies in geography in Japan developed in the approximately 20 years since the article’s publication? Moreover, what viewpoints and methodologies have been used in investigating subjects pertaining to gender studies? What issues do gender studies face today? How can gender studies be expected to develop in the future?

McDowell (1993), one contributor to the development of feminist geography in English-speaking academia discussed “situated knowledge” and “local knowledge,”
argued by Haraway (1991) to be generated based on relative and fluid views, and indicated that it is important for feminist geography to take on the perspective of a “somewhere” that is rooted in people’s lives. Ishizuka (2010) referred to previous studies published overseas and examined whether studies based on the perspective of a “somewhere” had been conducted. Ishizuka (2010) concluded that McDowell’s proposal was not sufficiently adopted and argued that it is necessary to continue making attempts to overcome the dualism that the sciences, including geography, have presupposed in feminist geography. Ishizuka (2010) carefully considered previous studies overseas; however, she only briefly touched on research trends in Japan—in her introduction—and did not touch on research angles, methods, or future tasks and prospects.

Yoshida et al. (2013) focused on gender studies in Japanese geography. They explained the positionality of Japanese geographers (including male researchers) have tended to favor the “geography of gender” over “feminist geography”, which influenced by women’s liberation movements in North America. Furthermore, they traced a history of how the geography of gender in Japan originated and discussed the influence the geography of gender has had in geography as an academic field and in university education. Based on the perspectives of women’s and men’s studies, Yoshida et al. (2013) considered the findings of previous studies written from the standpoint of space/place and gender. Lastly, they listed the problems faced by the geography of gender in Japan and considered the future prospects of the field with respect to the further development of studies in this regard. However, they did not take up qualitative methods used frequently in the geography of gender.

As far as I am aware, two articles have discussed qualitative methods in the geography of gender. Kamiya et al. (1999) investigated single women residing in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area and explained the characteristics of their choice of residence and relevant influential factors; they examined the validity of both group and individual interviews as methods to study single women as well as analytical procedures that can be employed to avoid creating power and gender relations between the researcher and informant. Sekimura (her former name is Kimura), whose article was published in 2009 (Sekimura 2009), used the life-story research to examine how retired men living in city suburbs reconstruct their masculinity within communities. The life-story and life-history research differed; Sekimura (2009) used the life-story research, which is based on oral materials. In the field of geography, the term “life history” has mainly been used (though the difference between these methodologies will be elaborated later). Kageyama (2013) elucidated geography and life history and indicated that the emergence of life-history research made it possible to hear the voices of subjects who have been placed in minority positions and have not been able to easily speak (e.g., women, people of color, the poor, people subject to discrimination, ethnic minorities). Given that the voices of those in power have not been investigated in life-history research, Sekimura (2009) argued that retired men, who have deconstructed the masculinity they had constructed in the public space of the workplace, are marginalized subjects placed on the edge of hegemonic masculinity; in so doing, Sekimura (2009) argued for the meaning of listening to stories from their life experiences.

This article hopes to advance the discussion of the efficacy of qualitative methods often used in empirical studies, in particular by focusing on narratives obtained through interview surveys and analyzed using discourse analysis. This article argues that employing the life-history research in the geography of gender can be useful and points toward future issues and prospects regarding the geography of gender.

Introducing Life History and Narrative

From the 1980s onwards, as “space” came to be widely discussed across the various fields of the social sciences and humanities in the West, in geography, the spatial turn, which focused on the various social relations in the structures and space of modern cities and society, had a significant influence on feminist geography (Beebe et al. 2015). In light of the fact that gender had originally been conceptualized as a weapon to resolve the issues pertaining to the inequality borne out of the asymmetrical power relations that existed between men and women, for geography, focusing on the various social relations around space and revealing the various social relations (which, of course, included gender relations) that were reflected and appeared in space is important. However, within Japanese geography, investigations with the ultimate aim of describing and mapping out spatial inequalities due to the gender gap between men and women (i.e., the geography of the gender gap) were only conducted in part. While studies in this vein did clarify the conditions of gender-gap-based spatial inequality by using societal and economic indicators for both men and women, Yoshida et al. (2013) argues that such studies failed to closely consider and examine the asymmetrical power struc-
tures between men and women, which were the original cause of this inequality. Furthermore, geography outside of Japan is progressing with cross-disciplinary study and gender and various axes of difference have become subjects of research based on these intersections. Studies in this regard have sought to critically investigate various problems in modern society, and create possibilities for alternative geography to develop; geography in Japan should also aim for this.

In addition to the influence of the spatial turn, in which previous concepts of space in geography were reconsidered, feminist geography effected new ways of understanding in terms of how researchers have understood the subjects of their research. In the 1970s, early English-language feminist geography considered women as a minority group, which led to criticism in the 1980s that various disparities facing women had been hidden away. Subsequently, the importance of investigating individual differences formed in the structure of groups and categories became apparent (Pratt 2009). Moreover, humanistic geography, with its emphasis on humanity, emerged from the late 1960s to the 1970s and stressed not only the “economic man” but also the subjectivity of human beings. With the introduction of humanistic geography, Japanese geographers became concerned about both the lived world and space as grasped by subjects beginning in the 1980s.1 To demonstrate individual informants’ experiences of places and practices in spaces, the technique of showing the lived experiences and the social structures of identity through the analysis of life histories was subsequently introduced into Japanese geography and came to be used particularly after the year 2000.

As far as I am aware, Nishi (1998) was the first to use narratives in informants’ life histories in an article published in a geographical peer-reviewed academic journal,2 where she examined the living spaces of and living awareness among single elderly people. Nishi (1998) directly quoted from interviews with men and women living in senior housing, demonstrating what the places elderly people lived in meant to them. However, although she did focus on differences (e.g., in bodily conditions, reasons for moving into senior housing, and in human relations, as well as sex, age and social class) among the elderly, terms related to “gender” never appeared.3 Using Nishi’s approach of aurally acquiring life histories through interview surveys as a reference, Matsui (2000) went on to elucidate the relationships between unmarried women from provincial farming communities employed as low-cost labor in urban spinning factories (i.e., contemporary “factory girls”) and the local community around them before the Second World War; their argument was based on narratives obtained through interview surveys with the now-elderly “factory girls.” Yet Matsui (2000) also never used the word “gender.” Yuzawa (2001, 2002), who has greatly enhanced our understanding of the changes that occurred in the division of labor among families and family businesses in a traditional textile-producing area based on the life histories of survey subjects, investigated in the form of memoirs and narratives, also never used the word “gender.” Though an academic book with a series of her studies concerning the division of labor among families and family businesses in a traditional textile-producing area was published in 2009 (Yuzawa 2009), the word “gender” is not in it.4

The attributes and historical backgrounds of the study subjects in the above three studies varied: one study investigated single elderly people (including men), another spinning factory girls, and another women in traditional textile family businesses. Nishi also obtained life stories through interview surveys she conducted with residents in government-supported senior housing in a 2005 (Nishi 2005) article that followed the 1998 (Nishi 1998) article; she analyzed their narratives, shed light on the issues they faced in maintaining their residences, and on what was necessary in providing housing support. Nishi (2015) went on to publish a book based on the doctoral thesis she had written by using her previous studies as the core; in addition to the effect of aging on physical function, factors such as the personal history, values (Nishi noted that they are influenced by gender norms), and social class of the elderly affect the formation of their living spaces. Based on elderly women’s memory of working as factory girls during the prewar period, Matsui (2000) also states that while factory girls were viewed as “tragic female workers” and were subject in local communities where factories were located to discrimination and prejudice due to their hierarchical position and gender, they “resisted” control by companies and disdain from local residents by acting in an orderly manner. Yuzawa (2009) explained the role of family labor in a local industry in which married women engaged in production work as weavers while taking care of housework, children, and elderly people. These female geographers did not set out to clarify gender relations that were reflected and appeared in spaces. However, I believe that the study of these female geographers could very well be positioned with the field of gender studies in geography, as all of them reveal the social relations in local communities and of groups within particular spaces—which is to
say that they demonstrate the gender relations preserved by the patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity.

Given this, why did these female geographers develop their articles without ever using the word “gender”? While it could be argued that they were simply indifferent to the concept of “gender,” I would like to suggest the following reasons: within the field of geography in Japan, researchers that do not profess themselves to be feminists are hesitant to work on feminist geography and do not understand properly the reason why the geography of gender has been developed. Moreover, because they believe they should position themselves from a neutral standpoint as researchers, perhaps they are avoiding making a political stand. Furthermore, the female geographers above may have wanted their respective studies to be seen as belonging to the disciplines of social geography or economic geography. Gender relates to the methods and viewpoints used when analyzing the subject of one’s study and as such, belongs to no particular field of research. However, it remains undeniable that feminist geography and the geography of gender are still mistakenly seen as a field within systematic geography.

Efficacy of Life History

As mentioned above, whether intentionally or out of indifference, Japanese geographers do place a certain distance between themselves and feminist geography/the geography of gender, although Kageyama (2000), Murata (2000), and Sekimura (2009), who analyzed informants’ narratives, can be noted for having sought to clarify the structures of space/place by focusing on gender relations acted out as power. Kageyama (2000) focused on unmarried women who came from rural areas to Tokyo during the period before World War II as “career women” and lived far away from the supervision of their guardians (in particular, their fathers and brothers) in apartment houses strictly managed as female-only. She listened to the life histories of the now-elderly previous inhabitants of these apartment houses and used these “narratives” to demonstrate the extent to which they formed such living spaces as their own. She concluded that the management system in the apartment houses had taken on the same role as that played by fathers and brothers. Murata (2000) cited narratives obtained from an interview survey with single men between the ages of 35 to 60 and raised the issue of spaces/places from which these men were excluded as a result of not marrying—in other words, as a result of their deviation from “the regular family.” Sekimura (2009) argued that male retirees in suburban estates, having confronted the limit of hegemonic masculinity through finding their way from the workplace/public space to the home/private space after their retirement, had consequently reconstructed relationships with their families and neighborhoods.

Naruse et al. (2007) reviewed discourse analysis in Japanese geography and assessed Kageyama (2000) and Murata (2000), two of the few studies that had worked on discourse analysis in earnest. However, Naruse et al. (2007) argued that Kageyama herself, as an author, was almost invisible within her article and suggested that the narratives of informants had been biased by relationships with the researchers, with whom they had inevitably built up meaningful relationships. Moreover, they suggested that not only the power relations between the interviewer and informants but also the fact that informants’ narratives are informed both by past experiences and present situations warrant attention. By analyzing their narratives regarding their jobs, everyday lives, dwellings, marriages, performance of masculinity, and futures, Murata pointed out spaces that had excluded his middle-aged, single male informants. Spaces are constructed not only by social relations but also by gender relations; hence, it was suggested that the way they understood spaces lacked the viewpoint of gender and obviated a consideration not only of the exclusion of men from public or private spaces but also of the exclusion of women (Murata 2000). Naruse et al. criticized Murata’s article as having failed to fully explain the relationship between sexuality and gender; hence, they doubted that Murata’s article showed a new perspective for understanding spaces.

I would like to discuss the comments by Naruse et al. (2007) in light of the two articles by Kageyama and Murata. Within the field of geography, interview surveys are a conventional survey method for gathering qualitative data. Interview surveys have been shown to yield empirically valid data, even in cases where it is difficult to obtain supplementary numerical and quantitative data. The life-history research finds meaning in having a subject to narrate. The research has gained attention as one way to explore the meaning of individuals’ behaviors and lifestyles: their private spheres, which are hard for others (i.e., researchers) to visualize from their perspective. However, it seems that the life-history research was introduced in the field of geography without sufficient discussion. I say this because geography has focused more on the analysis of narratives extracted from life histories while sociology has discussed life-history research as a methodology.
In sociology, life-story research was introduced amid the reevaluation of qualitative methods that proceeded in the late 1990s; life-story and life-history research were both discussed as methodologies (Ishikawa and Nishikura 2015). Behind this was the fact that Sakurai (1995), who had led life history research since the 1980s, reassessed it reflectively and made a methodological turn to life-story research (Kamezaki 2010; Ishikawa and Nishikura 2015). Life-history research takes an interest in reconstructing the life and past events of the informant by focusing on the story told by the informant. In contrast, life-story research enables the examination of the present the informant speaks of and its subsequent future by focusing on how the informant told the story or for what purpose the informant speaks. This conceptual framework is referred to as “interactive constructionism” (Ishikawa and Nishikura 2015). Whereas life-history research often omits questions from the interviewer so that the narrative of the informant is directed toward multiple unspecified audiences, life-story research incorporates the process of producing narratives into the description because it values the initiative of the informant and strives to use words and expressions used in the narrative in addition to respecting the autonomy of both the informant and interviewer (Nishikura 2015). In this way, life-history and life-story research comprise different methodologies. According to Ishikawa and Nishikura (2015), there are two types of life-history research: the positivist approach, in which the researcher establishes a hypothesis based on existing theories and conceptual frameworks and listens to individual life histories in order to test hypotheses, and the interpretive objectivist approach, in which the researcher begins to see the commonality—or the social reality that goes beyond individual subjectivity—as she or he listens to multiple life histories and repeatedly engages in inductive reasoning. Ishikawa and Nishikura (2015) conclude that these two approaches share a common assumption that the researcher can reach the social fact as long as an appropriate method is used. Referring to their view, it can be said that geography has been incorporating the framework of life-history research.6

Naruse et al. (2007) commented that the author, Kageyama, was herself almost invisible within her article (Kageyama 2000), as had been Murata, Nishi, Matsui, Yuzawa, and Sekimura. I assert that it is necessary for the interviewer to construct public histories or “truths” based on private histories given voice to by informants. However, interviewers should not be unconcerned about the power relations and gender relations that arise between the interviewer and the informant.7 In life-history research, the interviewer is a guide who draws narratives from informants and plays a role as a “prompter,” hiding themselves in the article.

Naruse et al. (2007) also criticized Murata (2000) for having failed to fully explain the relationship between sexuality and gender. In addition to gender relations, sexuality can often become an issue in micro-scale spaces (e.g., bodily spaces, living spaces, and everyday spaces), which are hard to represent on maps. Consequently, Japanese geographers have not been concerned about such spaces. I think highly of Murata’s article in the respect that he demonstrated a problem in micro-scale spaces, which are difficult to represent in map form, by analyzing narratives obtained in interviews with single middle-aged men who had a sense of alienation in their workplaces and homes. Abe (2005) interviewed Filipino female entertainers working in “Philippine pubs” with entertainment visas and revealed how they were managed by their employers. His aim was not to collect Filipino female entertainers’ life histories by interviewing them but to grasp how they were managed in pubs and how they leased apartments. Based on narratives reflecting gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, Abe made visible the politics of micro-scale spaces in relation to the management of female entertainers. Murata (2000) and Abe (2005) conducted valuable studies insofar as they were able, through discourse analysis based on gender and sexuality and through the consideration of mental and physical aspects, to uncover how interactions among individuals or groups in micro-scale spaces had alienated the informants and had otherted them.

Starting with the publication of Nishi’s (1998) article in the *Annals of the Japan Association of Economic Geographers* in 1998, three articles by Kageyama (2000), Matsui (2000), and Murata (2000), respectively, were successively published in the *Japanese Journal of Human Geography* in 2000. In 2001, the following year, Yuzawa’s (2001) article was published in the *Geographical Review of Japan* and was then also published in the *Japanese Journal of Human Geography* in 2002 (Yuzawa 2002). I can say that around the year 2000 was a turning point in Japanese geography for research methods such as life-history analysis.8

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that “narratives” are prone to several problems: narratives are open to the bias of the interviewer when editing, to temporal lags between the content being told of by the subject of the survey and the point in time in which it is told, to subjectivity, and to lapses in memory. Moreover, geography, which has
come to embody the positivist approach, could be said to hold a critical viewpoint given the overemphasis on individuality, a result of the differences between individual narratives. However, gender relations can often become an issue in micro-scale spaces, which are hard to represent on maps. In other words, there are cases where gender relations cannot be sufficiently comprehended at a mapped/visualizable level of space. Gender relations are far from fixed: they are situated, relative, and fluid relationships. Moreover, taking gender as a viewpoint is political and critical and gender relations cannot be said to suit quantitative methods, which are directed toward generalization and neutrality. The publishing of articles like those discussed above in various Japanese academic journals around the year of 2000 can be seen as holding great significance for the geography of gender, which does not subscribe to any monolithic generality bound by categories and groups and instead focuses on the social relations that surround space to demonstrate the social relations (which include gender relations) that are reflected/appear in space, with the disparities and diversity of its constituent parts taken as prerequisite.

Life-history research analyzes each informant’s life history; though what we call short life-history research analyzes a specific life period, it can be said that there are no differences between life-history and short life-history research in regard to interviewing and analyzing the narratives of informants; neither is less efficacious in the geography of gender. Short life-history research may be considered as useful as life-history research.

Still, outside of Japan, quantitative methods in feminist geography have been reexamined in feminist geography since the year of 2000. These reexaminations have been undertaken by female geographers and have dealt with empirical research employing GIS and quantitative methods while also displaying a significant interest in feminist geography. These female geographers have moved toward the use of a multi-method methodology that combines qualitative methods with GIS, taking a skeptical standpoint toward the dualism of positivist geographic thought in quantitative methods and critical geography with qualitative methods, in an attempt to transcend them. This is, of course, not a flat rejection of quantitative methods. By combining these with qualitative methods, this attempt can be seen as in line with Wakabayashi and Nishimura’s (2010: 68) proposal that “GIS is not the unilateral expansion of power and control; it holds the potent power of providing a new method of resistance that could topple conventional systems of control.” However, research themes that are suited to the use of GIS are only relevant to a part of gender studies. Moreover, it should be added that the issues of space/place caused by gender cannot be thrown into stark relief by the introduction of GIS.

**Future of the Geography of Gender**

The fact that a demonstrative approach based on “narratives” has come to be regarded reasonably highly even in geography in Japan, having been influenced by humanistic geography (attaching importance to humanity against the “quantitative revolution” in geography), the spatial turn (in English-language geography in the 1980s), and postmodernism (promoting a focus on differences and diversity), is an argument in favor of the efficacy of qualitative methods. Focusing on life-history research around the year 2000 in the geography of gender, this article argues that life-history research is useful for uncovering social relations, including gender relations preserved by traditional patriarchy systems and hegemonic masculinity, in local communities and groups within particular spaces. In this article, I would like to advance thoughts regarding the future of the geography of gender.

In Japan, the accomplishments of feminist geography in English-speaking countries were imported around 1990. There is no firm starting point for, for example, “geography undertaken by feminists.” Even so, is it proper that the geography of gender in Japan is underestimated compared with feminist geography overseas? The sociologist Ueno (2013: 2) stated that “feminism and gender studies are like the wheels of a car, as are ideology and theory, practice and research; one cannot be separated from the other. This is because gender studies is the offspring of feminism.” In other words, gender studies cannot run from feminism. Women’s studies, one of the outcomes of the women’s liberation movement, has positioned women as a subject of research, in contrast to previous studies that presented men as the subject while objectifying women. Slightly after the creation of women’s studies, men who were influenced by the women’s liberation movement established the field of men’s studies. Ueno (2013: 3) defines men’s studies as “a discipline of male self-reflection in the wake of feminism.” In other words, men’s studies is a “weapon” that allows us to gain the knowledge to liberate men from the hegemonic masculinity of the past. The emergence of men’s studies eliminated the need for it to be separated from women’s studies, and both came to be positioned as gender studies. Accordingly, the geography of gender does not limit research subjects by sex. It is an important
achievement point for the geography of gender to clarify politics of spaces that are reflected/appear in power relations between men and women.

In view of my understanding of the geography of gender, as described above, the fact that we can occasionally come across male researchers’ work in the geography of gender like the ones listed below is notable, particularly since the year of 2000. Alongside female geographers, Kamiya, Nakazawa, Yui, and Wakabayashi have focused on the diversifying life courses of Japanese women in recent years and have carried out studies on working women in particular. Their studies have included many research findings, such as regarding residential choice among working single women (Wakabayashi et al. 2002; Yui et al. 2004), housing issues among single women and single-mother households (Yui 2003a, 2003b), regional differences observed in women’s life courses and their determinants (Nakazawa and Kamiya 2005), the availability of childcare services for childcare working women and regional differences in this regard (Wakabayashi 2006), and the push and pull factors involved in encouraging Japanese women to pursue overseas employment (Nakazawa et al. 2008). Certain of these studies were presented in the symposium “Women’s Employment and the Variety of Living Spaces” at the academic meeting for Geographical Sciences (Chiri-kagaku) in 2006. The results of their some studies were published in 2012 (Yui et al. 2012). Kumagai (2006), who had worked on development as a research theme through fieldwork in developing countries, focused on women/gender and discussed developmental theory based on the view that development is related to agents and power. Murata, who was the first in Japanese geography to employ sexuality as an angle of analysis, shed light on the fact that gay men—and even heterosexual men—are subject to constraint or alienation in public and private spaces in Japanese society where there is deep-rooted heterosexism; he published his research findings in 2009 (Murata 2009). Abe (2011) uncovered just how the everyday spaces of Filipino female entertainers working in the amusement areas in the large city of Nagoya in Japan are controlled and restricted by their employers. As described, we can see that the geography of gender is an academic field to be advanced by geographers sensitive to the power relations that create the politics of spaces, regardless of the sex of the researchers and informants.

As this review of previous studies has indicated, the strength of the geography of gender in Japan lies in the fact that it has analyzed and examined the relationship between the space and society surrounding social groups that are subject to discrimination and disadvantages because of their social attributes (gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.) based on careful empirical research of subjects, without merely following theories or being swayed by theories. The geography of gender has been focusing on Japanese social issues, for example, variety of women’s life style and increase in number of working women, the issues on dwelling for the elderly with the rapid development of an aging society, the relationships among retired men and local communities, and sense of alienation due to deviation from heterosexuality, not only as matter of subjects’ relationships but also as matter of spaces/places. Accordingly, it can be said that the advantage of geography of gender lies in making use of the knowledge accumulated by urban geography.

Qualitative methods are essential in careful empirical research. Life-history research, which this article has focused on, can be considered rather an effective qualitative method. However, Yuzawa (2009) points out that the introduction of life history in empirical research has had the following issue: in sociology and ethnic studies, it is an effective method to reconstruct a realistic history for the person in question even after disregarding the fact that life history lacks objectivity. However, the lack of objectivity in life-history research has been considered problematic in geography. Yuzawa (2001, 2002) attempted to overcome the problem by using historical materials supplied by informants, such as memoirs, alongside narratives to supplement informants’ life histories. Kageyama (2013) argued that life history is an important qualitative method to deepen the study of geography from various standpoints and to include the perspectives of minorities even after discounting the issues that life history has.

The relations of various subjects are becoming the main focus of research in fields such as sociology and psychology that have advanced the study of gender and sexuality. With geography, it has become possible to point out issues that are found only “here” and cannot easily be generalized by questioning “where,” including microscale spaces that cannot be mapped or visualized. This can be called “local knowledge” that is generated from the perspective of a “somewhere” that is rooted in people’s lives, as proposed by McDowell (1993).

Although the geography of gender itself has gradually developed in Japanese geography, it cannot be said that its researchers are many in number now. I would like to see an increase in the number of researchers, both men and women, with an outlook that takes gender into account with power relations. In order to achieve this, the areas about which Japanese geographers still hold doubts—
for example, the political aims of feminist geography/the geography of gender and the efficacy of including the concept of gender in spatial theory—require a space for carefully assembled reviews and developmental debate.

Notes

1. Although feminist geographers have evaluated the anthropocentrism that humanistic geography has emphasized, they have criticized points of view that reflect a hegemonic masculinity (Rose 1993).
2. Kamiya et al. (1999) analyzed informants' narratives that were obtained by interview surveys. This study examined a relatively short period of time—the period of time that was necessary for people to decide on a place of residence—and hence did not query informants regarding their life experiences. However, Kamiya et al. did discuss how researchers can avoid gender bias in the analytic process employed in examining informants' narratives. Therefore, it can be said that Kamiya et al. proposed a significant view in regard to qualitative methods in geography.
3. Nishi published an academic book published (Nishi 2015) on the elderly that references gender perspectives.
4. Yuzawa (2009) merely noted that the previous study (Quataert 1985) had, based on gender, made arguments based on domestic work in the textile industry in a rural region in Germany.
5. Naruse et al. (2007) and Sugiyama (2008) discussed the efficacy of using narratives in qualitative methods, but they introduced simply life history.
6. Sakurai (2002) defined life history as a superordinate and life story as a subordinate concept; while the former is composed not only of interviews but also of biographies that encompass not only textual materials (including diaries and letters) and technical information pertaining to individuals' lives and life events, the latter are produced only based on interviews.
7. Nishi (2015: 51–63), referring to her experiences interviewing the elderly, proposed discussing researchers' positionality. Because of her position as a female and researcher met with opposition from her informants, she was deeply discouraged at the time.
8. Tahara and Kamiya published an article in the Japanese Journal of Human Geography in 2002 (Tahara and Kamiya 2002); through data obtained in interview surveys, the article elucidated the continued habitation of depopulated regions by the elderly based on their life histories, health conditions, and social relationships. The article did not involve the viewpoint of gender because they lumped the elderly together as one age-group for investigation and analysis. Moreover, an article by Inagaki that was published in the Geographical Review of Japan in 2003 (Inagaki 2003) took people born in new housing developments in the suburbs of a metropolitan area as the subject of study; the article examined the various conditions that influenced their choices of and moves to and from their residences and obtained life histories through interview surveys with the aim of complementing a questionnaire survey. It introduced the perspective of the gendered division of labor in the analysis of life histories; furthermore, because it classified movements of the second generation in the suburbs of the metropolitan area, individuals’ reasons and emotions, which had influenced their movement, were overlooked. Hence, the aim of the life-history surveys was not fulfilled. Consequently, the implications of these articles are not discussed in this article.
9. Tanigawa (2004) collected short life histories of informants who had migrated to the Osumi-shoto Islands in Kagoshima Prefecture; he explained the process and effects of migration in a community, analyzing informants’ narratives. However, he did not discuss how gender relations had affected processes and relationships with the community after migration. Tanigawa adopted a term, "short life history," which had been used by Yoshikawa (2001) who had investigated migration among people between their graduation from senior high school and their mid-20s.
10. Kwan is one of the female geographers who noticed an application of GIS to feminist geography by criticizing previous researches which used a quantitative method GIS (Kwan 2002). Recently, a young feminist geographer tried to draw daily life of Muslim women in the public spaces in Tehran by city using GIS (Nazgol 2013). The debate over the introduction of GIS and quantitative methods by feminist geography academics overseas is described in more detail in Wakabayashi and Nishimura (2010).
11. Apart from life history, qualitative methods include participant observation, group interview, discourse analysis on narratives and text, analysis of visual representation, and so on.

References

Abe, R. 2005. Politics regarding performances of Filipino female entertainers: From the perspective of microscale geographies. Geographical Review of Japan 78: 951–975. (JE)
Abe, R. 2011. Esunishitei no chirigaku: Imin esunikkukukan wo to (Geography of ethnicity: Examination of immigrants' ethnic spaces). Tokyo: Kokon Shoin. (J)
Beebe, K., Davis, A. and Gleadle, K. 2015. Introduction: Space, place and gendered identities: Feminist history and the spatial turn. In Space, place and gendered identities: Feminist history and the spatial turn, ed. K. Beebe and A. Davis, 1–10. New York: Routledge.
Haraway, D. 1991. Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of nature. London: Routledge. Translated by S. Takahashi 2000. Saru to onna to saibougu: Shizen no saikatsumei. Tokyo: Seidosa. (J)
Inagaki, R. 2003. Migration behavior of the suburban second generation: A case study of Kozoji New Town. Geographical Review of Japan 76: 575–598. (JE)
Ishikawa, R. and Nishikura, M. 2015. Raifu sutori kenkyu ni nani ga dekiru-ka (What will be possible for the life story research?). In What will be possible for the life story research?, ed. A. Sakurai and R. Ishikawa, 1–20. Tokyo: Shinyosha. (J)
Ishizuka, M. 2010. ‘The quest never ends: Rethinking of “space, place, and gender relations”. Annals of Ochanomizu Geographical Society 50: 2–26. (J)
Kageyama, H. 2000. Gendered space in the 1930s: The Otsuka Joshi Apartment House. Japanese Journal of Human Geography 52: 321–340. (JE)
Kageyama, H. 2013. Life history and geography. In Jibun chirigaku jiten (The dictionary of human geography), ed. The Human Geographical Society of Japan, 322–323. Tokyo: Maruzen Publishing. (J)
Kamezaki, M. 2010. The difference between life history and life story: Focusing on the discussion of Atsushi Sakurai. Bulletin of Tokyo Kasei University Museum 15: 11–23. (J)
Kamiya, H., Kageyama, H. and Kinoshita, R. 1999. A study on single women's residential choice in Tokyo Metropolitan Area by using interview methods. Geographical Reports of Kanazawa University 9: 17–32. (J)
Yoshida, Y., Murata, Y. and Kageyama, H. 2013. Toward the development of the geography of gender in Japan: Advances in research and prospects. Geographical Review of Japan 86B: 33–39.

Yoshikawa, T. 2001. Gakureki shakai no rokaru-torakku (Local track of academic background oriented society). Kyoto: Sekaihisosha. (J)

Yui, Y. 2003a. Housing problems of single parent families in Japan. Geographical Review of Japan 76: 668–681. (JE)

Yui, Y. 2003b. Housing purchase by single women in Tokyo. Quarterly Journal of Geography (Kikan-Chirigaku) 55: 143–161. (JE)

Yui, Y., Wakabayashi, Y., Nakazawa, T. and Kamiya, H. 2004. Hataraku josei no toshikukan (Urban spaces in which working women are living). Tokyo: Kokon Shoin. (J)

Yui, Y., Kamiya, H., Wakabayashi, Y., Nakazawa, T., Yano, K., Kinoshita, R., Kamo, H., Kukimoto, M., Kubo, T. and Thang, L. L. 2012. Josei shugyo to seikatsukukan (Female employment and living spaces). Tokyo: Akashi Shoten. (J)

Yuzawa, N. 2001. The function of the division of family labor in the Yukitsumugi production area: An analysis based on the life histories of textile weavers. Geographical Review of Japan 74A: 239–263. (JE)

Yuzawa, N. 2002. The state of family-owned businesses in the Yukitsumugi industry and associated changes: An analysis based on the life histories of three generations of women in hataya. Japanese Journal of Human Geography 54: 131–154. (JE)

Yuzawa, N. 2009. Zairai sangyo to kazoku no chiiki-shi: Raifu hisutori kara mita sho-kibo kazoku keiei to yukitsumugi seisan (Traditional industry and family's histories: Small scale family businesses in traditional textile-producing area referring to the life histories). Tokyo: Kokon Shoin. (J)