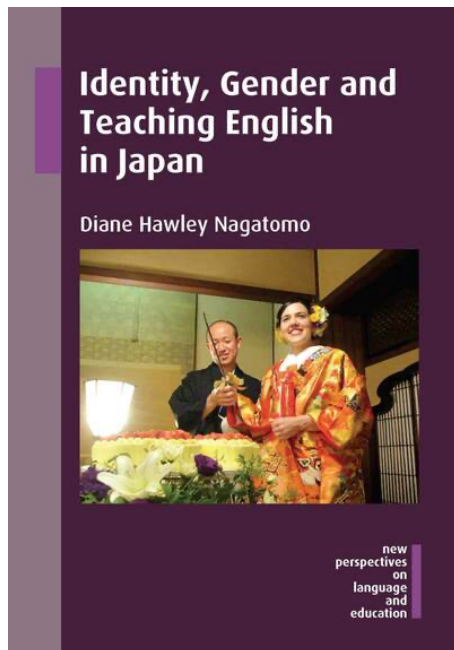


## Book Review



### **Identity, Gender and Teaching English in Japan**

Diane Hawley Nagatomo, Multilingual  
Masters. 2016. 264 pp.  
ISBN: 9781783095209

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The study of identity and gender and how they intertwine with each other is an area of interest to researchers. One commonality shared by these two constructs is that they are both built, negotiated and reconstructed through interacting with different people in different contexts (Julé, 2008; Paltridge, 2006). Diane Hawley Nagatomo's book *Identity, Gender and Teaching English in Japan* explores how a group of foreign English teachers develop their personal and professional identity after settling permanently in Japan to live and work. The book presents the interesting and insightful stories of ten Western women all with Japanese spouses. It illustrates the obstacles these women encounter in their personal and professional lives and how they tackle these challenges while developing and maintaining their teaching careers in Japan, where gender inequality at the workplace remains a largely unresolved issue (Yamaguchi, 2019). While these women's stories are the essence of this book, the author also includes a comprehensive account of how English education in Japan has evolved over the last 400 years.

Comprised of ten chapters, the book begins by providing relevant background information about English language teaching and learning in Japan and the rationale for investigating how Western female English teachers married to Japanese men develop their personal and professional identities in Japan (Chapter 1). The author then describes the changing role of English in the Japanese education system over time and its increased prominence in Japanese life (Chapter 2). This is followed by a description of the three major areas of EFL employment in Japan that have recruited foreigners since the 1980s (Chapter 3). The book then focuses on gender by examining the history of interracial and intercultural relationships in Japan and the impact of societal gendered attitudes on the career development of both Japanese and non-Japanese women (Chapter 4). Taken together, the first four chapters of the book provide a useful contextual overview of the cultural, social, political and gender issues foreign female English teachers with Japanese spouses commonly face both personally and professionally. This will be, especially helpful for readers who are not familiar with Japanese culture and history.

In the second part of the book, the author focuses on the women's stories. She first outlines the data collection and analysis processes, and explains the theoretical frameworks she uses to analyse the development of the women's identity (Chapter 5). Next, the author presents a detailed narrative of the women including: their reasons for going to Japan, their initial teaching experiences, their encounter with their husbands and their decision to reside in Japan after marrying (Chapter 6). The following three chapters (Chapters 7-9) analyse how seven of the women construct their personal and professional identities. Although the author acknowledges that three of the women will not be included in these chapters, no justification is given. This may leave readers confused, or, at best, wondering about the selection criteria for inclusion/exclusion in the chapter. The final chapter (Chapter 10) summarizes the main themes which emerged from the interviewed women's stories and reiterates the answers to the research questions guiding this study.

This book is a comfortable read because each chapter begins with a brief but clear overview highlighting the main issues to be discussed and ends with a succinct summary of the key points. The chapter overviews allow readers to quickly determine which chapter(s) will be the most useful or relevant to their interests.

The narratives of the women and the corresponding analysis are the crux of this book, and certainly they present inspiring stories of how these women live successfully and refuse to conform to the stereotypical norms that are often imposed on women, particularly foreign women with Japanese husbands. While there is much to be appreciated in this book, it seems that in the analysis of the women's stories there has been an over-emphasis on how the women's race has played a role in influencing the development of their personal and professional identities. Readers who are attracted by the book's title (which emphasises identity and gender) would probably expect more in-depth discussion on the impact of gender on those identities. Overall, this book provides appealing, informative and valuable ideas which will stimulate teaching professionals to consider how their identity can be positively and/or negatively affected if they decide to pursue a career abroad.

#### **About the reviewer**

Serina Chan is an assistant lecturer at the Centre for Applied English Studies, The University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include discourse analysis, language teaching and learning, and language and gender.

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