

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

Gender and Sexuality in East Asia

(Joint DIJ Social Science and History & Humanities Study Group)



July 22, 2022 (Fri), 6:30–7.30pm JST/10.30–11.30am CEST

The Taboo of All Taboos:

Regretting Motherhood in Japan

Forum Mithani, Cardiff University & Waseda University

The publication of *Hahaoya ni natte kōkai shiteiru* (Regretting Motherhood) in March 2022 attracted significant attention in the Japanese press, broadcast and social media. Segments on NHK's television and radio stations were devoted to the book and the reaction it provoked. Articles in publications such as the weekly *Bunshun* magazine published excerpts and there was much discussion on Twitter under the hashtag #母親になって後悔している. This follows waves of interest across the globe since the book, by Israeli sociologist Orna Donath, was first published in 2017 and subsequently translated into multiple languages across Europe, North America and Asia. Donath's provocative study has caused outrage as well as earned praise for its tackling of a subject that remains a taboo in many societies, not least of all in Japan: women who express regret for having become mothers. The voices of the many Japanese women who have expressed empathy with the subjects of Donath's research are particularly striking.

This talk introduces Donath's work, focusing in particular on the book's reception in Japan, and what it reveals about the contemporary notions and conditions of motherhood in a society in which the low birth rate continues to raise alarm. I will address how unpacking the taboo of maternal regret can reframe discourses of womanhood and motherhood, be they social, political or academic.

Forum Mithani is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at Cardiff University and Visiting Research Fellow at Waseda University. She received her PhD from SOAS (University of London) in 2019. Her research focuses on Japanese media, literature and popular culture, gender, motherhood, feminism and social minorities. Recent publications include *Handbook of Japanese Media and Popular Culture in Transition* (co-edited with G. Kirsch, MHM Limited, 2022).

About:

The *Gender and Sexuality in East Asia*-Lecture Series is part of the DIJ's Social Science and History & Humanities Study Groups. The events are open to all. Further information can be found [here](#).

Hybrid Event

On-site (DIJ Tokyo): Registration is required via email to kottmann@dijtokyo.org until July 21. Due to safety reasons the number of participants is limited to 17. Masks are obligatory.

Online participation: Please register via our webpage <https://dij.tokyo/motherhood>