



Asien-Orient-Institut – Japanologie, TIMEJ

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Childbirth in Medieval Japan: Time, Politics, Expertise

Projektpräsentation von Dr. Anna Andreeva, Universität
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Um Anmeldung für die zoom-Veranstaltung wird
gebeten (bitte an daniela.tan@aoi.uzh.ch)

Abstract: In medieval Japan, pregnancy and childbirth were understood as natural but unpredictable, risky affairs, fraught with various kinds of uncertainty, including the possible death of the pregnant woman and her offspring. For high-ranking aristocratic families, whose daughters had a chance of becoming imperial consorts, such possibilities presented a potentially dispiriting course of events or, in the event of a safe birth, a sure way to achieve certain political and socio-economic aspirations. Historical sources describe how elite households dealt with such uncertainties and dilemmas – by planning ahead and fostering special expertise that could help their daughters to conceive and give birth easily. This talk will focus on the several kinds of expert knowledge that the elite families, such as the Fujiwara and Saionji, were able to employ in order for their daughters and sisters to give birth to Japan's future rulers. Of special importance in these kinds of medieval knowledge were the competing time schemes that envisioned pregnancy in terms of distinct timeframes and modes of observation. Based on the analysis of previously unpublished or little-studied medieval manuscripts and sources, this talk will analyze the different kinds of gendered medieval knowledge on conception, pregnancy, and childbirth developed by Buddhist scholar-monks, yin-yang diviners, physicians, and “experienced women” in tenth- to fourteenth century Japan.

CV: Dr. Anna Andreeva is a research fellow at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, Heidelberg University (Germany). She is a primary investigator of the research project “Buddhism, medicine, and gender in 10th-16th century Japan: toward a transcultural history of women's health,” sponsored by the German Research Council (DFG) during 2017–2021. Her publications include *Assembling Shinto: Buddhist Approaches to Kami Worship in Medieval Japan* (Harvard Asia Center, 2017), *Transforming the Void: Embryological Discourse and Reproductive Imagery in East Asian Religions* (with D. Steavu, Brill, 2016), and “Childbirth and Women's Healthcare in Premodern Societies” (*Dynamis* 34/2, 2014).