

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

**DIJ Social Science  
Study Group**



**Wednesday, 31 March 2010, 18.30 h**

*Gitte Marianne HANSEN, University of Cambridge*

**“Contradictive Femininity” and Self-harm –  
A Social and Literary Analysis**

During the 1980s, just when it seemed that things could not be any better in Japan, a growing number of women began to throw up, starve, and cut themselves. This suggests that the transition to a consumer-based society had a dark side relative to the glossy magazine front covers. Since then, the incidence of eating disorders and self-harm behavior among Japanese females has been rising significantly. Such issues can partly be explained by the ‘contradictive femininity’ that emerged from the 1960s with Japan’s quick socio-economic change. Not surprisingly ‘contradictive femininity’ and related issues has been explored by women fiction producers and are now established themes in *manga*, *anime*, or literature. However, despite the many gender related criticisms of Murakami Haruki’s works, he has consistently authored a highly ignored group of works that participates in this literary expression of the contemporary social reality a growing number of women face.

This presentation has three main aims. First, introduce the concept of ‘contradictive femininity’ and relate it to problems such as self-harm and eating disorders. Second, illustrate how this difficult-to-balance femininity is thematized in fiction. And third, draw attention to what I term ‘Murakami Haruki’s female narratives’ – a group of works spanning from 1982 to present, including his latest literary hit *1Q84* – and locate their literary position within fiction that explores contemporary women’s social reality.

**Gitte Marianne Hansen** studied Japanese Studies and Gender Studies at the University of Copenhagen. Her master thesis deals with eating disorders and self-harm in Japanese cultural expressions since 1980. From 2004 to 2009, she studied and worked as a teaching assistant at Waseda University. She is presently a Gates Cambridge Trust PhD candidate at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for young scholars and Ph.D. candidates in the field of Social Sciences organized by Maren Godzik, Barbara Holthus and Ralph Lützel. All are welcome to attend, but registration ([holthus@dijtokyo.org](mailto:holthus@dijtokyo.org)) is appreciated.

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Jōchi Kioizaka Bldg. 2F, 7-1 Kioichō, Chiyoda-ku, Tōkyō 102-0094, Phone: 03-3222-5077.

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