

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

## DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



Thursday, 12 October 2017, 18.30 h

Satoshi Ota  
(Tama University)

### **Prolonging Youthfulness: An Investigation of the *bimajo* Phenomenon in Japan**

For the past five, six years, *bimajo* (美魔女) has come into media attention in Japan. *Bimajo* are women in their 35 and above, who look much younger than their actual age. They put on nice make up, their hair is nicely arranged, and they are very fashionable, too. On top of that, they maintain their skin very well, hardly have wrinkles and age spots, and keep their body fit. The term was coined by the Japanese magazine Bi-STORY (美 STORY) in 2009, and became more widely recognised because of a TV variety show where these ladies were introduced. This presentation will investigate this phenomenon from an anthropological perspective, especially by connecting it to the obsession with youth among Japanese women, which has become a dominant discourse.

*Bimajo* is an extreme example of women who want to stay young. More generally, this research has observed that many Japanese women around the age of 40, regardless of their marital status and occupation, try to be young; not only by their appearance but they also try to make the way they speak, and tone of their voice appear younger. The presentation will also investigate the social expectations of being young towards Japanese women through textual analysis of media discourse as well as an ethnographic approach: interacting with Japanese women in their 30s and 40s. This research applies the framework of van Gennep's rite of passage and investigates the change of life cycle among Japanese people.

**Satoshi Ota** is an Associate Professor at Tama University, School of Global Studies. He received a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and an MA in Social Anthropology of Japan from Oxford Brookes University as well as a Post-Graduate Diploma in Social Anthropology from University of Manchester. Ota worked as a part-time lecturer at the University of Delhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. His research areas include: popular culture, consumption and consumerism, youth culture, identity construction, globalization, nationalism, Japan, Taiwan, and Northeast India.

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is a forum open to scholars working on Japan in any field of the humanities. It is organized by Torsten Weber and Ronald Saladin. All are welcome to attend, but prior online registration via our website or via email (saladin@dijtokyo.org) is greatly appreciated.

**German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)**

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

For directions to the institute please see [www.dijtokyo.org/access](http://www.dijtokyo.org/access)