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East Asian Mothers in Britain

An Intersectional Exploration of
Motherhood and Employment

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macmillan

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I dedicate this book to my dearest son and motivation, Kaska.

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Abstract

Women's roles are changing throughout the world. Over decades we have witnessed rising educational levels and the growing economic as well as political participation rates of females in many countries. However, gender remains a central marker of social division, and women's lives in both the West and East continue to be moulded by their gender status, especially in conjunction with their race/ethnicity and class. By using an intersectional framework, this book explores first-generation East Asian mothers' narratives with specific focus on the outcomes of their motherhood and employment identity (re)construction, as well as gender dynamics at home in Britain. Chapter 1 outlines key themes in the book whilst situating the stories of East Asian migrant women within the broader debates around identity, subjectivity, detraditionalisation and individualisation. Chapter 2 discusses the question of identity with specific reference to East Asian migrant women in Britain. Chapter 3 explores intersectionality and storytelling in analysing East Asian women's stories. Chapter 4 focuses on the stories of stay-at-home mothers, mostly from South Korea and Japan, which suggests a strong support for an intensive motherhood ideology. Chapter 5 shifts to the stories of employed mothers, which indicate the importance of

employment for their identity, especially among those from China. Raised in the era of post-Mao gender equality, which encouraged women's participation in the labour market, Chinese women tended to show strong worker identity, espousing positive impacts of their employment on themselves and their children. Chapter 6 explores the gendered division of household labour. Whilst a minority of the Japanese women who married British men claimed to have a gender egalitarian division at home, the majority of women bore the brunt of domestic chores and childcare, regardless of their employment status, national/ethnic origins and financial status. The book highlights the persistent influence of their gendered beliefs, mostly rooted in their cultural/national heritage, simultaneously intersected by other factors, such as the location of settlement and their husband's gender beliefs linked to their national/ethnic backgrounds.