

## Japan royals ban book on princess

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An unprecedented complaint from the court of Japan's emperor has forced the country's biggest publisher to cancel publication of the translation of a book on the travails of the crown princess.

The English version of the book by the Australian author Ben Hills, *Princess Masako – Prisoner of the Chrysanthemum Throne*, has drawn huge interest and controversy in Japan and gone to number one in Amazon Japan's sales ranking of non-Japanese books.

The book has also drawn a vehement attack from the conservative bureaucracy surrounding the Japanese royal family, the **Imperial Household Agency**, which claims the book is inaccurate and disrespectful to the emperor and empress and their eldest son, Crown Prince Naruhito.

The book deals with the marriage of Prince Naruhito and Masako, a former diplomat who married into the world's oldest unbroken monarchy and has since become best known for her failure to produce a male heir and her descent into depression.

The book claims to illuminate the strange world she now inhabits, the pressure that the IHA's "men in black" put upon Masako to produce a male heir, and the allegation that she eventually resorted to IVF treatment in order to conceive. It is, claims Mr Hills in his preface, a book about "a young couple crushed by forces over which they have no control".

Kodansha, the publisher, had been planning to issue the Japanese translation on March 16 despite a barrage of Japanese foreign ministry criticism of what it called Mr Hill's "audacious conjecture and coarse logic".

But a spokesman for the publisher said on Friday it had decided to pull the book because Mr Hills had refused to apologise for any potential offence caused.

Mr Hills has refused to issue any apology, arguing that he has "no distortions or inaccuracies to apologise for". He said on Friday he was "disappointed that the editors Kodansha have allowed themselves to be bullied into this decision".

In a long letter sent to Mr Hill and his original publisher, Random House Australia, the emperor's grand chamberlain, Makoto Watanabe, focused on a factual error in the book, in which the author asserted that "it would be inconceivable for the Japanese royals to be associated with anything as controversial as Princess Diana's championing of the Leprosy Mission".

Mr Watanabe pointed out that the emperor and empress had, for 40 years, espoused various leprosy-related causes in Japan.

Mr Hills admits the error and said it was to be corrected in the Japanese translation. But Kodansha argue that, without an accompanying apology, the correction was not enough to allow the book's publication in Japanese. Mr Watanabe's letter also attacked Mr Hills's claim that the emperor's public engagements are "undemanding appearances at uncontroversial events". The letter points out that bottle grenades were once thrown at the emperor and empress on a visit to Okinawa in 1975, and that at a memorial ceremony in Saipan the emperor was obliged to pray "in the blazing sun".

Before Kodansha's decision to cancel publication, the author warned that the tactics being employed by the foreign ministry and the Imperial Household Agency were part of a "desperate attempt...to prevent ordinary Japanese citizens from learning what is happening in their own royal family".

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