

**Feminism in Post-War Japan: An
Overview Focusing on the Ūman
Ribu (Women's Lib) Movement in
the late 1960s and 1970s**

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Feminism in Post-War Japan: An Overview Focusing on the *Ūman Ribu* (Women's Lib) Movement in the late 1960s and 1970s

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the history and characteristics of second wave feminism in Japan focusing on *ūman ribu* or *ribu* which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first part summarizes the social and historical background of a feminist movement called *ribu* which is usually regarded as Japanese second wave feminism. The next part reviews principle topics which feminists in *ribu* dealt with and the structural characteristic of the movement's network. Finally, the regional gap in the movement and the other trends of the second wave feminism which arose in rural parts of Japan are also discussed.

Key Words: Japan, feminism, Japanese feminists, women's movement, *ūman ribu*

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Introduction

The grassroots women's liberation movement called *ūman ribu* (as loan words of “woman lib” in English) or simply *ribu*¹—usually regarded as Japan's second wave of feminism²—arose in the 1960s and 70s. *Ribu*, in which women radically requisitioned the gender role, consciousness, and oppression of women in modern Japan, has been regarded as a rather “scandalous,” “destructive,” or “violent”³ movement, associated with the New Left (Kano 2004:3). Therefore, mainstream historians of women's history have not treated it as a subject of historiography but have rather ignored it, as one of the representative second-wave feminist historians Kanou Mikiyo said that “*ūman ribu* is a movement that still has not been situated in Japanese women's history” (Kanou 2009:4).

Since the 2000s, however, many studies that rethought the *ribu* movement from various perspectives have been published by young gender studies researchers without first-hand knowledge of *ribu*. This trend is referred to as the “renaissance of *ribu*” (Ueno 2009:27). It can be said that the publication of *Shiryō nihon ūman ribu shi* (documented recollections of *ribu* published in 3 volumes in 1992, 1994, and 1995) contributed to this “renaissance.” These volumes represent primary sources that contain almost 700 leaflets and texts dating back to the period from 1969 to 1982. Furthermore, documented recollections of representative *ribu* groups, such as *Ribu Shinjuku Sentā*'s (the *Ribu Shinjuku Center*) *Ribu Shinjuku Sentā shiryō shūsei* (documented recollections of the center, published in 2008 and 2009 in 2 volumes), and *Kōdōsuru onna tati no kai*'s (the Women's Action Group) *Kōdōsuru onna tati no kai shiryō shūsei* (documented recollections of the group, published in 2015 and 2016 in 8 volumes), were also published after the 2000s. Materials pertinent to the grassroots feminist movement were easily scattered and lost, but, as of now, a growing number of young generation researchers can study the *ribu* movement using these primary sources.

Based on these recent research findings, this paper provides an overview of Japanese postwar feminism by focusing on *ribu*. The first part of this paper summarizes the social and historical background of *ribu*, which is usually regarded as Japan's second wave of feminism, and describes the movement's structural characteristics. Next, I examine the main topics dealt with by the *ribu* feminists. The final section discusses a regional gap in the movement that corresponds to the centralized modernization of Japan, and other trends

¹ In this article, the term of *ribu* is used to refer to the movement and women who participated in the movement. The term *ribu women* is especially used to indicate those who considered and identified themselves as *ribu* activists.

² The history of Japanese feminism is usually divided into two waves. The first wave began after the modernization of Japan during the Meiji Restoration and especially claimed the equality of women and men under the law. After the end of World War II in 1945, some legal equality between men and women was attained; however, the discrimination against women remained. The second wave sought the elimination of the discrimination in both public and private areas. The *ribu* movement is generally classified as the second wave feminism in Japan.

³ Following this, the Japanese translations all of the subsequent quotes are mine.

of second-wave feminism that emerged in a rural part of Japan that are distinct from those in mainstream *ribu*.

The birth of *ūman ribu* and its characteristics

The social and historical backgrounds

A new women's movement called the Women's Liberation Movement emerged among developed countries in Europe and in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, its counterpart—called *ūman ribu* or *ribu*—was becoming prominent in Japan. It is generally said that the dawn of the *ribu* movement occurred when some women's groups—of which the most famous was *Gurūpu Tatakau Onna* (Fighting Women's Group) founded by Tanaka Mitsu—participated in an International Anti-War Day demonstration on October 21, 1970 (Ehara 2002). Prior to this event several groups such as *Metoroparichen* (derived from the Russian word “metropoliten,” meaning “metro”) founded at Sapporo, Hokkaido in 1968, had been formed.

Although *ribu* has sometimes been misunderstood as having been imported or being a “spillover” from the United States (Nakata et al. 1995: 101), because of its etymology as a loanword from the English “woman lib,” as some *ribu* women indicated⁴, it should be noted that Japanese society, and more specifically Japanese women, had unique social and historical backgrounds that contributed to the movement's spontaneous emergence.

In the late 1960s and 70s, Japan underwent significant social contradictions that accompanied the country's rapid economic growth in the 1960s, known as the “Japanese economic miracle.” With regard to gender, the period of high economic growth reinforced the division of labor by gender, and *ribu* emerged as a historical, social, and cultural necessity for Japanese women, who were sometimes encouraged by women's movements in the United States⁵ and other countries to confront Japanese gender problems using their own voices.

At that time, young people initiated social and political struggles that included student movements and the New Left movement, in parallel with the worldwide liberation movements. *Ribu* also emerged from the waves created by these social movements. The female university students who had often faced sexism in movements that protested Japan's role in the Vietnam War and the Security Treaty between the United States and Japan initiated protests against a society that was characterized by gender discrimination and male

⁴ *Onna Sensen* (Women's Front) noted that “the movement of *onna* is definitely not as a result of a fashionable influence from the women's liberation movement of the U.S., but it has emerged as inevitable or radical for Japanese women, just as in the U.S.” (Onna Sensen 1970: 108)

⁵ One example of this is the translation of feminist texts in the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement, such as *Our Body, Ourselves* by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (1973), as a sphere of the Japanese *ribu* movement. Also, many American activists, including lesbian feminists, visited *Ribu Shinjuku Sentā* and interacted with *ribu* women (Endou et.al. 1996:221).

dominance. From 1969 to 1970, these often young, university-educated, middle-class women established many *ribu* activists groups.

From *fujin* (lady) to *onna* (woman): The liberation of *onna*

Amano summarizes four characteristics of the *ribu* movement as follows:

1. Contradicting traditional women's movements (*hahaoya undō* [母親運動 mother's movement] and *shufu undō* [主婦運動 housewives' movements]) premised on conventional gender roles such as housewives, mothers, and wives, and exposing the problems inherent in marriage or family systems which are based on those gender roles.
2. Problematizing "sex and reproduction (sexuality and motherhood)" which had been previously considered as taboo by the *fujin* [lady 婦人] movement, and criticizing the fact that sex is at the center of the relationship between the sexes and that that sex relationship is nothing other than a product of man-led society and culture.
3. Denying the historicity of woman, who has willingly accepted the norm as a member of a man-made society, in other words, the history of willing obedience, and taking consciousness raising "from women to women" as its central challenge.
4. Insisting on a shift from the values of production-centered materialism in favor of the values associated with life-centered post-materialism, and called them "the logic of the man," and "the logic of the *onna*" [女 woman] respectively (Amano 2005:235-236).

Many studies on *ribu* have focused on the meaning and difference of *fujin* and *onna* as political subjects of feminist movements. For Japanese feminists, how they refer to themselves is a political concern because in the Japanese language, there are some words for "woman" that have different nuances. Women's movements prior to *ribu*, such as *haha* (mothers 母) movement or *shufu* (主婦 housewives) movement, were known as *fujin* movement. *Fujin* means a married woman, namely, a woman who is respectable and should not be treated as a sexual object, to signify a woman in a specific state (Ehara 2001). The term *onna* has a sexual and indecent meaning, so the word *fujin* was used formally in official terminology to indicate women. The movements were enacted by women in their roles as mothers or housewives, both of which were considered acceptable and respectable gender roles for women. As Fujieda points out, since these movements were based on the accepted identity of *fujin*, they were recognized to a certain degree. However, the extent of the *fujin* movements was necessarily limited to the existing marriage system and gender norms (Fujieda 1990).

Unlike the *fujin* movements, *ribu* women chose to use the term *onna*, which means "woman" but has discriminatory and offensive overtones. They reclaimed the word *onna* to break with the *fujin* movement, which was premised on classifying women as *shufu* and *haha*. According to documents written during the movement's early days, *ribu* women often discussed the *onna* terminology. *Onna* was consciously chosen as a subject, and, as Shigematsu indicates, *ribu*'s reclamation of *onna* was linked to its rejection of the legitimacy of the gender-conforming roles of *shufu* and *haha* rooted in the Japanese family

system, which was critiqued by *ribu* activists as a microcosm of Japan's male-centered discriminatory capitalist order (Shigematsu 2012).

From the standpoint of *onna*, *ribu* women questioned modern female gender roles as mothers/housewives, and the women's movements acted by such subjects. For example, they questioned the mother's movement that flourished in the early postwar period, condemning these movements as a type of "imperialist feminism" that had the same roots which previously supported an aggressive war against Asian countries by playing women's role as mothers/housewives on the home front.

A contradistinction to the essentialist connotation of the term *onna*, *ribu* emphasized the differences among *onna* in power relationships, such as class, ethnicity, and nationality, and the different political, social or economic positions between women. The awareness of divisions between women was partly the result of specific socio-economic situations during that time, such as those mentioned above. *Ribu* women perceived themselves as privileged middle-class Japanese who lived in Hondo (the mainland), not in the occupied Okinawa. They also viewed Japanese women as oppressors of Asian women under an economic penetration that accompanied the sexual exploitation of Asian women, which reappeared in the form of sex tourism for Japanese businessmen. This situation was considered overlapping with Japanese imperialism and militarism during the war. Kanou and other researchers influenced these views in a series of books titled *Jūgoshi nōto* (Notes on the History of the Home Front; 1977–1996), issued by *Onna tachi no ima wo tou kai* (Circle of questioning women's current issues) that questioned women's responsibilities during the previous war.

The anti-hierarchical structure

Gelb conducted a comparative study of Japanese and U.S. women's movements, and suggested that Japanese feminism can be characterized as localized and loosely organized (Gelb 2005: 186). In the same way, the *ribu* movement was not a monolithic and organic whole, but was instead composed of various circles and individuals, as it was said, "three women make a *ribu* movement" (*Kōdōsuru kai kinensyū iinkai* ed. 1999: 268). In addition, most *ribu* groups and their activities had an anti-hierarchical, horizontal structure⁶, as described in the preface of *Seisabetsu no Kokuhatsu: Ūman ribu ha syuchō suru* (Exposing gender discrimination: Ūman ribu claims)—"the first book written on *ribu*"—as follows:

Unlike conventional organizations, the *ribu* movement has no representatives or center which directs and manages it. Furthermore, there is no authorization for movement participation. Prior to the definitions of the movement

⁶ One exception was *Chūpiren*, short for *Chūzetsu kinshihō ni hantai shi piru kaikin wo yōkyū suru josei kaihō rengō* (Women's Liberation Union for Opposing Anti-Abortion Law and Demanding a Release of the Pill), led by Enoki Misako. Although it had been occasionally regarded as a representative group of the *ribu* movement, this group's organizational form and protests were more similar to that of an American movement, following a top-down approach; some *ribu* women had a negative attitude toward this group (e.g., Shutou 1996).

(principles/agreement), there are the cries and claims of individuals or groups who intend to be independent (*Aki shobō henshūbu* ed. 1971).

A similar attitude could be seen in the first *Ribu Gassyuku (Ribu Camp)*⁷ held in 1970, from August 21 to 24, at Shinanodaira, Nagano, with over 200 women from across the country in attendance. *Ribu Gassyuku jikkō iinkai* (Executive committee for *Ribu* Camp) which consisted of *Gurūpu Tatakau Onna* and other *ribu* groups incubated this camp. During this camp, the autonomy and independence of participants were respected. Therefore, the committee intentionally did not complete the arrangements; for example, the camp began with a meeting in which they discussed what to do in/with the camp. The attendees shared their own experiences freely, such as the motivation of being associated with *ribu*, the experience of abortion, or criticism against the committee.

Inoue Teruko, who participated in the first *Ribu Gassyuku* and later became one of the founders of women's studies in Japan, drew a major distinction between *ribu* and the women's liberation movement in the United States, commenting that *ribu* did not have a leader or an ultimate, unique goal (Inoue 1971: 387) These orientations toward horizontality can be presumed to be a criticism of the established gender role, in which the lead role of "a fighter" is played by men, and a supporting role, such as that of "a kitchen maid," is assigned to women, as part of which the students' New Left movement⁸ campaigned for anti-establishment (Amano 2005).

The idea of a horizontal organization was also regarded as a criticism of the hegemonic idea of the efficiency-production-first policy that characterized Japanese society's post-economic growth, and its capitalistic logic that exploited female workers, thereby making them unproductive, second-class workers because of their childbearing functions.

Minikomi: An alternative feminist media

Ribu women communicated with mimeographed leaflets, newspapers, and magazines called *minikomi* (from mini-communications). They functioned as an alternative media to the male-dominated mass media, which often reported on *ribu* using negative and mocking attitudes. Countering these established media, *ribu* used *minikomi* as an alternative tool for expressing their own voices, "*From Onna to Onna*" (the name of one of the *minikomis*)

⁷ Only women participants and reporters could attend the camp, though the number of women reporter was considerably low at that time. Although the camp was criticized by some attendees for lacking any specific purpose or unique goal, many women were encouraged by this camp; moreover, the networks established in the camp helped in determining the next activities of *ribu*. For example, women acquainted in the camp began publishing *ribu* magazines, such as *Onna Erosu* (see chapter 2.4).

⁸ The shocking *Rengō Sekigun Jiken* (United Red Army Incident) from 1971 to 1972, in which female New Left activists were killed by the leaders owing to their "bourgeois femininity," symbolizes the oppression of women's sexuality in the movement. *Rengō Sekigun* (United Red Army) was an underground revolutionary New Left group established in 1971 for armed resistance against the state. During *Rengō Sekigun Jiken*, 12 young members (8 men and 4 women, including a pregnant woman) were tortured and killed by their own party members for infringement of party discipline or in the name of revolution.

directly. Other more full-fledged feminist magazines also developed. One comprehensive magazine was called *Onna Erosu* (Woman Eros, 1973–1981, Figure 1), and more than 600 women were involved with this magazine (Funamoto et al. 1999: 12).

Currently, one of the most important tasks for gender studies and women’s history in Japan is to collect and preserve the *ribu* grassroots feminist movement’s historical materials for future studies. Aside from the reprinted collections mentioned in the Introduction, another effort has involved the construction of the *Minikomi* online library (<https://wan.or.jp/dwan>) by the Women’s Action Network (WAN)⁹. As of September 2017, more than 60 titles and 4,000 magazines were made available on the Internet.



Figure 1 The cover page of *Onna Erosu* Vol. 13 titled “Special Feature: Toward a deconstruction of the family system.”

Ribu’s thoughts and activities

Rethinking female sexuality and motherhood

Ribu links the liberation of *onna* (女解放 *onna kaihō*) with sexual liberation from a feminist perspective. The strongest and most impressive *ribū* manifesto on this topic was written by Tanaka Mitsu in 1970, and is titled “Liberation from the toilet.” It accuses the Japanese culture and society of promoting the sexual objectification of women and patriarchal power over female sexuality in terms that classified a woman as “a good wife” or “a whore,” and sought the alternative holistic female sexuality.

⁹ WAN is a Japanese feminist non-profit organization founded by the most influential feminist sociologist Ueno Chizuko in 2009 for the purpose of providing information on gender equal society, coordinating women’s action, and encouraging women across Japan.

It is said that women are physical or bodily beings, while, at the same time they are alienated from their own female bodies, which are regarded as the property of “others,” namely their husbands, children, or doctors (Young 1990). In the *ribu* movement, some women problematized this alienation and tried to regain their female bodies using practical means. For example, a group named *Kunoichi* (female ninja) at Chiba University held a workshop to explain how to use tampons, which were considered an infringement on “patriarchal feminine virtue” and banned in some schools (Iwatsuki 1975). Also, Morosawa Yoko, a historian of women’s history, showed that natural childbirth respected the personality or independence of mother and baby in her book titled *Onna no Karada* (Women’s Body, 1979). Wakabayashi Naeko, a member of *Ribu Shinjuku Sentā* and the later famous lesbian feminist who founded lesbian organization *Regumi Sutajio* (the Regumi studio), stayed at a women’s clinic in the United States. After returning to Japan, she held *Onna no karada renzoku tīchi-in* (women’s body series teach-in) “to get back our women’s body that had been occupied by gynecologists for a long time” (Wakabayashi 1977:161-162).

Other women aspired to alternative expressions from women’s perspective. The concept of the “standard Japanese (標準語 *hyōjungo*)” is gendered in its origin. When the Meiji government developed a standard language for the purpose of unifying the country as a modern, centralized nation-state, the language spoken by the middle-class educated men who lived around Yamanote, Tokyo, was adopted as its “standard (標準 *hyōjun*)” (Nakamura 2007). This so-called man-made language disvalues femininity and lacks the vocabulary and concepts needed to express women’s experiences from women’s perspective. As previously discussed, recognizing this male-centered nature of the language system, *ribu* women declared themselves as *onna* instead of *fujin*; this is one of the examples of the challenges in changing the negative connotation of femininity.

In addition, a prominent feminist writer Morisaki Kazue, who sought new expressions for women before *ribu* movement and was widely read by *ribu* women, recalls her experience that when she was pregnant, she suddenly became not able to use the first-person pronoun *watashi* (I), explaining the reason as follows:

I realized the loneliness of women for the first time after experiencing that the mode of life represented by the concept or term *watashi* [which is used to refer to a unified subject] is far from that of mine as a pregnant woman. It is not one or two hundred years of loneliness and it seems to continue even after my death. Words are so insufficient. Concepts are too shallow. (Morisaki 1989: 228)

A pregnant woman has the “other” (fetus) in her body; therefore, she is considered a splitting subject. In this respect, Morisaki felt that the word *watashi*, which was used to indicate a single subject, did not match a pregnant subject.

Furthermore, some words have been coined by the *ribu* movement to express sexual exploitation of women or gender violence. One of the most successful example is *baishun* or *kaishun* (買春 buying prostitution). The word has created by Matsui Yayori, a journalist of the Asahi Shinbun, and Takahashi Kikue, a president of *Nihon Kirisutokyō Kyōfūkai* (Japan Christian Women's Organization), during the campaign against collective sex tours to South Korea by Japanese men in that period. The word *kaishun* was coined as

an antonym of *baishun* (売春 prostituting) to make an issue of and condemn those who were on the “buying” side, not women on the “selling” side.

Regarding sexual orientation, *ribu* groups were primarily seeking an equitable sexual relationship between men and women and had a heterosexism attitude; however, lesbian feminist circles, such as *Mainichi daiku* (Everyday Dyke)¹⁰ and *Hikari-guruma* (the Light Wheel), were also established in the late 1970s. A member of *Mainichi daiku*, which declared in its policy that they considered the lesbian issue from social political perspective and not from a personal viewpoint, asserted that the issue of sexual discrimination addressed by the *ribu* and *fujin* movement did not progress beyond the heterosexual majority. She also criticized discriminatory remarks against lesbians made by some *ribu* women and the notion that the lesbian issue and discrimination against women were totally different. She pointed out the relation between discriminations against lesbians and heterosexual women and called for a joint struggle as the same *onna* (Oda 1978: 239-240).

Criticism of the postwar Japanese family system

It is noted that *ribu* was a movement led by women from the relatively young, unmarried generation. Some older married women, however, also participated in it, and therefore they problematized the housewifization of Japanese women advanced during the period of rapid economic growth from their own experiences as housewives.

Some women problematized the hierarchical power relationship between men and women in the domestic sphere. As part of Japan’s postwar reform under the occupation of the General Headquarters (GHQ), *ie-seido* (家制度 the feudalistic and patriarchic Japanese household system) was democratized under the new Japanese constitution, which guaranteed equal rights for women and men.

Although the severance between prewar *ie* (家 patriarchic family or household) and postwar *katei* (家庭 home, or a modern nuclear family with a democratic nuance) has been emphasized in family sociology, *ribu* women considered that *katei* has gender oppressive characteristics similar to those of *ie*, which they tried to reveal and change. One such attempt is evident in the essay titled “Tokei ga kurui hajimeta: Fufu genka shiron” (A watch began losing time: Note on a conjugal quarrel) by Ishikawa Junko, published in her private magazine *Kemono tachi ha furusato wo mezasu: Harami, syussan no kiroku* (Beast head for home: A record of pregnant and delivery, 1971). In this essay, she pointed out and criticized the stereotyped “feudalistic” gender roles of wives and husbands that still existed in *katei*, based on her marital experiences doing housework and providing childcare as *shufu*, while working full-time.

[The postwar] *katei* built by marriage is a pre-modern family system in nature in which the husband has patriarchal rights in a family and the wife does all the domestic work under her husband’s rule. Shrouded in rhetorical flourishes such as

¹⁰ The word *Daiku* was used as a rhetorical device called *kake kotoba* (a pun), which means *Daiku* (carpenter) and “dyke,” a slang word for lesbian, and lesbian feminists in the United States appropriated it as a positive term. In the *ribu* movement, this kind of *kake kotoba* was preferred.

“mutual understanding,” “cooperation,” and ultimately “sexual love” between husband and wife, the nature of *katei* is invisible in daily life.” (Ishikawa 1970:144)

In this way, *ribu* problematized the continuity of the nature of prewar *ie* and postwar *katei* and articulated the repressive function played by gender roles in the Japanese family system, and described a desirable women’s role as being a *ryōsai kenbo* (a good wife, wise mother).

Others formed a *korekutibu* (collective) in which women lived together as one strategy for overcoming ingrained *ie-seido* and creating an alternative family of private sphere. In addition to the most famous collective *Ribu Shinjuku Sentā* (Tokyo), which also functioned as an information center and a node for linking various groups, there were many collectives across the country. Some collectives like the *Tokyo Komuunu*¹¹ (Tokyo) or *Sapporo Komuunu* (Sapporo) aimed to share childrearing/caring; the *Kurenai kan* (the Crimson Mansion, Fukuoka) sought to form a new relationship between women and men including sexual aspects (Nishimura 2006).

On protesting the Eugenic Protection Law

The major topic of concern for *ribu* groups was revisions to the Eugenic Protection Law that aimed to prohibit abortions, which they collectively protested. This law came into effect in 1948, with the objective of preventing the births of “inferior offspring,” protecting the health of the mother’s body, and controlling population numbers owing to the food shortage that occurred in the early postwar period. In 1949, a clause that allowed a pregnant woman to abort for economic reasons was added to the law, and the abortion procedures were simplified in 1952. Therefore, the number of abortions subsequently increased¹².

On May 25, 1972, the revised Eugenic Protection Law was proposed by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in the 68th Diet. The proposal consisted of three points: removal of the economic reasons clause, introduction of a selective abortion clause, and the establishment of a eugenic guidance system for women regarding the proper age at which they should have a first child (Kato 2009). Corresponding to these events, the birth control pill became a medicine that could not be purchased without a doctor’s prescription. These changes were intended to solve the labor shortage during the period of economic growth (Morioka 2001, Kano 2004).

Ribu argued against these changes, saying that the Japanese government had used women’s bodies as kind of “population control valve,” and protested against this reform bill, calling it “the Abortion Prohibition Law,” because almost all abortions were performed under the economic reasons clause, and removal of that clause meant a de facto prohibition on abortion.

¹¹ *Komuunu* is *kake kotoba* (a pun), which means “commune” and *koumi* (to give birth).

¹² This law also allowed the sterilization who had genetic disorders, and intellectual or mental disabilities. It is assumed that more than 16,000 cases of sterilization were performed, and more than 70% of them were performed on women that included young teenagers. The victims of this legal forced sterilization first spoke out in 2018 (Takushoku 2018).

Morioka summarized *ribu*'s broad-ranging discussion on sexuality and reproduction during the protest movement under three points:

1. The state should not intervene in a private reproductive activity.
2. Deciding whether to give birth or not is women's right/freedom.
3. "*Umeru shakai wo, umitai shakai wo* (Toward a society in which women can give birth and want to give birth)" (Morioka 2001).

The first point is evident in various articles or slogans of the protest movement, such as "Women don't excuse the state's control over sexuality/reproduction!" proposed by the *Yūseihogohō kaiaku wo soshisuru kai* (Union for Opposing the Revision of the Eugenic Protection Law) in 1973. This perspective was widely shared by women in the *ribu* movement. Some groups supported the second point, which was made mainly by *Chūpiren* (Women's Liberation Union for Opposing the Anti-abortion Law and Demanding a Release of the Pill). They claimed that women should have the right and be free to make their own reproductive choices, which included having legal access to abortions and using contraceptive methods such as the pill.

Tanaka Mitsu provided one example of the third point in a text titled "Aete teiki suru: Chūzetsu ha kitoku no kenri ka? (I dare to bring it up: Is abortion a vested women's right?)" in 1972. In this text, she claimed to be uncomfortable with the concept of "an abortion is a woman's right." Later, *Yūseihogohō kaiaku soshi jikkō iinkai* (Executive committee for preventing revisions to the Eugenic Protection Law) made the following statement in a manifesto titled "Umeru shakai wo! Umitai shakai wo! (Toward a society in which women can give birth and want to give birth)."

The [women's] rage against the change of the Eugenic Protection Law for the worse is never supported by a sense of victimization at being prohibited to have an abortion; it is none other than the rage against the lifelong oppression and control over women's sexualities/lives(性=生) through a mechanism in which, once a woman gives birth, her child is absorbed into the labor force in an enterprise, or once she chooses not to give birth [i.e. to have an abortion] she makes a doctor rich, and she herself is exploited as a cheap, part-time worker. [...]

Abortion in the context of a society in which women cannot or will not give birth is nothing other than another name for infanticide; of course, it is the society with which the guilt lies. [...] And yet, women cannot rationalize, or must not rationalize, their pain from the forced infanticide, making excuses for herself such as "aborting is reasonable in such a society" or "a fetus is not conscious yet". [...]

In the process of pursuing the evil of a society that does not allow women to give birth, women confront the fetus being chopped. The society that forces women to commit infanticide, of course, does not allow women themselves to live.

Let us make the very society in which women can give birth, want to give birth! Through that fight, let us proudly reclaim the possibilities of our own life

from the society which forces women to commit infanticide. Yes, the independent choice of abortion or contraception is ultimately something that only exists in a society in which women can give birth and want to give birth. [...] (Yūseihogohō kaiaku soshi jikkō iinkai 1973: 178)

It should be also emphasized that the criticism toward the *ribu*'s slogans by the disability rights movements, which occurred in the late 1960s to 1970s, triggered a deeper discussion on the type of society they wanted to live in. Initially the *ribu*'s protests against the law's reformation appeared under the slogan *Uumu umanai ha onna ga kimeru* (A woman decides whether to give birth or not). Activists of *Aoi shiba no kai* (Blue Grass Group), an association of people with cerebral palsy, played a leading role in the disability movement at that time, criticizing the slogan's eugenic and discriminatory nature against disabilities. As a result of their discussions, the slogan was revised to *Umeru shakai wo, umitai shakai wo* (Toward a society in which women can give birth and want to give birth), in an attempt to change a society that forces women to choose abortions, including selected abortions on the grounds of disabilities.

Contrary to western feminism, for *ribu* abortion was unanimously regarded as women's right to choose. Unlike the discussions on abortion in the west, where a woman's rights to choose are weighed in relation to a fetus' life, respectively as "pro-choice" vs. "pro-life," some *ribu* women sought the transformation of a society that presented women with difficult choices.

Regional differences in the *ribu* movement

Ribu has been associated with metropolitan areas, and especially Tokyo (Fujieda 1990). Figure 2 shows that this movement was concentrated in three major metropolitan areas—the Tokyo metropolitan area in Kanto region, the Osaka metropolitan area in Kansai region, and the Chukyo metropolitan area in Chubu region—which are circled in red. This regional gap can be attributed to Japan's centralized modernization. Through ongoing modernization processes that began with the Meiji Restoration, Tokyo has developed as Japan's economic and cultural center, and its sophisticated metropolitan lifestyle released urban women from the regional bonds and blood ties that constrained many other women, and allowed them to become active feminists (Fujieda 1990).

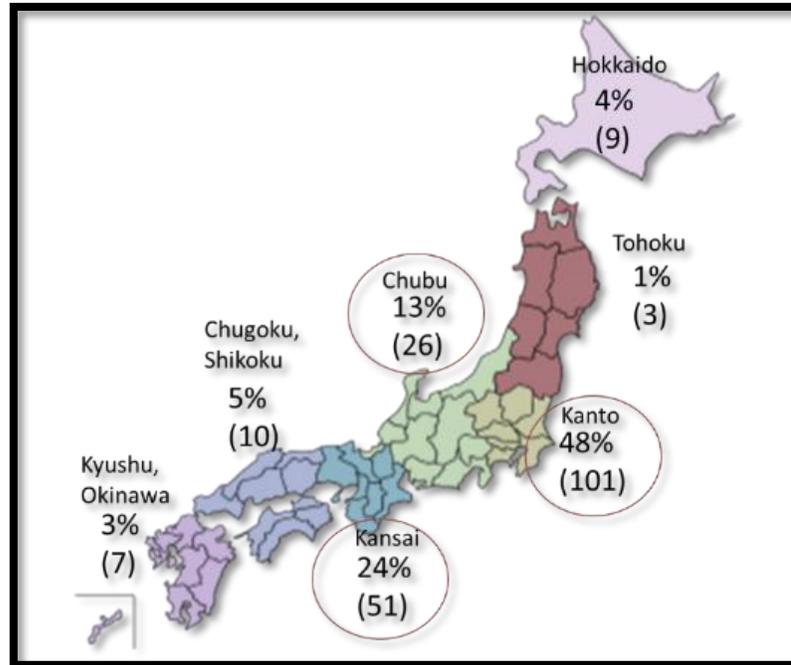


Figure 2 Number and proportion of ribu groups by region.

Created by Shiryō nihon ūman ribu shi. Vol. 3 (Mizoguchi et al. eds 1995)

At the time *ribu* was becoming active, women from Japan's rural or "peripheral" areas were critical of the movement that could be called "centralized feminism." This attitude is exemplified in a remark by Kinjō Kiyoko, an Okinawan lawyer and scholar of women's studies and law. Kinjō mentioned that there was no *ribu* movement in Okinawa as of 1971, noting that "for Okinawan women, for whom even the minimum standard of living for human survival is not at all guaranteed", and who live in a place which remains under U.S. military control and which is excluded from the application of the Japanese constitution [which guarantees the equality of men and women], *ribu* is "an extremely unrealistic and unhelpful idea" (Kinjō 1971:26). Similarly, Ichijō Fumi, a writer who was born and lived in a poor village in a famine-afflicted district in Iwate in the northern part of Japan, wrote that "I feel like the International Women's Year is a bell ringing far away," and that the wave of feminism represented by its enactment "has no connection to people like us, who do not know whether we will have food to eat today" and is "a bell whose sound does not reach the valley" (Ichijō 1975: 139).

However, though the number of groups was relatively small, *ribu* movements were established across Japan, as evident from Figure 2. Little is known about *ribu* movements in the regions other than the metropolitan areas, since many studies on *ribu* have been concentrated in and around metropolises, particularly Tokyo.

Some studies have claimed that seeds of the second wave of feminism were sown in the late 1950s and 60s by the postwar grassroots social-cultural movements occurring in the countryside. For example, Mizutamari accounts the inner stirrings of *ribu* around 1960

in her study of Morisaki Kazue and the group she attended called *Sākuru-mura* (the Circle Village) in Kyushu (a region located southwest of the main island). As seen in chapter 2, the emergence of *ribu* corresponded with the modern gender norms, reinforced during the rapid economic growth period. However, Morisaki and other female members of *Sākuru-mura* proposed radical feminist ideas prior to *ribu*, though they based their activities out of the coal mine area of Kyushu that was deprived of economic growth. Mizutamari points out the following 3 reasons behind this decision: first, the *Sākuru-mura* activists had an acute awareness of the differences—including gender—among workers or people. Second, the special circumstances of the area wherein women had been physically working in the pits with men; however, after the war, they were forced to accept the modern family system and female gender roles of mothers/housewives. Third, some male activists of *Sākuru-mura* and other related movements had patriarchal characters and it promoted feminist discriminations (Mizutamari 2005).

Other studies have claimed that a postwar grassroots self-education movement called *seikatsu-kiroku* (literally life-writing) movement paved the way for *ribu*. This was a self-educating movement for poorly-educated young people born to indigent farmers and particularly flourished in the Tohoku region; the movement aimed to raise social awareness by writing narratives and poetry based on personal observations and introspection. Yanagiwara explores one example of the second wave of feminism rooted in this movement in the Tohoku region. As mentioned in chapter 2, *ribu*, which is usually equated as Japanese second wave feminism, has generally been considered a movement of middle-class, university-educated urban women. By contrast, the *Seikatsu-kiroku* movement is an important contributor to another second feminist movement in rural regions. By writing about their own lives and reading about the lives of others, this movement's female participants shared their experiences of gender discrimination with other women and developed a critical stance toward the gender issues faced by rural women. This process is similar to the consciousness-raising that occurred in the urban *ribu* movement during the 1970s (Yanagiwara 2011, 2018).

As Mizutamari noted that any attempt to trace the origins of the second wave of feminism in Japan before the so-called “demonstration of *ribu*'s dawn” in 1970 must consider the complex network of social relationships, movements, and discourses that surrounded women at that time (Mizutamari 2005). In this respect, a further study of second-wave feminisms and *ribu* would be of value to the history of Japanese women's movements.

Conclusion

In postwar Japan, a women's liberation movement called *ribu* emerged concurrently with comparable movements in other developed countries. Given the context of the social contradictions that developed as a consequence of Japan's rapid economic growth, *ribu* questioned the various gender power relationships embedded in aspects ranging from public policies to private, everyday lives, and sought a new way of life with a whole existence as *onna*. Given the context of the development discussions that flourished postwar and the social-political movements that were proposed, *ribu* focused on the divisions between women with power relations in terms of liberating *onna*. In its entirety,

the *ribu* movement emerged as an urban, middle-class feminism that was localized in some metropolis; however, *ribu* women were found in almost all parts of the country. They communicated using their own media—called *minikomi*—and created an informal but vibrant network between women. In addition, other second-wave feminist movements originated from other historical aspects in some rural areas, and further studies examining these movements are needed.

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