



# Feminisms in Japan in transnational longterm perspective

A virtual *u:japan* lecture by Ilse Lenz

Thursday  
2024-06-13  
18<sup>00</sup>~19<sup>30</sup>





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Feminisms in Japan are still largely ignored in public or academic debate internationally. Also, feminism is often termed as ‘Western’ and framed as a contradiction or threat to ‘traditional’ domestic values as in present antifeminism worldwide. Thus, feminisms in Japan have a singular and crucial meaning in international perspective: They developed as an autonomous force selecting international impulses (for example equality, participation and female eros) and locating them in their context. And they were confronted with Japan’s singular development which was threatened by Western colonialism and transformed into a colonizing imperialist nation. They raise the issues of feminist autonomy in diverse cultural contexts and postcolonial critical memory.

This lecture will look at the diverse currents and transformations of feminisms in Japan in transnational longterm perspective aiming to overcome hegemonic eurocentric and nipponcentric views. They have developed over 140 years in a continual line which is different

from the Western model of the first, second and third wave. But they have proceeded with radical self-reflexive transformations reacting to fundamental challenges. From their start in the 1880ies, they were confronted with defining new concepts of women and gender, with intersectional inequality and with locating themselves in the nation and world society. In this changing context, they developed different discourses and practices between establishing new legitimate gender terms or deconstructing femininity / gender or between cooptation to nationalism or radical critiques of imperialism. Following a short summary until the 1970ies, I will focus on the trajectories of new feminisms after the lib movement. This will be concretised by looking at the debates around gender and women, intersectionality and the postcolonial critique of Japan’s international responsibility and feminist exchange in East Asia as in the comfort women issue.

## Ilse Lenz

received her doctorate in 1983 from the Free University of Berlin with a dissertation on women’s work in Japanese industrialization from a developmental sociological perspective. In her habilitation in 1989 at the University of Münster, she examined the gender relationship in the Japanese labor market and the influences of computerization. From 1992 until her retirement in 2012, Ilse Lenz held a professorship for sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Bochum. Together with Michiko Mae, chair of the Institute for Modern Japan at the University of Düsseldorf, worked on the project “*Frauenbewegungen in Japan*” (Women’s Movements in Japan). Together, they coordinate an annual workshop on gender research on Japan. Ilse Lenz is a co-editor of the book series Gender & Society of the publisher for social sciences and was the spokesperson for the Women’s Research section in the German Society for Sociology.



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