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Iijima Aiko's Feminist Theory and the Asian Women's Conference

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Abstract

In November 1970 the feminist activist and theorist Iijima Aiko expressed an unprecedented critique of ideas that dominated the women's liberation discourse in Japan. Taking part in a panel discussion on the state of women's liberation, Iijima presented a paper that shed light on the gendered power structures of Japanese society and the state by asking "What is Discrimination for Women?". Reflecting on her own position as a female leftist activist at the end of the 1960s, Iijima questioned a Marxist approach to women's liberation as well as the victim's consciousness of post-war women's movements, such as the Mother's Convention. Instead of hoping for women's liberation as a result of the socialist revolution or advocating an alleged peace that is gained through the invasion of other Asian countries, Iijima called for a profound analysis of the social, institutional and gender order in Japan. In contrast to previous ideas of women's liberation in Japan, Iijima located women's struggle in an Asian context and envisioned a women's liberation movement that is based on an Asian consciousness.

Iijima's position paper is widely known as a manifesto that marked the break with post-war women's movements and paved the way for the emerging women's liberation movement (*ūman ribu*) at the beginning of the 1970's in Japan. Moreover, Iijima herself emphasized the importance of this position paper, saying later that it was in this work that she established her own feminist thought. In view of the importance that is attached to Iijima's manifesto, I conducted a close reading of her position paper in my master's thesis. I have embedded the position paper in the historical, social and political context in order to understand the importance of Iijima's feminist theory in the formation of new ideas of women's liberation. I will present my findings and give an outlook on the development of new women's liberation movements in the early 1970s.