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# *Ūman ribu*, the disability movement, and reproductive justice Grassroots challenges to eugenics from the 1970s until 1996

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Anna-Viktoria Vittinghoff

Thursday  
2025-05-15  
18<sup>00</sup>~19<sup>30</sup>



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The early 1970s saw a significant victory for the radical feminist movement *ūman ribu* in Japan, which successfully campaigned against a proposed revision of the Eugenics Protection Law (EPL; *Yūsei hogohō*) that threatened women's reproductive autonomy and expanded state intervention. However, without the leadership of *ūman ribu* which disbanded in 1977, new groups were needed to mobilise protest. First and foremost was the group that came to be known as SOSHIREN - From My Body, from Women's Bodies (*Onna (watashi) no karada kara*), founded in 1982, which spearheaded challenges to the intersection of reproductive politics and eugenics in Japan for the next three decades. Its diverse membership underscored a commitment to an intersectional analysis of reproductive rights and bodily autonomy.

This paper examines the pivotal role of *ūman ribu* and subsequent activism in challenging eugenic policies and advocating for reproductive justice in Japan from the 1970s to

the mid-1990s. It analyzes how *ūman ribu*, sparked by the EPL revision debates, fostered an intersectional critique of state control and the devaluation of disabled lives, and won a key victory in the early 1970s. The paper then explores the continuation of this stance in the post-*ūman ribu* era, focusing on the emergence of SOSHIREN in 1982 in response to renewed attempts at revision. Building on the feminist critiques of the 1970s, SOSHIREN's diverse membership broadened the focus beyond access to abortion to formulate an inclusive, intersectional, and explicitly anti-eugenic reproductive politics. Through SOSHIREN's activism and the legacy of activist Yonezu Tomoko, this analysis argues that *ūman ribu*'s intersectional ideas provided a crucial foundation for sustained grassroots challenges to eugenics and the dominant valuation of productivity, ultimately shaping reproductive justice activism in Japan until 1996 and involving the negotiation of different activist generations.



**Dr. Anna-Viktoria Vittinghoff** is a Lecturer in East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield. Her research focuses on the activism of Yonezu Tomoko, a significant figure in both the Japanese women's liberation (*ūman ribu*) and disability movements from the 1970s to 1996, as explored in her doctoral work. Her broader research interests include eugenic legacies in postwar Japan and East Asia, and social activism at the intersection of gender and disability.



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