Gender, War, and Responsibility in Modern Japan: Experiences and Memories of Marginalization and Colonization

Programme Event

International Committee of Historical Sciences | 26–30 August 2026 | Leipzig, Germany

DATE	LOCATION
28 Aug 2026, 11:00 - 13:30	House 5 SR26
THEME	CONFERENCE
E - Gendered Perspectives in the Historical Sciences	International Committee of Historical Sciences

Overview

This panel analyzes the experiences and memories of marginalized women who lived in Japan or under Japanese colonial rule, and how women in postwar Japan reflected critically on war and colonialism. We aim to historicize gendered violence at the intersection of colonialism, militarism, and gender, and highlight how these systems are not relics of the past but persist in contemporary forms. By critically examining this continuity, the panel seeks to envision a future where the legacies of colonial and militarized oppression are dismantled.

Firstly, Emi OMURO shows an important dimension of Japanese colonial rule by examining the intersection of colonialism and gender in colonial Korea. Focusing on Japanese male gynecologists who lived in colonial Korea and were easily able to access women’s bodies, this presentation explores their discourse of “need for treatment” and “inferiority” of Korean women through bodily measurements and other methodologies.

Ryoko HIRONO examines the violence experienced by former Japanese "comfort women" after WWII. Through analysis of the intersection of ongoing structural and military violence and the enduring scars of individual suffering, this study critically examines how their narratives have been constructed and instrumentalized in historical debates, emphasizing the voices of survivors who have long been marginalized in mainstream historical discourse.

Kanane TAKAHASHI discusses the history of the control of women's sexuality through urbanization and other forms of modernization, focusing on the case of “panpan” women, whom American soldiers paid for sex informally during the 1950s. Urban planning was used to suppress “panpan” women, had continuity with the pre-war era, and was related to Japanese colonial rule.

Mairead HYNES discusses war and colonial memory in ethnic-majority Japanese women’s liberation movements in the 1970s, especially activist groups that analyzed military occupation, colonization, and postwar neocolonialism using the shared term “invasion.” Hynes considers the impact of conflating the historical processes of Japanese colonization and military invasion/occupation.

Momoka MINE examines postwar debates on women's war responsibility in grassroots Japanese women's history circles around the 1990s. During WWII, Japanese women did not commit violence directly but played a crucial role in supporting the war. MINE indicates that these grassroots circles analyzed women’s war responsibility in the context of their positionality in relation to colonialism and gender.

Through these five studies, this panel underscores the importance of gender in understanding colonization and war and their aftermath, emphasizing the need for a nuanced and inclusive historical analysis of responsibility and resistance.

Participants

Convenor

- Emi Omuro (Ochanomizu University)

Commentator

- Kazuko Hirai (Hitotsubashi University)

Panelists

- Emi Omuro (Ochanomizu University)
- Takahashi Kanane (Ochanomizu University)

- Mairead Hynes (Columbia University)
- Momoka Mine (Ritsumeikan University)

Papers

Colonialism, Gender, and Medicine: Japanese Gynecologists and the Discourse of Korean Women's Bodies in Colonial Korea

Emi Omuro (Ochanomizu University)

Urbanization, Modernization, and the Control of Women's Sexuality: The Case of 'Panpan' Women in 1950s Japan

Kanane Takahashi (Ochanomizu University)

War, Colonial Memory, and Women’s Liberation: The Discourse of ‘Invasion’ in 1970s Japan

Mairead Hynes (Columbia University)

Women's War Responsibility and Grassroots History: Japanese Women's History Circles in the 1990s

Momoka Mine (Ritsumeikan University)

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