

## **1968 IN JAPAN, GERMANY, AND THE UNITED STATES: POLITICAL PROTEST AND CULTURAL CHANGE**

Conference at the Japanisch-Deutsches Zentrum Berlin (JDZB), March 4-6, 2009. Co-sponsored by the GHI Washington, Japanisch-Deutsches Zentrum Berlin, Heidelberg Center for American Studies (HCA), University of Heidelberg, and the International Center for Protest Research. Conveners: Wolfgang Brenn (JDZB), Martin Klimke (GHI), Yoshie Mitobe (Meiji University, Tokyo), Joachim Scharloth (University of Zurich / University of Freiburg), and Laura Elizabeth Wong (Harvard University / HCA). Participants: Meike Baader (University of Hildesheim), Friederike Bosse (JDZB), Timothy Brown (Northeastern University), Claudia Derichs (University of Hildesheim), Kathrin Fahlenbrach (University of Halle-Wittenberg), Philipp Gassert (GHI), Dorothea Hauser (Berlin), Himeoka Toshiko (University of Tsukuba), Ishii Kae (Shitennoji University, Osaka), Izeki Tadahisa (Chuo University, Tokyo), Ekkehart Krippendorff (Free University, Berlin), Rainer Langhans (Munich), Wilfried Mausbach (HCA), Simone Müller (University of Zurich), Murakami Kimiko (Waseda University, Tokyo), Nunokawa Yasuko (Kyoritsu Women's University, Tokyo), Jeremy Varon (Drew University).

Many historians consider the year 1968 as marking the first global revolution of the twentieth century and representing a central node in the period of protest spanning the 1960s and early 1970s. Worldwide, and particularly in the industrialized states, youth-led protest movements shared similar goals advocating the breakdown of the authoritarian structures of educational systems, the overthrow of capitalist economic systems, and the end of superpower intervention in the Third World. Whether viewed from transnational or particularist perspectives, the Japanese and West German postwar experiences inevitably invite comparison along numerous lines. Following defeat in the Second World War, both Germany and Japan experienced Allied occupation, rehabilitation (for the strategic pursuit of America's global Cold War aims in Europe and Asia), and subsequent "miracles" in their revived economies. Not only were the domestic and international politics of the two defeated powers strongly influenced by the United States, but the dramatic social and cultural changes that accompanied the postwar years in both countries also bore a distinctly American stamp. Even after official occupation ended, the global influence of American popular and youth culture deeply affected the generations coming of age in the

late 1960s in West Germany and Japan. These experiences were explored in the interdisciplinary conference “1968 in Japan, Germany, and the USA: Political Protest and Cultural Change,” a three-day conference that marked the passing of forty-one years since the events of 1968 with eyewitness accounts from the period as well as fourteen presentations, two films, and lively discussions.

Following words of welcome from Friederike Bosse (JDZB), Philipp Gassert (GHI) and Wilfried Mausbach (HCA), Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth introduced the three prominent contemporary eyewitnesses that had been invited to relate how they experienced 1968. In a roundtable forum moderated by Klimke, Ekkehart Kripendorff, a self-proclaimed “65er,” described how his experience with the comparatively laid-back American university environment he encountered at Harvard (such as Professor Talcott Parsons welcoming him into his office with his feet up on his desk) equipped him to challenge the relatively authoritarian German university system to which he returned. He explained how his experience and practical knowledge of American protest methods (“picketing and sandwich boards”) contributed to the organization of the first student protests in Germany. Rainer Langhans, another active figure from Berlin in the sixties, particularly known for his role in Kommune I in Berlin, focused his comments on the spiritual and inwardly focused, but nevertheless public nature of his activities during this period. Langhans, who continues to lead a communal lifestyle in Munich, explained that a search for the self has always been his central focus. Trying to explain the feeling of living “as if half-dead with guilt,” Langhans recounted his ongoing horror at his generation’s legacy of mass murder in the name of National Socialism. Langhans said of 1968, “our actions weren’t political – they were much more.” Regarding the conference’s transnational approach to 1968, he remarked that activists felt not so much as if they were participating in a transnational phenomenon, but as if they were a part of one big family. He then challenged historians and social scientists to come up with a means of more adequately describing the spirit of the times. Historian and feminist Toshiko Himeoka turned eighteen in 1968. Her memories of protest in Japan began with the “Anpo” protests against the ratification of a revised U.S.-Japan security treaty. The deaths of two student protesters—a twenty-year-old woman at the Anpo protests and another student in demonstrations against the Vietnam War in 1967—brought the very real dangers of this form of protest home to her. This feeling

became even more palpable when she faced riot police in a woman-led protest in Kansai in 1969. Having studied in Germany, Himeoka was able to compare the Japanese and German atmospheres in the early 1970s, observing that protest culture in Germany had a markedly more personal flavor, exemplified by the idea that “the problems of others are also mine.” Later, the women’s movement in Germany also seemed to place greater influence on lifestyle (as opposed to politics) than the Japanese women’s movement did.

The conference was placed in a transnational framework by the theoretical approaches outlined in talks by Tim Brown and Martin Klimke. Brown linked “the global” to “the transnational,” observing that the global features characterizing the events of 1968 (their simultaneity, the timing of revolutions in the Third World) led to the development of a sense of a “global imagined community.” Within this community, transnational lines of influence falling across different terrains should be identified and their influences studied. The year 1968 could be approached as having two separate parts—the “big” 1968 of global youth culture and a certain set of ideas, and the “small” 1968, focused on the particular forms those big ideas took in individual settings. Klimke carried this idea forward, concentrating on transnational symbols and collective identity, and documenting the ways in which ideas of the movement were diffused transnationally and understood differently in different places and then recontextualized or adapted to local values and situations.

As a number of papers traced the trajectory of protest in Japan through the 1960s and compared it to protest in West Germany, it became clear that the year 1968 bears less emblematic weight in Japan. Claudia Derichs suggested that by 1968, postwar protest in Japan was already further advanced than in Germany. Despite superficial parallels, the New Left and student movements had different origins and long-term trajectories in Japan than in West Germany. Derichs’ paper sparked commentary from Japanese conference participants who emphasized that in Japan (as opposed to Germany) being a veteran of 1968 was considered to be neither a symbolic generation marker nor a point of pride or status.

Moving away from German-Japanese comparisons to a more Euro-American focus, Philipp Gassert analyzed how the counterculture eventually penetrated consumer culture to alter mainstream culture, while also leading to a democratization of lifestyles, revolutionizing and repositioning sexuality in the context of everyday life, and

unleashing a new wave of critical thought. Kathrin Fahlenbrach took on the icons of revolution in 1968, delving into the synchronic and diachronic pathways by which these visual images were transformed into icons that became uniquely embedded in the collective memories of varied cultures.

Tadahisa Izeki, Joachim Scharloth, and Yoshie Mitobe analyzed the social and cultural consequences of 1968. Izeki explored the popular and revolutionary publications that influenced the postwar baby boomers who went on to lead the student movement. Scharloth followed with a tightly documented panorama of the ways in which 1968 led to the heightened presence of emotion and informality in daily practice, particularly in aspects of language and behavior. Mitobe approached the consequences of 1968 through a comparative analysis of abortion debates in Japan and West Germany, paying particular attention to differences in men's and women's participation, finding that men in Germany participated considerably less than in Japan.

Toshiko Himeoka compared the women's movements in Japan and West Germany, elaborating on the theme of liberating women's sexuality in Japan, as proclaimed by Mitsu Tanaka's article "Liberation from the Toilet." The Japanese women's movement remained on the radical fringe, in contrast to the West German women's movement, which had more success in altering social practices. Interestingly, however, the Japanese movement remained more open to mothers and children than its German counterpart. Chieko Yamagami's and Noriko Seyama's 2004 documentary film *30 Years of Sisterhood*, which featured veterans of the women's movement in Japan, was presented by Laura Wong, who argued that the movement must not be viewed as just an offshoot of left-wing protest, but as part of a separate and ongoing revolution in the construction of gender roles. Kae Ishii discussed the role and construction of gender in the Japanese and German film industries since the 1960s, as exemplified in the work of female directors like Sachi Hamano, who, excluded from the club of male directors, came up through the genre of low-budget, short production time "pink films." Directors like Hamano appropriated the genre and used it to show female sexuality from a female perspective, eventually gaining a diverse and loyal audience of women film lovers. Moving from the revolution in the film industry to the revolution in education, Meike Sophia Baader discussed the formation of *Kinderläden*—parent-sponsored alternative childcare centers or kindergartens—which emerged in West Germany following the 1965 education

reforms. These proliferated under the influence of the 1968 generation, and later, the women's movement. Although the first *Kinderläden* in Berlin and Frankfurt were known for their politicized anti-authoritarian stances, the character of *Kinderläden* developed and broadened as the model became more widespread in subsequent decades.

It is particularly noteworthy that Germany and Japan, which led brutal expansionist campaigns through World War II, saw particularly strong and violent left-wing terrorist groups emerge in the late 1960s, which, unlike their counterparts in the United States, took a large number of lives before their implosion and capture. Conference participants viewed Wakamatsu Kouji's unsettling film *United Red Army* (2007), which dramatizes the Japanese Red Army's mountain camps and eventual siege in the winter of 1971/72. Dorothea Hauser approached the culture of violence in Japan, Germany, and the United States from a comparative perspective in her talk on Red Army groups in Japan and West Germany; she identified parallel strains of anti-Americanism in the two terror organizations bred in former Axis powers. Jeremy Varon addressed the inadequacies of viewing the Red Army Faction in West Germany and the Weathermen in the United States from purely national perspectives, which provide only inadequate explanations of the "apocalyptic violence" of these groups. Varon argued that understanding these groups' views of themselves as participants in a global movement is essential if one is to begin to comprehend how they came to view violence as a form of sacred action in the redemption of a falling/fallen world.

As the conference drew to a close, participants reflected on what a conference marking the fiftieth anniversary of 1968 in Japan, Germany and the United States in ten years' time might entail. Aspects that should receive greater emphasis next time included those of translation, terminology, sociological impact, political institutions, and culture. Further analytical research of the Japanese experience was also called for. Overall, the challenge of bringing three distinct cultures and locations together to explore a period whose legacy is still unresolved proved a significant step in generating locally specific as well as transnationally meaningful portraits of 1968 in Japan, Germany, and the United States.

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