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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Molony, B. (2022). Rice Paddles and Pink Helmets: Framing Gendered Resistance in 20th Century Japan. *International Quarterly for Asian Studies (IQAS)*, 53(1), 97-119. <https://doi.org/10.11588/iqas.2022.1.18747>

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Rice Paddles and Pink Helmets

Framing Gendered Resistance in 20th Century Japan

Barbara Molony

Abstract

Two Japanese women's organisations – Shufuren, founded in 1948 and still in existence, and Chūpiren, founded in 1972 and disbanded in 1977 – appear to be vastly different from one another. And yet, they had one critical similarity: their use of accessories to make a political point. Shufuren members were advocates for consumer rights (and in the immediate postwar era, for food availability). Since then, they have demonstrated for such political issues as food safety, recycling, environmental protection and anti-nuclear energy, all in the name of their roles as wives and mothers. When demonstrating, they always appear bearing large mock-ups of the rice paddle used in Japan to scoop rice from the cooking pot. The rice paddle was a powerful symbol of women's domestic and political strength. Chūpiren women, on the other hand, distinguished themselves in their advocacy of reproductive rights not only by their forcefulness but also by wearing pink helmets. Chūpiren saw value in street theatre and sensationalism. No other radical feminist group in the mid-1970s wore uniforms. The media at that time mocked Chūpiren's helmets and attention-grabbing tactics, and in the process disparaged contemporary feminism as a whole.

Keywords: Japan, Shufuren, Chūpiren, women's organisations, second wave feminism, feminist consumer activism, media representation, accessories, semiotics of dress

At first glance, two postwar Japanese women's organisations, Shufuren and Chūpiren, could not appear to be more different from one another. Shufuren – the title is an abbreviation of its original name *Nihon Shufurengōkai* (Japan Federation of Housewives' Associations) – is now subtitled on its English-language website as the Association of Consumer Organisations, reflecting its evolution as an organisation dedicated to improving the lives of women and society through housewife-activists' roles as consumers and citizens. Founded in 1948 during the post-World War II years of poverty and deprivation, Shufuren is still active today, although with far fewer members than it had at its peak in the immediate postwar years. Chūpiren – an abbreviation of *Chūzetsu Kinshi Hō ni Hantai shi Piru no Zenmenkaikin o Yōkyū suru Josei Kaihō Rengō* (Women's Liberation

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Federation for Opposing the Abortion Law and for the Complete Legalisation of the Contraceptive Pill) – was established in 1972 and disbanded in 1977. As its name implies, it focused on reproductive rights. Despite the clear differences between the organisations, this article will show that they shared one notable feature – they publicised their actions through signature accessories.

Normally, contemporary historians try to avoid attributing major events or institutions in the past to one or just a few individuals. In the cases of Shufuren and Chūpiren and their uses of symbolic accessories, however, the individual founders, acting in the changing contexts of their times, were closely identified with their movements. And the representations of those movements are closely linked to their founders' experiences. Thus, this article devotes attention to the leaders – especially Oku Mumeo (1895–1997) of the long-lived Shufuren, but also Enoki Misako (born in 1945) of Chūpiren – and the accessories they chose as symbols of their movements.

Though founded by prominent pre-World War II feminist Oku Mumeo, Shufuren did not initially claim to be a feminist organisation, but rather a group of committed women, organised as women and especially as women in households, who advocated for consumer rights (and in the immediate postwar era, for consumer necessities such as food and household items). In the three-quarters of a century since then, they have organised and demonstrated for such political issues as food safety, recycling, environmental protection, international peace, protection of small businesses and anti-nuclear energy, under the rubric of their relational roles as wives and mothers and to signify and enhance their roles as enfranchised citizens. Women voted for the first time in national elections in 1946, just two years before the founding of Shufuren, a fact that did not escape the notice of its members, particularly because founder Oku Mumeo herself was elected to Japan's parliament in 1947.

When carrying out protests in the streets, Shufuren members could often be seen bearing huge mock-ups of the *shamoji*, the paddle traditionally used to scoop rice from the cooking pot and distribute it in appropriate measure to one's family. The *shamoji* used in the home is a large spoon with an almost flat bowl. As can be seen in Figure 1, Shufuren's mock-ups of this kitchen tool could be used as placards large enough to carry a message. Serving rice within the family was a sign not of subordination but of household authority. In the pre-World War II period it was a symbol of the household matriarch's control and maintenance of the family's resources.¹ The written characters for "housewife" are literally *shu* (main or primary) and *fu* (woman), and a woman gained the power and status of the *shufu* in the household when the rice paddle was passed to her by the previous matriarch (Segawa 1978: 1–9). Although most early Shu-

1 Naoko Komori connects the early modern housewife's control of the *shamoji* to her control of household accounting as well (Komori 2008: 333).

furen members may not have called themselves feminists, they did practice gendered resistance, using their social position as empowered wives and mothers. The rice paddle – and the kitchen-style aprons some of them wore over their street clothes in the early postwar years (Robins-Mowry 1983: 199) – made this clear to the members of the public that witnessed their demonstrations in the streets and viewed photos that Shufuren leaders knew would appear in the newspapers shortly after the demonstrations.

Three decades later, Chūpiren activists chose to distinguish themselves as advocates of reproductive rights not only by their forcefulness – a trait they shared with other 1970s radical “second-wave” feminists who were, as will be discussed below, strong opponents of Chūpiren’s stance on the birth control pill – but also by their decision to wear pink helmets.² Chū-

piren members also saw value in various forms of provocative sensationalism, such as publicly outing men who had extra-marital affairs or who brutalised their wives or partners. No other radical feminist group wore such readily identifiable clothing. Only the radical (and often misogynist) men of the New Left of the 1960s and early 1970s, from whom many of Japan’s 1970s feminists distanced themselves to form their own groups, wore helmets as “part of their uniform” (Steinhoff 2014: 17). The media at that time mocked Chūpiren’s helmets and attention-grabbing tactics, and in the process disparaged



Figure 1: Bearing *shamoji* with their campaign slogans, women wearing sashes indicating Shufuren membership lead a demonstration against a rise in utility prices, on 19 February 1980, at the Kasumigaseki Building, site of Japan’s cabinet-level bureaucracies (photo by *Yomiuri Shinbun*)

2 The “second wave” metaphor has been challenged in recent decades (Molony / Nelson 2017: 2–3). The metaphor has become problematic because it universalised a movement trajectory from the history of white European and American women, overlooking the varieties of experiences of women of colour in those areas and of women in other regions of the world; and because it suggested, incorrectly, troughs of inactivity between mountainous waves of activism. However, in the Japanese case, “second wave” may have some explanatory value. The feminist movements in Japan in the 1970s were vastly different in orientation from earlier movements. A movement like Shufuren, with deep prewar antecedents, was reformist but never intended to overturn the political or social order. The 1970s movements did challenge both those orders. What makes this metaphor so striking is that the new radical organisations existed contemporaneously with the less radical ones such as Shufuren. The older and newer groups never competed for members, but they have competed for historians’ attention. For another critique of the wave theory of feminist movements, see Shigematsu 2018: 218.

contemporary feminism as a whole in the eyes of those already inclined to view feminism through a negative lens.³

Members of both organisations distinguished themselves by the accessories they carried or wore in public protests – Shufuren’s rice paddle and Chūpiren’s helmet. While Shufuren stressed women’s social, political and civic power through symbols identified with power *within* the family, and Chūpiren stressed women’s power as individuals through their autonomy and independence *from* the family, they both distinguished themselves from other feminist groups in their use of symbolic accessories.

The semiotics of accessories

Perhaps even more than dress as a whole, accessories lend themselves to symbolising identity, status, political resistance and/or the quest for affiliation (of which national identity and group membership are prime examples). In crafting societies and nations, individuals and groups use fashion – namely all forms of dress, including items carried in one’s hands or worn on the head – as symbols or signs that can be read and understood by members of the group and others. In their introduction to *Fashion, Identity, and Power in Modern East Asia*, Kyunghye Pyun and Aida Yuen Wong write: “Modern fashion in East Asia is closely connected with identity and nationality” (Pyun / Wong 2019: 15), and a contributor to that volume, Mei Mei Rado, underscores the particular role of accessories as “potent cultural markers” (Rado 2019: 194). The semiotics of fashion and dress, writ large, and linking fashion to legible political, cultural, and social status as well as religious membership, can be made more focused by considering accessories. That is, the use of accessories is a more intentional way to articulate a message of advocacy than the somewhat more passive act of wearing clothing, as accessories can be easily put on, carried or removed. If they contain written messages of advocacy for a political goal, as do the rice paddles of the Shufuren, accessories function clearly as signs.

Several scholarly works that examine the semiotics of headwear worn by advocates in different types of (often disruptive) movements help us understand the rationale for Chūpiren’s wearing of helmets that are both protective and provocative. Jean Gelman Taylor describes a hybrid (traditional and modern, Indonesian and Western) men’s dress in her study of men’s and women’s dress in post-independence Indonesia. Accompanying his Western-style suit, President

3 As we shall discuss later, radical feminists of the *ūman ribu* (“women’s lib”) movement of the 1970s opposed both the operational methods and ideology of Chūpiren and of its founder Enoki Misako. Press accounts mocked their sensationalistic style. Interestingly, some feminists outside Japan were also critical of Chūpiren at that time, noting the “inordinate media attention paid to this sensationalist group” that overshadowed other feminist groups (Mackie 2003: 166–167).

Sukarno wore a fez-like hat called a *peci*, a sartorial hybridity he intended to signify the “pluralism and religious tolerance” of the new Indonesia he was trying to create (Taylor 2007: 108). While Sukarno was part of the state and not part of a resistance movement against the state when he wore his hybrid dress (though he had been an independence fighter during the Dutch colonial days), several other movements used headwear as a sign of resistance. Headwear could also be an intentional disruptive signifier. For example, during the height of India’s Civil Disturbance movement (1930–32), pro-independence men were pressed by their fellow independence fighters to wear a “Gandhi cap”, which the British colonial officials had prohibited, claiming they were a “symbol of sympathy with civil disobedience [and] a potential cause of disturbance to public tranquility” (Tarlo 1991: 140).

Another symbol of resistance, the Palestinian *keffiyeh*, “traditionally a Middle Eastern peasant headdress” (Tynan 2019: 125), was transformed into a nationalist symbol during the resistance to the British during the 1930s Arab revolts. In 1938, to hide rebels who could be identified by their head covering, “the rebel leadership commanded all Arabs in urban areas to also wear the *keffiyeh*” (Tynan 2019: 126). Peasants and urban men – and later women rebels, too – were united through this headwear, which, like the Chūpiren’s helmet 40 years later, came to be seen as a marker of resistance (Tynan 2019: 127).

More recently, American women in Los Angeles devised a knitted pink cap with cat ears, the “pussy hat”, that spread to tens of millions of women around the world protesting the 2016 election of United States President Donald Trump (Mehta 2017). Ubiquitous at women’s demonstrations for over a year, they began to fade away in 2018, but their role as a sign of resistance had been powerful (Shamus 2018). Shufuren women bearing rice paddles and Chūpiren women in helmets understood the power of symbolism in accessories equally well, as will be shown in the course of this article.

Shufuren – Rice paddles and citizenship

The making of the prewar housewife consumer advocate

The Shufuren movement was born in October 1948 following a long gestation period. Its founding mother, Oku Mumeo, had engaged with a variety of approaches to feminism for three decades – as a proponent of women’s political rights, a pioneering advocate of viewing consumers as citizens, a historian of feminism and a postwar member of the Diet (parliament) – before throwing herself into her unique form of feminism grounded in the consumer-citizen. The family matriarch’s rice paddle was an ideal symbol for this kind of work,

because it represented empowered womanhood linked to the community's well-being and livelihood (*seikatsu*) rather than any notion of consumption perceived as self-focused.⁴

The early years of Shufuren and its rice-paddle-bearing founder can be comprehended through Oku Mumeo's pre-World War II activities. After graduating from Japan Women's University in 1916, this daughter of the middle class got a job under an assumed name in a textile mill – from which she was expelled within ten days for lying about her identity. In 1919 leading feminists Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971) and Ichikawa Fusae (1893–1981) recruited her to join them in founding the Shin Fujin Kyōkai (New Women's Association, NWA), which focused on expanding women's rights to participate in political activities and to allow women to terminate marriages or engagements to men with syphilis (Ichikawa 1974: 51, 66–70). Although NWA members lobbied members of the Diet, they initially failed to persuade the more conservative House of Peers that women should have *sanseiken* (the right of political participation) (Ichikawa 1974: 70–73, Loftus 2004: 49–58).⁵

Hiratsuka and Ichikawa left the NWA in 1921, but Oku soldiered on. She succeeded in getting the Diet to approve partial revision of a law repressing women's rights in 1922 when, in a one-on-one meeting, she impressed upon the staunchest opponent of women's rights, Baron Fujimura Yoshirō, that women could be involved in politics and still be “women” (Loftus 2004: 53.) Oku had strapped her baby on her back, as a good Japanese mother, and headed off to the meeting. This is an early example of Oku's manipulation, for political purposes, of one of the tropes of womanhood – motherhood – and her use of motherhood's powerful symbol of the baby on one's back. Here we see her developing two components of what would be her postwar activism in Shufuren: engaging in civic activism through non-threatening sources of female empowerment such as motherhood and, three decades later, the empowered housewife; and using easily understood symbols to highlight those sources of power – in 1922, her visible maternity, and after 1948, the Shufuren rice paddle.

While working on this political campaign, Oku Mumeo engaged in a debate in 1920 in the pages of a mass circulation journal with socialist feminist Yamakawa Kikue. Yamakawa asserted in an article that the NWA's piecemeal advocacy of rights would never improve women's conditions – only the destruction of capitalism could accomplish that. Oku's rebuttal to Yamakawa called on women across the political spectrum to join hands to raise women's consciousness. She summarised this view in her 1988 autobiography, asserting

4 Several excellent works deal with the expansion of the concept of the consumer (*shōbisha*) from its original narrow sense of being the end-user of products created using other people's work, a socially divisive concept, to being a part of the interactive social relationship of producers and users forging a more balanced society as *seikatsusha* (people promoting an improved lifestyle) (Maclachlan 1998: 113–128; Maclachlan 2001).

5 This and other references to Loftus 2004 are from Loftus's translation of Oku Mumeo's 1988 autobiography.

that no single theory could take the place of social justice activism grounded in real life, a view that undergirded the postwar Shufuren (Oku Mumeo in Loftus 2004: 54).

Oku turned to other activities in the following years. She established in 1923 a new organisation for a broad spectrum of working women angry at work-place and societal inequality, Shokugyō Fujinsha (Working Women's Association), with an associated journal, *Shokugyō fujin* (*Working Women*; Loftus 2004: 60–62). The magazine shifted its focus to working-class women, changing its name to *Fujin to rōdō* (*Women and Labour*) in 1923, and in 1925 to *Fujin undō* (*The Women's Movement*), with an expanded target audience of working-class, agricultural and white-collar workers (teachers, office workers, nurses, typists) as well as students and housewives. In 1926, Oku was invited to help run an emerging consumer organisation, the Nakano Consumer Union Movement. As she noted in her autobiography:

In November of 1927, the women in the (consumer) union movement founded a new “association of households” (*kateikai*). [...] I felt that housewives were the primary actors in the whole consumption process, and that the consumer union movement should be led by mothers and housewives. (Oku Mumeo in Loftus 2004: 67)

Over the next few years, Oku Mumeo put the idea of this type of association into practice with the Fujin Shōhikumiai Kyōkai (Women's Consumer Cooperative Society). By 1930, cooperative societies had expanded throughout the country and held a national conference. The issues they covered went beyond cooperative purchases; they addressed birth control, a mother-child assistance law, abolishing the sales tax and other social and economic issues. As we shall see with the postwar housewives' movement, the activities of this prewar movement underscored the notion that housewives were not only the primary managers and maintainers of their individual households – that is, the bearers in theory and practice of the *shamoji* – but also capable of exercising civic responsibility in matters of community and national significance (Loftus 2004: 68).

Working-class and poor men had been granted the vote in 1925 – wealth qualifications had previously determined suffrage eligibility – and the first national election in which almost all men were allowed to vote took place in 1928. Proletarian parties sprang up quickly, and just as quickly, they began to contend with one another. Oku countered the seeming political confusion by calling on women-in-need to support one another through cooperatives, settlement houses⁶ and other support groups. To Marxist men around 1930 who criticised

6 Settlement houses originated in England in the 1870s but had their greatest impact and growth in the United States beginning in the 1880s. By the early 20th century, more than 500 settlement houses were built throughout the country. Educated young women, many inspired by Christian socialism or Jewish reformism, lived in these houses located in poor working-class communities. They taught their immigrant or minority communities English and other subjects necessary to break out of poverty. They offered daycare, food and charity. Social justice advocates from around the world, like Oku, sought to replicate settlement houses for the poor in their own countries.

these palliative actions as reactionary because they would “postpone the arrival of the revolution,” Oku replied:

To the fighters of the vanguard, just to have the revolution is enough. Love, children, the consumer economy, the cooperativization of life – these are merely unimportant details. However, for the ordinary proletarian housewife who lives in poverty, the main problems, the ones that press upon them every day, come from their children and from the household economy. [...] To put roots down in the midst of their everyday life, and to cut out a path to social revolution – this is our job! (Loftus 2004: 72–73)

Here was the bedrock of the housewives’ movement of the postwar era, grounded in pragmatism, feminine strength and empathy toward the poor. This would lead to a kind of collective citizenry of consumers, producers and other stakeholders, expanding to additional causes beyond the alleviation of poverty. And, of course, it was led by housewives represented by the *shamoji* rice paddle.

The last major programme of the pre-World War II period was the establishment of settlement houses, where all women, including the poor, contributed whatever they could – their talent, their labour, their money, their time. The Hatarakufujin no Ie (Working Women’s Houses) were intended to help women who had to work longer hours by the end of the 1930s as men went to war. As Narita Ryūichi, a scholar of gender and labour in the twentieth century, has noted:

Oku Mumeo’s activities under the wartime system [consumer organisations, settlement houses] supported and contributed to that system, sought official recognition, and were directed towards modernisation of the working class and especially the home environment of working women. (Narita 1998: 151–152)

The postwar movement of housewives bearing *shamoji*

As a member of the House of Councillors of the Japanese Diet – women were eligible for elected office and voted for the first time in 1946 – Oku Mumeo was pressed by her destitute constituents in 1948 to do something about the scarcity and cost of food and other necessities. The ideology and approaches to action she had developed since 1920 made the establishment of the Shufurengōkai, soon shortened to Shufuren, and its rice-paddle symbol associated with housewives, obvious. Oku’s organisation was not the first housewives’ association in postwar Japan. That was the Osaka Shufu no Kai (Osaka housewives association), a local organisation that arose following a protest in October 1945 by fifteen housewives demanding adequate rice rations. Carrying *furoshiki* (large cloth squares used to carry packages or other items, in this case rice rations), the Osaka housewives descended on a local rationing authority at noon, where they saw the officials eating generous portions of cooked rice. As Patricia MacLachlan recounts in her description of this scene, “miraculously” the housewives received their rations later that day. Consumers throughout Japan followed their Osaka sisters in what was later called the “Give us back our rice *furoshiki*

movement” (*Kome yokose furoshiki undo*; Maclachlan 2002: 62–63), a political action literally defined by an accessory. The Osaka Shufu no Kai that grew from this protest encouraged other women in the Kansai region⁷ to found local housewives’ groups, which came together as the Kansai Shufuren in 1949. Like the national Shufuren founded in Tokyo in the fall of 1948, the Kansai organisation initially focused on fighting black marketeering, excessive prices and critical shortages of and systemic distribution inequities in food and necessary supplies.

Inspired by the Kansai groups’ activism, large protests demanding rice erupted in Tokyo – one with 15,000 housewives in August 1948 and another with 500 in September (Loftus 2013: 5).⁸ House of Councillors member Oku Mumeo, motivated by her constituents’ pleas for help, sprang into action and organised a housewives’ protest rally against defective matches on 3 September 1948. Electricity had not been restored in many places since the end of the war, and cooking and lighting were done with coal and kerosene. This required matches. Available matches were remarkably shoddy and overpriced. Oku and her colleagues gathered a truckload of matches, a scene well covered by the media at the time. Shufuren would soon discover that the power of the image of trustworthy housewives acting in their familiar and respected capacity was often greater than the power of the law. Shufuren may have failed to win many of their lawsuits against producers of shoddy and unhealthy products – a tactic they employed later – but their power to shame companies or government officials could not be denied (Maclachlan 2014: 129–134). The wise housewife trope – later enhanced in observers’ eyes by the *shamoji* rice paddle – often won the day. Indeed, in September 1948, Oku extracted an apology from the match manufacturers and an agreement by the government to regulate production (Maclachlan 2002: 64). She and her fellow protestors took the energy of their successful protest and founded the Nihon Shufurengōkai a few weeks later.

Although the immediate motive for the founding of the Shufuren was to overcome hunger and deprivation, the group also represented the coming to fruition of the goal of prewar and wartime consumer activists: to transform housewives into citizen-consumers. Oku’s prewar and wartime promotion of the settlement movement, for instance, had a history of working with the government, having been co-opted from above by the wartime government. Frustrated at the lack of control in this wartime top-down collaboration, however, the postwar Shufuren sought to return to Oku’s 1920s ideal of the citizen-consumer who exercised power in a gendered collaboration with other house-

7 Kansai is the south-central region of Japan, with cities like Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe.

8 This and other references to Loftus 2013 are from the memoirs of activist and historian Yoshitake Teruko, translated by Loftus.

wives. As the lead article in the inaugural issue (5 December 1948) of *Shufuren dayori*⁹ (*Shufuren News*), the official organ of the Shufuren, announced:

The greatest success of the Federated Housewives' movement to date has been the establishment of a pipeline into government officialdom so that the voice of female consumers can be heard in quarters that heretofore had been reserved for business elites only. [...] This deeply rooted movement is aimed at responding to our rights being trampled upon. [...] The Federation of Housewives is a cooperative organization formed for the purpose of uniting women around issues directly connected to our daily lives. (Loftus 2013: 52)

Exactly when Shufuren began to use the *shamoji* as a meaning-bearing symbol is uncertain. Shufuren's 2021 English-language website does not discuss the use of the rice paddle, although it does contain a small cartoon image of a young man running with a *shamoji* in his hand. Interestingly, the "About Us" page on the Japanese website does discuss the *shamoji* (Shufuren 2021: Japanese-language "About Us" page). In a section entitled "Oshamoji no kokoro" (The Heart of the Rice Paddle), we learn that the first sighting of the rice paddle in a demonstration was in September 1951, indicating that it may have taken three years to develop this symbol as the group's representation. To be sure, it may have been used earlier, but the "Heart of the Rice Paddle" paragraph does not suggest that. The last line appears to be written in the first person, stating that "I" or "we" took large mock-ups of *shamoji*, wrote upon them slogans representing the cause being protested, walked into the street and confronted the government.¹⁰

In addition to demonstrating while carrying rice paddles, some Shufuren members worked in research laboratories. In 1950, Oku hired a recently retired professor of pharmacy, Takada Yuri, as Shufuren's first product quality tester. In the next few years, Takada's work angered both food producers and government regulatory agencies because it found impurities and shoddy quality in numerous food products. Takada's success prompted a major laboratory upgrade in the new Shufuren building in 1956 (Robins-Mowry 1983: 197). Some government agencies saw value in Shufuren's testing and gave financial support to the lab (Buckley 1994: 159). Meanwhile, Takada's lab gave consumer advocates the data they needed to make evidence-driven arguments to push for and win passage of legislation to improve quality standards for food and other products. In 1968, after two decades of testing and monitoring products and carrying *shamoji* that pressured government regulators for their lack of action and shamed producers for selling unhealthful and mislabelled products, housewife activists from several organisations played the dominant role in the passage of the Shōhisha hogo kihonhō (Basic Law on Consumer Protection; see

9 Also Romanized as *tayori*.

10 Japanese does not use verb conjugations that indicate person or number; I inferred the first person from the context.

Shufuren 2021: English-language website). Although the law used the term *shōhisha* (consumer) rather than *seikatsusha* (person promoting an improved lifestyle – the term preferred by most activists), the passage of this law was an important step forward. Shufuren was joined by other members of Shōdanren, a federation of housewives' organisations and consumer cooperatives promoted by Shufuren in 1956.¹¹ The efficacy of the law is debated, however. Maclachlan notes that despite these kinds of laws, consumer protection continued to be more effective at the local or regional level than at the national level, and I-Liang Wahn argues that the law had just one major benefit for consumer activists, though noting that this was a considerable benefit. That is, it gave positions on the *shingikai* (an official advisory and deliberative council for consumer issues) to Shufuren and other Shōdanren members (Maclachlan 1998: 122, Wahn 2019: 86). From that perch, the Shufuren and other consumer groups pushed for and achieved numerous additional pieces of protective legislation in the following decades. Finally, perhaps, the “pipeline into government officialdom” heralded in the December 1948 *Shufuren dayori* would be created.¹²

On its own or, more often, in collaboration with other consumer groups, Shufuren mounted challenges to illegal price-setting, mislabelling of food products, environmental pollution, rises in utility rates (see protest in Figure 1), consumption taxes and numerous other consumer-related issues. Housewife groups have also been at the centre of issues that are as much political as they are consumer-related, including anti-nuclear movements (Higuchi 2008: 341–343), chemical safety movements, opposition to the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and policies concerning consumer aspects of information-technology (Shufuren 2021: English-language website). The joint effort in 1970–71 to boycott colour televisions due to unfair price fixing was a success. This brought together over 15 million members of the so-called “big five” women's groups – Shufuren, Chifuren, the League of Women Voters, the Japanese Consumers Association and the Japanese Consumer Cooperatives Union (Robins-Mowry 1983: 202–203).¹³ These kinds of issues bring us to the emphasis on *seikatsusha* activism and another reason to carry the *shamoji*.

11 The federation has gained a significant voice in recent decades, as the membership of its federated groups is over 30 million today; about one in four Japanese has some connection to a consumer group or co-op affiliated with the umbrella organisation.

12 There are about 200 deliberative councils reporting to various government ministries in Japan.

13 Like Shufuren, Chifuren (Zen Nihon Chiiki Fujinkai Rengōkai, National Federation of Regional Women's Organisations, founded in 1952) brought housewives together to address problems in postwar society and families. The two organisations often collaborated, but Shufuren was less tied to the Japanese government than Chifuren, which operated the regional Women's Halls, for example. Both were headed by feminist former colleagues of prewar suffragist Ichikawa Fusae: Oku Mumeo in the New Women's Association and Chifuren's Yamataka Shigeri in the Fusen Kakutoku Dōmei (Women's Suffrage League). The postwar League of Women Voters was a direct descendent of the prewar Women's Suffrage League, both headed by Ichikawa. Small wonder that these three organisations, whose leaders had known each for decades, played a central role in joint consumer activities.

Maclachlan's discussion of *seikatsusha* is compelling. There is no exact equivalent for the term in English. I have tried to render it in a short form as "person promoting an improved lifestyle" (the words "improve" and "promote" are not part of the term in Japanese, however, and *seikatsu* can mean "lifestyle, livelihood, life or living" in the sense of earning a living). Maclachlan's detailed analysis of the concept is spot-on. Citing a Shufuren vice-president in 1994, Maclachlan notes that the concept of a *seikatsusha* embraces a number of characteristics:

[A] *seikatsusha* is a human being concerned with his or her life and physical and mental health. On a more sophisticated level, the concept embraces the notion of citizenship within both the nation and civil society (*shimin shakai*). [...] A *seikatsusha* may sometimes assume the work-related functions of either a producer or laborer. [...] Put simply, the concept of *seikatsusha* denotes a multi-faceted and proactive human being situated at the confluence of the social, economic, and political spheres. [...] Whereas the term *shōhisha* [consumer] conjures up an image of conflict between producers and consumers, the notion of *seikatsusha* helps bridge the conceptual divide between the two and lays the foundation for a much more complementary – if not always harmonious – relationship between them. (Maclachlan 1998: 115–116)

In short, a *seikatsusha* promotes the good life for herself and those around her in the family, the community and the nation, and accomplishes this by exerting the respected authority of the "good wife" of the Japanese trope of "good wife, wise mother".¹⁴ This enhances her civic belonging or citizenship and is manifested by the symbolic accessory of the housewife's *shamoji*. As Maclachlan notes, the *seikatsusha* does not, as a rule, build walls between labourers, producers and consumers. A housewife may be a worker or married to a worker, and the intersection of those two roles means production and consumption are not alienated in the case of the middle- and working-class housewife. If we subdivide the types of producers into big businesses and small businesses or farms, we can see that even producers per se are not necessarily the opponents of consumers either. Strong statements like Oku Mumeo's exclamation at the first National Consumer Rally in 1957 that "Capitalism is a double-edged sword! We are exploited both as workers and consumers!" (Maclachlan 2001: 58), were superseded by statements that supported small businesses. Consumers had to pull together with small producers and put big businesses in their place. Oku did not view business itself as the enemy, though the government's typical preferential treatment of big business frequently stifled consumers, workers and small producers, all of whom could promote *seikatsusha* well-being and civic involvement.

The numerous times Shufuren and other consumer groups pressured businesses and their ostensible government regulators – also by marching with *shamoji* – to lower prices, to clean up the environment, to produce healthy

14 In the prewar period, "good wife, wise motherism" was part of the school curriculum for girls, and the trope had tenacious staying power after the war (Uno 1993: 293–322).

products or to eschew forms of corruption such as mislabelling or price-fixing, should not be overlooked. And yet some scholars find it surprising that women in consumer groups failed to rally around the larger consuming public by opposing formal and informal trade restrictions on imported foods. If tariff policy kept out cheaper imported rice that could help the pocketbook of consumers, why didn't housewives take to the streets with *shamoji* to force the government to allow in more imported rice? The emphasis on *seikatsusha* over *shōhisha* (consumers) helps to explain that seeming paradox.

Shufuren women acting as *seikatsusha* to promote the well-being of other *seikatsusha* were, in fact, acting out the respected and empathetic role of the senior *shamoji*-wielding housewife in the historic family. This was not evident, however, to several commentators in the 1980s and 1990s who focused more on the issue of the price of rice for Japan's urban majority than on Shufuren's larger, overarching goal of improving the quality of life for all *seikatsusha*, including small farmers. These leading scholars included, among others, Karl van Wolferen, Thomas Flannigan and Amanda Andrews, Steven K. Vogel and Hamada Koichi. Flannigan and Andrews cited van Wolferen's suggestion that housewives themselves were uninformed as a way of explaining their lack of desire to prioritise cheaper imported rice over serving the larger community, including producers. "Finding themselves with increasing leisure," van Wolferen wrote, "they have developed an enthusiasm for neighborhood causes [that is, *seikatsu* or lifestyle causes]" (van Wolferen 1989: 52–53). They were co-opted by the government, Flannigan and Andrews contended, and "opposed opening the Japanese market to foreign rice and organized noisy demonstrations in favor of the [import] ban" (Flanagan / Andrews 1998: 27–29). Vogel correctly asserted that consumer groups focused on lifestyle issues, especially at the local level, but added that "many of them lacked a solid financial foundation to support their political activities" in favour of supporting restrictions on imported rice (Vogel 1999: 188). Hamada notes:

Japan's consumers either willingly, reluctantly, or out of ignorance [...] endure the extremely high prices of rice and other agricultural commodities. [...] These [consumer] organizations consist mostly of women. The central organization, "Shufuren," [...] is often symbolized by a "rice scoop". (Hamada 1996: 9)

Those comments were written almost a quarter century ago, so they may simply represent an earlier viewpoint, one that I shared at that time as well.¹⁵ By contrast, Helen Macnaughtan has more recently contended – very insightfully – that the Japanese view of activist housewives differed greatly from that of observers in the West like those noted above.

Japan's Shufuren has played a leading role in the post-war consumer movement [...] demonstrating the importance of a gender perspective in bringing the Japanese govern-

¹⁵ The Japanese media similarly used stereotypical tropes and branded women students in New Left movements of the 1960s as "naïve" (Schieder 2021: chapter 1 passim).

ment and producers to task over consumer issues. [... They] were increasingly viewed as knowledgeable and responsible consumers, aware of environmental issues, strong players in the development of consumers' rights, and in themselves an active, identifiable consumer group in the domestic market. (Macnaughtan 2012: 96)

Operating in a Japanese context, playing, as it were, to a Japanese audience, it comes as no surprise that the *shamoji* would be the important and readily understood symbol at the intersection of the traditionally empowered housewife and the postwar *seikatsusha* citizen. The Shufuren members were neither uninformed government toadies nor advocates of revolution. And the rice paddle was no trivial symbol.

Chūpiren and attention-grabbing pink helmets

The women of the short-lived organisation Chūpiren, to whom we now turn, were mocked not only by conservatives but also by other radical feminists in Japan, and their signature accessory, a pink helmet, was always the subject of commentary in media accounts of their actions. Compared to other “second wave” feminist groups of the mid-1970s, Chūpiren has received far fewer pages in histories of the period. What was most important about the organisation was its linkage of reproductive rights to women's bodily autonomy; to social, political and economic rights; and to sexuality rights. In linking these types of rights, the group had some similarities and some dissimilarities with other radical feminists, but all demanded thoroughgoing societal transformation. The most notable feminist organisations of the 1970s were part of *ūman ribu* (“Women's Lib”, also simply called *ribu*). While Chūpiren and other *ribu* groups shared the goal of feminist transformation, their ideologies and praxis differed in key areas. Where they did not differ was in their attitudes toward mainstream Japanese gendered society and women's movements like Shufuren. As Setsu Shigematsu notes, “Ribu's relationship to mainstream Japanese women's movements was highly critical, involving a deliberate distance and break from the existing constellation of political organizations such as housewife associations, women's democratic leagues, and mothers' peace movements” (Shigematsu 2012: 3).¹⁶

Many feminists in *ribu* groups of the 1970s got their start in New Left organisations of the 1960s and, as in many other countries, the hyper-masculinity and violence that characterised these earlier groups drove many women members, who were expected to abide by sexist gender roles, away from those groups and into women-only feminist groups. Chelsea Schieder, whose study *Coed Revolution* focuses on women activists in the masculinised New Left movements that preceded second-wave feminism, successfully resurrects the women erased by most historians and by those fleeing the New Left. Scholars' focus on the “Left-to-Lib” narrative of the development of feminist groups in the

16 For more on mothers as reformers, see Maxson 2018: 34–49.

1970s (Schieder 2021: 162) – which, Schieder notes, derives from participants’ memories of sex-role stereotyping, sexual violence to keep women in line, other kinds of sometimes deadly violence and the marginalisation of women who mentioned sexual violence (Schieder 2021: 93–100, 108) – is part of that erasure. It is unsurprising that many former members recalled the New Left of the 1960s as having been toxic, which has contributed to the discounting of the contributions of the small number of women in that movement.

Many of the largely but not exclusively male members in New Left groups wore helmets of various colours, so there is a precedent for some helmet-wearing by a small number of women activists.¹⁷ Chūpiren’s wearing of helmets adopted the legacy of militancy of their predecessors in New Left movements – without the violence. Other than Chūpiren members, however – and a company of 200 helmet-wearing women marching as a group on Antiwar Day in October 1970, which some scholars consider the beginning of the second wave of feminism in Japan (Schieder 2021: 152) – most feminists of the 1970s did not dress or wear accessories as a uniform to set them apart from other feminists. Chūpiren members, however, wore a “revolutionary ensemble, which consisted of pink helmets, and sometimes sunglasses and towels over the mouth” (Norgren 2001: 116). Norgren notes that Chūpiren members were “notorious” as much for donning “revolutionary clothes” as for their “militancy” (Norgren 2001: 116), paralleling the type of intentionality of markers of resistance such as the wearing of hats or scarves in Indian, Palestinian and American resistance movements, as described above. Chūpiren’s eye-catching dress, Norgren notes from conversations and interviews, was what many Japanese recalled decades later. Shigematsu reminds us that their distinctive headwear gave Chūpiren their nickname, “Pink Helmets” (Shigematsu 2012: 225–226).¹⁸

Like Shufuren, Chūpiren had a founder, Enoki Misako, whose ideas and personality were at the centre of the organisation. Just as there are few historical studies on Chūpiren, Enoki herself remains fairly obscure in history. The name “Enoki” is a pseudonym (her real name is Katayama), and this article will use the name she chose to use. Enoki was a member of a *ribu* writing group, the Urufu Kai (“Wolf Group”), which translated English-language essays and also published original work (Mackie 2003: 152). When the Wolf Group refused to allow Enoki to use their group’s name on her pamphlet “Lift the Pill Ban!” at the 1972 Women’s Liberation Convention, because they opposed hormonal contraception, she left and formed Chūpiren (Norgren 2001: 116). Enoki was a pharmacist by profession, so she was knowledgeable about the pill (Chujo / Aizawa 2021: 136), but rather than being an asset, her profession was likely

17 What all sources call “helmets” were not military helmets but rather plastic hard hats of the kind worn by workers at construction sites. The New Left students wore helmets of various colors designating group affiliation. For an image of a large mass of demonstrators in multi-colored helmets, see Ogura 2015: 13.

18 While most sources refer to Chūpiren’s helmets as pink, one contemporaneous observer noted that the “Pink Helmet brigade [...] wore] pink and blue helmets and wav[ed] pink flags” (Robins-Mowry 1983: 135).



Figure 2: Helmet-wearing Chūpiren members staging a sit-down at the Ministry of Health and Welfare in protest of the proposed revision of the Eugenic Protection Law, 12 May 1973 (photo by *Yomiuri Shimbun*).

one of the reasons she came to be shunned by other feminists who opposed the pharmaceutical companies that they identified with Enoki (Norgren 2001: 116). The most notable detailed account of Enoki and Chūpiren was written by scholar-activist-journalist Akiyama Yōko, who had been Enoki's colleague in the Wolf Group and later became an opponent of Chūpiren, its demeanour and its ideology (Akiyama 1993: 121–138). Founder of the influential *Femintern Press* (Mackie 2005: 152), Akiyama was not alone in voicing opposition to Chūpiren. Unsurprisingly, Akiyama paints Enoki and the organisation in a negative light, reflective of the rivalry between Chūpiren and *Gurūpu Tatakau Onna* (Fighting Women Group), the organisation that had founded the *Ribu Shinjuku Sentā* (Shinjuku Lib Centre) that one movement veteran calls the “core of the [1970s] movement” (Matsui 1990: 438). The groups' major ideological differences on the issues of abortion and the contraceptive pill will be discussed below.

Different operating styles also contributed to the groups' antagonism. For example, most radical feminist organisations communicated with one another through *mini-komi* (mini-communications) and newsletters and eschewed enlisting the mass media. By contrast, Chūpiren preferred using the mass media (Norgren 2001: 66), which maximised their media exposure.

The ideas and actions of the Shinjuku Lib Centre's Tanaka Mitsu, the best-known *ribu* feminist of the 1970s, were, like those of Chūpiren, shockingly radical in many people's eyes. At the first major women's liberation conference in the summer of 1971, for example, all the participants were naked. The media ridiculed Tanaka and her group. Not wishing to be further ridiculed, other “second-wave” radical women's groups also distanced themselves from Chūpiren because “its splashy (*hade na*), publicity-seeking protest activities attracted a great deal of media attention (and ridicule), leading the general public to believe

that Chūpiren was representative of the larger *ribu* movement”.¹⁹ Nevertheless, for the many “housewives, students, and office workers” who wrote to Chūpiren requesting contraceptive information, Chūpiren was representative of the movement in a more positive sense (Norgren 2001: 115–116). Thus, the organisation, enhanced by its ability to play the media, attracted support from some average women (outside the feminist movement), even as it was attacked in the press and rejected by other feminist groups whom the media also treated as frivolous and laughable. For Chūpiren, the medium was a major part of the message.

The mainstream radical *ribu* activists did not develop a more positive attitude toward Chūpiren in the decade following the demise of both Chūpiren and the Shinjuku Lib Centre. Akiyama Yōko’s early 1990s reportage was typical of other feminists and the mainstream news media (Akiyama 1993: 121–138). Feminist Matsui Machiko’s 1990 article in *NWSA Journal*, “Evolution of the Feminist Movement in Japan”, which introduced Japanese feminist movements to many readers in English, bemoaned Tanaka Mitsu’s being “ridiculed and trivialized by male critics and journalists” for her radical ideas and actions (Matsui 1990: 435), but Matsui never mentioned Chūpiren at all. This was undoubtedly an intentional erasure due to the continuation, long after both groups folded, of memories of ideological differences and fears of negative press.

Some would-be allies in the movement to secure approval of the contraceptive pill, such as the mainstream Family Planning Federation of Japan, were also wary of the effect of Chūpiren on their own advocacy of the pill. The Federation’s executive director Ashino Yuriko described in 1999 how two decades earlier, Chūpiren members, wearing pink helmets, crashed a meeting of the National Convention on Family Planning and had to be ejected. Ashino contended that Chūpiren’s sensationalism extended the wait for the pill to be approved and “distorted [the] perception of women’s liberation” (Ashino 1999: 86–88). However, the lengthy approval process may also have been the result of bureaucratic foot-dragging as well as concerns about possibly diminished use of condoms during the AIDS crisis if oral contraceptives were approved (Weisman 1992: Section A 3), rather than resulting principally from the government’s reaction to Chūpiren.

The clash of ideas between the Shinjuku Lib activists and Chūpiren over representation can be linked to deep ideological differences concerning gender and reproductive rights advocacy. Abortion was available in Japan before the development of the contraceptive pill, so we shall start there. The Eugenic Protection Law of 1948 (EPL; the law’s name was changed in 1996 to “Maternal Protection Law”) outlawed abortion. A revision of the EPL in 1949 allowed

19 Eto Mikiko asserts that “the emergence of [Chūpiren] discouraged many women from sympathizing with feminism” (Eto 2008: 124).

an exception to the prohibition for “economic reasons”, and 99 per cent of abortions from 1952 to the early 2000s were approved under the exception clause (Kano 2016: 77). By the 1970s, debates over oral contraceptives and abortion became intertwined. Just as pro-pill and anti-pill feminists were challenging one another, a right-wing religious organisation with representation in the Diet, Seichō no Ie, was making one of their periodic proposals to revise the EPL by removing the economic exception for abortion because Japan was no longer poor. Other interested parties proposed replacing that exception with one allowing abortions for foetal abnormalities, discoverable through the new diagnostic technologies of the 1970s.

Disability rights groups immediately opposed any revision of the EPL. Their opposition was joined by the Shinjuku Lib and Chūpiren groups, but the opposition of these two groups was grounded in different principles. The arguments made by the disability rights community resonated deeply with many social reformers. Tanaka was concerned that she might be seen as opposing disabled people’s right to life. She carefully threaded the needle by stating the *ribu* position as one where abortion would have to remain legally possible at least until all families who wished to have babies could afford to have them. She asserted: “Make a society where we can have children, where we want to have children,” thereby undercutting Seichō no Ie’s contention that Japan’s wealth made abortion for economic reasons immoral (Norgren 2001: 68).

Tanaka’s argument was based on an economic justice framework more than on women’s bodily rights. Another source of difference was in regard to the question of contraceptives. The *ribu* feminists, principally Tanaka, had strongly opposed the legalisation of oral contraceptives for the purpose of birth control – the pill was at that time available off-label if prescribed for dysmenorrhea. Nonetheless, they were concerned that it would become more widely available, which they did not support, if it could be prescribed for birth control. *Ribu* feminists feared the pill’s possible side effects, and they wished to make men share responsibility for birth control by using condoms. In addition, *ribu* feminists were concerned that it would be easier for lawmakers to remove the economic exception from the EPL if the pill were widely used (Norgren 2001: 114).

Ironically, one reason why the Ministry of Health and Welfare dragged its feet on approval of the pill was that they contended the converse, that is, that abortion made the pill unnecessary. *Ribu*’s Tanaka believed that abortion was a mother’s violent murder of her foetus, but, paradoxically, she justified it on economic grounds.²⁰ Tanaka’s colleagues in the Fighting Women’s Group opposed the pill for additional reasons. Some were hostile toward science and technology because of Japan’s horrific industrial pollution at that time, and this extended to medical technology like the pill (Eto 2008: 123).

²⁰ Tanaka also supported mothers who killed their living children, under vastly different circumstances, so her philosophy was complicated, to say the least, and beyond the scope of this article (Shigematsu 2012: 24).

Chūpiren's Enoki, on the other hand, argued from the perspective of women's absolute rights as opposed to the maternalist point of view of *ribu* activists. A woman had the right to her bodily integrity, Enoki stressed, and that meant she should have the "basic right" to use oral contraceptives and obtain abortions. As a pharmacist she stated that the pill was safe, although it was hard to persuade most *ribu* feminists of that (Norgren 2001: 117). The foetal disability issue, Enoki contended, was not related to a woman's right to determine what was best for her own body and health, and a choice to have an abortion should be possible irrespective of the question of disability. Women should not be shamed for making choices that Enoki noted were probably emotionally painful; the men of the right-wing Seichō no Ie hoped to shame women for these choices (Kano 2016: 99). In the end, neither side had to deal with the disability issue, as the EPL was not revised while the Shinjuku Lib Centre and Chūpiren were still active. But their major differences in approaches to women's rights and women's economic rights did produce tensions.

The groups' different perspectives on how to deal with women's issues help to explain why only Chūpiren members distinguished themselves from other 1970s *ribu* feminists in wearing symbolic attire, especially the helmet. In contrast, the Fighting Women Group's resistance to technology and support for the environment led them to "internalize ecological concerns rooted in traditional motherhood worship in Japan" (Eto 2008: 123). In their support for the environment, they may have seemed to have more in common with Shufuren, but as we have seen, the Fighting Women, like Chūpiren, rejected mainstream women's groups and sought to radically change society (Shigematsu 2012: 3).

But their means differed. The Fighting Women ran summer camp meetings in the countryside without specific leadership, where everyone was encouraged to speak (and possibly not wear clothing), and later established the Shinjuku Lib Centre, where participants could take part in consciousness-raising as a way to help change individuals and especially society (Eto 2008: 124). This approach did not produce a group of women dedicated to specific feminist attacks on policy – especially surrounding abortion and the pill – or to outing misbehaving men. While both groups sought societal change, the policy-oriented Chūpiren stressed individual rights, using the helmet of the militant fighter to publicly highlight each member's commitment to specific goals. The Fighting Women, their name notwithstanding, used quieter, collaborative consciousness-raising tactics.

The helmeted Chūpiren members existed for the same five years as the Shinjuku Lib Centre – from 1972 to 1977. Across the Pacific, North American newspapers in cities large and small proclaimed that feminism in Japan was dead when Chūpiren folded, although that was far from true. The *Ottawa Journal* asserted in an article published on 29 July 1977 that "Japanese Libbers

Fold” (Mehta 1977), and thousands of miles to the west, the *San Bernardino County Sun* rang a death knell for Japanese feminism, proclaiming on 24 July that the “women’s movement folds in Japan” (Shamus 1977). Erring more egregiously was the *New York Times* on 23 July, claiming that with “support waning, [the] women’s movement knuckles under in Japan” (Malcolm 1977: 32).

These journals and others were happy to discuss Chūpiren’s helmets, but they all failed to observe that there was a multifaceted and long-standing women’s movement in Japan both before and during the years of Chūpiren’s existence. What had folded was Enoki’s ephemeral political career, not women’s continuing quest for equality in all facets of life. The *Times* quoted Enoki saying that her failure meant “the cause of women’s liberation in Japan is finished” (Malcolm 1977: 32), then followed up by claiming, incorrectly, that the “women’s liberation movement here is expected to virtually disappear for the foreseeable future”. Only Chūpiren, they noted, with its highly visible “military style uniforms with pink helmets” (Malcolm 1977: 32), could raise women’s consciousnesses.

But Chūpiren had already been losing members who were tired of Enoki’s top-down organisational style since 1974, three years before it disbanded. In 1977, Enoki decided to run for a seat in the Diet as a member of the Japan Woman’s Party, which she created that year to launch her campaign. Failing to be elected, she repaid her husband, as promised, for his loan to her campaign. He took the repayment in the form of Enoki doing weekly housework, which the North American press considered emblematic of the end of Japanese feminism. There was a silver lining in what appeared to be this terrible case of a fall from leading a reproductive rights movement to performing menial housework – Enoki’s implicit payment was an acknowledgement of the feminist demand that housework be compensated (White 2002: 222, note 34).

None of the North American papers mentioned any organisations other than the flamboyant Chūpiren. To be sure, the symbolic helmets elevated their visibility, but other organisations existed as well. The closing of the Shinjuku Lib Centre in 1977 was followed by many of its leaders moving into significant roles in other spheres, including politics, publishing, academia and other women’s organisations. Academic Women’s Studies programmes also emerged in Japan. Some former activists, such as the Ribu Centre’s Tanaka, moved far from the limelight, as had Enoki, but many more transitioned to these other forms of feminist activities.

Conclusion

Shufuren and Chūpiren, the former still active, the latter disbanding in 1977, were diametric opposites in character, behaviour, operational tactics and most other aspects. The former sought to improve the lives of citizen consumers, the latter sought to overturn sexism in Japan by asserting women's individual reproductive and social rights, an effort which distinguished them not only from the Shufuren but also from other radical feminists of the 1970s. But what they had in common was an understanding of how to use the media for gendered resistance, using accessories in a way that told their historical stories and attempted to generate support – even if, in the case of Chūpiren, such support was short-lived.

Both organisations understood that their accessories would be the first thing, other than their gender, that observers would notice when Chūpiren or Shufuren marched or occupied a public or private space. Shufuren's *shamoji* made the protesting housewives (*shufu*) acceptable, as they appeared to be remaining in their proper lanes. But the words on their rice paddles were strong and disruptive of the status quo, somewhat challenging the housewifely stereotype while supporting the trope of the powerful wielder of the rice paddle – that is, the controller of the family's resources. Chūpiren members, with their militant dress, especially their pink helmets, were intentionally noticeable, loud and, ultimately, the members believed, disruptive. Chūpiren failed to achieve the group's primary goals in the 1970s, but many of their goals have been legally adopted, in whole or in part, since their period of activism.

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