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"LGBT issues" and the 2020 Games

Claire Maree

Abstract: The forthcoming 2020 Games are a critical moment in the implementation of diversity and inclusion strategies targeting sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) related issues in Japan. However, the resultant "hypervisibility" of "LGBT issues" has led to an increasing "invisibility" of those who supposedly fail to fit LGBT narratives that pivot on specific forms of consumerism, internationalism and globalized diversity from which the "issues" purport to arise.

Drag queen performers in gorgeous costuming accented the stage as superstar vocalist Misia sang a medley of her popular hit songs as the final featured performance (*tori*) of the red (women's) team at NHK'S 70th Kōhaku Uta Gassen (hereafter Kōhaku) on New Year's Eve, 2019. Openly proud lesbian DJ Noodles, from Taiwan, teamed with regular queer club event DJ EMMA to pump out tracks from above a digital monitor displaying the rainbow flag. In her introduction to the extravaganza, actress Ayase Haruka cited superstar Misia as wanting to "surmount the obstacles of age, gender/sex (*seibetsu*) and even national borders through the power of love and music." The camera panned members of the red and white teams who flanked each side of the Kōhaku stage waving rainbow flags. The red team's final extravaganza was a visible celebration of rainbow pride. It seemed we had stepped into the next phase of the "LGBT boom," which has seen an explosion in use of the acronym LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) in mainstream public discourses, and a (re)branding of sexual minorities in the mainstream media since the mid-2010s.

In posts to social media networks and online magazine articles, members of Japan's diverse LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual plus) communities expressed immense pride at witnessing a display of queer representation on the national broadcaster's annual Kōhaku celebration. Consternation was also voiced about rainbow flag waving by celebrities and performers not known for their support of rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender individuals in Japan. Would the average Kōhaku viewer understand the iconic imagery of the rainbow flag, people wondered. The festive celebration of the dynamic drag queen scene was also critiqued for promoting a stereotypical view of gay men's club culture, that is not representative of the diversity of Japan's LGBTQIA+ communities. "Diversity" (*tayōsei*), however, was posited as a crucial component of the discussion and planning of the featured performance. In a *Newsweek Japan* (January 24, 2020) interview that probes the NHK producer as to the reasoning behind the use of the rainbow flag, Misia's long association with the queer club scene is duly noted. The question of what image Japan wants to give to the world in the lead up to 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics (hereafter 2020 Games) is also highlighted as a central concern.

As research into international sporting events has consistently shown, ideologies of nation, gender and the body intertwine with ideologies of globalization and modernization in the

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spectacle of the Olympics (Tomlinson and Young 2006). Staging of the Olympics is a process that facilitates the branding of the nation within contemporary global geopolitics. Nations appeal to international commonalities that are intertwined with global markets (Tomlinson 2008) by committing to Olympic values. This impact is potentially ongoing with the commitment to legacies that will extend beyond the closing ceremonies of the games. The core vision of the 2020 Games are "Striving for your personal best (Achieving Personal Best)", "Accepting one another (Unity in Diversity)" and "Passing on Legacy for the future (Connecting to Tomorrow)". Within the context of the contemporary sociopolitical environment in Japan, political approaches to Japanese-neoliberalism and the rebranding of Japan following the triple disaster of 3.11, the 2020 Games impacts on governmental policies, corporate initiatives and civic society. One area that has been influenced is the framing of issues to do with sexual orientation and gender identity (increasingly referred to as SOGI in Japanese).

The Anti-Discrimination Clause of the IOC Charter

Sexual orientation was added to the anti-discrimination clause of the IOC Charter in 2015. This was in response to global protest surrounding the 2014 Winter Games which were held in Sochi under a regime that endorsed strong "anti-gay-propaganda" legislation supposedly aimed at protecting youth. In the broader context of global LGBT rights discourses, the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched the Being LGBT in Asia initiative in 2014, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by 193 United Nations (UN) member countries in 2015. Expanding the anti-discrimination clause requires that hosting bodies of the Olympics and Paralympics ensure the non-discrimination of both gender and sexual orientation in their practices. The measures adopted by each host are, necessarily, shaped by local social, cultural and political institutions and the histories of activism and local organizing. In contemporary Japan, the commodification of "LGBT issues" vis-a-vis the "LGBT boom" and a recurring "backlash" mobilized by moral conservatives that reaches back to the 2000s (Kano 2011, 2016), intersects with histories of activism and community organization. For, although often obfuscated by the branding of "LGBT" as new to Japan, organizing around and campaigning against the institutionalized discrimination of sexual minorities has an ongoing history (Curran and Welker 2005, Maree 2015, Takemura 2010).

The 2020 Games occurs in the context of rising populism internationally, and a transnational backlash against feminism and gender studies that has been well documented by academics and activists alike. My discussion here is limited to sexual orientation and gender identity and is therefore at risk of not acknowledging the intersections of discrimination experienced by many in Japan. Needless to say, xenophobia, ableism and a widening wealth gap are also a nexus of concern in the lead up to the 2020 Games, that embraces the overarching Olympic value of "unity in diversity" foregrounded in International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Bach's 2013 manifesto, and whose core vision is, paradoxically, "(a)ccepting one another (Unity in Diversity)."

"LGBT issues" at the Olympics

The inclusion of sexual orientation to the anti-discrimination clause of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Charter has necessitated official engagement with SOGI

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issues in Japan as Tokyo prepares to host the 2020 Games. Within the rhetoric of Olympism, SOGI issues have been branded as significant enough to catch the attention of policy makers, and business interests. The unearthing of the so-called "LGBT market" circa 2012 has buoyed this and facilitated the inclusion of SOGI issues within diversity discourses manifest in corporate social responsibility activities. Although the acronym "LGBT" has been used in Japanese language activism and scholarship regarding issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, it has been rebranded as a "new concept," therein requiring explanation and promotion. The "LGBT boom," which comes after a series of similar booms since the 1950s, converges dissemination of the benefits of tapping into "LGBT markets" in a flailing economy with educational infotainment on, for example, the struggles of gay and lesbian couples for familial acceptance. While this is launched as a "new" social concern, community networking around such issues stretches back to at least the women's organizations and gay subcultures of the 1970s, and work at the community level on raising awareness of issues to do with partnership rights in Japan has been ongoing since at least the 1990s.

Engagement with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity is posited as fundamental to "diversity and inclusion" strategies of the 2020 Games. This is evidenced in the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's (TMG) anti-discrimination ordinance. The aim of the ordinance is to "make Tokyo a city that upholds the human rights values of banning any sort of discrimination as stated in the Olympic Charter" (Knight 2018).[1] It has the dual purpose of increasing awareness of diverse gender and sexualities through prohibiting discrimination, and of improving measures to protect non-Japanese nationals against unreasonable discrimination. Debate around the TMG's anti-discrimination ordinance was heated due to this dual focus. In terms of local government measure in regard to discrimination against sexual minorities, the ordinance symbolizes a sizable shift in attitudes since the *Fuchū Seinen no Ie* case in 1994. In this groundbreaking legal case, the Japan Association for the Lesbian and Gay Movement (OCCUR) successfully sued the TMG for damages due to harassment suffered and overturned their ban on the use of youth activity centers by "homosexuals".

The focus on the responsibilities of the city as host for the 2020 Games was fore fronted in the push to have the ordinance passed in the Metropolitan Assembly. Human rights advocates and activists mobilized support through media campaigns. This is indicative of the ways in which civil society in Japan has gradually come to acknowledge the importance of SOGI rights. Debate was fierce. At the final deliberation of the ordinance that I attended, the implications of concretizing any notion of "hate speech" were heavily scrutinized. So too were the measures that the TMG would take to, firstly, ensure the anonymity of LGBT identified individuals who contacted the dedicated help line, and, secondly, ensure that actions taken in response to discrimination would be more than mere window dressing. It was a nuanced discussion, but there was also domestic politics. Those opposing the ordinance cautioned that the TMG was usurping the national government's prerogative. Not only had the national Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) instigated, in 2015, a multi-partied network chaired by Hase Hiroshi, an LDP Member of the House of Representatives, to investigate "LGBT issues" in the run-up to the Olympics, but they had publicly committed to exploring possible legislation to raise awareness of "LGBT issues" in 2017.

During the debate the argument that "not all LGBT people" were supportive of the measure, was also floated While one could charitably interpret this as a nod to the diversity of the so-called LGBT community, this line of argumentation quickly segued into a detailed

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commentary of how the ordinance threatened traditional gender values, and by extrapolation, configurations of the family and the nation. This rhetoric is key to understanding the precarious nature of public debate on contemporary "LGBT issues" in pre-2020 Games Japan, especially in light of ongoing statements made by politicians from the ruling LDP itself that reconfigures the backlash of the early 2000s.

In celebration of the passing of the TMG anti-discrimination ordinance, the Tokyo Love Parade was held in October 2018. Community organizers, politicians, human rights advocates and everyday residents walked and wheelchaired through the streets of busy Shinjuku, to a fashionable department store where a final celebratory party was held. The parade course was scattered with rainbow flags and many participants held placards proclaiming "I Love Tokyo Diversity." The parade slogan "love and equality" decorated the front of the van that lead the march. Music and speeches were interspersed by a message congratulating the TMG on its stand against discrimination and protesting discriminatory comments made by Sugita Mio (LDP Member of the House of Representatives) that had offended many from the LGBTQIA+ and disabled communities.

In a short essay published in *Shinchō 45* Sugita wrote that "LGBT support was excessive" and labelled "LGBTs" as "unproductive" as they "don't produce children" (August 2018 edition [on sale from July 18]). The statement was heavily critiqued for its overt discrimination and eugenics undertones. Public outcry demanding Sugita's immediate apology culminated in demonstrations outside the LDP Tokyo headquarters on July 27, 2018. The initial response from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) positioned Sugita's opinion as an individual one. However, following calls for her resignation, the LDP released a statement recognizing Sugita's "insufficient understanding and consideration" (*fujūbun na rikai to hairyo*). The statement also noted that she had been counselled to exercise more caution. The message was prefaced by the LDP's commitment to drawing up legislation "aiming to advance wide and proper understand of sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBT)." Posted at the bottom of the page are links to three key documents by the LDP Special Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: "Foundational thoughts on Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity" (2016), a pamphlet on "Diversity in Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity" (2016) and, "Q&A's about Sexual Orientation and GID (Gender Identity)" (2019) (LDP website August 1, 2018).[2] Each of these documents sets out the LDP's official stance towards SOGI issues. Each addresses global expectations that, as a nation hosting global sports mega-events and one marketing itself as an international tourist destination, Japan will take measures to protect the rights of sexual minorities. Each is also imbued with a discourse that claims tolerance and understanding, while simultaneously advocating against legislative reforms.

The LDP's "Foundational Thoughts" document maintains that Japan has been tolerant of diverse gender identifications and sexual orientations since the Middle Ages. The document conceptualizes a society in which there is no need to "come out" and "we each accept each other naturally" (*tagai ni shizen ni ukeirerareru*). The opening question of the "Q&A" (2019) inquires as to why the LDP should engage with issues of sexual orientation and GID at all. The answer first acknowledges that those who are grappling with their own sexuality and/or gender identity often experience difficulties in education and employment that can lead to suicide. Here the impact of research and surveys conducted on the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth and attitudes towards LGBT identified individuals is evident (Kamano et al. 2016). However, it is not this crisis in help and

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support alone that motivates engagement; the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Olympic Charter is also cited. Readers are directed to another section (A18) where SOGI related concerns are explained as pertaining to the 2020 Games diversity and inclusion platform. The receipt of a "silver" ranking, and a best Practice Award from Working with Pride Japan is cited as evidence of success. Note, however, that in response to the question of marriage equality, the document maintain that same-sex partners were not anticipated (*sōtei*) under the clause of the constitution related to marriage. That marriage equality is not a goal for the administration is clearly underlined. The LDP'S official standpoint, therefore, claims a benign tolerance for diverse gender and sexual identities yet prevents legislative reform in the name of protecting "traditional" family values. Backlash discourses are enabled to resurface anew as it allows parliamentarians to voice anti-gay sentiments without serious consequences.

The backlash in Japan can be traced back to the early 2000s following the implementation of the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society 1999 that set out to attain a "society in which both men and women, as equal members, have the opportunity to participate in all kinds of social activities at will, equally enjoy political, economic and cultural benefits, and share responsibilities" (http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/index.html). It was generated by an ultra-conservative critique of "gender-free" education that spread fearmongering in regard to the supposed threat to masculinity and the family by initiatives to eliminate gender biases from compulsory education. Lobbyists campaigned against gender studies and had certain books removed from public libraries. Scaremongering was rife, and outlandish claims of excessiveness were lodged against programs providing education around sex and the body for intellectually disabled children. One of the key players in the backlash was the current prime minister, Abe Shinzo. Abe led the LDP's project team for "Investigating the Status of Radical Sex Education and Gender Free Education." In pre-2020 Games Japan, the backlash works in "insipid" ways, because "tolerance" mandates the contours of "acceptance" and simultaneously marks the queer as "beyond" what can be tolerated. It sits alongside transnational backlash discourses targeting LGBT rights and attacking academic freedom of gender and sexuality studies, and feminism.

Legacies, the Connections to Tomorrow

Hosts of the Olympics and Paralympics are mandated to produce legacies that extend beyond the closing ceremony. The Vision for the 2020 Games proclaims "(s)port has the power to change the world and our future. The Tokyo 1964 Games completely transformed Japan. The Tokyo 2020 Games will bring positive reform to the world." The rhetoric of "recovery and reconstruction" references the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami (2011) and ongoing Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. In the contemporary moment a rhetoric of "transformation" points towards soft-diplomacy rhetoric of *Cool Japan* and *omotenashi* (welcoming) which sits precariously alongside a revival in territorial claims in the region and troubled economic relations between nations in the region. "LGBT issues" are mobilized as central to this transformation. This tactic resonates with the cooption of lesbian and gay rights in the service of nationalism that have been critiqued by scholars in the USA in the context of post-911 politics (see Puar 2007).

The dovetailing of the global rhetoric of LGBT rights with the Olympic spirit of "diversity and inclusion" undoubtedly enables new articulations of local activism. There was a shift

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from activist groups, such as feminist collectives and gay men's rights groups in the 1970s and 1980s, to collectives for cultural organizing such as the Lesbian and Gay Parade and Queer Film Festival which coincided with a global "gay boom" in the 1990s. With the implementation of Japan's NGO laws, designated NGOs and/or NPOs have also transformed lobbying and collaborative work with businesses and (local) governments. As Chen notes in discussion of the Beijing Games, "whether or not a country is able to culturally seduce all the world, to balance its value distributions in the flow of information and to provide credible high-quality public goods is the criteria by which we evaluate the success" (Chen 2010, 814) of global sports mega-events. Communication, promotion, and branding is key. However, as Ahmed cautions, "(d)oing diversity work can mean passing "diversity" around, both *as* a word and in a document" (Ahmed 2012, 29). In other words, material outputs and ideological shifts are also paramount to achieving change. Concern is voiced by those working on the intersections of ableism, poverty, wealth imbalances and rights of non-Japanese residents that coopting "LGBT issues" to symbolize diversity and inclusion, potentially privileges specific configurations of "LGBT issues" that can be promoted and used as evidence of "tolerance."

The application of global norms to facilitate obligations in the staging of a global mega-event such as the Olympics and Paralympics brings LGBT issues to the forefront while reinstating a "traditional" interpretation of SOGI issues that can be coopted into the "traditional" family. The positioning of LGBT rights and issues as new and/or unique in the context of the 2020 Games enables them to be marketed as desirable commodities, but simultaneously renders invisible a history of activism at the local level. The introduction of ordinances recognizing same-sex partnerships in cities and regions through Japan, the formation of an anti-discrimination ordinance by the TMG, increased awareness of SOGI harassment, lobbying through the Rainbow Diet initiatives, the dissemination of "LGBT issues" in mainstream media all occur as Japan continues to slip further down in both press freedom and gender equality in the respective global rankings. The forthcoming 2020 Games, therefore, are a critical moment in the implementation of diversity and inclusion strategies targeting sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) related issues in Japan as it labels them as worthy of receiving attention. However, as theorists working in this area continue to note, the resultant "hypervisibility" of "LGBT issues" has led to an increasing "invisibility" of those who supposedly fail to fit LGBT narratives that pivot on specific forms of consumerism, internationalism and globalized diversity from which the "issues" purport to arise.

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Claire Maree (PhD) is Associate Professor and Reader at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne. Her current research explores the reproduction, negotiation and contestation of identities in language, and sexual citizenship. Claire's third monograph, *queerqueen: Linguistic Excess in Japanese Media* (2020, Oxford University Press) examines the editing and writing of queer excess into Japanese popular culture through mediatization of queerqueen styles. Claire is actively involved in Queer Studies and also contributes to the area of language education. Other major publications include '*Onē-kotoba*' *Ron* (Seidosha, 2013); *Hatsuwasha no gengo sotoratejī toshite no negoshiēshon kōi* (Hituzi Shobo, 2007). She is co-editor with Kaori Okano of *Discourse, Gender and Shifting Identities in Japan: The Longitudinal Study of Kobe Women's Ethnographic Interviews 1989-2019, Phase One*

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(Routledge, 2018).

cmaree@unimelb.edu.au

Notes

[1] The ordinance [in Japanese] is accessible from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's website: https://www.soumu.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/10jinken/tobira/pdf/regulations2.pdf
[2] The October edition of *Shinchō 45* magazine further debated the issue of whether Sugita's essay was "that ridiculous?" (*sonna okashii ka*); a sequence of events that eventually led to the demise of the magazine itself.

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