

Hypervisibility and Invisibility of Queer Lives and Politics in Neoliberal Japan

11th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 11), Leiden University, the Netherlands, 17 July 2019

Abstract

In 2013, Tokyo was elected as the host of the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The following year, the Russian Sochi Winter Olympics and Paralympics suffered from international criticisms and boycotts due to their anti-gay policies. This led to the International Olympic Committee adopting an anti-discrimination clause that includes sexual orientation, which in turn has resulted in LGBT issues suddenly becoming mainstream political and social topics in Japan. The LGBT market started to be seen as big and trending by private businesses. Showing concern for LGBT issues became part of corporate PR strategies to advertise a company's progressiveness and 'diversity'. Mainstream media started to air features about LGBT activists. From 2015 on, several municipalities started to issue certificates recognizing same-sex partnerships. However, rather than an improvement of actual LGBT rights, this 'hypervisibility' of LGBT rights issues and people has led to an increasing 'invisibility' of certain LGBT lives and rights, especially when they fail to fit these new LGBT narratives in the context of consumerism, internationalism, and globalized diversity.

This panel explores problems and possibilities of contemporary queer lives and politics in Japan in light of this hypervisibility and invisibility through an analysis of political discourses, as well as representations in television and social media, manga and contemporary literature.

Kazuoyoshi Kawasaki analyses contemporary political backlash discourses against LGBT rights in Japan, which were triggered by the new 'LGBT-boom' and the 'hypervisibility' of LGBT rights issues. He discusses how certain criticism against this backlash ironically redefined and confined the issue of LGBT rights within conservative political discourses.

Claire Maree examines how the hypervisibility of 'sexual minorities' in contemporary media obfuscates a long and diverse history of advocacy for same-sex partnership rights in Japan, and is recreating ignorance of a 'majority' towards a 'minority'.

Yuko Sasaki analyses two recent examples of autobiographical visual representations of female-female couples. She discusses what kind of gender and family norms they reproduce in the midst of seemingly positive changes with regards to LGBT rights in Japan, and what kind of lives remain invisible.

Stefan Wuerrer explores how Shōno Yoriko's most recent novel *Uramizumo dorei senkyō* (2018) opens up a discursive space in which the exclusionary and inclusionary mechanisms of sexual citizenship in present day Japan are critically renegotiated. He demonstrates how this discursive space can be read as a counterstrategy against the recent backlash against LGBT rights in Japan triggered by the new 'LGBT-boom'.

Discussant: Andrea Germer, Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf