Kazuyoshi Kawasaka

The progress of LGBT rights in Japan in the 2010s

The 2010s was a monumental decade for the progress of LGBT rights in Japan. LGBT rights and discrimination cases became political topics in the mainstream media, attracting public interest. Contrasting with the political climate of the 2000s, when it was rather exceptional for politicians and local governments to promote LGBT rights, 47 local ordinances had institutionalized same-sex partnership certificates and/or anti-discrimination laws that included sexual orientation and gender identity by March 2020 ("Pātonāshippu seido," 2020). In February 2020, Naruhito became the first Japanese emperor to mention LGBT people, advocating diversity and calling for tolerance toward social minorities in a press conference on his birthday (The Imperial Household Agency, 2020).

These political changes cannot simply be analyzed in terms of the historical discourses of Japanese sexual minorities' activism. In 2016, Shibuya Ward in Tokyo suddenly introduced a same-sex partnership certificate system for the first time in Japan. Before that, Japanese LGBT activists had rarely, if at all, argued for such a system, which is highly symbolic but, as I will discuss in this paper, offers nowhere near the same legal rights as heterosexual marriage (Enoki, 2019). In the 2000s, they had often discussed systems that offered legal rights to same-sex couples, such as the French civil solidarity pact (PACS; *pacte civil de solidarité*), which is very different from contemporary Japanese models such as Shibuya's (Akasugi et al., 2004). Thus, the notable gap in Japan between the activist political agenda of the 2000s and the institutionalization of LGBT rights in the 2010s indicates a discursive and political transformation. This paper will contextualize Japanese mainstream pro–LGBT rights discourses and representations – a new politicization of LGBT issues – within domestic and international political contexts and analyze how general Japanese attitudes toward LGBT issues changed in the 2010s.

Firstly, this paper discusses three factors that have particularly changed LGBT discourses and public attitudes in Japan in the 2010s, contributing to the mainstreaming of LGBT politics in society: the LGBT market; the use of LGBT rights in US diplomacy; and the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo. Secondly, it considers how Japanese local governments have become some of the main actors in the institutionalization of LGBT rights, even though they do not have the legal authority to change the marriage system. Thirdly, it analyzes popular representations of LGBT rights and visibility in Japan, focusing on whiteness, as Japan faces international, not domestic, political pressure to institutionalize LGBT rights

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and tolerance, which are represented as being originally from the West. The paper concludes with a discussion of how the institutionalization of LGBT rights is appearing through Japan's neoliberal, uneven governmentality, which maintains its male-dominant heteronormative conservatism while impressing upon the international community that Japan is seemingly becoming an LGBT-friendly place that promotes diversity.

1 Transnational contexts of LGBT rights in the 2010s

1.1 The concept of an LGBT market in Japan

In 2012, two business magazines issued a special edition about the "LGBT market" in the same week, estimating it to be worth 5.7 trillion yen (approximately US$50 billion) and describing it as an emerging market that is already influential in the US and Europe ("Kokunai shijō," 2012; "Nihon no LGBT," 2012). Subsequently, Dentsū (2015), a major Japanese advertising and public relations company, estimated the market to be worth 5.9 trillion yen and stated that 7.6 % of the Japanese population identified as LGBT. The latter figure was cited in a report on discrimination against LGBT people in Japan, which was published by a research committee of the upper house of the Diet (Nakanishi, 2017, p. 5). Japanese think tanks such as Keidanren (2017) and Mitsui UFJ Research (Hattori, 2017) have since published similar reports on the Japanese LGBT market and diversity.

In the US and Western Europe, the LGBT market was formed within gay communities, including advertisements in gay community magazines, consumer activism, and LGBT employees' efforts to visualize the market in marketing or advertisement companies (Branchik, 2002; Chasin, 2001; Sender, 2004). Although there are many critiques of the connection between neoliberal consumerism and LGBT activism, such as those using the term "new homonormativity" (Duggan, 2004), LGBT activism and visibility also reflect the history of the LGBT community, lifestyle, and political goals (Maks-Solomon & Drewry, 2021).

In the Japanese case, however, the concept of the LGBT market was largely introduced and emphasized by marketing companies and think tanks as a new emerging market and business model that had already influenced Anglophone societies and global corporations, without much interaction with the local LGBT communities and activism. LGBT economic activities in Japan have been historically closely associated with space – the so-called "gay towns" of Ni-chōme in Tokyo and Dōyama in Osaka, or bars in local towns (Baudinette, 2021; Fushimi, 2019; Su-

nagawa, 2015). However, marketing discourses disconnected LGBT economic activities from the existing limited space of gay towns with the concept of an "LGBT market," and recharacterized it as a "new" market in which "nobody has yet toughed it" ("Nihon no LGBT," 2012, p. 122): the hitherto-invisible market consists of tens of millions of people. Here, the LGBT market is recognized not by the visibility of LGBT customers but by their invisibility and mystification, which arouses a desire to find and understand them.

The LGBT market has also been associated with the concept of "diversity" (*daibāshitī*) (Keidanren, 2017). Shingae Akihiro (2021), a cultural anthropologist specializing in gender and sexuality, noted that the idea of diversity, including LGBT people, became mainstream around 2015 in Japan in line with the needs of corporate management and diversity marketing that were shaped by shifts in the domestic and international business environment (pp. 38–42). He pointed out that the Abe administration encouraged Japanese corporations to improve their diversity management for innovation and to address the domestic labor shortage caused by the declining population. Thus, Japanese corporations introduced "diversity" management and marketing not to improve equality and human rights issues but to manage and utilize demographic differences for economic benefits (Shingae, 2021, p. 42).

Corporate attention to Japanese LGBT markets has influenced LGBT activism, too. One of the most remarkable forms of activism sponsored by "LGBT-friendly" corporations is arguably Tokyo Rainbow Pride (TRP). Established in 2011, TRP is a new organization managing the pride parade in Tokyo. It split from Tokyo Pride Parade (TPP), which had organized pride parades for a decade, after a dispute over the event's management. In an interview in their first year, TRP organizers pointed out that one of TPP's problems was its financial structure (Ogiue, 2012). According to Ōtsuka Kensuke, one of the TRP organizers, TPP had been too dependent financially (e.g., for ads in gay bars) on the gay community in Nichōme, famous for one of the highest concentrations of gay bars in the world. However, because of Japan's long-running recession, such financial arrangements between TPP and the gay community have become difficult (Ogiue, 2012). TRP's budget was reportedly minimized through the recruitment of multinational members as its core workers, in order to acquire the know-how of overseas pride parades. As a result, from 2013 the visibility of gay bars in Tokyo has been downplayed, and multinational corporations, such as Alfa Romeo, Philips, Google, Audi, Volkswagen, Dentsū, and IBM have become its official sponsors ("Supporters," 2013, 2014).

In terms of a business marketing strategy, however, TRP is regarded as a model case of social activism that can be utilized for corporate branding (Yotsumoto & Senba, 2017, p. 110). Thus, the connection between Japanese LGBT activism and "LGBT-friendly" corporations also did not happen through long-term interactions

between the local LGBT community and domestic and international LGBT-friendly corporations. Rather, it was enabled by the efforts of marketing firms to turn LGBT people and their allies into their new potential consumers, while LGBT activists utilized such opportunistic exploitation for their own movements amid the shrinking number of traditional local queer businesses.

The emergence of the LGBT market in the 2010s is a model case of the marketization of marginalized groups for political and economic purposes, such as the "Womenomics" promoted by the second Abe administration.[1] While a similar marketization of the LGBT community and the introduction of the term "LGBT market" had been attempted by marketing strategists in the mid-2000s (Ilye, 2008; Kawaguchi, 2013), it was not as successful as in the 2010s when a different social context emerged around LGBT issues in Japan: the US pro-LGBT cultural diplomacy and the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo.

1.2 US diplomacy for LGBT rights and visibility by the Obama administration

Under the Obama administration, the promotion of LGBT rights became an official goal of US diplomacy (*National Security Strategy*, 2015, p. 20). In her groundbreaking speech "Gay Rights are Human Rights," the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2011) symbolically showed the administration's policy for international LGBT rights promotion. Subsequently, the US embassy in Japan started to promote LGBT-friendly messages through openly gay diplomats, Japanese celebrities, events for LGBT rights, and its presence in local LGBT activism such as TRP.[2] It is notable that the Obama administration is the first US government that internationally used LGBT rights as soft power ("Obama Uses Embassies," 2014).

There are two prominent characteristics of the Obama administration's narrative on LGBT rights. Firstly, it situated LGBT rights as universal values, not Western values specifically. For example, in her abovementioned speech, Clinton (2011) associated protecting LGBT rights with "a phrase that people in the United States invoke when urging others to support human rights: 'Be on the right side of history.'" As Cynthia Weber (2016), a queer theorist in international relations, has noted, by setting up a dichotomy between the "right" and "wrong" sides of history in relation to LGBT human rights, Clinton violently "divided the world into good gay-friendly

1 For an analysis of the commodification of feminist discourses under neoliberalism in Japan, see Kikuchi (2019).

2 On the openly gay US diplomat and his promotion of LGBT visibility and rights in Japan, see Linehan and Kanegusuke (2014).

states and bad homophobic states" (p. 135). Secondly, even though LGBT rights are supposedly universal, they are represented through US history and values. The *National Security Strategy* of 2015 includes LGBT rights as "American values" that the US promotes globally (p. 26).

The US embassy promoted LGBT rights as a part of the US historical context, not based on local Japanese activism and agendas. In April 2013, when John Roos, the first US ambassador to Japan under the Obama administration, finished his term and left office, he published an essay about LGBT rights as human rights in the Japanese national and liberal newspaper *Asahi shinbun.* He positioned his and Obama's efforts for LGBT equality in the international community as their legacy. He also presented the historical and cultural projection of international LGBT rights as if LGBT rights had originated from US social struggles and then spread to Japan and the world:

> In recent years, LGBT people have made great strides in the advancement of equality – yet hurdles remain. Let us remember the courage of those men and women at Seneca Falls, Selma, and Stonewall, and let us continue to make clear that the struggle for gay rights is part and parcel of the long-term fight for civil rights that has made better places of America, Japan, and the entire world. (Roos, 2013, p. 17)

His narrative presents civil rights and LGBT equality as universal but also, at the same time, as US values that have emerged through the nation's historical struggles. The US ambassador, who wanted to "enlighten" Japanese people about LGBT issues, paid little attention, if at all, to the historical struggles of sexual and other social minorities in Japan.

Caroline Kennedy, the daughter of the former president John F. Kennedy, was extremely popular as the second US ambassador appointed by Obama to Japan (2013–2017). She was more dedicated to promoting LGBT rights, having expressed support for same-sex marriage since 2008, earlier than President Obama had. She became the first US ambassador to participate in and give a speech at TRP in 2016 ("Activists March," 2016). In addition to Kennedy, who garnered celebrity-like attention from the Japanese media, the US embassy utilized actual celebrities to attract general attention to LGBT issues in Japan. It invited Kuroyanagi Tetsuko, a popular Japanese TV presenter, in 2013, and George Takei and Abe Akie, the Japanese first lady, in 2014, to its party for LGBT pride month. These activities of the US embassy in Tokyo certainly created LGBT visibility and opportunities for LGBT activists, such as giving a platform and support to openly LGBT politicians in Japan. At the same time, however, the Obama administration's pro-LGBT discourses disconnected it from the historical and social contexts of sexual minorities in Japan and contextualized them within US politics and discourses. In addition, celebrities who called for tolerance toward LGBT people contributed to relabeling LGBT issues as

something fashionable, rather than human rights issues reflected in the everyday struggles of minorities. Through the Obama administration's efforts for LGBT rights promotion, LGBT rights have gained US connotations and their promotion has been an "Americanization" of LGBT rights in Japan (Kawasaka, 2013).

The subsequent Trump administration was not LGBT-friendly, as evidenced by its rolling back of domestic LGBT rights protections started by Obama, moving toward a trans ban in the US military and supporting "religious liberty" against LGBT equality. In Japan, however, the US embassy still participated in TRP, despite a dramatic decline in the number of its LGBT-related events and messages. The then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo even declared LGBTI Pride Month on 1 June 2018. The Trump administration failed to create a new coherent international narrative on LGBT issues and instead dispassionately, perhaps lazily, merely repeated the narrative of the Obama administration.[3]

1.3 The 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics and LGBT visibility

The 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo also influenced general attitudes toward LGBT issues in Japan. In September 2013, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) elected Tokyo as the host of the Olympics in 2020. The 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi had suffered from international criticism and boycotts caused by Russia's anti-gay policy (see, e.g., Sykes et al., 2018; Wiedlack, 2017), and the IOC revised the Olympic Charter to include a ban on discrimination against sexual orientation in 2014. Observing an international affray caused by LGBT rights, Japanese officials recognized the need to promote LGBT rights for a successful Olympics (Maree, 2020b; Nikaidō, 2017). In 2016, the Tokyo Organising Committee (TOC) of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (2016, pp. 4–5) announced the Tokyo 2020 Games Vision and its three core values: "Achieving Personal Best," "Unity in Diversity," and "Connecting to Tomorrow." Connecting the concept of diversity with a positive future, the vision stated:

> Sport 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. (TOC, 2016, p. 1)

3 For changes in US foreign policy on LGBT rights under the Trump administration, see Carlson-Rainer (2019).

In preparing to host the 2020 Games, the Tokyo metropolitan government passed an anti-discrimination ordinance – the Ordinance for Respect of Human Rights Protected by the Olympics Charter in Tokyo (Tokyō-to Orinpikku Kenshō de Utawareru Jinken Sonchō no Jitsugen o Mezasu Jōrei) – focusing on anti-LGBT discrimination and banning hate speech against non-Japanese people in 2018. In this context, LGBT rights were considered an unavoidable international duty for Japan as the host country, even though the conservative Abe administration and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) were in favor of protecting "traditional" family values against feminist policies (see, e.g., Yamaguchi, 2014).

LGBT activists also regarded the Tokyo 2020 Games as a great opportunity to make LGBT rights mainstream in Japan. Human Rights Watch in Japan promoted the institutionalization of human rights progress, including LGBT rights for the 2020 Games. It held a campaign for an anti-discrimination law that included banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity at a national level. However, this human rights approach necessitated "considerable negotiation between pursuit of economic profits and respect for human rights" (Sykes et al., 2018, p. 99). A marketing approach for LGBT awareness was more successful in attracting media attention. Good Aging Yells, a Tokyo-based nonprofit LGBT advocacy organization, announced that it would open a Pride House Tokyo during the Games, which supported the TOC's diversity policies (Pride House, 2017).

However, LGBT activists' efforts to promote diversity and human rights exposed the hypocrisy and resistance of the Japanese elite. The first TOC president, Mori Yoshirō, a former prime minister infamous for gaffes that attract public attention, sparked turmoil by his sexist remark that: "If we increase the number of female board members, we have to make sure their speaking time is restricted somewhat; they have difficulty finishing, which is annoying" ("Tokyo Olympics Chief," 2021). Following Mori's resignation from the TOC and several other sexism scandals involving other TOC members, Hashimoto Seiko, the new TOC president, visited Pride House Tokyo for Tokyo's Pride Week in April 2021 to publicly emphasize the committee's commitment to diversity (Takenaka, 2021). The Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) also reformed the board to increase female membership, achieving its target of 40 % for gender equality. Despite its supposed commitment to diversity, the JOC elected Sugiyama Fumino, a trans man and one of the TPP directors, as a "female" board member, ignoring his gender identity and commitment to trans activism (Asatsuma, 2021). In this context, the TOC and JOC attempted to cover up the sexism scandals by exploiting LGBT activists as "diversity" branding while ignoring their identities and dignity.

In this way, the globalization of LGBT politics such as the marketization of diversity by multinational corporations, human rights diplomacy, and human rights issues in international sports events, prepared the ground for Japanese society to

address LGBT issues. At the same time, however, LGBT political issues are tied to economic benefits by the LGBT market or successful international events such as the Olympics. In the next section, I will discuss how LGBT issues in Japan have been translated into actual policies.

2 The political actualization of LGBT rights in Japan

Japanese local governments have become some of the main actors for the institutionalization of LGBT rights in Japan. After Tokyo was selected as the Olympic host city, Shibuya Ward, one of the city's major commercial and cultural centers, announced that it would be the first local municipality to issue certificates of same-sex partnership in 2014.[4] By March 2020, 47 local municipalities had introduced a similar system ("Pātonāshippu seido," 2020). Following Bunkyō Ward in Tokyo in 2013, approximately 10 local municipalities, Ibaraki Prefecture, and metropolitan Tokyo have passed or are moving toward legalizing an anti-discrimination ordinance, including discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

The ground for local LGBT rights movements was prepared in the early 2000s by the then Prime Minister Koizumi's neoliberal reforms, which aimed for state decentralization by privatization and reducing the size of the central government's bureaucracy. One of his main goals was to change relations between central and local governments: giving local governments more political autonomy while cutting funds from the central government (Ikawa, 2008). As a result, local governments have needed to govern in the same way as a private company for securing their own funds: making their own mascots to attract people, rebranding their local products, playing the role of a matchmaker (*konkatsu*) for young people to form families and produce babies to combat the problem of an aging society (Itō, 2015; Walter, 2014).

In this context, some local governments started to regard LGBT rights as an opportunity for their new branding. The introduction of the new term "LGBT" from English has contributed to the representation of LGBT issues as a new, "trending" phenomenon. Shibuya's same-sex partnership certificate system has become a model case that other local municipalities have followed. The system is purely symbolic and provides no legal protections – although some local governments have

4 For a background of the institutionalization of this system in Shibuya, see Esumuraruda and Kira (2015).

offered benefits with the certificate, such as the right to apply for public housing – because it is the national government that has the authority to reform the legal marriage system in Japan. Hasebe Ken, the mayor who promoted Shibuya's recognition of same-sex partnerships, openly admitted that the intention was to foster an international image of diversity and culture rather than to improve human rights protections (Esumuraruda & Kira, 2015, p. 23; Kawasaka, 2015, p. 91). Similarly, Iga City, the third municipality and the first outside Tokyo, announced a similar recognition of same-sex partnerships in 2016 as a symbolic international embrace of diversity because its prefecture, Mie, hosted the G7 summit that year. In this context, advancing LGBT rights has been regarded not as a human rights issue but a symbol of internationalism and diversity and a tool for promoting a town's image (Shimizu, 2017).

In such promotions, the term "LGBT" can often be confusing in Japanese. In the early 2010s, the term was introduced to the general public and suddenly became a buzzword (Fotache, 2019). *Kōjien*, one of the most popular Japanese dictionaries, included it for the first time in its seventh edition published in 2017. The media started using "LGBT" without understanding what it really meant. Even the *Kōjien* definition was initially inaccurate, as "people who have a different sexual orientation from the majority," which failed to include "transgender." As the term "LGBT" was confusing even for the dictionary's editors, its introduction as a buzzword promoted confusion and ignorance. As a loanword from English, "LGBT" has sometimes been utilized to refer to sexual minorities to avoid having to explain gender and sexuality issues. For instance, NHK, Japan's public broadcasting corporation, used the description "*seiteki shōsūsha, iwayuru 'LGBT'*" (sexual minorities, so called "LGBT") when referring to a gay man who died by suicide after being outed at Hitotsubashi University (NHK@shutoken, 2016). It avoided using the words *gei* (gay, or gay man) or *dōseiai* (homosexuality). In the Japanese context, the foreign loanword "LGBT" can therefore function to obfuscate gender and sexuality issues even in the news media.[5]

Such linguistic obfuscations of gender and sexuality issues enabled the majority party, the LDP, to discuss LGBT issues. As the social conservative party for "traditional" family values, the LDP has been critical about sexual minorities' issues and has been tied to anti-feminist nationalist movements since the 2000s (Yamaguchi, 2014). Nikaidō Yūki (2017), a journalist who has covered LGBT issues since the 2000s, reported that an MP stated in an internal LDP committee on LGBT issues that "in our view, [LGBT issues] are like observing the sun rising from the west"

5 For more details of this incident at Hitotsubashi University and the wider contexts of queer lives in Japanese higher education, see Shimizu (2016).

(p. 167). To draw party consensus on these issues, the LDP focused on people's ignorance and proposed a policy to promote a "proper" understanding of LGBT people among the general public.[6] Nikaidō (2017) pointed out that the LDP policy for promoting knowledge about LGBT issues was suggested as a political strategy to stop LGBT political movements from going "too far," such as the legalization of same-sex partnerships or marriage and the enactment of anti-discrimination laws at a national level because there are many opponents to LGBT rights within the party (p. 171).

In English, "LGBT" means lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/sexual, but as a foreign loanword in Japan it is utilized for a particular political message. "LGBT" politics is represented as a fashionable, international, new phenomenon, while obfuscating actual Japanese human rights and institutional problems that the government must reform. Thus, the introduction and failure of the translation of "LGBT" in Japan has functioned to build an information wall between the Japanese and English contexts: while it is utilized in Japanese contexts to avoid challenging gender and sexual norms, the word "LGBT" can function internationally to give the impression that Japanese society is making progress in LGBT rights.

The abovementioned compromises have failed to translate into actual policy. The Abe administration did not revise the school curriculum guidelines of the Ministry of Education to include LGBT issues in 2017. Thus, their discussions about promoting "proper" knowledge about LGBT people are indeed a political performance, pretending to support LGBT issues as the host country of the 2020 Games. In 2021, when the pandemic-delayed Games was approaching, the LDP did not even bother with this pretense. A bill of law on promoting LGBT understanding failed to be read in the Diet due to opposition from an ultraconservative group within the LDP, and it was scrapped just before the Games started in 2021. They opposed the bill for its wording – "discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity shall not be tolerated" – and the media reported that some MPs bluntly

6 The imagined Japanese "ignorance" on LGBT issues often functions against LGBT rights in Japan, justifying the exclusion of gender and sexuality. In June 2020, the Nagoya District Court (2020) rejected a request to recognize those in same-sex relationships that had lasted 20 years as being in de facto marriages (*jijitsukon*), rendering surviving partners ineligible for victim compensation claims. *Jijitsukon* is a legal status that is usually recognized if heterosexual couples share a household for more than three years. The court based its decision on the lack of so-called "social conventions" (*shakai tsūnen*) in Japan regarding same-sex relationships, which equate cohabitation with marital status (Nagoya District Court, 2020). Thus, the court relied on this supposed Japanese conservatism and ignorance to exclude a survivor whose same-sex partner was murdered from access to the victims' compensation system.

expressed homophobic views in the LDP internal meeting, such as "LGBT goes against the preservation of the species" (Doi & Kyle, 2021).

3 Cultural representations of LGBT rights

As LGBT rights refer to a new business opportunity, foreignness, internationalism, and diversity, they are often represented through a white male body. Tagame Gengorō is one of the most internationally famous and critically acclaimed Japanese gay erotic artists. His first manga for a general audience beyond gay media, *Otōto no otto* (*My Brother's Husband*, 2014–2017), was exceptionally successful compared to other LGBT-related manga. It received an Excellence Prize at the 19th Japan Media Arts Festival and was turned into a TV drama by NHK. *My Brother's Husband* is a story about a Canadian called Mike, who suddenly visits Yaichi, the twin brother of his deceased husband, in Japan. A single father with a daughter, Yaichi's ignorance and attitude toward gay couples is slowly changed as Mike stays in his house for a few weeks.

In this manga, Canadian (or Western) gay friendliness/knowledge and Japanese homophobia/ignorance are racially marked through the visible difference of Mike's white and Yaichi's Asian bodies. Unsurprisingly, in this story, only Japanese people are destined to learn new knowledge on sexuality issues from the Canadian gay man, while the opposite does not occur, although Mike sometimes enjoys the "unique" Japanese culture and customs such as food and tourism sites. The title of the first episode was "The Black Ships Arrive!" (*Kurofune ga yattekita!*). This refers to the historic arrival of the US Navy warships in Edo Bay (now Tokyo Bay) in 1853, which compelled Japan to change its centuries-old isolationism policy to open its ports to trade with the US and ended up overturning the early modern regime, triggering Japan's modernization. The ships are now used to symbolize the inevitable social changes triggered by Western political, economic, or cultural pressures, although resistance persists in Japanese society. In the history of sexual politics, a similar image of Black Ships was used for the AIDS crisis in the early 1990s, implying that it was a danger coming from the US (Shingae, 2013, p. 134). In the 2010s, however, the representation of LGBT issues in terms of Black Ships implies that LGBT tolerance and friendliness are Western phenomena and Japan is under international pressure to accept these new sexual norms.

Contrasting with Mike's embodiment of Canadian gay-friendly whiteness, the Japanese localness signifies a latent homophobia including the closeting of gay men. While Mike influences Japanese people, especially the children around him, to develop tolerance toward homosexuality, no openly gay or lesbian Asian adults appear in the story. In the scene when Mike is having dinner with Katoyan,

a closeted gay friend of his deceased husband Ryōji, Mike shows a lack of empathy toward him. Just after Katoyan explains why he is in the closet to Mike – "Unlike Ryoji I have no intention of coming out. I don't think there's any reason anyone needs to go out of their way to proclaim it" – Mike scorns him in his mind: "Though, you will go out of your way to hide it" (Tagame & Ishii, 2017, p. 132). As Yaichi represents the implicit homophobia among straight people in Japanese society in the early part of the story, Katoyan symbolizes the internalized homophobia among Japanese gay people against their own visibility in society. Being with Katoyan, Mike feels he is also forced back into the closet and thinks: "I understand how Katoyan feels. But to be eating with him and keeping it from Yaichi-san…. I came out of the closet to avoid creating more secrets inside secrets" (Tagame & Ishii, 2017, p. 134). Rather than trying to understand the local or personal situation surrounding the closeted gay Japanese man, Mike, a first-time visitor to Japan, easily believes that he understands Katoyan's feelings but cares more about himself being back in the closet for a few hours. Mike's lack of interest in the Japanese cultural and political contexts shows disregard for the relationship between the Japanese social and cultural structure and the intolerance toward certain sexualities. In this story, Mike is symbolized as the promotion of tolerance for gay people without concern for local contexts, where people either become tolerant by encountering sexual others with cultural authority or remain in the old order. Only Mike is immune to change, even when he encounters cultural others. Such enforcement of cultural changes indeed coincides with the metaphor of the Black Ships.

In this work, while whiteness embodies universal values that can permeate across cultural differences, Japanese people are presented as needing to change and overcome cultural differences. When some Japanese characters fail to do so, they are tied to their localness, representing sexual conservatism such as homophobia and being in the closet. Such representations are actually underlined by both Western-centric universalism and Japanese heterosexist nationalism. Although Tagame's work was clearly intended to tackle homophobia and Japanese ignorance against same-sex couples, it rather reproduces the comfortable Japanese nationalist and heterosexist fantasy by representing LGBT-related issues and knowledge with the white male body: the Japanese and the other are visually different; Japan is a racially homogeneous and stable heteronormative place, while LGBT issues and racial diversity are foreign issues. Racialized and Westernized representations of gay friendliness and sexual diversity ironically strengthen the tie between Japanese localness and heteronormativity, which is what anti-LGBT conservatives are eager to defend.

The representation of LGBT rights and visibility through white men also goes hand in hand with the Japanese marketization of LGBT rights. In 2015, the "Out in Japan" project – a series of exhibitions of 10,000 portraits of LGBT-identifying in-

dividuals over a period of five years until 2020 – was launched to "familiarize the Japanese public with the presence of sexual minorities and to share accurate information and knowledge of the LGBT community" ("Concept," 2015). Leslie Kee, arguably the most popular and famous openly gay fashion photographer in Japan, joined the project. In 2016, Kee posted a group photograph on his Facebook page for the Out in Japan exhibition on the theme "To Work," with the following comment in Japanese: "Elite salarymen [businessmen] in leading companies are gay and came out. This one group photograph creates Japan's future." The photograph features dark-suited young men in their late 20s to early 40s, mostly Japanese but with a few white men as well, with a big caption in English "The Gay Elite: Goldman Sachs, IBM, Google, Apple, Dentsu, Mitsui Sumitomo, photographed by LESLIE KEE." This suggests that gay men can be respectful business executives in major corporations, not always the *onē* (queeny) that people see daily on TV.[7] However, at the same time, it also premises the respectability of LGBT people tied to their occupation, class, and embodied straight masculine gender. The dark suits represent the men's assimilation to the existing male-dominated Japanese corporate hierarchy and culture; the photograph is not intended to challenge this culture as the new Japanese IT entrepreneurs did in the mid-2000s with their symbolic gesture of refusing to wear business suits to challenge the "old" Japanese business order and culture.[8] While the gay men in the photograph could easily pass as straight businessmen in Japan, their youthfulness and whiteness represent the new Japanese internationalism, which is different from the existing closed corporate culture. This gay representation therefore does not radically challenge the Japanese social order but adds a new "diversity" and internationalism to it.

Such representations are enabled by the Japanese buzzwords "LGBT" and "diversity" as well. "LGBT" and "diversity" do not necessarily include gender diversity, lesbians, and trans people, in Japanese contexts – as we can see from how the JOC only increased the number of its female board members after the sexism scandals in 2021 – but it can make an impression as an international diversity symbol, represented by mostly Japanese and some exceptional white men working in multinational conglomerates. This means that the term can contribute to the international and domestic image of Japanese society as moving toward Western liberal "diversity," which is becoming symbolically important in Japanese business, as Keidanren (2017), the Japan Business Federation, suggests. At the same time, it actually allows the continuation of Japan's male-dominant, business-centered society. Eve K. Sedgwick (2011) once characterized US gay movements based on identity as sep-

7 For popular representations of effeminate gay men on Japanese TV, see Maree (2020a).

8 For an analysis of this symbolic gesture of IT entrepreneurs in Japan, see Warren (2007).

aratist assimilationism claiming "the right of seamless social assimilation for a group of people *on the basis of* a separatist understanding of them as embodying a stable ontological difference" (p. 183). Separatist assimilationism underlines LGBT representations in Japan as well, that is, a separatist understanding of minority for "diversity" and an assimilationist stance toward the Japanese corporate culture and heteronormative family systems.

4 Conclusion

It is true that Japanese society has been moving toward increasing the visibility of LGBT people and institutionalizing LGBT rights in the 2010s, despite the limited effectiveness of these policies. However, the LGBT rights discourses and representations are also well reflected by Japanese neoliberal reforms.

Firstly, as LGBT issues have become a marketing tool, working for LGBT rights is not a legal or social duty but a marketing strategy for private corporations that can bring them profit. This economic framing of human rights issues permits them to avoid working for LGBT issues if they decide not to pursue the market. Thus, the buzzword "LGBT issues" as the international diversity symbol has been invented in Japanese society and presented as no serious challenge to Japanese conservatism and traditional family values.

Secondly, as local governments and private corporations have become the main actors in LGBT rights policy, LGBT issues are now an exception to other human rights issues that governments must universally respect. While the role and principle of the state protecting human rights have regressed, local governments instead appear to protect them partly for their own publicity. At the same time, as the legal effectiveness of local recognitions of same-sex partnerships are limited, private corporations have started to offer actual benefits for same-sex partners, such as redefining "family" for their employees and customers. As a result, LGBT rights are localized and tied with class and education: if you can afford to live in an LGBT-friendly local government area, or if you are lucky to be employed by an LGBT-friendly corporation and have enough knowledge about LGBT-friendly services and legal advice, you can partly protect and enjoy your own rights. This localization and privatization of human rights issues are undermining equality among citizens, and economic principles are being applied to issues of human rights and dignity. Moreover, ineffective and uneven governmentality is appearing in Japan.

These neoliberal LGBT issues contain serious contradictions: between new ideas and values of diversity and Japan's internal conservatism, and between economic and legal principles. Such superficial "LGBT friendliness," characterized by

Western- and economic-centered narratives, is also being pointed out by anti–LGBT rights critics, some of whom are openly LGBT-identifying conservatives. Matsuura Daigo, an openly gay ex-politician, said that LGBT rights are concepts from the West, where society has long been homophobic and has acted to legally, socially, and religiously repress LGBT people (Matsuura & Ozawa, 2018, pp. 232–234). Echoing the LGBT market discourse but using it in an anti–LGBT rights way, right-wing politicians in the LDP have started to insist that LGBT people are "unproductive" as they do not produce children, and therefore the government should not support them (Sugita, 2018, pp. 58–59). Unsurprisingly, such anti–LGBT rights discourses are products of the same discursive dynamism that enabled LGBT-friendly discourses in the 2010s.

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