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On the Emergence of Gay Conservatism in Japan

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Abstract

This paper discusses how contemporary political backlash discourses against LGBT rights have ironically influenced pro-LGBT rights discourses in Japan.

In 2018, political backlash discourses against LGBT rights, triggered by the new LGBT political visibility, have started to be visualised and have provoked public controversy in Japan. In May, right-wing media and twitter accounts targeted messages on placards by participants in Tokyo Pride Parade criticising Prime Minister Abe and Japan's Emperor System. They made demands to 'de-politicise' and disconnect LGBT issues from left wing politics and their political party. In July and September, Sugita Mio, a member of the Liberal Democratic Party and PM Abe's ally, published articles in an Opinion Magazines *Shincho*⁴⁵ insisting that LGBT people were reproductively fruitless, therefore the government should not spend any tax-payer's money on them. What was notable in this controversy is that her arguments have been criticised by 'conservative' politicians and opinion leaders, while criticisms and opinions from left wing politicians and intellectuals were underrepresented publicly in Japan.

On the other hand, 20 years ago, backlash movements against gender equality, supported by major politicians such as Abe Shinzo, now the Prime minister, rose in Japan. In these backlash discourses, anti-gay/transgender views were well utilised for their political campaigns and often LGBT activism were connected to leftist movements in the manner of conspiracy theory.

Through reviewing Japanese history of LGBT rights discourses and backlash discourses against gender equality in the last 20 years, this paper shows similarities between contemporary anti-LGBT rights discourses and anti-feminist discourses 20 years ago. It explores how the failure to counter the backlash against gender equality decades ago still defines LGBT rights

discourses. Then it shows how Japanese embracement of LGBT diversity confines LGBT rights politics within conservative political domains, assimilating Japanese normativity and traditional family values.