

## COMPLETION REPORT

### **LGBT activism, rights and visibility in global Japan: the case of Tokyo Rainbow Pride and Okinawa Pink Dot**

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Pride events, as political performances of a collective LGBT identity, have become a global phenomenon in the last few decades. In Japan today, around 8 large-scale pride events are being held annually. However, except for a handful of studies on the gay liberation movement in Japan in the 1970s, lesbian movements within women's liberation movement in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as records of the early Tokyo Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade, a comprehensive study of pride events in Japan is almost inexistent. This project hence examines the history and social significance of LGBT pride events in Japan, especially within the context of the regional rise of LGBT activism in Asia and a global turn towards LGBT rights and equality.

My preliminary research findings reveal that pride events can provide a lens through which to not only understand the LGBT social movement in Japan, but also the social, economic and political climate under which LGBT people in Japan are living. Although oppression of LGBT people in Japan from the police or religious groups is generally unheard of, sexual and gender non-conforming people do face various forms of prejudice and exclusion in their everyday lives. Pride events then, as a form of mass protest, offer an important platform for LGBT individuals and activists in Japan to challenge a society's heteronormative norms and values, and make claims to their sexual citizenship.

There are two main types of large-scale pride events in Japan—parades (e.g. Tokyo Rainbow Pride) and rallies (e.g. Pink Dot Okinawa). The annual Tokyo Rainbow Pride is by far the largest pride event in Japan. In 2019, 200,000 people from both Japan and overseas participated in the 2-day event, which comprised of a festival component that occupied the entire Yoyogi park, and a 3km parade around Harajuku and Shibuya. The parade, with its blasting music, elaborate floats and the sheer number of participants waving rainbow flags while marching on the busy roads of Harajuku/Shibuya, is an especially powerful way through which LGBT people unapologetically declare their presence, and collectively resist against the silencing that they face in their everyday lives. In contrast, the rally-style pride event Pink Dot Okinawa operates on a much smaller scale, featuring stage events and community and corporate booths at an outdoor open space in Naha. Unlike the more politically confrontational pride parades that are effectively a public performance of collective coming out, Pink Dot events put more emphasis on showing solidarity, promoting inclusivity and “supporting the freedom to love,” as the event's slogan goes.

Like many pride events around the world, the increased involvement of private corporations (in the form of corporate sponsorship) has brought about concerns about the events losing their radical edge as they become increasingly commercialized. However, it also cannot be denied that corporate sponsorship has contributed to the growth of the events, which in turn brought about increased media attention that helped to raise the awareness of LGBT issues in Japan.

Regardless of their format and scale, pride events are certainly gaining momentum in Japan, providing valuable insights into the state of LGBT politics in Japan. Yet, as the nature and impact of these various pride events are inevitably shaped by the social, cultural, political and economic conditions specific to each locality (for example, Tokyo vs. Okinawa), further research is needed (and already underway) to bring out the complexities of the “Japanese LGBT movement”.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

Yuen, Shu Min. “Global pride, local parades—LGBT advocacy in Japan in the age of global LGBT rights and equality”, paper accepted for presentation at the *23rd Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia*, University of Melbourne, Australia, July 6-7, 2020.

[Update] Yuen, Shu Min. “Pink Dot as Asian Pride? Pink Dot Okinawa and the LGBT movement in Japan.” Paper to be presented at the *Asian Studies Association of Australia Conference: Social Justice in Pandemic Times*, Monash University, Australia, July 5-8, 2022.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)

Other academic publications in progress, for the foundation’s reference only (please **DO NOT disclose this to the public** because the paper is in progress/under review, and journals require authors to not disclose such information before a paper is officially accepted):

-“Where global LGBT rights meet Asian illiberalism—Lessons from Tokyo Rainbow Pride and Okinawa Pink Dot.” (Journal article in progress)