

“Tada no nomikai desu”...ka?

Negotiations of transgender belonging in contemporary Japan

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Abstract

In the last twenty years, transgender people have acquired increased visibility in mainstream Japanese society following the introduction of the medical concept of Gender Identity Disorder and the decriminalization of sex reassignment surgery in 1996. From 2004, with the enactment of the “Exceptional Treatment Law for persons with Gender Identity Disorder”, transpeople who have completed sex reassignment surgeries were able to modify their gender in the family register, the instrument par excellence that defines Japanese citizenship. Notwithstanding that, understandings of Female-to-Male (FTM) transpeople continue to remain hazy among the Japanese public, and largely unaccounted for in both Japanese and English-language academia. In this presentation, I seek to account for one aspect of FTM cultural life, and explore how the production and consumption of this cultural life allows us to see the workings of FTM people’s negotiations with the state apparatuses and market forces. I draw on my fieldwork in what I call the “FTM scene”—a loose network of FTM individuals and organizations, institutions, events and gatherings, as well as FTM media and businesses—and demonstrate how the FTM scene not only plays an important role in fostering a sense of community among its participants, but also enables the negotiation of FTM people’s civic inclusion and autonomy. While consumption certainly lies at the center of scene activities, and indeed, the participants’ ability to participate is contingent on their spending power, I use the case of the drinking party—the most common form of collective activity in the scene—to urge us to think beyond the binary of consumption as necessarily depoliticizing, versus consumption as necessarily leading to minority sexual rights. In doing so, I hope to complicate the existing frameworks for conceptualizing queer consumption and sexual citizenship, which in turn can have implications for our understandings of the “LGBT/rainbow market” that is increasingly gaining attention in Japan today.

About Speaker

YUEN Shu Min is a senior tutor at the Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore. Her key research interest is in gender and sexuality in contemporary Japan, with a particular focus on popular representations and the lived experiences of gender/sexual non-conforming people. Her PhD dissertation, which was recently completed at the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, archives the cultural history of Female-to-Male transpeople in present-day Japan. Some of Shu Min’s recent publications include “Mediated masculinities—Negotiating the ‘normal’ in the Japanese Female-to-Male trans magazine *Laph*” in *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Media*, edited by Fabienne Darling-Wolf (forthcoming), and “When erotic meets cute: Erokawa and the public expression of female sexuality in contemporary Japan,” in *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 2, 1 (2016) [co-authored with Hiroshi Aoyagi].

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