

**CONSTRUCTING THE SEXUALITY CONVERGENCE MODEL:
EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS OF SEXUALITY, NATIONALISM, AND
GLOBALIZATION IN CHINA**

By

© **Jian Fu**

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Abstract

This thesis develops a Sexuality Convergence Model that is applicable across multiple levels of analysis (simultaneously incorporating micro, meso, and macro dynamics) to investigate the intricate intersections of sexuality with nationalism and globalization (SNG). Employing various data sources including interviews, observations, document analysis, and analysis of newspaper articles and social media, this study establishes three components for navigating SNG: the state and public discourse, social movements, and individual navigation.

Within the state and public discourse, this thesis investigates how the Chinese state employs nationalism to counter transnational pressure for LGBT rights. I argue that two mechanisms, authenticity and securitization, play significant roles in this process. Additionally, two distinct forms of nationalism coexist within the Chinese public discourse arena: macho nationalism and homonationalism. While these forms of nationalism fundamentally differ in their perception of traditional and authentic Chinese sexuality, they share a common belief that foreign (particularly American) LGBT support interferes with Chinese domestic affairs and disrupts Chinese society.

In examining individuals' navigation of SNG, this thesis presents and explores how ideal types within the Chinese LGBT community (including Pink Gays, LGBT Liberals, and LGBT Avoidant Group) navigate their relationships with Chinese nationalism and globalization. Specifically, Pink Gays adopt a pro-regime and "positive energy" approach, while LGBT Liberals take a critical stance against state-sponsored nationalism and detach themselves from this nationalism. On the other hand, the LGBT Avoidant Group adopts an avoidant, or pragmatic approach as they navigate the pressures and pulls of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization. Each ideal type that I present rationalizes their navigation strategies with their own internal logic.

In examining social movements, this thesis delves into the strategies employed by Chinese local LGBT activists in the context of surging nationalism. Despite the significant constraints imposed by Chinese nationalism on local LGBT activism, Chinese local LGBT activists exhibit creativity by utilizing indirect resistance strategies, such as employing Filial Nationalism, to advance their own LGBT advocacy through government official discourse. Moreover, China's deep integration into the global economic system, relying on foreign talents and multinational corporations' contributions to its economy, creates a paradoxical situation that grants privileges to foreigners and multinational corporations while nationalism rises. However, this situation also provides political opportunities for local LGBT activists to seek protection and support from foreign individuals, companies, embassies, and UN human rights mechanisms in their domestic LGBT advocacy efforts.

By constructing the Sexuality Convergence Model, this thesis makes valuable contributions to the broader understanding of intersectionality, diversity and heterogeneity among individuals within seemingly homogeneous contexts, internal heterogeneity within nationalism, dynamic state-society relations in authoritarian regimes, the issue of marginality, and the globalization of sexuality.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

A number of important works within the field of sexuality scholarship have been dedicated to the study of two distinct themes: the globalization of sexuality (e.g., Altman 1996, 2002, 2004; Stychin 2004; Binnie 2007) and sexual nationalism (e.g., Puar 2007; Mosse 1996; Jaunait et al. 2013). Nevertheless, the integration of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization within a unified research framework remains a relatively infrequent endeavor. Accordingly, this thesis aims to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework that elucidates the multifaceted and multi-level intersectionality of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization. As such, the central research question guiding this thesis is an exploration of how LGBT identity intersects with larger institutions and forces, including state-sponsored nationalism and globalization, operating at different levels and contexts. In order to elucidate this guiding research question, I explore three sub-questions using China as a case study:

(1) How does Chinese nationalism impact the influence of foreign support for the LGBT community?

(2) How do members of the LGBT community navigate their LGBT identity intersected with nationalism and globalism in China?

(3) How do LGBT activists interact with Chinese nationalism and global forces in their local LGBT activism in China?

I contend that despite China's extensive engagement in and economic gains from globalization, Chinese nationalism is a significant factor in LGBT activism and identity politics in contemporary authoritarian China. Being LGBT in China involves negotiating multiple identities while managing the pursuit of cultural, economic, and political life. I argue that

Chinese national identity, patriotism/nationalism discourse, LGBT identity and foreign support for LGBT human rights mean different things to different individuals within the Chinese LGBT community. Therefore, LGBT people use various negotiating strategies to reconcile their multiple identities within nationalism and globalism frameworks, which include obedience, embracing, remaining avoidant about, fleeing, making use of, and resisting the effects of nationalism and globalism. In summary, this thesis sheds light on the complexities of the marginalized LGBT community and its intricate intersections with Chinese nationalism and globalization.

I begin this chapter by explaining how these research questions originated from my observations of Chinese nationalism, the Chinese LGBT community, and the “798 Advocacy,” a seldom-seen street advocacy for the LGBT community in China. In the rest of this chapter, I provide background information for a better understanding of the social and political context that impacts the Chinese LGBT community, followed by an outline of the thesis structure.

1.1 Research Motivations

My research is primarily motivated by three factors. First, it originates from my personal experiences of undergoing patriotic education in China throughout my life, which have prompted me to engage in critical reflections on Chinese nationalism. Second, as a member of the LGBT community, I have actively observed and participated in this social group. Third, during my observations of the 798 Advocacy, I encountered instances of intersectionality between sexuality and Chinese nationalism, which sparked my interest in conducting research that investigates the interconnections of sexuality and nationalism within a unified framework.

1.1.1 Motivation One: Personal Experiences of Patriotic Education in China

I have been highly interested in issues related to Chinese nationalism because I was surrounded by patriotism as a child and throughout my upbringing. I remember watching anti-Japanese movies with my family as a kid in the 1990s at the rural village council where I grew up. Additionally, patriotism was an essential course from elementary school through university. The anti-Japan protests in 2012 over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands prompted me to reflect deeply on Chinese patriotism. During this protest, angry Chinese nationalists deliberately vandalized many Japan-related stores and Japanese cars. One of the most contentious cases was the “U-Lock” incident. Li Jianli, who was driving a Japanese car, was smashed through the skull with a U-shaped lock by a “patriotic youth” named Cai Yang (Jiang 2022). Cai Yang was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment, while Li Jianli was left disabled for the rest of his life. This incident made me reflect on how a Chinese person could become so violent and hurt another Chinese person in the name of patriotism. Nowadays, due to the Chinese government’s strict restrictions on any sort of protest, including those initiated in the name of nationalism, patriotism has evolved into many new forms, such as patriotic cancellation campaigns on the internet and abroad. Abroad patriotism peaked in 2018, with a series of incidents of Chinese citizens causing major disturbances at foreign airports as the following reports showed: “Stranded Chinese tourists clashed with Japanese police at Tokyo’s Narita Airport: they started singing the Chinese national anthem” (Wong 2018) and “angry Chinese tourists stage another noisy ‘patriotic’ protest after fog forces cruise ship to stay in port: passengers seen jostling crew members while singing the national anthem after the voyage was scuppered due to safety concerns” (Zhou 2018). In cyberspace, patriotists launched a series of cancellation campaigns against foreign companies and brands, attacking them for insulting China (Ru Hua 辱华). The most famous case was the

event of “Dolce and Gabbana insulting China” in 2018. The luxurious brand was accused of racism and stereotyping China because they created an advertisement where the Chinese model ate pizza with chopsticks (Xu 2018). As a result, many celebrities distanced themselves from Dolce and Gabbana to show their patriotism and stand with the Chinese people because of the pressure of patriotism. Patriotism has become almost a form of ‘political correctness’ in China, and patriotic discourses have flooded the Internet with messages such as “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China, when you encounter danger in a foreign land, do not give up! Please remember, at your back stands a strong motherland” (People’s Daily 2017) and “anyone who offends China will be killed no matter how far the target is” (BBC 2017).

1.1.2 Motivation Two: Observations from the Chinese LGBT Community

The Chinese LGBT community is another subject of my observation. The visibility of the LGBT community has been increasing in recent years. The 2018 “I Am Homosexual” campaign was one of the biggest boosts to LGBT visibility in China in recent years. This campaign was initiated in opposition to Weibo’s¹ censorship of homosexuality. On April 13 at 8:25 am, Weibo Official posted a regulation to “clean up”² illegal comics, games, and short video content based on the Cybersecurity Law³ and other regulations’ requirements (@Weibo Official 2018).

¹ Weibo operates similarly to X (the former Twitter) and is one of the most popular social media platforms in China. It has played a significant role in shaping online discourse and trends in the country.

² The phrase “clean up” is widely used by the Chinese government for social management campaigns. It means the government censors, bans, deletes, erases, prohibits, and punishes content that it does not encourage or allow in order to restore social order based on its expectations. In this case, cleaning up homosexual content means that Weibo would cooperate with the government to remove gay posts and accounts to restore the low visibility of homosexuality in society.

³ The Cybersecurity Law of the People’s Republic of China was enacted on November 7, 2016. It requires network providers to store specific data within China and permits the Chinese government to perform spot checks on a company’s network activities. The law includes vague terminology and lacks official guidance. Homosexuality is not mentioned in this law. However, the government can initiate campaigns to ban, remove, and punish specific objects when it wants to censor cyberspace. Weibo’s cleanup action was in line with the “Qing Lang Operation(清朗)”, a campaign aiming to clean up the cyberspace environment since November 25, 2016. Due to the vague penalty objectives of the Qing Lang Campaign, many Internet corporations are forced to self-censor themselves and

Homosexual content was one of the main targets of this operation, which drew immediate opposition from the Chinese LGBT community. Zhudingzhen (@竹顶针), a key opinion leader in the Chinese LGBT community with 500,000 followers, called for an online campaign with his posts at around 9:00 pm on April 13: “Let’s use the hashtag #I Am Homosexual# together.” In a very short period, the “I Am Homosexual” movement received massive reaction within and outside the LGBT community. Many netizens posted their selfies with the text “#I Am Homosexual#” and a series of rainbow emojis to speak out against Weibo’s homophobic regulations. The hashtag received over 600 million views within 72 hours (Vista 2018). The campaign succeeded in forcing Weibo to compromise and in forcing the state media, People’s Daily, to come out in support of gender and sexual minorities with its comments: “different fireworks can bloom just as well” and “homosexuality or bisexuality is normal and never a disease; we should put down your prejudices and tolerate others” (People’s Daily 2018a). The movement was successful, with Weibo Official retreating from its regulations to censor homosexual content on April 16.

1.1.3 Motivation Three: Observations from 798 Advocacy

The “I Am Homosexual” movement has significantly raised the LGBT community’s visibility in China, but it has also brought LGBT issues to the forefront of nationalists’ concerns. In the “I Am Homosexual” movement, the nationalist assault on the LGBT community was not highlighted because the widespread criticism at Weibo’s censorship of homosexuality overshadowed it. However, a month after the “I Am Homosexual” movement, the 798 Advocacy

rely on speculative information about what the government disapproves of. So, some Internet service providers, like Bilibili and Weibo, established their own rules to restrict homosexual content—even when the government doesn’t explicitly require it.

brought nationalist attacks on the LGBT population to light. This relates to several differences between 798 Advocacy and the “I Am Homosexual” movement. First, rather than being an online advocacy, 798 Advocacy was a street campaign, and its organisers hoped to increase awareness of LGBT issues by handing out rainbow badges in Beijing’s 798 Art District. Second, the conflict between participants and 798 District security staff made “798 Advocacy” a hot topic. It did not, however, gain as much support as the “I Am Homosexual” movement. Third, “798 Advocacy” took place around International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia, and at the same time, some foreign embassies in China, such as the US Embassy, the Netherlands Embassy, and the European Union Embassy, had LGBT-themed events. These are some of the reasons why nationalists targeted 798 Advocacy. After reviewing some nationalist attacks, I noticed three puzzles:

(1) Foreign support, which one might expect to be perceived as supporting Chinese LGBT human rights, conversely came to be seen as hostile foreign forces by some LGBT and non-LGBT individuals. This leads to an ironic situation where some LGBT people reject foreign aid and even stigmatise it as being foreign anti-China forces, despite the reality that foreign aid is intended to defend their equal rights as LGBT people.

(2) Some LGBT people’s attitudes regarding LGBT activism are self-contradictory. LGBT movements and other allied equal rights social movements (e.g., women’s movements) have been seen as important forces to empower gender and sexual minorities. However, LGBT activism in China has been stigmatised by some nationalist groups hosting conspiracy theories, even among the Chinese LGBT community itself. This raises the important question of why certain marginalised LGBT people in China denounce LGBT activism, how they navigate their

marginalised LGBT identity intersected with Chinese national identity, and why some LGBT individuals accuse LGBT activism of being an accomplice of hostile anti-China forces.

(3) It is puzzling that some LGBT people strongly praise China's domestic environment for gender and sexual minorities despite the well-known fact that the Chinese government has intensified its censorship and restricted freedom of speech in the past decade (Denyer 2017). For example, the China Television Drama Production Industry Association (CTPIA) recently published new guidelines prohibiting the portrayal of LGBT relationships on television (Lee and Zhou 2016); several popular gay web drama series were banned from being broadcast online (Lin and Chen 2016); the police threatened and detained some LGBT activists (Blanchard 2017); and Mango TV, one of the most popular TV channels, blacked out rainbow flags when they were televising the Eurovision Song Contest 2018 (Kuo 2018). In addition, same-sex partnerships are not protected (Jeffreys and Wang 2018); Chinese LGBT persons frequently face discrimination in a variety of spheres of their everyday lives, including in the family, media, healthcare, religious settings, educational institutions, social services, and the workplace (Wang et al. 2020); and conversion therapy that attempts to forcibly change sexual orientations and gender identity is still in practice (Parkin 2018). Given these social truths, it is obvious that claiming China as an LGBT-friendly country is inconsistent and contradictory. So, how do some LGBT people interpret the Chinese government's restrictions as well as the societal environment, which is comparatively conservative and homophobic? Why do some LGBT individuals still highly praise these unfriendly policies and social environments, which are repressing and marginalising the LGBT community?

These observations of 798 Advocacy and its related paradoxes drove me to explore how gender and sexuality intersect with nationalism and globalism in China. What roles do the

government, the Chinese LGBT community, Chinese nationalists, and international LGBT support play in this intersection? What logic enables this intersection to function? How do LGBT activists mobilise locally at this intersection?

1.1.4 Details about 798 Advocacy

For a better understanding of how the 798 Event inspired my research questions, I present it below from the multiple viewpoints of the organiser, participants, 798 District security guards, two beaten females, the Chinese LGBT community, and Chinese internet nationalists. The 798 Advocacy⁴ was an LGBT awareness-raising event on May 13, 2018 organized by Piaoquanjun (his Weibo name is @票圈君), a gay fourth-year journalism student. Before this advocacy was held, Piaoquanjun had become known as an LGBT opinion leader with his writings during the “I Am Homosexual” movement, which criticized the pervasive discrimination against gender and sexual minorities occurring in Chinese society. One of his most widely read articles, “Hello Jerk Sina Weibo, I’m Gay”, got 1.1 million reads within 12 hours. When the “I Am Homosexual” movement was successful in forcing Weibo to withdraw its censorship of gay content, this gave Piaoquanjun more courage to organise a street advocacy (Piaoquanjun 2019). In addition, there had been a rainbow badge distribution event in Shanghai People’s Park on April 21, 2018, where the organizers, Shu-Zai (@没有龙葵素的薯仔), distributed 5,000 rainbow badges in Shanghai People’s Park (Piaoquanjun 2019). Later, Piaoquanjun asked Shu-Zai for his organisational experience and found a factory to make 5,000 customised rainbow badges (Chen 2018).

⁴ 798 Art District, also known as 798 Art Park or 798 Art Zone, is a cluster of former state-run military factories established in the 1950s. During China’s transition from a planned economy to a market economy in the 1990s, it was difficult for the 798 factories to be competitive, and some factory buildings were left vacant. Therefore, 798 rented out these buildings to artists and art institutions at a low price. Since the 2000s, an art colony has gradually formed in the 798 District.

Piaoquanjun chose the 798 Art District as venue because it was known for its tolerance and openness and was the main venue for Beijing Queer Film Festival (Koetse 2018). The date of May 13th was chosen to correspond with the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (Liu and Yin 2018).

On May 9, 2018, Piaoquanjun posted on Weibo (see Figure 1.1) for mobilization: “This Sunday, I have 5000 rainbow badges in Beijing to give to you for free. #517 No Silence# Time: 4:00 pm, May13 [2018]. Location: Creativity Square of Beijing 798 Art District. Contents: Give a hug to me, get a rainbow badge, and then stay or leave.” He issued another invitation via a Weibo post the day before it began (see Figure 1.2): “Tomorrow at 4pm, I’ll wait for you at the 798 Art District.”



Figure 1.1 (Left) Piaoquanjun’s Weibo post on May 10, 2018



Figure 1.2 (Right) Piaoquanjun’s Weibo post on May 12, 2018

On the day of the event (May 13, 2018), Piaoquanjun arrived in the 798 Art District Creative Square two hours early (at around 2:00 pm) with 5,000 rainbow badges. At the venue Piaoquanjun saw that there were two participants waiting for badges, one of whom even

travelled from Tangshan City; but he was disappointed when the security guard approached and stated that he was not allowed to give out badges within the District (Chen 2018). In order to avoid having the security guards in charge, Piaoquanjun moved the activity to a place outside of the north gate and then updated this adjustment on his Weibo account. More and more people arrived at the location at around 3:00 pm, and they all lined up to receive a free hug and a rainbow badge from Piaoquanjun (see Figure 1.3, Figure 1.4, and Figure 1.5). A participant stated seeing close to 1,000 people at the activity's climax, and Piaoquanjun said that the number of people waiting in line to receive the rainbow badge exceeded his expectations, and he handed out more than 3,000 badges between 3 pm and 4 pm (Chen 2018).



Figure 1.3 (Left) The Lineup at the Venue

Figure 1.4 (Middle) A Participant Hugging Piaoquanjun at the Advocacy

Figure 1.5 (Right) A Participant Displaying the Received Rainbow Badge

The event proceeded smoothly until 4:00 pm, at which point unforeseen circumstances arose. Piaoquanjun was informed by a few attendees that police cars had arrived and that policemen were looking on. To avoid the activity being labelled as an illegal gathering and to

shield organiser Piaoquanjun from potential troubles (such as the possibility of being questioned by the police or even being arrested), some participants suggested that Piaoquanjun end the event as soon as possible. Following this advice, Piaoquanjun decided to cancel the hug session and asked the participants to help finish distributing the badges as soon as possible (Chen 2018). Following that, Piaoquanjun reminded everyone in a Weibo post: “Security guards and police vehicles are on the scene due to the massive crowd gathered. Please disperse as quickly as you can to guarantee everyone’s safety. Badges are almost given out. I apologise for not giving many of you hugs. #517 No silence #.”

The attendees advised Piaoquanjun to leave the area, which he did. However, this does not imply that Piaoquanjun put the people there in danger. The organiser and participants developed a relationship of cooperation, support, and protection. The organiser was courageous enough to organise the advocacy, and the participants were also courageous enough to defend the organiser. According to the participants: “We all felt the thrill of the event and the warmth and enthusiasm we provided to each other” (Lu 2018), and “We are all grateful to Piaoquanjun for the fantastic experience he created” (Joke King 2018). PFLAG-Beijing gathered a small group, including gay volunteers and mothers of LGBT children, to show their support. Mama Pan, a 72-year-old volunteer of PFLAG, stood in line for hugs alongside the participants (see Figure 1.6) and encouraged other participants to be brave and be their true selves (Lu 2018). After the police car arrived on the scene, the crowd quickly dispersed following Piaoquanjun’s call for disbanding. “Because everyone knew deep down that planning such an activity was difficult, the request to disperse was heeded by the attendees to show their support to the organiser,” Ales (2018a) said. On-site participants also actively changed themselves into volunteers and offered

Piaoquanjun assistance in keeping the line organised. An on-site volunteer describes his experience:

It surprised me that there were so many people here for such a small badge: an American guy stated he wanted to write an LGBT article; a guy purchased some water for us volunteers and said we were so damn cool; a guy brought a small rainbow flag; and two girls bought watermelons and shared them with everyone. As soon as Piaoquanjun paused the hugging session, a few of us volunteers and other participants helped to finish distributing them as soon as possible. Additionally, I warned those waiting in line not to enter the District wearing rainbow badges because the security guards could take badges away. After saying that, I felt incredibly guilty and sad because, ten years after coming out to my parents, I can't believe I told everyone to hide their badge and don't let the security staff see them (JokeKing 2018).



Figure 1.6 Mom Pan and Piaoquanjun at the Rainbow Badge Distribution Site

Some of the participants wanted to go inside the 798 District after they received the rainbow badges; however, the security guards were very aggressive in preventing them from entering the District. According to a witness, security personnel prevented individuals from bringing rainbows into the park, regardless of whether badges were worn or carried in bags, and they actually requested that badges be discarded: “The security guards stared at us like we were thieves, and the guard’s words were, ‘If you wear them in, your arms and legs will be broken’”

(Ales 2018a). A netizen, Xiaozhugan (@一根小竹竿儿), described the rude treatment by the security guards:

“Take out your small badges (rainbow badges),” the security guards said as they grabbed my wrist when I entered the park. They had a horrible expression on their faces. The badge dropped to the ground as soon as I loosened my hand. They probably would have beat me if I hadn’t done so. I was grateful that the boys standing next to me offered me another badge. I was still feeling scared. (@Xiaozhugan (一根小竹竿儿), May 13, 2018)

And the 798 District explained their view on why they asked the participants to remove their rainbow badges: “The District has a right to stop illegal activity. Wearing a rainbow badge is illegal to me. And they, the homosexuals, have distorted sexual orientation. It is terrifying that God created humans as they are” (Lin and Yin 2018).

The physical altercation came into focus when two lesbian women wearing rainbow badges were pushed to the ground by security guards (see Figure 1.7, Figure 1.8 and Figure 1.9).

Ales (2018a), a witness at the scene, stated:

There were numerous security guards surrounding the two girls. The long-haired girl was shoved to the ground, and the other female received a punch. I attempted to assist the girl on the ground, then the security guards came around again. This time, the guards were being pushed back by a couple of guys, but one guard continued to kick the girl on the ground. I was just behind the girl and was sure that she was badly hurt. More people came in to stop the security guards’ violence, which have made the guards realise that the situation could be out of control and thus curtailed their violence.

However, the 798 District staff blamed the women for starting the incident, saying the woman “gave a middle finger to one of the security guards” (Lin and Yin 2018). Soon, the police intervened and dispersed the crowds. Later, the police took the two women to the police station to take records and sent them to the hospital for injury identification. One of the injured women had sutures in her mouth, and the other had bruises on her face (Lin and Yin 2018). Piaoquanjun contacted them at around 5:00 pm after he learned of the conflict. The two women said that in order not to involve Piaoquanjun in the conflicts and cause more troubles, they wanted him not

to go to the police station. In this way, the conflict was only between them and the security guards.

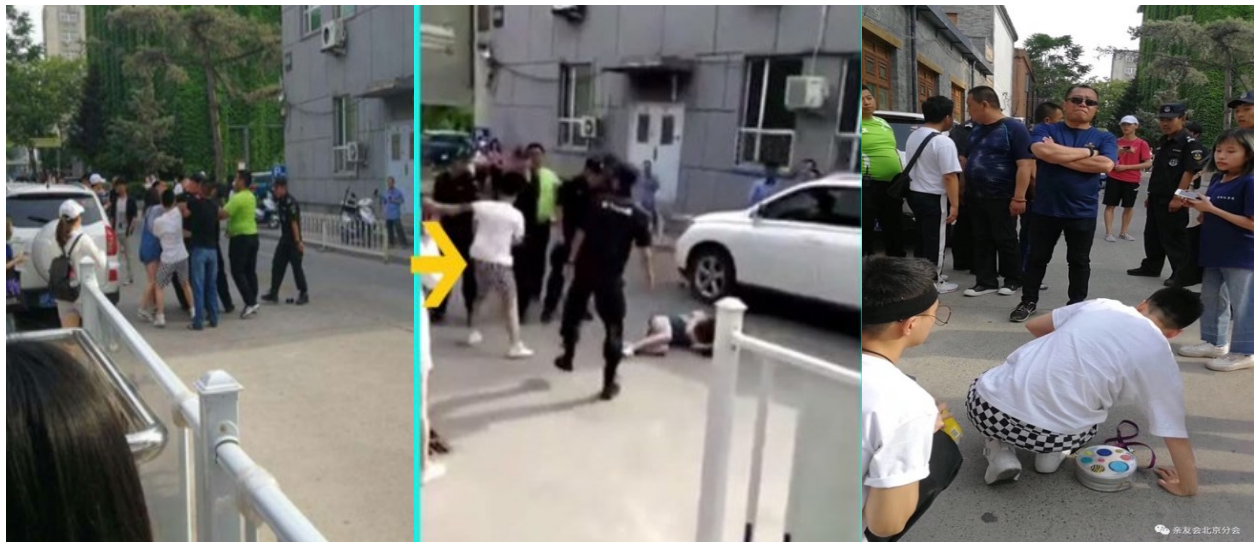


Figure 1.7 (Left) Physical Confrontation between Security Guards and Two Lesbians

Figure 1.8 (Middle) One Woman Pushed to the Ground by Security Guards

Figure 1.9 (Right) The Other Lesbian Woman Pushed to the Ground by Security Guards

The next day (May 14th), one of the women explained the final result of the conflict. According to Ales (2018b), although the security guards roughly beat them, they fought back during the beating, that is, her girlfriend also attacked the security to protect her. The police told them that this meant the conflict could only be classified as mutual assault⁵ considering both parties were at fault, so both parties would be punished. The police therefore advised them not to charge the security guards with legal responsibility but to opt for a private settlement. In this way, the police could help them get the security guards to make apologies and cover their medical expenses. Although the women hoped to have a formal apology from the 798 District,

⁵ According to Chinese Public Security Regulations, as long as the person being beaten fights back during the conflict, it is defined as mutual assault.

this goal was not so easy to achieve. In the end, they chose to compromise with the officials from the District, and the two guards were expelled, which was acceptable to them (Ales 2018b).

In cyberspace, what stirred the Chinese LGBT community was the ten-second video footage of the physical altercation, several security guards turning violent and knocking down two lesbian women wearing rainbow badges. This led to the creation of the hashtag “#798 Beating#” on Weibo, which had more than 250,000 views on that day (Koetse 2018). In addition, 14 LGBT organizations⁶ issued a joint statement titled “Rejecting Violence Against the Rainbow: A Letter of Condemnation from LGBT Organizations on the 798 Incident.” Besides denouncing the violence and discrimination against the LGBT community, the LGBT-friendly narratives did not dominate the Weibo space like the “I Am Homosexual” movement. Instead, the “#798 Advocacy#” and the “#798 Beating#” became controversial topics on the Internet, and many others condemned the 798 Advocacy as illegal and argued that the organiser should have applied for a public gathering permit from the Public Security Bureau, since the crowd gathering could create traffic congestion. Furthermore, some made conspiratorial claims, saying that the 798 Advocacy was linked to foreign forces seeking to interfere with China’s internal affairs and cause social upheaval. A typical expression of this viewpoint came from CaoShiFu (@曹师傅依好):

Setting the [798] incident aside, we should know the new Secretary of the US [Michael Richard Pompeo] and his new policies on the US-China relationship. You should know that the US is trying to use certain issues to initiate young people’s street gatherings. So, no matter whether the issue is related to LGBT, what matters is that they [the US] want to

⁶ They are Guangzhou Gender Education Center (广州性别教育中心), LGBT Equality Rights Promotion Association (LGBT 权促会), TP Factory (TP 工厂), F Feminist Group (F 女权小组), Shanghai Women Love(上海女爱), Guangzhou University Rainbow Group (广州高校彩虹小组), LOVE&VOICE(乐窝公益), Romantic Turn-back (浪漫转身同志公益), kuaer.org (跨儿中心), Zhitong Guangzhou LGBT Center (智同中国), Gay Voice (同志之声), BiVoice, Hangzhou Queer Forum (杭州酷儿论坛), China Youth Sexuality and Gender Network (中国青年性与性别网络).

create a division between the Chinese government and our young people. Therefore, the young people will hate and distrust our government, infuriating the government in return. (@CaoShifu, May 13, 2018)

He speculated that the United States aimed to stir internal resistance against the Chinese government. The material he used to justify this conspiracy theory was a poster from the US Embassy in Beijing celebrating the IDAHOTB, titled “2018 IDAHOTB: Alliances for Solidarity”. His followers supported the conspiracy speculation with comments such as:

I heard that it [the 798 Incident] was organised by the US Embassy. (@ziwo zhuozhuo (自我濯濯), May 13, 2018)

It seemed that 789-incident indeed had relations with the US, as we can see from the US Embassy’s similar advertisement. So, we should be alerted and not utilised by the US. (@Dalanghua (大浪花呀), May 13, 2018)

The imperialist forces have been seeking to destroy us, and now they instigate homosexuals to make trouble for China. (@Baozupo(包租婆), May13, 2018)

The persons involved in the 798 Incident deserved to be beaten, and they cannot be sympathised with. You shouldn’t use your sexual minority’s identity to brainwash the public or justify your illegal gatherings. Western White leftists have been hyping the concept of equal rights in order to gain public sympathy and thus gain votes. But in China, I’m telling you that it doesn’t work. (@Cance_Fire (Can_火包包包), May 14, 2018)

Surprisingly, conspiracy theories that linked the 798 Advocacy and foreign intervention surfaced in both non-LGBT and LGBT communities. Some LGBT individuals also publicly denounced the 798 Advocacy. For example, a gay Weibo blogger named Bieguanzhuwo (@拜托别来关注我) expressed similar opinions to CaoShiFu. Ironically, he contended that the LGBT-unfriendly Chinese government is not the one to be blamed but rather the one to be embraced and praised. His first point of contention is as follows:

…… I came out as gay ten years ago, and I think China has an excellent domestic environment for us. ……Marches and rallies for LGBT people don’t help us much. As a gay person, the best way for you to protect your rights is to climb to the top rank of society, become social elites, and then loudly announce your LGBT identity. However, it

is not a good strategy to scream about LGBT rights online, which will harm acceptance from both the government and the public. (@Bie Guanzhu Wo, May 13, 2018)

He followed up with an additional post to justify his arguments and respond to some netizens who criticized him for denouncing LGBT equal rights advocacy and his conspiracy arguments. In the second post, he speculated that the US as well as the Taiwan Separatist Forces were behind this 798 Event, and the Chinese LGBT community should stay vigilant about the possibility of these hostile foreign forces and their interfering with Chinese internal affairs. He wrote:

I know what LGBT equal rights are, and I know what protest is. However, I think this kind of public opinion orientation to attack the government is very unusual. You should know that there are many pro-US forces and pro-Taiwan independence forces in China. So, I guess that the mosaic covering the rainbow flag by Mango TV a few months ago and the conflicts caused by 798 Event are both deliberate attempts by these forces to incite the LGBT community. There are many cases of Taiwan's separatist forces stabbing China in the back, so we should not fall into their trap. If we fall into their designed trap and are instigated by them to rebel against the government, thus bringing social unrest, we ordinary people are the direct victims. Those with high education and income are not supposed to be affected because they can flee China when there is unrest. However, we ordinary people are not capable of fleeing China and escaping from the disaster in times of turmoil.

Moreover, although there are some problems with the rule of the Communist Party, if there is a different ruling party, it may not necessarily be better than the Chinese Communist Party in power, and we, the ordinary people, may not have a better life. Furthermore, if the Chinese Communist Party is really as bad as you say, how can China become the second largest economy in the world, and how do we have a chance to compete with the United States for the position of the world's top power? We should think about the reasons for the collapse of the former Soviet Union, so we must not follow in its footsteps. So, those who criticize the government on the internet should wake up and refuse to be used by foreign forces. (@Bie Guanzhu Wo, May 14, 2018)

In summary, my research motivation stems from a prolonged period of critical reflection on Chinese nationalism, as well as observations made within the Chinese LGBT community, both of which intersected during the 798 Advocacy. Analyzing the contradictions arising from my observations during the 798 Advocacy sparked a strong interest in researching how sexuality intersects with nationalism.

1.2 Research Context

To gain a better understanding of how sexuality intersects with Chinese nationalism in the context of China, the following section will provide background information on gender and sexual minorities in China, China's globalization, and Chinese nationalism.

1.2.1 Domestic Environment for Gender and Sexual Minorities in China

Scholars such as Hinsch (1990) argue that homosexuality and homoeroticism existed in ancient China in a relatively tolerant environment. This can be seen in many homosexual love stories from the Shang Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty. For example, “The Leftover Peach (余桃)” describes a homosexual story between Duke Ling Wei (卫灵公) and Mi Zixia (弥子瑕) in the Zhou Dynasty; “The Passion of the Cut Sleeve (断袖之癖)” tells the story of Emperor Ai (汉哀帝) and his homosexual lover Dong Xian (董贤); and in the Liu Song Dynasty era, homosexuality was as common as heterosexuality (Hinsch 1990). Indeed, policies firmly opposing homosexuality did not emerge in China until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Hinsch 1990; Kang 2009). Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, policies on gender and sexuality have experienced several changes. Homosexuality has vacillated between legal and illegal statuses. For example, homosexuality has not been defined as illegal since 1949, and the Supreme Court ruled that same-gender sex was not criminal in 1957 (Hildebrandt 2011). However, for the following four decades, Article 106 of the Chinese Criminal Code still allowed the local police to arrest homosexual men on the charge of “hooliganism” (Ruan 1992). It was not until 1997 that “hooliganism” was removed from the Criminal Code, a change that has been taken as the official legalization of homosexuality in China (Hildebrandt 2011). Finally, in 2001,

homosexuality as a kind of pathological disease was deleted by the Chinese Society of Psychiatry. Since then, GSMs (especially lesbians and gay men) have advocated for their normalization and equal rights more openly.

Even though the government has decriminalized homosexuality in contemporary China, the government holds an ambiguous and conservative attitude toward GSMs, an attitude that is referred to as the “three-no policy (no approval, no disapproval, and no promotion)” (Zhang 2014). State policies never define LGBT people as illegal, but neither do they support or justify appeals for anti-discrimination and equal rights. For example, the state newspaper, People’s Daily, commented in 2018 that “it should be common sense that homosexuality is not a disease.” However, efforts to promote LGBT people’s equal rights have mostly been denied by the government. For instance, Li Yinhe’s proposal to legalize same-sex marriage at the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the National People’s Congress (NPC) failed to move forward in 2006 (Hildebrandt 2011). Electric shock as a method to “cure” homosexuality (conversion therapy) is still tacitly accepted in China, and sexual orientation reversal treatment is still available in up to 136 medical institutions nationwide (William Yang 2019). The most notorious example is Yang Yongxin and Room-13 of the Internet Addiction Treatment Center of Linyi Fourth People’s Hospital, where Yang used “electric shocks, restrictions on personal freedom, personal worship, and brainwashing” to treat internet addicts, early pregnancies, homosexuals, drug addicts, and other so-called behaviour problems (Senior Brother Qingnan 2021). According to the LGBT Experience in Health Service Report (2018) published by the Beijing LGBT Center and its collaborators, 6.3% of the surveyed LGBT individuals indicated that their counselors or medical practitioners had either recommended, attempted to persuade them to undergo, or provided corrective therapy aimed at

altering their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The findings from a survey specifically targeting transgender individuals, as reported by the Beijing LGBT Center and its collaborators in 2017, revealed an alarming rate of 11.9% having experienced coerced conversion therapy, which is twice the corresponding figure for other sexual minority groups (4.6%). Nevertheless, the credentials of these medical institutions and practitioners have not been revoked; on the contrary, they continue to function as usual. For instance, Yang Yongxin maintains his position as the vice president of Linyi Fourth People's Hospital (Senior Brother Qingnan2021).

Traditional culture and public attitudes toward LGBT people have mirrored this combination of policies and practices. That is, they have fluctuated between tolerance and intolerance. Confucianism, which has been adopted as China's traditional culture, has been perceived as conservative due to the hierarchical authority underlined by its morality and ethics, such as "Three Fundamental Bonds (三纲)⁷" (Chan and Young 2012) and "Three Obediences and Four Virtues (三从四德)⁸" (Gao 2003). Different aspects of Confucian values, including filial piety, traditional gender roles (gender stereotypes), family intactness/integrity, obedience to authority, and conservative sex-related values, are closely related to negative attitudes towards homosexuals (Adamczyk and Cheng 2015; Adamczyk 2017; Lin et al. 2016; Whyke 2022). The ways in which homosexuality conflicts with traditional expectations of the conventional family lead to negative public attitudes toward homosexuality (Lin et al. 2016; Hu and Wang 2013). For example, the primary function of marriage and family in Confucianism is reproduction.

⁷ "Three Fundamental Bonds" refer to the obligations attached to three key relationships, including between the king and his subjects, father and son, and husband and wife.

⁸ Three Obediences and Four Virtues were developed to discipline women. The Three Obediences require women to obey the father before marriage, obey the husband after marriage, and obey the first son after the death of husband. The Four Virtues are (sexual) morality, proper speech, modest manners, and diligent work.

However, gay and lesbian people may not have descendants, violating parental expectations of clan continuity (Xie and Peng 2018). While many scholars note the negative relationships between Confucian culture and gender and sexual minorities, Yeh and Bedford (2003) argue that some reciprocal and humanist dimensions still exist in Confucianism, which supports the tolerance of GSMs in some ways. For instance, children are expected to obey their parents, but their parents are also expected to be benevolent (仁) to their children. According to some statistics, public acceptance of homosexuality has improved, even though many people still believe same-sex sexual behaviour is always wrong (Xie and Peng 2018; Cao, Wang, and Gao 2010; Zhang et al. 1999). This helps explain why public attitudes towards homosexuality are elastic in China. Overall, compared with other countries, in terms of legal and public acceptance, the social environment for GSMs in China falls somewhere in the “middle.” Sexual minorities are legal in China, which is better than in many countries such as Uganda and many East Asian countries where homosexual behaviour is still classified as a crime. Yet, China lags behind many Western countries, such as the Netherlands, Canada, and the UK, where anti-discrimination policies and equal rights have been enshrined in law.

1.2.2 Transnational Power (Global Civil Society) in China

In the era of globalization, many factors, such as economic development and advances in information technology, facilitate the flow of transnational power across the world (Castells 2008, 2010). This promotes the formation of a new transnational public sphere that includes global civil society, global communication networks, and global governance (Castells 2008; Scholte 2002; Keane 2003; Lipschutz 1996). Through these mechanisms, transnational power significantly influences local politics, economics, and cultures (Held et al. 2000). China has

never been isolated from the world system, especially since 1978 when it adopted the Open Door Policy⁹. Many types of transnational power intertwine with Chinese society economically, politically, and culturally, as can be seen from the increasing presence of INGOs and their projects since the mid-1990s (Morton 2005; Xie 2011). These international forces have influenced Chinese society greatly. For example, Xie (2011) argues that INGOs have assisted Chinese voluntary groups in their financial and organizational capacity building, which has boosted Chinese domestic civil society. The INGOs' activism has empowered the community with new sources and ideas and paved the way for local Chinese people to join the official policy-making arena.

Similarly, transnational actors¹⁰ significantly impact gender and sexual minorities in China at various levels (Kong 2011; Hildebrandt 2012). Foreign government aid agencies, intergovernmental programs, and private foundations have provided necessary funding to local LGBT organizations (Hildebrandt 2012). According to a report from UNDP and USAID (2014), international HIV/AIDS and MSM-related funding began to enter China in the early 2000s, which promoted the visibility of gay people in the public sphere across the country. Local NGOs such as Danlan not only received HIV/AIDS donations but also had opportunities to showcase LGBT people's lives and culture on the world stage at the International AIDS Conference. Transnational forces also promote foreign social values in China, such as those surrounding the human rights of LGBT people. The principles of the Declaration of Montreal and the Yogyakarta

⁹ The term Open Door or Open Up policy in the context of China pertains to a sequence of economic and political reforms that were instigated during the latter part of the 1970s and the early 1980s, under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping. This policy signified a substantial deviation from the preceding, comparatively closed and centralized economic framework. Its principal objective was the assimilation of China into the global economic sphere and the facilitation of industrial modernization.

¹⁰ These foreign actors include foreign governments and their agencies (e.g., the US Embassy, the Netherlands Embassy, the Canadian Embassy, and the USAID), intergovernmental organisations (e.g., UNDP and UNHRC), international non-government organizations (e.g., IDHOA committee, Chinese LALA Alliance, ILGA, and GLISA) and so forth.

Principles have been widely disseminated and quoted in the Chinese LGBT community regarding Western-based human rights discourses. Any international event related to LGBT human rights can therefore invoke intense discussion in China, and China's international stance toward sexual minorities, whether it supports, opposes, or abstains, has been the subject of intense domestic debate. Any progress in LGBT rights improvement achieved in other societies invokes and inspires the confidence of the Chinese LGBT community. For example, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia and Pride Parades worldwide in May and June each year provide the Chinese LGBT community opportunities to call for local action on LGBT issues. Foreign actors such as the US Embassy, the Canadian Embassy, and the UN in China usually offer support to the Chinese LGBT community, and local LGBT activists use IDAHOTB and transnational LGBT support as resources to educate the public about sexuality (Hou 2014).

While transnational forces have contributed to increased visibility for the Chinese LGBT community and the dissemination of LGBT human rights values, their influence has been greatly limited by obstacles imposed by the Chinese government. First, the Chinese government has been imposing censorship and restrictions on foreign aid. This censorship reached its peak with the implementation of the 2017 Overseas NGO Law¹¹, which makes all foreign aid subject to government scrutiny before it enters China. As a result, a significant amount of previously unrestricted resources and assistance have been halted or interrupted. As Hildebrandt (2012) observes, the only licenced opportunity for LGBT foreign aid to enter China is funding for HIV/AIDS prevention through government agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which distributes HIV/AIDS funding to community-based organizations. Many other

¹¹ The full name is The Law of the People's Republic of China on Administration of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations in the Mainland of China (2017)

LGBT organizations are highly dependent upon the goodwill of the state for allowing them to exist in the first place (Hildebrandt 2012). This has led to a weak linkage between local NGOs and transnational support. Second, the Chinese government has always kept an eye on the spread of Western values and has taken them as a potential threat to Chinese social control and governance. For example, China has set up internet firewalls (the Great Fire Wall) to interfere with, block, and shield content that the government deems inconsistent with official requirements (Ensafi et al. 2015). This results in many internet resources, including Facebook, Google, X (the former Twitter), Instagram, the New York Times, and many other foreign websites, being unable to serve Chinese netizens. Global LGBT information cannot be received directly by domestic people in China, so they need to go over the internet wall through Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to get relevant information. In addition, when state media provides LGBT information, the information is often distorted and twisted deliberately. For example, when Taiwan legalized same-sex marriage in 2019, state media, People's Daily, posted that "local lawmakers in Taiwan of China, have legalized same-sex marriage in a first for Asia," which has been seen as taking credit for the achievement made by Taiwan. Additionally, the Chinese state has applied a Stability Maintenance System (维稳)¹² to eliminate and suppress elements that could harm social order (Yang 2017). Therefore, although Chinese GSMs are not criminals, the Chinese government still filters global LGBT influences through a range of measures to maintain 'social stability.' These restrictions and obstacles imposed by the Chinese state on foreign LGBT support not only significantly limit the connections between China's domestic LGBT movement and the international LGBT movement but also create a relatively closed information

¹² This Stability Maintenance System is constituted of hybrid and complex apparatuses such as "cultivating grass-roots state agencies and mass organizations, controlling media outlets and allowing various extralegal policing practices" (Dali Yang 2017).

environment conducive to the breeding of Chinese nationalism. This interplay between globalization and the Chinese state deepens the complexities of the intersections between sexuality, Chinese nationalism, and globalization.

1.2.3 Rising Nationalism in China

While the definition of nationalism is controversial in social and political theory, many scholars agree that the key feature of nationalism is the imagined belonging to a political community (Anderson 1983; Chin 2021). As Giddens defines, nationalism is “a set of symbols and beliefs providing the sense of being part of a single political community” (2009: 989). Thus, individuals feel a sense of pride and belonging in being British, American, Canadian, Russian, etc. Nationalism creates national identity and psychological attachments; it fosters strong emotions that can unite all the members of the country, and it also distinguishes compatriots from foreign Others (Spencer and Wollman 2002). This means that nationalism also creates boundaries and borders because the sense of nationhood is based on the existence of Others (Pilkington 2002). Through the imagination of images, stories, norms, and symbols from national perspectives, people understand “their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (Taylor 2002: 106).

National passions and national identities can be formed in different ways. Lucian W. Pye (1993) finds that some countries may unite by inspiring national pride and some by focusing on shared oppression. That is, some nations turn to charismatic appeals and themes of heroic glory, while some others have sought to detail their real and imagined humiliations by Others. In addition to humiliation and glory as two important sources of nationalist imagination, other

factors, such as anxiety about national public health (Alter 1997) and security (Tank 2002), can also evoke national emotions. Once nationalism is formed, it, in turn, shapes public concerns and collectively coordinated actions (Chin 2021).

Indeed, glory and humiliation play an important role in forming and developing Chinese nationalism (Liu 2019). Humiliation as an important mechanism for the construction of Chinese nationalism has deep roots in China's semi-colonial history at the end of the Qing dynasty and the beginning of the Republican era, when China experienced foreign invasions (Tang and Darr 2012). The term Sick Man of East Asia, as argued by Askew (2009), transformed into a phrase encapsulating China's national identity and bolster Chinese nationalism over a significant period of the twentieth century. Consequently, shedding this label has constituted a longstanding objective for China, aimed at acquiring international recognition and status. "Sick Man" as a metaphor for a declining nation first originated in Emperor Nicholas I's description of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-19th century (Karaian and Sonnad 2016). "Sick man of Europe" was used to describe France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Germany after World War I (Scott 2008). In 1895, Yan Fu (严复), a Chinese military officer, translator, and intellectual, began using "Sick Man" to describe defeated China in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) in an article titled "On the Origin of Strength (原强)." Later, Yan Fu (1896) introduced Western ideas, Social Darwinism (the ideas of "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest"), to China to inspire the Chinese people to build a strong country and get rid of the title "Sick Man of East Asia." After that, the term "Sick Man of East Asia" became popular and was used by many awakened intellectuals of that period to criticize the corrupt Qing Dynasty government and the turmoil of Chinese society. Getting rid of the "Sick Man of East Asia" and building a strong country has become one of the cornerstones of Chinese nationalism, which has inspired powerful

mobilizations and collective actions to defend against foreign aggression and build a new nation (Tang and Darr 2012). Humiliation has been built into Chinese people's memories (Cong 2009), and the label "Sick Man of East Asia" continued even after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. For example, Chairman Mao announced to the world on October 1, 1949, that the Chinese people had stood up after many foreign invasions since the middle of the nineteenth century (Tang and Dar 2012; Cheek 2002). In 1987, Chairman Deng Xiaoping addressed that "since the Opium War, China became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, and we Chinese became the notorious 'Sick Man of East Asia'" (Deng 1987), and Wu notes: "We were 'Sick Man of East Asia' in the past, but we will be a strong man of East Asia in the future" (Wu 2008). Furthermore, until the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Chinese officials still used the symbol of "Sick Man of East Asia" in their propaganda, where they argued that the Beijing Olympics was a landmark moment in history when the Chinese proved to the world that they had completely removed the label of "Sick Man of East Asia." For example, Liu Peng, the Director General of Sports, argued that 60 years after the founding of New China, China had changed from "Sick Man of East Asia" to a major sports power (Liu 2008).

In contrast, glorification is another mechanism that fuels Chinese nationalism. It is common practice to glorify the nation by tracing a glorified Chinese past in order to assert the superiority of China over other countries. A prime example of this glorification is found in Chinese textbooks. Jonathan Doughty (2009), in his study of Chinese textbooks, finds that some texts emphasize the innovations of Chinese antiquity¹³ while devaluing the contemporaneous backwardness of Europe. China was far ahead of the West in terms of technology and culture in history; thus, Chinese people are encouraged to be proud of their nation. Around 2018, the

¹³ The Four Great Chinese Inventions, including paper, printing, magnetic compass and gunpowder, are the most cited examples.

Chinese official media coined the phrase “New Four Inventions” and claimed that China invented high-speed rail, mobile payment, e-commerce, and bike-sharing, which inspired a new wave of nationalistic glory (XinhuaNet 2017a). That is, in the 21st century, China’s tremendous economic development, which has made China the second largest economy in the world and a greater voice in the international community, has become one of the sources of the new Chinese pride (Hussaini 2020). However, glorification, as a strategy to increase symbolic power in bolstering Chinese nationalism, also brings about hostility toward Others (He 2007; Oksenberg 1986). The public’s excessive anti-Japanese sentiment in China is a typical example. China has made Japan a central target of attack while over-glorifying the heroism of the Chinese Communist Party in its war against Japan. But the public was too preoccupied with China’s suffering to recognize the subtle difference between Japanese militarists and ordinary Japanese, which led to a general sentiment of rejection toward Japan (He 2007).

Humiliation and glorification both contribute to the construction of a sense of national unity; thus, these two mechanisms of nationalism can drive collective concerns and collective actions (Chin 2021). For example, nationalism played an important role in China’s anti-colonization movements, such as the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861–1895), the Wuxu Reform (1898), the Xinhai Revolution (1911-1912), and the May Fourth Movement (1919). In contemporary China, nationalism is also used to promote government projects. For example, Building a Moderately Prosperous Society (建设小康社会, proposed by Deng Xiaoping), the Great Renaissance of the Chinese Nation (中华民族的伟大复兴, a concept developed by Hu Jintao), and the Chinese Dream (中国梦, proposed by Xi Jinping) have employed nationalism for the Chinese state’s ends. These political projects and mobilizations call on the entire

population to work for China's development and construction with "assertiveness, determination, strong bodies, fearlessness, perseverance, and, above all, virility" (Tenzin 2013: 37).

Concerning gender and sexual minorities, even though the social acceptance of homosexuality has increased in China (Lin et al. 2016), at the same time, LGBT representation has disappeared or been marginalized in the state narratives. This can be seen in the previously referenced "three-no Policies" (Zhang 2014). On the one hand, homosexuality was decriminalized and non-pathologized when the national penal code was revised in 1997, and as noted, China's Psychiatric Association removed the term homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 2001. China has also permitted citizens to change their legal gender following sex reassignment surgery since 2002. However, the authorities are tightening their grip in China, and national homophobia is reviving. In 2016, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) published "General Rules for Television Series Content Production," which banned television dramas from depicting "abnormal sexual relationships and behaviours," including same-sex relationships (Sohu 2016). One year later, on July 30, 2017, China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA) released new censorship regulations related to online broadcasting, which conflates homosexuality with sexual abuse and sexual violence and defines it as an "abnormal sexual relationship." These regulations also ban stories about, images of, and references to homosexuality in online broadcasting (XinhuaNet 2017b).

With the increased visibility of LGBT individuals in Chinese popular media, public attitudes towards the LGBT community have also become a subject of contention. It can be seen from events, especially in the rulings of legalizing same-sex marriage in the US in 2015 and Taiwan in 2019, the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHTB), and gay galas such as the Pride Parade around the world. All these events incited

fierce debates between the LGBT community and conservative groups in China. Chinese anti-gay community online has reinforced and legitimized discourses of homophobia through nationalist discourses. Xuekun Liu (2021), for example, discovers that by constructing the legalization of same-sex marriage against public opinion, Chinese homophobia has attempted to frame homosexuality as Westernization and Taiwan Independence attempting to split from China. This framing justifies their homophobic attacks as legal and representing the interests of the Chinese people. These nationalist discourses are strategically and consistently utilized on a range of LGBT issues to justify homophobia.

The more ironic thing is that in such a homophobic social environment, a wave of “homonationalism” has arisen in China within the BL/Danmei/Dangai (耽美/耽改)¹⁴ subculture, which has rapidly gained its popularity in China among young, urban heterosexual women and sexual minorities. Shana Ye (2022) argues that BL/Danmei/Dangai is a special and ironic phenomenon of the commercialization of queerness in China. BL/Danmei/Dangai subcultures and related TV/drama series include homoerotic content that risks censorship in Mainland China. In order to gain profits from the “she” economy (young women’s markets who love the BL subculture) and meet the authoritarian state’s requirements of building heteronormative social harmony, producers of BL/Danmei/Dangai series alter the original novels. Ye (2022) summarizes their strategy as “queer opacity”: producers acknowledge that the characters in the BL/Danmei series have homo-romantic roots, while the characters maintain non-homosexuality on screen. That is, on the outside, the Danmei series depicts a friendship between two men so

¹⁴ BL/Danmei/Dangai (耽美/耽改) is a subculture among urban young women who love romantic and erotic stories between beautiful young men (Wong 2020: 501). This subculture in China is influenced by the Japanese *tanbi*—the worship of and obsession with beauty. Danmei is primarily produced by and for young, urban, heterosexual women and some sexual minorities, and it comes in a variety of formats such as online fiction, manga, anime, games, audio/TV drama, and cosplay (Ling Yang 2017).

that the series can outfox the state and societal constraints on non-normative gender and sexuality, but in fandom, Danmei fans know that it is the plot that depicts gay couples. The BL/Danmei/Dangai fans also coined the term “socialist brotherhood” (Ye 2022: 3) to refer to the same-sex relationships in BL/Danmei/Dangai TV series. Ye (2022) argues that the actors of the BL/Danmei/Dangai TV series wear multiple faces: on the one hand, they sell their homoerotic cuteness; on the other hand, they play a public role model of Chinese nationalist righteousness. In this way, BL/Danmei/Dangai series in China succeeded in bypassing government censorship and acknowledging queerness in commercialized queer products and cultures, despite the fact that rights for gender and sexual minorities in China remain largely unacknowledged (Ye 2022).

In conclusion, rising nationalism has been intertwined with gender and sexuality. There exists macho nationalism that features heteronormativity, masculinity, militancy, and revolutionary narratives. In a social environment unfavourable to the LGBT community, there also exists homonationalism among BL/Danmei/Dangai subculture. As Ye (2022) argues, Chinese national cultural branding, elitist queer longing, venture capitalism, and the re-inscription of patriarchal gender and sexuality norms intersect and construct gender, sexuality, and nationalism in contemporary China.

1.2.4 GSMs Stuck between National and Transnational Influences

Studies on sexuality have highlighted its variety. Gagnon argues that “there are many ways to become, to be, to act, to feel sexual” (1977: Preface). In contemporary China, the realm of sexuality has been influenced by the development of the economy, the influx of Western culture and values, and transnational identity politics. For example, gay people in Guangdong

Province and Hong Kong identify themselves as “Membra.”¹⁵ Some homosexual people call themselves “Tongzhi (同志),” which expresses the meaning of “comrade” and has been widely used in LGBT activism and young people usually prefer the term “Gay” to represent their identity because it sounds more fashionable (Kong 2011).

National and global forces and dialogues converge and contradict one another (Song 2010), complicating the issue of gender and sexual minorities in China. Different groups within the LGBT community in China are divided and conflicted in their approach to nationalism and globalism. This conflict is reflected in the mutual labelling and attacks online. For example, Pink Gays (粉红 gays), Colonialism Gays (殖 gays), Nation-hating Gays (恨国 gays), and Silent gays (沉默 gays or 岁月静好 gays) are names/categories widely found in cyberspace. In the context of authoritarian China, and especially in Chinese cyberspace, there are some unique labels and titles associated with these patriotists and nationalists, such as “Pink Gays (粉红基),” “Fifty-Cent Gays (五毛 gays),” “Voluntary Fifty-Cent Gays (自干五 gays)” and “Wolf Warrior Gays (战狼 gays).” The label “Pink Gays” is commonly utilized nowadays by many LGBT activists and some liberal-leaning LGBT people. It is a label referring to the GSMs who usually stand on the side of the authoritarian state and government, support the government’s policies regardless of whether they harm the LGBT community, and keep a distant and vigilant attitude toward all foreign Others. “Fifty-Cent Army” refers to some online commentators who are set up by the Chinese government to promote pro-government ideas. The related government propaganda agency pays these commentators fifty cents per post (Han 2015a). The “Voluntary Fifty-Cent Army” refers to some netizens who defend the regime voluntarily without compensation or

¹⁵ “Membra” is a Cantonese pronunciation of “member,” and is taken from Western queer tendency to refer to LGBT individuals as “members of the community” when speaking indirectly.

payment. These two labels emphasize the degree to which some netizens act as “soldiers” in support of the communist party-state and regime. “Wolf Warrior” is a new label which originated from the nationalist action film *Wolf Warrior II*, which promotes the national rejuvenation and rise of China. “Anyone who offends China will be killed no matter how far the target is” (BBC 2017) has been used as a promotional slogan, which has fostered blindly patriotic emotions toward the country while promoting adversarial and antagonistic attitudes toward Western countries (Harper 2017). LGBT people who share the views of the “Fifty-Cent Army,” “Voluntary Fifty-Cent Army,” and the “Wolf Warriors” are labelled as such by many liberal LGBT activists and intellectuals.

Compared with the labels of “Pink Gays” and “Wolf Warrior Gays,” the liberal-leaning gays are also tagged by their opponents with unique labels such as “Spiritual American Gays (精美 gays),” “American-cent Gays (美分 gays),” and “Public Intellectual Gays (公知 gays).” The term “Public Intellectual” is no longer taken as a highly respected title in Chinese cyberspace. It has gradually become a derogatory term due to stigmatization by many nationalists and patriotic youth (Wu 2017). Wu (2017) has observed that Chinese public intellectuals are depreciated, which can be seen from some Weibo posts: “Real patriots see the continuous progress that China is making. Those traitors call themselves public intellectuals, but they are only clinging to the past or fabricating negative information”; “they are ‘American Cent’ and ‘Spiritual American’”. Nationalist youth use these labels to degrade people holding liberal and democratic ideals and argue that, although they are Chinese, they are Americans in spirit and may be hired by the US and Japan to post anti-China opinions (Zhang 2010).

In cyberspace, mutual attacks primarily occur between liberal-leaning gays and nationalist gays. However, despite the vocal presence of these two groups in the public domain,

the majority of LGBT individuals tend to remain silent or avoid expressing their political opinions. For example, even though China is home to the world's largest LGBT population (approximately forty to seventy million individuals) (Wang et al. 2020), only a small percentage (about 5%) are willing to disclose their sexual identity to others (UNDP 2016). This reluctance can be attributed to the strict government surveillance, driven by stability maintenance policies and Internet censorship. Consequently, many LGBT individuals choose to distance themselves from politics, either voluntarily or intentionally, given the prevailing LGBT-unfriendly circumstances.

1.3 Outline of Dissertation

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. In this Chapter 1, I have introduced the research objectives of this thesis. I also explained how these research questions come from the 798 Incident and provided background information about LGBT people's living environment, Chinese nationalism, transnational power in China, and the Chinese LGBT community.

In Chapter 2, I will review previous research on gender and sexuality identity politics, as well as how gender and sexuality intersect with nationalism and globalization. I reflect on this previous literature and summarize the possible contributions of theories of hybridity, creolization, and the convergence zone.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology I use to answer my research questions. I do not restrict myself to only one method. Instead, I collect data through in-depth interviews, observation, document research, media research, and blogosphere research. An online survey was also created and administered on behalf of Chinese activists that were encountered in the field, and I draw from that data to provide further context to the qualitative research. In Chapter

3 I also present and explain the Sexuality Convergence framework I have used for data analysis, a framework built through my examination of the literature in this area.

In Chapter 4, my focus is on examining how China engages with global pressure concerning LGBT human rights in international arenas and domestic discourse arenas, particularly Weibo and the UN. This investigation aims to reveal how Chinese nationalism resists foreign LGBT support. I analyze two nationalism mechanisms, namely authenticity and securitization, to understand their role in this process of resistance. Notably, within the interplay of Chinese nationalism and international LGBT support, I find the coexistence of macho nationalism and homonationalism. Finally, I also discuss how Chinese nationalism, particularly macho nationalism, has evolved into a criterion for censorship, significantly constraining the survival space for other discourses.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I examine the mechanisms employed by different ideal types of LGBT individuals in navigating their marginalized identities within the context of Chinese nationalism and globalization. Specifically, Chapter Five is dedicated to investigating the Chinese patriotic gay group, known as Pink Gays. In the first part, I elucidate how and why the term “Pink Gays” emerged as the current appellation for nationalist and patriotic LGBT individuals in the Chinese public discourse arena. In the second part, I present an analysis of Pink Gay individuals’ self-justification of their identity as pro-regime patriots, including their endorsement of nationalistic values and alignment with the state’s ideologies. In the third part, I explore the recognized strategies employed by Pink Gays to advocate for LGBT rights, which involve demonstrating loyalty to the state and conforming to mainstream heterosexual norms. These mechanisms play a significant role in shaping the Pink Gays’ interactions with Chinese nationalism and their positioning within the larger social context of globalization.

Chapter 6 will introduce two additional categorizations of the LGBT community: the LGBT Liberal group and the LGBT Avoidant group. I will incorporate a discussion of the key characteristics of both the Chinese LGBT Liberal and Avoidant groups. Subsequently, I will examine their respective strategies for navigating Chinese nationalism. Specifically, I will analyze how the LGBT Liberals engage in detachment from Chinese nationalism. Regarding the LGBT Avoidant group, I will investigate their reasons for choosing to avoid confronting the intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization.

In Chapter 7, I explore how Chinese nationalism has increasingly constrained the political space for the LGBT movement. Despite these obstacles, local LGBT activists in China have exhibited remarkable creativity in utilizing all available political avenues. This chapter examines the strategies employed by Chinese LGBT activists in advocating for local LGBT rights amidst the backdrop of escalating nationalism. Specifically, I discuss a unique form of nationalism known as Filial Nationalism and how it is employed by local LGBT activists to advance LGBT advocacy. Moreover, despite China's surge in nationalism leading to certain degrees of exclusion, the country's economy remains deeply embedded within the globalized system. Consequently, China relies on foreign talent and businesses to contribute to its economy, which creates a paradoxical situation of nationalism coexisting with privileges granted to foreigners and foreign enterprises. This paradox also presents opportunities for LGBT advocacy. Hence, I will also explore how Chinese LGBT activists leverage the involvement of foreigners, multinational corporations, foreign embassies, and UN human rights mechanisms to promote local LGBT advocacy.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I present a summary of the main findings from the previous chapters. Building upon this foundation, I develop a new interpretive framework, the "Sexuality

Convergence Model,” to explore the intersections of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization at different contexts (the state and public discourse, individual contexts, and social movement context). Additionally, I will discuss the contributions of this Sexuality Convergence Model in the following aspects: (1) expanding understanding of intersectionality, (2) broadening the comprehension of diversity and heterogeneity among individuals in homogeneous contexts, (3) extending the understanding of internal heterogeneity within nationalism, (4) deepening the understanding of dynamic state-society relations in an authoritarian regime, and (5) enhancing comprehension of the center-periphery paradigm and the issue of marginality. Finally, I will address the inherent limitations of this study and propose potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review:

Exploring Scholarship on Sexuality, Nationalism, and Globalization

To illustrate the puzzles and paradoxes of Chinese LGBT identity politics, we need to unpack the following questions: why are identities important to certain individuals, groups, societies, nations, and the global civil society? How do gender and sexual identities become a battlefield and convergence zone in the context of nationalism and globalism? And how do LGBT people situate themselves in this battlefield? In order to do this, I start this literature review by re-examining the basic concepts of identity and identity-related politics. Although definitions of identity are debated, the basic functions of identity are widely acknowledged: situating people into different social categories and creating in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. Therefore, identity, including national identity and gender and sexual identity, become battlegrounds as different groups attach their political, social, and cultural pursuits to identity. Secondly, I review the literature on intersections of gender and sexuality and nationalism, focusing on two main intersecting modes, macho nationalism and homonationalism. Thirdly, I examine the literature on the intersections between gender and sexuality and globalization. Globalization contributes to the diffusion of gay identity, the HIV/AIDS pandemic/epidemic and prevention, LGBT human rights, and homophobia. Finally, I introduce the theoretical framework of my dissertation, outlining three theories that I contend can be used to put gender and sexuality, nationalism, and globalization in the same framework for analysis: Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, Hannerz's creolization theory, and Tenzin Jinba's convergence zone theory.

2.1 Identity and Its Power

Social sciences and humanities have witnessed an increasing amount of theoretical and empirical research on identity due to its significance in understanding human meaning, social life, and social interactions (Huddy 2001; Burke & Stets 2009; Brekhus 2020). Although social psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists have different emphases on the concept, identity can be viewed as a shared set of meanings through which people can classify themselves and others into different social categories (Stets & Serpe 2013; Ashforth & Mael 1989). People experience various identities throughout their lives which include different intertwined and overlapping types: personal identities (these are elementary identities which provide for specific biographies such as name and birthplace, unique characteristics such as intelligence, and so forth), role identities (these are linked to specific positions and commitments in society, such as parents, teachers, and doctors), group identities (these show membership in meaningful groups/organizations such as professional organizations, civic groups, or recreational teams), social identities (these are created by social stratification and people are ascribed to these identities such as race/ethnicity and gender¹⁶), and collective identities (these are identities important for social movements and activism because they can bring people together based on “we-ness” to fight for or against social changes based on a constructed and shared meaning and group consciousness) (Burke & Stets 2009; Andriot & Ownes 2012; Stets & Serpe 2013). According to social identity theory, identity serves two basic functions: situating individuals into different social categories (Stets & Serpe 2013) and creating gaps and boundaries between “We/Us/Self” and “They/Them/Others” (Barth 1981; Tajfel & Turner 1979). Identities can also

¹⁶ It is still debatable whether gender is an acquired identity or an ascribed identity. For most binary gender individuals, gender can be largely described as ascribed identity. However, for non-binary gender individuals, especially transgender groups, their identity-negotiation processes are different. Their identity affirmation processes are breaking down the original ascribed identity and thus are to some extent achieved (Nuru 2014)

guide what people should think, feel, and behave (Tajfel & Turner 1979, 1986). Identity and social classifications, to some extent, define people's unique characteristics and locate them in particular social roles and various group memberships, providing a sense of belonging (Stets & Serpe 2013). Furthermore, the existence of excluded Others and the need for a positive distinctiveness defines and develops in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel & Turner 1979; Tajfel 1981; Appiah, Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter 2013).

Identities also work as a medium that helps link individuals and the social structure, which brings the concept of identity into a broader theoretical framework for exploring social change (Burke & Stets 2009; Giddens 1991). Social identities and categorizations fulfill people's needs for group affiliation (Kelman 1961). Through affiliation with group identities, people can maintain their self-esteem and their need for belonging and certainty (Huddy 2001). This individual affiliation with the group can create a sense of common fate: a sense that people have similar experiences because of their shared identity and, therefore, will have common outcomes (Sell & Love 2009). Individuals and groups often share a common goal or enemy through their shared identity, and thus people perceive the fate and future of the group as their own and voluntarily identify themselves as group members. As Hall et al. (1970) argue, identification promotes integration and congruence between the goals of organizations/groups and those of individuals. Through this perceived common fate, identity commitments and duties to groups are developed, which leads to people believing in and accepting group values, to a willingness to take on group responsibilities, and even to changes in their own social and political attitudes and behaviors (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Conover 1988). The power of identity promotes the rise of identity politics, which has been taken as one of the most influential dynamics of social change since the 1970s (Combahee River Collective 1982; Alcoff & Mohanty 2006). As Neofotistos

(2013) summarizes, identity can be strategically employed to frame political claims, advocate for political ideologies, and guide social and political action with the aim of asserting group distinctiveness, fostering a sense of belonging, and seeking power and recognition. In addition, identity politics can assert ways of understanding distinctiveness, reclaim greater self-determination, and secure political freedom for marginalized groups to challenge oppressive and limiting dominant characterizations of their group (Burke 2021).

Moreover, identity has been used as a cornerstone for addressing the concerns and agendas of marginalized and excluded individuals, and to fight against social injustices such as sexism, homophobia, racism, heterosexism, and classism (Bernstein 2005). Various groups of people have utilized identity in different forms of mobilization since the early 1980s (Burke 2021). For example, identity has played a crucial role in social movements like the feminist movement, the civil rights movement in the US, and the LGBT movements (Bernstein 2005; Neofotistos 2013). As the Combahee River Collective argues in their statement about Black feminist identity politics: “in the process of consciousness-raising, actually life-sharing, we began to recognize the commonality of our experiences and, from the sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression” (1982: 14-15). Through identity-based movements, women, Black people, and LGBT people can be true to themselves and emphasize their authenticity (Taylor 1994; Kruks 2001).

However, identity is not only employed by marginalized groups to combat oppression and injustice; it has also been used as a tool by other less progressive groups such as the Christian Identity movement, nationalists and White supremacists (Burke 2021). Therefore, identity-based politics can either be progressive or conservative: identity can not only be a weapon for Self, but it can also be an arm for Others. With so many debates on identity and

identity-based politics, scholars agree that identity has become an essential concept for contemporary political discourses, contributing to models of the self, political inclusiveness, and possibilities for solidarity and resistance (Heyes 2020). As a result, identity has become a battlefield where different groups fight for/against their sameness and differences in contemporary society. National identity and gender and sexual identity are two of these conflicting battlefields. First, I will explore how gender and sexual identity are sites of conflict in the literature, and then move on to explore national identity as a contentious field.

2.1.1 Gender and Sexuality as a Battlefield

Gender and sexuality have been both private and public topics that fuel debates because different people attach different meanings to the two concepts (Hawkesworth 1997). Traditionally, gender serves as the cultural marker of biological sex (Vance 1984:9), and sexuality serves as the cultural marking of desire (Foucault 1978). In many societies, the traditional binary gender/sex model, in conjunction with biological determinism (essentialism, which claims that biological features determine social roles and functions), usually determines public discussions of gender and sexuality (Hyde et al. 2019). As a result, many social institutions (such as marriage, wage, and voting rights) take the binary sex/gender system as their basis. In other words, the binary gender/sex system recognizes certain genders and sexes while excluding others and determines how certain genders and sexes should express and identify their feminine and masculine features. Men are expected to behave in a masculine manner, and women are expected to behave in a feminine manner, which requires individuals of different genders/sexes to conform to social expectations and stereotypes (Morgenroth et al. 2020).

However, people outside binary norms are considered deviant and systematically excluded by social institutions and discourses (Schutte 1997; Monro 2005).

Despite this, many cultures have alternative ways of understanding sex and gender, such as “Hijras¹⁷” in India (Nanda 1986; Kalra, Gupta & Bhugra 2010), “tomboi-femme couples¹⁸” in West Sumatra, Indonesia (Blackwood 2010), “calalai”, “calabai”, “bissu”¹⁹ in South Sulawesi, Indonesia (Davies 2010), and “two-spirit²⁰” in Indigenous communities of North America (Estrada 2012; Robinson 2020). These gender/sex cultures provide evidence against the binary gender/sex system’s common-sense assumption. Gender/sex diversity has existed and continues to exist across many cultures, offering evidence against the binary gender/sex system’s common-sense assumption. Activists and scholars from both scientific and social science fields have expanded our understanding of gender/sex diversity from various perspectives. For instance, Hyde et al. (2019) have noted neuroscience findings have denied gender/sex dimorphism in the human brain; behavioral endocrinology has refuted the concept of biologically fixed and gender dimorphic hormonal systems; psychological research on transgender and nonbinary people is undermining the gender binary, demonstrating that categories given to people at birth are

¹⁷ The hijra (eunuch/transvestite) is an institutionalized third gender role in India. Hijra are neither male nor female but contain elements of both. The Hijra communities in India have a recorded history of more than 4000 years (PUCL-K 2003: 17). Hijras, who are born as intersex or as male (some undergo castration), trace their origins to the myths in the ancient Hindu scriptures of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Hijras belonged to the “Eunuch” culture that was common across the Middle East and India, where Eunuchs worked as guards, advisers, and entertainers (PUCL-K 2003).

¹⁸ Blackwood’s (2010) detailed and captivating ethnography, *Falling into the Lesbi World*, explores the lives of West Sumatran tombois, masculine females who identify as men, and their partners (femmes), who identify as “normal” women who desire men.

¹⁹ Davies (2007) explores sexuality in relation to gender in her fascinating study of Bugis calalai (female-bodied individuals who desire heterosexual women and may or may not identify as men), calabai (male-bodied individuals who desire heterosexual men and may or may not identify as women), and androgynous bissu shamans in South Sulawesi.

²⁰ Two-spirit is a neologism for Indigenous people who identify as sexual and gender minorities that was developed in the 1990s at the Third Annual Intertribal Native American/First Nations Gay and Lesbian Conference in Winnipeg (Robinson 2020). On the one hand, the term “two-spirit” is employed in place of the term “berdache,” which was coined by early Settler anthropologists (Robinson 2020). Moreover, the phrase also contextualises Native American or First Nations culture, making it useful for distinguishing non-Native gays and lesbians (Estrada 2011)

insufficient to predict how they will define their own gender and sex (Hyde et al. 2019). While feminist movements and LGBT liberation movements have struggled to raise public attention about the diversity of gender and sexuality (Bernstein 2005), feminists, poststructuralists, and queer theorists have contributed to challenging the binary gender system and rigid gender roles (Feinberg 1996). For example, liberal feminism emphasizes the model of androgyny, in which individuals integrate masculinity and femininity, and the specialized talents specified by gender roles (such as nurturance, physical strength) are no longer required for success due to advancements in technology (such as contraceptives and computers), which have somewhat eliminated the effects of biological differences between men and women (Monro 2005). Post-structuralism and queer theory extend this further as they deconstruct firm and rigid gender roles and argue that gender and sexuality should be taken as fluid, contingent, and socially constructed (Butler 1990). These perspectives critique the idea that decisions are made rationally or based on a unified sense of self and essential truth. Instead, they note that the reality of the gender/sex binary system is constructed through the exclusion of other gender/sex options (Butler 1990; Beasley 2005; Monro 2005).

De-gendering and gender-pluralism have been used as strategies to challenge gender/sex binary policies and practices. While de-gendering aims to remove or minimize gender/sex differences (Morgenroth 2021), gender-pluralism takes gender as a spectrum that “calls for new and self-conscious affirmations of different gender taxonomies” (Halberstam 2002: 360), including more gender possibilities and categories such as the pronouns “ze” and “hir” (see Feinberg 1996). Gender pluralism projects involve changing the binary definition of gender and sexuality and raising awareness about self-determined gender and sexuality (Halberstam 2002). These projects aim to create inclusive spaces for gender and sexual minority communities (Doan

2015), improve policies, combat discrimination (UNDP/PGA 2017), and resist conservative forces that oppose gender diversity, such as the anti-sissy boys movement (反娘炮运动) in China (Zhang 2019; Song 2021), and Taiwan (Kuan 2019).

Despite efforts to challenge it, the world continues to be deeply structured by dichotomous understandings of sex and gender. The dominant binary understanding of sex assumes that male or female are the only possible configurations of sex, and that they are “opposite sexes” that are naturally attracted to each other, like magnetic fields (Ingraham 1994: 215). In many societies, this male-female binary remains unchallenged and taken for granted, and the default mode of gender is “heterogender,” which asserts that males and females, as well as masculine and feminine, heterosexual and gay, are hierarchical oppositional binaries, and males and females evolve into men and women with unique, opposing features depending on sex (Ingraham 1994: 204; Elbow 1993). In other words, many societies assume that becoming a gendered person means learning how to act appropriately as a woman in regard to a man, or as feminine in respect to masculine, while masculine and feminine qualities cannot coexist in one person (Hart 1996). Heterosexuality behaviors and expectations are taught by all social institutions, including family, church, and education, leading to heterosexuality becoming a social organizing structure (Ingraham 1994, 2002). Ingraham defines this phenomenon as heteronormativity, which is the view or ideology that “institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements” (1994: 204) and “naturalizes the institution of heterosexuality” (1994: 211).

Furthermore, the central role of institutionalized heterosexuality in the distribution of financial resources, cultural dominance, and social control ensures that some people (man and the heterosexual) will have more class status, power, and privilege than others (Ingraham 1994,

2002; Griffin 2007). Consequently, those who do not participate in dominant heterogender arrangements become the abnormal or deviant “other” of heteronormativity (Javaid 2018). Although the rise of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender rights movements and theories are challenging heterosexuality, heteronormativity, and heterocentrism, denaturalizing heterosexuality as a taken-for-granted biological entity is not an easy task (Ingraham 1994). Creating a diverse, equal, and tolerant society inevitably encounters resistance and pushback and therefore, gender and sexuality remain a contentious field.

2.1.2 National Identity as a Battlefield

National identity also acts as a battlefield. Nationality as a basic form of social identity has existed for a long time, so most people may take national identities for granted (Spillman 1997). According to Spillman (1997), national identity is a symbolic elaboration of an imagined community (Anderson 1983), among which people believe they have things in common and are different from Others. On one hand, national symbols (such as national flags, sculptures, and architectures), languages, culture, music, beliefs and values, and other common points are created and utilized to construct shared cultural identity/kinship (Wiebe 2002: 5) and shared national characters. On the other hand, through comparison with Others, the boundaries between “us” and “them” are perceived and reinforced (Smith 1991; László 2013; Tajfel & Turner 1979). Most people can sense their belonging to one nation and feel proud of it. However, while they know “who we are” and “who they are,” few people notice what lies behind their everyday actions (Tajfel & Turner 2004; Spillman 1997).

When national identities encounter ethnic identity, immigration, and globalization (Woods, Schertzer & Kaufmann 2011; Doty 1996; Ariely 2012; Croucher 2004), nationality

becomes complicated. First, constructing collective sameness among “us” and labeling Others by nature are processes of including certain populations while excluding Others (internal Others and external Others) (Colley 1992). Therefore, the issue of who owns the power to define national identity becomes a vital concern. The state (or the government) and the ethnic majority, as some scholars argue, play a leading role in nation-building (Myadar & Rae 2014). National identity construction reflects the state’s arrangements and ideological commitments. By defining identity categories and establishing boundaries among the population, the state (government or sovereign) exercises its power of ordering and orienting (Myadar & Rae 2014). Thus, in contrast, ethnic minorities, subcultural groups, and gender and sexual minorities are usually the marginalized populations who are excluded from the collective narratives of nationhood. For instance, non-Han (非汉族) peoples were taken as Chinese Others, and they were even called “foreigners” in textbooks of the early 1950s before they were transformed into an integral part of the Chinese community in the history textbooks at the beginning of the 21st century (Baranovitch 2010). Similarly, in the United States, Indigenous peoples are often treated as “pre-history” (Zerubavel 1997: 86–87). Ethnic minorities in many societies are not only excluded from textbooks but also experience social exclusion. Constructing national identity is not only a cultural process; it is also a material process because it is directly related to civil rights, including equal schooling, employment and a safe environment/neighborhood, resource allocation, and social justice (Fenton 2011: 15). So, many minorities and marginalized populations inspired by multiculturalism have tried to reverse one-sided and majoritarian-flavored national history and identity to stress the complexity and multidimensionality of inner ethnicities, cultures, and voices. For example, feminists critiqued the masculine narratives of Australian identity and the silencing of women in their national history (Moran 2011). These challenges encouraged

Australia to renew its national identity constructions in an inclusive way to accommodate and support multiculturalism (Moran 2011).

National identity can also be a symbolic force (Renan 1990), through which intense sentiments of ordinary people can be gathered and mobilized to fight for the nation. As Anderson (1983) suggests, regardless of internal inequality and exploitation, a shared perception of deep and horizontal comradeship can fuel patriotism strong enough that people willingly die for their nation and kill in its name. However, patriotic sentiments and emotions triggered by national identity can cause both positive and negative results. National identity can promote social solidarity of society, encouraging people to sacrifice personal gain for the common good, and to support each other in times of hardship (Wimmer 2019). For example, anticolonial nationalist movements mobilized people to end colonial rule and create independent nation-states in the global South, which has reshaped the structure of the world system in the past two hundred years (Go & Watson 2019). In addition, national identity and sentiments exclude those deemed to be Others. The ideological narratives of national unity prioritize national interests above other social concerns and issues; therefore, human rights and social justice, including freedom of assembly and association, freedom of speech, electoral, and self-determination, can be violated in the name of nationalism (Yazici 2019). Thus, the differentiation of Us and Others triggers not only patriotism but also possible enmity between countries (Schrock-Jacobson 2010: 25–28). For example, charismatic leaders can manipulate national sentiment to create or stoke conflict (Byman & Pollack 2001: 141), such as in the US invasion of Iraq after September 11 (McCartney 2004). Thus, it is quite unfortunate that nationalism, which can function as a driving force against monarchy and colonialism, can also be harnessed as a force that justifies the violation of social justice and human rights. (Yazici 2019; Wimmer 2019). Nationalism,

nowadays, gets a bad reputation when it is connected with White supremacy, violation of human rights, the restrictive immigration policies in many Western countries, and the resurgence of economic protectionism (Wimmer 2019).

Both national identity and gender and sexual identity, as a type of social identity, work among societies both positively and negatively, through forming both pride and prejudice, constructing altruism and oppression, and helping people find a sense of belonging as well as creating boundaries of differentiation. They are both on the battlefields where exclusion confronts inclusion and social unity confronts multiculturalism.

2.2 Gender and Sexuality Intersected with Nationalism

Individuals' identities and experiences are not isolated phenomena; therefore, before moving on to investigate the interconnections between gender and sexual identity and national identity in the existing literature, it becomes essential to introduce the concept of intersectionality. The concept of intersectionality was initially introduced by Black female scholars Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Patricia Collins (2000) in the late 1980s.

Intersectionality recognizes that social identities and categories, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, age, disability, religion, and nationality, are not distinct and separate but rather intricately linked and mutually constitutive. These intersections can lead to compounding or alteration of disadvantages, advantages, or complexities that cannot be fully comprehended by examining each identity in isolation (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2000; Pedulla 2014).

Consequently, embracing the perspective of intersectionality allows us to attend to the intricacies and multidimensionality of social phenomena, thereby avoiding overly simplistic approaches when addressing complex social issues.

In the contemporary world, LGBT rights advocacy and liberal social movements have promoted LGBT visibility and awareness of human rights concerns regarding GSMs. At the same time, nationalism has resurged in many countries. As I have summarized above, both national and gender and sexual identity inherently have the capacity to mobilize groups to fight for belonging on the basis of identity. Both also have the capacity to exclude Others internally and externally. These two topics, sexuality and nationalism, are not isolated, but closely related and entwined. As Anne McClintock argues, “all nationalisms are gendered,” “all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender,” and nations are imagined sexual communities in many ways (1993: 61). Feminist (e.g., Peterson 1999; Yuval-Davis 1997) and postcolonial studies (e.g., McClintock 1993) have explored the interplay between nationalism and gender and propose various explanatory concepts, such as “gendered nationalism,” “sexual nationalism” (Jaunait, Le Renard & Marteu 2013), “macho nationalism” (Mosse 1996), “homonationalism” (Puar 2007), and “pink wash and gay imperialism” (Jaunait et al. 2013). These concepts help us to understand: (1) how nationalism and national identity constructions include certain gender and sexual groups in “We/Us” in the name of national unity and solidarity; (2) how certain gender and sexual groups (particularly women and gender and sexual minorities) are defined as internal (domestic) Others in some expressions of nationalism; (3) and how different gender and sexual cultures are shaped as external (foreign) Others in order to define the boundaries of the imagined community. Overall, the relationships between nationalism and gender and sexuality can be summarized into two modes: macho nationalism and homonationalism.

2.2.1 Macho Nationalism

Macho nationalism is introduced by Mosse (1996) in the book, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. This concept encapsulates the dominant form of nationalism globally and historically. Under macho nationalism, a patriarchal moral code is constructed based on mainstream masculinity and heterosexuality. As Mayer argues, “despite its rhetoric of equality for all who partake in the ‘national project,’ globally nation remains the property of men” (2000: Preface), and heterosexual males have been deemed the mainstay of nation-building. Through controlling access to the benefits of belonging to the nation, masculine prowess is expressed and strategically exercised, and nationalism becomes a tool for sexual and gender control and repression. For example, by exerting control over a national “moral consciousness” (Renan 1990: 20) or “moral code” (Mayer 2000: 8) that its members feel must be upheld at all times and at all costs, heterosexual males are able to dominate women and GSMs. Thus, macho nationalism is full of “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (Enloe 2000: 44). In macho nationalism, women are constructed as auxiliary; and their national importance is based on their capacity to reproduce. Based on that, women are taken as useful for bearing national unity and survival, and allow nationalists to define the boundaries of a community through invoking their so-claimed common descent (Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1989). Through sexual and marital restriction, macho nationalism defines the status of women in nationalism as biological reproducers and reproducers of ethnic and national boundaries (Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1989; McClintock 1993). The most notable examples of macho nationalism are family planning projects in many countries. For instance, in Indonesia, women were either encouraged to have more children or to restrict their fertility at different times of the nation’s history in the name of “being good for the country” (Dwyer 2000). Similar birth control projects also occurred in China with the slogan “birth control is the

contribution to the country²¹.” Abortion is another focus of debate among nationalists (particularly religious nationalists) in countries such as Ireland and the former Yugoslavia, where nationalists claim that abortion is the moral enemy of the nation (Martin 2000; Mostov 2000).

The homophobic tendencies of macho nationalism dictate that gender and sexual minorities are largely constructed as national Others. Internally, macho nationalist narratives stigmatize and discriminate against gender and sexual minorities and make them targets of persecution, thereby excluding them from macho nationalist discourse. The marginalization and exclusion of gender and sexual minorities are frequently justified and rationalized by macho nationalism in a variety of ways. The first is the construction of heterosexual reproduction as a necessary requirement for national survival and purity in macho nationalist narratives, which leads to the creation of a conservative-leaning moral code based on traditional culture and religion (Mayer 2000; Renan 1990). Thus, gender and sexual minorities that deviate from this ideal moral standard represent a threat to the integrity and security of the nation. For example, in his research of the Third Reich’s Aryan German ideal images, Micheler (2002) contends that homosexuals were excluded from national identity because they did not fulfil the sacred duty of procreation and, if they did, they were feared to convey degeneration to their offspring. Thus, this nationalism portrays homosexuality as a disease and a crime, and homosexuals as corrupters and seducers who prefer (and corrupt) boys and youth, thereby threatening the nation (Micheler 2002).

Second, macho nationalism constructs masculinity as a heroic quality used to defend the country from internal and external weakness and attack, particularly during times of war (Nagel

²¹ In 2000, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council promulgated the Decision on Strengthening Population and Family Planning Work to Stabilize Low Fertility Levels. The Decision states: The population issue is a major long-term problem at the primary stage of socialism and is a key factor limiting China’s economic and social development.

2003). As a result, according to macho nationalists, gender and sexual minorities' atypical masculinity and non-traditional gender and sexual practices weaken and undermine the country. Furthermore, macho nationalism not only stigmatizes and excludes gender and sexual minorities in discourse but also reduces the visibility of LGBT populations and even engages in persecution of gender and sexual minorities (Swimelar 2020). For example, many national policies, such as those in Russia, Bosnia, Poland, Uganda, and Zambia, banning the "propaganda" of homosexuality have argued that the country's "traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom (Roe 2004: 48)" are threatened by the increased visibility of LGBT communities promoted by LGBT movements (Stella & Nartova 2015; Ayoub & Paternotte 2014; Swimelar 2020). Externally speaking, under macho nationalism, homosexuality is seen as being imported from hostile foreign nations that seek to subvert authentic and traditional national values. This expression of macho nationalism is prevalent in Russia and some African countries. For instance, both the Russian anti-homosexual campaign in the Stalin era (1933-1934) and the ban on "propaganda for non-traditional sexual relations" in the Putin era (in 2013) have utilized discourses of nationalism to stigmatize homosexuality as imported from Europe to undermine traditional Russian values (Edenborg 2020). Overall, macho nationalism stigmatizes gender and sexual minorities as internal and external Others to preserve and protect a supposedly healthy, pure, normal, and authentic family, society, and nation (Micheler 2002; Stakic 2015), despite the fact that macho nationalists themselves advocate for national unity.

2.2.2 Homonationalism

Macho nationalism, an expression of heterosexual and masculine hegemony, remains relatively stable in many countries. However, traditional gender and sexual models have been challenged by the work of feminist movements and LGBT liberation movements worldwide. For example, some governmental policies have been established to protect GSMs' human rights, including their equal rights to marriage and partnership, healthcare, and reproduction (Jaunait et al. 2013). In addition, LGBT activism improves LGBT people's visibility and public acceptance, significantly reducing discrimination against LGBT people (Witeck 2014). More importantly, narratives regarding the LGBT community have been reversed in the nationalist discourse of some countries. Acceptance of LGBT people, who were once excluded from nationality and constructed as sick or criminal, or as corrupters, seducers, enemies, and threats to both families and nations under macho nationalism, can now be constructed as an example of modern, civilized, progressive values and be linked with democracy, liberty, and freedom (Puar 2007). Liberal attitudes toward gender and sexuality are sometimes defined as features of national identity, and protecting LGBT human rights becomes a matter of sustaining democracy (Jaunait et al. 2013). For example, in the Netherlands, openly talking about gender and sexuality and respecting LGBT people is taken as an expression of the true Dutch People (Aydemir 2012). Puar (2007) summarizes the new type of nationalism, wherein the acceptance and recognition of LGBT rights is employed to advance a specific interpretation of the nation, as "homonationalism."

Homonationalism positively includes GSMs in its citizenry and imagination of nationality, creating a gay-friendly environment. However, this new relationship between gender and sexuality and nationalism has inevitably been accompanied by social exclusion (an essential feature of nationalism). As Puar (2007, 2013) suggests, homonationalism selectively includes

queer bodies as worthy of state protection, leaving some other groups excluded both internally and externally. First, homonationalism strengthens heteronormativity because LGBT people and same-sex couples are described in normalized terms in homonationalism as similar to straight people and straight couples. In this way, LGBT people and monogamous queer couples deserve rights and protections from the nation and can fit into nationalist projects (e.g., Stychin 1998; Puar 2007), while alternate kinship relationships and public sex practiced by other queer people are excluded because they violate quasi-nuclear (monogamous) kinship structures. Second, homonationalism is constructing a new sexual imperialism to some extent, considering that it distances and excludes some other racial and cultural blocks (mainly Muslim groups and nations). In the Netherlands, for instance, homonationalism creates a line between good and bad citizens as open discussion of sexuality is normal and characteristic of the “Dutch” (We), whereas some immigrant populations—mostly Muslims—and their cultures are labeled as backward or participants in retrograde sexism (Jaunait et al. 2013). Third, homonationalism, which Others and stigmatizes Muslim countries as being backward, is used as a justification for violations. For example, in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, some scholars (such as Blackmer 2019) argue that Israel dishonestly utilizes its achievements in protecting LGBT human rights to conceal or whitewash its military actions against the Palestinians. Similar cases also happened in the United States when the government and civil society actors invoked homonationalism to defend their involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Puar 2007). So, the process of integrating GSMs into homonationalism and connecting them with modernity, according to some scholars (e.g., Dudink 2013; Jaunait et al. 2013), is similar to macho nationalism, which stigmatizes and excludes GSMs; and the new trend of homonationalism is an updated

Orientalism of the colonial era, in which Europe was seen to lead civilization, development, and democracy.

All in all, nationalism as an ideology requires community members to share the same kind of loyalty to their nation, which inherently involves the social exclusion of internal and external Others (Mayer 2000). Gender and sexuality, which are cultural constructs based on biological sex and desire (Vance 1984; Foucault 1978), have been an area of power characterized by repression and restriction from different ideologies that reward and praise certain behaviors and people while punishing and restricting Others (Rubin 1984: 309). The exclusion and repression of LGBT people under macho nationalism have a long history and still dominate most countries around the world (Harper & Schneider 2003; OHCHR 2019). In contrast, the new trend of homonationalism seeks to include queer populations in nationalist discourse in some countries, mainly Western European countries. However, both nationalisms have been accompanied by the exclusion of certain populations from national projects. Although homonationalism protects LGBT people's human rights to some extent, scholars such as Dudink (2013) argue that homonationalism contributes to racist presumptions and structures of White supremacy. Hence, a cautious approach persists among numerous scholars (e.g., Dudink 2013; Puar 2007, 2013; Aydemir 2012) in relation to the interplay between nationalism and sexuality.

2.3 Gender and Sexuality Intersected with Globalization

We are living in a globalized world. The forces of globalization have heavily influenced almost all aspects of people's lives with the worldwide circulation of ideas, beliefs, and culture, the cross-border mobility of goods, services, data, technology, capital, investment, and information (Albrow & King 1990; Nayyar 2002), and the international migration and movement

of people (Freeman 2006). National governments, governmental and intergovernmental organizations, and government-independent organizations (including international non-governmental organizations and social movement organizations) are deeply integrated into the world political system (Babones 2008; Modelski et al. 2007; Moghadam 2005; Steger 2017). In other words, economies, culture, politics, and military are increasingly interdependent on a global scale. Even though scholars have developed diverse definitions of globalization from different perspectives, it is widely admitted that the critical feature of globalization is cross-border interaction that transcends local or national territories (Giddens 2009). As a result, a new public sphere characterized by global civil society, global communication networks, and global governance has formed (Castells 2008). McLuhan (1992) suggested that globalization would turn the world into a global village, where people from different countries would become more integrated and aware of their common interests and shared humanity. However, globalization also brings some challenges, including new global inequalities (Goesling & Baker 2008), the assimilation of cultures (e.g., Westernization or Americanization) (Thong 2012), international environmental damage due to economic expansion (Panayotou 2000), and the rise of xenophobia because of the fear of losing identity (Ariely 2017). But for better or worse, globalization, as an unstoppable force, has profoundly changed human society, not only in terms of the big system, but also in terms of individuals and personal lives (Vieira and Vieira 2018). As Anna Tsing metaphorically put it, the power of globalization, “like a storm, sweeps the flux beyond its accustomed boundaries” (2000: 328), shifting every aspect of our social world.

Globalization impacts almost all aspects of people’s lives, and gender and sexuality are inevitably involved in cross-border interactions (Altman 2004). With the global movement of people, capital, and goods, we can observe various phenomena in the globalization of sexuality,

such as the trafficking of women into prostitution, mail-order brides, the global development of the sex industry, sex tourism, and the AIDS pandemic (Binnie 2004). Globalization, as an influential force, is influential in the construction and regulation of identity, culture, and related human rights on gender and sexuality. Regarding the intersections of sexuality and globalization, many scholars, such as Altman (1996, 2004), Binnie (2007), Stychin (2004), and SeckinelGin (2012), have focused on four main topics: the globalization of sexual identity, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the universalization of LGBT human rights, and the globalization of homophobia.

Firstly, a significant amount of literature has explored the globalization of gay identity (Altman 1996, 2002, 2004; Stychin 2004; Binnie 2007). Altman (1996, 2002, 2004) uses the term “global queer” to describe the rapid spread of modern gay identity and culture from Western societies (especially the US) to the rest of the world. According to Altman (1996), the globalization of gay identity mainly refers to the Westernization/Americanization of gayness and sexual culture. This follows the same logic of economic McDonaldization (Ritzer 1993) in the global food industry and Disneyization (Bryman 2004) in the entertainment industry. Stychin (2004) similarly argues that the “Stonewall model” of sexual identity and liberation (also understood as the coming out movement) has transcended its American cultural and historical roots and become a universalized paradigm of gay and lesbian identity and culture in other parts of the world. Hence, we can observe numerous Western influences on non-Western societies. For instance, “macho” gay men and “lipstick lesbians” have become widely recognized global gay “types,” and the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York are now considered a global symbol and the foundation of gay liberation, similar to the 1968 European student riots (such as May ‘68 in France), according to many scholars (Altman 1996). The symbols (such as rainbow flags) of American lesbian and gay imagery and self-representations can be found in most cities of the

world (Altman 2002; Katya 2002). Moreover, non-Western communities interpret their local gender cultures according to American standards, as seen with the *banci* of Indonesia, who tend to be subsumed within the gay category (Boellstorff 2004; Altman 2000). Overall, many scholars argue that the globalization of sexuality refers to the spread of a Western model of sexuality (Binnie 2007; Wright 2000). Globalizing economic and technological forces have promoted cross-border interaction, especially through non-Western societies borrowing “global” language, symbols, lifestyle, and self-stylization from Western queer discourse (Altman 1996).

Secondly, the global HIV/AIDS pandemic is both a cause and a product of globalization (Altman 1996; Binnie 2007). Due to the cross-border movement of people, HIV/AIDS has spread beyond nation-states, promoting people’s awareness of the world as a single place (Binnie 2004). Therefore, preventing HIV/AIDS requires global policy responses and cross-border collaboration between nation-states, national organizations, international NGOs, and activists (Altman 1996; Binnie 2007). According to Altman (1996) and Binnie (2004, 2007), gay identities have become prevalent worldwide because most HIV/AIDS-related projects and policies have begun to use terms such as “sex worker,” “homosexuals,” “gay/bisexual men,” and “men who have sex with men (MSM),” making these terms more universally common. Whether governmental attitudes towards sexual minorities are friendly or not, governments have to acknowledge the existence of some gender and sexual minorities (especially gay people), and those minorities then educate themselves with knowledge about condoms, safer sex, and sexual behaviors heavily shaped by liberal Western understandings of sexuality. In this way, these new concepts (e.g., “MSM,” “people with HIV/AIDS,” and “homosexual men”) have become embedded in governmental regulatory systems (Altman 1996, 2004; Yulius et al. 2018). At the non-governmental level, in their efforts to prevent HIV transmission, local LGBT activists and

organizations not only receive funds and training from international groups but also are invited to participate in national, regional, and global conferences, creating strong bonds between local LGBT activists and the international community and leading to the widespread use of shared, Western terms related to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) (Hildebrandt 2012; Yulius et al. 2018). For instance, according to Hivos Annual Report (2015), the Global Fund against AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (GFATM) has provided funding to the Indonesian government since 2007 to address HIV among MSM and transgender women, and as many as 25 Indonesian LGBT civil society organizations have received funding from the Dutch humanitarian organization Hivos. As a result, terms such as MSM, homosexuality, and LGBT have become more common among activists and are officially recognized by the Indonesian government (Yulius et al. 2018). Similarly, a significant percentage of the foreign funding (before 2017) that Chinese LGBT organizations received was targeted for HIV/AIDS prevention initiatives, and many LGBT organization leaders admit that their groups would probably not exist without these funds (Hildebrandt 2012). Overall, global HIV/AIDS prevention efforts have opened a unique pathway for the proliferation of the Western model of sexual/gender identities and facilitated transnational linkages for developing countries (Binnie 2004, 2007; Altman 1996). Through these mechanisms, Binnie (2007) argues that the AIDS pandemic has become a primary vector and metaphor for the globalization of sexuality.

Thirdly, the universalization of LGBT human rights and transnational LGBT social movements is another result of globalization. Transnational LGBT social movements have become a major expression of globalization as they work to organize across borders and lobby intergovernmental organizations for the advancement of LGBT rights (Kollman & Waites, 2009). According to Kollman and Waites (2009), LGBT movements have defined themselves as

global in nature and have expanded their demands for equality and liberation into the discourse of LGBT human rights, which has proven successful on a global scale (Saiz 2004; Swiebel 2009). The gay liberation movements that began in Western countries during the late 1960s and early 1970s advocated for equality and liberation while working to counter discrimination and structural oppression. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, progressive organizations began using a human rights framework in their social movement mobilization, and a global network of human rights activists was established with the efforts of LGBT groups (such as ILGA and its branches) and mainstream human rights organizations (such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch). Since the 1990s, the LGBT human rights framework has successfully made its way onto the agendas of influential organizations, particularly within the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) (Saiz 2004; Swiebel 2009). After the 2000s, two crucial documents paved the way for the breakthrough in LGBT human rights: The Declaration of Montreal (2006) and the Yogyakarta Principles (2007). These documents have become the cornerstone for LGBT activists to articulate and demand sexual citizenship rights (Altman & Symons 2016).

Based on the efforts of LGBT movements, LGBT human rights claims have become an influential voice in the international community, intensifying global LGBT movements and shaping the political agendas of many countries (Kollman & Waites 2009). Transnational LGBT social movements follow the same logic as Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's (1998) "boomerang pattern." Powerful international organizations integrate to form transnational advocacy networks (TANs) so that LGBT social movements can be organized transnationally. Seckinelgin (2012) argues that TANs or global civil society advocacy actors play the role of a "shepherd" because they educate LGBT people from non-Western countries. Many local LGBT groups, mainly in non-Western societies, do not have access to state protections and supports and

therefore lack channels for lobbying their government safely. As a result, they turn to TANs for help by lobbying international organizations for their resources and support. TANs can then exert pressure on domestic governments, which may promote changes in domestic environments and systems. This is why we can observe global phenomena of an affirmative event or backlash against LGBT issues in one place triggering a response in another part of the world. For example, in 2015, the US Supreme Court's ruling on marriage equality also increased global LGBT rights discourse. Uganda's Private Members' Bill in 2009, which initially proposed the death penalty for some homosexual acts, attracted global criticism from activists, INGOs, IGOs, and so on (SeckinelGin 2012).

Moreover, the transnational LGBT movement supports communication and interaction between LGBT actors from the West and non-West, which in part facilitates the solidarity of the LGBT community on a global scale despite the fact that there are still many unrepresented voices and many unfocused demands (SeckinelGin 2012). Through these interactions, LGBT human rights has extended its scope to non-Western contexts, and non-Western LGBT activists became more and more involved in a universal political agenda (Warner 1993). With the increased public visibility of LGBT identities globally since the 1990s (Hildebrandt 2014), LGBT rights have come to be recognized as human rights and have become a key criterion for evaluating whether a country is progressive or not (see discussion on homonationalism above). LGBT human rights transcend national borders and have become a symbol of global civil society. More and more countries and IGOs (e.g., EU and UN) acknowledge the universality of LGBT human rights. For example, many national courts reinterpreted domestic rights documents (such as *Egan v Canada* in Canada and *Obergefell v. Hodges* in the US) (Stychin 2004); and the

Council of the European Union adopted a general framework directive on equal treatment in employment that includes “sexual orientation” (Waaldijk and Bonini-Baraldi 2006).

The interaction of globalization and sexuality has both light and dark sides. On the one hand, progressive groups are expanding LGBT rights worldwide; on the other hand, regressive/conservative groups are attempting to globalize different kinds of homophobia (SeckinelGin 2012). Transnational political homophobia usually aligns with religious social movements through the same logic of TANs and the boomerang pattern (Weiss & Bosia 2013; D’Amico 2015). These alliances do not just lobby international organizations; they also extend their power within local societies. For example, the Christian Right and its allies have been lobbying the United Nations to promote anti-abortion and anti-homosexuality agendas (Binnie 2004). According to Kaoma (2009), the framing/formation of the anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda in 2009 was closely connected to the influences of the American “Church renewal movement” in three religious denominations: the Episcopal Church (TEC), the United Methodist Church USA (UMC), and the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) and their Christian conservative allies in Africa (Kaoma 2009). Kaoma (2009) argues that it is evident that the bill bears the imprint of ideas discussed in the “Seminar on Exposing the Homosexual Agenda” in Kampala in 2009. The Ugandan domestic conservative groups accepted funding from international conservative groups to support their conservative position in local societies. Following the same logic, some international conservative groups (such as MassResistance, International House of Prayer, Bread of Life Christian Church, and Agape Christian Church) also provide ideological, funding, and leadership support for far-right anti-gay political and religious groups in Taiwan, Malawi, Russia, and elsewhere (Yang & Kang 2021). Against LGBT human rights, the conservative transnational network frames their movement by emphasizing the

sanctity of the family, the idea of sacred and accepted marriage being only between men and women, and stereotypical gender roles (Yang & Kang 2021). In other words, they advocate hegemonic heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) and construct parallel solidarity among conservative people worldwide. The globalization of homophobia is not new. Some traditional sexual and gender values that conservative groups have defended are the legacies of globalization during colonization (Reddy 2002). This can be seen in Section 377 (or the anti-sodomy laws) of the British colonial penal code that criminalized all sexual acts “against the order of nature.” Section 377 was first created in England and then exported to India and other colonies; nowadays, the penal codes remain in Singapore, Bangladesh, and Malaysia.

We see that issues of gender and sexuality have become an arena for conflict in global civil society between progressive and conservative groups. Their clashes with each other also further the globalization of sexuality. To elaborate: the legalization of same-sex marriage in the U.S in 2015 on the one hand empowered LGBT rights discourses globally, but on the other hand, this event also ignited conservative–homophobic resistance and culture wars against sexual claims in some regions such as Indonesia and Brunei (Yulius, Tang and Offord 2018). In the same way, Russia’s law against the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations and attempt to criminalize homosexual behaviour before 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi was confronted with resistance from LGBT organizations and pressure from the Olympic Committee (Picq & Thiel 2015). In conclusion, gender and sexuality continue to be contested issues in global civil society, with clashes between progressive and conservative groups contributing to the globalization of sexuality.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Developing Sexuality Convergence

The literature mentioned above provides valuable insights for my research on the intersections of gender and sexuality with nationalism and globalization in authoritarian China, particularly the concepts of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2000), “macho nationalism” proposed by Mosse (1996) and “homonationalism” used by Puar (2007). However, it is uncommon for these three topics, gender and sexuality, nationalism, and globalization, to be integrated into a single research framework. Specifically, discussions on intersectionality have primarily focused on the individual level.²² In contrast, research on macho nationalism and homonationalism has been predominantly concentrated at the macro level, particularly the national level. However, the experiences of individual intersectionality are fundamentally interconnected with various larger institutions, systems, and forces, such as social movements, state power, and the forces of globalization. Currently, there is no single theoretical framework or model that comprehensively encompasses all these different levels, including the individual, national, and social organizational (social movement) levels, while explaining the dynamic interactions between these levels. Therefore, it is imperative to construct a new theoretical framework to analyze the intersections and interactions across these different levels.

To address this gap and propose a new theoretical framework, I draw upon center-periphery theory (e.g., Bhabha 1994; Hannerz 1987; Tenzin 2013) as a reference. I further develop and apply a new analytic approach, “sexuality convergence,” which integrates sexuality, nationalism, and globalization into a unified framework at various levels. This approach enables me to strengthen the theoretical foundation of my investigation and expand my research findings.

²² For example, a substantial body of research focuses on intersectionality at the individual level, exploring how various aspects of individuals’ multiple identities influence their experiences of the world, their treatment by society, and the opportunities available to them. This is evident in topics such as healthcare disparities (e.g., Damaskos et al. 2018; Kelly-Brown et al. 2022), workplace discrimination (e.g., Kelly 2009; Pedulla 2014), education and achievements (e.g., Jang 2018; Strand 2014), immigrant experiences (e.g., Mahalingam, Balan, and Haritatos 2008; Adames et al. 2018), and mental health and well-being (e.g., Price et al. 2019; Duran 2021).

The center-periphery relationship framework has been used by some anthropologists (e.g., Hannerz 1987; Ong 1989; Bhabha 1994; Tenzin 2013) to explore the marginality and marginalization of local identity and cultures under the influence of globalization. In these works, the center or heartland does not only refer to geopolitical, economic, and cultural mainstream and center in the sense of political sovereignty, but the concept is also connected with ethnicity and gender identity. The borderland, margin, or periphery depicts the other side of the political-economic structure and cultural identity. Therefore, the center-periphery relationship is usually seen as an unequal power structure. Many scholars explore the creativity and agency of the borderlands. For example, Scott (2009) finds that border and marginalized statuses allowed farmers to escape the impositions of states and their wars (power from the center), while Tsing (1993) argues that borderlands are the interplay space of different cultures. As it is at the cultural crossroads and a distance from the political central power, the border is not only a place of passive acceptance of central culture and central domination, but the periphery also has the opportunity to create new cultures and escape from political domination. Among these theories, I find three particularly helpful: hybridity (Bhabha 1994), creolization (Hannerz 1987), and convergence zone (Tenzin 2013).

Homi Bhabha (1994), in his book, *The Location of Culture*, criticizes traditional post-colonization theories (e.g., Fanon (1967) and Said (1978)) because of their binary distinction of the colonizer and the colonized, the East and the West, the center and the periphery, where the colonizer oppresses the colonized and the colonized revolts against the colonizer. Bhabha (1994) contends that colonization is not a process of instilling the colonizer's ideas and culture into the colonized. Instead, it is a complex process full of resistance and acceptance. He argues that regardless of the unequal power relations between them, there exists a hybrid space between the

colonizer culture (the center) and the colonized culture (the periphery) because of their constant contact and interpenetration (Bhabha 1994). The hybrid space displays an ambiguous situation of “you in me” and “me in you” (Zhang and Li 2021: 317). So, we should fully notice the complexity of local history and cultures and their strong cultural vitality even though they are in a marginalized/colonized society. Because of the interpenetrating and dialogic nature of the hybrid space, the colonizer influences the colonized and vice versa. This means that identities in this hybrid space are multiple, ambiguous, and hybridized; indeed, in different arenas, identities may be interchangeable between dominant and subordinate.

The characteristics of hybrid space dismantle the purity and authenticity of colonial discourses and colonial culture to a certain extent and thus dismantle the colonizer’s authority (Amoamo 2011). An important premise and root of the colonizer’s attempt to assimilate/homogenize the culture of the colonized is based on the fact that there are differences between the two (Bhabha 1994). That is, the authenticity of the colonizer is different from that of the colonized. In order to establish their cultural authority, colonizers must continuously search for differences and constantly repeat their pure cultural symbols, but the nature of hybridity dictates that differences are continually deconstructed, and purity gradually disappears and disintegrates in interaction (Bhabha 1994). Further, Bhabha (1994) argues that rulers experience colonial anxiety and internal fragmentation of their colonial discourse. First, the colonizers begin to doubt the purity and authenticity of their own culture. In addition, colonizers fear the complete homogenization of the “Other,” that is, the colonizer wants to assimilate the colonized; they want the colonized to change from “them” to “us” (Bhabha 1994). However, if the colonized completes this transformation, that is, the colonized transforms into the colonizer, then the

colonizer's opposition no longer exists, and colonizer authority is threatened and/or destroyed (Bhabha 1994).

Hybridity and the ambivalence within colonizers give colonized people space to resist and Bhabha's proposed strategy of resistance is mimicry (Bhabha 1984). He argues that resistance takes place in the area of hybridity, where colonized people can selectively accept the colonial culture and recompile it, thus achieving the goal of deconstructing the purity of the colonial culture (Bhabha 1984, 1994). Bhabha argues that colonization processes cannot be complete assimilation or total Westernization, and that colonization was therefore doomed to fail (Bhabha 1994). For example, India was colonized by the British for hundreds of years, but the core of Indian culture did not disappear, and there was not total Westernization (Tenzin 2013).

Hannerz's theory of creolization and Bhabha's theory of hybridity share similarities in that they both highlight the asymmetric power relations between the center and the periphery during the process of interaction. However, Hannerz places a greater emphasis on the notion that the relationship between the center and the periphery is not fixed, but rather constitutes a dynamic and creative interplay. Specifically, Hannerz's (1987) argues the world is (or has always been) in creolization. With his creolization theory, he situates his research in the context of globalization and explores the interaction of the West and the non-West (East) and the center and the periphery. Hannerz argues that "Creole cultures—like creole languages—are intrinsically of mixed origin, the confluence of two or more widely separated historical currents, in what is basically a center/periphery relationship" (1992: 264). In other words, in the process of interaction between global and local culture, the local culture will not be quickly vanished and become "Westernized." Instead, the creole culture in periphery societies "absorbs the influx of meanings and symbolic forms from the centre, transforms them to make them in some

considerable degree their own” (Hannerz 1990: 127). For example, Hollywood movies are in every corner of the world; likewise, Western products such as McDonald’s and Coca-Cola and their cultural symbols are pervasive. However, this does not mean that non-Western cultures are homogenized by the West; on the contrary, it is a process of local modification and innovation of the globalized culture. For example, McDonald’s in China creates products that differ significantly from American tastes (Tenzin 2012); Japanese Hip-Hop culture, which was introduced from the US, has been imprinted with Japan’s nationality and reflects Japan’s social conflicts and the lower and middle classes people’s lives (Condry 2006). In addition, Hannerz notes the possibility of center-periphery switching, that is, today’s periphery maybe tomorrow’s center and vice versa (1992: 266). For example, musical elements and productions from non-Western regions such as Africa, South America, the Middle East, South Asia, and China have entered the global market, appealed to people at the center, and become an important trend in Western pop music (Stokes 2004).

On the one hand, creolization explains why the spread of contemporary Western cultures does not result in the homogenization of cultures throughout the world. On the other hand, creolization is also a contentious process (Sheller 2003). Creolization allows the peripherals to talk back and resist the center’s power. Creolized cultures can re-ground cultural signs, meanings and symbols, and they can also use the same framework and technology from the center for their own advantages (Hannerz 1990). As a result, some creolized cultural production becomes part of the central culture or throws confusion into the center who are pursuing a pure/authentic origin or uncontaminated cultures (Hannerz 1990).

Tenzin (2013) proposes the concept of the convergence zone, which applies the exploration of the center-periphery relationship to the context of China. Tenzin’s convergence

zone shares much with Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and Ulf Hannerz's creolization model, that is, the center-periphery are in the process of dynamic interaction with each other. Further, Tenzin (2013) extends them and adds new ideas based on his exploration of Gyarong society and the local culture, ethnic identities and gender identities. First, he develops the relations between (one)center- (one)periphery relationship into a model of double center - dual periphery based on his research site, Gyarong society, which is located in Sichuan province, where Gyarong people (as an atypical Tibetan) are doubly marginalized because they are far from the Tibetan people in Tibet (center) and also far from the Han people in mainstream China.

Second, Tenzin (2013) strongly emphasizes the subjectivity and agency of the periphery society. He disagrees with Bhabha and Hannerz's idea of impurity because of the interactions between cultures; instead, he stresses that the periphery society (Gyarong society) is self-centred and self-formed (Tenzin 2013). Therefore, the periphery has its own independence and is constructing its own purity and authenticity, that is, the periphery takes a self-centred strategy to deal with their unequal relationship with the two centers (Tenzin 2013). In the case of Gyarong society, Tenzin finds that Gyarong people do not take their periphery as a restraint and restriction. Instead, they take a method of "voluntary/strategic marginality" to deal with their relations with the centers (Tenzin 2013:6). On the one hand, they are fully leveraging their marginality to promote the difference (including their unique language, culture and history in China) and transferring their marginality into possible scarce resources in order to obtain the special supporting policy from Danba County Government (Tenzin 2013: 32-33). On the other hand, local men in Gyarong promote the so-called "strong women and weak men" legacy of Eastern Queendom in their history and they claim that local women are more capable and powerful than they are, so that women are the backbone of the family and the local community

(Tenzin 2013: 70). By creating a new gender identity, the periphery society successfully attracts cultural curiosity hunting and attracts mainstream society to visit. In their voluntary marginalization, the periphery and impurity (atypical Tibetan culture) are transformed into “center” and “purity” (Tenzin 2013: 122-127).

Third, in addition to the strategy of voluntary marginalization, Tenzin (2013) also looks at another model of how marginalized groups deal with their relationship with the center. That is, they actively show loyalty to the center in order to avoid their repression, which can be seen in the Gyarong people’s patriotism, their support for the Chinese Communist Party’s ethnic and Tibetan policies, and their separation of themselves from the Tibetan riots.

All these three center-periphery models contribute to my research framework from different dimensions. All of them, Homi Bhabha’s hybridity model, Ulf Hannerz’s creolization paradigm and Tenzin’s convergence zone, notice that regardless of the existence of unequal power relations between them, the center and the periphery are not clearly separated from each other; instead, they are constantly in a dialectical relation with each other. The first difference between their theories is that their studies originate in different contexts. Bhabha’s research stems from his reflections on post-colonialism (center) and addresses the question of why colonialism was doomed to fail and why the colonized areas (periphery) were not fully assimilated. Hannerz’s research stems from the interaction between the West (center) and the non-West (periphery) in the context of globalization and addresses how local cultures respond to the West through the modification and innovation of the (Western dominated) globalized culture. Tenzin puts the convergence zone in the Chinese context (the Tibetan and Han are two ethnic center and Gyarong people as the periphery). Tenzin’s convergence zone explores two centers and a dual marginalization, which sheds light on my research about Chinese gender and sexual

minorities who are experiencing dual marginalization comparing with the two centers (Chinese nationalism/national identity/mainstream heterosexual society and the global civil society/forces).

Second, the ideas of hybridity, creolization and convergence have different emphases on the dynamic interplay of the center and periphery. Bhabha looks at colonial anxiety. That is, the center/dominant/ruler is not a solid block; instead, there are internal conflicts within them. The anxiety of the center/ruler and the hybridity and ambivalence at the periphery lead to the failure of the center's (colonial) discourse and cultural assimilation. This idea is very helpful for reconsidering why foreign support for Chinese LGBT human rights is not as successful as expected and why China's policies sometimes take self-contradictory measures and attitudes towards LGBT people.

Third, the idea of the convergence zone talks about one pragmatic strategy: people at the periphery may praise the greatness and correctness of the central power's policies and actively distance themselves from social rebellion to receive supporting policies from the government. This idea is very helpful in explaining why the nationalist gay (Pink Gay) glorifies oppression and suppression from mainstream propaganda and policies (Chapter 4). Tenzin highly stresses that showing loyalty to the center results from the subjectivity and agency of local people. However, whether the subjectivity and agency among some other group (such as the nationalist gay people) is overestimated and overly emphasized, still needs further investigation.

Fourth, all the three theorists examine practical/pragmatic/strategic resistance strategies of the people at the periphery. The hybridity/mimicry (me in you, and you in me) deconstructs the purity/authenticity of the center; the creole culture absorbs the production of the center, rehomes it at the local, and sometimes promotes the local production into the center, which also

in some ways dismantles the purity of the center. The convergence zone theory, on the contrary, argues that it does not matter whether the purity will be dismantled or not. Instead, authenticity and purity can be utilized by the periphery. In order to gain some benefits from the mainstream society, local people can even voluntarily marginalize themselves and highly praise the center. The three theorists reveal the complexity of resistance, and in some social contexts, these practical resistance strategies are successful (such as the relative independence of India regardless of colonization). These ideas are also helpful in my analysis of local LGBT activism in China.

Fifth, all three theorists have a strong tendency toward elitism, neglecting the “matter of class” (Ahmad 1995). As Ahmad criticizes Bhabha’s hybridity, he points out that “most individuals are really not free to fashion themselves anew with each passing day, nor do communities arise out of and fade into the thin air of the infinitely contingent” (1995:1). It is right that those who have the ability to reflect the center-periphery interactions and achieve the so-called resistance through mimicry/hybridity, creolization, or voluntary marginalization are the bourgeoisie, the privileged, the elite and the intellectuals of local societies. For example, in the convergence model, Uncle Pema, who is both a cadre and local intellectual from the Danba Township, contributes most to the construction of local identity through voluntary marginalization (Tenzin 2013). However, these theorists neglect the silent majority; that is, the agency and subjectivity of local societies are overestimated. Therefore, not all people at the periphery will resist when they are oppressed by the center, even if it is a strategic and gentle resistance.

All in all, inspired by the three theories, Chinese LGBT issues can be situated in both the center and periphery of power relations. In Mainland China, LGBT people are marginalized and

repressed by the state and mainstream society (Miles-Johnson and Wang 2018). LGBT people in China are also peripheral in global civil society compared to those in Western nations, where LGBT human rights are more developed and more impactful (Kong 2019). Therefore, LGBT people in China are in a doubly marginalized position, domestically and internationally. Of course, the dual marginalization of LGBT people in China does not mean that they passively accept the positions and labels attached to them. As Giddens' structuration theory shows, there is an interplay between structure and the agent and "the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems" (1984: 69). Thus, Chinese LGBT people are agents and subjectively negotiate their identities with state and global powers in the realm of sexuality (Hildebrandt 2011, 2012; Kong 2019). Gender and sexuality in China are a hybridized and marginalized zone, where the state, global forces and LGBT people intersect and engage with one another. It is therefore helpful to bring in the notions of the center and periphery to understand how Chinese LGBT people manage, adapt, and challenge their identities and related rights through negotiation with other central powers.

In sum, this chapter discusses the literature on sexual identity, the globalization of sexuality, and sexual nationalism. It also explores center-periphery theories as a reference framework. Building upon the aforementioned discussion, in the following six chapters, I will delve into the intricate intersectionality of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization within various spheres, including the state, public discourses, LGBT individuals, and the LGBT social movements.

Chapter 3 Methodology

As discussed, my dissertation explores the intersections between sexuality, nationalism, and globalization in current China. To be precise, the research objects encompass exploring questions such as: (1) How does Chinese nationalism impact the influence of foreign support for the LGBT community? (2) How do different people within the Chinese LGBT community negotiate their own gender and sexuality with the influences of nationalism and globalization? And (3) what strategies do Chinese LGBT activists use to deal with their relations with Chinese nationalism and the influences of globalization? In order to understand these questions, I collected different types of data for analysis.

3.1 Data Collection

My research questions have necessitated the utilization of diverse data sources. Specifically, in-depth interviews were my primary method, allowing LGBT individuals to express their personal ideas and stories. I used interview data to uncover LGBT people's perceptions and attitudes toward their sexuality, their relationship with national identity and global civil society, as well as their strategies to reconcile and harmonize these relations. I also employed participant observation of different LGBT activities, which were mainly organized by LGBT activists, in order to better understand strategies and discourses used by Chinese LGBT activists in their mobilization and resistance. Moreover, I examined documents and media. For document analysis, I examined publicly available files related to LGBT, Chinese nationalism, and patriotism from the Chinese government, as well as LGBT-related statements and resolutions from the UN and foreign embassies in China. For media analysis, I examined data

from both news media and social media. In addition to interviews, observations, and document analysis, over the course of my research, I was invited by NGO_X Beijing Branch (pseudonym) to conduct a survey on “family acceptance of LGBT people in China.” I have therefore also included results from this online survey to provide additional context and an overall description of the Chinese LGBT population, including their attitudes toward nationalism and globalization.

3.1.1 In-depth Interviews

Purposive Sampling and Snowball sampling

I used purposive and snowball sampling to choose my interviewees as a way to access the relevant population: gender and sexual minorities in China. In this research, I aim to understand the perceptions, attitudes, and strategies of LGBT people in dealing with the relationship between gender and sexual identities, Chinese national identity, and transnational and cosmopolitan LGBT human rights advocated by global civil society. Therefore, the main criterion for selecting interviewees is based on their sexual orientations and gender identities. I set the age limit at 18 because my research questions need participants to have a relatively clear idea of and information about LGBT issues. Young people under 18 years of age may not meet this criterion because sexuality education is still marginalized in practice under educational system in China (Sa, Tian and Wang 2021). Gender and sexual minorities include a wide range of categories such as gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, queer, intersex, pansexual, and pangender groups. However, these sexual and gender minorities still have low visibility in Chinese society, with only around 5% of them choosing to disclose their LGBT identity in different arenas (UNDP 2016). Gay men have relatively higher visibility, resulting in gay people being the largest proportion (65%) of my interviewees alongside other gender and sexual

minority groups (lesbian, queer, transwomen, transmen account for 16%, 7%, 7%, and 5% respectively). To ensure a diversified sample, I also took age, education, occupation, and religion into my sampling consideration.

I recruited a total of 43 participants, with 41 interviewees from four regions of China (see Figure 3.1): Beijing, Shanghai, Lanzhou (the capital of Gansu province), and Chengdu (the capital of Sichuan province), which possess different levels of economic development and openness to the LGBT community. Shanghai is located in the southeast of China and is the most LGBT-friendly and economically prosperous city in China, with one of the largest economies in the country, as well as Shanghai Pride, the only annual festival celebrating gender and sexual diversity. Beijing is the political center of China, where most NGOs are registered (Shieh and Brown-Inz 2013), and it is also an international city. Lanzhou and Chengdu have not progressed as far in the process of globalization, but Chengdu is considered to be a relatively LGBT-friendly city and is often referred to as the “gay capital” (gay 都) (Qian 2016). Lanzhou, a region heavily influenced by Muslim culture, is more conservative concerning gender and sexuality than the other three cities, and its economy is less developed. Therefore, the four cities I selected as my research locations represent a diversity of LGBT cultures in China. I also recruited two participants from outside of these four cities. These two participants were selected due to their status as international students (specifically studying in Canada and the UK), which brings unique experiences of globalization and enriches the diversity of interview data.



Figure 3.1 Map of Mainland China

Recruiting interviewees

The most challenging part of gaining access to the field and recruiting interviewees was finding a gatekeeper. I started my journey of investigation in Lanzhou, the region I know best even though the public acceptance in this city is most conservative compared with the other three. I knew that the NGO_X China set up a branch in Lanzhou in 2016. I searched related information and found contact information for the person in charge of NGO_X Lanzhou. Then I sent my greetings and requested a meeting with him. It was fortunate that Activist WJ (pseudonym), the leader of NGO_X Lanzhou, was a graduate student at Lanzhou University, which was also my alma mater. It made my access to the field in Lanzhou much easier because of my status as Lanzhou University Alumni. With Activist WJ's help, I came to know more LGBT people in Lanzhou from whom to draw interview participants. Activist WJ, who has his social networks in the LGBT community across the country, introduced me to other leaders of NGO_X in Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi'an (although Xi'an was not one of the cities I had selected). Therefore, through this initial connection with NGO_X, I gained at least one key

person to help introduce me to the local LGBT community in the other three cities. I used similar methods of finding a key informant via community organizations and joining local LGBT activities to successfully recruit my participants in Chengdu, Beijing, and Shanghai. All in all, I conducted 43 formal semi-structured interviews with LGBT individuals.

Before each interview, I provided each participant with a consent form and ensured that they understood it before signing. I introduced myself, explained my student status, thesis, research, privacy protections, data analysis, and how I would utilize their data in future publications. Then, I informed them of the expected duration of the interview, up to 2 hours, and asked their permission to use a digital recorder. Finally, I made sure that they understood they had the right to refuse to answer any specific question when they felt uncomfortable and the right to stop the interview at any point. I also informed them of their right to withdraw their interview recordings before August 1, 2019.

The interviews were conducted in various social settings, which were agreed upon through negotiation with the interviewees. In Lanzhou, I booked an independent office at Lanzhou University, where most of the interviews took place. However, some interviews were conducted in interviewees' homes or over the telephone. Since I could not find an independent office in the other three cities, many interviews were conducted in parks or other public spaces, as well as in interviewees' homes or over the phone.

The interview mainly comprised five main sections (see Appendix I). In the first section, I collected general demographic information from participants. Section two explored their process and experience of recognizing and understanding their gender and sexual identity, including any coming out experiences, as well as their opinion of and involvement with the LGBT community. The third section focused on national LGBT policies, including their

knowledge about and opinions on those policies. The questions also explored their understanding of patriotic emotion and national Chinese identity and whether LGBT policies affected their sentiments of patriotism, and any general commentary on how they navigate the relationship between their national identity and identity as a GSM. Lastly, for those involved in activism, this section explored how national policies affect their mobilization and framing of LGBT activism in China.

Following these first three sections, section four focused on participants' knowledge and opinions of foreign support in China and the connections with LGBT human rights. For any participants not familiar with foreign support in China, I provided information for them to comment on to gather their thoughts. For example, I said, "During 517 IDAHOTB, the US Embassy and the Canadian Embassy organized activities in China in support of the Chinese LGBT community. How do you comment on their support? Do you think it is necessary to have their support? How about their resources/funding aids?" For participants who are LGBT activists, I also asked whether/how foreign support affects their mobilization and framing of LGBT activism in China. This section also asked participants for their comments on the "798-Advocacy" organized by Piaoquanjun(票圈君) (see Chapter One for more details), and the ways that some had positioned that activism as coming from hostile anti-China forces. To further explore connections between nationalism and sexual and gender identity and activism, I asked participants to comment on Taiwan's legalization of same-sex marriage and how they saw that connecting in terms of mainland China.

Lastly, in section five I asked participants to talk about their future expectations for their personal life, for national policies on LGBT rights, for Chinese LGBT activism, and for global LGBT human rights.

The participants were the center of interview process. While the interview schedule was used to shape the conversations and ensure consistency, I encouraged participants to talk about their stories in a friendly conversation, allowing for follow up questions and iterative clarification of the discussion on the required themes. Overall, all the interviews were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. From March 1, 2019, to June 30, 2019, I interviewed 43 participants (see Appendix II), including 9 activists and 15 volunteers. Each interview lasted around two hours on average and was transcribed in full for analysis using NVivo.

Basic description of interviewees

As shown in Table 3.1, all my interviewees are gender and sexual minorities. The majority are homosexual (38 interviewees), while a few respondents identified as (trans) heterosexual, pansexual, or gender non-conforming and are also included. In terms of gender identity, the majority of participants were cisgender males (29 interviewees), followed by cisgender females (7 interviewees). In addition, I deliberately searched for transgender groups during my research, and was able to include five transgender individuals. To my surprise, many of interviewees had already come out to their families (27 participants). This may be related to the fact that many of my interviewees were recommended by local activists or were invited to my research when I met them at LGBT activities. Additionally, those willing to speak to a researcher looking for participants who identify as members of the LGBT community may be more likely to be those who are already out to their families (less fear of participation risks).

The majority of my respondents (33 interviewees) were born in urban areas of China. In terms of age distribution, most respondents were under 40 years old, with only one respondent over 40 years old. Regarding religious beliefs, most of the respondents (33 interviewees) were

non-religious. During my research process, I deliberately sought out people with religious beliefs as respondents, and I interviewed four Christians/Catholics, two Muslims, and two Buddhists. In addition, one respondent expressed a preference for the Flying Spaghetti religion, and one respondent believed in mystical powers (crystals). In terms of ethnic distribution, 41 respondents were Han Chinese, and two were Hui people (which corresponds to their religious beliefs in Islam). For education level, most of them were relatively well-educated, having received a college or university education (29 interviewees) and even master's degrees (7 interviewees).

Table 3.1 Summary of Interviewees

		Frequency (Total=43)	Percent (%)
Sexuality	Heterosexual	3	7
	Homosexual	38	88.4
	Pansexual	1	2.3
	Non-Conforming	1	2.3
Gender	Cis Man	29	67.4
	Cis Women	7	16.3
	Transgender Man	2	2.7
	Transgender Woman	3	7
	Nonbinary	2	4.7
Come out	Yes	27	62.8
	No	16	37.2
Birthplace	Urban	33	76.7
	Rural	10	23.3

Age	18-22	9	20.9
	23-30	16	37.2
	31-40	17	39.5
	40-50	1	2.3
Religion	None	33	76.7
	Christianity/Catholicism	4	9.3
	Islam	2	4.7
	Buddhism	2	4.7
	Other	2	4.7
Ethnicity	Han	41	95.3
	Hui	2	4.7
Education	Primary/middle school	2	4.7
	High school	5	11.6
	College/university	29	67.4
	Master	7	16.3

3.1.2 Observations

I employed participant observation to collect data on LGBT activism in China. In the four cities selected for my research, I participated in 26 activities organized by various LGBT NGOs (see Appendix III). In Lanzhou, I was invited to participate in a Mini Sharing Session organized by the NGO_X Lanzhou. In Chengdu, I had opportunity to join a whole session of Volunteer Training organized by NGO_X Chengdu and an Open Workshop and an Open Lecture organized by NGO_M (pseudonym). In Beijing, I participated in a series of activities surrounding

IDAHOTB, including a symposium at the EU Embassy (organized mainly by NGO_B (pseudonym) and NGO_C(pseudonym)), a film screening at the Danish Cultural Center (organized primarily by NGO_B), and a Parent-Child Relationship Symposium at the Czech Embassy (organized mainly by NGO_X Beijing). In addition, I participated in the Volunteer Training of the NGO_X Beijing. In Shanghai, I participated in a series of activities connected with Shanghai Pride including film screenings, symposiums, an LGBT Groups Open Day, and the China Rainbow Media Awards. I also participated in three conferences organized by NGO_X Shanghai (LGBT workplace Equality, Lesbian Session, and Coming Out Meeting) and one symposium on Gender Diversity Education organized by NGO_T. Through joining these activities, I collected data through observation, on different LGBT NGOs' beliefs, organizational forms, mobilization strategies, methods of dealing with state control, and their relations with foreign supports.

I have summarized the distinctive aspects of these 26 events, as shown in Table 3.2. Specifically, I participated in 1, 3, 7, and 15 events in Lanzhou, Chengdu, Beijing, and Shanghai, respectively. These 26 interactions can be classified based on different scales, with 5 events having 10 to 20 participants, 4 events having 20 to 40 participants, 11 events having 40 to 80 participants, and 6 events having more than 80 participants. Furthermore, these 26 events can be categorized into different types, including 3 volunteer training sessions, 9 speaking forums led by guest speakers, 6 internal community sharing and discussion sessions without guest speakers, 7 film screenings/art exhibitions/theatrical performances, and 1 award ceremony (Rainbow Media Award). Moreover, there were 3 activities related to IDAHOTB and 9 activities related to Shanghai Pride. These 26 events were held at various venues, with 14 held in commercial places, 7 in foreign embassies/consulates or cultural centers, and 3 in NGO meeting rooms. A majority

of these 26 events received sponsorship and cooperation, with 10 events sponsored by foreign companies, 12 events sponsored and cooperated by foreign embassies, and 15 events sponsored by local Chinese private enterprises, while 7 events received no sponsorship. The methods of participation varied, with 7 events being open to the public without registration, 12 events being open to the public but requiring registration, and 7 events being non-public and requiring invitations from the organizers.

Table 3.2 Summary of Observations

		Frequency (Total=26)	Percent (%)
Cities	Lanzhou	1	3.8
	Chengdu	3	11.5
	Beijing	7	26.9
	Shanghai	15	57.7
Number of Participants	10-20	5	19.2
	20-40	4	15.4
	40-80	11	42.3
	Above 80	6	23.1
Categories	Volunteer training sessions	3	11.5
	Speaking forums (led by guest speakers)	9	34.6
	Internal community sharing and discussion sessions (without guest speakers)	6	23.1
	Film screenings/art exhibitions/theatrical performances	7	26.9

	Award ceremony (Rainbow Media Award)	1	3.8
Topics	IDAHOTB	3	11.5
	Shanghai Pride	9	34.6
	Other	14	53.8
	Commercial venues	14	53.8
Venues	Foreign embassies/consulates or cultural centers	7	26.9
	NGO meeting room	3	11.5
	Other	2	7.7
	No sponsorship	7	26.9
Sponsorship and Cooperation	Foreign corporate sponsorship	10	38.5
	Foreign embassy sponsorship and cooperation	12	46.2
	Domestic private company sponsorship	15	57.7
Participation Methods	Public event, no registration required	7	26.9
	Public event, registration required	12	46.2
	Non-public, internal invitation	7	26.9

3.1.3 Document Research

In addition to interviews and observation of LGBT people, organizations, and events, my research questions require examination of the state/government (who plays a crucial role in constructing nationalism in China) and foreign actors (who are trying to support the LGBT community in China) and their interplay with each other. Given the level of restrictions and lack of access, interviews with government officials and foreign actors in China were not possible, so

I turned to government documents they produce as expressions of their stances toward and actions on LGBT issues.

For government documents, I collected three types of files: those related to gender and sexual minorities, those related to nationalism, and those associated with the management of foreign actors (see Appendix IV). The central and local governments have generally been silent on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity, reflecting their ambiguous attitudes of “no support, no opposition, no advocacy” (Zhang 2014). Consequently, the perspective of gender and sexuality is largely absent from state policymaking. On the rare occasion that policies are gender-sensitive, “gender” is limited to a binary heteronormative definition that fails to address the concerns of sexual and gender minorities (UNDP and USAID 2014). To locate relevant documents on gender and sexual minorities, I searched eight categories²³ of laws and policies and collected nine related files²⁴. Regarding nationalism, I collected files from three categories, including four files on patriotic education policies and three files on possible punishment for lack of patriotism. Concerning the management of foreign actors, the primary file I accessed is the Law on Administration of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations in the Mainland of China.

²³ The 8 categories include criminal law (removing hooliganism; but not protecting sexual assault between same-sex rape and assault), classification policies of medical disorders, anti-discrimination laws (employment, education, health), censorship, transgender policies, HIV related policies (blood donation and Civil Service Recruitment Examinations Standard), NGO management, partnership and marriage law.

²⁴ During the process of searching for “LGBT laws and policies,” I primarily relied on three important tools: (1) the “Being LGBT in Asia: China Country Report” published by UNDP and USAID in 2014, (2) Google search, and (3) the “cnlgbtdata.com” database. Specifically, I began by analyzing a significant summary report on China’s LGBT policies and laws, which is the “Being LGBT in Asia: China Country Report” published by UNDP and USAID in 2014. From this report, I compiled important documents related to LGBT issues. Subsequently, I used the Google search engine to find these specific documents. Finally, I supplemented the information from the UNDP and USAID (2014) report by utilizing the “cnlgbtdata.com” database, which provided further insights into LGBT policies and laws that were not covered in the aforementioned report.

The foreign actors that have influence on the Chinese LGBT issue can be categorized into three main forms: the United Nations, INGOs and foundations, and foreign government agencies. The website ohchr.org contains most of the files that provide a comprehensive analysis of UN LGBT advocacy mechanisms. I searched for the topics “LGBT people” and “China,” and found different types of documents, including LGBT-related resolutions, statements, annual thematic reports, and the Universal Periodic Review of China (see Appendix V), which were analyzed to understand the UN’s role in influencing human rights issues. Similarly, I tried to collect information about INGOs (such as ILGA and ARC-International) and their advocacy mechanisms, but there is limited information available due to China’s restrictive policies on INGOs in China. In comparison, most foreign governments have embassies in China, making related information easier to collect. To analyze their influence on China’s LGBT issues, I selected five of the most influential foreign embassies in China, including the US Embassy, Canadian Embassy, UK Embassy, Netherlands Embassy, and EU Delegation, and analyzed their public statements on Chinese LGBT issues.

3.1.4 News Media Research

According to the China Rainbow Media Monitoring Report²⁵ (2014-2019), there were approximately 680 reports on LGBT issues in Chinese media (including government official media and non-government media) during that five-year period. The government media represents the official voice of the state and is used as a tool to distribute government propaganda and explain official policies, while non-government media contains a greater diversity of voices.

²⁵ The China Rainbow Media Monitoring Report is released by the China Rainbow Media Awards (CRMA), an organization that focuses on monitoring LGBT media coverage in China. In addition to producing the Monitoring Report, the CRMA is also involved in press industry training and organizing the China Rainbow Media Awards Ceremony.

Therefore, I selected a sample of 120 articles from 2016 to 2021: 80 articles from the government official media (40 in Chinese and 40 in English) and 40 articles from non-government media. The time period from 2016 to 2021 was chosen because this study primarily focuses on the intersectionality between nationalism and LGBT issues in recent years. I used the website “people.cn²⁶” and its English counterpart “en.people.cn” to search for government reports on LGBT issues in China using keywords such as “gay,” “lesbian,” “homosexual,” “transgender,” “bisexual,” “intersex,” “queer,” and “Tong Zhi (同志).” For non-government reports, I used the website “163.com.” Additionally, I collected 40 reports from international media such as Pink News, The Guardian, and CNN between 2016 and 2021 for comparison.

3.1.5 Social Media Research

In China, ordinary people do not participate in the policy-making process due to the authoritarian regime, and their voice is not fully represented in newspapers. However, the rise of the internet provides ordinary people with a venue and opportunity to express their ideas and concerns on public issues. In China, the rapid growth of the blogosphere and other forms of online media has provided public online space for ordinary people, even though the internet is subject to government censorship (MacKinnon 2008). There are many internet communication platforms in China, such as Weibo, Tieba, Douban, and Zhihu. Weibo is the biggest social media platform in China, with over 0.57 billion monthly active users as of Q3 2021 (XinhuNet 2021). Weibo operates similarly to X (the former Twitter), and Weibo users can post short messages, images, videos, and other multimedia content to share with their followers. Different Weibo users can interact with each other through comments, private messages, hashtags, and

²⁶ the website, people.cn, is held by the People’s Daily, the party newspaper of the Communist Party of China, with a focus on news reporting. It contains central and local governmental news.

“@mentions.” Many companies and organizations also use Weibo as a marketing and public relations tool to reach a wider audience. Additionally, China’s censorship of news media has made Weibo an important source of news, as many parties involved in events will use their Weibo accounts to document the process of the event. Moreover, Weibo is an important platform for social and political discourse, with many discussions and debates happening on the platform. Many Chinese government agencies, state media, foreign embassy agencies, NGOs, and public opinion leaders have their Weibo accounts. Therefore, I also collected data from Weibo to understand how different Weibo users interplay on LGBT issues. First, I collected 500 representative posts and responses by assessing their relevance to nationalism, globalization, and LGBT issues. This involved utilizing search keywords that included phrases like “517 IDAHOTB (517 国际不再恐同日),” “Pride Parade (骄傲节),” “Taiwan’s legalization of same-sex marriage (台湾同性婚姻合法化),” “the legalization of same-sex marriage in the US (美国同性婚姻合法化),” and “the 798-Event (798 事件).” In addition to the opinions on a specific topic on Weibo, I also focused on the typical posts of the main actors. These actors include Chinese government agencies and official media, foreign embassy agencies, nationalist public opinion leaders, LGBT NGOs, LGBT public opinion leaders, and nationalist gays (Pink Gays) (see Appendix VI). Specifically, I selected 50 typical posts from each of these actors on topics including LGBT issues, nationalism, and foreign LGBT support from 2016 to 2021.

3.1.6 Online Survey

Initially, I did not have an online survey in my research as a survey is less suited to providing the data necessary to explore the qualitative questions of my research. However, while performing research in Beijing, the Director of Beijing branch of NGO_X asked if I could help

conduct an online survey about LGBT people's coming out and their relations with parents. I took the opportunity and designed a questionnaire and applied a new ethical amendment. In this online survey, I added questions to measure LGBT people's attitudes toward nationhood (nationalism) and foreign support. NGO_X Beijing and I used a variety of venues to recruit participants, mainly through WeChat and Weibo, using snowball sampling. Survey participants could complete and submit their responses online with the tool wenjun.com (a professional online survey tool in China). The online survey was conducted from October 14, 2019, to April 30, 2020 (there were several interruptions because of the Covid-19 pandemic). 2041 people participated in this survey, and there were 1781 valid questionnaires, with an effective rate of 86%.

The survey enriches my data and provides a basic overview of the contemporary young LGBT community in China. As Table 3.3 shows, in this online survey, although cisgender men are the majority of participants, respondents also include those who are intersex, with whom I did not have an opportunity to speak during my interviews. In terms of gender identity, cisgender males account for over 66%, cisgender females account for over 17%, and transgender males and transgender females also represent over 9% of participants. Similar to the distribution of interviewees, in terms of sexual orientation, homosexuals are still the dominant participants (82.8%). In terms of age distribution, close to half of the participants are between 23-30 years old, followed by close to 30% of the participants being between 18-22. Thus, overall, most participants are young and middle-aged, with almost no older participants. In terms of ethnic structure, Han Chinese account for about 94%, while ethnic minorities make up only about 6%. In terms of religion, more than 80% of the participants are religiously unaffiliated, followed by over 10% of Buddhists and 3.6% of Christians/Catholics; the sample also includes Taoists,

Muslims, and other groups. The overall education level of participants is relatively high, with more than 80% having received college/university education and above. In terms of birth background, more than 60% of participants were born in urban areas, while less than 40% were born in rural areas. In terms of occupational distribution, students occupied a large proportion, nearly 40%, while those with regular jobs were close to 45%. Regarding the distribution of income, the percentage of non-income earners is close to 30%, which may be related to the large percentage of student participants. Among the participants with income, most of their income is concentrated between 2000-5000 (24.5%) and 5000-10000 (21.8%) RMB.

This online survey partly reflects the landscape of gender and sexual minorities in China but has many limitations. For example, it mainly collected data from young LGBT people familiar with the Internet; however, others who cannot access the Internet or hide their LGBT identities were not included. Besides, gay men dominated the sexual minorities in the sample, which likely reflects their higher visibility in China than other LGBT groups. Nonetheless, the survey enriches my data and provides a basic overview of the contemporary young LGBT community, in which to situate the more detailed qualitative data gathered through interviews and observation.

Table 3.3 Summary of Online Survey

		Percent (%)
Sex assigned at Birth	Male	72.6
	Female	26
	Intersex	1.4
Gender Identity	Cis Man	66.7
	Cis Women	17.6

	Transgender Man	5.4
	Transgender Woman	3.9
	Non-binary	3.9
	Other	2.4
Sexual Orientation	Homosexual	82.8
	Bi/Pan-sexual	12.6
	Heterosexual	1.5
	Other	3.1
Age	14-17	4.6
	18-22	29.8
	23-30	45.9
	31-40	16.8
	above 41	2.9
Ethnicity	Han	93.9
	Minorities	6.1
Religion	None	82.3
	Buddhism	10.9
	Christianity / Catholicism	3.6
	Taoism	1.5
	Islam	0.3
	Other	1.4
Education	Junior high school and below	4.7
	High school	14

	College	15.9
	Undergraduate	51.3
	Master's and above	14
Birthplace	Rural	38.2
	Urban	61.8
Occupation	students	38.5
	Regular job	44.1
	Non-regular job	11.4
	No job	6
Monthly Income (¥)	No income	29.8
	Below 2000	9.2
	2000-5000	24.5
	5000-10000	21.8
	10000-20000	9.9
	Above 20000	4.7

3.2 Data Analysis

In this research, I use several methods to collect data, this approach of “all is data” is a strategy advocated by Glaser (2001), to explore how LGBT identity and activism interrelate with nationalism and globalism in China. The majority of my analysis is qualitative, with the online survey data being used only to provide additional context. Data collection resulted in a range of different forms of data for analysis. I transcribed the recorded interviews, took observational notes for participant observation data, and I collected the relevant textual material for the

document analysis, news media, and social media posts. My analysis involved four stages, and that, in conjunction with the work of my literature review, led to my creating a gender and sexual convergence framework that proved further useful for my analysis.

First, I read the transcribed interview data and different categories of documents, with the method of line-by-line coding to identify potentially valuable concepts/terms. I gave each code a specific term with my summary or the interviewees' own words. For instance, when my interviewees talked about their gender and sexuality, they usually used "come out," "Tong Zhi small circle," "no loudly proclaim," "no ask, no speak," "family pressure," "disguising," "cooperative marriage/xinghun (形婚)." So, I use them as "in vivo codes." When the Chinese government explained the question of "why people need to be patriotic", several reasons were highlighted by government files, newspapers, and some nationalist public opinion leaders, such as "the independence of the nation," "the dignity of nation," "the unity of nation," "the prosperity of the country," "the revival of the great nation," "Chinese Dream" and "anti-secession." These words were also employed as codes.

In the second reading stage, I compared the first-stage codes and tried to categorize them into different groups according to various topics. For example, when I read different codes about justification of the "unfriendly" policies (for the nationalist and Pink Gay group, the policies might not be unfriendly) from the Chinese government, I found they use different downward comparison strategies. I categorized them into different groups, including downward comparison to more LGBT-unfriendly countries (such as some Middle East countries and India) and downward comparison to the heterosexual people's difficulties (such as being forced to marry, being forced to give birth to babies).

In the third stage of reading, I tried to clarify the relations between different groups of codes. According to my main research subjects, including the Chinese government (nation, national identity), foreign actors related to LGBT issues in China, and the LGBT community, I further categorized them into different themes. I have listed the themes that emerged from the reading as follows:

- Authenticity
- Security
- Being Chinese/being patriotic
- Being Liberal
- Being Avoidant
- Employing Chinese Nationalism
- Employing Foreign LGBT Support
- Decoupling Strategies
- Coupling Strategies
- Downward Comparison
- Upward Comparison
- Defending Nationalism
- Criticizing Nationalism
- Detachment from Nationalism
- Pragmatism
- Resistance

Fourth, I tried to link the different grouped codes under different themes and construct my arguments and theory. For example, nationalism and patriotic discourses are not always restrictions for LGBT activism in China when I compare different mobilization strategies between different local LGBT NGOs, activists and public opinion leaders. I used my observational data and interview data to show that sometimes nationalist narratives (such as building a harmonious family and society) can be utilized by LGBT activists and NGOs such as NGO_X (with their slogan “constructing harmonious family and promote social unity”). With these comparisons of different data, I disclose the impacts of nationalism in shaping Chinese LGBT activism.

Furthermore, combining the above data analysis with my literature review, I construct a dissertation framework titled the “Sexuality Convergence” Model (see Figure 3.2). This framework defines a dual marginal space where gender and sexual minorities exist at the intersection of state/nation/nationalism and global forces. The two centers of this framework are the Chinese state/nation/nationalism and global forces. The Chinese gender and sexual minorities experience dual marginality within this space. By utilizing this framework, the complex interactions between the LGBT community, Chinese state and nationalism, and global LGBT support are made clearer. It serves as a guide to establish coherent connections between the collected data and various theories and literature.

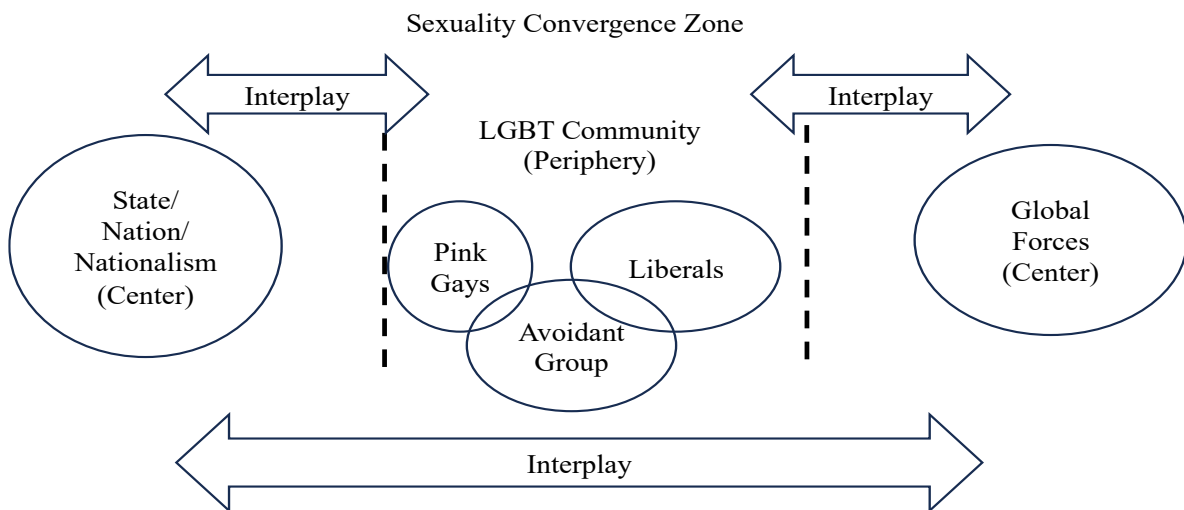


Figure 3.2 Analysis Framework

Finally, I need to point out that I have employed quotations at length in my writing, particularly in Chapters 5 and 6. This choice is based on two reasons: (1) quoting at length allows for a more comprehensive presentation of the viewpoints and logical reasoning of LGBT individuals; and (2) considering the limited exposure and recognition of voices within the

Chinese LGBT community, extensive quoting also serves the purpose of amplifying their voices and advocating for their inclusion.

Chapter 4 One Foreign Force, Two Nationalisms:

How Does Chinese Nationalism Block Foreign LGBT Support?

This chapter focuses on exploring the intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization in the Chinese context, specifically at the state and public discourse contexts. Existing literature shows that advocating for local LGBT human rights through transnational advocacy networks (TANs) in conservative nations is often controversial due to potential conflicts with local traditional cultures and values, as well as national identity (Stella and Nartova 2015; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Nationalists often publicly criticize local LGBT movements and foreign support for LGBT rights, claiming that they undermine national traditions and security, which weakens the impact of foreign influence on local LGBT advocacy (Swimelar 2020). Situating its analysis in the broader literature on sexual nationalism and globalization of sexuality (as discussed in Chapter 2), this chapter aims to shed light on how Chinese nationalism affects or hinders foreign LGBT support or pressure.

To investigate these dynamics, I employ various research methodologies, including document research, social media research, and analysis of news media. This chapter begins by discussing the challenges and dilemmas faced by international advocates for LGBT rights in China. It explores the difficulties encountered when attempting to promote LGBT rights within the cultural and political context of China. Next, this chapter examines the utilization of Chinese nationalism as a means to counteract international pressure for LGBT rights. It includes an examination of its impact on both international platforms, such as the United Nations, and domestic platforms like the social media platform Weibo. The findings suggest that while the Chinese state employs nationalism to resist external pressure, there exists an internal divide

within Chinese nationalism when intersected with sexuality, marked by the coexistence of macho nationalism and homonationalism. Furthermore, this chapter investigates the relationship between these two forms of nationalism and the contradictions and ambiguities in the Chinese state's representation of LGBT issues. This chapter also delves into how Chinese nationalism is used as a tool of censorship, effectively silencing the voices of the Chinese LGBT community. I argue that the two dilemmas of transnational LGBT support in China create a space for the Chinese state and nationalists to resist external pressure regarding LGBT human rights. However, a certain degree of internal inconsistency and ambiguity in the Chinese state's stance on LGBT issues has resulted in an internal divide within Chinese sexual nationalism. Nevertheless, I contend that despite the presence of some homonationalist discourses in China, macho nationalist discourses dominate and play a significant role in silencing LGBT voices. Overall, this chapter contributes to a better understanding of the complex interplay between sexuality, nationalism, and globalization in the Chinese context.

4.1 The Dilemmas of Transnational LGBT Support in China

China's open-door policy has created an opportunity for transnational LGBT organizations to penetrate the country politically. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs), foreign embassies, private foundations, and multinational corporations have played a crucial role in forming and nurturing the growth of local LGBT communities and activism in China since the 1990s (Hildebrandt 2012). Some Chinese LGBT activists have noted that the development of the LGBT community and its organizations would be hindered without international funding (Hildebrandt 2012). However, over the past decade, China has witnessed an increase in domestic social control (Chin and Lin 2022) and a notable shift in its foreign

relations strategy (Sørensen 2015). Regarding international relations, Chinese foreign policy has transitioned away from focusing on keeping a low profile and instead, it has embraced a more proactive approach by showcasing China's capabilities and actively seeking regional or global leadership (Sørensen 2015). This shift signifies a more assertive or aggressive trajectory in Chinese foreign policy under the leadership of Xi Jinping (Sørensen 2015). Domestically, perceiving the operations of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) as a significant national security concern, the Chinese government enacted the Law on Administration of Activities of Overseas NGOs in Mainland China (the Overseas NGO Law) in January 2017. This law has created high barriers to INGO registration and restricted their funding distribution, making it increasingly difficult for international LGBT organizations to provide financial support to the local LGBT community in China or to exert influence or pressure on the Chinese government (Chinafile 2017; Li 2020; Spires 2020).

According to the Foreign NGO Service Platform²⁷, from 2017 to 2022, a total of 681 international non-governmental organizations (representative offices) registered in China, but none of them focused on LGBT issues. Of the 4,752 short-term collaborative projects, only 40 focused on HIV/AIDS prevention and 11 on gender equality, as shown in Figure 4.1. The 4 INGOs that conducted the 11 gender equality projects were the Raoul Wallenberg Institute from Sweden, Bread for the World from Germany, the Association for International Solidarity from Italy, and the Asia Foundation from the United States. The 40 AIDS prevention projects were primarily conducted by the Barry & Martin's Trust from the UK, the AIDS Health Foundation from the US, Bread for the World from Germany, and Give Anywhere Safety from the US.

²⁷ The overseas NGO Service Platform (<https://ngo.mps.gov.cn/ngo/portal/index.do>) functions an audit of overseas organizations. It was launched by the Ministry of Public Security of China on January 1st, 2017.

However, due to strict government surveillance, these limited short-term projects have had a minimal impact on the government’s policies regarding LGBT issues.

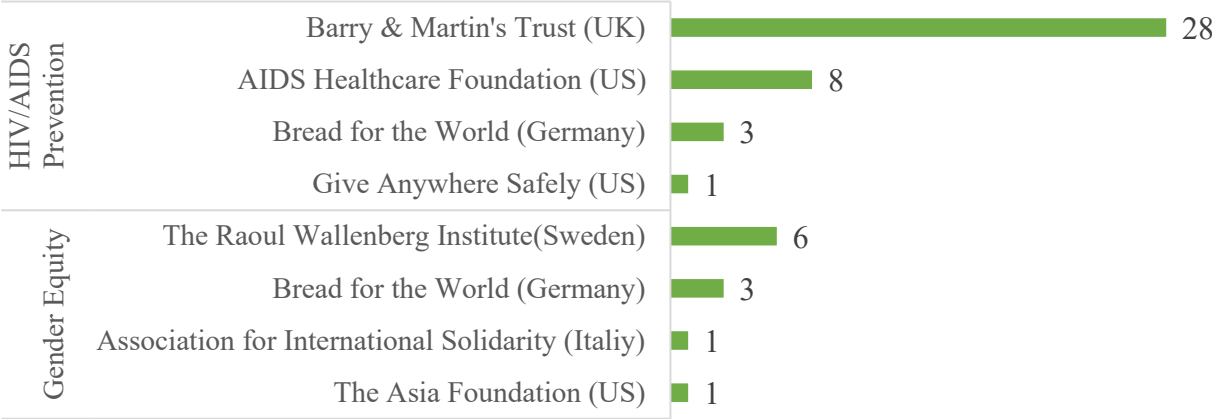


Figure 4.1 Distribution of Short-Term Collaborative Projects

At present, the United Nations and certain foreign embassies are the primary sources of pressure regarding LGBT issues in China. By promoting the protection of LGBT rights and bringing attention to LGBT issues through its various mechanisms²⁸, the UN serves multiple functions in pressuring China on LGBT issues. First, the UN exerts pressure on China to state its position on LGBT rights. Before 2013, when the UN did not exert direct and specific pressure on China regarding LGBT rights, China tended to abstain from or oppose the protection of these rights and avoided using terms such as “sexual orientation” or “LGBT” in its statements. However, the increasing review and criticism of LGBT human rights directed at China by the UN have forced the country to respond directly to this pressure. For instance, during the first

²⁸ These mechanisms include promoting resolutions related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE) passed by the Human Rights Council and General Assembly, leading the UN Free & Equal campaign, monitoring and exposing human rights violations against LGBTI individuals, reviewing the implementation of human rights treaty obligations signed by individual states through its review mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is held every four years, and appointing independent human rights experts to report and advise on human rights issues from thematic or country-specific perspectives.

cycle of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2009, there was only one criticism from the Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI) that China had no law or policy on same-sex sexual harassment and sexual violence, homosexual marriage, and the adoption of children by homosexual individuals²⁹. In the second cycle of UPR in 2013, the number of critical comments increased to six, with Norway, Ireland, and the Netherlands joining in criticizing the state of LGBT human rights in China³⁰. In the third cycle of UPR in 2018, ten criticisms and recommendations from additional international non-governmental organizations and countries (Spain, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and the UK) were issued³¹. Consequently, during the second UPR review in 2013, China used the term “persons with different sexual orientations” for the first time in its UN statements, and China accepted and committed to the proposal to establish anti-discrimination laws to protect the gay community from discrimination in work and school³². During the 2015 review by the Torture Prevention Committee, China used the term “LGBTI” for the first time, indicating that the UN has pressured the government to study LGBT issues (Peng 2018). During the third UPR review in 2018-2019, China’s representative delegation positively responded to the domestic LGBT rights issue at the UN, stating that “our country has always respected the health rights of the LGBT+ community and given them equal social protection” (Gay’s Voice 2018; Taylor 2019).

²⁹ For more details, refer to the Summary Prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Document No. A/HRC/WG.6/4/CHN/3) issued by Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Fourth session of the Human Rights Council, held in Geneva from February 2-13, 2009.

³⁰ For more details, refer to: (1) Compilation prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Document No. A/HRC/WG.6/17/CHN/2) issued by Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review during October 21 – November 1, 2013; (2) Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (Document No. A/HRC/25/5) issued by the Human Rights Council on December 4, 2013; (3) Questions submitted in advance on the 2nd cycle of Universal Periodic Review - China.

³¹ For more details, refer to: (1) Compilation on China (Document No. A/HRC/WG.6/31/CHN/2) and (2) Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions on China (Document No. A/HRC/WG.6/31/CHN/3), both issued by the Working Group of the Human Rights Council during November 5-16, 2018; and (3) Advance Questions to China (First Batch) on the 3rd cycle Universal Periodic Review - China.

³² For more details, refer to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (Document No. A/HRC/25/5/Add.1) issued by the Human Rights Council on February 27, 2014.

Secondly, the LGBT community has utilized China's active statements at the United Nations (UN) as a means to exert pressure on the Chinese government within the domestic context, particularly in the context of judicial decisions. For instance, in the first transgender employment discrimination case in 2016, a legal expert presented China's acceptance of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendation on anti-discrimination in the workplace as part of her testimony in court. The court accepted this evidence and stated in its judgment that "an individual's gender identity and expression fall within the scope of protection of general personality rights, and the gender identity and expression of others should be respected. ... Workers should not be subjected to differential treatment during the employment process based on their individual gender identity and expression" (Common Language 2018; Peng 2018).

Thirdly, China's voting on resolutions and participation in discussions at UN conferences frequently sparks intense debates among the country's LGBT community and consequent public pressure. For example, in 2019, China voted against extending for three years the mandates of the Independent Expert (IE)³³ on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) at the United Nations Human Rights Council. This move elicited strong opposition from the LGBT community, with a popular Weibo hashtag (#UN Passes Resolution to Continue Appointing SOGI Anti-Discrimination Experts: China Votes Against#) garnering 2.23 million reads. This public reaction amplified pressure on China.

Foreign embassies in China have been exerting pressure on the Chinese government to address LGBT issues through various means, with public statements being one of the primary methods. For instance, the US Embassy in Beijing has released statements condemning the

³³ The UN Human Rights Council established the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (referred to as the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity, or the "IE SOGI") in 2016. Subsequently, in 2019 and 2022, the Human Rights Council extended the term of the IE SOGI for three years each time.

treatment of LGBT individuals in China and urging the government to respect their rights and freedoms in its annual human rights report (China) as well as in some statements on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBT), and during pride month in June. The 2021 China Human Rights Report features a dedicated section that reviews acts of violence, criminalization, and other abuses based on sexual orientation and gender identity, condemning governmental discrimination and harassment experienced by LGBT individuals and organizations. In addition to public statements and condemnations, some embassies have organized advocacy activities, such as film screenings, forums, flying rainbow flags, and promoting LGBT rights on social media platforms like Weibo and WeChat, to raise awareness and show support for the Chinese LGBT community. The Canadian Embassy, for instance, has organized various advocacy activities, as shown on in Figure 4.2. By providing support to the Chinese LGBT community, foreign embassies can send a clear message to the Chinese government that the international community is taking the issue of LGBT rights seriously and closely monitoring it.

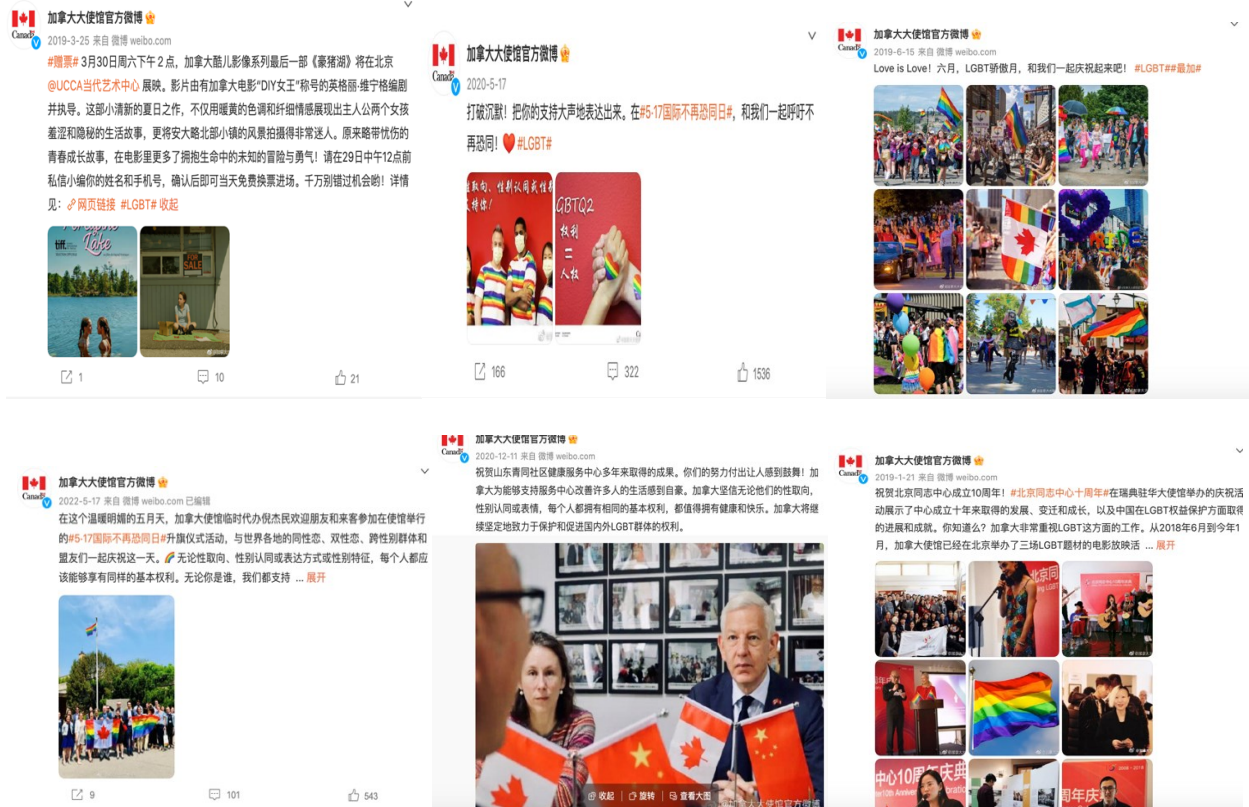


Figure 4.2 Canadian Embassy in China advocate for Chinese LGBT Community³⁴

Both UN pressuring mechanisms and foreign embassies' support for LGBT human rights in China are faced with dilemmas that are being exploited by the Chinese government and nationalists. One of the key dilemmas is the conflict between intervention and non-intervention in China's domestic affairs. As Denza notes, "with the greater emphasis in modern international relations on the encouragement and protection of human rights in other States, conflicts between the diplomatic duty of non-interference and the objective of promoting observance of human

³⁴ The first row of images shows the Canadian Embassy in Beijing hosting a queer film screening event in 2019, calling for an end to transphobia on International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia in 2020, and celebrating Pride Month in 2019. The second row of images shows the Canadian Embassy hoisting the rainbow flag on May 17, 2022, supporting the Shandong Qing Tong Community Health Service (HIV/AIDS prevention) Center in 2020, and supporting and congratulating the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Beijing LGBT Center in 2019.

rights are frequent” (2008: 465-466). The principles of upholding national sovereignty, promoting self-determination, and refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of states are fundamental pillars of both the United Nations and international relations. These principles find explicit recognition and support in specific provisions of the UN Charter, namely Articles 1.2, 2.4, and 2.7. Therefore, a range of activities, such as monitoring, advocacy, technical cooperation, and public information campaigns by the UN to end violence and discrimination against LGBT people, leads to criticism from countries with less favorable human rights situations and conservative countries, including Russia and China, who see these mechanisms as interfering in their internal affairs and violating their sovereignty. For example, in 2015, Russia opposed the UN’s extension of staff benefits to same-sex couples, arguing that the new benefits formulation forces changes on countries’ domestic laws, violating their sovereign right to determine their own norms. The then Deputy Russian UN Ambassador Petr Ilichev raised an anti-LGBT resolution³⁵ and asserted that the United Nations should “respect cultural differences, the sovereign right of each and every state to determine its norms” (Nichols 2015; Brown 2015). China supported and agreed with Russia’s position (UN WebTV 2015).

The second dilemma concerns the conflict between universalism and particularism with respect to LGBT identities and movements. On one hand, the UN argues that human rights are universal and applicable to all individuals, regardless of their cultural or religious background. On the other hand, respecting regional, cultural, and religious differences is also considered important when it comes to human rights. This creates tension, as some countries may use cultural or religious justifications to oppose LGBT rights. For instance, the resolution on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity,

³⁵ For more details, refer to the Russian Federation: draft decision (Document No. A/C.5/69/L.9) issued by the Fifth Committee during the General Assembly Sixty-ninth session on 21 December 2014.

passed during the Human Rights Council's Thirty-second Session on June 30, 2016, exemplifies the simultaneous presence of conflicting principles of universalism and particularism within a single document. On the one hand, this resolution reaffirms that

all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status; strongly deplores acts of violence and discrimination, in all regions of the world, committed against individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender identity;

On the other hand, this resolution reiterates “the importance of respecting regional, cultural and religious value systems as well as particularities in considering human rights issues,” and underlines “the fundamental importance of respecting relevant domestic debates at the national level on matters associated with historical, cultural, social and religious sensitivities.”³⁶

The dilemmas of universalism and particularism in promoting LGBT rights in the UN framework are also evident in foreign embassies' LGBT advocacy in China. Most countries that maintain diplomatic relations with China are required to adhere to the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (和平共处五项原则),” which include non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Thus, countries that advocate for LGBT human rights in the name of universality may encounter opposition from the Chinese government, which perceives such advocacy as interference. Moreover, transnational LGBT rights advocacy in China has faced resistance in public discourse due to Chinese nationalist discourse that emphasizes the importance of opposing interference and respecting China's particular traditions.

Despite the United Nations' persistent efforts to resolve the challenges of balancing sovereignty, religion, tradition, culture and LGBT rights, many conservative countries still

³⁶ Refer to the Resolution on Protection against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (Document No. A/HRC/RES/32/2) issued by the Human Rights Council on July 15, 2016.

employ these concepts as justifications to deny LGBT individuals and their rights. For instance, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon remarked in 2013 that religion, culture, and tradition cannot be used to justify the denial of LGBT people's basic rights, pointing out that these same justifications have been used to justify practices such as slavery, child marriage, rape in marriage, and female genital mutilation (UN News 2013). In 2015, he also noted that early human rights action strengthens national sovereignty, rather than challenging or resisting it (OHCHR 2015). In 2022, the United Nations reiterated the linkage between national sovereignty, religion, culture, and LGBT rights. The UN SOGI Independent Expert, Mr. Víctor Madrigal-Borloz, condemned the employment of religious beliefs and cultural norms to impede or attack defenders of SOGI rights. He emphasized that religion and tradition should not be at odds with LGBT individuals, who are highly regarded members of different faiths and cultural customs worldwide (OHCHR 2022). However, some countries still remain unconvinced, ignoring these UN statements. For instance, in 2020, China still used culture and tradition to counter criticism from human rights experts regarding the practice of "conversion therapy" in the country (UN WebTV 2020).

4.2 The Role of Chinese Nationalism in Blocking Transnational LGBT Advocacy

Despite the aforementioned discussion regarding the pressures exerted by INGOs, UN LGBT human rights mechanisms, and foreign embassies on LGBT rights in China to varying degrees, the process itself reveals two paradoxes: universalism versus particularism, and interference versus non-interference. These paradoxes provide a basis for Chinese nationalism to counteract such pressures. Specifically, through analyzing the discourse of Chinese nationalism on international platforms (primarily the United Nations) and Chinese public discourse platforms

(mainly Weibo), two main strategies employed by the Chinese state in response to foreign pressure on LGBT issues have been identified: (1) constructing an authentic Chinese gender and sexuality by emphasizing speciality of China, and (2) stigmatizing foreign LGBT support forces by highlighting China's concerns regarding social security.

4.2.1 Authenticity: Tradition or Non-Tradition

The first strategy that I have identified is the utilization of so-called special “traditions,” “culture,” “history,” and “moral values” by the Chinese state on international platforms and domestic public discourse platforms to justify its lack of action in protecting Chinese LGBT individuals. This stance reinforces the notion that heterosexual norms embody the authentic Chinese sexual and gender culture and values. For example, in 2014, China abstained from voting on a resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity, stating that it is necessary to respect each country's history, culture, tradition, religious background, and moral values to avoid division and confrontation in the Human Rights Council (OHCHR 2014). In doing so, China confirmed that homosexuality is not in line with traditional Chinese gender and sexual values. The affirmation of Chinese heterosexuality as the authentic Chinese gender and sexuality is further evident in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on China (2018-2019). During this review, China rejected the notion of protecting same-sex marriage, citing historical, cultural, and value factors as the basis for recognizing only marriage between a man and a woman, rather than acknowledging it as a form of discrimination (UN WebTV 2018). Moreover, China differentiated itself from the West, arguing that imposing Western gender values on China would violate the principle of equality in the international community, and this position was unsurprisingly reiterated in Chinese statements on LGBT issues in 2019 and 2020 (UN WebTV

2019, 2020). The following is an excerpt from the statement made by the Chinese representative at the 44th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2020, providing a detailed explanation of how the Chinese government employs Chinese speciality (such as history and cultural traditions) to defend its inaction on conversion therapy in China:

China has always insisted that the international community should respect the differences in history, religion, and cultural traditions, respect different social regimes, respect different development levels of countries, respect the path of human rights development independently chosen by each country, and avoid imposing their own values on others. China expresses its strong dissatisfaction and firmly opposes the independent expert's citing unconfirmed information in his report and making presumptuous comments about many countries, including China. (Chinese Presentative statements, Interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert – 13th Meeting, 44th Regular Session Human Rights Council, 2020)

In domestic popular discourse, the concept of authenticity is also employed to prevent foreign LGBT advocacy in China. I conducted an analysis of the posts published by the United States Embassy on Weibo between 2016 and 2021, with a specific focus on posts related to LGBT issues and the corresponding comments made by Chinese netizens. Over this time span, the US Embassy disseminated a total of 102 posts expressing support for LGBT issues. Out of these, 75 posts received fewer than 500 comments, 18 posts garnered between 500 and 1000 comments, and 9 posts attracted over 1000 comments. For the purpose of analysis, I primarily gathered 200 representative nationalist comments from the discussions beneath these 9 highly commented Weibo posts. To illustrate the distribution of Chinese nationalist comments, I selected a promotional Weibo post (see Figure 4.3) shared by the US Embassy in China on May 16, 2018, which pertained to the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia and featured the theme of the “Solidarity Alliance.” This particular post amassed a remarkable 3356 comments from Chinese netizens. Within these comments, nationalist remarks constituted 43.7%, comments expressing opposition to nationalism accounted for 6.7%, and

other miscellaneous comments constituted 49.6%. Among the nationalist comments, 5.1% could be categorized as homonationalism, 14.9% as macho nationalism, and 23.7% as comments attacking the US Embassy for exploiting LGBT issues to threaten Chinese society³⁷.

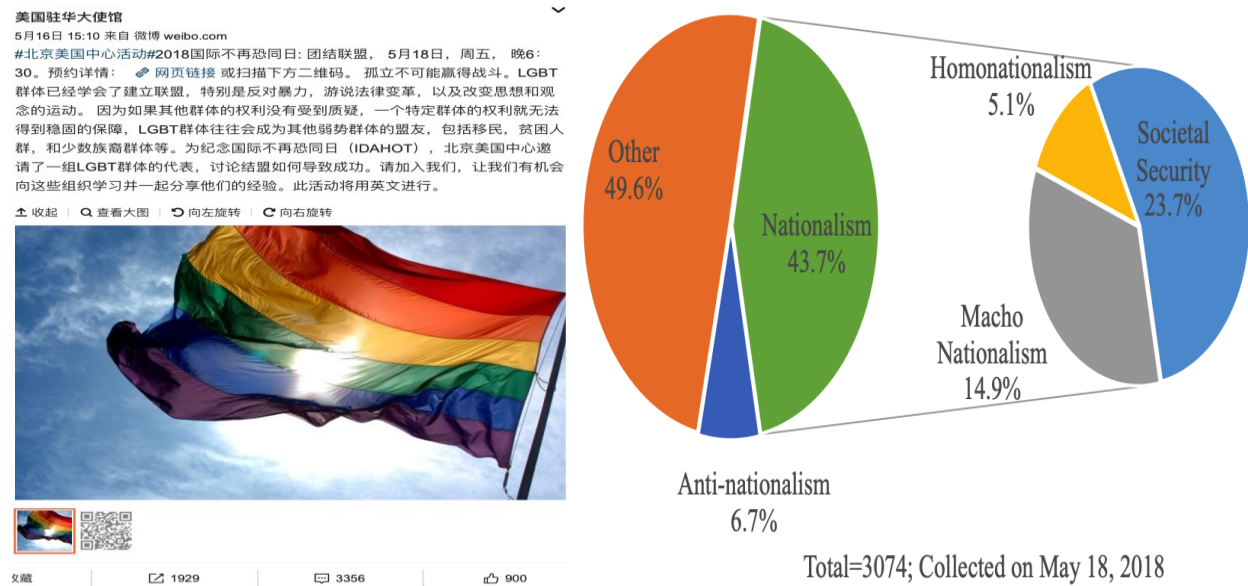


Figure 4.3 Distribution of Comments on a US Embassy Post (2018)³⁸

My analysis of Weibo posts on LGBT issues by the US Embassy and the responses of Chinese netizens reveals the coexistence of macho nationalist and homonationalist discourses in the public sphere. Macho nationalism frames homosexuality as “abnormal,” “seductive,” “garbage from the West,” and “immoral.” In these narratives, homosexuality is not considered to

³⁷ The selection of this particular Weibo post by the United States Embassy was motivated by two factors: (1) its notable level of engagement, as reflected by a relatively high number of comments, and (2) the activities mentioned in the post were construed by certain Chinese nationalists as evidence of collaboration between the 798 Advocacy (organized by Piaoquanjun, as discussed in Chapter 1) and the United States. Additionally, it is important to note that the statistical data regarding the comments from Chinese netizens on this post is rough and not highly accurate. This is due to the censorship of speech in China, resulting in the deletion of certain comments. Moreover, there is a certain degree of overlap among the categories of homonationalism, macho nationalism, and societal threat.

³⁸ Due to the Weibo censorship system, the data collected at different time intervals may exhibit variations. Generally, Weibo comments tend to diminish over time due to various moderation procedures, such as deletion, hiding (rendering posts unsearchable), prohibition of reposting, shadow banning (making posted content visible only to the user who posted it), and account suspension or deletion (CDT 2020).

be an inherent part of Chinese culture. Instead, it is portrayed as having been brought to China by Western nations with the aim of degrading the Chinese nation. The first rhetorical strategy employed by macho nationalists in China is to equate homosexuality with other forms of behavior that are considered immoral, such as pedophilia, bestiality, polygamy, rape, incest, and drug use. They argue that legalizing homosexuality will lead to the legalization of other types of immoral behavior, which they see as a fundamental challenge to Chinese morality and authenticity. Consequently, they often depict homosexuality as “obscene,” “pornographic,” “perverted,” and “vulgar,” and maintain that it has no place in Chinese society. Secondly, macho nationalists also use traditional gender culture to attack homosexuality in China. They frequently cite idioms like “it is not filial piety if you do not have descendants (不孝有三, 无后为大)” and “men are not manly and women are not womanly (男不男, 女不女)” to denigrate homosexuals who do not have children and who fail to adhere to the traditional Chinese “Yin and Yang (阴阳)” gender dichotomy. Therefore, in their view, the spread of LGBT culture will corrupt Chinese children and undermine public order and morality, leading to a disordered society. The above two arguments follow the “moral slippery slope” logic of downward comparison, which associates homosexuality and same-sex marriage with other sexually immoral behaviors like polygamy, incest, and bestiality, and concludes that the legalization of same-sex marriage (or other LGBT rights) will lead to a slippery slope towards moral decay (Lin 2017; Corvino 2005; Volokh 2005; Rubin 1984). Here are three typical comments under US Embassy’s LGBT posts on Weibo:

Why does same-sex marriage have to be legalized separately? If same-sex marriage is legalized, does that mean polygamy should also be legalized? Does it imply that child marriages should be legalized as well? (@situokefu qiangwudi (斯托克夫强无敌), May 18, 2018)

Now, many children are following the trend of falling in love with people of the same gender. If they grow up in such an environment, more children will be confused about their sexual orientation, and more will become homosexuals, which is a shame. (@xiangzhethianfeigong(想着天妃宫), August 26, 2020)

If our young people are addicted to this LGBT pornographic culture and other unhealthy ideas, they will lose their fighting spirits and ability to fight for the country. (@Ningmengzhujun(柠檬猪君), April 21, 2021)

Thirdly, Chinese nationalists view foreign embassies' LGBT advocacy in China, particularly that of the US Embassy, as a systematic and deliberate attempt to export "toxic" culture to China. To justify their claims, Chinese nationalists stigmatize Western (or the US) LGBT advocacy as 'political correctness' created and propagated by capitalists and politicians to gain support during election periods. By fragmenting society into various subgroups based on individuals' sexual orientation, politicians can divert attention from social class conflicts between the wealthy and the impoverished. However, macho nationalists believe that China is a communist/socialist country that adheres to Marxism and thus Chinese people should reject Western (or the US) LGBT 'political correctness.' The following are some typical macho nationalist comments:

China's affairs do not need intervention from the United States. We Chinese people have our own aesthetic views and sexual orientation. Take your dam gay people and go away @US Embassy in China. (@daotingtushuo or (道听途说 or), May 17, 2018)

The United States is attempting to portray the LGBT issue in China as a matter of political correctness. However, in reality, the United States does not genuinely care about the human rights situation of LGBT individuals in China. The underlying objective of the United States is to exploit the LGBT issue in order to divide the Chinese people into distinct groups, provoke conflicts among these groups, and ultimately create division and turmoil within Chinese society. (@syn·tac·tic, June 30, 2020)

The United States shouldn't politicalize homosexuality in China. Everyone knows that homosexuality has already become a tool used by the United States. (Xiagurouqing fanghenwan (侠骨柔情方恨晚) May 28, 2018)

If the US respects the human rights of homosexuals, you should give all the homosexuals the Green Cards [Permanent Residential Card] and take all the homosexuals away from China. (@Skypeasan May 17, 2020)

Compared to the aggressive, discriminatory narratives of Chinese macho nationalists, Chinese homonationalists offer relatively milder arguments, but with a similar logic. First, homonationalists do not view homosexuality or other sexual minorities as “abnormal” or “degraded.” Instead, they argue that homosexuality is a normal and prevalent phenomenon in Chinese history and literature. They argue that there has been no historical or current systematic persecution of homosexuals in China, which distinguishes it from Western societies. Homonationalists frequently cite idioms such as “male love/porn (nan feng/nan se 男风/男色)” and intimacies between two women, such as “Jinlan Qi (金兰契)” or “Self-combing (自梳),”³⁹ which are recorded in Chinese history. Ancient stories of “Long Yang (龙阳)”⁴⁰ and “Broken Sleeve (断袖)”⁴¹ are well-known to the public, and novels such as *The Golden Lotus (金瓶梅)* of

³⁹ “Jin Lan Qi (金兰契)” is a term used in the early Qing Dynasty to describe female same-sex relationships or partnerships. Women who formed a Jin Lan Qi bond had a deep emotional connection, loving and relying on each other. They made a lifelong commitment to not marry in order to live together, or if they were already married, they refused to return to their husbands’ homes. The practice of Jin Lan Qi was relatively common in the Pearl River Delta region during the Qing Dynasty. During the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China era, the act of women making a Jin Lan Qi pact to remain unmarried took on a more formal ritual known as “Self-combing(自梳).” It involved a woman who was determined not to marry having her hair styled in a bun instead of braids, symbolizing that she was neither a young girl nor a married woman. The Zi Shu process, in addition to the vow of remaining unmarried, also symbolized the bond of sisterhood, mutual assistance, and commitment between the women. After forming a Jin Lan Qi bond and committing to remain unmarried, these women would support each other in managing their own family lives.

⁴⁰ “Long Yang (龙阳)” is an ancient Chinese term used to describe male same-sex relationships. The reference originates from the historical account of the homosexual relationship between King Anxi of Wei and Lord Long Yang. In the story, Lord Long Yang and the king are depicted together in a fishing boat, where Lord Long Yang begins to cry. When the king inquires about the reason for his tears, Lord Long Yang expresses his fear that the king might be tempted by other, more attractive men, and consequently lose interest in him. In response, the king sternly forbids anyone from mentioning other beauties in his presence, imposing the penalty of death for any transgressions.

⁴¹ “Broken Sleeve (断袖)” is a term in Chinese culture that originated from a historical anecdote. It refers to a story about the deep bond between the emperor of the Han dynasty, Emperor Ai, and his male courtier, Dong Xian. According to the legend, Emperor Ai fell asleep on Dong Xian’s sleeve, and rather than disturbing the emperor, Dong Xian cut off his sleeve to avoid waking him. This act symbolized their intimate relationship. In contemporary usage, “Broken Sleeve” has become a metaphor for homosexuality or same-sex relationships in Chinese society.

the Ming Dynasty and *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (红楼梦) of the Qing Dynasty contain numerous depictions of homosexuality. Therefore, homonationalists conclude that homosexuality is not a problem in Chinese history and that Chinese culture does not reject homosexuality. Instead, they argue that Chinese morality takes a relatively tolerant attitude towards gender and sexual minorities.

In their understanding of the current social environment in China, homonationalists selectively overlook or deny the unfriendly conditions for the LGBT community in the country. Conversely, they contend that the right to live as homosexuals is ensured, except for the right to marry. Furthermore, they claim that the Chinese government is inclusive of sexual minorities, frequently referencing isolated instances of positive comments about the LGBT community in state media such as *People's Daily* and China Central Television (CCTV). This is presented by homonationalists as evidence to showcase China's supportive stance on homosexuality, disregarding the fact that these state media outlets have maintained strict censorship on LGBT-related subjects over a prolonged period. In addition, homonationalists also point to the designated guardianship system (意定监护) created by the Chinese government in 2015 and strategically utilized by LGBT couples since 2019. The guardianship system was first established for the elderly over 60 years old in 2015, and later extended to all adults with the General Principles of Civil Law in 2017. Any adult can determine their guardian according to their own wishes to fulfill the guardianship responsibilities. Homonationalists view this as evidence that China is protecting LGBT individuals, as designated guardianship provides quasi-marriage rights to LGBT couples. Therefore, homonationalists argue that China is doing better than most countries in protecting the rights of LGBT individuals and does not require foreign LGBT advocacy in China. The following are some typical arguments:

In ancient China, there was practices such as broken sleeve(断袖) and sharing peach (分桃),⁴² which Americans do not understand. China never opposes homosexuals as long as they take their family responsibilities. (@Amumuliangsam(阿木木良 sam), June 29, 2020)

Homosexuality is not wrong. The government has said that homosexuality is not wrong. ... People's Daily also published an article saying that there was nothing wrong with homosexuality. There is no history of persecution of homosexuality in China's 5000-year history, and there has never been public opposition to homosexuality. In many areas of China, it is not unusual for men to live together. (@weitengyao (胃疼药), May 17, 2020)

To establish Chinese authenticity as tolerant towards homosexuality, homonationalists employ a form of downward comparison logic distinct from that of macho nationalists. Instead of drawing moral decay comparisons, homonationalists juxtapose the favorable treatment of LGBT individuals in China with the harsher treatment experienced by LGBT individuals in foreign countries. They argue that many other nations have historically subjected the gay community to systematic persecution and far more severe mistreatment. Specifically, homonationalists often cite cases, such as US President Trump's anti-LGBT stance, the high rates of violence against the LGBT community in Brazil, and instances in Muslim countries where same-sex behavior is sentenced to death, to assert China's superiority in its treatment of the LGBT community compared to other nations. Moreover, homophobia in China is attributed by homonationalists to Christian or Catholic missions during the Western invasion of China in the late Qing Dynasty. As a result, homonationalists conclude that China is essentially and authentically inclusive towards the LGBT community. They further argue that Western

⁴² "Sharing Peach (分桃)" is another term in ancient Chinese culture that describes same-sex relationships. This term originates from a story set during the Spring and Autumn Period, involving Mi Zixia, a high-ranking official of the Wei State, and Duke Ling of Wei, the ruler of the state. According to the story, Mi Zixia and Duke Ling of Wei visited a peach orchard together, where they shared a peach. Mi Zixia took a bite and gave the remaining half to Duke Ling of Wei. Delighted, Duke Ling of Wei remarked, "Your love for me is so great that you have forgotten the delicious taste in your own mouth and shared the peach with me!" As a result, the term "sharing peach" has become a symbol used to represent same-sex relationships in Chinese culture.

countries, such as the United States, should not advocate for LGBT rights in China, but rather promote their ideas of LGBT equality in Africa or Muslim countries where true homophobia exists. Here are some typical claims made by homonationalists:

Chinese culture is relatively tolerant towards homosexuality, while Western Christian cultures have a long history of harsh persecution of homosexuality. Therefore, the core of Western culture is anti-homosexual. (@seedsong23, May 17, 2018)

China has made progress in protecting homosexual groups, and the Chinese government is capable of continuing to do so. I remember clearly that the Vice President of the United States, Pence, does not support homosexuality. Therefore, it seems obvious that the US promotion of homosexuality in China is intentional. (@xiagurouqingfanghenwan (侠骨柔情方恨晚), May 17, 2018)

The United States' ally, Saudi Arabia, still has the death penalty for homosexuality. Why doesn't the US Embassy go there to promote Pride Month? China's situation is much better than Saudi Arabia's, and there's no need for the US to promote it here. The US truly holds double standards. (@bangezshisu (半个直树), June 9, 2021)

4.2.2 Securitization: Foreign Hostile Forces as Societal Threats

In the past decade, the Chinese government has placed a greater emphasis on national and social security. This shift is partly attributed to changes in China's international relations. Specifically, under the leadership of Xi Jinping since 2012, the Chinese government has moved away from a policy of maintaining a low profile (Sørensen 2015) and has adopted a more confrontational stance towards Western powers. As a result, the Chinese population, particularly the younger generation, has exhibited a more assertive and aggressive attitude towards foreign entities (Weiss 2019: 479). On the domestic front, the Chinese government has explicitly incorporated the concept of "foreign hostile forces," "foreign anti-China forces" or "foreign forces" into its legislation, as seen in the Anti-Espionage Law of China (2014). This law defines hostile entities as those opposing the people's democratic dictatorship and the socialist system of the People's Republic of China (PRC), posing a threat to national security. While my document

research and social media analysis have revealed an emphasis on securitization discourse concerning LGBT issues on domestic public opinion platforms, it is notable that the Chinese government has generally refrained from using securitization discourse in response to external pressure on LGBT issues. Specifically, my research on China's statements at the United Nations indicates that Chinese representatives primarily employ securitization as a strategy to counter external pressures in sensitive areas such as Chinese human rights lawyers and the human rights situation in Xinjiang and Tibet rather than in discussion of LGBT issues. An example of this can be found in the 2019 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)⁴³, where China vehemently opposes any form of "pressure on the Chinese government" and "interference in its sovereignty and internal affairs" when the Human Rights Council requests unrestricted access to Xinjiang and Tibet for monitoring the implementation of measures against racial discrimination in these regions. Additionally, China views the Human Rights Council's call to "release all human rights defenders, including lawyers, and refrain from persecuting those who exercise their rights or defend others" as an encroachment on its judicial sovereignty. In contrast, when it comes to LGBT issues, the Chinese government has not relied on securitization discourse to counter pressure within the United Nations. Instead, it has primarily emphasized China's traditional culture and unique national circumstances, as discussed earlier.

In the realm of Chinese public discourse, my analysis of Weibo posts concerning LGBT issues by the US Embassy and the subsequent response from Chinese netizens indicates that the discourse surrounding the US and other Western countries as adversaries posing a threat to China's social security extends to the realm of LGBT rights. Both macho nationalists and

⁴³ Referring to the two documents regarding the Universal Periodic Review of China (3rd Cycle) in Human Rights Council, Fortieth session, 25 February–22 March 2019: (1) Universal Periodic Review Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review* China (A/HRC/40/6), and (2) Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review* China Addendum (A/HRC/40/6/Add.1).

homonationalists perceive “foreign LGBT support” as a challenge to China’s societal security, despite their distinct interpretations of authentic and traditional Chinese gender and sexuality. Doubting the motivations of foreign entities is a commonly employed strategy, utilized by Chinese macho nationalists and homonationalists alike, to transform foreign LGBT support into a matter of social security. Furthermore, in order to substantiate their conjecture regarding the malevolent intentions behind overseas LGBT support, both homonationalists and macho nationalists employ the inference of guilt as a method of argumentation.

Firstly, Chinese macho nationalists and homonationalists argue that the advocacy for Chinese LGBT individuals by foreign embassies is not driven by genuine or altruistic intentions, but rather harbors ulterior motives. The most commonly cited motive by these macho nationalists and homonationalists is the desire to launch “color revolutions.” Color revolutions are seen as revolutionary coups d’état that have occurred in several countries, such as Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), where public protests adopted a color as a symbol to identify themselves and their cause (Lane 2009). The term, “color revolutions” has since been used to describe various other revolutionary movements that have occurred in various parts of the world, including the Middle East (also called Arab Spring, 2010-2012). The elements of color revolutions include mass protests, a focus on removing incumbent political leaders, the involvement of a large base of young people, particularly students, and moral and financial support from Western foundations (Lane 2009). In China, the term “color revolutions” is viewed as a threat both externally and internally by the Chinese leadership, with the government being particularly wary of Western powers, especially the United States, who they believe could instigate such events in order to overthrow China’s socialist system (Wilson 2009). Chinese nationalists accept the government’s depiction of color revolutions and infer that foreign

support for LGBT issues is also part of these revolutions. Specifically, they speculate or believe that the United States is advocating for LGBT rights with intentions that threaten China's societal security, such as inciting, countering, or manipulating the LGBT community, engaging in infiltration, stirring up social conflict and opposition among domestic groups, supporting traitors, threatening the Chinese government, and planning terrorist activities. Here are four examples that illustrate the speculated motives of Chinese nationalist groups regarding the US Embassy's promotion of LGBT equality in China:

The US Embassy in China is now using issues such as homosexuality and women's rights to incite specific groups to carry out color revolutions and divide China. (@OlympicprinceZhangWenquan(奥运小王子张文全), June 18, 2020)

We should keep in mind the premise that resources on Earth are limited. All countries compete for these resources. So it is not likely that the US selflessly helps to improve the quality of life for the Chinese LGBT community. If they appear to be doing so, there must be other motives. (@petatohead(蛋头先生 petatohead), May 16, 2018)

The intentions of the United States include: (1) belittling the culture of the opponent, (2) cultural infiltration, (3) accusing the opponent of human rights violations, (4) dividing groups, (5) attacking the opponent's political system, (6) supporting traitorous and disloyal voices, (7) economic exploitation, (8) military threats and attacks... The ultimate goal of the United States is to destroy China. (@cengjingyapi(曾经雅痞), June 15, 2021)

Do you think that America is really speaking for the Chinese LGBT community? No, they have just found another new topic and group that can cause opposition to the government and bring social conflict. Actually, they do not truly care about whether the group is LGBT or not. Their concern is solely directed towards groups that can generate conflicts which can be exploited. Subsequently, they employ and manipulate these groups, employing similar tactics as they do with environmental activists in China. (@quandameigou jiaocaitianri(拳打美狗脚踩舔日) June 25, 2021)

Secondly, in terms of how they argue the malevolent intentions behind foreign LGBT support, Chinese nationalists employ the inference of guilt as a reasoning method. I summarize the three most common inference methods employed by Chinese nationalists as show in Figure 4.4. Specifically, both macho nationalists and homonationalists hold the belief that Western powers, especially the United States, have undisclosed malicious intentions behind their

promotion of LGBT advocacy in China. However, they employ different reasoning processes to arrive at the conclusion that the United States has ulterior motives, resulting in internal variations within their argumentative dimensions.

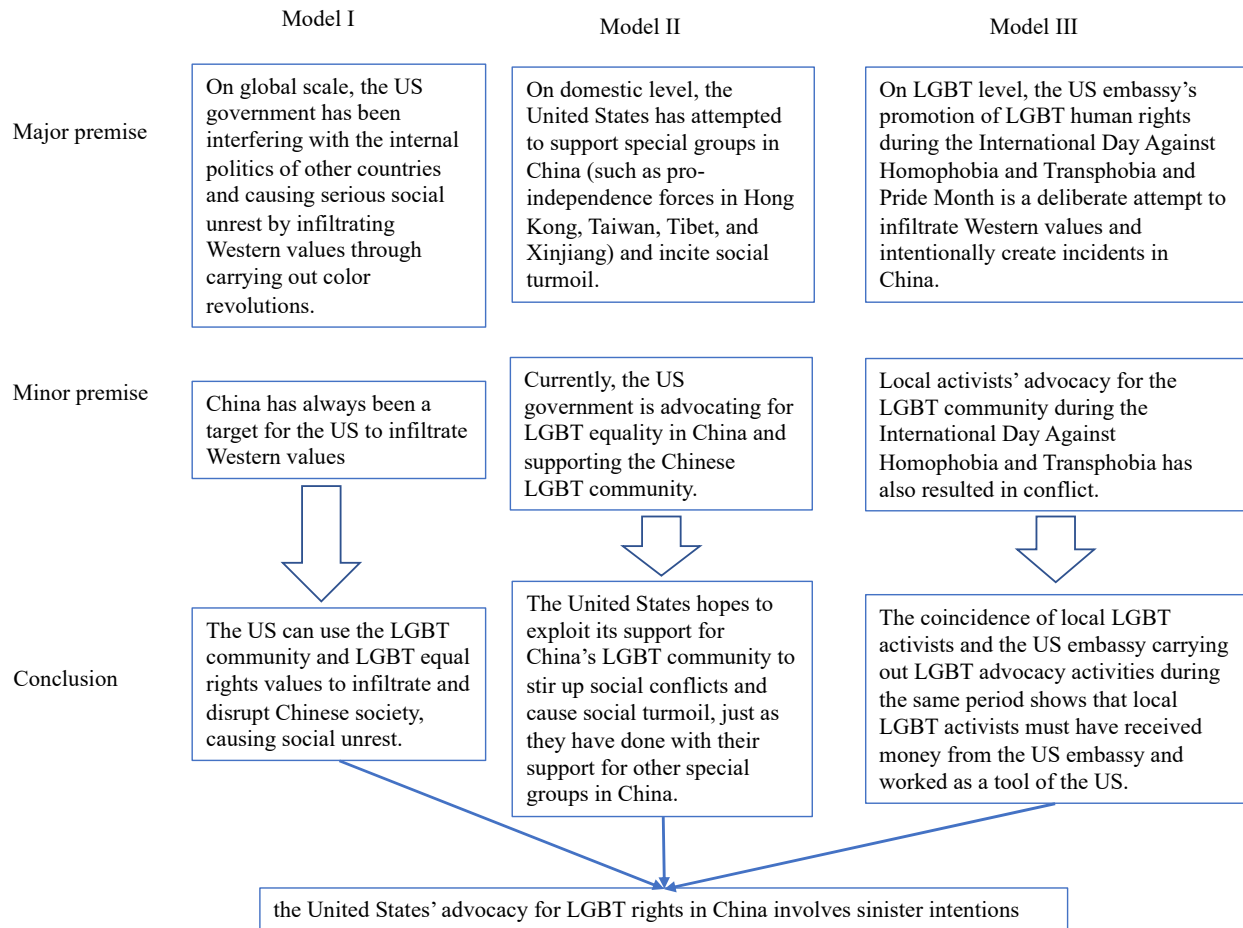


Figure 4.4 Nationalists' Guilt Inference on US LGBT Rights Advocacy

Using Model I, I delineate the inferential logic of guilt employed by Chinese macho nationalists and homonationalists starting at the global level. Specifically, they maintain the perspective that the US government engages globally in interference in the internal affairs of other nations and foments societal upheaval through the propagation of Western values, including the facilitation of color revolutions. This standpoint functions as the primary premise

for Chinese macho/homo nationalists, necessitating no further substantiation or validation.

Within this premise, Chinese macho/homo nationalists posit that China is a target of US efforts to infiltrate Western values, encompassing the realm of LGBT rights and values. As a result, Chinese macho/homo nationalists draw the conclusion that the US manipulates the LGBT community and advocates for LGBT equality as a strategy to infiltrate and disrupt Chinese society, thereby engendering social instability. Here, I provide two illustrative examples that exemplify this mode of inference employed by Chinese macho/homo nationalists:

The typical method used by the United States to infiltrate target countries is by establishing and fostering many LGBT organizations in other nations (such as Russia), brainwashing them with American values, and thereby laying the foundation for potential color revolutions in those target nations. This LGBT propaganda is another type of color revolution, the “Rainbow Revolution,” being applied by the United States to China, which will cause social turmoil in China. (@shenhaitongzhi aoheima(深海同志奥黑马), May 16, 2018)

As a country’s institution, the US Embassy interferes in the domestic politics of other countries. What do they want to do? Do they want to wage a war or overthrow our government? Is this a color revolution? The US brought down the Soviet Union with color revolutions, and now they want to do the same to China. We Chinese are all very familiar with this pattern. (@jake117, May 18, 2018)

Using Model II, I provide a summary of the guilt inference employed by Chinese macho/homo nationalists, originating from the domestic level. Specifically, Chinese macho/homo nationalists assert, based on domestic factual observations, that the United States has repeatedly attempted to support specific groups within China, such as pro-independence movements in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang, in order to incite social unrest. This observed pattern of behavior and intention exhibited by the United States is believed to extend to the realm of LGBT issues, suggesting that the United States may exploit the LGBT community and the LGBT agenda in China as targets for manipulation, thereby inciting social conflicts and

generating societal turmoil, similar to their support for other special interest groups within China.

I present four illustrative examples that exemplify this reasoning framework:

The United States has been supporting separatism in Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan with the goal of dividing China, in order to prevent China from surpassing the United States. However, since supporting separatism has not achieved its goal, the United States has changed its approach and is now supporting the Chinese LGBT community. We must not be deceived by the United States and must remember that we are all Chinese. (@Aoyunxiaowangzi Zhangwenquan(奥运小王子张文全), June 18, 2020)

The United States wants to initiate a color revolution in China? Hell no! In the past, the United States used public intellectuals as their proxies in China to manipulate public opinion. That approach is no longer effective, and now they are targeting the LGBT community and even promoting their LGBT values. This is truly a joke. (@fangkuang xiansheng (方框先生), May 16, 2018)

If the United States is promoting liberalism in China, please fuck off! We should know the promotion of Black human rights, Muslim human rights, environmental protection, animal protection, and LGBT rights in China is funded by foreign sources. Those who believe in US propaganda are merely pawns in the United States' effort to bring about a color revolution in China. (@buzhouxiashanhong (不周山下红), May 16, 2018)

A friend of mine converted to Christianity under the influence of others. After six months, she completely rejected her Chinese identity and even insulted it. Now, the US government is trying to promote LGBT rights in China. Is it planning to use sexual minorities as a tool to initiate a color revolution? I advise sexual minorities not to become a weapon for the US to use against China. (@qushahuan (去撒欢儿), May 16, 2018)

Using Model III, I present an illustration of the guilt inference employed by Chinese macho/homo nationalism, which directly emerges from the LGBT issue as a focal point of argumentation. Specifically, Chinese macho/homo nationalists perceive the promotion of LGBT human rights by the US Embassy during the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia and Pride Month as a deliberate undertaking aimed at infiltrating Western values and intentionally provoking incidents within China. Additionally, the advocacy efforts of local LGBT activists in China during the same period have been associated with conflicts.

Consequently, Chinese macho/homo nationalists contend that the simultaneous engagement of local LGBT activists and the US Embassy in promoting LGBT advocacy implies that the local

activists have likely received financial support from the US Embassy and have been utilized as a means to incite social unrest within China. This pattern of macho/homo nationalist reasoning can be seen in the description of the 798-Advocacy in the Chapter 1. Many macho nationalists have launched numerous attacks on the 798-Advocacy, and @caoshifu (曹师傅依好) made one of the most typical one. He associated the 798-Advocacy organized by Piaoquanjun with the LGBT panel discussion titled “Alliance for Solidarity” organized by the US Embassy at the same time. He then conspiratorially inferred that the US Embassy must have supported the 798-Advocacy. This inference has gained a lot of agreement among nationalists. Another example of this rhetoric can be seen in an article on Weibo by a homonationalist, @Yule Lingmao (娱乐灵猫), titled “The 2018 International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is About to be Held in Our Country. Beware of a Certain Country (the United States) Taking Advantage of This Opportunity.” The article has been viewed by over 100,000 netizens and links the 798-Advocacy to the US Embassy’s advocacy. It argues that the US is attempting to cause unrest in China and undermine the government’s credibility by sowing mistrust between the government and young people. The article cautions Chinese citizens, particularly the younger generation, against falling for these supposed schemes. Moreover, many comments under the US ambassador’s advocacy also reflect this pattern of nationalist reasoning, and here is a typical example:

The United States has targeted the LGBT community and promoted the concept of political correctness. I guess they will advocate for LGBT rights in various institutions, such as schools, in order to gain more support for the cause. Over time, the LGBT community and their organizations will likely seek expanded rights beyond just anti-homophobia. Moreover, local LGBT organizations may use the financial support from the United States to expand their propaganda from schools to the entire society, thereby forming a political force in China. So, the United States is using homosexuality to create division within the public and against the government, which is a malicious strategy. (@benzuobuxiangduinichushou (本座不想对你出手), May 16, 2018)

Overall, Chinese nationalists employ various strategies, including questioning motives and making allegations about foreign support for LGBT rights, to create panic encompassing sexual panic and national security panic. Sexual panic (Stychin 1998; Altman and Symons 2016), closely linked to the slippery logic of macho nationalism, posits that the promotion of LGBT human rights by the US Embassy in China, particularly regarding same-sex marriage rights, will lead to a decline in social morality. This decline is believed to include an increase in individuals identifying as “neither male nor female,” more children identifying as gay or transgender, and a rise in practices such as polygamy, incest, bestiality, and pedophilia. On the other hand, national security panic emphasizes the potential disasters associated with color revolutions, such as group confrontation, social division, government collapse, social unrest, economic stagnation, and foreign invasion.

Both macho nationalists and homonationalists adhere to the logic of securitization, but their understanding of authentic Chinese gender and sexual values differs significantly, resulting in slight variations in their securitization approaches. Macho nationalists directly perceive the promotion of LGBT human rights by the US embassy in China as “moral terrorism” (Boellstorff 2004). In contrast, homonationalists take an additional step to demonstrate the harm of foreign LGBT support. Initially, homonationalists acknowledge that homosexuality is not considered a disease in China, that the Chinese government does not oppose LGBT individuals, and that everyone’s sexual orientation should be respected in China. They then highlight that the US also faces its own human rights issues, such as LGBT gun violence and the social exclusion of Muslims, refugees, and Black communities. Consequently, the US lacks the moral high ground to criticize China’s LGBT human rights situation. Furthermore, homonationalists argue that the US, despite purportedly supporting Chinese LGBT human rights, is not genuinely supporting the

LGBT community in China but rather has ulterior motives. These motives involve utilizing the Chinese LGBT community as a political tool or weapon to create social resistance and unrest.

4.3 Two Chinese Nationalisms, State Ambiguity/Opacity and Hegemonic Censorship

After analyzing the interplay between international LGBT pressure and Chinese nationalism, this section focuses on the emergence of two distinct forms of nationalism: macho nationalism and homonationalism. It delves into the intricate relationship between these two forms of nationalism and China's ambiguous and conflicting strategies regarding LGBT issues. Additionally, the section discusses how Chinese nationalist discourses, especially Chinese macho nationalism, have come to dominate the public discourse arena in China with the support of the Chinese censorship system.

(1) Two Chinese Nationalisms and State Ambiguity

In my analysis of discourses on Chinese macho nationalism and homonationalism, I have observed that these two forms of nationalism strongly depend on the attitudes of the Chinese state towards LGBT rights to establish their legitimacy. Specifically, the government's contradictory and ambiguous stance on LGBT issues allows both macho nationalists and homonationalists to justify their positions.

On one hand, the Chinese state openly discriminates against the LGBT community and explicitly upholds heterosexuality as the mainstream in line with Chinese tradition. This exclusion of sexual minorities from Chinese nationhood actively promotes macho nationalism. Consequently, macho nationalists argue that heterosexuality aligns with the nation's traditional gender and sexual values, while homosexuality is deemed contrary to these values due to official

endorsement by the government. For example, in 2019, the Social Law Office of the National People's Congress reaffirmed that marriage between a man and a woman is in line with China's national conditions and historical and cultural traditions (Wang 2019). Similarly, in 2020, Huang Wei, Director of the Civil Law Office of the Legislative Affairs Commission of the NPC Standing Committee, characterized the proposals for same-sex marriage presented by the LGBT community as "organized,"⁴⁴ claiming that these proposals on same-sex marriage are the same and copied, and they once again emphasize the maintenance of the one-man-one-woman (heterosexual) marriage system (XiaoShan 2020). Apart from repeatedly affirming China's recognition of only heterosexual marriage, the Chinese government has linked the legalization of same-sex marriage to national security. For instance, Shen Chunyao, Director of the Legislative Affairs Commission, stressed that the government received numerous opinions requesting the legal recognition of same-sex marriage. However, China acknowledges marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman because human rights and freedoms vary in different national contexts, and in China, respecting and safeguarding human rights must align with upholding national security (China News 2020).

Drawing from the narratives of the Chinese state's exclusion of sexual minorities, macho nationalists assert that heterosexuality aligns with the nation's traditional gender and sexual norms, while homosexuality is perceived as conflicting with these values due to its official endorsement by the government. The subsequent examples illustrate instances where Chinese macho nationalists employ official discourse to substantiate discrimination against the LGBT community:

⁴⁴ In China, organized activities organized by civil organizations are considered sensitive and opposed by the government, as such activities imply potential mass opposition and have the potential to undermine government authority (Saich 2000).

Marriage laws are ultimately established to facilitate better procreation of offspring. However, since you cannot reproduce, there is no need to modify the laws for the homosexual community. On the contrary, the homosexual community lacks the concept of raising children and establishing families, which goes against ethical morality and causes overall social conflicts. Thus, their mere existence is divisive to society. Promoting homosexual culture is teaching others to sever their own offspring and undermining traditional marriage institutions. Such malicious acts should be subject to imprisonment. Additionally, when homosexuals grow old, it is the responsibility of other taxpayers to support their elderly care, which increases the burden on the country. So why should we grant same-sex marriage to homosexuals? (@shengliwanshui_SS(胜利万岁_SS), June 11, 2020)

#Suggestion to Legalize Same-Sex Marriage in the Civil Code# After the legalization of same-sex marriage, the legalization of the buying and selling of eggs and sperm, as well as surrogacy, will follow. This will undoubtedly lead to an increase in the population of AIDS patients. It is definitely the desired outcome of capital and foreign forces, a tremendous conspiracy by traitors, which will undoubtedly jeopardize national interests and national security. (@Yangliulang (杨六郎), December 21, 2019)

The current homosexual ideology has been transmitted from the West and is the result of capitalist corruption. Homosexuality in China was considered feudal ideology in the past, and now it has resurfaced. Those who advocate for the legalization of same-sex marriage must be colluding with foreign forces, deliberately interfering with our country's judicial process. We cannot wait until homosexuality leads to the collapse of China's social morals and ethics to realize the harm of same-sex marriage and homosexuality to the public. Therefore, I firmly believe that promoting homosexuality is absolutely unacceptable, and same-sex marriage should never be legalized. (@Madongming110 (马东明 110), June 23, 2020)

In contrast, homonationalists also utilize the Chinese government's limited LGBT-friendly narratives to reinterpret traditional Chinese gender and cultural values, thereby seeking endorsement. Specifically, the Chinese government's official pro-LGBT statements have arisen in response to public outcry and the intensification of an anti-LGBT discrimination campaign, prompting state media to make concessions and adjustments to pacify public anger and uphold online stability. Consequently, to some degree, the government recognizes the LGBT community. For instance, in 2011, Christian celebrity couple Lv Liping and Sun Haiying posted discriminatory statements against homosexuality on Weibo, calling it a "sin," a "shameful thing deserving retribution," and a "crime that will destroy all of humanity" (Ifeng 2011). The ensuing

backlash against their hate speech incited condemnation from many celebrities, NGOs, and scholars, turning it into a public opinion incident. As a state media outlet, CCTV devoted nearly a minute of airtime to commenting on Lv Liping's anti-gay speech in its news channel, in an attempt to calm the public outrage that had arisen from the incident:

We do not agree that a socially influential public figure can express your discrimination so openly against a group that is still somewhat special in Chinese society. There is no need to avoid the fact that there are some people around us whose orientation differs from the majority. However, they are also working hard for society. Homosexual people, like us (heterosexual people), have the right to exist and thrive in this society, and that right should not be violated even by perceptions. We want to say to the homosexual community with a very familiar phrase, "I may not agree with the way you live, but I am willing to defend your right to live differently than I do." (CCTV 2011)

In 2018, a similar incident occurred when Weibo attempted to delete content related to homosexuality in the name of internet safety. This move was met with the online campaign called "I am homosexual" launched by Chinese LGBT public opinion leaders and activists, which garnered over 600 million reads in 72 hours (Vista 2018). The People's Daily, China's largest newspaper group owned by the CCP, intervened and released comments on April 18, 2018, stating that there are multiple sexual orientations, and that homosexuality and bisexuality are normal and not a disease. The article also emphasized the importance of respecting and protecting different sexual orientations as it is a reflection of society's civilization.

These concessions, combined with China's decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality, create an opening for homonationalists to reconstruct the definitions of "history" and "traditional culture" and to justify homosexuality through the inclusion of homosexuality in historical contexts. Some even argue that the protection of LGBT rights makes China modern and allows it to surpass certain Western countries. For example, a gay activist advocating for same-sex marriage demonstrates this perspective:

Chinese civilization is the only one among the four ancient civilizations that has remained uninterrupted. This is due to the unique ability of Chinese culture to adapt to social changes. Taiwan, which also has Confucianism at its core and follows traditional Chinese culture, legalized same-sex marriage in May 2019, demonstrating that Chinese culture does not have a deep-seated barrier to legalizing same-sex marriage. Instead, it shows that traditional Chinese culture is more inclusive in modern society than some Western cultures. Same-sex marriage is consistent with the meaning of modern marriage. Granting same-sex couples the right to marry reflects that we are a country under the rule of law and that our government wholeheartedly serves the people. (@AQiang, December 23, 2019).

Furthermore, there are other examples that illustrate how homonationalists utilize LGBT-friendly narratives endorsed by Chinese state officials to support the legitimacy of sexual minority communities and counteract homophobic discourse:

I won't say much, but I urge everyone to read the commentary published by the People's Daily on April 15, 2018, at 16:56, titled "Different Fireworks Can Still Shine." I believe that articles from the Chinese Communist Party's newspaper carry weight and can silence those homophobic individuals. (@Youzhiyuan xiangjibisai dijiuming(幼稚园照相比赛第九名), September 29, 2018)

We are not living in the extinct Qing Dynasty but in the 21st century. However, some people continue to shout that homosexuality is illegal and immoral, and that it represents erroneous values and perspectives on life. Let me educate you on the articles published by the People's Daily. The original text clearly states, "Whether it is homosexuality or bisexuality, both are considered normal and not illnesses. Sex education for children is not only important but also necessary. Let go of biases, embrace others, and may every form of love be unharmed, allowing everyone to express their inner colors. Different fireworks can still shine." (@Wocaosheng(卧槽生), June 11, 2022)

@People's Daily. The People's Daily recently published a commentary titled "Different Fireworks Can Still Shine." Now, I found that a school, which does not follow the Chinese Communist Party's instructions, openly displays banners with the slogan "Reject Homosexuality, Create a Sunlit and Harmonious Campus." Who is influencing them to do such a thing? (@Senlinhuace, May 30, 2018)

Apart from the aforementioned contradictory expressions regarding LGBT rights by the Chinese state, there are instances where the government incorporates such contradictions within a single statement, simultaneously expressing non-discrimination towards the LGBT community while opposing further protection of LGBT rights. Consequently, both macho nationalists and

homonationalists selectively extract elements that serve their respective positions. For instance, during the United Nations review of China's implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on May 12, 2023, the Chinese representative was queried about the safeguarding of LGBT individuals' rights within the context of family life. In response, the representative asserted:

The Chinese Constitution and laws do not discriminate against LGBT individuals. They are regarded as normal individuals and, therefore, do not receive special treatment. The Chinese Civil Code establishes the one-man-one-woman marriage system, which forms the bedrock of the entire marital institution and is in accordance with Chinese traditional culture and the current national situation. (The Chinese representative's response during the CEDAW, May 12, 2023)

For macho nationalists, they selectively extract the notion from government statements that heterosexuality is the cornerstone of the marriage system and represents authentic Chinese traditional culture. They utilize this idea as evidence to support the legitimacy of heterosexuality. Additionally, macho nationalists interpret the statement in government discourse that "China does not provide special treatment to the LGBT community" as implying that the demands of the LGBT community, including the call for same-sex marriage, are seen as requests for special privileges. The following examples illustrate how macho nationalists selectively extract the conflicting official statements from the Chinese representative's response during the CEDAW to justify their discrimination against the LGBT community:

Our Chinese UN representative just stated at the United Nations on May 12th that there is no special treatment for the LGBT community in our country, and they should not seek privileges. However, on June 1st, the US embassy started its Pride Month and even invited Jin Xing (a transgender Chinese celebrity) to deliver an LGBT speech. Is Jin Xing's behavior bringing glory to our country? It's simply going against our nation. (@ChaoyiChaoer (超一超二), June 4, 2023).

The government official response from the Chinese representative at the United Nations did not explicitly state that same-sex marriage and heterosexual marriage are equal. However, the government officially supports and legislatively protects heterosexual marriage. This is because same-sex relationships, especially those that do not contribute

to procreation, are seen as detrimental to the overall social structure and human reproduction. Especially nowadays the country advocates for having more children. Can same-sex couples have children? If they don't contribute to the population, why should they demand the same legal status as heterosexual marriage? Therefore, demanding same-sex marriage while not contributing to the country's population is essentially requesting special privileges. (@PuleierYZ (普雷尔 YZ), June 1, 2023).

The Chinese ambassador at the United Nations responded to questions about LGBT issues with utmost clarity. Western societies, using moral coercion as a means, attempt to force mainstream heterosexuals in China to submit to the LGBTQIA+ minority group and grant them privileges. Some even incite the Chinese LGBT community to break established traditional norms. We need to firmly oppose this! (@Huanyujingtou (寰球镜头), June 1, 2023).

If you want privileges, go to the United States! (@Panxiaofeng (潘晓丰), June 1, 2023).

On the contrary, homonationalists perceive that the Chinese constitution and laws do not discriminate against the LGBT community, which indicates a certain level of recognition of the LGBT community by the Chinese state. The following are comments made by homonationalists regarding the statements of the Chinese representative at the CEDAW:

Just as the Chinese delegation stated at the United Nations meeting, LGBT individuals are normal people who should be treated equally and contribute to society. Our ambassador's speech at the United Nations was impressive, showcasing one of the greatest aspects of our country. Throughout history, China has been an incredibly inclusive nation, with no discrimination against homosexuality. (@WillinMao, May 31, 2023)

The Western world's special treatment of homosexuality and manipulation of gender politics stems from the anti-homosexual traditions of Judaism and Christianity. For instance, these religions created terrifying stories of the condemned cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to persecute the homosexual community. Confucianism, the philosophical framework of China, is atheistic, and China has maintained a consistent tradition of tolerance without persecuting homosexuals. Moreover, there were instances of homosexuality and bisexuality among emperors during the Han Dynasty. Therefore, we should not emulate the West's gender politics. (@Finance 鸟不飞, May 31, 2023)

While same-sex couples cannot obtain marriage certificates in China, we do have equivalent legal systems. In our country, same-sex partners can mutually recognize each other as "intended guardians." This means that individuals can designate a guardian to take care of their lives, manage their property, and exercise their rights when necessary. This indirectly acknowledges same-sex marriage." (@Shechuan (涉川), May 31, 2023)

In sum, the statements of the Chinese state concerning LGBT issues exhibit contradictions and ambiguity, thus offering justifications that align with the perspectives of both forms of nationalism. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Chinese government's concessions on LGBT issues have only provided homonationalists with a limited political space. As a result, macho nationalism predominates the public discourse, while homonationalism is marginalized within the nationalist narrative, holding a considerably smaller influence (see Figure 4.3).

(2) Chinese Nationalism as Censorship in Silencing LGBT Voices

Chinese nationalism is a potent force in contemporary China and exerts substantial influence on public discourse surrounding LGBT issues. As previously discussed, nationalist discourse employs strategies grounded in Chinese authenticity and social security to undermine LGBT rights and foreign support for the LGBT community. Specifically, within the current landscape of public discourse in China, nationalist discourse, particularly macho nationalism, overwhelmingly prevails over anti-nationalist discourse, as depicted in Figure 4.3. Nationalist discourse commands a significant majority, comprising approximately 43.7% of the comments under the US embassy's posts, while anti-nationalist discourse accounts for a mere 6.7%, illustrating the striking dominance of nationalist discourse. This prevailing supremacy of nationalist discourse within the online public opinion space is closely connected to the utilization of Chinese nationalism as a form of censorship, which encompasses both top-down state control and grassroots nationalist endeavors (Zhao 2021; Weiss 2019), aimed at silencing LGBT voices.

From the perspective of top-down state control, Chinese nationalism has emerged as a tool of censorship, shaping China's socio-political landscape. Firstly, China's patriotic policies

provide the basis for utilizing Chinese nationalism as a mechanism of scrutiny. The Outline for Conducting Patriotic Education, introduced in 1994 and revised in 2019, establishes patriotism as a fundamental endeavor for constructing socialist spiritual civilization in China (Zhao 1998; Doughty 2009; People's Daily 2023). Furthermore, these versions of patriotic education policy merge the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese nation into a unified entity, equating love for the nation with love for the CCP and Chinese socialism, encapsulated in the phrase “adhering to the unity of loving the Party, loving the country, and loving socialism” (People's Daily 2023). Additionally, these outlines mandate the integration of patriotism throughout the entire education process, from kindergarten to university, making it the prevailing theme in Chinese society, where individuals are consistently exposed to patriotic ideals and spirit. Consequently, by linking Chinese patriotism with the fate of its people and emphasizing the leadership of the government and the Communist Party of China as guarantees for improving living standards and maintaining social stability, patriotic propaganda becomes deeply ingrained.

Moreover, with the endorsement of patriotic education policies, Chinese nationalism has become a criterion for censorship within the public opinion sphere in China. For example, the General Rules for Television Series Content Production (2016) stipulate that TV series must strongly promote patriotism and avoid content that undermines national unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity, security, honor, or interests. Similarly, the General Rules for Auditing the Content of Network Audiovisual Programs (2017) require internet audiovisual programs to praise the nation and guide the public in adopting a correct and pro-regime perspective on history, nation, country, and culture. In this context, Chinese public opinion platforms, such as Weibo, have established censorship departments to review and censor user expressions. According to China Digital Times' (2020) report, the review process for posts on the platform

involves several steps: initially, the platform’s backend system conducts a machine review based on a “sensitive word library,” followed by a second review by Weibo content reviewers who make decisions on deletion, hiding (making posts unsearchable), prohibition of reposting, shadow banning (restricting visibility of posted content to the user who posted it), account suspension, or account deletion, depending on the sensitivity of the information (CDT 2020). This process facilitates the display of performances by the “fifty-cent army”⁴⁵ or patriotic netizens (Bi 2020).

Furthermore, the Chinese government exercises control over media outlets and publications to suppress LGBT voices. For example, television programs, films, and online content are subjected to stringent regulations that prohibit the portrayal of same-sex relationships or discussions of LGBT issues, and homosexuality is stigmatized and characterized as vulgar, obscene, immoral, pornographic, low, and unhealthy (UNDP & USAID, 2014). The Film Review Regulations (1997) explicitly categorize homosexuality along with obscenity, rape, prostitution, and solicitation as prohibited content. Similar censorship of LGBT content persists in contemporary China. The Notification on Strengthening and Improving the Moral and Ethical Construction of Minors in Radio and Television Programs (2004) mandates the deletion of unhealthy sexual content, such as language, imagery, and plots that advocate sexual freedom, promiscuity, sexual pleasure, and homosexuality. In the Notification on Reiterating the Film Review Standards (2008), the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television classifies homosexuality together with obscenity, pornography, and low-level content, and emphasizes the need for deletion and modification. Similar stigmatization of homosexuality is found in the General Rules for Television Series Content Production (2016) and the General Rules for

⁴⁵ The term “50-cent army” refers to paid internet commentators who support the Chinese government or the Chinese Communist Party. It is often used by Chinese liberals to refer to Chinese nationalists.

Auditing the Content of Network Audiovisual Programs (2017). Even in 2020, the Cyberspace Administration of China, through its Qinglang (清朗) campaign aimed at purifying Chinese cyberspace from undesirable content, categorized homosexuality as vulgar and undesirable (Yang 2020). The implementation of various censorship-related regulations has significantly limited the political space for public discussions on LGBT issues in recent years. For instance, according to research conducted by the China Rainbow Media Awards, the number of original media reports on sexual minorities by Chinese media institutions decreased from 867 in 2015 to 348 in 2020 (Yi Yang 2021).

Apart from stigmatizing homosexuality as “obscene” and “deviant” in legal policies, the discourse of “foreign hostile forces” is also an important tool employed by the Chinese state to suppress the LGBT community. For instance, in 2018, the advocacy efforts of the Wuhan University Gender and Sexual Equality Association (WHU-GSEA) were obstructed, and university counselors claimed that such activities were influenced by Western subculture and contradicted the Core Socialist Values, suggesting potential connections to foreign forces (Yang, Tang, and Chen 2021). In 2021, WHU-GSEA, along with more than 20 other organizations and their WeChat official accounts, were banned for the same reason of “links with foreign forces.” According to a member of WHU-GSEA, university counselors believed that the organization had a “foreign force” backing and questioned the funding sources of its members (Yang, Tang, and Chen 2021). In addition to these university-based LGBT groups, Chinese pioneering LGBT organizations such as Chengdu MILK, Shanghai Pride, LGBT Rights Advocacy China, and Beijing LGBT Center were shut down in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2023, respectively. According to NGO CN’s report, in the past two years, China’s LGBT NGOs have become a major target of the Chinese government’s crackdown (XiaoAo 2023). The leaders of LGBT organizations have

faced increased police or national security interrogations, and their activities are frequently disrupted (XiaoAo 2023). As an example from NGOCN's report, in March 2021, a gathering organized by a transgender organization in their office, with only about ten participants, was disrupted by the police, who demanded they cease the activity, register their identification cards, and inquired about their connections with foreign entities (XiaoAo 2023). Similar cases of using the discourse of foreign forces to scrutinize LGBT advocacy are widespread (XiaoAo 2023), further undermining the legitimacy of LGBT organizations and communities.

In addition to state control through a top-down approach, Chinese nationalists, particularly macho nationalists, also contribute to the censorship of LGBT voices through a bottom-up approach. As discussed in the previous section, Chinese nationalists, especially macho nationalists, utilize social media platforms to flood comment sections with derogatory comments and slurs targeting the Chinese LGBT community and foreign LGBT support. By comparing the discourse of Chinese macho nationalists and homo nationalists on the Weibo platform with official statements from the Chinese government, I observed that repeating government statements is a common and effective method for nationalists to censor LGBT issues. This approach allows them to demonstrate their sense of belonging to Chinese identity and highlight the close relationship between individual fate and the Chinese state. For instance, frequently used terms by nationalists used to attack foreign LGBT advocacy, such as “traditional Chinese culture,” “foreign forces,” “color revolution,” “being fooled by the US,” “subversion,” and “collusion with the enemy,” can be traced back to official government documents or statements, including the Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education in the New Era (2019), the Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China (2016), the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Management of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations within

Mainland China (2017), the General Rules for Television Series Content Production (2016), and the General Rules for Auditing the Content of Network Audiovisual Programs (2017).

Apart from the repetition of official discourse, boycotting and reporting LGBT advocacy and discussions is another means through which Chinese nationalists, particularly macho nationalists, exercise their censorship power. This opposition and reporting are supported by the state, as evidenced by the enactment of the Anti-Espionage Law of the People's Republic of China in 2014, followed by its revised version in 2023. Under this law, local governments in China have implemented various "Rewards for Reporting Clues of Espionage Behavior by Citizens" programs. For instance, according to the "Rewards for Reporting Clues of Espionage Behavior by Citizens" guidelines issued by the Beijing Municipal Government in 2017, the Beijing Municipal State Security Bureau evaluates the role and effectiveness of the reported clues and grants a maximum reward of 500,000 yuan after verification (Wang 2017). At the national level, in April 2022, the Ministry of State Security issued the "Rewards for Reporting Acts Endangering National Security by Citizens" measures, which promote and encourage reporting behavior. According to this regulation, successful informants may receive either "spiritual rewards" in the form of certificates or "material rewards" in cash. In this context of the Chinese government's encouragement to report traitors and spies, liberal commentators are frequently accused by nationalists, especially macho nationalists, of betraying China and are derogatorily referred to as "Walking 500k" – insinuating that these liberals work for foreign spies and are worth a cash reward (up to 500,000 yuan) upon being reported to Chinese authorities (Gan 2022). This type of reporting and opposition from nationalists, especially macho nationalists, similarly applies to LGBT issues. For instance, the Guangzhou Pride Film Festival, jointly organized in July 2021 by 17 embassies including the United Kingdom, the United States,

Canada, and the Netherlands, faced boycotts and reporting from Chinese macho nationalists and homonationalists. Their intention was to discourage support for LGBT causes and reinforce the perception that LGBT identities are incompatible with Chinese cultural norms. Among these nationalist netizen, @Youshangde Shaoxiao (忧伤的少校) provided a detailed explanation for opposing the Guangzhou Pride Film Festival organized by foreign embassies:

China doesn't need the LGBT movement. We firmly oppose and boycott the British Consulate General in Guangzhou's blatant promotion of LGBT on the internet, which is a blatant invasion of Chinese culture. Throughout history, Westerners have always manipulated gender politics, attempting to infiltrate Chinese culture through the LGBT community and using the LGBT movement to create social division, ultimately aiming to disturb or overthrow China. ... One of the aspects that the West often exploits is the feminist movement and the LGBT movement. According to the 2015 report "Global LGBT Human Rights" published by the US Embassy in China, the United States believes that LGBT rights are human rights, and any country that cannot guarantee LGBT rights is a country that does not respect human rights. This is one of the means by which the United States suppresses its opponents. Their purpose in infiltrating LGBT culture is to further intensify social conflicts, lower the birth rate, curb the growth of the Chinese nation, and weaken the ability of the Chinese nation to resist foreign aggression. We strongly oppose and boycott LGBT culture becoming a means of propaganda and infiltration because it may evolve into a movement that demands political correctness. These Western countries claim to uphold democracy and freedom and promote cultural exchange, but they never respect Chinese traditional culture. Instead, they blindly promote Western culture in China, aiming to achieve their undisclosed objectives. Please warn or suspend the accounts of the British Consulate General in Guangzhou on platforms such as Sina Weibo and Tencent, @Sina Weibo and @Tencent. Please effectively supervise the activities of local overseas consulates, @Guangdong Government and @Guangdong Public Security. (@Youshangde Shaoxiao (忧伤的少校), July 29, 2021)

There are many similar comments of boycotting and reporting from Chinese nationalists regarding events like the Guangzhou Pride Film Festival organized by foreign embassies. Here are some examples:

... Friends in Guangzhou, please boycott the gathering on July 31. Relevant government departments should also pay attention. It might be a large-scale "500k"⁴⁶ gathering. #China LGBT Investigation #Be ware Color Revolution# (@大大大饼干, July 29, 2021)

⁴⁶ The term "500k" or "Walking 500k" originated from the "Measures for Rewarding Citizens Reporting Clues of Espionage Behavior," initially issued by the Beijing Municipal Government in 2017. According to this policy,

@Weibo Administrators @Laiquzhijian (Weibo CEO). It's time to take action. (@Elorirss, July 26, 2021)
@Sichuan Internet Police Inspection and Enforcement @Guangzhou Internet Police Inspection and Enforcement Comrades of the Internet Police, please handle this. (@NIU 爱吃草, July 26, 2021)

In addition to the British Consulate General in Guangzhou, other European Consulates General in Guangzhou, such as the Dutch Consulate General, are also deliberately promoting it collectively! Let's report them together! (@紙老虎本虎, July 26, 2021)

The top-down control exerted by the Chinese state has established Chinese nationalism as a significant criterion for censorship. In parallel, bottom-up nationalists, particularly those adhering to a macho ideology, actively align themselves with the state's position and engage in nationalist-driven censorship within the public sphere. Consequently, this form of censorship, operating under the pretext of Chinese nationalism, has effectively suppressed LGBT voices and diminished the visibility of the Chinese LGBT community in public discourse. To exemplify the evolving dynamics of nationalist and anti-nationalist expressions on online platforms, I will draw upon a specific case: a post made by the US Embassy on Weibo on May 16, 2018, which organized a discussion forum centered around IDAHOTB (International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia) (see Figure 4.3). Figure 4.3 illustrates the distribution of comments on this Weibo post on May 18, 2018. While there were purportedly 3,356 comments on that day, after accounting for deletions or hidden comments due to Weibo's censorship mechanisms (CDT 2020), only 3,074 comments remained visible. Continuing with the analysis, on June 18, 2023, I conducted a recount of the comments on the aforementioned US Embassy Weibo post (see Figure 4.5). Despite a nominal count of 3,574 comments, the actual number of visible comments was merely 675, indicating that over 80% of comments were

individuals can receive a maximum reward of 500,000 yuan for reporting foreign spies. Subsequently, Chinese nationalists on the internet started using "500k" or "Walking 500k" to refer to the targets that can be reported, such as foreign forces, public intellectuals, dissidents, feminists, and others.

deleted or hidden, rendering them invisible. Furthermore, by comparing the distribution of comments across different categories between 2018 and 2023 (see Figure 4.6), it becomes evident that the proportion of nationalist comments increased from 43.7% in 2018 to 65.3% in 2023. Specifically, the proportion of macho nationalist and homonationalist comments rose from 14.9% and 5.1% in 2018 to 22.2% and 10.5% in 2023, respectively. Comments emphasizing societal security increased from 23.7% in 2018 to 32.6% in 2023. Conversely, the proportion of anti-nationalism comments decreased from 6.7% in 2018 to 4.3% in 2023. These alterations in the distribution of comments to some extent reflect the silencing and marginalization of LGBT voices, as well as the persistent reinforcement of the nationalist narrative within China’s public discourse.

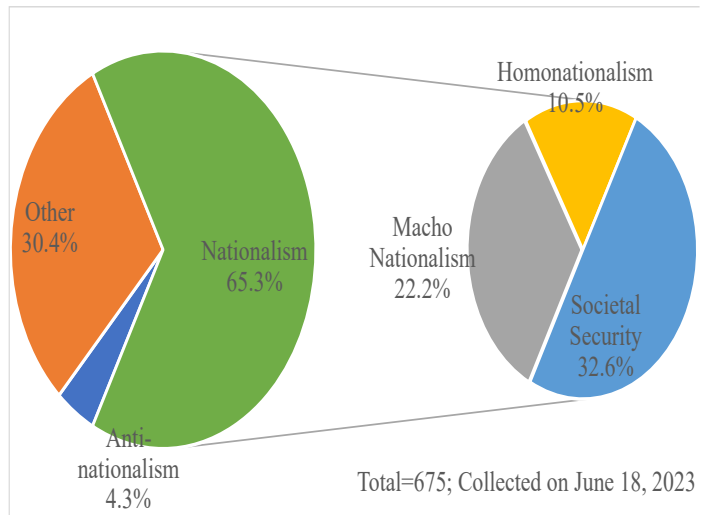


Figure 4.5 Distribution of Comments on a US Embassy’s Weibo Post (2023)

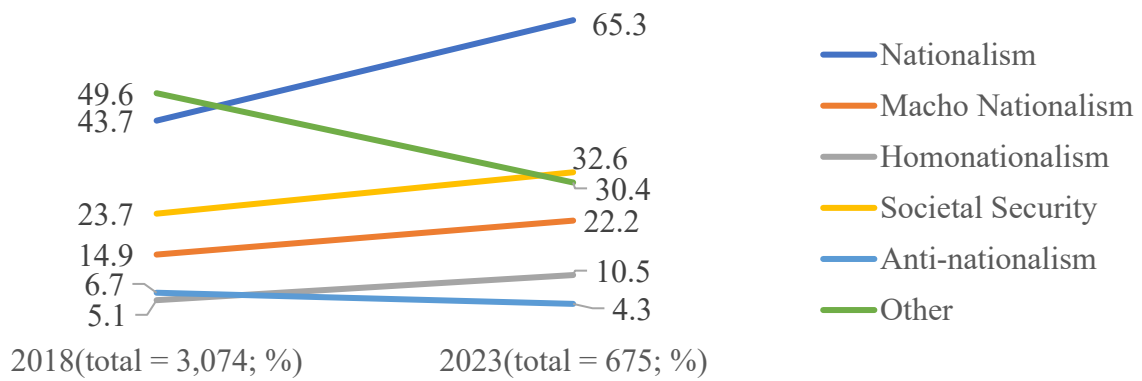


Figure 4.6 Changes of Comments on a US Embassy’s Weibo Post between 2018 and 2023

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter investigated the complex relationship between transnational LGBT advocacy in China, the Chinese state, and Chinese nationalism. Transnational LGBT advocacy, including the UN’s LGBT human rights mechanisms, faces two dilemmas: universalism and particularism (the conflict between promoting LGBT rights and respecting local cultural/traditional specificities), and intervention and non-intervention (whether promoting LGBT rights entails interfering with sovereignty and integrity). Chinese nationalists often employ the concepts of authenticity and societal security as self-defence mechanisms, leading to the rejection of external LGBT advocacy. However, the positions of Chinese nationalists regarding foreign LGBT advocacy in China are not consistently aligned. Instead, internal divisions exist within nationalist groups, giving rise to two distinct narratives: macho nationalism and homonationalism. These two forms of nationalism differ in their interpretations of traditional and authentic Chinese gender values, but both reject Western LGBT equality values and associated advocacy as interference in China’s internal affairs. This reveals a pro-regime, pro-Communist Party of China (CCP), and pro-government stance towards the Chinese state. The

coexistence of these two types of nationalism is linked to China's strategic ambiguity concerning LGBT issues. Despite generally adhering to a heterosexual moral framework, the Chinese government has carved out limited space for supporting the LGBT community, which provides a foundation for the emergence of homonationalists. While internal divisions exist among nationalists, macho nationalists still maintain dominance. Furthermore, Chinese nationalism has become a significant criterion within China's censorship system. Top-down state control measures and bottom-up nationalist efforts, particularly those driven by macho nationalists, contribute to the censorship and silencing of Chinese LGBT voices, marginalize their concerns, and reinforce the prevailing Chinese nationalist narrative.

This chapter exemplifies how Chinese nationalism is utilized by the Chinese state and Chinese nationalists, especially macho nationalists, to counter foreign LGBT advocacy pressure. However, the scope of the analysis is limited to Weibo and specific UN statements issued by China, thus providing only a partial understanding of the operational mechanisms of Chinese nationalism. Additionally, due to the brevity of Weibo comments, the thought processes of Chinese online nationalists can only be partially glimpsed. Nevertheless, this chapter contributes to an initial understanding of the coexistence of homonationalism and macho nationalism, as well as their operational mechanisms, which represent significant dilemmas in current LGBT advocacy in China that require further exploration. Future research could delve into the interactive processes between macho nationalists and homonationalists. Furthermore, this chapter contributes to the discussion of internal variations in the inference logic used by nationalist groups to rationalize their beliefs, despite their outward similarity. Moreover, China exhibits other phenomena similar to homonationalism, such as pink (patriotic) feminism and

pink BL (boys' love)/Dangai (耽改) fandom, thus offering promising avenues for further comparative analysis in future studies.

Chapter 5 Being Gay and Being Patriotic:

Exploring the Intersection of Sexuality, Globalization, and Nationalism through the Lens of

Pink Gays

This chapter investigates how nationalist LGBT individuals in China, commonly referred to as Pink Gays, navigate and reconcile their dual identities as members of the LGBT community and Chinese citizens with patriotic sentiments. To achieve this objective, a mixed-methods approach was employed, which included conducting social media research on Weibo and interviews with Chinese LGBT individuals. I also use results from the online survey developed to enhance the dataset with further context. The first section of this chapter delineates the evolution of Chinese nationalism from the “Angry Youth” and “Voluntary Fifty-Cent Army” to “Little Pinks,” drawing on an examination of existing research. Additionally, this section outlines the origins of the term “Pink Gays” and its application in describing nationalist gays within the Chinese public discourse, utilizing social media research on Weibo. Subsequently, the second section explores the identity of the Pink Gays community as pro-regime patriots, particularly examining how they employ different mechanisms to rationalize this identity. These mechanisms include decoupling the state (government/regime) from the social suffering and individual challenges experienced by LGBT individuals, employing downward comparison to argue for the superiority of LGBT rights in China, and establishing a salient patriotic identity to suppress their LGBT identity. In the third section, I discuss the acknowledged means of obtaining LGBT rights for Pink Gays, which include demonstrating loyalty to the state and conforming to mainstream heterosexual norms. By delving into these three aspects of the Pink

Gays community, this chapter provides insight into the intersectionality of Chinese nationalism, gender, and sexuality at the individual level through the lens of Pink Gays.

5.1 Who Are the Pink Gays?

5.1.1 From “Angry Youth” and “Voluntary Fifty-Cent Army” to “Little Pinks”

Since the late 1990s, China has witnessed the emergence of several generations of patriotic or nationalistic youth, including the “angry youth (fen qing, 愤青),” the “voluntary fifty-cent army (zi gan wu, 自干五),” and the “little pinks (xiao fen hong, 小粉红)” (Yang and Zheng 2012; Han 2015a; Fang and Repnikova 2018). Although these groups share some similarities, they also represent different social changes in China.

The term “angry youth” refers to the generation born after the 1980s who hold a cynical and critical view of Chinese society and the world. Some nationalist “angry youth”⁴⁷ have been actively and deeply involved in organizing and participating in many nationalist movements in China between the late 1990s and 2010s, leading the media to use the term “fen qing (angry youth, 愤青)” to refer to nationalistic and patriotic youth groups (Yang and Zheng 2012).

According to Yang and Lim (2010), several factors contribute to the emergence of the angry youth. Firstly, despite rapid economic growth, China has not achieved a commensurate increase in international status. After over two decades of open-door policy, China’s economy surpassed many Western nations, and in 2010, it even overtook Japan to become the world’s second-largest economy. Hosting the Olympics successfully fueled the imagination and expectations of Chinese

⁴⁷ The nationalistic angry youth (fen qing) is one group among the broadly defined angry youth. In addition, Yang and Zheng (2012) identified other types of angry youth, such as angry youth who criticizes domestic affairs.

youth that China would earn respect from the world, especially from the West (Yang and Lim 2010). However, China did not receive the expected level of recognition. Instead, its social conflicts and associated human rights issues have faced repeated criticism from Western societies. Consequently, their unfulfilled sense of superiority manifests as anger (Yang and Lim 2010; Shan and Guo 2011). Secondly, domestic patriotic education in China has been identified as a factor that contributes to xenophobia among Chinese youth. Since 1994, patriotic education has been implemented in response to possible rebellions and other threats to the Chinese Communist Party, such as the 1989 Tiananmen Incident. However, the biased effects of this education are that it has planted the seeds of hatred in the minds of youth (Shan and Guo 2010). Thirdly, information and communication technology has provided platforms for the angry youth to voice their dissatisfaction and political expressions, and it has also facilitated their ability to mobilize nationalist movements (Esarey and Qiang 2008; Yang and Zheng 2012).

The nationalist sentiments expressed by Chinese youth are not only confined to online platforms but are also translated into a series of nationalist movements in real life. Numerous nationalist protests have been organized in China to oppose foreign Others. For instance, anti-American protests occurred after the 2001 China-US military plane collision incident in Hainan province.⁴⁸ Anti-South Korea movements arose from disputes over the ownership of traditional foods (such as dumplings), festivals (such as Duanwu/Dano (端午)), and traditional medicine.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ On April 1, 2001, the collision between a United States Navy EP-3E ARIES II signals intelligence aircraft and a Chinese J-8II interceptor jet led to the Hainan Island incident, which sparked an international dispute between the United States and China. This incident triggered a wave of Chinese nationalist fervor.

⁴⁹ Although China and South Korea share similarities in their Confucian heritage, disputes have arisen over ownership claims to specific intangible cultural heritage (ICH), including festivals such as Duanwu/Dano, traditional medicine, and food culture. These controversies have been particularly contentious among nationalist groups in both countries.

Anti-Japan protests erupted in 2012 due to the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.⁵⁰ Additionally, an anti-CNN movement⁵¹ was organized to counter biased reports by mainstream Western media outlets such as CNN, Fox, BBC, Times, RTL, and N-TV (Tang and Dar 2012; Yang and Zheng 2012). The Chinese government maintains a love and hate relationship with the angry youth (Yang and Zheng 2012). On the one hand, their pro-regime inclinations can be utilized to justify the Chinese Communist Party's ruling. On the other hand, the collective mobilization and protests can threaten social stability. For example, the 2012 anti-Japan protest escalated into a riot of looting and burning Japanese-related stores and destroying Japanese-branded vehicles in many cities (Lai 2012).

In contemporary cyberspace discourse, the term “angry youth” has lost its prevalence, and a new label for Chinese nationalists has gained influence: the “fifty-cent army (wu mao dang, 五毛党)” and the “voluntary fifty-cent army (zi gan wu, 自帶干粮的五毛).” The former term refers to internet commentators hired by the government to shape online opinion and produce pro-state commentaries (Han 2015a). The “fifty-cent army” label originated from a 2004 recruitment notice issued by the Changsha City Communist Propaganda Department, which offered “fifty cents for every comment” posted by internet commentators (Initium 2016). King, Pan, and Roberts’ (2017) research estimates that one out of every 178 social media posts on commercial sites is fabricated by the government’s “fifty-cent army.” The latter term, the “voluntary fifty-cent army,” refers to another group of netizens who defend the regime like the

⁵⁰ The Diaoyu Islands, located in the East China Sea, cover a total area of 6.3 km² and have been a source of bitter dispute between China and Japan since the 1960s. Despite the lack of human habitation or reported economic activity, the islands have significant strategic, economic, and political implications.

⁵¹ In 2008, the Anti-CNN movement emerged in China as a prominent nationalist movement triggered by foreign media coverage of the Lhasa Riot. The movement accused Western media, particularly CNN, of being biased in their reporting and distorting facts. The movement was initiated by a group of young Chinese students and quickly spread from online protests to offline demonstrations both within China and abroad. It has been considered one of the most extreme anti-American nationalistic movements of the past decades (Lin 2016).

“fifty-cent army,” but without government compensation (Han 2015a). An analysis of 3,440 Weibo users by Huang, Gui and Sun (2019) found that Internet users who voluntarily defend the regime account for 9.62%.

In the eyes of liberal netizens, the voluntary fifty-cent army has gained notoriety due to their actions, such as manipulating public opinion and engaging in online propaganda efforts (Han 2015a, 2015b, 2018, 2019). However, the Chinese government has highly praised this voluntary faction of netizens. Chinese state media outlets, such as Guangming Daily, People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Daily, and the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League Weibo account, have referred to the voluntary fifty-cent army as “good netizens” (Zhang, Song, and Liu 2015) and “firm practitioners of socialist core values” (Zhao 2014). Key opinion leaders (KOLs) within the voluntary fifty-cent army, including Zhou Xiaoping (周小平) and Hua Qianfang (花千芳), are regarded by the PLA Daily as “tenaciously fighting voluntary fifty-cent army” members who spread positive energy (Di 2015). Therefore, according to government propaganda, it is suggested that everyone should become a member of the voluntary fifty-cent army and contribute to the realization of the “Chinese Dream” (Li 2015).

Rongbin Han argues that the voluntary fifty-cent army is more effective at influencing public opinion than state agents, as they utilize a variety of creative expressive tactics, including “labeling wars,” “face-slapping,” “cross-talk,” “fishing,” and “positive mobilization” (2015a: 1012-1019). For instance, voluntary fifty-cent army members employ various creative tactics to mock and criticize their opponents, such as labeling them as the “US cent party” (美分党, a derogatory term for US-sponsored internet commentators), “road-leading party” (带路党, those who will lead the way for invaders), or “spiritual Japanese or American” (精日 or 精美, Chinese with Japanese or American identity and spirits) (Han 2015a: 1012; Zhu 2004: 74; Gui, Huang

and Ding 2020). Additionally, they also target liberal-leaning media outlets such as the Southern Media Group (SMG 南方报业传媒集团) for allegedly “smuggling in their hidden agenda in reports” (jiadai sihuo 夹带私货) with the aim of brainwashing the public with Western values (Han 2015a: 1013). For instance, they criticized SMG for adopting a double standard in its reporting on disasters in China, such as the Sichuan earthquake in 2008. While the SMG blamed the Chinese government for its failure to predict the earthquake, it praised the Japanese government for its order and transparency in handling the 2011 earthquake in Japan. The voluntary fifty-cent army concluded that the Southern Media Group and other public intellectuals and elites were attempting to defame and smear China while praising its Western adversaries (Han 2015a, 2018).

The third label used to describe young Chinese nationalists is “little pink.” This term originated around 2008 from Jinjiang Literature City (jjwxc.net) (Fang and Repnikova 2018). Jinjiang Literature City is one of the most influential internet literature forums, occupying 80% of the female book market in mainland China (Forbes China 2021). One important branch of the website focuses on Boys’ Love (BL) literature, and this website had a pink background. Therefore, Jinjiang Literature City users used “little pink” to refer to themselves and the website (Fang and Repnikova 2018). A small group of users on Jinjiang, called the “Jinjiang girls who are worried about the country (晋江忧国少女团),” typically wrote about patriotism and nationalism on the forum. In 2011, some of these girls quit Jinjiang Literature City because the liberal-leaning website owner, @iceheart, tried to shut down their forum section and humiliated them as fools (Yu 2021; Fang and Repnikova 2018). These former Jinjiang users then created their own website, Fengyi (凤仪), and referred to themselves as “Fengyi Girls (凤仪妹子).” They even claimed themselves as the “voluntary fifty-cent army” based on their patriotic stance

(Yu 2021). In 2015, Fengyi users engaged in an online scolding war with liberal public opinion leader Daguguji (@大咕咕鸡) (Fang and Repnikova 2018). While Fengyi Girls called Daguguji “chicken shit,” Daguguji referred to the Fengyi users as ugly “little pink” who are human batteries of the government (Fang and Repnikova 2018: 2170). After that, “little pink” was used by Daguguji’s fans to refer to nationalistic young girls.

The 2016 Diba⁵² Expenditure/Crusade Incident helped popularize the term “little pinks” on the Chinese internet. The incident was triggered by Taiwanese pop star Chou Tzu-yu’s assertion of her nationality as Taiwanese. Mainland Chinese nationalist netizens interpreted Chou’s statement as indicative of her support for Taiwan independence. Subsequently, thousands of Diba and other internet users launched a campaign to circumvent China’s network firewall and attack Facebook accounts associated with figures such as Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, pop star Chou Tzuyu, and other pro-Taiwan-independence media outlets such as Apple Daily (Zheng 2021). Liberal public opinion leaders commonly borrow the term “little pinks” to refer to these nationalist crusaders, despite the majority of Diba Expenditure participants being male.

There are two primary reasons why liberal opinion leaders and netizens adopted the term “little pink.” Firstly, it allowed them to deride young nationalists as being inferior, ideologically regressive, ignorant, and emotionally zealous, as documented by Fang and Repnikova (2018). However, I also argue that the use of the term “little pink” at this level obscures the misogyny prevalent among many male liberals in China, which is discriminatory towards individuals possessing feminine qualities, whether male or female. Specifically, in denigrating these nationalist crusaders, liberal opinion leaders insinuate that Chinese nationalists lack masculinity and are comparable to mindless young women, particularly those who are fans of Boys’ Love

⁵² Diba is an online forum in China known for its nationalist views.

literature, and incapable of independent thinking. Secondly, many liberal netizens have associated “little pinks” with the “Red Guards” of the Cultural Revolution era (1966-1976), due to their propensity to form “online mobs” to suppress opposing views (Yang Guobin 2019; Fang and Repnikova 2018). As red is strongly associated with the Chinese Communist Party and government in China, the use of the term “pink” as a lighter shade of red is perceived as a way of emphasizing that these young nationalists share the same ideological system with the Chinese Communist Party and government. Once the term “little pinks” became associated with Chinese nationalists and gained prominence in public discourse, the original association between the term and the Jinjiang forum and female BL fans gradually diminished (Fang and Repnikova 2018).

In sum, while the term “little pink” was initially created accidentally through an initial association of some young nationalist women with Boys’ Love literature, it later became widely applied to young Chinese nationalists in general. Over time, more young netizens joined the “little pink” group, gradually forming a powerful presence in Chinese cyberspace (Wu, Li and Wang 2019). Unlike the angry youth and voluntary fifty-cent army, little pinks romanticized and idolized their patriotic sentiments (Liu 2019; Wu, Li and Wang 2019). They created a cute and family-oriented national image, such as “Azhong Brother (Brother China, 阿中哥哥),” “Papa State (祖国爸爸),” or “70-year-old baby (70 岁仔仔),” borrowing from the fandom subculture to make the national image more appealing (Dong et al. 2022:1355; Liu 2019; Wong et al. 2021: 11; Wang & Chen 2023; Gengzhige 2019). In 2019, Azhong Brother and Papa State replaced the previously widely used term “Homeland Mother,” signaling changing attitudes towards the Chinese nation (Dong et al. 2022:1355). The little pink group asserts that there should be no idols more important than the nation or that the only idol should be the Chinese nation (Zhuang, Huang and Chen 2022).

In addition, little pinks utilize their consumer power as leverage to practice their nationalism (Li 2019). They do so by participating in a series of online boycott campaigns, including boycotts related to the Dolce & Gabbana insulting China incident⁵³ in 2018 and the Nike and H&M incidents⁵⁴ in 2021 (Ng 2022). Little pinks declared that they would not buy products from these “Insulting China (ru hua, 辱华)” brands, using this as a weapon to force the brands to make concessions to their patriotism (Ng 2022). Instead, Chinese domestic brands (guo huo, 国货) such as Hongxin Erke (鸿星尔克), Lining (李宁), and Anta (安踏) gained little pinks’ support after they spoke up in support of domestically produced Xinjiang cotton (Xu & Liu 2021). Moreover, little pinks have exercised their significant influence in online space by employing innovative mobilization techniques. For instance, in 2019, they initiated the “814 Fan-Girls Expenditure (饭圈出征)”⁵⁵ campaign (Zhuang, Huang and Chen 2021), utilizing some aggressive campaign strategies from fan-club/fandom organizations, such as “task division and cooperation,” “framing slogans,” “boosting hashtags and boosting popularity,” “channeling viewers,” “flooding positive comments,” “controlling or reducing negative comments,” “digging up negative information of opponents,” “fighting back against negative or malicious comments,”

⁵³ Dolce & Gabbana’s Chinese model, Ms. Zuo Ye, faced accusations of racism after appearing in an advertisement campaign for the brand in which she appeared to struggle to eat Italian food, including cannoli and pizza, with chopsticks. This act was perceived by Chinese nationalists as an insult to Chinese culture and the Chinese people.

⁵⁴ Nike and H&M’s decision to avoid using Xinjiang cotton due to human rights concerns was perceived by the Little Pinks as an affront to the Chinese people.

⁵⁵ The Hong Kong government proposed an extradition bill in 2019, known as the “Hong Kong Extradition Law.” This bill would have allowed the extradition of criminal suspects to mainland China. The bill triggered large-scale protests in Hong Kong, starting from March 2019, called the Hong Kong Anti-Extradition Bill Movement. The protesters feared that the bill would undermine the city’s judicial independence and could be used as a tool by the Chinese Communist Party to target critics of the Chinese government. Despite the Hong Kong government’s withdrawal of the bill in September 2019, the protests continued with broader demands for greater democracy and freedoms in Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, some nationalist stars from mainland China and Hong Kong sided with the Chinese government and supported the Hong Kong Extradition Bill, condemning Hong Kong protesters. This drew criticism from liberals outside mainland China, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. Therefore, fan girls launched the “818 Expenditure” to support these Chinese nationalist stars.

and “reports against opponents (jubao, 举报)” (Yu 2021: 104). They used these strategies to attack Hong Kong protesters, support their patriotic idols (such as Jackson Wang and VaVaMis), and endorse the Chinese government’s stance on repressing the Hong Kong protests (Gengzhige 2019).

The patriotic online activism by the little pinks has received regular praise from the Chinese government. In 2019, for instance, CCTV News referred to fan-girls (a branch of little pinks) as a “powerful positive energy” who were “caring and supporting Hong Kong” (Southern Metropolis Daily 2019). The state media outlet, Global Times, also described these fan-girls as safeguarding the best of Azhong (阿中) (Gengzhige 2019). However, some scholars, such as Yu (2021), have found that the little pinks are inherently self-contradictory. On the one hand, they are proud of their country’s achievements and optimistic about its future; on the other hand, they are pessimistic about their personal daily lives due to real dilemmas in employment, marriage, and other areas (Yu 2021). Rather than blaming the government for these issues, the little pinks have found a new outlet for their dissatisfaction: capital and capitalists (zi ben, 资本). Capital and capitalists have become the target of condemnation since the release of CCTV’s documentary, “The Power of Capital,” in 2019. While the documentary initially promoted the achievements of the Chinese capital market and how it had promoted the country’s economy, the little pinks have used it to find a vent for their real-life struggles. They argue that capital has caused many disasters in China and that capitalists manipulate Weibo as a public platform, since their posts and comments are sometimes deleted by Weibo administrators (Yu 2021). This has given rise to a new wave of anti-capitalism in China. Furthermore, similar to the Angry Youth and the Voluntary Fifty-Cent Army, the little pinks continue to view the hostile anti-China force (the West, particularly the US) as a scapegoat.

5.1.2 The Invention of Pink Gays

This section investigates the origin of the term Pink Gays (feng hong ji, 粉红基). As the term “little pink” first emerged in 2015 (Fang and Repnikova 2018), I conducted an analysis of Weibo research data spanning the years 2015 to 2020 to provide a suitable timeframe for examining the semantic evolution of the term Pink Gays. Using the search function on Weibo, I searched for content related to terms included as “pink gay (粉红 gay),” “pink ji (粉红基),” “pink lesbian (粉红拉拉/lesbian),” and “pink LGBT (粉红 LGBT).” After filtering out irrelevant information, I recorded the frequency of “Pink Gay” appearances each year, as shown in Figure 5.1. Overall, the frequency of “Pink Gay” usage gradually increased over time. Considering the strict censorship system on the Chinese internet, especially on Weibo, and the six-month visibility limit set by some users, this frequency graph is not entirely accurate. Although some Weibo posts related to Pink Gays may not be accessible through this search method, the data collected is sufficient to support an exploration of the process by which “Pink Gay” emerged as a tag and the semantic changes it underwent.

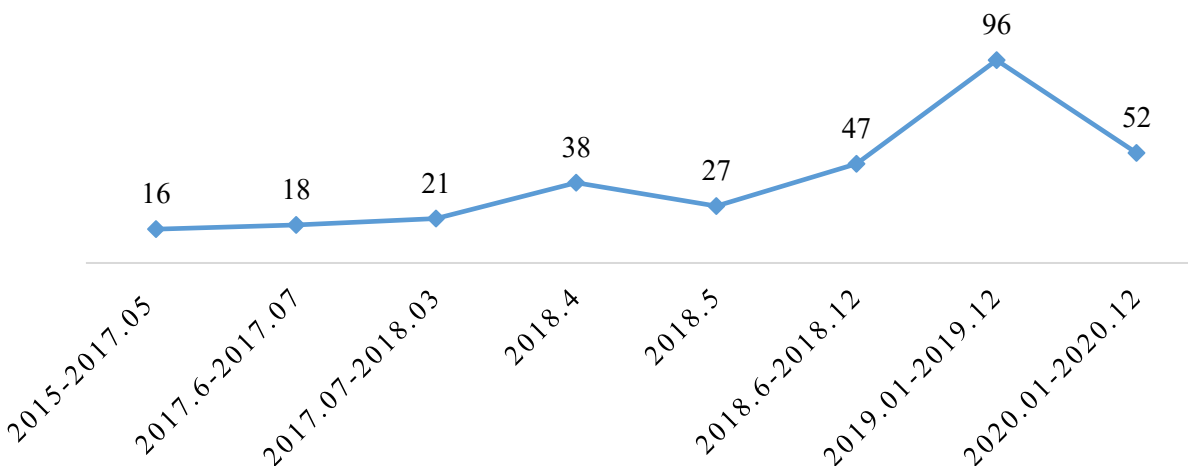


Figure 5.1 The Frequency of Usage of “Pink Gay” Over Different Time Periods

Analyzing the semantic changes of the term Pink Gays, I find that the combination of “little pink” and “gay” began to shift its meaning towards a nationalistic or patriotic gay identity in mid-2017, almost two years after “little pink” was first coined by Daguguji (@大咕咕鸡). The invention and prevalence of “Pink Gay” on Weibo can be divided into three phases: the use of “pink” and “gay” in the subcultures of Boys’ Love (BL) fans before mid-2017, the emergence of the term Pink Gays by liberal-leaning LGBT opinion leaders in July 2017, and the increasing prevalence of the term Pink Gays following the “I am homosexual” online campaign in April 2018.

To be specific, prior to June 2017, I find that the combination of “pink” and “gay/lesbian” did not have any nationalistic or patriotic connotations. In other words, despite the usage of the term “little pinks” by liberal-leaning netizens derived from Daguguji to criticize Chinese nationalists since the 2016 Diba Expenditure (Fang and Repnikova 2018), it is crucial to emphasize that the amalgamation of “pink” and “gay” did not undergo a semantic transformation leading to the connotation of “nationalist/patriotic gay” during that specific period. Additionally, prior to June 2017, the combination of “pink” and “gay” mainly appeared in the Boys’ Love (BL)/Dammei subculture, where “pink” referred to romantic and flirtatious behaviors between real or imagined male-male CPs⁵⁶ (coupling), such as holding hands, hugging, cheeking, and whispering between two young males. Here are some typical usages of the combination of “pink” and “gay” prior to June 2017:

Today is May 20th, the Chinese Valentine’s Day @League of Legends BL fandom(英雄联盟同人). I’m going to break up all kinds of couples, including pink gay couples in the game. (@xinye ranzhi(新叶燃之), May 20, 2017)

⁵⁶ CP stands for “Coupling,” which refers to the romantic relationship between two characters. In the BL subculture, CP is used to refer to loving relationships between two boys.

#Band EXO⁵⁷# the highlight clips of CPs of EXO are highly full of pink and gay love (@Korean-Music (韩流音乐), June 2, 2017);

I feel the No.1 and No.2 Male leads of this drama series have some “pink” and gay love. (@RicJoyce-G7, February 2, 2016).

Iconic equipment/feature of “little pink” people: airy bangs, diamond-studded phones, uncle CPs⁵⁸, “male-male gao ji(男男搞基),”⁵⁹ and Paris Baguette⁶⁰. (@Fenger (凤二凤二比较二), February 2, 2016)

In addition, I also found several items using the combination of “pink” and gay in LGBT activism. For example, Blued, the largest gay dating app company in China, issued a report in 2016 on Weibo called “Pink Economy Report.” In this report, the term “pink” refers to LGBT community and “pink economy” refers to the consumption or purchasing power of LGBT community. So overall, the combination of “pink” and “gay” did not carry any nationalistic or patriotic implications before mid-2017.

However, both BL fans and the LGBT community were aware that the meaning of “pink” was evolving in public discourse, and some BL fans attempted to revert the term “pink” back to its original meaning. For instance, one BL fan argued that “the label was very significant for us, so I plead with you to leave ‘little pink’ to us. In reality, it initially referred to BL fangirls.”⁶¹

My investigation of the semantic changes of “Pink Gay” on Weibo found that the term was first used to refer to nationalistic and patriotic gay individuals in July 2017, during discussions among some liberal LGBT public opinion leaders and their followers regarding new restrictions and repressions on homosexuality. Specifically, on June 30, 2017, the China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA) issued the General Rules for Auditing the Content of

⁵⁷ EXO is a South Korean Chinese boys’ band based in Seoul.

⁵⁸ a term referring to the pairing of older male and younger male characters in fan fiction

⁵⁹ a slang term for gay romantic and sexual activity

⁶⁰ a popular bakery chain in China

⁶¹ @zengjunbaimao yaoguangxiao(赠君白帽姚广孝), July 27, 2017

Network Audiovisual Programs, which categorized homosexuality as abnormal sexual relations and behavior, obscene pornography, vulgarity, and low taste, and required its deletion from internet audiovisual programs, prohibiting its broadcast. Moreover, in early July 2017, several video platform websites, such as Bilibili and AcFun, began removing or taking down videos related to homosexuality and the BL subculture. In this context of strict censorship of homosexuality, many liberal LGBT public opinion leaders on Weibo expressed their anger and disappointment with the country's stance. They stated that:

This Auditing General Rules is total persecution. (@SAKURAWAY, July 13, 2017)

If you, me, and others do not stand up for ourselves...the LGBT groups will always be ravaged by those who hold the power of discourses. (@Zhudingzhen (竹顶针), July 3, 2017)

We lost Website A (AcFun.cn), and then Website B (bilibili.com); now Website C (China Central Television) controls the world. (@Director Zhangwenshuang (导演张文爽), July 12, 2017)

In addition to critics of state censorship on homosexuality, these Weibo gay public opinion leaders and their followers also targeted pro-regime and patriotic gay people, mocking them with the nickname "Pink Gay." For instance, followers of @SAKURAWAY mocked these patriotic gays as the Figure 5.2 shows: "Pink Gays would say, 'I feel that China is very tolerant towards gays, and at least I haven't experienced discrimination.'" ⁶² Another netizen retweeted with the comment, "Yes, patriotic LGBT individuals all have this tone." ⁶³

⁶² @ silaite guize (斯莱特规则), July 13, 2017

⁶³ @van_-injp, July 13, 2017



哼...

+关注

17-7-13 02:05

//@人間審查員://@van_-injp:对, 爱国LGBT都是这个调调//@斯莱特规则:粉红基: “我觉得中国对gay很宽容啊, 至少我就没有感觉到歧视”//@SAKURAWAY:这是彻底的迫害了

抱歉, 此微博已被作者删除。查看帮助: [网页链接](#)

17-7-13 00:52

Figure 5.2 Early Usage of the term Pink Gays among Liberal-Leaning Netizens

During this period, it is worth noting that some patriotic and pro-regime gays also referred to themselves as Pink Gays. From their statements, it can be seen that the term Pink Gays shares the same characteristics with “little pinks.” Besides supporting the regime and loving the country, they also tend to use cute or adorable language to describe the state or nation. For example, terms like “Tuan-Tuan (League-League, 团团)”⁶⁴ and “Hong-Hong (Red-Red, 红红)”⁶⁵ are used to refer to the Chinese Communist Youth League and the Chinese Communist Party in a cute manner. An illustrative example of the early usage of the term Pink Gay among patriotic gay groups is shown in Figure 5.3. Netizen Manolo (@Manolo 丹丹芬) self-identified as a Pink Gay and complained on July 2, 2017, about the Auditing General Rules’ censorship of homosexuality: “I don’t know what to do [with the General Rules], so I can only privately

⁶⁴ In Chinese culture, repeated characters are often used to create a sense of playfulness or cuteness. The Chinese Communist Youth League is commonly referred to by its abbreviation “Tuan” in Chinese, which means “League.” Some patriotic netizens have created the repeated characters “Tuan-Tuan” to refer to the Chinese Communist Youth League in a cute way.

⁶⁵ The creation of “Hong-Hong (Red-Red)” follows a similar pattern as “Tuan-Tuan”. In China, the color red is often used to represent the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party and is referred to as “Hong” in Chinese characters. Therefore, some patriotic netizens have created the repeated characters “Hong-Hong” to refer to the Chinese Communist Party in a cute way.

message Tuan-Tuan (the Chinese Communist Youth League, 团团) and ask if there is any way to reverse it. It's a daily painful struggle as a Pink Gay (粉红基).”

Another netizen CatAier (@CatAier) retweeted Manolo's post and added his comment: “We still have some the dream to force the government to change it. Hold on!” In addition, CatAier also kept optimistic about China with his post that “the General Rules [of CNSA] is boycotted unanimously. But I believe the Hong-Hong (the Chinese Communist Party, 红红) will abolish it naturally under the joint pressures.”

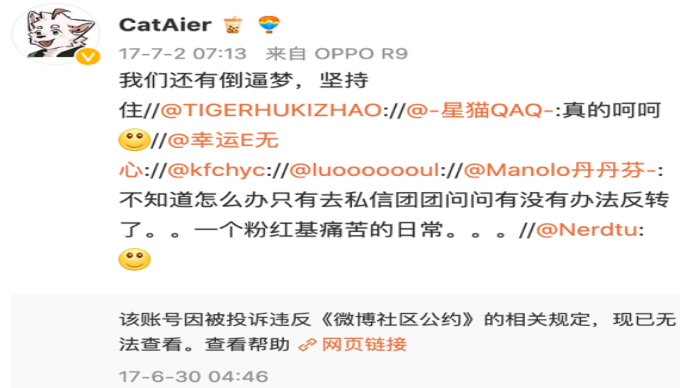


Figure 5.3 The Usage of the Term Pink Gays among Pink Gay Group

The repression and restrictions on homosexuality in mid-2017 brought the label “Pink Gay” to the forefront, albeit to a limited extent, among liberal LGBT public opinion leaders and their followers. In the early stage, the General Rules affected only a few video websites, such as Bilibili and AcFun, that do not function as public discourse platforms like Weibo. Nevertheless, ongoing restrictions on homosexuality continued to fuel the anger of the LGBT community, paving the way for the massive break away from Liberal LGBT folds after Weibo made the announcement to censor homosexuality in April 2018. Specifically, on April 13, 2018, the Weibo administrator announced its compliance with the Cybersecurity Law and initiated a three-month network cleanup (censorship) campaign, listing homosexuals as one of the targets for

deletion. This triggered the accumulated resentment that had been gathering since 2017. Subsequently, liberal gay public opinion influencer Zhudingzhen (@竹顶针) initiated an online campaign among his followers, advocating for the use of the hashtag “I am homosexual.” Soon after, more LGBT public opinion influencers, such as @SAKURAWAY, @I Am Angry Wangxiaoneng (我是愤怒的王小能), @Piaoquanjun (票圈君), @BeiguoJiaren Lichunji (北国佳人李春姬), and LGBT activists and organizations, such as the Beijing LGBT Center, PFLAG China, Common Language, and LGBT Rights Advocacy Association, joined the campaign. The silent majority in the LGBT community and heterosexual allies also spoke out for LGBT people with hashtags such as “I am heterosexual, but I support homosexuality.” The hashtag “I am homosexual” received 600 billion views/reads⁶⁶ from April 13 to April 16 (Vista 2018), forcing concessions from the Weibo administrator and China’s state media outlet, the People’s Daily.

Along with the relatively successful and large-scale online protest campaign “I am homosexual”, the label “Pink Gay” has spread among the LGBT community and, to some extent, overflowed into the public opinion arena. More netizens are using the label “Pink Gay” to attack patriotic gay people. First, liberal LGBT key opinion leaders and their followers continue to express their dissatisfaction and resentment towards “Pink Gays” for their pro-regime stance, regardless of the repression from the Chinese state. The “Pink Gays” are mocked for suffering from Stockholm Syndrome and deeply loving their oppressors the Chinese state, or for lacking a backbone and betraying the LGBT community. The following are some typical examples:

I am astounded by the substantial size of the “Planting Flowers Family”⁶⁷ (Zhonghua Jia, 种花家) Pink Gay community. They really are in the late stage of Stockholm Syndrome. (@Kanfengzheng (抱着契税看风筝), April 14, 2018)

⁶⁶ Views/Reads refer to the number of times a specific Weibo post, topic, or hashtag has been viewed by users on the Weibo platform.

⁶⁷ “Zhong Hua Jia (种花家)” or “rabbits of Zhong Hua Jia (种花家的兔子)” is a term that originated from a patriotic animated series called “Year Hare Affair (那年那兔那些事儿).” In Chinese, “种花家” (zhòng huā jiā)

The Pink Gay group is the most monstrous creature I have ever seen. Their brains must be damaged. (@Caizhemianbaozou (踩着面包走), April 14, 2018)

Little pinks, is clearing you out of the Internet by the state what you hope for? Is this your so-called “prosperous era?” If so, you really deserve such a “prosperous era.” (@DDZhangxunao, April 14, 2014)

I know many people in the Pink Gay community. I speculate that their level of “pinkness” may be related to their level of English proficiency, meaning that they may not have exposure to the outside world beyond China. (@FZF505fzf, April 15, 2018)

Secondly, following the expression of support by the People’s Daily for the LGBT community, the patriotic gay community highly commended the newspaper’s position, which has caused strong dissatisfaction among liberals. Liberal LGBT Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and netizens were dissatisfied with the compromise made by the People’s Daily as it did not address the discrimination and censorship against the LGBT community. For instance, KOL YAWARUKAS⁶⁸ (formerly SAKURAWAY) did not view the statement of People’s Daily as a sincere show of support and recognition for the status and visibility of the gay community. Instead, he argued that the concession made by the People’s Daily was issued under pressure from the 440 million views of the hashtag “I am homosexual,” and People’s Daily’s comment contained implicit discrimination against the LGBT community. To be specific, the comment made by the People’s Daily (2018) emphasized that homosexuality is not a mental illness and sexual orientation is a different dimension of a person, thereby necessitating the elimination of discrimination. However, it is ironic that the same article also contended that sexual orientation should not be utilized as a gimmick to garner attention. If sexual orientation is employed as a

sounds similar to “中华家” (zhōng huá jiā), which means “Chinese family.” Meanwhile, the word for “rabbit” (兔子, tù zǐ) sounds like “comrade” (同志, tóng zhì). Therefore, some liberals use “Zhong Hua Jia” as a playful way of referring to patriotic and nationalist Chinese.

⁶⁸ YAWARUKAS and SAKURAWAY are two Weibo accounts belonging to the same person. As a public opinion leader, he frequently criticizes the Chinese government and policies, which leads to his Weibo accounts being frequently deleted by the Weibo administrator under a strict censorship system.

selling point on online platforms to seek fame and popularity, it can devolve into a vulgar and sycophantic performance; and the proliferation of such crude content, particularly among minors, may create the impression that this is a trend, engendering a tendency towards blind imitation (People's Daily 2018). As a gender and sexual minority group that has been discriminated against and oppressed, it is ironic and disconcerting for patriotic gay people to praise and be grateful for such government remarks. A wave of attacks and criticisms against the patriotic gay community based on this emerged. YAWARUKAS published six Weibo posts in which he criticized Pink Gays for endorsing the statement made by the People's Daily. Here are three relatively complete posts in which YAWARUKAS criticizes Pink Gays:

If you believe that the recent statement by People's Daily signifies a positive change in the government's attitude towards the LGBT community, and that its policies will be reformed, then you are a fool. In fact, it was the massive outcry and the 440 million views the hashtag #I am homosexual# that eventually compelled People's Daily to make the statement. The credit for this concession should be attributed to the efforts of the protesting netizens on Weibo. However, Pink Gays of mistakenly view this statement as a gift from the government, which is nauseating to me. (@YAWARUKAS, April 15, 2018)

The decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality are not the results of local LGBT rights movements, in fact, there has been no substantial progress of China's LGBT rights for decades. Why? It's because every time the government slaps the LGBT community in the face, they give us a sweet jujube/reward afterwards. Many Pink Gays immediately lick it up like a happy dog and wag their tails, completely forgetting what happened before. They have no memory at all. Whenever they see these so-called compromises and support, which look like sweet dates, they immediately lick them up without even discerning the shit inside. They even complain that others are not licking fast enough. (@YAWARUKAS, April 15, 2018)

The relationship between Pink Gays and the government is like that of a master and a slave. The master said that you don't need to be beaten with a stick this time, and you were grateful to the point of tears, thinking that this was an act of grace. But this subservient behavior made you forget that you deserve freedom and should not have suffered such insults and abuse. (@YAWARUKAS, April 16, 2018)

These posts garnered 2122 reposts, 82 comments, and 2217 likes, with the overwhelming majority of reposts and comments expressing support for his critique. Here are some typical comments:

Pink Gays are like someone who has been slapped hundreds of times by the government, but now that they've been given a broken piece of candy, they're saying that everything is peaceful and fine. (@_Yanci (颜辞), April 15, 2018)

The Pink Gays in “your country”⁶⁹ (你国 or 尼国) are too easily satisfied, just like house pets with no sense of crisis. They even think that our criticisms of the government are all exaggerations. (@sun and sunflower (阳与向日葵), April 15, 2018);

They kill all your family members and then give you a candy. So many people immediately began to be pleased again (@麦琪吱吱吱 April 16, 2018)

Pink Gays now all retweet People's Daily's comment and cry bitterly that “the motherland still loves me and thank the Mama China.” (@FZF505fzf April 15, 2018)

After the term “Pink Gays” was coined by Chinese LGBT liberals, it elicited varying responses within the nationalists LGBT community. Some nationalist LGBT individuals perceive the term “Pink Gay” as derogatory and advocate for its boycott. For instance, netizen @Langxixingjian (浪戏星间) suggested that Chinese LGBT nationalists should “not define ourselves as Pink Gays because this term is derogatory from anti-China individuals towards patriotic individuals. I propose that we openly identify ourselves as patriots”⁷⁰. However, some Chinese LGBT nationalists accept the term Pink Gays and take pride in self-identifying with this label. For example, netizen @Duihuayouhao Shuhatuo (对华友好苏哈托) identifies himself as a Pink male homosexual and expresses pride in this identity:

I am looking to make friends and find a partner. I am aware that the number of Pink LGBT individuals is limited, especially Pink male homosexuals, but I am still trying to

⁶⁹ “Your country (你国)” is an Internet slang term commonly used by Chinese liberal netizens to refer to their own country, China. It can be used to express a sense of sarcasm, humor, or criticism towards the government or certain aspects of Chinese society. The term “Your country” can allow them to detach themselves from China and express their disapproval and non-recognition of the Chinese government and Chinese identity.

⁷⁰ @Langxixingjian (浪戏星间), May 11, 2023

find a boyfriend. ... Currently, I am studying for my graduate degree in Beijing, and I will also be working in Beijing in the future. My major is International Relations, and my career focus will be in think tanks. I have interests in politics, economics, history, Japanese dramas, musicals, the navy, and traveling to cultural and historical sites.... I hope to find a partner with similar values, physically and mentally healthy, with a balanced physique, someone to share my life with and walk hand in hand.
(@Duihuayouhao Shuhatuo(对华友好苏哈托), May 4, 2023)

Pink Gays, feel free to reach out to me if you're looking for a community or organization.
(@Duihuayouhao Shuhatuo(对华友好苏哈托), May 10, 2023)

In summary, the emergence of the term “Pink Gay” reflects the process of creating and disseminating new words in Chinese discourse. The term “little pink” originally derived from the BL fan community and was later adopted by Daguguji to describe nationalist individuals during online quarrels/conflicts. After the “Diba Expenditure Incident,” the term became widely used in public discourse, especially in the liberal community, to attack patriotic and nationalist individuals. Subsequently, the term “Pink Gay” was formed within the LGBT community by adding the word “gay” to “pink.” In Chinese cyberspace, the practice of creating or adopting new words as a means of attacking opponents is commonplace and the creation of terms “little pink” and “Pink Gay” are typical examples.

5.2 Pink Gays and Their Pro-Regime Stance

The preceding section has examined the development of the term “Pink Gays” and the criticism that has been directed towards this group of people by liberal netizens, who use it to denounce the Pink Gay group’s pro-regime stance. According to Chinese LGBT liberals, the LGBT community, as a marginalized and oppressed minority in China, should not lend their support to the government, but rather resist its policies. Consequently, liberal netizens argue that being LGBT is fundamentally incompatible with being a patriotic Chinese citizen. However, Pink Gays hold a different perspective, asserting that one can be both LGBT and patriotic while

supporting the regime. This viewpoint is exemplified by a statement made by a 31-year-old lesbian interviewee (C35):

National identity and sexual identity are not bound by a binary logic of either/or; they can coexist harmoniously. I have a deep love and pride for my country and identify myself as Chinese, and this does not contradict my attraction to individuals of any gender. I am not bothered by the Chinese government's stance on my sexual orientation, and the Chinese state does not impose any restrictions on my choice of partner. Therefore, the notion that patriotism and sexual orientation are mutually exclusive does not apply in my case.⁷¹

The question now emerges regarding why the Pink Gay community persists in expressing patriotism and maintaining a pro-regime stance, despite the clear suppression of the LGBT community by the Chinese government. Therefore, this section aims to delve into the mechanisms utilized by the Pink Gay community to rationalize their identity as Chinese pro-regime patriots. By analyzing interviews within the Chinese LGBT community, this section endeavors to uncover the explanations for this intriguing phenomenon.

Before delving into the logic of the Pink Gay community, it is important to present the distribution of the group based on the findings derived from 22 in-depth interviews and an online survey. In the online survey, I use eight questions⁷² to gauge the level of “pinkness” among members of the LGBT community. These items included topics such as a desire to relocate to a more accepting country for sexual minorities, the need for international funding to support Chinese LGBT welfare, and the importance of international pressure on China to promote equality for sexual minorities. Other questions were designed to assess respondents' sense of global citizenship, their views on the functioning of the Chinese state, their pride in their country,

⁷¹ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

⁷² the questions are: (1) If given the opportunity, I would like to immigrate to a country that is more accepting of gender and sexual minorities; (2) We need more international funds to support sexual minority public welfare; (3) It is necessary for the international community to exert pressure on China in promoting sexual minority equality; (4) I am a global citizen; (5) I think the way Chinese society operates is reasonable; (6) I am proud of my country; (7) Domestic issues should be resolved by the country itself; (8) International organizations should not participate in domestic issues.

and their opinions on how domestic issues should be resolved. Based on these eight questions, I calculated the “pinkness index” and categorized the survey sample into five groups based on their level of patriotism⁷³, as shown in Figure 5.4. The results indicate that the majority of respondents adopted a neutral stance (47.6%) in relation to their level of patriotism. The pink and highly pink groups accounted for 15.7% and 1.0% of the survey sample, respectively. The opposition to nationalism within the Chinese LGBT community, including the anti-pink and strongly anti-pink groups, constituted 35.8% of the survey sample. In summary, approximately half of the respondents maintained a neutral position, while the number of Chinese LGBT individuals opposing nationalism was approximately twice that of the Pink Gay group.

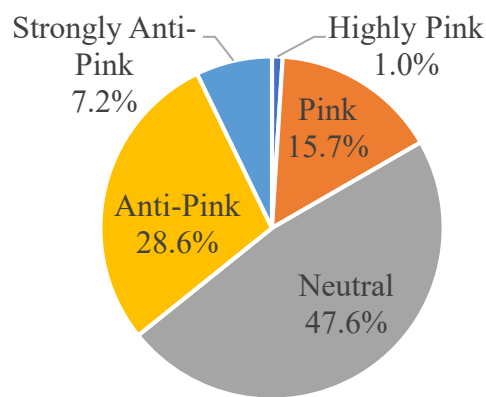


Figure 5.4 Distribution of Pinkness Based on Online Survey (Total = 1760)

⁷³ All eight questions in the survey were measured using a Likert scale: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, and 5 = Strongly disagree. For the first four questions, lower scores indicate a higher level of patriotism or “pinkness” among the survey participants. Conversely, for the remaining four questions, higher scores indicate a higher level of patriotism or “pinkness.” To ensure consistency in the direction of responses across all questions, where higher scores indicate higher levels of patriotism or “pinkness,” the response options for the latter four questions were recoded as follows: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. Subsequently, the scores for all eight questions were summed to calculate the “pinkness index.” The “pinkness index” ranges from 8 to 38. To provide a rough classification based on the scores, the “pinkness index” was categorized into five groups as follows: Strongly Anti-Pink (8-14), Anti-Pink (15-20), Neutral (21-26), Pink (27-32), and Highly Pink (33-38).

The above online survey provides an overview of the distribution of Pink Gays within the Chinese LGBT community, indicating that the proportion of Pink Gays is relatively small. In comparison, due to the subjective sampling method employed, the distribution of Pink Gays in my interview research differs significantly from that of the online survey. Based on the extent to which interviewees defended government oppression of gender and sexual minority groups and the degree of exclusion towards international LGBT support, I categorized them into five groups: Extreme Pink, Highly Pink, Moderately Pink, Mildly Pink, and Non-Pink/Opposed to Pink. Specifically, as shown in Figure 5.5, approximately half of the interviewees belong to the Pink Gay population, with their level of “pinkness” ranging from Mildly Pink to Extreme Pink, gradually decreasing in proportion. Only two individuals were classified as Extreme Pink, accounting for 4.7% of the interview sample. The Highly Pink group constituted 11.6% of the interview sample. Mildly Pink was the most prevalent “pink” group, accounting for 20.9%, followed by Moderately Pink, which accounted for 14.0%. It is important to note that the differentiation based on varying degrees of “pinkness” is imperfect, as the individuals interviewed exhibited complex mixtures and cannot be simply categorized as “pink” or “non-pink.” However, for the purpose of presenting the distribution of the Pink Gay interviewees in a more straightforward manner, I simplified the categorization.

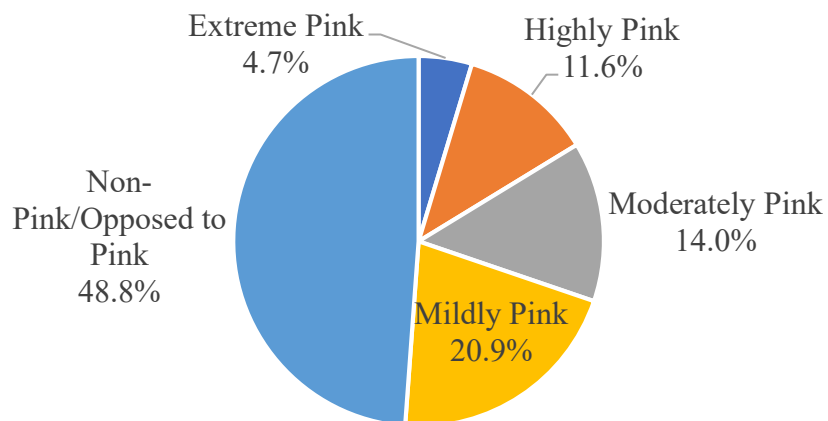


Figure 5.5 Distribution of Pinkness Based on Interviews⁷⁴

In the following part of this section, I examine the strategies utilized by Pink Gay individuals to reconcile their LGBT identity with their identity as patriotic Chinese citizens. Using data from 22 interviewees of various levels of Pinkness, I analyze the nationalist discourse observed among these individuals regarding the Chinese government's LGBT policies and attitudes, as well as foreign LGBT support. Specifically, my analysis identified and isolated three mechanisms within the Pink Gay community to rationalize their supportive stance towards the Chinese regime: (1) decoupling the state (government/regime) from the social suffering and individual challenges experienced by LGBT individuals, (2) employing downward comparison, and (3) establishing a salient patriotic identity.

5.2.1 Decoupling the State (Government/Regime) from the Social Suffering and Individual Difficulties Faced by LGBT People

⁷⁴ The assessment of pinkness among interviewees differs from the measurement of pinkness in the online survey. The online survey utilized eight specific and quantifiable indicators. In contrast, the assessment of pinkness among interviewees primarily relied on their attitudes and perspectives towards the Chinese government's LGBT policies, making it a more rudimentary measurement.

The decoupling strategy, which involves dissociating the state (government/ regime) from the social suffering and individual difficulties faced by LGBT individuals, has emerged as a prevalent mechanism employed by the Pink Gay community to rationalize their patriotic sentiments and support for the Chinese government. Through my research, I have observed that all 22 LGBT individuals with varying degrees of “pinkness” demonstrate a tendency to absolve the Chinese state and government of their discriminatory practices against the LGBT community. Specifically, Pink Gays hold the belief that societal problems should be attributed to the society, while individual challenges should be attributed to the individual. This belief system creates a separation between the state, society, and individuals, leading to a perspective where the state and government are perceived as disconnected entities from the individual and societal suffering experienced by the LGBT community. To a certain extent, the decoupling strategy adopted by Pink Gays involves a fundamental separation between their personal choices and wider social structures, presenting a challenge to C. Wright Mills’ (1959) concept of the sociological imagination, which emphasizes the understanding of individual experiences and behaviors in the context of larger social forces such as culture, social norms, institutions, and historical events. Specifically, two types of logic have been identified to justify this decoupling phenomenon: (1) victim/LGBT blaming, which involves attributing the societal problems faced by the Chinese LGBT community to the LGBT individuals themselves, and (2) public blaming, which attributes these problems to society at large.

(1) Victim/LGBT Blaming

The Chinese LGBT community faces various challenges in China. For example, the UNDP and USAID report (2014) identifies employment discrimination, campus bullying and

violence, and marriage pressures as the primary difficulties experienced by the LGBT population in China. Additionally, my online survey provides supporting evidence that confirms the presence of these challenges within the Chinese LGBT community. Specifically, among the online participants, 67% reported experiencing verbal insults targeting their LGBT identity to varying degrees, and 33.7% indicated experiencing different levels of physical violence. The survey participants also disclosed the prevalence of workplace and campus discrimination based on their sexual minority status, with 46.8% and 45.9% respectively reporting such experiences. Furthermore, the survey revealed that 61.7% of participants had not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to their parents, while nearly 70% expressed concerns about parental acceptance of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

The Pink Gay community also confronts the aforementioned challenges. However, they perceive aspects such as the gender and sexual identity and expression of LGBT individuals, the selection of romantic partners, decisions pertaining to marriage and reproduction, and even experiences of discrimination in educational institutions and workplaces as personal matters within the individual realm, where the Chinese state does not interfere. As articulated by a 21-year-old gay interviewee (C2), “it is not the Chinese government that compels Chinese sexual minorities to enter into heterosexual marriages or procreate.” Consequently, these struggles encountered by LGBT individuals are not ascribed to the state or government, and it is seen as unjustifiable to hold the Chinese government accountable for the difficulties faced by the LGBT community.

The victim/LGBT blaming logic of Pink Gays is applied to various LGBT issues, including same-sex marriage, HIV/AIDS discrimination, and non-binary gender expression. In terms of same-sex marriage, the Pink Gay community often cites the perceived lack of courage

among the majority of Chinese LGBT individuals to disclose their sexual orientation to their parents as a reason justifying the Chinese government's refusal to legalize same-sex marriage. According to their perspective, even if the Chinese state were to grant same-sex couples the right to marry, these individuals who identify as homosexual but choose to keep their sexual orientation private would still be hesitant to register their partnerships. Since most of China's LGBT individuals are unwilling to publicly disclose their sexual orientation, the act of granting same-sex couples the right to marry would be considered meaningless. A typical explanation supporting this line of reasoning was provided by C28, a 31-year-old lesbian volunteer serving in NGO_X based in Beijing:

The main concern expressed by most homosexual individuals who seek assistance from me is self-acceptance, which is unrelated to whether we have marriage rights or not. If same-sex marriage were legalized tomorrow, would those individuals who are still in the closet have the courage to disclose their sexual orientation to their families and register their partnerships? This is a question that needs to be taken into consideration when advocating for our rights.

Allow me to provide a straightforward example. I have a roommate who is a lesbian and remains deeply closeted. Apart from me, nobody else is aware of her sexual orientation. She feels anxious about any discussions related to homosexuality. Additionally, being over 30 years old, she faces continuous pressure from her parents and even her manager at work to get married. Now, imagine if she were granted the right to marry, would she openly acknowledge her homosexuality and register her marriage? Personally, I don't believe she has the courage to do so.

Hence, the challenges experienced by many homosexual individuals have little to do with the state or government. Instead, these difficulties stem from their own struggle to accept themselves as gay and their fear of coming out to their parents.⁷⁵

Another volunteer, a 31-year-old gay interviewee (C25) from NGO_X in Beijing, expressed a similar line of reasoning regarding the government's stance on the recognition of same-sex marriage. However, their emphasis was placed on the issue of gay individuals engaging in fraudulent or deceptive heterosexual marriages:

⁷⁵ Interview in Beijing, May 10, 2019

I was informed by a friend that a representative of the National People's Congress (NPC) mentioned that the Chinese government is aware that approximately 3-5% of the total population in China consists of homosexuals. However, despite this awareness, the government does not recognize same-sex marriage. The representative believes that one reason for this is that a significant number of homosexuals eventually enter into heterosexual marriages. Therefore, the government assumes that homosexuals are marrying individuals of the opposite sex, and thus, there is no need to establish new legislation for same-sex marriage. I agree with this argument as any legislation should take into account the number of individuals who would benefit from it.

The homosexual community itself faces pressure from family and society, which leads some individuals to engage in fraudulent or deceitful marriages. This behavior indicates a lack of personal responsibility towards their own lives. In such circumstances, who can they expect to take responsibility for them? The government?

Overall, our efforts should be focused on persuading homosexuals not to enter into heterosexual marriages. The homosexual community should have the courage to come out rather than resorting to fraudulent or deceitful marriages. Only then will the general public and the government acknowledge the existence of the homosexual community and consider granting us the right to same-sex marriage. I have noticed that many gay individuals express their demands for same-sex marriage online. However, in my opinion, this approach is futile and may even increase the government's resentment towards the homosexual community.⁷⁶

In relation to HIV/AIDS discrimination, five out of twenty-two Pink Gay interviewees attribute the transmission of HIV and the discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS to a lack of self-discipline among certain LGBT individuals. Specifically, they believe that undisciplined or promiscuous sexual behavior within the gay community is the primary factor leading to the transmission of HIV and subsequent stigmatization of the community. Consequently, when the terms "gay" or "sexual minorities" are mentioned, the general public immediately associates them with HIV/AIDS. These five interviewees believe that demanding rights from the government is unrealistic given the negative public perception of the LGBT community that they see as resulting from indulgent sexual behavior that is seen to lead to the transmission of HIV. For instance, a 21-year-old gay interviewee (C2) from Lanzhou argued that the lack of self-love and self-discipline among LGBT individuals contributes to the problem of HIV discrimination:

⁷⁶ Interview in Beijing, May 8, 2019

Many gay individuals engage in promiscuous behavior, as I was informed by one of my friends who knows a gay person that recently contracted HIV. Moreover, if you observe gay dating apps like Blued, you will notice that they primarily revolve around casual sex, which can be perceived as vulgar. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for some gay individuals to enter into fraudulent marriages. When the public becomes aware of these behaviors, they are likely to distance themselves from the LGBT community. In my opinion, it is crucial for us to practice self-discipline and refrain from engaging in promiscuous sexual behavior. These behaviors are the reasons why homosexuals often face stigmatization by others.⁷⁷

A 32-year-old gay interviewee (C20) from Chengdu expressed a similar viewpoint regarding the transmission of HIV/AIDS, associating it with a lack of discipline and unhygienic sexual practices that he deems prevalent within the male homosexual community. Moreover, he contended that the responsibility for this issue should not rest solely on the Chinese government:

There has been a long-term effort to promote the use of condoms, yet the HIV infection rate remains high. Some may question whether the state has not distributed enough free condoms, but the state actually allocates substantial funds for HIV prevention each year. Despite this, I do not believe that the high HIV infection rate is the state's responsibility. The root of the issue lies in the fact that many gay individuals engage in unprotected sex, which puts them at risk for HIV transmission. While most people understand that using condoms is responsible behavior, many still choose not to take this safety measure. I believe this is a matter of mindset. Some people give up on themselves and lack self-discipline, assuming that it is acceptable to become infected and unconcerned about dying. Such an attitude reveals a lack of self-responsibility, which is not related to the state's LGBT policies. In my view, legalizing same-sex marriage cannot reduce the infection rate among young people, especially college students, as this is not a state issue. Instead, I believe that many gay individuals need to accept and love themselves, as well as cultivate self-discipline.⁷⁸

Regarding discrimination against non-binary gender expression, four interviewees expressed their lack of recognition of non-binary genders and believed that the gender expression exhibited by the homosexual community diverges from mainstream heterosexual stereotypes, leading to a failure to create a positive impression on the public. For instance, a 33-year-old gay

⁷⁷ Interview in Lanzhou, March 3, 2019

⁷⁸ Interview in Chengdu, April 28, 2019

interviewee (C13) from Chengdu expressed discomfort with the use of terms like “sisters” among male homosexuals and the use of exaggerated feminine gender expression:

I believe that it is important for us, as members of the LGBT community, to conduct ourselves with dignity and avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes that society may hold about us. Let me provide an example to illustrate my point. Recently, while riding the subway, I witnessed a group of gay men dressed as women engaging in pole dancing. When the subway security personnel attempted to intervene, they even got into an argument. Additionally, I often encounter situations where some gay men publicly wear women’s clothing and engage in attention-seeking behavior in places like streets and parks, referring to each other as “sisters.” I find this behavior inappropriate and off-putting, as it tarnishes the reputation of the gay community. These actions have a detrimental impact on society, reinforcing the perception that we are all abnormal, erratic, or even deviant. As members of the gay community, it is crucial for us to practice self-awareness, self-respect, and dignity in order to earn the respect of society.⁷⁹

In summary, the various facets of LGBT blaming, particularly concerning HIV/AIDS and discrimination against non-binary and non-traditional gender expression, to some extent indicate the presence of internalized homophobia (Meyer & Dean 1998) within certain members of the Pink Gay community. This phenomenon is prevalent across diverse societies (Chard et al. 2015) and manifests as gay individuals directing negative social attitudes towards themselves, experiencing discomfort regarding others’ sexual disclosure and homosexual behaviors, and lacking connection with other LGBT individuals (Meyer & Dean 1998). The mindset of LGBT blaming among Pink Gays partially severs the connection between the individual suffering of Chinese LGBT individuals and the Chinese government, thus providing justification for the government’s denial of rights for sexual minorities. This, to some extent, reflects the limited sociological imagination (Mills 1959) within the Pink Gay community to establish a link between individual experiences of LGBT suffering and the abstract concept of state power.

(2) Public Blaming

⁷⁹ Interview in Chengdu, April 18, 2019

Public blaming serves as another means of decoupling the Chinese state (government/ regime) from the social suffering and individual difficulties experienced by the Chinese LGBT community, thereby rationalizing the state's failure to provide protection for the LGBT community. Similar to LGBT blaming, through public blaming, Pink Gays believe that social discrimination, violence, and other challenges faced by the Chinese LGBT community should be attributed to the Chinese public's inadequate understanding of gender and sexual minorities rather than repression by the Chinese state. As articulated by a 22-year-old queer university student interviewee (C14) in Chengdu, "it is not the government that instructs the public to discriminate against homosexuals,"⁸⁰ thus indicating that the plight of the LGBT community cannot be solely attributed to the state. A typical example of this public blaming logic comes from a 31-year-old lesbian interviewee (C28) from Beijing. While she expressed sadness about not being able to publicly display affection with her girlfriend and having to act as if they were just friends, she attributed this to "society not allowing it" and "the public's lack of understanding and knowledge about homosexuality."⁸¹ When asked about her opinion on the 798 Advocacy Incident, she argued that it was a minor altercation confined to a specific location, and the physical assault by security guards on two lesbian women was a personal matter. According to her, the guards' lack of awareness regarding the LGBT community was the cause of the incident rather than an explicit order from the government. Similarly, she attributed Mango TV's mosaic processing⁸² of the rainbow flag and the translation of homosexuals as a "special group" during the broadcasting of the Eurovision Song Contest to Mango TV's lack of understanding of

⁸⁰ Interview in Chengdu, April 15, 2019

⁸¹ Interview in Beijing, May 10, 2019

⁸² Mosaic processing is a censorship technique employed within China's regulatory framework to control and manage content that is considered politically sensitive, morally inappropriate, or socially controversial. It involves the manipulation of images or videos by obscuring or blurring specific content in order to conceal or censor elements that are deemed inappropriate or sensitive by the Chinese authorities.

sexual minorities. She also commented on Weibo's 2018 cleanup/censorship of homosexual content, stating that it was Weibo itself stirring up the issue rather than intentional censorship by the Chinese government, as evidenced by the People's Daily issuing a comment in support of homosexual individuals, demonstrating the Chinese government's inclusive attitude towards the LGBT community. Overall, she refrained from attributing responsibility to the Chinese state and government, instead commending them for their support of the LGBT community.

Interestingly, three interviewees referenced Taiwan's unsuccessful same-sex marriage referendum in 2018 as a case to support the logic of public blaming. Through the example of Taiwan's failed same-sex marriage referendum, they argue that the advancement of LGBT rights in China relies on public support, thus relieving the Chinese government of responsibility. Furthermore, they emphasize that even if the Chinese government were to allow a referendum on same-sex marriage, it would not succeed unless it receives substantial backing from the heterosexual majority. As a result, the challenges faced by the Chinese LGBT community are attributed to societal intolerance rather than the Chinese government's failure to provide them with protection. A typical case comes from a 31-year-old gay volunteer (C25) affiliated with NGO_X. He provides an explanation of Taiwan's failed same-sex marriage referendum and presents his logic of public blaming as follows:

Same-sex marriage is now legally recognized in Taiwan, but it was defeated in the 2018 referendum. This outcome reflects the ongoing lack of acceptance and understanding of same-sex marriage among the majority of the Taiwanese population. Specifically, a significant portion of the Taiwanese public still holds traditional views on gender and believes that supporting homosexuality will lead to their children being influenced to become homosexuals. Therefore, the failure of the same-sex marriage referendum in Taiwan can be attributed to society's low tolerance towards diverse sexual orientations. It is important to note that the issue should not be solely attributed to the government, as the Taiwanese government has provided citizens with the right to vote on same-sex marriage.

In my opinion, the Chinese LGBT community needs to take more proactive measures to bring about change. This can be done by encouraging more individuals to come out and openly express their identity, which can help influence and change public

perceptions of the LGBT community. Rather than solely focusing on criticizing the government's shortcomings, it is crucial to have a personal impact on those around us. It should be acknowledged that achieving success in a same-sex marriage referendum in China would also be challenging, given the current level of acceptance of homosexuality among the Chinese population.⁸³

In summary, the Pink Gay community attributes the personal and societal difficulties encountered by the LGBT population, including issues related to family acceptance, school bullying, same-sex marriage, HIV/AIDS stigma, and non-traditional gender expressions, to either the LGBT community itself or societal intolerance. This attribution logic results in a transfer of responsibility for safeguarding the human rights of LGBT individuals as Chinese citizens away from the Chinese government. Consequently, Pink Gays' pro-regime position is justified through the practice of assigning blame to the LGBT community and engaging in public blaming.

5.2.2 Downward Comparison

In my research, I have discovered that not all patriotic and nationalist gay groups completely deny the discrimination and exclusion faced by LGBT individuals by the state. In fact, a segment of the Pink Gay community acknowledges the government's lack of action in safeguarding the human rights of LGBT individuals. However, this realization of the government's shortcomings in protecting the rights of Chinese LGBT individuals does not result in a shift in the pro-regime stance of Pink Gays or lead to them criticizing the government. In this context, Pink Gays employ a downward social comparison (Ndlovu 2021; Chae 2021; Wills 1981) to rationalize the government's suppression of the LGBT community. According to social comparison theory, downward social comparison is motivated by the desire to enhance one's self-image by comparing oneself to individuals considered inferior (Chae 2021). Downward

⁸³ Interview in Beijing, May 8, 2019

comparison involves exposing problems and negative information, which may potentially have adverse effects on people's perceptions. However, this type of comparison more frequently yields positive outcomes in terms of emotions and self-evaluation (Wills 1981).

My research has uncovered that the utilization of downward comparison logic among Pink Gays does not diminish their sense of patriotism; rather, it has the opposite effect of augmenting their patriotism. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, the downward comparison logic adopted by Pink Gays operates on the assumption that there are no flawless policies or perfect countries, and every nation faces its own set of issues. Consequently, it is considered normal for Pink Gays to acknowledge the presence of challenges concerning LGBT rights in China. Secondly, through the practice of downward comparison, Pink Gays accentuate and bring to the forefront negative information pertaining to discrimination and violence against LGBT individuals in other countries and societies. Examples include conservative religious influences, the plight of homeless and impoverished LGBT individuals, and instances of honor killings targeting homosexuals. By comparing these negative aspects prevalent in other countries to the positive information available regarding China's lack of systematic persecution and occasional government support, Pink Gays reach the conclusion that, overall, China's treatment of LGBT individuals is acceptable. As stated by a 22-year-old gay university student interviewee (C3):

I am aware that the Chinese government has its shortcomings, but considering the management of such a populous country, the Chinese government is already doing relatively well. Furthermore, foreign countries are not necessarily doing better than the Chinese government. Many people criticize China by comparing it to the United States and Europe, but Western countries are like "The crow standing on the pig's back sees only others as black, but fails to see its own blackness (乌鸦站在猪身上，只看见别人黑看不见自己黑)." ⁸⁴ They only see the faults of others but fail to acknowledge their own

⁸⁴ The Chinese saying "The crow standing on the pig's back sees only others as black, but fails to see its own blackness (乌鸦站在猪身上，只看见别人黑看不见自己黑)" is similar in meaning to the expression "The pot

shortcomings. Many Western countries have a dark history of persecuting homosexuals, so what right do they have to criticize China? To be honest, living in China at least ensures safety.⁸⁵

Through the analysis of interviews conducted with members of the Pink Gay community, several types of downward comparison methods have been identified. Firstly, when contrasting with LGBT-friendly countries, particularly those that have already achieved marriage equality, Pink Gays frequently highlight that even in these countries where same-sex marriage is legally recognized, there are still imperfections and underlying issues present. For instance, a 24-year-old graduate student interviewee (C1) from Lanzhou emphasized the negative aspects of LGBT issues in the United States:

Although same-sex marriage has been legalized in the US, my friend shared with me his observations from visiting an LGBT NGO in the country last year, revealing that the US is not exempt from its own set of challenges. For instance, he discovered that there are numerous cases of homosexual individuals experiencing rejection from their families, leading to a significant number of young LGBT individuals becoming homeless after coming out to their parents. Additionally, certain conservative states within the US continue to hold steadfastly anti-gay positions, as evidenced by the presence of anti-gay organizations and the perpetuation of homophobia.⁸⁶

Similarly, employing the same downward comparison logic, a 31-year-old lesbian interviewee (C35) who has studied and resided in Canada for an extensive period of time draws a comparative analysis between her encounters as an LGBT individual in both China and Canada:

I don't believe that there is a society that fully accepts gender and sexual minorities, even in a country like Canada that prides itself on being diverse, open, and inclusive. As someone who has studied and lived in Canada for many years, I have experienced this firsthand. Although Canada legalized same-sex marriage years ago, there are still conservative elements in the country. For instance, during my time in Canada, I attended a Christian church for my master's thesis, and the event I attended focused on preaching against homosexuality. This was a direct attack on my identity as a lesbian. Additionally, I also attended the local pride parade, which was primarily composed of White individuals, with very few ethnic minorities in attendance. These experiences show that

calling the kettle black." Both expressions convey the idea that the person making the accusation is being hypocritical or unaware of their own faults while criticizing others.

⁸⁵ Interview in Lanzhou, March 5, 2019

⁸⁶ Interview in Lanzhou, March 1, 2019

every country faces its own unique problems and challenges, even those considered to be more progressive in terms of LGBT rights.⁸⁷

Another typical case that employs the downward comparison logic comes from a 32-year-old gay man (C20) from Chengdu, who highlights the violence experienced by the LGBT community in Brazil and the United States to underscore China's comparatively friendly and inclusive stance towards LGBT individuals:

I used to believe that Brazil was more accepting and supportive of the LGBT community. However, after watching the American TV show "Gaycation," I came to realize that Brazil's apparent sexual openness and freedom are merely superficial. In reality, society is not as tolerant towards the LGBT community, despite the legalization of same-sex marriage. For instance, during Brazil's Carnival, people may appear naked, giving the impression of openness and inclusivity. However, there are violent groups that specifically target and assault homosexuals. These individuals harbor strong hatred towards the LGBT community, and Brazil's laws are inadequate in effectively addressing this issue. Acts of violence against the LGBT community are often overlooked by the legal system. This leads me to perceive that the country's surface-level openness does not guarantee personal safety. Similar challenges exist in other countries, such as occasional shootings at gay bars in the United States. These experiences have made me realize that, at least in China, my personal safety is still assured.⁸⁸

The second type of downward comparison commonly employed by Pink Gays involves contrasting China with more conservative Muslim countries and certain societies in Africa. This comparative approach aims to present China's LGBT policies in a more positive and favorable manner. An example from a 33-year-old gay man (C13) in Chengdu exemplifies this downward comparison with conservative regions, such as the Middle East and specific parts of South Asia.

When I compare China to other countries, particularly those in the Middle East and certain parts of South Asia, I can't help but feel grateful for the level of acceptance we have here. I have come across news reports detailing the severe persecution and violence faced by homosexuals in those regions, such as stoning and other forms of brutality, which is truly horrifying. Although we may not have the right to marry in China, we still have certain fundamental civil rights that are protected. Unlike in some other countries, we are not in danger of being subjected to burning or stoning, which is a relief.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

⁸⁸ Interview in Chengdu, April 28, 2019

⁸⁹ Interview in Chengdu, April 18, 2019

Another typical case is presented by a 31-year-old gay interviewee (C25) from Beijing, who shares similar perspectives and highlights a downward comparison with Iran:

Many gay individuals online often highlight the lack of support for the LGBT community in China's policies and express pessimism regarding the prospects of legalizing same-sex marriage. However, it is crucial for those who consistently criticize the Chinese government to take into account the current situation of homosexuality in countries like Iran. In Iran, individuals discovered to be gay can be subjected to extreme punishment, including gruesome acts such as being burned alive or stoned to death. As a gay man in China, one should consider oneself fortunate that, unlike in Iran, the Chinese government does not imprison or execute individuals based on their sexual orientation.⁹⁰

The aforementioned use of the expression “personal physical safety is assured” by Pink Gays interviewees inaccurately portrays the actual situation of the LGBT community in China. For these Pink Gays, the phrase “personal physical safety is assured” implies that, compared to societies where physical persecution against LGBT individuals occurs, such as stoning, hanging, or honor killings, China's LGBT community does not face comparable levels of persecution. While this argument holds some validity due to China's decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality, and the absence of systemic use of severe torture methods like stoning or hanging against LGBT individuals, the narrative “physical safety is assured in China” is inaccurate because of the lack of comprehensive protective policies for the LGBT community in China, leading to instances of physical violence. For instance, a significant proportion of Chinese transgender individuals (11.9%) reported experiencing coerced conversion therapy (Beijing LGBT Center 2017). An analysis by Wu et al. (2020) focused on 777 men who have sex with men (MSM) in Guangzhou, China, and found that 13.4% reported instances of physical violence. Similarly, my online survey also attests to the prevalence of physical violence experienced by the LGBT community. For example, 33.7% of respondents experienced varying degrees of physical violence, such as being punched, teased, or shoved, while 39.2% faced sexual harassment, and

⁹⁰ Interview in Beijing, May 8, 2019

10.1% even endured sexual assault. Thus, despite Pink Gays' use of the “personal physical safety is assured” argument to rationalize their pro-regime stance, it is crucial to recognize the inaccuracy of this assertion.

Thirdly, this research also reveals the utilization of the downward comparison logic to establish comparisons between LGBT and non-LGBT individuals within Chinese society. Specifically, certain members of the Pink Gay community argue that despite the Chinese government's implementation of more restrictive policies targeting gay individuals, mainstream heterosexual individuals in China are not necessarily in a more advantageous position. Within the framework of downward comparison, heterosexuals also encounter challenges related to marriage and childbearing. For instance, a 31-year-old lesbian from Beijing (C28)⁹¹ asserts that while heterosexuals possess the legal right to marry, the high divorce rate implies that a significant portion of them do not experience marital happiness. Moreover, she contends that the declining marriage rate among heterosexuals diminishes the significance of the institution of marriage, consequently raising doubts about the necessity of legalizing same-sex marriage. Similarly, a 31-year-old gay interviewee from Beijing (C25) argues that “young people in Chinese society are increasingly reluctant to enter into marriage, and some even advocate for the complete abolition of marriage. So, why do we, as gay individuals, need the right to marry?”⁹² Consequently, there is less urgency to urge the Chinese government to recognize same-sex marriage, given the growing number of heterosexuals opting not to marry.⁹³

⁹¹ Interview in Beijing, May 10, 2019

⁹² Interview in Beijing, May 8, 2019

⁹³ The phenomenon of some LGBT individuals opposing same-sex marriage due to a general aversion to the institution of marriage is also observed in countries where same-sex marriage has been legalized. For instance, Jane Rule, a revered figure in the queer community, was against gay marriage because she believed that “To be forced back into the heterosexual cage of coupledness is not a step forward but a step back into state-imposed definitions of relationship. With all that we have learned, we should be helping our heterosexual brothers and sisters out of their state-defined prisons, not volunteering to join them there” (The Globe and Mail, 2007).

In summary, the Pink Gay community employs the logic of downward comparison to argue that no country provides an entirely fair, inclusive, and flawless environment for LGBT individuals. By comparing the human rights of Chinese LGBT individuals with those of other countries or with the rights enjoyed by the heterosexual population in Chinese society, they arrive at the conclusion that every country faces its own social problems and challenges, and both sexual minorities and mainstream heterosexuals in China encounter difficulties. Through this comparative analysis, it becomes evident that many individuals worldwide live in challenging circumstances, with some even facing threats to their right to life. However, in comparison, China has relatively better human rights for LGBT individuals, and it is argued that at the very least, LGBT individuals can lead safe lives in the country. Thus, the logic of downward comparison offers solace to many individuals. As expressed by a 30-year-old lesbian from Chengdu (C19), “The moon may appear rounder in foreign countries, but it will not be square in China. I do not believe that any government in the world is entirely honest with its people or completely satisfactory; there must be some issues.”⁹⁴ By utilizing downward comparison, Pink Gays rationalize the government’s unfriendly policies and reconcile their own sense of patriotism.

5.2.3 Establishing Patriotism as a Salient Identity

The third mechanism employed by the Pink Gay community to justify their pro-regime stance is the establishment of patriotism as a prominent and significant identity. Social identity theory posits that individuals tend to categorize themselves based on the social identities that hold salience and meaning in a particular context (Turner et al. 1987; Stets & Burke 2000).

⁹⁴ Interview in Chengdu, April 27, 2019

Different identities possess varying levels of importance in different contexts, and when faced with multiple identities, individuals are more inclined to enact or prioritize the more salient identity in a given situation, following a hierarchy of salience (Stryker 1968; Stets & Burke 2000). In the context of the Pink Gay community, it becomes evident that their identity as patriotic Chinese citizens occupies a higher position in the hierarchy of salience compared to their LGBT identity. This positioning of their patriotic identity can even overshadow or suppress their LGBT identity among Pink Gay individuals. As a result, this approach enables them to maintain consistency and harmony within their multiple identities. As a 31-year-old lesbian from Beijing (C28) expresses her self-evaluation:

I am patriotic, perhaps it's innate, as I have had a strong sense of devotion to my country since childhood. I used to aspire to join the military, but that wish has remained unfulfilled. If there were a war, such as the reunification of Taiwan, I would actively volunteer for military service. National identity will always take precedence because we are all descendants of the Chinese nation, and this is an unchangeable fact. The collective interest outweighs personal interests, and in times of necessity, one can sacrifice personal interests. These are principles we learn from an early age, right?

...

When I came out to my friends, they advised me to consider immigrating to a foreign country, as China is not particularly friendly towards the LGBT community. However, I am against this viewpoint and refuse to immigrate abroad. I am a Chinese person, and I have lived in China since childhood. Why should I go to another country? Although China's policies regarding the LGBT community are imperfect, you must understand that China is a vast country with numerous issues that need to be addressed by the nation. LGBT issues are not the primary urgent matter in current Chinese society. We should not exacerbate social conflicts just to fight for the right to same-sex marriage.⁹⁵

Furthermore, social identity theory emphasizes that individuals are motivated to identify with certain groups or roles because it positively affects their self-esteem (Stets & Burke 2000). When individuals identify with a particular group, they often derive a sense of belonging, acceptance, and validation from that membership. For the Pink Gay community, establishing patriotism as a salient identity allows them to experience a sense of pride and, consequently, a

⁹⁵ Interview in Beijing, May 10, 2019

boost in self-esteem. Specifically, Pink Gays can derive their pride and self-esteem from two aspects: the economic development achievements of China and the progress of LGBT rights in China.

Firstly, out of the 22 Pink Gay interviewees, 16 of them demonstrate a sense of pride in China's economic development, which serves as a source of their patriotic sentiment. Pink Gays perceive the Chinese Communist Party and the government as instrumental in improving "the overall standard of living of the Chinese population" and "pulling the country out of difficult circumstances,"⁹⁶ leading them to highly appreciate the Chinese government. In the pursuit of national economic development, all Chinese human rights, including those relevant to the LGBT community, may be subject to sacrifice. As a result, within their identity salience hierarchy, national pride and national identity hold a higher position than their LGBT identity, their advocacy for individual LGBT human rights, as well as their emotional attachment to their LGBT identity. A typical case comes from a 31-year-old lesbian (C35) in Beijing, whose viewpoint illustrates that her pride in China's economic achievements can overshadow concerns for LGBT rights:

I believe that China's economy remains robust, despite facing challenges such as a real estate bubble and false prosperity. However, I don't think other countries are immune to similar economic problems. What sets China apart is that it has managed to avoid the same level of economic crises as other nations and has consistently safeguarded the livelihoods of its citizens, even during difficult times. The remarkable achievements of China's decades-long development are evident globally, and no other country has accomplished such a transformation from an economic depression to becoming the world's second-largest economy in just 50 years.

In my perspective, even if certain freedoms and rights, such as the right to same-sex marriage, need to be sacrificed, it is still acceptable. For many people in China, prioritizing survival takes precedence over personal freedom, and the Chinese government has successfully ensured the well-being and survival of a large number of Chinese citizens. While society may not be entirely equitable, it is acceptable and deserving of support. In my opinion, China is on the right track. Given the current stage

⁹⁶ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

of China's development, there is no alternative political system that can replace the leadership of the Communist Party of China in governing the country.⁹⁷

Similarly, a queer interviewee (C14) from Chengdu expressed a comparable perspective and went on to emphasize that the state would grant rights to sexual minorities once economic development is achieved:

China's current main focus is on strengthening its economy and attaining global independence, while also avoiding suppression from Western countries, particularly the United States. This remains the top priority. The legalization of same-sex marriage is considered secondary in comparison to economic concerns. Only when our country's economic strength has reached a certain level will the rights of sexual minorities be duly recognized. Advocating for equal rights at this moment might potentially jeopardize our economy.⁹⁸

Secondly, the progress of LGBT human rights in China serves as another source of national pride for the Pink Gay community, further enhancing their sense of patriotism. For Pink Gays, the state of LGBT human rights in China is not as negative as portrayed and criticized by Chinese LGBT liberals. In fact, some even believe that China's efforts in promoting LGBT rights are advancing at a faster pace compared to other countries. For instance, a 31-year-old gay volunteer (C25) from NGO_X in Beijing expressed his pride in China's LGBT activism by commending the "relatively rapid pace" of progress in the country:

Objectively speaking, the pace of LGBT activism in China is currently faster than in many foreign countries. Let's consider the situation ten years ago, when there were hardly any platforms available to learn about homosexuality, whether positive or negative, and there were no homosexual dating apps. However, in 2019, there has been a significant improvement with numerous platforms now providing information about LGBT individuals.

Just twenty years ago, divorce was a controversial and taboo subject, let alone homosexuality. However, if you go online now, you can see the considerable increase in tolerance within Chinese society. As a volunteer for an LGBT organization, I once contacted the staff of an LGBT NGO in the US, and they all agreed that the LGBT movement in China is progressing at least three times faster than in the US. While the US took over sixty years to advocate for same-sex marriage in a few states, China has transitioned from considering homosexuality as a disease to becoming a much more

⁹⁷ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

⁹⁸ Interview in Chengdu, April 15, 2019

tolerant society in just over two decades. Therefore, it is fair to say that progress has been quite rapid.⁹⁹

Furthermore, I have observed additional perspectives within the Pink Gay community that express approval and pride in the Chinese government's policies regarding LGBT issues. One example is a 28-year-old gay interviewee (C27) from Beijing who cites recent legal advancements as a justification for his sense of national pride. He specifically mentions notable lawsuits, such as the successful defense of the rights of a homosexual kindergarten teacher in Qingdao City in 2018, as well as two similar cases in 2014 and 2017 involving homosexual conversion therapy. These legal cases indicate progress in protecting the rights of the LGBT community and rationalize his sense of national pride. Similarly, a 31-year-old lesbian woman (C28) expresses gratitude towards the country for recent changes in household registration laws. She explains that as a single lesbian woman, it was previously impossible for her to register her child in the household system. However, with the updated laws, single women like her now have the right to give birth, register their children, and obtain household registration. These developments signify an improving legal environment for the LGBT community in China and have instilled a sense of pride in their country for these two individuals.

Therefore, both the achievements in China's economic development and the limited progress in LGBT rights have become sources of national pride for Pink Gays. This sense of national pride positions being a patriotic Chinese citizen at a relatively higher level in their identity hierarchy than being LGBT, with the latter even being considered a sacrificial identity. In other words, the national identity or the identity as a pro-regime patriot is regarded as a significant salient identity for Pink Gays, and it can outweigh and even oppress LGBT identities.

⁹⁹ Interview in Beijing, May 8, 2019

In summary, this section focuses on discussing Pink Gays' identity as pro-regime patriots. For Chinese LGBT liberals, the Chinese state/regime is seen as the main source of oppression against LGBT rights and is thus subject to criticism. However, for Pink Gays, they are able to reconcile their identity as pro-regime patriots with their marginalized LGBT identity. To rationalize their pro-regime stance, Pink Gays employ different rationalization mechanisms, including the decoupling of the state (government/regime) from the social suffering and individual challenges experienced by LGBT individuals, downward comparison, and the establishment of a salient patriotic identity. These mechanisms are analytically distinct but empirically intertwined. For example, downward comparison also serves to enhance patriotic pride to some extent, leading some Pink Gays to view the national identity as an important factor that can oppress LGBT identity. Overall, these mechanisms interact with each other and collectively serve to rationalize Pink Gays' pro-regime stance.

5.3 Pink Gays' Approach to Pursuing LGBT Rights: "Showing Positive Energy"

In the previous two sections, I have discussed the emergence of the term "Pink Gay" and explained how the Pink Gay community rationalizes their identity as pro-regime patriots. In this section, I further examine LGBT advocacy strategies recognized by Pink Gays within the context of their pro-regime stance, as well as delve into the reasons behind their choice of strategies.

5.3.1 Pink Gays' Endorsed Action Approach: "Showcasing Positive Energy"

According to identity theory, individuals who strongly identify with a particular identity are more likely to engage in behaviors that align with that identity in order to maintain self-consistency between their actions and their identity (Stets & Burke 2000). The action strategy

endorsed by the Pink Gays community is also consistent with their salient identity as pro-regime patriots. Specifically, among the 22 cases collected in my research, representing various degrees of involvement within the Pink Gays community, all of them express opposition to street protests, such as gatherings, marches, and demonstrations, for LGBT rights, viewing them as excessively radical. Instead, most of them prefer to pursue their rights by demonstrating “positive energy” to the public and the government. In the Chinese context, the term “positive energy” primarily refers to attitudes or emotions that align with the ideological or value systems promoted by the Chinese state, or any discourse that advances such alignment (Yang & Tang 2018). The term has been appropriated by the Chinese government, originally popularized among ordinary internet users to signify acts of philanthropy, charity, and positive personal emotions (Yang & Tang 2018). However, after being incorporated into the government’s official lexicon and discourse, it has been used as a political term to encourage the public to celebrate Chinese well-being, prosperity, and national strength. Thus, “positive energy” has become a political term employed to advance the government’s agenda (Chen, Kaye, & Zeng 2021; Hird 2018).

The Pink Gay community conforms to the official interpretation of “positive energy” and seeks public recognition and support by presenting a positive image that aligns with the state’s discourse. By doing so, they aim to integrate into the mainstream discourse system and increase their chances of obtaining LGBT-related rights from the state. Through my research, I have identified two distinct but interconnected ways in which Pink Gays demonstrate their “positive energy”: (1) showing loyalty to the state and (2) adhering to mainstream heterosexual norms.

(1) Demonstrating Loyalty to the State

My research reveals that 17 out of 22 Pink Gay individuals consider conforming to state ideology crucial in attaining LGBT rights, as it serves as the foundation and prerequisite for LGBT communities to engage in dialogue with the government. Within this group of 17 Pink Gays, the government is perceived as playing a role as the grantor of LGBT rights, while only 5 interviewees believe that LGBT rights are inherent and should be guaranteed for LGBT individuals. Specifically, the majority of Pink Gay interviewees view advocating for “family harmony and social harmony”¹⁰⁰ as an acceptable form of LGBT advocacy that aligns with the official ideology. Conversely, advocating for concepts such as “human rights” and “freedom, equality, and equal rights”¹⁰¹ is considered unfavorable, as these notions have been stigmatized in China as Western values, thus touching upon sensitive areas for the government. Consequently, many Pink Gays view exchanging loyalty to the state and government as a means of obtaining recognition for sexual minorities. A typical example illustrating the exchange of loyalty to the state for LGBT rights is provided by a 31-year-old lesbian interviewee (C28), who is also a member of the Chinese Communist Party:

I am a member of the Communist Party, and I hold a steadfast loyalty to the Party. I would never engage in any activities that could harm our country. If the country requires it, I am even willing to sacrifice my life. I consider this obligation as something that cannot be avoided. Moreover, like any ordinary citizen, I strive to contribute to society and assist those around me. During times of war, the Communist Party established the broadest united front, known as the People’s United Front (人民统一战线). As homosexuals, we can also be a part of this united front and contribute to our country and its people. I approach my work with sincerity and am always ready to respond to the calls of the Party, the country, and the people.

I heard about a foreign country where a group of homosexuals formed a fearless unit and achieved victory during a war, all while remaining loyal to their country. I believe that we can also do something similar. Since 2017, I have been utilizing my spare time to do what I can, such as organizing gatherings and sharing sessions for lesbians. I also make use of social platforms like Rela (热拉) and conduct live broadcasts to help people understand sexual minority groups in an accurate and unbiased manner. Additionally, I provide counseling to those who are struggling with coming out, and it is

¹⁰⁰ Interview in Lanzhou, March 1, 2019

¹⁰¹ Interview in Chengdu, April 21, 2019

a great achievement when they can reconcile with their families and achieve self-acceptance. I firmly believe that by spreading positive energy in society and promoting harmony, our country will acknowledge our contributions, thereby increasing our chances of obtaining the corresponding rights.¹⁰²

Furthermore, in order to demonstrate loyalty to the state, a portion of Pink Gays believe that it is necessary to avoid creating troubles for the Chinese government while advocating for LGBT rights. For example, a 31-year-old gay interviewee (C18) criticized many LGBT advocacy efforts as “too radical” and likened them to an “irritating alarm clock” that constantly reminds the country to grant rights to LGBT people. In contrast, he believes that the LGBT community should exercise patience and avoid causing trouble for the Chinese government in order to have a possibility of gaining recognition and acceptance of LGBT rights by the Chinese government:

Recently, there was an incident where the lesbian hashtag was blocked on Weibo. I noticed that many feminists and lesbian communities started causing trouble on Weibo, criticizing government censorship, and also criticizing the gay community for not speaking out. I think their actions are too radical, and personally, I do not support such excessively radical strategies. Their behavior can evoke too much hatred, especially towards the government, and this has already crossed a sensitive line for the government. The political system in China cannot be broken. The approach I endorse for achieving equal rights for the LGBT community is a moderate approach that does not confront the government. In order to seek cooperation with the government, we must seek solutions within the framework of this system. I consider many of the radical approaches that confront the government in the pursuit of equality to be immature, like a child throwing a tantrum and saying, “If you don’t give me candy, I will throw a fit.”

I believe that our government, in balancing fairness and efficiency, may have prioritized efficiency and, to some extent, overlooked fairness. But we should understand the difficulties faced by the government. You have to understand that resources in the world are limited, and the Chinese government may have put most of its energy into securing resources for its citizens. Therefore, the government has sacrificed some fairness and temporarily has not granted rights to the LGBT community.

To put it plainly, our LGBT community’s rights have not been fully met, and we should exercise patience and willingly endure for the sake of the overall situation. LGBT equality should not be treated like an annoying alarm clock that constantly stirs up trouble and causes headaches for the country. This would undoubtedly divert the country’s focus from resolving major issues such as economic development and social stability. Therefore, our fight for LGBT equality should not become an alarm clock

¹⁰² Interview in Beijing, May 10, 2019

because LGBT rights are not an issue that can be resolved overnight. We should patiently wait until the government has resolved other major problems and allocates some resources to address the challenges faced by our LGBT community.¹⁰³

Furthermore, many Pink Gay individuals have chosen to engage in self-censorship by refraining from advocating for LGBT rights in ways that do not align with a pro-regime stance, such as participating in protests and demonstrations. For instance, a 30-year-old lesbian interviewee (C19) emphasized the importance of “paying attention to the stance of the state media so that the strategies and approaches used to advocate for LGBT rights are in line with the government’s ideology.”¹⁰⁴ In essence, she believes that if the government disapproves of protests, then the LGBT community should refrain from protesting and instead utilize alternative methods to voice their demands, such as submitting petitions or writing letters to members of the National People’s Congress or relevant government agencies. Another 31-year-old lesbian interviewee (C28) expressed a similar perspective, stating that the promotion of the LGBT rights movement should be carried out through reasonable and lawful means. She argues that organizing an LGBT parade in China requires government approval, which is nearly impossible to obtain. Given that the state does not welcome any form of protest, the LGBT community should refrain from engaging in actions that could pose difficulties for the government. Insisting on holding a protest may be viewed as irrational and unreasonable by both the government and the public. During my research, I encountered an extreme viewpoint expressed by a 32-year-old gay interviewee (C20) who believed that publicly advocating for human rights and criticizing the current state of LGBT rights in China would be perceived as being anti-government:

There are individuals who dedicate their entire day to creating uproar on the internet about how the government persecutes the LGBT community. However, in my opinion, these efforts are entirely futile. Such advocacy merely aims to capture attention and generate temporary excitement. People will quickly move on to the next trending topic,

¹⁰³ Interview in Chengdu, April 21, 2019

¹⁰⁴ Interview in Chengdu, April 27, 2019

and it will not have a lasting impact on their beliefs or attitudes towards the LGBT community. Therefore, I believe that these individuals are wasting their time on meaningless activities.

Furthermore, consistently highlighting the inadequate state of LGBT rights in China, in my view, only serves to provoke trouble and pose challenges for the government. Imagine someone standing outside your house, hurling insults at you all day and demanding rights or benefits from you. Would you give in to their demands? Certainly not. It would only confirm their irrationality if you did! Similarly, those who spend their time online complaining about the government's human rights record achieve nothing except inciting hatred towards the government and creating divisions between the LGBT and heterosexual communities.

If you want people to understand your perspective, you must present your ideas in a constructive and respectful manner. Some self-proclaimed leaders in the LGBT community and human rights advocates appear more interested in exploiting the LGBT community and using them as a means to further their own interests. However, this approach does not benefit the community as a whole.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, my research findings indicate that 9 out of 22 Pink Gay individuals perceive the necessity of disassociating LGBT advocacy from foreign influences in order to showcase their positive energy. This particular group of Pink Gay individuals commonly regards foreign support for LGBT rights in China as a negative influence. For instance, one gay interviewee (C2) likened foreign influence to “a contaminant that spoils an entire dish,”¹⁰⁶ arguing that their involvement could increase the risks associated with advocating for LGBT rights in China. Patriotic gay individuals view foreign influences as propagators of rumors and contributors to heightened tensions between the Chinese government and gender and sexual minorities. These individuals believe that foreign influences might incite Chinese LGBT individuals to revolt against the government and engage in protests, thereby disrupting social order and providing opportunities for foreign influences to interfere in China's domestic affairs. This perspective on foreign influences is particularly evident in their assessment of the US Embassy's LGBT advocacy in China. For example, a 30-year-old lesbian interviewee (C19) evaluated an LGBT

¹⁰⁵ Interview in Chengdu, April 28, 2019

¹⁰⁶ Interview in Lanzhou, March 3, 2019

discussion titled “Alliances for Solidarity,” hosted by the US Embassy during the 2018 International Day Against Homophobia, as follows:

Last year, the US Embassy in China organized an event called “Alliances for Solidarity” during the International Day Against Homophobia. I strongly believe that this activity was intended to create disturbances in China. The event’s theme, “Alliances for Solidarity,” was particularly provocative as it implied that the LGBT environment in China was inadequate, while the US Embassy purportedly provided a more liberal environment for Chinese LGBT individuals. Such promotions have the potential to easily provoke certain individuals, especially young people, into acting irrationally and being manipulated by the US Embassy to oppose the Chinese government. For example, student groups lacking social experience can be easily swayed by US propaganda. These young individuals are essentially being exploited by the US as mere pawns. Furthermore, as a result of being influenced by the US, some people lose their emotional connection to our country and nation. Therefore, the US does not genuinely care about China’s LGBT community.¹⁰⁷

A similar viewpoint was shared by a 21-year-old gay interviewee (C21). He engaged in a discussion with his peers concerning the 2018 LGBT event organized by the US Embassy, and they collectively concluded that the US Embassy deliberately incited conflict between the Chinese LGBT community and the government, encouraging the community to resist governmental authority. The utilization of the term “alliance” in the event’s theme was particularly politically sensitive within the Chinese context. As a result, both the interviewee and his peers hold the belief that it is preferable to refrain from challenging or opposing the government, as well as abstaining from participating in the US Embassy’s LGBT activities:

I recall that in 2018, during the International Day Against Homophobia, the US Embassy in China announced an LGBT event. Many of my friends perceived the Embassy’s announcement as an effort to provoke conflict between the Chinese LGBT community and our government, which they deemed inappropriate. The event’s theme focused on uniting the LGBT community with other religious groups to form a collective force. However, there was uncertainty regarding the purpose of this force and who or what it would oppose. It seemed to imply that gay individuals should resist the government due to its perceived oppression of the LGBT community. I personally believe that such activities are too extreme and sensitive. While it is true that China may impose restrictions on homosexuality, we have made progress, including the decriminalization of same-sex relationships. Promoting social change and advancing LGBT rights is a gradual

¹⁰⁷ Interview in Chengdu, April 27, 2019

process that demands patience. However, establishing alliances, particularly with sensitive areas involving the government, is a delicate matter. If our aim is to achieve LGBT rights, it is advisable to avoid engaging with these sensitive issues as it may be interpreted as a desire to rebel against the government. Therefore, it is better for us not to directly challenge the government.¹⁰⁸

(2) Conforming to Mainstream Heterosexual Norms

In addition to expressing loyalty to the state, I have identified a second form of positive energy display among Pink Gay communities: the integration into mainstream heterosexual norms. Specifically, in my research, 11 out of 22 patriotic gay individuals argue that LGBT advocacy should not oppose mainstream heterosexual norms but rather present positive and constructive images that align with mainstream values. One participant, a 32-year-old gay interviewee (C20), stated, “homosexual individuals are a minority in society. In order to secure our rights, we require the support of mainstream heterosexuals. Therefore, it is advisable not to challenge the established public norms, aesthetics, and values.”¹⁰⁹

This approach employed by Pink Gays partially reflects a neoliberal sexual politics commonly referred to as homonormativity (Duggan 2002), within Western societies. The homonormative framework “does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2002: 179). In other words, the homonormative framework favors and encourages the integration of gay and lesbian individuals into mainstream society, while simultaneously upholding and reinforcing existing norms and institutions such as monogamy, marriage, domesticity, and reproduction. An illustrative example of this can be seen in the

¹⁰⁸ Interview in Chengdu, April 10, 2019

¹⁰⁹ Interview in Chengdu, April 28, 2019

emergence of gay moralism in the United States since the 1990s, which criticizes “promiscuity” and the perceived “gay lifestyle,” while advocating for monogamous marriage as a responsible strategy for HIV/AIDS prevention (Warner 1999). Conservative writer Bruce Bawer makes this conservative gay politics clearer by stating, “it appeared reasonable to suggest that a substantial portion of gay America’s aspirations lie not in working-class rebellion but rather in the opposite - a gradual diffusion of pro-gay sentiments from influential corporate boardrooms into everyday settings such as shops, farms, and factories” (1996:112).

Essentially, within the logic of *Pink Gays*, conveying positive messages of the LGBT community to mainstream heterosexual society and gaining recognition from mainstream heterosexuals can help mitigate hostility from both the government and the public. For example, one of the participants, C20, a 32-year-old gay interviewee, provides insights into the connection between mainstream culture and the progress of LGBT rights. This gay interviewee asserts that in order for sexual minority groups to integrate successfully into mainstream society, it is necessary to demonstrate to the heterosexual population that members of the LGBT community are ordinary individuals, similar to their heterosexual counterparts. Furthermore, he argues that LGBT individuals are law-abiding citizens who deserve support and recognition from the heterosexual public:

China’s mainstream culture is known for its reserved and implicit nature, and it is important for us to respect this tradition. Embracing Western practices, such as wearing revealing clothing or engaging in public nudity, would face significant challenges in gaining acceptance from many Chinese people and could lead to negative social consequences. Furthermore, such behavior may reinforce negative stereotypes about the LGBT community. In order to foster greater acceptance, it is crucial for us to emphasize our similarities and shared experiences with heterosexual individuals. This entails highlighting aspects such as our ability to form stable and meaningful relationships, our professional accomplishments, positive relationships with family and friends, and our dedication and contributions to society and the nation. By leaving a positive and lasting impression on the public, we can cultivate support from heterosexual individuals who will advocate for our rights and urge the government to recognize and acknowledge us.

Conversely, it is important to refrain from spreading negative messages that perpetuate the notion that many gay individuals are troublemakers who seek to provoke confrontations with the government.¹¹⁰

My research has revealed similar instances where patriotic LGBT individuals hold the belief that in order to advocate for their rights effectively, it is necessary to refrain from disseminating information that can be easily misunderstood and stigmatized by the general public. For instance, negative narratives such as portraying the LGBT community as “promiscuous, undisciplined, disregarding sexual safety, and prone to HIV”¹¹¹ should not be propagated. Instead, it is crucial to showcase exemplary figures from the LGBT community who have excelled in various fields, such as “Oscar Wilde, Chanel designer Karl Lagerfeld, Chinese renowned celebrity Leslie Cheung, and Apple CEO Tim Cook.”¹¹² Furthermore, it is essential to highlight the patriotic positive energy exhibited by the LGBT community. For instance, a 31-year-old lesbian interviewee (C28) exemplifies how she manifests positive energy in her everyday life:

Ever since my colleagues discovered that I am a lesbian, they have commended me for my patriotism and positive attitude, which I believe is the kind of image we should strive to present to the public. Rather than disseminating negative information about homosexuality, such as associating it with drug abuse, AIDS, and promiscuity, our focus should be on dispelling these stereotypes. This also applies to reports linking homosexuality with depression or suicide, as they only serve to reinforce the notion that homosexuals are vulnerable and unable to cope with societal pressures. To change these perceptions, it is crucial for us to project a more positive image to the public. I take great pride in being an exemplar of this approach, and I firmly believe that by achieving significant accomplishments in our respective careers and then openly embracing our LGBT identities, we can demonstrate to others that we are exceptional individuals. This will aid in reducing societal prejudices against us and enhancing our overall image. It is a more mature approach that the public is likely to embrace.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Interview in Chengdu, April 28, 2019

¹¹¹ Interview in Lanzhou, March 5, 2019

¹¹² Interview in Lanzhou, March 3, 2019

¹¹³ Interview in Beijing, May 10, 2019

In addition, I have come across an opinion expressed by a 22-year-old patriotic gay student (C3) that can be regarded as somewhat extreme. He aligns with certain state media criticisms of “effeminate” behavior within the gay community. According to his viewpoint, the gay community should emphasize masculine qualities, and he perceives the Chinese aesthetic of “effeminate” behavior as a pathological characteristic:

In recent years, there has been a noticeable inclination among Chinese individuals towards embracing thinness as a beauty standard, and I find it difficult to comprehend. Personally, I consider this trend to be unhealthy. Why is it necessary for men to strive for thinness as well? I frequently observe young male celebrities in the public eye presenting themselves with an effeminate appearance. They appear unnaturally thin, almost resembling extraterrestrial beings, and it appears to me that their mindset has also become distorted. This observation extends to certain members of the gay community as well. Many effeminate gay men exhibit a preference for activities such as hair dyeing, makeup application, and an inability to tolerate even a single blemish on their faces. I question why they cannot embrace and showcase their masculine qualities. In my opinion, their mindset has deviated from a more balanced perspective. If the prevalence of this effeminacy trend continues, it will not prove advantageous for our nation. If all men conform to this pattern, where will our country derive its strength and resilience from? Men should strive to embody a more pronounced sense of masculinity.¹¹⁴

Regarding specific LGBT advocacy strategies, a gay volunteer (C1) from NGO_X argues that when engaging in LGBT advocacy, particularly when expressing the rights and demands of the sexual minority group to the public, it is important to align with mainstream values. To illustrate this point, he cites his participation in a cyber advocacy campaign that employed the slogan “I am gay, I will not enter into a heterosexual marriage.” This gay activist believes that this slogan resonates with mainstream values due to the general public’s criticism of homosexuals engaging in fraudulent marriages and deceiving heterosexual individuals. By utilizing the slogan “not entering into a heterosexual marriage,” he asserts that they can attain public approval. In contrast, he believes that “slogans such as ‘I want the freedom to hook up,’ ‘I have the right to have sex,’ ‘I have the right to adopt children,’ and ‘I want same-sex

¹¹⁴ Interview in Lanzhou, March 5, 2019

marriage,¹¹⁵ would make LGBT rights highly controversial and detrimental to the public's acceptance of our LGBT community."¹¹⁶

5.3.2 Why Pink Gays Choose to “Showcase Positive Energy”

The paths proposed by Pink Gays to achieve LGBT equality, whether through demonstrating allegiance to the state and government or assimilating into mainstream heterosexuality, are based on a pro-regime stance. Besides the pro-regime stance as the primary premise, the Pink Gay Community tends to choose the approach of “showing positive energy” to attain LGBT rights due to the following factors: (1) Pink Gays believe in the growing acceptance and support of the heterosexual public towards the LGBT community. (2) Pink Gays anticipate that the Chinese government will respond to public opinion by granting appropriate rights to gender and sexual minority groups once substantial societal support for LGBT rights is established. Furthermore, (3) there is a fear of the potential consequences brought about by alternative “radical” methods of LGBT equality outside of “showing positive energy.”

Firstly, in addition to actively presenting a positive image of the sexual minority group, it is observed that 15 out of 22 Pink Gays believe that the best option available to them is to passively await an increase in societal acceptance of LGBT individuals. They place their hopes on a generational shift. These Pink Gay individuals express optimism that when the younger generation, who exhibit a higher level of acceptance towards the LGBT community, assume positions of influence in society and government, it will be more feasible for them to embrace the demands of LGBT groups for equal rights. This pertains to both the societal level and the power structure within the government. As emphasized by a 24-year-old gay interviewee (C1),

¹¹⁵ In fact, these slogans are seldom utilized by local LGBT NGOs for LGBT advocacy.

¹¹⁶ Interview in Lanzhou, March 1, 2019

the younger generations, including those born in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, are expected to be more open and receptive to the LGBT community compared to their counterparts born in the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, a more natural discussion on LGBT equal rights is anticipated at that juncture:

Advocating for LGBT rights necessitates a transformation in the broader societal ideology. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a solid groundwork in fundamental LGBT knowledge and education. This will contribute to a gradual increase in acceptance, particularly among the younger generation, specifically those born in the 1990s and 2000s. This shift is already observable in various aspects, such as the popularity of “Boys’ Love/Danmei (耽美)” cultures among young individuals, as well as the widespread use of LGBT-related slang within the gay and lesbian community. Additionally, there is extensive support for LGBT culture among young people. As these individuals mature, they will inherently drive a change in mainstream societal values, fostering greater acceptance of the LGBT community. Notably, experts like Li Yinhe have projected that it may take another 20 years before same-sex marriage becomes legalized in China. I concur with this prediction. By that time, the emerging generation of young individuals will likely assume significant societal and governmental leadership roles, resulting in a discernible shift in the protection of LGBT rights.¹¹⁷

Secondly, the conviction in the benevolence, good intentions, and reform-oriented nature of the government constitutes the second fundamental aspect of the pro-regime approach to attaining LGBT equality, as acknowledged by 13 patriotic gay individuals. From their standpoint, the Chinese government demonstrates responsiveness to the changing societal landscape and possesses the willingness and capacity to enact reforms. However, they assert that a prerequisite for governmental reform is the prior transformation of social attitudes, which would subsequently enable the government to adapt accordingly. A representative statement endorsing this perspective is provided by a 31-year-old lesbian interviewee (C35):

I believe that a positive aspect of the Chinese government is its willingness and capacity to implement reforms across various domains, including the economy, politics, and society. In fact, significant reforms have taken place in China since the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution. It is important to recognize that China follows the principle of the “golden middle way (中庸之道),” where policy changes typically occur following

¹¹⁷ Interview in Lanzhou, March 1, 2019

notable shifts in public opinion. As Chinese society gradually becomes more accepting of homosexuality and the younger generation adopts a more progressive mindset, there is optimism for achieving equal rights for the LGBT community. Assuming social stability is maintained, I anticipate that sexual orientation and gender identity will no longer be considered taboo subjects in the future, leading to corresponding reforms initiated by the government. Moreover, I posit that China may exhibit greater acceptance of homosexuality compared to foreign countries due to its historical tolerance of such behaviors. Discrimination against the LGBT community in China became more prevalent only towards the end of the Qing Dynasty, while prior to that period, the country displayed openness and liberality towards homosexual activities. Consequently, I believe that there may be fewer obstacles to implementing LGBT policy reforms in China when compared to other nations.¹¹⁸

Likewise, a 31-year-old gay volunteer (C25) from NGO_X presented two instances to exemplify the Chinese government's display of a benevolent stance towards the LGBT community. Additionally, he holds the belief that the government's disposition towards the LGBT community will progressively become more accepting in the future:

In April 2018, Sina Weibo issued a notice stating that content pertaining to homosexuality would be subjected to censorship. In response to this incident, a group of gay volunteers from Beijing, along with a 60-year-old volunteer mother, collectively submitted a letter to Sina. Subsequently, it was discovered that this joint letter had successfully reached relevant authorities and garnered attention. In the same year, a film director from Shanghai initiated legal action against the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) due to the removal of his works that depicted homosexuality. As an observer, I attended the trial for the initial hearing. Following the trial, reports emerged indicating that the NRTA acknowledged the absence of legal and policy grounds for discriminating against the LGBT community in China. However, the NRTA disclaimed any association with the "Network Audio-Visual Program Content Review Rules" established by the China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA). I sought advice from a lawyer who confirmed that while the ruling did not meet the plaintiff's expectations, such as an apology from the NRTA, on the other hand, the NRTA has not eliminated any video materials related to homosexuality or other gender and sexual minorities since the initial ruling. Therefore, I am of the opinion that the Chinese government is making progress in terms of LGBT rights. If this were not the case, the court would not have accepted similar cases, such as lawsuits against government agencies like the NRTA.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

¹¹⁹ Interview in Beijing, May 8, 2019

Thirdly, 12 out of 22 Pink Gays express apprehension towards alternative methods of achieving LGBT equality beyond “showing positive energy.” They fear the potential disasters associated with such approaches, including China’s economic decline and the possibility of social unrest, and therefore advocate for their rejection and opposition. Based on the perspective of some Pink Gays, the pursuit of equal rights for sexual minorities may give rise to ideological and intellectual pluralism, which could undermine China’s unity. This diversification of thought is seen as a potential distraction from China’s primary focus on economic development and the maintenance of ideological cohesion as promoted by the government. Consequently, pluralism is perceived as a potential threat to China’s economic progress. The following statement from a 31-year-old lesbian interviewee (C35) exemplifies this viewpoint:

The restrictions on homosexuality in China, particularly in the media, are justified. While there are individuals who argue that the government holds conservative views on LGBT matters, I comprehend the reasoning behind these restrictions. Presently, China’s primary objectives are to uphold social stability and advance its economy, which are deemed more important than individual liberties. Excessive liberalism could lead to adverse outcomes, including a divergence of thoughts that disrupts the stable environment required for economic progress. Consequently, I find the stricter ideological and cultural limitations on homosexuality to be comprehensible.¹²⁰

Furthermore, the LGBT movement may evoke associations with social uprisings, revolutions, and unrest among certain Pink Gays. Some individuals hold the belief that social revolution or reform entails the replacement of the government or the existing regime, a process they perceive as potentially resulting in violent conflicts and economic decline. For example, lesbian interviewee C35 expresses the view that while the LGBT movement advocates for personal freedom, it may inadvertently parallel political movements like the Tiananmen Square incident. If the movement were to evolve into a revolution aimed at transforming the Chinese

¹²⁰ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

government, it could trigger social upheaval that would be detrimental to the Chinese population, even if the likelihood of unrest is low. She elaborated on her reasoning:

The current Chinese government has shown no willingness to relinquish power, indicating that achieving social reform would necessitate the overthrow of the existing government. Such a scenario would inevitably result in violent armed conflict in a country like China, where the party, government, and military are tightly unified. This violent conflict would likely lead to economic regression and social hardships. Even if a democratic regime were to be established following the social movement, it could potentially introduce new social chaos. We have witnessed similar disasters unfold in places like Taiwan and the Middle East, and we can anticipate a comparable outcome in China if social revolutions were to occur.

Comparatively, the United States, despite its history of democratic governance, has experienced societal divisions and unrest since the rise of Trump to power. China, with its long-standing history of authoritarianism, would undoubtedly face even greater challenges. We have witnessed the struggles between the Kuomintang Party (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan, where all political activities, including those related to same-sex marriage, have become pawns in their political game. Many policies are not formulated with the welfare of the people or the country in mind, but rather as opposition tactics against the rival party. The current economic recession in Taiwan serves as evidence. Considering China's population of over a billion, it is difficult to imagine the country enduring such drastic social changes.

It is a fact that the people in China can be easily manipulated. There are still many impoverished individuals in China for whom voting holds no significance, as they can be influenced or bribed with just a few dollars.¹²¹

Moreover, certain Pink Gay individuals hold the belief that their livelihoods are primarily reliant on the stability and economic progress of the society governed by the Chinese authorities. They assert that if China's social stability and economic development were to deteriorate, their own stable lives would also be jeopardized. Quoting the words of a 24-year-old transgender men interviewee (C42), "When the skin is gone, how can the hair remain attached?" and "no eggs are left in a toppled nest." In addition, he argues that China's policy of maintaining stability is the optimal choice for the country, and the LGBT movement should not be seen as an obstacle to social stability:

I strongly believe that LGBT protests and demonstrations should not take place in China due to the potential disruption they could cause to societal stability. Moreover, it is highly

¹²¹ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

likely that such protests would be suppressed by the government. Despite criticisms directed at the government for utilizing strict measures to maintain stability and suppress dissent, it is important to consider the perspective of the state. The government's actions may not necessarily be unjustified, as they always have their own considerations. As individuals, our views may sometimes be limited in scope.

The continuous development of China's economy and maintenance of social order necessitate a policy of stability maintenance, which is crucial for our secure and stable lives. Currently, our quality of life is favorable, and as a gay individual, I am able to navigate the streets without fear of being targeted by homophobic individuals. Hence, my personal safety is ensured in China. If we can sustain our social order and quality of life, I still support an increase in government funding for stability maintenance.¹²²

In summary, within the pro-regime context, Pink Gays advocate for the acquisition of LGBT rights in China through the strategy of "showing positive energy," which involves demonstrating loyalty to the state and conforming to mainstream heterosexual norms. In addition to the pro-regime perspective, the adoption of "showing positive energy" as an LGBT movement strategy is influenced by other factors. These factors encompass the belief that as generations change, Chinese society will become increasingly accepting of the LGBT community. Furthermore, Pink Gays perceive the Chinese government as responsive to public sentiment and anticipate that the government will grant appropriate rights to the LGBT community as societal acceptance of LGBT individuals grows. Additionally, Pink Gays harbor concerns about the potential disasters that may arise from radical approaches to achieving LGBT equality. These concerns significantly contribute to their decision to adopt a more conservative approach to advancing LGBT rights.

5.4 Conclusion

In the current context of rising Chinese nationalism and increased visibility of the LGBT community, the navigation of LGBT identity and Chinese citizenship at the individual level has

¹²² Interview in Shanghai, June 20, 2019

become an important issue. Chinese LGBT liberals criticize both the Chinese state and the associated patriotism as ideological frameworks due to the government's suppression of the LGBT community. However, LGBT individuals in China with nationalist inclinations embrace patriotism and strongly align themselves with the regime, which makes them targets of criticism from Chinese LGBT liberals. Consequently, Chinese LGBT liberals have coined the term "Pink Gays" to denounce LGBT individuals with Chinese nationalist tendencies.

The Pink Gay community takes pride in their identity as pro-regime patriots and employs various mechanisms to rationalize this identity. Specifically, through victim/LGBT blaming and public blaming, Pink Gays separate the state (government/regime) from the social suffering and individual difficulties experienced by the LGBT community. Moreover, by utilizing downward comparison and comparing the human rights of Chinese LGBT individuals with those in other countries or with the rights of the heterosexual population in Chinese society, they conclude that China relatively fares better in terms of LGBT rights, and at the very least, LGBT individuals can lead safe lives in the country. Furthermore, by establishing patriotism as a salient identity, Pink Gays cultivate a sense of national pride and prioritize their identity as patriotic Chinese citizens over their LGBT identity, with the latter even being considered a sacrificial identity.

Furthermore, within the framework of pro-regime ideology, Pink Gays advocate for the pursuit of LGBT rights through the strategy of "Showing Positive Energy," which entails demonstrating loyalty to the state and conforming to mainstream heterosexual norms. Their choice of this conservative path is not only rooted in the pro-regime premise but also influenced by their belief in the societal changes that will lead to increased acceptance of the LGBT community in China. They anticipate that the Chinese government, in response to public opinion and the growing acceptance of LGBT individuals among the Chinese population, will grant

corresponding rights to the LGBT community. Additionally, Pink Gays harbor concerns regarding the potential calamities that may arise from radical approaches to LGBT activism, thereby reinforcing their decision to embrace a conservative approach.

This chapter analysis has certain limitations. For instance, the examination the term 'Pink Gay' creation process primarily draws upon existing literature and data gathered from online comments on the Weibo platform. However, due to the constraints imposed by China's internet censorship system, numerous pertinent discussions have been deleted, resulting in a lack of data richness. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the emergence of the term "Pink Gay" transpired within the context of verbal attacks between Chinese LGBT liberals and nationalist LGBT individuals. The online attacks extend beyond Chinese LGBT liberals devising new terms to target their adversaries; rather, the opponents, encompassing Chinese nationalists and nationalist LGBT individuals, retaliate by formulating terms to counterattack Chinese LGBT liberals. To illustrate, I have observed instances where the nationalist gay community responds and counterattacks Chinese LGBT liberals by introducing recently coined terms, such as the term "colonialist gay" (zhi gay, 殖 gay) that surfaced in July 2022. This term, originated by Creamy-Banana (@creamy蕉), aims to stigmatize and denounce liberal gay individuals as representatives or agents of Western colonialists in China. The term "colonialist gay" has gained traction within the nationalist gay community and has entered the sphere of public discourse. Similarly, the term "colonialist Chinese," derived from "colonialist gay," is widely employed to refer to liberal netizens who frequently criticize China's historical conquests. Future research endeavors could delve into the interactive dynamics between various factions of online users, particularly Chinese liberals and Chinese nationalists, and explore their utilization of coined terms as a means of reciprocal attack.

Furthermore, the Pink Gays community is a complex group. This chapter contributes to the discussion of three main aspects concerning this community: the emergence of the term “Pink Gay,” the pro-regime stance of Pink Gays, and the pathways they recognize for attaining LGBT rights. However, it is important to acknowledge that Pink Gays encompass additional complexities that warrant further investigation in future research. For instance, in the online survey conducted, 72.9% of the respondents expressed pride in their country (China), while nearly 60% indicated a desire to immigrate to an LGBT-friendly country if given the opportunity. Within this subset, a significant proportion (38.4% of the total online survey sample) maintain a patriotic identity while simultaneously harboring aspirations of emigrating to nations that are more accepting of the LGBT community. Exploring the underlying reasons behind this conflicting choice among the 38.4% segment of the Chinese LGBT sample would present an interesting topic for future research.

Moreover, conservative gay politics similar to the Pink Gay community can be observed in various societies around the world. In the United States, for example, Lisa Duggan (2002) points out the existence of assimilationist or homonormativity tactics within gay rights activism since the 1950s. These tactics aim to integrate gay individuals into mainstream society by emphasizing their similarities to heterosexual individuals. In comparison, the emergence of China’s Pink Gay community is influenced by the collectivist and authoritarian nature of the Chinese system. In contrast, the emergence of China’s Pink Gay community is rooted in the collectivist and authoritarian system of China, whereas conservative gay politics in the United States, such as the gay Republicans Log Cabin (Rogers and Lott 1997), are rooted in the individualistic and democratic system of the United States. Despite the stark cultural and

political differences, these two contexts have given rise to similar conservative LGBT identity politics, thus making a comparative study between the two an intriguing topic worth exploring.

Chapter 6 Unveiling Heterogeneity of Chinese LGBT Individuals' Responses to Sexuality, Nationalism, and Globalization:

Insights from Chinese LGBT Liberal and Avoidant Groups

At the individual level, Chinese LGBT individuals employ diverse strategies to navigate the tensions stemming from their sexual identity within the context of Chinese nationalism and globalization. While the term “Pink Gays” has existed in Chinese public discourse, representing LGBT individuals who embrace patriotism and a pro-regime stance (as discussed in Chapter 5), this chapter seeks to explore additional strategies, and identifies two additional ideal types: the LGBT Liberal group and the LGBT Avoidant group. With the addition of these categories I aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse approaches employed by LGBT individuals negotiating the tensions between sexuality, nationalism, and globalization. The analysis of the LGBT Liberal group is based on liberal perspectives expressed by 20 participants during interviews while the analysis of the LGBT Avoidant group is based on identified dimensions of avoidance observed in interviews with 18 participants.¹²³ To begin with, I present a discussion concerning the characteristics exhibited by both the Chinese LGBT Liberal and Avoidant groups. The distinguishing feature of the Chinese LGBT Liberal community is their critical stance towards the pervasive discrimination faced by the LGBT community in China across various levels. Conversely, the primary characteristic of the Chinese LGBT Avoidant group is their apathy towards Chinese LGBT activism, state policies regarding LGBT issues, and international advocacy for LGBT human rights.

¹²³ In this chapter, I have employed quotations at length for two primary reasons. Firstly, quoting at length enables a more comprehensive presentation of the viewpoints and logical reasoning of LGBT individuals. Secondly, given the limited exposure and recognition of the voices within the Chinese LGBT community, quoting at length also serves the mission of amplifying their voices and advocating for their inclusion.

In addition to summarizing the distinguishing traits of the Chinese LGBT Liberals and Avoidant groups, I also investigate their respective strategies for navigating Chinese nationalism. Unlike Pink Gays, who actively embrace Chinese nationalism, the LGBT Liberals engage in detachment from Chinese nationalism. This detachment process involves identifying the fractures (Egoz 2008:39) or contradictions (Griffith 2001:3) within the prevalent nationalist discourse, given the dominance of Chinese nationalist narratives in the public sphere of China and the marginalization of alternative narratives, as discussed in Chapter 4. By doing so, it becomes apparent that the concepts of nation, nation-state, and nationalism are not cohesive or monolithic entities (Callahan 2005). Examining individuals' marginalized positions and experiences from a peripheral perspective proves to be an effective approach in revealing the ruptures and contradictions within Chinese nationalism. However, the divergent understandings of their marginalized positions by the LGBT Liberals and Avoidant groups also shape their varying levels of engagement with the structure of Chinese nationalism, thereby leading to differences in their navigational strategies (critique and avoidance) when it comes to nationalism. Specifically, the LGBT Avoidant group differs from the Pink Gays and LGBT Liberals because they avoid confronting the intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization. Overall, through the establishment of these ideal types, the LGBT Liberals and LGBT Avoidant groups, as well as the exploration of their approaches to navigating nationalism, this chapter seeks to illuminate the heterogeneity and diversity at the individual level in response to the intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization (SNG) within the lives of Chinese LGBT individuals.

6.1 Detachment from Chinese Nationalism: Perspectives from LGBT Liberals

The Liberal group within the Chinese LGBT community serves as one of ideal types that I have identified for the purpose of understanding how Chinese LGBT individuals navigate the complex intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization. In the context of China, the term “Liberals” has been utilized by scholars to describe Chinese intellectuals and public opinion leaders who express strong criticism towards the Chinese Communist Party State and advocate for “universal values”¹²⁴ such as democracy, freedom, and human rights (Lin 2021: 86). In this study, I adopt the concept of “Liberals” to encompass LGBT individuals who resist conforming to nationalist and state-sanctioned norms and ideologies of heterosexual citizenship, adopting a critical standpoint that emphasizes their marginalized LGBT status and their resistance of state authority. Based on an analysis of 20 interviews,¹²⁵ in the initial section, I will provide a comprehensive description, highlighting the defining characteristics of the LGBT Liberal group, with particular emphasis on their critical perspective regarding the discrimination faced by the LGBT community. Subsequently, guided by their critical stance, I delve into an in-depth examination of how LGBT Liberals detach themselves from Chinese nationalism and

¹²⁴ Within the Chinese context, the term “universal values” has been narrowly understood since the 1980s to encompass the ideals of democracy, freedom, and human rights. According to Qi (2011), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), while defending the market economy reforms initiated in 1978, emphasized the applicability of the market economy to both capitalism and socialism. This viewpoint sparked debates among intellectuals advocating for political system reforms, asserting that democratic systems, human rights, and philanthropy are universal values relevant to both capitalism and socialism. In the early 21st century, democracy, human rights, and philanthropy gained widespread acceptance among the Chinese public, transcending national and ideological boundaries. This trend raised concerns among some CCP leaders who feared that these values could undermine their power. Since 2008, the Chinese state has criticized and stigmatized universal values, considering them as tools for ideological infiltration by domestic and foreign hostile forces. Consequently, within the Chinese context, universal values have been narrowly defined as Western values primarily encompassing democracy, freedom, and human rights.

¹²⁵ Among these 20 interviewees, there are 8 activists, 5 volunteers, and 7 other participants. The term “activist” is employed to describe individuals actively engaged in advocating for LGBT social, political, or cultural change. The term “volunteers” is used to characterize individuals who willingly contribute their time, skills, or services without financial compensation to support LGBT organizations.

patriotism¹²⁶ through coupling discrimination against the LGBT community with the Chinese state, upward comparisons, and decoupling “love for the country” from patriotism.

6.1.1 Critical Stance of Chinese LGBT Liberals

Through an analysis of 20 participants, I have identified several significant dimensions that characterize Liberal LGBT individuals’ perspectives. These include their critical perspectives on (1) LGBT-unfriendly social environment, (2) LGBT-unfriendly government policies, (3) Chinese nationalism, and (4) their support for foreign aid and opposition to narratives depicting foreign hostile forces.

(1) Critique of LGBT-Unfriendly Social Environment

The LGBT Liberal community in China perceives the Chinese social environment as conservative due to the restrictive influence of mainstream heterosexual culture on the LGBT community. Specifically, a total of 8 participants out of the 20 LGBT Liberals direct their critique towards Confucian culture, arguing that Confucian values reinforce the dominant position of heterosexuality and contribute to the oppression of gender and sexual minority groups in Chinese society. As an illustration, a gay interviewee aged 39 (C15) explicitly highlights the conflict between Confucian values, such as filial piety and the Three Obediences and Four Virtues(三从四德)¹²⁷, and the principles advocated by the LGBT movement, including equality,

¹²⁶ It is important to acknowledge that in this chapter, I employ the terms “patriotism” and “nationalism” interchangeably. This usage is rooted in the specific context of China. The Chinese government’s utilization of patriotism as an ideological instrument consistently results in the characterization of contemporary Chinese nationalism as patriotism. Consequently, in the Chinese context, Chinese nationalism and patriotism are regarded as closely related concepts (Bislev & Li 2014). Hence, in this study, I employ both terms, “patriotism” and “nationalism,” interchangeably.

¹²⁷ The Three Obediences and Four Virtues were developed as Confucian moral principles to regulate women’s behavior. The Three Obediences dictate that women should obey their fathers before marriage, their husbands after

freedom, and diversity. According to this interviewee (C15), Chinese Confucian culture was originally designed to serve the ruling class and lacks any association with freedom and equality, as its purpose is to establish a hierarchical system and cultivate compliant subjects. Similarly, another 35-year-old lesbian interviewee (C8) emphasizes the historical and ongoing existence of a patriarchal society in China, where individuals are socialized to obey their parents and leaders, resulting in a pervasive culture of “obedient citizenship.”¹²⁸ She further argues that this culture of obedience hinders the necessary resistance against the dominant heterosexual culture that the LGBT movement should embody.

In addition, 4 out of 20 LGBT Liberals criticize China’s culture of sexual shame and repression, which contributes to the lack of tolerance towards the LGBT community in Chinese society. The culture of sexual shame and repression has led to a pervasive lack of knowledge and understanding regarding sexuality, gender, and sexual orientation in China. For example, a 31-year-old lesbian participant (C4) advocates for the freedom to express one’s sexuality naturally, whereas traditional Chinese culture emphasizes ethical principles that “prioritize heavenly principles over human desires (存天理灭人欲)”. As a result, Chinese society has become highly sensitive and uncomfortable when discussing sexuality, perceiving it as a shameful and concealed aspect of life. The participant finds this societal atmosphere “disgusting, anti-human, and conservative.” Furthermore, this interviewee (C4) believes that the culture of sexual shame has contributed to the classification of homosexuality as hooliganism in contemporary China:

In China, apart from major cities that are relatively more open, many regions, especially rural areas, tend to be quite conservative. In some places, the cultural practice of “separate seating for boys and girls after the age of seven” is still prevalent. The ages of seven and eight are when children begin to develop an awareness of gender differences and experience sexual awakening. At this stage, many parents start cultivating young

marriage, and their eldest sons after the death of their husbands. The Four Virtues encompass (sexual) morality, proper speech, modest demeanor, and diligent work.

¹²⁸ Interview in Lanzhou, March 28, 2019

boys and girls according to rigid stereotypes of heterosexual binary gender roles. Furthermore, in many culturally conservative regions of China, premarital sexual activities are also strongly discouraged. Many Chinese, especially the older generation, still perceive this sexually repressive lifestyle as “good and pure.” Ignorance about sexuality is equated with sexual purity, while sexual freedom is viewed as moral decay and corruption. This perspective is deeply ingrained in Chinese society and is even reflected in government policies. For example, the Chinese government previously established the crime of hooliganism, where immoral sexual behavior could lead to imprisonment. During that time, homosexuality was considered immoral and punishable. To be honest, although China has abolished the crime of hooliganism, our society remains sexually repressed and conservative.¹²⁹

Moreover, 11 out of 20 LGBT Liberals contend that while the internet has partially contributed to a greater chance for the public to encounter diverse gender identities, sexual orientations, and gender expressions, it has not fundamentally altered the deeply rooted conservative sexual culture that characterizes China’s online environment. As a 28-year-old gay interviewee (C12) in Chengdu affirms, “Chinese social civilization has not advanced to the extent of embracing gender and sexual minority groups, and it is unlikely that the mainstream heterosexual community in China will become allies of sexual minority groups.”¹³⁰ To support his critique of China’s conservative gender and sexual culture online, this participant (C12) provides several examples. For instance, he observes that many prominent LGBT figures are frequently subjected to bans or censorship on platforms like Weibo and additionally, hashtags related to LGBT issues, such as lesbian, LGBT, or homosexuality, are prone to being reported and removed.

Overall, according to the viewpoint of LGBT Liberals, the conservative sexual culture prevalent in China has greatly impeded the visibility and recognition of gender and sexual minority groups. As a result, LGBT Liberals are resistant to embracing China’s historical and cultural identity. As a lesbian participant (C6), she articulates her dissent by stating, “The

¹²⁹ Interview in Lanzhou, March 7, 2019

¹³⁰ Interview in Chengdu, April 14, 2019

country consistently promotes China's 5,000 years of history and culture, encouraging us to take pride in it. However, I am against this pride because our culture is excessively conservative, and the public's mindset is regressive. We don't even have the right to be acknowledged as sexual minority individuals."¹³¹

(2) Critique of Unfriendly LGBT Policies

The unfriendly LGBT policies in China have been a focal point of criticism from Chinese LGBT Liberals. Firstly, all 20 LGBT Liberals express varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the government's stance towards sexual minority groups, as demonstrated by the "three-no" principle (which entails no approval, no disapproval, and no promotion). As an example, a lesbian participant (C6), aged 29, asserts that the government's claimed stance of "neither supporting nor opposing" gender and sexual minority groups may seem neutral, but it demonstrates clear opposition to LGBT individuals. She asserts,

As sexual minority individuals, we are deprived of rights. For instance, when we seek marriage, the Civil Affairs Bureau refuses to register our unions, and online content related to homosexuality is subjected to censorship. Are these actions by the government meant for our benefit? Can we consider this a neutral stance? If the government genuinely aims to be impartial and fair, it should grant us the same rights as heterosexual citizens.¹³²

Likewise, a lesbian participant (C8), aged 35, critiques the Chinese government's "three-no" principle as an ambiguous strategy utilized to deprive the LGBT community of their rights. To support her viewpoint, she discusses China's statements and positions on the LGBT community within the context of the United Nations:

The statements made by the Chinese spokesperson at the United Nations regarding LGBT human rights are contradictory, resembling the government's "three-no" principle. When questioned about the denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples, the Chinese

¹³¹ Interview in Lanzhou, March 17, 2019

¹³² Interview in Lanzhou, March 17, 2019

representative asserts that China does not discriminate against homosexuals and justifies the absence of same-sex marriage as a reflection of Chinese traditional culture. This exemplifies the evasive rhetoric commonly employed by the Chinese government. These declarations are exasperating as they appear to be mere empty words from the government. The denial of equal rights to LGBT individuals, in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts, is both unfair and discriminatory. Moreover, regardless of the Chinese government's stance at the United Nations, where they assert non-discrimination against same-sex relationships and accept recommendations from other countries on LGBT issues, it is merely a facade to maintain the government's international reputation. In fact, within China, the government continues to exercise strict censorship on LGBT individuals, disregarding accepted LGBT-friendly recommendations and, instead, exacerbating discrimination and suppression against us.¹³³

In addition to their criticism of the government's "three-no" principle, the Liberal group also directs specific critiques towards the Chinese government's censorship system that targets gender and sexual minority groups. For instance, regarding the 2018 incident of Weibo censoring content related to homosexuality, 18 out of 20 LGBT Liberals collectively believe that Weibo's censorship is rooted in the government's regulatory system, particularly the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA). A typical discussion highlighting the critique of the government's censorship of homosexual content comes from a 35-year-old lesbian participant (C8), who expresses her concerns in the following manner:

The announcement regarding the cleaning of homosexuality content on Weibo last year (2018) clarified that Weibo's censorship is based on the Cybersecurity Law. Therefore, the state ultimately mandates the removal of gender and sexual minority content from online platforms. In fact, even before Weibo's cleansing of homosexuality content, other online platforms had already undertaken similar actions. Furthermore, following the public controversy caused by Weibo's censorship, People's Daily, as the state's representative, issued a statement condemning discrimination against LGBT individuals but also cautioning us against seeking attention and influencing young people. This statement implies that our public visibility somehow corrupts children and leads to an increase in homosexuality among them. I find these remarks baseless and highly ignorant. I grew up in a harmonious family with loving parents. I resided in a predominantly heterosexual environment, receiving education from heterosexual teachers, and I have never encountered homosexual teachers. Despite growing up in a purely heterosexual environment, why am I not heterosexual? Therefore, when the government or the public

¹³³ Interview in Lanzhou, March 28, 2019

asserts that we are negatively influencing children, I can only regard them as ignorant or engaging in discrimination, using unfounded reasons to suppress us.¹³⁴

Furthermore, the prohibition imposed by the government on LGBT civil organizations from obtaining civil registration is another area of focus for criticism raised by 12 out of 20 LGBT Liberal interviewees. According to a report by UNDP and USAID (2014), most LGBT organizations are unable to obtain civil registration and operate as legal NGOs. Instead, these organizations are forced to apply for business registration, registering as private companies, which incur higher costs and full taxation. A 33-year-old gay interviewee (C10) further explained the survival situation of LGBT organizations, stating that as long as civil organizations are associated with LGBT issues, the government will not allow them to register as legal NGOs. He provided an example of an organization in Guangzhou, which has the word “homosexuality” in its name and is consistently rejected when attempting to register with the local Civil Affairs Bureau. The reasons for rejection explicitly mention the inclusion of homosexuality. Another interviewee, (C9) is a 23-year-old gay volunteer from NGO_W, who is actively involved in HIV prevention work, explained that even though HIV prevention is acknowledged and supported by the state, obtaining civil registration for HIV prevention organizations remains extremely challenging. He cited the example of a local HIV prevention organization in Lanzhou that specifically targets HIV prevention among the homosexual community. Despite the organization’s long-standing presence and its engagement in HIV prevention activities, it has not been granted legal registration by the local Civil Affairs Bureau. The government acknowledges the organization’s contributions in HIV prevention yet denies its legal status. This gay interviewee believes that the ambiguous status of LGBT organizations, including HIV

¹³⁴ Interview in Lanzhou, March 28, 2019

organizations, regarding civil registration is a deliberate strategy by the government to exert control over these organizations:

The government currently turns a blind eye to many LGBT organizations, including HIV prevention organizations. The government aims to maintain this ambiguous state because it desires certain organizations, such as HIV organizations, to contribute to addressing social issues, while simultaneously preventing these organizations from growing and becoming a threat. Consequently, when the government seeks to encourage these organizations to help resolve societal problems, it relaxes its scrutiny of them. However, when the government intends to suppress these organizations, it can readily close them down since they lack registration and can be deemed illegal. For instance, a few months ago, the Rainbow Group at a university in Guangzhou was declared an illegal organization and subsequently shut down by the Guangzhou Civil Affairs Bureau. So, I think that the present circumstances faced by LGBT organizations in China resemble living on the edge, as they can be easily eliminated by the government.¹³⁵

Similarly, 12 out of 20 LGBT Liberal interviewees express criticism towards the government's suppression of LGBT activists and public opinion leaders. Under internet censorship, LGBT activists and public opinion leaders may have their accounts deleted and face the risk of being banned or even interrogated by the police. For instance, based on my observation, the main initiator of the "I am homosexual" movement, @Zhudingzhen, has had his personal accounts deleted on multiple platforms, and several WeChat public accounts of Piaoquanjun (the organizer of 798-Advocacy), have been banned. During an interview, a 42-year-old gay activist (C29) of NGO_X expressed deep concerns about his personal safety due to the increasing surveillance. This gay activist (C29) has already been summoned and interrogated by the police and state security multiple times for organizing offline LGBT advocacy activities. Drawing from his experiences dealing with the police and state security, this gay volunteer critically argues that the current state surveillance has cast society into a state of extreme "darkness," reminiscent of George Orwell's book "1984," where individuals live under strict

¹³⁵ Interview in Lanzhou, March 29, 2019

government control and endure constant surveillance and control by the government. He further elaborated:

Our organization is currently facing increasingly strict police intervention. On multiple occasions during our ongoing activities, the police have directly come to our venue and demanded our immediate disbandment. As the organizer, I have been taken to the public security bureau to register my personal information, and they have even requested information about my family. Subsequently, the police have asked me to write a pledge, promising not to organize any illegal activities. They have also periodically called to inquire about the status of our LGBT group. At times, they have summoned me directly to the police station for questioning. All of these experiences have caused me immense psychological stress. We have no bargaining power with the police; our only option is to unilaterally cooperate and obey. Additionally, there have been instances where the police approached me for questioning regarding activities unrelated to our organization. For instance, after the 798 Incident, I received a phone call from the police inquiring whether I organized the 798 Advocacy. They also questioned my whereabouts on the day of the event and whether I was present at the scene. The police demanded that I provide them with the participant list and volunteer list for the 798 Event. The situation at the time was extremely frightening and aggressive, and the police warned that their trust in us had been broken. I could only explain to them that I had no knowledge of the 798 Incident and that it was not organized by me.¹³⁶

Overall, the LGBT Liberal group expresses profound dissatisfaction with China's LGBT policies, which in turn engenders a broader discontent with the entire political system. For instance, drawing from his understanding of the current state of the LGBT movement, a 22-year-old gay interviewee (C30) reaches the conclusion that "street advocacy and public performance art are currently prohibited," further asserting that "China exhibits zero tolerance for dissent, with government intervention permeating every facet of society; the pervasive presence of the

¹³⁶ Interview in Beijing, May 11, 2019

The interrogation experienced by this gay activist (C29) serves as an illustration of the utilization of "soft repression" within China's current political policing landscape (Fu 2021). Prior to the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997, instances indeed existed where the police arrested homosexuals under charges of "hooliganism" (Beijing LGBT Center 2021). However, subsequent to that period, the government's approach to political policing towards the LGBT community has predominantly employed "soft repression." This entails the utilization of surveillance, early intervention, and political persuasion to exert governmental pressure on targeted groups and individuals, including some LGBT activists, to ensure compliance (Fu 2021). Consequently, dissenting individuals, including some LGBT activists, may face outcomes such as subtle intimidation, consent extracted under duress, relational repression, and even detention (Fu 2021).

government is unmistakable.”¹³⁷ Similarly, a 35-year-old transgender woman (C33) goes as far as characterizing the Chinese government as a “dictatorial regime”¹³⁸ due to the overarching principle that all institutional arrangements in China serve the interests of those in power. Specifically, she argues that if the government implements protective policies for a specific group, it is solely because these policies align with the interests of those in power, and without clear advantages for the stability of the regime, the Chinese government will not grant rights to any particular group.

(3) Critique of Chinese Nationalism

The LGBT Liberal group, consisting of 16 out of 20 individuals, actively opposes the government’s promotion of patriotism and nationalism.¹³⁹ Their critique of Chinese nationalism primarily focuses on the notions of China’s uniqueness or authenticity and the discourse surrounding foreign hostile forces. As an example, a 27-year-old gay activist identified as C11 from NGO_M, expresses criticism towards the argument presented by Chinese representatives at the United Nations, which emphasizes that China’s rejection of same-sex marriage is determined by its special national conditions and cultural traditions. This activist (C11) argues that such a stance taken by China’s representatives actually reflects the authoritarian nature of the country and its rejection of the universal value of “everyone born equal.”¹⁴⁰ Similarly, the perspective of many Chinese nationalists, who view heterosexuality as an inherent and authentic aspect of Chinese culture, is also a focal point of criticism by LGBT Liberals. As an illustration, another

¹³⁷ Interview in Beijing, May 13, 2019

¹³⁸ Interview in Beijing, May 22, 2019

¹³⁹ In the Chinese context, patriotism is essentially synonymous with nationalism because the Chinese government has appropriated patriotism as an ideological tool.

¹⁴⁰ Interview in Chengdu, April 5, 2019

39-year-old gay interviewee (C15) experienced attacks from family members who held nationalist viewpoints during the process of coming out:

When I came out to my family, my father insulted me by saying that being gay means engaging in anal sex and contracting AIDS. He also questioned, “Can two men have children?” and asserted, “Homosexuality only exists in the United States, not in China!” In my father’s perception, being Chinese and being homosexual are mutually exclusive. He believes that my homosexuality is a result of negative Western influences spread through the internet. My uncle shared similar views, stating, “Child, you cannot engage in homosexuality! By doing so, you will bring destruction to the Chinese Communist Party and the country! If all Chinese people were like you, there would be no one left on Earth!”¹⁴¹

This gay interviewee (C15) has been out to his parents for over three years yet has been unable to change his father’s discriminatory attitude towards homosexuality. Moreover, he finds it “ridiculous” that his father and uncle elevate homosexuality to a national level and employ nationalism as a tool to attack him. In his opinion, homosexuality has existed since the birth of humanity. If homosexuality were to cause the extinction of humankind, it would have happened from the very beginning. Additionally, he criticizes his homophobic family members for using rhetoric such as “destroying the Chinese Communist Party and the country” to attack him because they believe that suppressing homosexuality at the national level can naturally justify these attacks. He emphasizes that Chinese homophobic individuals envision an authentic Chinese society based on stereotypical heterosexual impressions, excluding gender and sexual minority groups from their heterosexual imagination. Consequently, many Chinese nationalists automatically adopt an “us versus them” perspective to attack the LGBT community:

My father and uncle had no contact with the United States whatsoever. However, since childhood, they have been educated in a manner that links Western capitalist societies with decadence, moral decline, the proliferation of homosexuality, and HIV/AIDS. Their viewpoint on these matters frequently centers around an “us versus them” mentality, resulting in their belief that anything Western is inherently negative, and any unfavorable incidents in China, like homosexuality, must have originated from the West. In essence,

¹⁴¹ Interview in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

they hold the belief that a segment of “normal” Chinese individuals has been influenced by detrimental Western ideologies, resulting in their becoming homosexual.¹⁴²

Moreover, the discourse surrounding “foreign forces interfering in internal affairs” is subject to criticism from LGBT Liberal groups as well. As an example, a 26-year-old gay interviewee (C37) views the utilization of this rhetoric concerning foreign forces as baseless and rejects it as unfounded accusation. He argues that anything contrary to government-endorsed values can be easily labeled as collaboration with foreign forces or foreign interference in internal affairs. By associating these actions with foreign forces, it creates the impression that “foreigners are encroaching on Chinese sovereignty and posing a threat to social order.”¹⁴³ This interviewee (C37) believes that China possesses an extensive stability maintenance system, making it illogical to suggest that foreign support for LGBT activities could undermine it. Consequently, he perceives the discourse of foreign hostile forces as a tool used to denigrate gender and sexual minority groups and discredit the advocacy of LGBT rights. This highlights the possibility that the country inherently harbors disdain towards the LGBT community, alongside the growing prevalence of xenophobic sentiments within China. Similarly, another gay interviewee (C11) shares the belief that the increasing prevalence of rhetoric surrounding foreign hostile forces signifies a shift towards conservatism in Chinese society, coupled with a decline in the independent thinking capabilities of young Chinese individuals. This perceived decline is viewed as a “very sad situation.”¹⁴⁴ According to this interviewee (C11), many nationalist internet users draw unsubstantiated conclusions that foreign anti-China forces exploit LGBT issues as a means to subvert the Chinese regime. C11 asserts that these conclusions lack logical

¹⁴² Interview in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

¹⁴³ Interview in Shanghai, June 3, 2019

¹⁴⁴ Interview in Chengdu, April 5, 2019

reasoning and solely rely on conspiracy theories to speculate about the motives of LGBT activists and foreign supporting forces, thereby baselessly connecting two unrelated matters.

Although devoid of substantiation, the discourse surrounding foreign hostile forces significantly undermines the legitimacy and credibility of local activist organizations, LGBT activism, and foreign support for the Chinese LGBT community. As an example, the organizer of 798 Advocacy, Piaoquanjun, has been unjustly labeled as colluding with foreign forces to intervene in domestic affairs, as discussed in Chapter One. Piaoquanjun clarifies that 798 Advocacy was solely organized by himself and had no affiliation or involvement with the US Embassy. Consequently, Piaoquanjun characterizes these nationalist internet users as “foolish and malevolent, exhibiting both ignorance and malicious intent”:

If we apply the same logic as that of foreign hostile forces, an intriguing question arises. Each year during the Chinese New Year, the Chinese Embassy in the United States organizes cultural events aimed at promoting Chinese culture, which attract the participation of local American citizens. So, what conclusion should we draw from this? Are we to assume that these American participants are accepting money from the Chinese government and causing disruption in the United States by assisting in China’s cultural outreach? It is highly unlikely that Chinese nationalists would perceive the activities of the Chinese Embassy as interference in the internal affairs of the United States. Consequently, it becomes evident that those patriotic individuals who advocate for exclusive cultural outreach from Chinese embassies abroad, while rejecting similar initiatives by foreign embassies in China, are clearly displaying a double standard.¹⁴⁵

Similarly, another 28-year-old gay interviewee (C27) effectively countered the discourse surrounding foreign hostile forces by drawing upon his personal engagement in LGBT activities organized by the United States Embassy:

I believe that the notion of foreign hostile forces interfering in internal affairs is nothing more than a conspiracy theory, as these individuals may not have actually attended similar activities at the US Embassy. Last year (2018), I signed up for a panel discussion organized by the United States Embassy as part of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. I noticed that several individuals in our LGBT community, including volunteers, were suggesting that we should avoid attending, claiming that the United States was using LGBT rights as a pretext to incite our gender

¹⁴⁵ Interview in Beijing, May 9, 2019

and sexual minority group against the government. I found these claims absurd and filled with conspiracy theories. I made it clear that I was determined to attend, and I had already registered. Some people from our LGBT community kept asking me, wanting to know if the United States had made any provocative statements during the event. Many individuals, including those within our LGBT community, have been influenced by our patriotic education to the point of developing delusions of persecution, believing that any action by a foreign government in China must have hidden motives. They assume that our participation in events organized by foreign entities automatically implies collaboration with foreign hostile forces. However, my attendance at the event organized by the US Embassy was a very ordinary sharing and networking session, similar to the events we regularly organize within our LGBT group. The only difference was the venue being within the US Embassy. I had heard the stories shared by the guest speakers several times before. Furthermore, the duration of the sharing session organized by the US Embassy was even shorter compared to our own events. In addition to the activities at the US Embassy, I have also attended events organized by the Dutch Embassy, Danish Embassy, and other foreign embassies. I was even invited as a guest speaker by the Dutch Embassy. If you have attended such sharing sessions, you would realize that they are not sensitive in nature.¹⁴⁶

Lastly, the LGBT Liberal group criticizes the Pink Gays. One 32-year-old lesbian interviewee (C8) strongly condemns the Pink Gays and refers to them as “fools” for embracing a “false sense of pride.”¹⁴⁷ Another gay interviewee (C11) views the Pink Gays as a significant detriment that contributes to internal divisions within the LGBT movement. The Liberal group attributes the formation of the Pink Gay group to the government’s patriotic education system and its influence in indoctrinating the general public. For instance, a 22-year-old queer interviewee (C31) emphasizes that this system of patriotic education compels the Pink Gays, as oppressed individuals, to actively defend the government that oppresses them:

The patriotism in China is indeed highly effective, as evidenced by the Pink Gay group. The discourse of patriotism transforms the oppressive government into a savior in the minds of the oppressed, leading the Pink Gays to express gratitude towards their oppressors. Within the perception of the Pink Gays, they believe that their current ability to live a comfortable and ostensibly happy life, including access to sufficient food and clothing, is all bestowed upon them by the Communist Party and the state. It is incredibly ironic that individuals who are themselves marginalized and oppressed would cheer for their own executioners. One cannot help but wonder if they would continue to cheer when the blade of power is placed at their own necks.

¹⁴⁶ Interview in Beijing, May 9, 2019

¹⁴⁷ Interview in Lanzhou, March 28, 2019

The Pink Gays aspire to become subjects of the government's united front efforts and align themselves with the government. However, I consider this aspiration to be impractical. The gender and sexual values of the Communist Party inevitably clash with the principles of equality, freedom, and diversity for sexual minorities. For instance, the CEO of a Chinese gay dating app stated during a panel discussion that the LGBT community in China should align themselves with the Chinese government and seek its recognition, with the best outcome being assimilation into the government's framework. I find this approach towards achieving equality to be unrealistic and a complete disregard for the fact that the government itself is an oppressor, akin to the "elephant in the room." In other words, the government and the system that perpetuates rights violations are the primary factors contributing to discrimination against the LGBT community. Embracing the very system that oppresses us contradicts our values of equality and the advocacy for our rights.¹⁴⁸

Similarly, another 22-year-old gay interviewee (C30) also emphasizes the indoctrination effect of the patriotic education system on Pink Gays:

In the current patriotic education system, the presence of Pink Gays who believe that the LGBT community should silently accept their status as gender and sexual minorities, refraining from causing any disturbance to the country, can indeed be observed. Their perspective aligns with that of heterosexual individuals holding homophobic attitudes. They exhibit indifference or even hostility towards LGBT rights. This phenomenon exemplifies the effectiveness of our country's patriotic education, as Pink Gays wholeheartedly embrace and identify with the prevailing patriotic discourses. They do not perceive themselves as victims of brainwashing. On the contrary, they perceive activists like us, who advocate for equality, as individuals manipulated by foreign forces, branding us as mere puppets of capitalism. They argue that we, as equality advocates, lack patriotism since the country nurtures us, yet we engage in actions that they perceive as betraying the nation by consistently opposing the government and the Chinese Communist Party. From their perspective, our advocacy for LGBT rights is tantamount to "biting the hand that feeds us" and colluding with foreign forces to interfere in domestic affairs.¹⁴⁹

Overall, the Liberal group, as a community that aligns with progressive values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights, maintains a critical stance regarding Chinese nationalism. They reject the state's utilization of national distinctiveness and traditional culture as justifications for denying the rights of gender and sexual minorities. Furthermore, they oppose xenophobic discourse of foreign hostile forces. Additionally, they critique both nationalists and

¹⁴⁸ Interview in Beijing, May 14, 2019

¹⁴⁹ Interview in Beijing, May 13, 2019

Pink Gays within the LGBT community. Consequently, Chinese nationalism represents a significant impediment to the progress of the LGBT movement in China for Liberal groups.

(4) Support for Foreign Aid

Aligning with their opposition to the discourse surrounding foreign hostile forces, 11 out of 20 LGBT Liberals express endorsement, support, and appreciation for foreign assistance in addressing Chinese LGBT issues. From the perspective of these LGBT Liberal individuals, the Chinese LGBT movement not only relies on adopting LGBT equality concepts from Western societies but also necessitates direct financial support from abroad. As articulated by a 22-year-old queer interviewee (C31), theories, concepts, and values related to LGBT equality have been originally developed by Western countries and subsequently adopted and applied by Chinese intellectuals, LGBT activists, and public opinion leaders. Likewise, a 23-year-old gay volunteer (C9) from NGO_W engaged in HIV prevention underscores the ongoing process of learning and incorporating more advanced HIV prevention experiences, particularly in the realm of psychological intervention, from Western contexts. Furthermore, he underscores the urgent need for foreign funding to support Chinese LGBT organizations, given the substantial difficulty and limitations associated with raising funds domestically for LGBT equality issues in China:

I believe that without foreign funding, the operation of many LGBT organizations would be extremely difficult. The HIV prevention organization I volunteer for, for example, was initially established with funding from the United States. Especially now, with restrictions on accepting funds from foreign foundations, many LGBT organizations have resorted to internal fundraising within the LGBT community. However, the amount of money raised is limited, resulting in a financial shortage for these LGBT organizations. HIV prevention organizations, on the other hand, have relatively better prospects as local Centers for Disease Control (CDC) provide some funding for relevant HIV prevention projects. However, this also means that these HIV organizations face increased government intervention.

Furthermore, the leader of our HIV organization continues to attend conferences in the United States in order to maintain connections with the international community. I

believe that this kind of international exchange is essential because we need to learn from more developed HIV prevention practices. For instance, there is a lack of understanding among China's gay community regarding knowledge about Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), which has already been widely promoted in some more progressive countries for many years.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, according to LGBT Liberals, it is imperative to exert pressure on China regarding LGBT issues by utilizing the mechanisms available within the United Nations human rights system. As an illustration, a 33-year-old gay interviewee (C23) expresses the viewpoint that leveraging the UN platform to apply pressure on the Chinese government regarding LGBT issues, at the very least, compels the government to make a statement. Without inquiries and recommendations from other countries and international organizations on LGBT matters in China, he asserts that the Chinese government would not even address these concerns.

To justify the legitimacy, rationality, and necessity of international support, LGBT Liberals make efforts to remove the stigma surrounding foreign assistance for the Chinese LGBT community. For instance, the gay interviewee C23 employs an analogy to argue that the provision of foreign support to the Chinese LGBT community is equitable and morally correct:

Some online nationalists often claim that foreign forces are interfering in China's internal affairs. If we define LGBT rights as an aspect of China's internal affairs and then exploit the pretext of internal affairs to suppress gender and sexual minority groups within the country, I am in favor of foreign intervention in internal affairs. When the state oppresses and targets our LGBT community, why should we not seek help from the international community? The reasoning is straightforward: the experiences of our gender and sexual minority community resemble domestic violence perpetrated by the state. The abuser physically assaults and humiliates family members, and when neighbors intervene to mediate and issue warnings, it is undoubtedly a well-intentioned form of support. Should we view the external intervention of neighbors as something negative? Those who suffer from domestic violence undoubtedly require similar external support, and even more of it, to mitigate the abuse. Comparing our situation as a gender and sexual minority community, our fundamental rights have been stripped away, making it natural for us to seek external support to critique and halt the perpetrators. If external support, particularly from abroad, remains indifferent to our LGBT human rights situation, I find it more

¹⁵⁰ Interview in Lanzhou, March 29, 2019

terrifying. Indifference is tantamount to turning a blind eye to domestic violence, leaving the victims in even greater peril.¹⁵¹

Another gay volunteer (C37) associated with NGO_X adopts a similar approach to challenge the stigma associated with foreign support for the Chinese LGBT community:

During one of the Rainbow Embrace events we organized, we faced criticism from many individuals who claimed that we had foreign support. However, I question the significance of foreign funding behind our LGBT advocacy. Considering the discrimination our community experiences, shouldn't we receive support? The purpose of foreign support for Chinese LGBT advocacy is to enhance public understanding of the LGBT community, rather than endorsing the destruction of cultural landmarks like the Forbidden City. Moreover, some argue online that such street advocacy disrupts traffic order. If congestion occurs, we can easily address it by having traffic police maintain order in the vicinity of the event since it falls within their responsibilities. In my opinion, even if there is support from foreign governments or corporations, it should not be regarded as an overly sensitive matter. Foreign financial support is widespread, including foreign investments in factory construction and contributions to China's economic development. Many HIV prevention funds in the past were also provided by foreign governments or foundations. Therefore, foreign support for the LGBT community should not be stigmatized as a malevolent force.¹⁵²

Overall, the LGBT Liberal group is characterized by its strong critical stance. They criticize the conservative heterosexual social environment in China, the discriminatory policies of the Chinese government towards the LGBT community, and the obstacles posed by Chinese nationalism. Additionally, they endorse universal values and, therefore, identify more strongly with the concepts of LGBT equality, including fairness, freedom, and diversity. Consequently, they also endorse and appreciate foreign support for the Chinese LGBT community and strive to destigmatize such support. Having outlined these key characteristics of the LGBT Liberal group, I now turn to exploration of how members of this Liberal group detach themselves from Chinese Nationalism as part of their response to it.

¹⁵¹ Interview in Chengdu, April 22, 2019

¹⁵² Interview in Shanghai, June 3, 2019

6.1.2 Detachment from Chinese Nationalism

In response to the relationship between the marginalization of the LGBT community and the government-sponsored macho nationalism, the Pink Gay community has employed intricate rationalization strategies to justify their pro-regime patriotism, as expounded upon in Chapter 5. In contrast, the LGBT Liberal group exhibits a distinct recognition of the inherent conflicts and contradictions between Chinese nationalism and the concerns of marginalized sexual minority groups. As examined in the preceding section 6.1.1, Chinese LGBT Liberals approach this conflict from a critical perspective. In other words, the propaganda of Chinese nationalism fails to convert LGBT Liberals into pro-regime patriots; rather, Chinese LGBT Liberals actively engage in detachment from Chinese nationalism. In this section, the focus will be on examining how Chinese LGBT Liberals detach themselves from Chinese nationalism. By analyzing 20 interviews, three primary methods employed by LGBT Liberals to detach themselves from Chinese nationalism have been identified: (1) coupling LGBT suffering with the Chinese state, (2) upward comparison, and (3) decoupling “love for the country” from Chinese state-sponsored patriotism.

(1) Coupling LGBT Suffering with the Chinese State

The coupling strategy adopted by Chinese LGBT Liberals, which involves connecting discrimination against the LGBT community with the Chinese state, stands in direct contrast to the decoupling strategy employed by Pink Gays. Pink Gays aim to separate individual hardships from the broader social and political structures in China, using this approach to defend the government’s lack of action in protecting LGBT rights. In contrast, the coupling strategy of Chinese LGBT Liberals, which associates LGBT suffering with state power, dismantles the

foundation of Pink Gays' and other nationalists' justifications for their pro-regime stance. Specifically, my analysis reveals that by coupling Chinese LGBT suffering with (1) the absence of protection, (2) public erasure, and (3) active suppression/harassment perpetrated by the Chinese state, LGBT Liberals are motivated to challenge the prevailing narratives of Chinese nationalism.

(i) Coupling LGBT Individual Suffering with the Absence of Protection by the Chinese State

Experiences of discrimination and even persecution faced by Chinese LGBT individuals have heightened the awareness of LGBT Liberal individuals regarding the prevalent macho nationalism (Mosse 1996) in mainstream Chinese society. Specifically, under this heterosexual system, the entire social structure does not protect the freedom of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics for LGBT individuals. For example, among the individuals I interviewed, there was an extreme case of a 23-year-old transgender woman (C32) who, after enduring instances of domestic violence, police brutality, and sexual assault, developed a strong aversion to the overarching patriotic narrative. She described the various forms of gender-based violence she had experienced in the following manner:

Around the age of 16, I was expelled from my parents' home due to my transgender identity. Prior to being expelled, my mother, who is a doctor, used to wake up in the middle of the night to draw my blood and test my hormone levels and chromosomes. She would then return with the evidence of my chromosomes and repeatedly brainwash me, trying to make me believe that I was male. I didn't know how to cope with this situation, so I tried drinking more water to dilute my hormone levels, but it didn't have a significant effect. My mother was disgusted by me wearing feminine clothing and ultimately kicked me out of the house. Without the financial support of my parents, I couldn't continue my education.

Even after leaving home, my mother continued to send testosterone medication to me when she learned my address, hoping to increase my male hormone levels. She continuously tried different methods to change me. I attempted to report this to the police,

but it proved to be futile. Instead, the police sided with my parents and saw it as an opportunity to educate me, reinforcing the idea that children should listen to their parents. In other words, the police were incapable of protecting transgender individuals like us.

After being expelled from home, and being young and unable to find a job, I fell into the trap of a sexual predator. I became a victim of sexual assault by this pervert. The criminal held onto my identification card, preventing me from leaving. I knew it was a crime, but I didn't dare to report it out of fear that I would be sent back home or to a psychiatric hospital. Later, while chatting with other transgender women, I learned that there were dozens of them who had also been sexually assaulted by this same pervert, but I couldn't verify the authenticity of their stories. Eventually, I managed to escape from that abusive environment. It was a horrific time, and I choose to selectively forget the most detailed aspects of it.¹⁵³

After experiencing these difficulties, this transgender woman (C32) criticized the police system, family culture, and patriotic narratives in China:

The police in China still adhere to the notions of “a virtuous government official should not interfere in family affairs” or “family harmony leads to social prosperity,” forcibly fitting abusive parents and victimized children under the concept of family. However, when it comes to the question of whether children are subjected to domestic violence by their parents, the police show no concern whatsoever. Looking at the legal judgments across China, there are hardly any successful cases where parental custody rights have been revoked through litigation. What the police do is, once a child runs away from home and the parents report it, the police apprehend the child and force them back into the violent household. I have come into contact with many transgender women, and as a group, our overall educational attainment is not very high. This is because many of us have had experiences similar to mine, being expelled by our parents at a young age and unable to continue schooling. Finding employment is also challenging for us. Consequently, our community has an alarmingly high suicide rate as some individuals feel they cannot go on. Our voices are never truly heard, as our WeChat groups and Weibo accounts are frequently deleted.

Therefore, I strongly oppose the online patriotic youth and their patriotic behavior. I detest their statements such as “In this life, no regrets joining the Chinese nation; in the next life, I'll join the Chinese family again.” If there were indeed a next life, I truly wouldn't want to be born in China. The rhetoric about “foreign forces” on the internet is even more nonsensical. The logic employed by those nationalists in approaching issues is similar to that of the Chinese police, both maintaining strong, outdated notions of tribalism and traditional family values. They all believe in “a virtuous government official should not interfere in family affairs,” insisting that internal conflicts within a family should be resolved by the family itself without any external intervention, even if a person within that family or clan is experiencing violence. Furthermore, they uphold the outdated concept of a patriarchal society, where it is considered justified for a parent to physically discipline their child. These nationalist individuals always curse foreign forces, and their logic is similar because they view China as a large clan,

¹⁵³ Interviewed in Beijing, May 20, 2019

believing that internal matters should be dealt with by the Chinese people themselves, even if internal violence is being inflicted upon gender and sexual minority groups, especially our transgender community, through social violence, domestic abuse, and societal discrimination. They argue that we should not accept external assistance. So, they expect us to endure their mistreatment, not to respond or fight back. Thus, based on my own experiences, I cannot find any reason to believe in the rhetoric of nationalism; nationalism is simply too foolish.¹⁵⁴

Similarly, a 26-year-old lesbian individual (C17) conveyed her disappointment towards the entire police system and the government-promoted patriotism because of her personal experience with domestic violence:

Our family has been plagued by domestic violence since my childhood. My mother endured frequent acts of violence from my father, and my sister and I were also victims of his abuse. The underlying cause of this domestic violence stemmed from my grandmother and father's disdain for my mother's inability to bear a son. In this patriarchal society, the failure to produce a male heir leads to discrimination and further domestic violence. It is the responsibility of the state to intervene and address cases of domestic violence. However, what were the outcomes of our attempts to seek help? We reported these incidents to the police, but they dismissed them as internal family matters. They only made my father write a letter of guarantee, promising not to engage in violence again, while urging us to maintain a peaceful atmosphere at home. Consequently, my father faced no consequences and continued his abusive behavior.

Given the circumstances within my family, I am even more apprehensive about disclosing my homosexuality to them. Now that I am financially independent, I have no desire to return home. Participating in LGBT activities and being among fellow lesbians and gays brings me immense joy. As a result, I am profoundly disappointed in this country. While we claim to be a society governed by the rule of law, the lenient stance on domestic violence within our legal system is disheartening. I have lost hope that this country will progress further in terms of its values. Since the state does not prioritize my well-being, I will reciprocate by disregarding its concerns. If the government fails to support us, then I will not espouse patriotism or loyalty to the government.¹⁵⁵

Additionally, a 33-year-old gay activist (C10) associated with NGO_X, provides further evidence from their activist perspective that highlights the inadequate protection of LGBT rights by the Chinese government. According to this volunteer (C10), targeted conversion therapy continues to persist in China, intensifying the challenges faced by sexual minority groups. To

¹⁵⁴ Interviewed in Beijing, May 20, 2019

¹⁵⁵ Interviewed in Chengdu, April 19, 2019

their dismay, when they reported instances of conversion therapy to government authorities, no action was taken to close these institutions. Notably, doctors, including the infamous Yang Yongxin in China, who engage in conversion therapy, have not faced any form of punishment.

These experiences have left this volunteer deeply dissatisfied with the government:

I have been providing coming-out counseling for several years and have witnessed numerous cases of LGBT children experiencing domestic violence. For example, when parents do not accept their child's sexual orientation, they may take the child to hospitals for treatment, seeking to reverse their sexual orientation with the assistance of unscrupulous medical institutions and homophobic doctors. In other cases, parents who refuse to accept their child's sexual orientation believe that the child has been influenced by negative elements in society, leading them to restrict the child's personal freedom. Persecution of sexual minority children of this nature is prevalent among Chinese parents. We have also made efforts to rescue several similar LGBT children.

Additionally, we compile lists of homophobic hospitals and doctors to expose their practices. Cases such as the use of electric shock therapy by Yang Yongxin in previous years for treating internet addiction in adolescents or attempting to change their sexual orientation have been reported. We contacted the local police to report Yang Yongxin and his hospital. However, the police responded by saying, "Sorry, we cannot handle this case; you need to contact the local education bureau." I made the call to report Yang Yongxin precisely to have the police contact the local education bureau. Otherwise, why would I bother making the call? This incident initially required the police to address it directly, but they shifted the responsibility to the education bureau. Subsequently, we called the local education bureau and explained the situation regarding Yang Yongxin. The response we received from the education bureau was that they had received numerous similar complaints and needed time to verify the information. I was extremely frustrated because there was an abundance of evidence, yet they simply turned a blind eye, whether it was the police or the education authorities. I truly wanted to express my anger at their irresponsibility.

Therefore, changing this unfriendly society is exceedingly difficult. China is a collectivist society where a child's life is not their own but rather granted by their parents, which means they must comply with their parents' wishes. Engaging in a lifestyle that mainstream heterosexual society does not approve of, such as being homosexual, is considered deviant. Nonconformity to the majority results in discrimination. To make matters worse, the state shows no concern for our community, and all our endeavors to fight for our rights are futile.¹⁵⁶

In summary, LGBT Liberals tend to assert that the absence of protective policies by the Chinese government for the LGBT community is a significant factor contributing to LGBT

¹⁵⁶ Interviewed in Chengdu, April 4, 2019

suffering. Consequently, from their perspective, the Chinese government's demand for patriotism, love for the government, and allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party from the LGBT community, while failing to safeguard their interests, reveals internal inconsistencies and inherent conflicts. This ultimately leads to the rejection of state-led Chinese nationalism by LGBT Liberals.

(ii) Coupling the Silencing of LGBT Discourse with the State's Deliberate Public Erasure

In addition to linking the challenges faced by the LGBT community with the lack of government protection, the coupling of silencing LGBT discourse with the state's deliberate public erasure serves as a crucial avenue for LGBT Liberals to detach themselves from Chinese nationalism. During my interviews, Liberal respondents frequently emphasized the following instances related to the Chinese LGBT community: the National Radio and Television Administration's (NRTA) classification of homosexuality as a perversion in 2017, Weibo's categorization of homosexual content alongside pornography for deletion in 2018, and the banning of lesbian-related topics on Weibo in 2019. These instances of state crackdown on the LGBT community contradict the state's claims of non-discrimination against homosexuality, thus shedding light on the marginalized position of the LGBT community within the framework of Chinese national identity. For instance, a 26-year-old gay interviewee (C37) critically examines and detaches his sense of national affiliation with China by comparing the removal of homosexual content by Weibo in 2018, the statements made by the state-affiliated media outlet People's Daily, and China's positions on LGBT issues expressed at the United Nations:

Last year (2018), Weibo's cleanup of homosexual content sparked the "I am homosexual" movement. The strong backlash it generated compelled People's Daily to publish a commentary clarifying that the state does not discriminate against the LGBT community. To me, the statements made by People's Daily were full of loopholes and contradictions. By comparing what the government says and what it actually does, the contradictions between the two become evident, revealing a double standard where the

government presents one image publicly while acting differently behind the scenes. In reality, the government discriminates against the LGBT community. I even believe that Weibo's censorship of homosexuality is done at the government's behest. People's Daily's stance may seem supportive of homosexuality, but its purpose is not genuinely to support our community. It is merely a means to appease public anger online. This is how our government operates, using a combination of rewards and punishments. Just think about it, as a commercial company, why would Weibo willingly offend its large pink market? Therefore, if there were no government requirements, Weibo would not censor the LGBT community. This can only mean that the Chinese government simply dislikes gender and sexual minorities and belittles and discriminates against us. Furthermore, the Chinese government presents a different facade to foreigners compared to what it does domestically. In its speeches at the United Nations, it eloquently claims that China does not discriminate against homosexuality. However, when foreign representatives suggest same-sex marriage, the Chinese government argues that it goes against traditional culture. Isn't this contradictory?

So, as you can see, this year another wave of censorship emerged, resulting in the banning of lesbian-related topics on Weibo. However, due to the previous deletion of several important LGBT opinion leaders' accounts by Weibo, launching another anti-discrimination movement has become challenging, and the voices of resistance have weakened significantly. We are even not allowed to be seen by the public, not to mention the marriage rights, reproductive rights, and adoption rights for the LGBT community. These are tangible and legitimate rights. Faced with the state's suppression of our community, how can we possibly like or trust the government? It is natural for us to feel disillusioned. As a Chinese citizen, why don't I have the right to enjoy legal rights? In that case, why should I still love this country?¹⁵⁷

Furthermore, during my interviews, two gay participants (C16 and C26) provided insights into the censorship mechanisms employed by Weibo and Tencent, the two largest internet platforms in China, as a means to highlight the discriminatory practices of the state towards gender and sexual minorities. For example, the interviewee C16 shared that his partner worked in video review at Tencent, where he assessed videos uploaded by Chinese content creators to determine their suitability for the Tencent platform. On a specific occasion, his partner received a notification from a higher-level government regulatory body, namely the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA), explicitly instructing the removal of homosexual content. This incident angered his partner as, being gay himself, he was compelled

¹⁵⁷ Interviewed in Shanghai, June 3, 2019

to eliminate elements pertaining to homosexuality. Notably, these particular notifications are not publicly accessible, preventing the general public from accessing the censorship documents issued by the government. Similarly, the other gay interviewee C26 had previously interned at Weibo. He reported that the internal censorship mechanisms at Weibo operate in the following manner: Government entities responsible for media supervision, such as the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA), exert pressure on Weibo, either through verbal directives or internal documents, to request the removal of undesirable content in accordance with the government's preferences, including content related to homosexuality. Consequently, Weibo is obliged to engage in self-censorship and content purging based on the instructions received from government authorities.

Drawing from the insights provided by these two interviewees regarding the specific processes of government censorship targeting homosexuality, both interviewees (C16 and C26) arrive at a shared conclusion that the Chinese government and society discriminate against individuals with a homosexual orientation. As a result, they detach themselves from the prevailing narratives of Chinese nationalism and patriotism. Expressing this sentiment, the interviewee C16 stated,

China's social system, including the establishment of censorship mechanisms, functions as a top-down structure in which subordinate levels adhere to commands from higher levels. Even commercial internet platforms have effectively transformed into propaganda departments, directly complying with government directives. As ordinary citizens, particularly those belonging to marginalized gender and sexual minorities, we find ourselves at the bottom, with the state exhibiting a lack of concern for our rights. Given the state's neglect and oppression targeting our community, it is only natural for us to harbor dissatisfaction with the government. In such circumstances, the expectation for us to demonstrate love for our country is inherently contradictory. However, many individuals solely criticize us for being unpatriotic without recognizing the extent of government discrimination we face.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Interviewed in Chengdu, April 18, 2019

For LGBT Liberals, the aspiration to enhance LGBT visibility clashes with the deliberate public erasure implemented by the Chinese state. The restricted space for LGBT public discourses enforced by the Chinese government exacerbates the skepticism and disillusionment of LGBT Liberals regarding the government's propaganda of Chinese patriotism.

(iii) Coupling Challenges of LGBT Activism with State's Active Suppression/Harassment

Chinese liberal activists, by engaging directly with state power through their advocacy for LGBT rights, experience firsthand the government's scrutiny and pressure. This interaction subsequently contributes to the detachment from the Chinese nationalist narrative. In my interviews, 8 LGBT Liberal activists possess a keen awareness that China operates under an authoritarian regime, which signifies that “any form of LGBT advocacy, ranging from more radical street protests to policy advocacy or more moderate community support, is something the state does not want to happen.”¹⁵⁹ In essence, while the Chinese government proclaims that Chinese citizens have the freedom to assemble and protest, these rights hold a nominal status, as the state actively discourages its citizens from participating in such activities. For example, a 22-year-old gay activist (C30) from NGO_T involved in legal and policy advocacy articulates the contradiction between China's authoritarian system and LGBT advocacy in the following manner:

Because China is not a democratic country, the members of the National People's Congress (NPC) do not truly represent the voice of the people. For instance, we hope to advocate for government legislation on certain critical issues, such as transgender healthcare coverage, LGBT campus bullying and violence, same-sex marriage, and so on. We aspire for the NPC members to promote bills in these areas, but it is challenging to lobby them to accept our recommendations. Thus far, the most influential proposal in the LGBT context has been Li Yinhe's same-sex marriage bill, which was introduced several years ago. Subsequently, there has been a dearth of NPC proposals on LGBT issues. Despite our efforts to gather substantial evidence and attempt to influence some NPC

¹⁵⁹ Interviewed in Beijing, May 13, 2019

members, the impact has been limited. After all, NPC members are not elected by us, and even the more progressive representatives must tread carefully when directly addressing the concerns of the LGBT community. For instance, we may desire to prohibit bullying and violence against LGBT individuals on campuses, but for them, mentioning LGBT issues directly could be seen as contentious since these topics remain sensitive. Therefore, we must frame our proposals as a general prohibition on campus bullying to achieve any progress.¹⁶⁰

For Liberal LGBT activists, the situation worsens when they are subjected to police interrogations and surveillance by national security, which poses a threat to their personal safety. NGO_M (pseudonym), a local LGBT organization, and its founder MX (pseudonym), serve as typical examples that are widely recognized within the Chinese LGBT community. According to a gay activist (C10), MX received a police warning following his Speak Out campaign in 2015, which involved advocating through public speaking. Subsequently, when MX and his team conducted similar advocacy in Xi'an, they were once again taken to the police station for interrogation. As a result, the Speak Out series of advocacy activities was permanently discontinued. In 2018, the police also shut down MX's fundraising event. In addition, local LGBT activists face significant disadvantages when it comes to their interactions with the government or police. Faced with direct pressure and surveillance from the state, Liberal LGBT activists argue that it is contradictory and ironic to demonstrate patriotism. According to this gay activist (C10), "We must comply with whatever the police say, or else we cannot organize any future activities. ... So, what I feel more is fear rather than patriotism."¹⁶¹

Another typical case is exemplified by a queer activist (referred to as C31) who has previously organized campus LGBT advocacy and faced pressure from the university administration. The justification provided by the university administration, citing "foreign forces," has further eroded their belief in state-sponsored patriotism:

¹⁶⁰ Interviewed in Beijing, May 13, 2019

¹⁶¹ Interviewed in Chengdu, April 4, 2019

I have organized activities on our campus for the International Day Against Homophobia, such as displaying rainbow flags and coordinating letter-writing campaigns to address homophobic teachers. Additionally, I have arranged LGBT film screenings. However, I encountered pressure from the school administration. They went as far as contacting my parents, alleging that I had been influenced by foreign forces and urging them to exert pressure on me to cease organizing similar LGBT advocacy activities. Previously, I believed that extreme nationalist rhetoric like “foreign forces interfering in our internal affairs” or “the imperialisms’ wild ambition of destroying us does not disappear yet” was confined to online platforms. Yet, in reality, “foreign forces” has become a justification employed by government authorities to suppress social movements. Consequently, after experiencing this pressure, it is difficult for my sense of national identity not to be affected. On one hand, the government demands patriotism from us, while on the other hand, they stifle our community. How can I place trust in this narrative of patriotism?

Furthermore, the government has significantly restricted the space for social movements. As an example, several LGBT saunas in Taiyuan have been compelled to close due to police interference. It is widely recognized that the primary obstacle to advancing LGBT rights in China emanates from the government. Presently, I harbor concerns that we may potentially witness a situation akin to Russia, where homophobia is rampant, and the LGBT community becomes a scapegoat, deflecting public dissatisfaction and anger and diverting attention from pressing social issues.¹⁶²

In summary, by coupling LGBT individual suffering with the lack of protection by the Chinese state, the silencing of LGBT discourse with the deliberate public erasure by the state, and the challenges faced by LGBT activism due to the state’s active suppression and harassment, Chinese LGBT Liberal groups recognize the existence of embedded power structures within the overarching narrative of nationalism and patriotism. They also acknowledge the exclusion and marginalization of the LGBT community within this patriotism narrative. Consequently, Chinese LGBT Liberals undergo a significant erosion of their sense of identification with the Chinese state and patriotism.

(2) Upward Comparison

Nationalistic beliefs are often fostered through intergroup comparisons with other nations (Mummendey, Klink and Brown 2001), particularly employing strategies of outgroup derogation

¹⁶² Interview in Beijing, May 14, 2019

(Viki and Calitri 2008). For instance, in Chapter 5, I explore the utilization of downward comparison as a form of outgroup derogation by Pink Gays to rationalize their patriotic sentiments and pro-regime stance. Conversely, LGBT Liberals who oppose Chinese nationalism and reject the downward comparison utilized by Pink Gays adopt an alternative strategy known as upward comparison, which serves as an effective means for LGBT Liberals to detach themselves from Chinese nationalism. Specifically, my analysis reveals that Chinese LGBT Liberals utilize the strategy of upward comparison to shed light on the limitations, biases, and negative consequences associated with extreme or exclusionary forms of Chinese nationalism. This strategy involves comparing Chinese nationalist ideals and beliefs with more inclusive, diverse, or globally cooperative perspectives found in other countries. Through this approach, Chinese LGBT Liberals aim to highlight the shortcomings of Chinese nationalism and advocate for a more inclusive and open-minded understanding of national identity.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that Chinese LGBT Liberals tend to engage in upward comparison with countries that are more supportive of LGBT rights. However, they also recognize that there are societies around the world that are more conservative than China in terms of LGBT issues. Nevertheless, for Liberals, downward comparison can only provide a sense of “consolation”¹⁶³ and does not effectively contribute to the advancement of LGBT rights in China. For instance, during an interview, a 39-year-old gay interviewee (C15) drew a comparison between China and countries that exhibit even more adverse conditions for LGBT rights. However, he emphasized that such comparisons are not helpful for advancing LGBT rights:

There are indeed countries in the world that are more conservative than China when it comes to LGBT issues. For example, there has been recent news that Brunei is planning to reinstate stoning as a punishment for homosexuality, and several Middle Eastern

¹⁶³ Interviewed in Beijing, May 14, 2019

countries have a long history of persecuting the LGBT community. However, we should not engage in downward comparison, and we certainly should not look to backward cultures and customs as a source of learning. Any progressive nation aims to move towards a more civilized direction rather than regress towards conservatism, don't you agree? Therefore, we should not take pride in the fact that some countries and regions continue to persecute individuals based on their sexual orientation. We should not feel fortunate simply because in China, our government does not systematically persecute sexual minority groups or imprison us. Such downward comparison is misguided. When compared to developed and more inclusive countries, we still have a long way to go.¹⁶⁴

In terms of specific choices for upward comparison, the West, particularly the United States, serves as one of the most important reference points. LGBT Liberals experience a contrast between their admiration for the progress of LGBT rights in Western societies and their disappointment with the conservative social atmosphere and national policies in China. This contrast to some extent undermines their sense of patriotism and national pride. For instance, during an upward comparison, a 23-year-old gay interviewee (C9) perceives the United States as a symbol of sexual openness and freedom, positioning it as a “vanguard.” Simultaneously, he juxtaposes the plight of the LGBT community in China with a state of “oppressive darkness.” In his own words,

When I see pride parades in foreign countries online, I genuinely envy them for being able to live openly and bravely in the sunlight. Although I haven't been to the United States, I am aware of their sexual liberation movement, and my impression of the United States is that it embodies sexual openness and has become a symbol of freedom. In comparison, LGBT individuals in China can only exist in the shadows.¹⁶⁵

Another typical case highlighting the United States as a reference point for upward comparison comes from a gay interviewee C15. Specifically, this interviewee (C15) attended the San Francisco Pride Parade in 2016 and participated in volunteer training at the LGBT Center in Los Angeles in 2018. Through these experiences, he made a similar upward comparison, which led to a sense of frustration regarding China's inadequate efforts to protect LGBT rights:

¹⁶⁴ Interviewed in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

¹⁶⁵ Interviewed in Lanzhou, March 29, 2019

In 2016, I attended the Pride Parade in the United States, and I felt that their pride parade had moved beyond the stage of opposing government restrictions and instead had transformed into a large celebration, full of joy and excitement. The feeling of freely enjoying life in the sunlight made me think it was truly fantastic. Their society's inclusiveness was also evident, with numerous groups and various commercial sponsors participating in the parade. They would hug passersby and distribute various small gifts along the way. I also received many souvenirs. Furthermore, in 2018, as a volunteer, I went to the LA LGBT Center to receive training where they introduced us to the history of the gay rights movement in the United States, which was truly inspiring. The way the Los Angeles LGBT Center operates, both in terms of their equality values and operational methods, is more advanced than ours. Moreover, they receive government support, and a significant number of their programs are government-funded services. Additionally, we visited a well-known Chinese gay couple in the local area. Both of them were university professors and belonged to the intellectual elite. We were curious whether their children would face discrimination in the United States due to having two dads. They told us that the gay rights movement in the United States has developed for many years, and now in American schools, they refer to parents as "parent 1" and "parent 2" instead of "mom" and "dad." They try their best to eliminate discrimination in these details. After I visited the United States and witnessed their culture's acceptance of diversity, I felt that these were the aspects that a country should be proud of.

Actually, we also have a similar event called the Rainbow Run, which is associated with a marathon. During registration for the marathon, we gather individuals from gender and sexual minority groups to form a contingent that runs together with the rest of the participants. We may wave rainbow flags along the way. However, even this type of rainbow run is no longer allowed to wave rainbow flags because in some areas, the rainbow runs have faced police intervention. Thus, this type of street advocacy is no longer permitted. Advocating for LGBT rights in China is challenging. Our country's gender and sexual minority community has never experienced the democratic and free atmosphere similar to that of the United States. We live in a repressed state. In such a society, we can hardly change anything. Any advocacy for LGBT rights is suppressed, and even organizers are questioned by the police. Therefore, we feel frustrated and believe that seeing a pride parade or same-sex marriage in our lifetime is highly unlikely.¹⁶⁶

Aside from employing the West as a reference object, I have also identified Taiwan as another comparative object utilized by LGBT Liberals. Sharing similar culture, Taiwan's advancements in addressing LGBT issues creates a substantial psychological contrast for LGBT Liberals residing in mainland China. For instance, a 22-year-old gay student interviewee (C26), who embarked on an exchange program to Taiwan in 2018 and resided there for a year, actively

¹⁶⁶ Interviewed in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

participated in Taiwan's Pride Parade. Employing the framework of upward comparison, he observed a considerable disparity between the social consciousness and awareness of equal rights between the Chinese population and Taiwan, with the latter significantly surpassing the former in terms of progress:

During my one-year exchange program at a university in Taiwan, I had the opportunity to participate in Taiwan's Pride Parade and thoroughly enjoyed the vibrant atmosphere. It is evident that Taiwan exhibits greater tolerance towards the LGBT community compared to mainland China. I believe that Taiwan's experiences in advancing LGBT rights are highly valuable and serve as a progressive direction for us. For instance, their approach to LGBT rights covers a wide range of issues comprehensively and inclusively, including diverse family structures, gender expression, unconventional sexual preferences such as BDSM, and bodily autonomy, such as nude freedom. Moreover, I was particularly drawn to the freedom of assembly and nonviolent resistance in Taiwan. The political atmosphere in Taiwan is highly democratic and allows the LGBT community to freely monitor and question the government, even going as far as surrounding government institutions like the Legislative Yuan and Executive Yuan to exert pressure on the government. These forms of activism are common in Taiwan, ensuring the protection of LGBT human rights, which is both exhilarating and aspirational.

In contrast, on the mainland, we are still engrossed in discussions such as whether "effeminate" aesthetics should be criticized, whether men wearing feminine or gender-neutral clothing is considered peculiar, and whether the LGBT community needs to excel further to gain recognition and acceptance from the country and society at large. Therefore, I believe that Taiwan is far more advanced than us in terms of LGBT issues, and we are indeed lagging behind. Taiwan's LGBT community has achieved a certain degree of liberation, while LGBT individuals in mainland China continue to live in repression. Thus, I identify more with Taiwan's approach and their progress in LGBT rights. I believe that Taiwan represents a future direction for social and community development.

Therefore, when comparing the two, both being part of Chinese culture, it is disheartening to see that same-sex marriage is on the verge of legalization in Taiwan, while the Chinese government consistently rejects the issue of same-sex marriage, citing special national conditions and traditional Chinese culture as reasons for refusal. How can we not feel disappointed and disheartened by this stark contrast?¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, another 35-year-old lesbian interviewee (C8), upon conducting an upward comparison between Taiwan's legalization of same-sex marriage, articulated not only a feeling

¹⁶⁷ Interviewed in Beijing, May 9, 2019

of disappointment but also critically analyzed the nationalist discourse asserting that “Taiwan is an indivisible part of China”:

When I browse the news online, I often pay close attention to which countries have passed same-sex marriage laws. Witnessing an increasing number of countries legalizing same-sex marriage gives me a sense of progress in the world. These news stories provide strength and hope, filling me with a feeling of joy. I am deeply moved by these positive developments and feel hopeful about the future. However, when I turn my gaze back to China, I can't help but wonder when we will see the day when same-sex marriage is legalized. This stark contrast leaves me feeling profoundly disappointed as someone living in China.

Taiwan is on the verge of introducing a special law for same-sex marriage, and they hold pride parades every year. Comparing our situation to theirs, I feel frustrated. Although I have been taught since childhood that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China, I sometimes find myself contemplating the idea that perhaps Taiwan should pursue independence, considering the significant progress they have made.¹⁶⁸

The strategy of upward comparison empowers Chinese LGBT Liberals to critique the socially inhospitable environment and government policies towards LGBT individuals in China, contributing to the detachment from the state's official narrative of patriotism to a certain extent. Furthermore, the act of upward comparison undertaken by Chinese Liberals encompasses their aspirations and expectations for a more inclusive and LGBT-friendly China. They yearn for China to become a subject of comparison that aligns with their upward aspirations, similar to Western countries (such as the United States) or Taiwan, where LGBT rights, including the legalization of same-sex marriage, are protected, and where a free, open, and diverse LGBT environment thrives. Consequently, the act of upward comparison by Chinese LGBT Liberals serves not only to detach themselves from state-sponsored patriotism but also reflects their endeavor to reconstruct a more inclusive and open-minded understanding of national identity.

(3) Decoupling “Love for the Country” from State-Sponsored Patriotism

¹⁶⁸ Interviewed in Lanzhou, March 28, 2019

As discussed in previous sections, Chinese LGBT Liberals detach themselves from Chinese nationalism by associating LGBT suffering with the Chinese state's lack of protection, public erasure, and active suppression. Moreover, they challenge prevailing narratives of state-sponsored Chinese nationalism through the logic of upward comparison. Despite expressing criticism and discontent towards the LGBT-unfriendly social environment and government policies, most individuals within the Chinese LGBT Liberal community are unable and unwilling to completely sever their connection to their Chinese identity, but reject and distance themselves from the term "patriotism" because they consider it synonymous with nationalism in China—a tool employed by the Chinese authorities for ideological propaganda. As expressed by a queer activist (referred to as C31) who has previously organized campus LGBT advocacy:

In my perspective, patriotism is a tool used by the state to manipulate people's patriotic sentiments. Essentially, in China, loving the country means loving the government and the party. The government has distorted the concept by transforming people's affection for Chinese culture, our nation, or this land into love for the CCP and the government. In other words, patriotism essentially serves as a tool to legitimize the CCP's rule.¹⁶⁹

Indeed, there exist different perspectives regarding the distinction between patriotism and nationalism. Some scholars argue that there are significant differences between the two concepts. For instance, Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) propose that nationalism entails perceiving one's own nation as superior to others, whereas patriotism encompasses emotional attachments to the nation, such as love and pride. However, in the Chinese context, the distinction between patriotism and nationalism is often blurred in practice, and their meanings overlap to a great extent. As discussed by Bislev and Li, Chinese nationalism and patriotism are considered two sides of the same coin (2014: 30). The Chinese government has institutionalized patriotism as an ideological tool through state-sponsored campaigns, particularly after the Tiananmen Square

¹⁶⁹ Interview in Beijing, May 14, 2019

Incident in 1989 (Zhao 2004). This has led to the appropriation of patriotism by the Chinese government to promote its approved values and suppress Western democratic ideals, thereby legitimizing the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and justifying exclusionary sentiments within Chinese society (Bislev & Li 2014). A recent example of such appropriation can be seen in the response of Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying in 2021, who addressed the criticism and boycott of H&M¹⁷⁰ by Chinese netizens. Hua emphasized that the resistance against H&M by the Chinese people is a reflection of their commitment to national honor and dignity, describing it as a “plain form of patriotism” (CCTV 2021). The consistent practice of the Chinese government appropriating patriotism as an ideological tool contributes to the association of contemporary Chinese patriotism with nationalism.

In light of the government’s appropriation of the term “patriotism,” the majority of Chinese LGBT Liberals (18 out of 20 interviewees) refrain from using it to describe their sense of belonging and affiliation to the Chinese nation. As a result, LGBT Liberals strive to detach themselves from and redefine the term patriotism, separating their self-defined understanding of “patriotism” from the state-endorsed concept. Through analysis, it becomes evident that Chinese LGBT Liberals prefer to express their sense of identity as Chinese, along with their deep connection and attachment to the Chinese nation and country, using the phrase “love for the country (热爱这个国家).” More specifically, LGBT Liberals discern distinctions between the Chinese nation, country, political party, and culture. They emphasize that their sense of patriotism encompasses a degree of affection for the land of China, as well as the strong personal

¹⁷⁰ The H&M incident in China refers to a controversy that arose in 2021 when H&M, a Swedish multinational clothing retailer, made a statement expressing concerns about the use of Xinjiang cotton due to human rights issues in the region. The statement was perceived by Chinese nationalists as an attack on China’s sovereignty and an attempt to interfere in its domestic affairs. Consequently, there was a widespread backlash in China, with calls for boycotts of H&M products and criticism directed at the company.

bonds they share with their family and friends within the country. However, their sentiments do not extend to encompass love for the Chinese Communist Party or the government. Therefore, this method of decoupling allows them to express their patriotic feelings while detaching themselves from the prevailing narrative structure emphasized in both the 1994 and 2019 versions of the Chinese Patriotism Education Outlines which propagate the equation of patriotism with unwavering support for the Chinese Communist Party, the Chinese government, and Chinese socialist ideology. For instance, a 42-year-old gay activist (C29) from NGO_X elucidates his Chinese national identity in the following manner:

I still quite like this place in China because I grew up on this land. However, I distrust and dislike the rulers and the government, as well as the social system, and I have no sense of identification with them. What I desire is a space and environment where I can freely express my opinions and attitudes. Much of our advocacy for LGBT rights and criticism of government policies stems from our love for this country and our hope for it to become better and more inclusive. We do not want this country to be filled with hatred, xenophobia, and discrimination against marginalized groups, including the LGBT community.

To put it more bluntly, the Communist Party and the current government do not represent China. If we look at it from a historical perspective, the current rulers are merely a fragment of history. Therefore, by distinguishing between the Communist Party, the Chinese government, China, and the Chinese people, I believe we can see the relationships between these different identities more clearly. Our patriotic education confuses these relationships, as we are taught from a young age that loving the Chinese Communist Party means loving the country, or vice versa, that loving the country means loving the party. In essence, it binds the concepts of the nation, the people, and the Communist Party and its regime together. However, for me, it is not the case. I have a clear distinction between these concepts, including the party, the country, the nation, the government, and the Chinese people. Therefore, I believe being Chinese is not something to be ashamed of, and I cannot escape my Chinese identity. It's just that I do not love this regime and political party.¹⁷¹

Another 22-year-old gay activist (C30) from NGO_T holds a similar perspective, asserting that his identification with China and his Chinese identity remains unaltered.

¹⁷¹ Interviewed in Beijing, May 11, 2019

Nonetheless, he recognizes the need to differentiate between identifying as a Chinese and endorsing the Chinese government:

Would China's LGBT-unfriendly policies affect my sense of national identity? I believe it is essential to differentiate between the notions of country and government. If we are discussing identification with the government, then certainly, my level of identification would be diminished. In other words, the various LGBT-unfriendly policies and the suppression I face in my LGBT advocacy work undoubtedly foster greater distrust towards the government. Since we do not live in a democratic society where the public can effectively supervise the government, and there are no means to check the government's power, essentially, they can do as they please. This is something we cannot endorse. Moreover, many of our LGBT advocacy efforts fall within the realm of civil society movements, aiming to promote the role of civil society in holding the government accountable. However, there is a clear trend of the government suppressing civil society and citizen organizations. We hope to utilize our status as citizens to drive social change, which fundamentally contradicts the current political system in China.

However, if you ask about my identification as a Chinese person and China as a country, I would say that I actually identify quite strongly with my Chinese identity. I do not view being Chinese as something negative. Nor do I aspire to become an American or British citizen or anything of that sort. In fact, most foreign activists who are aware that I am Chinese and engaged in LGBT advocacy in the challenging environment of China regard me with admiration. As a result, I take pride in being Chinese and working towards the advancement of the LGBT cause in China.¹⁷²

Furthermore, another typical case is exemplified by a 26-year-old gay interviewee (C37) from Shanghai. On one hand, this interviewee (C37) critiques the Chinese government's inadequate protection of the human rights of the LGBT community, particularly in comparison to the legalization of same-sex marriage in Taiwan. On the other hand, he expresses his affection for the land of China and the collective identity of the Chinese nation. In his own words, he "loves the place where I was born, raised, and have been living" and "the family and friends who share this living space with me reside." Faced with an unsupportive social environment and national policies towards the LGBT community, he adopts decoupling as a means to navigate his Chinese and LGBT identities. Specifically, he "loves this country" but does not harbor love for the Chinese state and government:

¹⁷² Interviewed in Beijing, May 13, 2019

Recently, Taiwan passed a same-sex marriage bill, and in response, the China Taiwan Affairs Office stated that they have taken note of the relevant reports from Taiwan, but mainland China adheres to the marriage system of one man and one woman. At that moment, I felt ignored as a sexual minority. The country completely disregarded our strong desire for marriage. I am just like heterosexual individuals, a Chinese person, yet the country does not care about our community. Regardless of how much I loved this country before, hearing such dismissive remarks about our community is deeply hurtful. Sexual orientation is a significant aspect of our lives and cannot be ignored by the state. I hope to marry my partner and receive social recognition. The country demands patriotism from everyone, but rights are only granted to a select few. This unequal treatment and discrimination make me feel marginalized. Naturally, it affects my perception of this country and its government. In such a context, if I am expected to remain patriotic, wouldn't that be a form of cognitive dissonance?

However, on the other hand, I don't actually reject my Chinese identity. I have love for the place where I was born, raised, and have been living. It is where my family and friends, who share this living space with me, reside. So, I do not harbor hatred towards this land of China. My dissatisfaction lies solely with the state and, more precisely, the government's disregard and oppression towards us.¹⁷³

The strategy of decoupling “love for the country” from state-sponsored patriotism is a process that involves detaching themselves from the structure of Chinese nationalism and reconstructing one's own sense of national identity, particularly for Chinese LGBT Liberals. The Chinese government has consistently utilized patriotism as an instrument for its ideology, conflating love for the country with love for the government and the Communist Party. Through the utilization of state power, the government has initiated patriotic movements and maintained a dominant position in the discourse arena. However, it is evident that not all Chinese individuals are convinced by this state-sponsored narrative of patriotism, particularly the Chinese LGBT Liberals. This division regarding the definition and content of “patriotism” extends beyond the Chinese LGBT Liberal community. For instance, according to a 2014 online questionnaire survey conducted by state media outlet Global Times, 49.8% of participants agreed that “love-the-country” and “patriotism” are synonymous, while 41.4% opposed this perspective (Bislev & Li 2014: 31).

¹⁷³ Interviewed in Shanghai, June 3, 2019

In sum, this section examines the strategies employed by LGBT Liberals in detaching themselves from Chinese nationalism and sheds light on their efforts to redefine the narrative of patriotism within the Chinese context. It explores how LGBT Liberals employ various techniques, including coupling the suffering of the LGBT community with the absence of state protection, the public erasure of LGBT discourse, and the active suppression and harassment imposed by the Chinese state. Additionally, it delves into their use of upward comparison and the decoupling of the concept of “love for the country” from state-sponsored patriotism. Through these detachment strategies, the marginalized status of the LGBT community within the nationalist discourse is acknowledged, presenting challenges for LGBT Liberals as they navigate the reconciliation of their sexual and gender identities with societal expectations and nationalist ideologies. Furthermore, the section examines the alternative narratives advocated by Chinese LGBT Liberals, envisioning a China that is inclusive, supportive, and protective of LGBT rights. These aspirations are evident in the upward comparisons made by Chinese LGBT Liberals and their construction of alternative narratives surrounding their “love for the country.”

Chinese LGBT Liberals’ redefinition of their own LGBT-friendly “patriotism” bears great similarities to the concept of “Liberal nationalism” advocated by Liberal intellectuals in the 1980s (Yang and Lim 2010: 466-470). This wave of Liberal nationalism in China during the 1980s, driven by the desire to learn from the West, particularly the United States, was fueled by the Chinese reformist leadership’s engagement in domestic reform and opening up to the West, as well as the goodwill displayed by Western countries (Yang and Lim 2010). The objective was for China to adopt Western models, including economic development patterns and democratization, with the aim of becoming a strong nation. However, the tragic Tiananmen crackdown of 1989 marked the end of this wave of nationalism and led to the marginalization of

Liberal nationalism in the discourse arena, as the Chinese government intensified ideological control through patriotic campaigns (Zhao 2004; Yang and Lim 2010). In the current context, Chinese LGBT Liberals' detachment from state-sponsored patriotism and their establishment of their own recognized narrative of "love for the country" can be viewed as an extension and development of the 1980s Liberal nationalism, aligning with their aspirations for a better, more inclusive, and diverse China by learning from societies that are more tolerant and progressive, particularly Western societies.

6.2 LGBT Avoidant Group

The LGBT Avoidant group is another distinct category identified in this study, which differs from the Pink Gays discussed in Chapter 5 and the Chinese LGBT Liberals described in Section 6.1. By examining the avoidant behaviors discussed by 18 interviewees, I have delineated the core attributes of this ideal type. Subsequently, I have directed my attention towards a thorough analysis of the underlying rationales driving the avoidance choices made by this group. Finally, I have engaged in deliberation regarding the utilitarian aspects of the LGBT Avoidant group and have explored the question of whether avoidance can be construed as a form of resistance.

When it comes to navigating the intersection of LGBT identity with Chinese nationalism and globalization (SNG), Pink Gays prioritize their pro-regime patriot identity, giving it a salient position and employing various mechanisms to justify their identity as pro-regime LGBT nationalists. In contrast, Chinese LGBT Liberals utilize strategies of critique and detachment from Chinese nationalism as they navigate the SNG relationship. The Chinese LGBT Avoidant group, on the other hand, differs from both Pink Gays and Chinese LGBT Liberals in that they

choose to avoid engaging with the dynamics between LGBT identity, Chinese nationalism, and globalization (SNG), rather than defending or detaching themselves from and criticizing Chinese nationalism. Thus, the LGBT Avoidant group, as I have defined it, encapsulates a collective characterized by an inclination towards avoidance and pragmatism in response to the inherent contradictions arising from the intersection of sexuality, Chinese nationalism, and globalization. Specifically, the LGBT Avoidant group demonstrates their avoidance across three dimensions: (1) their tendency to not disclose their sexuality and keep their distance from LGBT movement, (2) their apathy towards the LGBT policies implemented by the state, and (3) their apathy towards international LGBT human rights advocacy.

Firstly, the LGBT Avoidant group is characterized by their reluctance to publicly identify themselves and their tendency to distance themselves from the LGBT movement. For instance, when questioned about their involvement with LGBT issues in China, a common response I received was similar to “In essence, I do not actively follow LGBT news”¹⁷⁴ or “I only seek out LGBT information if it is brought to my attention.”¹⁷⁵ 10 out of 18 individuals within the Avoidant group believe that keeping up with LGBT-related information is ineffectual, as they perceive it to have no impact on China’s LGBT policies or the current status quo for LGBT individuals. As one 32-year-old gay interviewee (C7) expressed, “whether I pay attention to LGBT issues or not, nothing will change, neither for the better nor the worse.”¹⁷⁶ Regarding the LGBT movement, 13 out of 18 Avoidant individuals argue that expecting social change through repetitive statements such as “LGBT people demanding human rights” is impractical and

¹⁷⁴ Interview in Lanzhou, March 5, 2019

¹⁷⁵ Interview in Lanzhou, March 26, 2019

¹⁷⁶ Interview in Lanzhou, March 26, 2019

unrealistic.¹⁷⁷ The following explanation from a 22-year-old gay interviewee (C3) encapsulates this perspective:

I do not actively follow news related to LGBT issues. When I am online, I tend to read about gaming discussions and occasionally watch porn. Honestly, I do not want anyone to know that I am gay. Currently, I work as a part-time teacher and fear that revealing my sexual orientation could have negative consequences for both myself and my students, given that China's sex education is inadequate and homosexuality is not widely accepted in society. Therefore, I avoid discussing these topics altogether, both in person and online. I am quite cautious about revealing my most vulnerable side to others. While I have attended a few offline LGBT events, I am still hesitant and tend to approach everything with care, including sexual encounters. I only meet with a gay person when I am around 70% certain that he would not expose my homosexuality.¹⁷⁸

Secondly, the LGBT Avoidant group (11 out of 18) also maintains a relatively indifferent stance towards the Chinese government's position on LGBT issues. As the gay interviewee C3 expressed, "I have limited knowledge regarding the national LGBT policy, and from what I understand, the government neither supports nor opposes our community."¹⁷⁹ While some members of this group may perceive the government's disposition towards LGBT individuals as unsupportive, they do not harbor animosity towards the Chinese government. Furthermore, the LGBT Avoidant group does not engage in endeavors to rationalize the unfavorable policies of the Chinese state through self-justification strategies similar to those of Pink Gays, nor do they criticize the Chinese state and Chinese nationalism like LGBT Liberals. For the majority of LGBT Avoidant individuals, state recognition of the rights of gender and sexual minorities is desirable, but the absence of such recognition is not considered significant. The following example from a 29-year-old gay interviewee (C38) exemplifies the perspectives of the Avoidant group regarding China's LGBT policy:

I don't have a strong attachment to this country or its government, nor do I hold any significant animosity towards it. And the government doesn't have much of an impact on

¹⁷⁷ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

¹⁷⁸ Interview in Lanzhou, March 5, 2019

¹⁷⁹ Interview in Lanzhou, March 5, 2019

me either way. While I do hope that the state will pass a same-sex marriage law, I don't consider it a major goal in my life. If I have a partner and we live together, it makes no difference to me if we can obtain a marriage license from the Civil Affairs Bureau. Even if same-sex marriage remains illegal or if the government introduces policies to suppress the LGBT community, I will not alter my sexual orientation or gender expression. I am just an ordinary person, and I have no way of influencing the evolution of the country's LGBT policies. My focus is on living my life to the best of my ability, and I don't have time for anything else.¹⁸⁰

Thirdly, the LGBT Avoidant group also demonstrates a notable lack of interest in LGBT events taking place outside of China. When queried about their familiarity with international LGBT-related information, 13 out of 18 Avoidant individuals respond with phrases such as "I don't know," "I'm not familiar," or "I'm not interested." They contend that the developments related to LGBT issues in foreign countries are too removed from the everyday lives of ordinary Chinese individuals, and thus perceive these foreign LGBT narratives as having minimal impact. As an illustration, the gay participant C3 articulated his perspective on international LGBT information as follows:

I don't actively seek out LGBT information from abroad because I don't feel it is directly relevant to me. I only learned about Taiwan legalizing same-sex marriage through a related news article on Baidu News, but I didn't bother to investigate whether it was true or not. In my imagination, Chinese people generally do not approve of homosexuality, while foreigners are more open-minded and accepting. I know that Denmark, the United States, and the United Kingdom support homosexuality, but I don't know to what extent, and I haven't looked into it. I have heard about pride parades in northern European countries, but I am not sure which countries specifically, probably some European countries. However, knowing this information is useless to me because, as you know, China is a society led by the government. The decisions are made by those in power, and the people at the bottom have no say or power. To access foreign news, I would need to use a VPN and have a good understanding of English, which I don't possess.¹⁸¹

6.2.1 The Logic of Avoidance

¹⁸⁰ Interview in Shanghai, June 4, 2019

¹⁸¹ Interview in Lanzhou, March 5, 2019

In contrast to the Pink Gay community and LGBT Liberals, who employ complex logic to argue for their respective positions, the cognitive logic of the LGBT Avoidant group is relatively straightforward and easy to understand. Through the analysis of 18 interviewees, I have identified and summarized the three most significant factors that contribute to the observed distancing behavior in the LGBT Avoidant group: (1) prioritizing survival over LGBT rights, (2) fear of punishment, and (3) a perceived lack of escape options. These three factors enable LGBT Avoidant individuals to marginalize their own LGBT identity to avoid potential risks.

(1) Survival Outweighing LGBT Rights

The rationale of “survival outweighing LGBT rights” is frequently cited as a factor that shapes the perception of LGBT Avoidant individuals regarding their own LGBT human rights and the state-imposed restrictions on the LGBT community. For instance, when the respondents discussed their expectations for the future, statements such as “Money comes first, no matter what. The first priority is achieving financial independence,”¹⁸² “Same-sex marriage is not important to me. I can live without marriage, but I cannot live without money,”¹⁸³ or “You can see how difficult my life has become. So, what I desire the most is a salary raise from my boss,”¹⁸⁴ were commonly expressed. The pursuit of livelihood consumes a significant portion of Avoidant people’s energy, resulting in diminished attention towards advocating for the Chinese LGBT movement.

Several indicators from my online survey can provide context to substantiate the challenging living conditions faced by the Chinese LGBT community and the relatively low

¹⁸² Interview in Chengdu, April 15, 2019

¹⁸³ Interview in Lanzhou, March 7, 2019

¹⁸⁴ Interview in Chengdu, April 27, 2019

level of participation in LGBT activism by Chinese LGBT individuals. For instance, only about 36% of survey respondents have ever participated in any LGBT organizations or related activities. However, when it comes to their own vital interests (as depicted in Figure 6.1), their level of concern is notably high. Nearly 68% of survey respondents worry about their future health and illness, around 60% express concerns about employment, nearly 58% worry about their future aging life, and approximately 50% express concerns about not having a partner in the future. This implies that, for the majority of LGBT individuals, their individual survival takes precedence as the most significant issue.



Figure 6.1 Chinese LGBT Concerns (Online Survey, %)

These survey results provide evidence of the prevalent survival challenges faced by the Chinese LGBT community that can inform our understanding of decisions to adopt an avoidant stance regarding LGBT identity. In this context, my interviews offer additional insights into how the survival challenges experienced by individuals in the LGBT Avoidant group influence their choice to engage in avoidance when navigating the relationship between their LGBT identity and Chinese nationalism. First, it is crucial to recognize that the traditional Chinese family structure places importance on the expectation that children will financially and emotionally support their

parents in old age. This expectation of “filial piety” assumes a heterosexual model where parents can rely on their heterosexual children to fulfill these obligations. Moreover, within the context of an imperfect social welfare system in China (Chan and Hui 2023), the entire societal welfare system, particularly the pension system, heavily relies on the intergenerational support system based on the heterosexual model. For LGBT individuals, particularly homosexual individuals who may not be able to have biological children or fulfill the traditional role of a breadwinner, there may be additional pressure to conform to societal expectations. This pressure can stem from the fear of not being able to meet their parents’ expectations, financially support them in the future, or receive the same support from their own children. Therefore, making money becomes the primary means of self-protection, leading to significant anxiety within the Chinese LGBT community. As described by a 33-year-old gay interviewee (C13) with only a high school education, engaged in entry-level property service work, and with relatively low income, “If I am not financially independent, my future retirement life will be miserable, especially considering that as a gay man, I will not marry and have children like the previous generation of gay individuals did.”¹⁸⁵

As a contrasting example, another typical case comes from a 28-year-old gay interviewee (C12). This participant (C12) is a secondary school teacher in Chengdu who, despite having a secure job and steady income, also prioritizes earning money in his future plans. His explanation for prioritizing earning money reflects the inadequate welfare system in China and the reliance on an intergenerational support model based on heterosexuality. This reliance significantly amplifies the concerns of the LGBT community regarding future retirement. Consequently, this respondent (C12) chooses to prioritize saving money during his youth to mitigate the

¹⁸⁵ Interview in Chengdu, April 18, 2019

uncertainties of old age. These survival pressures and concerns about future life expectations overshadow his prioritization of LGBT identity and related human rights:

My only goal now is to earn money because money is extremely important to me. In Chinese society, it is difficult for gay people to achieve anything without money. For example, I will need money for my own retirement in the future, and my parents will also need me to support them in their old age. I used to look down on those who did WeChat business, but now, due to financial pressure, I am also doing WeChat business. I help small businesses promote their products on my WeChat Moments. For instance, I am now helping some merchants sell fruits and snacks through my WeChat. If customers order products through my promotion channels, the merchants will pay me a commission of about 10 yuan per transaction. Although this is not much, it's still better than nothing.

I have a colleague who is a music teacher and also gay. He now has three extra jobs: WeChat business, pet breeding, and teaching Guzheng (a traditional Chinese musical instrument, 古筝) outside of school. He does all of this to live a more comfortable life in his old age and to support his aging parents. Elderly people require a significant amount of money when they fall ill. In China, hospitals require patients to pay upfront before receiving treatment. If one cannot afford the fees, it is like a death sentence. He is under more pressure than I am, and his hair has started to turn gray. Seeing his situation, I have come to realize the importance of earning more money.

Therefore, my biggest dilemma at the moment is not the lack of a partner or the absence of the right to same-sex marriage, but the fact that the money I have saved is not enough. My parents are both farmers and do not earn much. Hence, they cannot provide me with significant support, and I cannot provide them with much support either. The last time my mother had surgery, I could not even be with her. I could not take a week off and go home with my parents. If I take a week off, my salary as a teacher will be deducted. I had to rely on my own efforts. If I have enough money, I will have the freedom and courage to say no without worrying about deductions from my already modest salary when facing difficult situations.¹⁸⁶

Furthermore, the pressure to survive and earn a livelihood is tangible and immediate, whereas the enforcement of oppressive policies by the state feels abstract and distant. Consequently, these LGBT concerns become expendable for the LGBT Avoidant group. Maintaining a stable and peaceful life is already challenging, and therefore, remaining avoidant and preserving the status quo becomes the most pragmatic choice. The LGBT Avoidant group simply does not have the extra energy to dedicate to Chinese LGBT movements and other issues

¹⁸⁶ Interview in Chengdu, April 14, 2019

that extend beyond their immediate survival. As expressed by one lesbian respondent (C35), “Not all of the LGBT community follows the logic of ‘give me liberty, or give me death!’ Survival and living are more important to me than the intangible right to same-sex marriage.”¹⁸⁷ Another typical example is a 31-year-old gay freelance translator (C18) residing in Chengdu. Specifically, he mentioned the financial needs of his mother requiring surgery, the necessity to save for a house down payment, and his personal experiences of depression due to excessive work pressure, resulting in expenses for psychiatric consultations. Confronted with these challenging realities, he describes himself as “overwhelmed” by the burdens of life, often feeling vulnerable and anxious about the future. All these encounters represent tangible and urgent life difficulties for this gay interviewee (C18). In comparison, he perceives the so-called “same-sex marriage rights,” which may hold greater significance for some individuals, as the least important matter for him.¹⁸⁸ Similar situations have also emerged with a senior college student (C3) in Lanzhou who is on the verge of graduating. He explained his financial difficulties in the following manner:

I don’t mind whether I get married or not, as long as I have enough money. The lack of money is currently driving me crazy because I have to pay for my rent and tuition fees. My parents have just built a house and we still have some debts to repay. In the future, as long as I have enough money, everything will be alright. Money makes the world go round, that’s how it is in Chinese society. If I can earn a lot of money, then I’ll be content and won’t have to worry about so many problems. Right now, my only desire is to buy a bigger apartment because I can’t stand living in this small, rented room anymore. It feels very suffocating. So, the only way to alleviate my concerns is to become wealthy. Currently, earning money is the only thing that brings me happiness.¹⁸⁹

In summary, in China, where the social security system, particularly the pension system, is imperfect (Chan and Hui 2023), citizens face significant pressures to ensure their survival.

¹⁸⁷ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

¹⁸⁸ Interview in Chengdu, April 21, 2019

¹⁸⁹ Interview in Lanzhou, March 5, 2019

This compels them to allocate the majority of their energy towards coping with these circumstances. The LGBT community, particularly the Avoidant group, is not exempt from these survival pressures. As a result, the LGBT Avoidant group prioritizes survival over LGBT rights issues to confront the uncertainties of LGBT existence, particularly in relation to retirement, as “making money is the only reliable means of subsistence”¹⁹⁰ for them.

(2) Fear of Punishment

The second underlying logic behind the LGBT Avoidant group is the fear of punishment, which encompasses two main fears: (i) the fear of retribution from state authorities and (ii) the fear of social discrimination against LGBT individuals.

(i) Fear of Punishment from State Power

Fear of punishment from the state is a prevalent sentiment among the LGBT Avoidant group. Even though some individuals in the avoidant group may be unaware of LGBT-related information and advocacy efforts, a majority of them (15 out of 18) possess a keen awareness of the potential consequences associated with involvement in social movements. This fear is often rooted in the belief that the state has the power to punish those who speak out on LGBT issues, and that public advocacy could lead to retaliation. As a result, these individuals choose to avoid any public involvement in LGBT advocacy activities. When asked about their opinions on LGBT equal rights activism in China, LGBT Avoidant individuals often refer to two common Chinese proverbs: “the shot hits the bird that pokes its head out (枪打出头鸟),”¹⁹¹ which means that a person who stands out in a group will become a target of attack, and “settle accounts after the

¹⁹⁰ Interview in Lanzhou, March 5, 2019

¹⁹¹ Interview in Lanzhou, March 3, 2019

autumn harvest (秋后算账),”¹⁹² which implies that the state seeks revenge after quelling resistance. These proverbs reflect the perceived risks associated with public LGBT advocacy activities, as LGBT Avoidant individuals believe they could easily be arrested under the pretext of endangering social security. Typical responses further illustrate this fear, such as “the risk of protesting is too great, and I am not willing to take such a risk because we could easily be arrested in the name of endangering social security”¹⁹³ and “marching as a vulnerable group is just waiting to be banned.”¹⁹⁴ These responses highlight the perceived risks of engaging in public LGBT advocacy activities, which LGBT Avoidant individuals believe could result in arrest and punishment.

Furthermore, punishment related to speech censorship, China’s stability maintenance system, and the persecution of dissidents are also sources of fear for the Avoidant population. For instance, a 32-year-old gay interviewee (C7) highlighted the risk of being “invited for tea (请喝茶)”¹⁹⁵ by the police or national security personnel, or even being arrested, when engaging in group mobilization activities in China:

The current political system in China does not offer any effective means for ordinary citizens to advocate for LGBT equality. The option of organizing protests or demonstrations is not viable, and even expressing opinions online can have serious consequences. We have all heard stories of people being summoned by the police for speaking out against the government. Organizing a protest is simply not possible - if you manage to gather a group, you are likely to be arrested before you can even start.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Interview in Lanzhou, March 7, 2019

¹⁹³ Interview in Lanzhou, March 3, 2019

¹⁹⁴ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

¹⁹⁵ “Inviting someone to have tea” (请喝茶) is a euphemism used by Chinese authorities to warn individuals who express dissent or do not comply with government policies. It involves summoning the individual to a meeting with the police or state security agents, usually at a police station or other official location, to discuss their behavior or views. It is considered a form of intimidation and a means of exerting pressure on individuals to conform to government expectations.

¹⁹⁶ Interview in Lanzhou, March 26, 2019

Similarly, a 31-year-old lesbian respondent (C4) emphasized that advocating for LGBT human rights under China's authoritarian regime is perceived as a threat to the Chinese government:

China is a one-party dictatorship and promoting LGBT rights is very difficult. The government can easily crush any such efforts as fighting for our rights is seen as a threat to the government. As an individual, I cannot fight against the state machine. So, whether I support LGBT rights or not, it doesn't make much of a difference. Furthermore, the internet censorship in China is very strict. If you say anything negative about the government online, the police could potentially come knocking at our doors. The surveillance is so severe that expressing oneself freely becomes a daunting task.¹⁹⁷

Therefore, it is reasonable for the Avoidant group to adopt an avoidance approach when addressing LGBT human rights, considering the highly unlikely prospect of same-sex marriage legalization in China and the significant risks associated with LGBT advocacy. Consequently, it is more advantageous for Avoidant individuals to concentrate on their current lives and optimize their present circumstances. For example, one lesbian interviewee (C35) exemplifies a sense of detachment from the progress of the LGBT movement in China, and her rationale for not participating in the LGBT movement is rooted in the perceived risks and fears associated with it:

When it comes to the development of the LGBT movement in China, I prefer to take a hands-off approach. I am not willing to take on the responsibility of participating in LGBT-related marches or demonstrations because protecting my personal safety is a top priority for me. While organizers may feel that such activities are meaningful, I think that their social impact is minimal and unlikely to result in policy changes, given the state of censorship and suppression of all kinds of "negative" information in China. Such efforts are destined to fail. While I do respect the organizers, I think that their sacrifice is too great, and the gains are too small, which makes it not worth it. Furthermore, if many people were arrested and imprisoned as a result, the losses would be even greater. Additionally, one must consider that the Chinese discourse environment is completely controlled by the government, making it easy for the public to believe that these marchers are criminals who are deliberately undermining social stability, thus stigmatizing the entire LGBT community. Therefore, while I may support the movement in spirit, I will not take part in any action.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Interview in Lanzhou, March 7, 2019

¹⁹⁸ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

Therefore, within a tightly monitored society, a prevailing sense of futility exists among grassroots LGBT Avoidant individuals regarding resistance. This sentiment has resulted in a decreased inclination to effect social change and engage in acts of resistance. Even individuals who were previously active activists have opted to step back and adopt an avoidance stance. A typical case that exemplifies this phenomenon is that of a 39-year-old gay interviewee (C15) who detailed the risks encountered in Chinese LGBT mobilization and narrated their personal journey of transitioning from active involvement in local LGBT advocacy to embracing a strategy of avoidance:

Initially, I was highly motivated to lead an NGO team and make a larger impact. In the beginning, our team in a small town could only reach out to around 30 to 40 individuals, but our WeChat group has now grown to over 280 members. However, my enthusiasm has significantly decreased. After participating in various activities, I have realized that the government simply ignores our group and, at times, actively suppresses it. Nowadays, every activity carries significant risks. As ordinary volunteers, our voices at the grassroots level become insignificant in the face of the disapproval of the top level, i.e., the government. If we make any mistakes, our LGBT groups could be wiped out in minutes. Furthermore, if one understands Chinese politics, it becomes apparent that resistance has been quelled in history, particularly in the Tiananmen Square incident. This is the reality of the Chinese system. The government can be merciful if it chooses not to eliminate you entirely. I am now acutely aware that I cannot fight against the state machine alone, or even as a group. While I still volunteer, my motivation to participate in various activities has reached an all-time low. If I had the opportunity to immigrate, I would not hesitate to do so.¹⁹⁹

Moreover, in China, nationalistic sentiments have gradually evolved into the standards of censorship within the public discourse, as discussed in Chapter 4. Criticizing the government or exposing negative social issues that the government wishes to suppress is perceived as spreading negative energy (Yang and Tang 2018) and may even result in false accusations of colluding with foreign forces or betraying China (Berry 2022). Similarly, advocating for the rights of the LGBT community risks being stigmatized as collaborating with foreign forces (Ng 2022).

¹⁹⁹ Interview in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

Against this backdrop of heightened Chinese nationalism, the LGBT Avoidant group also seeks to avoid potential targeting and being labeled as traitors. A lesbian interviewee (C4) explained her understanding of Chinese nationalist censorship and her desire to distance herself from foreign forces to avoid being perceived as a threat to national security:

I believe that common people in China have no access to real information outside of the country, let alone any influence. The most frequently seen information in China is the “wolf warrior” speeches of the Foreign Ministry, which makes ordinary people feel that they have strengthened their own backbone and can command the foreign world. How can these patriotic individuals put up with foreigners’ criticism of China all the time? Therefore, I believe it’s useless to push China to reform through outside forces. This is the status quo. Without government support, nothing will work in China. People in China either sing praises like the “Little Pink” nationalists or keep silent. If people speak out against the government, they can be silenced in minutes. This isn’t just my pessimistic view, but rather the result of my experience living in China for over 30 years.

Moreover, China is in a very sensitive period when it comes to foreign forces. If I were to use funding from a foreign embassy to organize an event and were then falsely accused of endangering national security and thrown in jail, that would be trouble. In this environment, if they say you’re a spy, then you’re a spy; if they say you endanger national security, then you endanger national security. The current xenophobic climate is very frightening. It’s not a matter of whether you’ve actually done anything or not. If they think you have, then you’re connected to foreign forces, and it’s difficult to defend yourself. Endangering national security is a catch-all charge used to go after dissidents. To be honest, if the state wants to go after us, they could arrest us and take us to the police station in a matter of minutes, even if it harms our families.²⁰⁰

Therefore, for the LGBT Avoidant group, neither the domestic LGBT movement nor the external support and pressure from Western societies have the ability to influence the Chinese government’s stance on LGBT issues. On the contrary, advocating for LGBT human rights may lead to being labeled as anti-government and collaborating with foreign forces. In such a context where the power of the state and conservative social culture cannot be challenged, the LGBT Avoidant group feels compelled to choose avoidance as their only viable option.

(ii) Fear of Social Discrimination

²⁰⁰ Interview in Lanzhou, March 7, 2019

Prejudice, discrimination, and hostility towards LGBT individuals can have a profound impact on their sense of safety, marginalization, and discrimination, leading them to choose to remain avoidant about their gender identity or sexual orientation in public and social settings (Shelton et al. 2006; Martinez et al. 2017). This is indeed true for the LGBT community, particularly the Avoidant group, in China. Findings from my online survey provide background data that shed light on the perceived social discrimination experienced by the Chinese LGBT community (see Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3). For instance, over 76% of LGBT individuals agreed that “most people in China do not accept same-sex marriage.” Additionally, 68.6% of participants believed that the public still associates homosexuality with perversion, 65.8% felt that the LGBT community is looked down upon by many people, and more than 61% agreed that homosexuality is seen as detrimental to the social environment in the eyes of the Chinese public. Furthermore, HIV-related discrimination remains prevalent, with 56.1% of respondents believing that homosexuality is still equated with HIV by the public. In terms of workplace inclusivity, over 55% of the LGBT community believes that they will face discrimination in the workplace. Regarding family acceptance, over 74% of respondents believe that most families would feel hopeless upon discovering that their child is a sexual minority.



N=1778, 1782, 1782,1781, 1782, 1778,1782, respectively

Figure 6.2 Perceived Social Discrimination (Online Survey, %)

In addition, the LGBT community experiences various forms of discrimination in their daily lives, as shown in Figure 6.3. About 67% of respondents reported experiencing verbal bullying, while 33.7% reported physical harm. The family, workplace, and school are three important arenas of life where a high proportion of sexual minorities have experienced discrimination. This includes 54% of respondents experiencing verbal bullying from family members, and over 46% experiencing workplace discrimination from colleagues or superiors. The proportion of respondents who have experienced differential treatment from schoolteachers is also close to 46%.

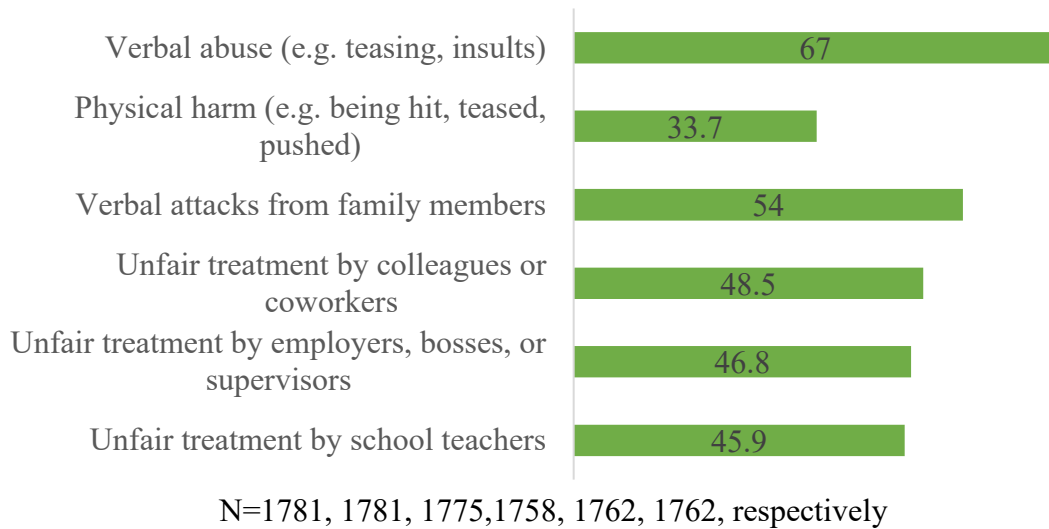
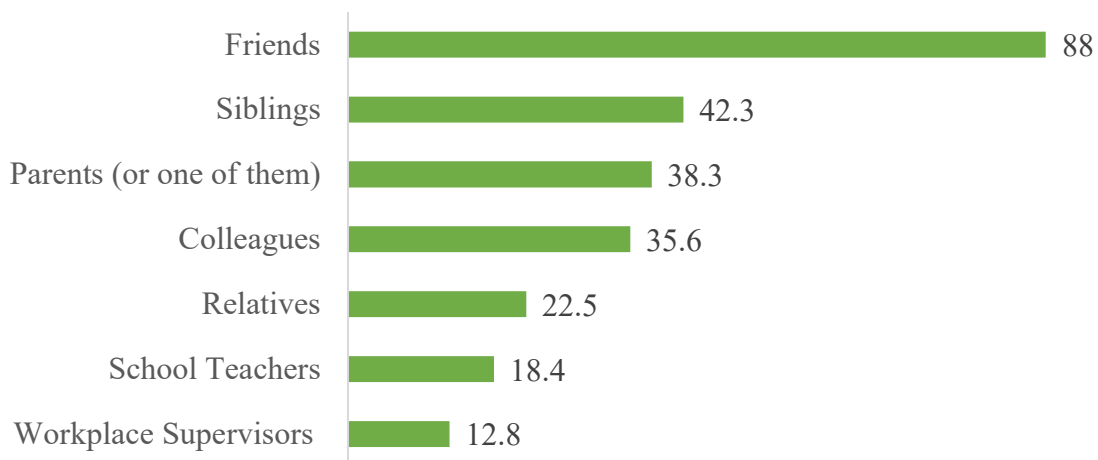


Figure 6.3 Experienced Discrimination by Chinese LGBT individuals (Online Survey, %)

Social discrimination can indeed lead to a significant proportion of LGBT individuals choosing to conceal their gender and sexual orientations (Miles-Johnson and Wang 2018; Wang et al. 2020). This is evident in the data presented in Figure 6.4, which illustrates the rates of coming out among sexual minorities in various contexts. The data indicates that while there is a relatively high rate of coming out to friends (88%), most individuals do not come out to their families. Particularly in school and workplace environments, the rate of coming out is extremely low. Only 12.8% of individuals choose to come out to their workplace superiors, and 18.4% come out to their schoolteachers.



N 1662, 1662, 1782, 1662, 1662,1662,16662, respectively

Figure 6.4 Rate of Coming Out to Different People (Online Survey, %)

These statistics demonstrate the widespread social discrimination faced by the Chinese LGBT community, which contributes to their decision to remain avoidant about their identities. My interviews further shed light on how LGBT individuals choose to remain avoidant due to experiencing discrimination. For example, a lesbian participant (C35) shared her experience of living in a relatively conservative small town with a conservative gender and sexual culture and explained her decision to conceal her sexual identity:

In small towns like where I grew up, people are often very conservative, and being different from others can attract a lot of gossip and judgment. I remember when I was in high school, there was a lesbian couple who were very close, and they became the talk of the school and the center of a scandal. At that time, even students' dating was considered taboo, let alone being a same-sex couple. The public is very interested in this kind of gossip, and they spread the news around the school. I remember during break time, I overheard some people next to me discussing how disgusting the lesbian couple was. It's these kinds of hurtful comments that make me feel it's better not to reveal my sexual orientation.

Although people on the internet often discuss historical examples of homosexuality, such as "Long Yang (龙阳)", and it may seem like our society has been historically more accepting, in reality, most ordinary people today still don't understand

sexual minorities. Regardless of how open and accepting society may have been in the past, it doesn't really matter now. While people today have access to more information, their knowledge and understanding of sexual orientations still have not changed much. Furthermore, our education system does not prioritize sexual education, let alone addressing sexual orientations. At most, there may be some emphasis on practicing safe sex and using condoms.

In China, there is a general mindset of seeking conformity, so anyone who is different or does something out of the ordinary is likely to become highly controversial. For example, 20 years ago, if you got divorced in a small town or rural area, you would be drowning in gossip. Now, being a same-sex couple is just as controversial and likely to attract criticism because, in Chinese culture, sex is still a very taboo topic, and anything related to sex is easily stigmatized.²⁰¹

In addition, she cited a passage by Professor Zhang Beichuan (张北川)²⁰² criticizing China's conservative sexual culture. According to the passage, the Chinese public often labels homosexuality as abnormal, and their understanding of sexuality is outdated, as they view sex solely for procreation. Consequently, many Chinese people view sexual ignorance as purity, sexual illiteracy as moral virtue, and sexual discrimination as a principle. Therefore, she emphasized the high risk of coming out in China, stating that apart from a few close friends, she never discusses her sexual orientation in her workplace. Even when colleagues often discuss their families, she chooses to avoid participating. Similarly, she does not participate in LGBT-related activities, explaining that:

Coming out is a very risky thing to do, and so is participating in LGBT community activities, as it puts the participants in a vulnerable position. Once someone joins an LGBT organization or takes part in LGBT-related activities, their sexual orientation becomes more likely to be revealed. If that person is deeply closeted and also works in a government department in China, it could lead to serious consequences such as being fired. The conservative social environment and people's gossip can make this person collapse, let alone the more severe workplace discrimination.

Furthermore, there is no anti-discrimination law in China that protects sexual minorities. Once they encounter unfair treatment in the workplace, they basically have no way out and are at the mercy of their fate. Many people, for their own benefit, hide in the closet, and this group accounts for a large proportion.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

²⁰² Professor Zhang Beichuan (张北川) is a well-known Chinese sociologist and sexologist. He is recognized as one of the pioneers in the field of sexology in China.

²⁰³ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

Furthermore, the practice of marriages of convenience (形婚) persists in Chinese society, where a lesbian and a gay person enter into a mutual assistance marriage to cope with family and societal pressures. Among the Avoidant group, four individuals have experienced marriages of convenience. For instance, a 32-year-old gay individual (C7) stated that social discrimination, particularly pressure from his workplace, was the primary reason for making this decision. Specifically, after more than four years of communication and getting along with his lesbian wife, they got married in 2017. Apart from a very small number of individuals who are aware of his sexual orientation, he assumes the role of a “straight man” and maintains a heterosexual image. Moreover, he views same-sex marriage as a distant topic and holds low expectations for its legalization. Even if same-sex marriage were legally recognized, he believes it would be challenging to marry his same-sex partner due to the pressure exerted by his family and society.

Furthermore, he also mentioned that he knows several individuals who are deeply closeted and work in government departments. They have also chosen to enter into a marriage of convenience, due to the fact that homosexuality is an even more taboo topic in these work environments:

I have several gay friends who work in government departments, and their sexual orientation is a burden for them. Although the government does not have explicit rules stating that one must get married to be promoted, getting married and having children is an implicit standard for promotion. If you are unmarried and childless, the Organization Department of the Communist Party may consider your personal life problematic. The promotion system in government agencies follows a conservative, heteronormative model of a core family. In order to advance their careers, gay individuals within the system must get married, whether it be in a marriage of convenience or a traditional marriage. Additionally, once you reach the age of thirty, your colleagues or superiors in the workplace will actively try to introduce you to potential partners, and unmarried young people in government agencies are often the subject of gossip. As a result, my gay friends who work in government agencies have all gone through the process of getting married.

Furthermore, they even dress and speak in a more masculine manner on a daily basis to avoid being discovered.²⁰⁴

Moreover, discrimination and bullying against the LGBT community on campus have forced many interviewees to hide their sexual orientation in order to avoid the risk of being victimized. During my interviews, a gay teacher (C12) from Chengdu discussed the phenomenon of LGBT discrimination in their school from the perspective of school management, as well as his own need to conceal his sexual orientation:

Our school's guidance counselor is a homophobe. When he found out that there were gay students at our school, he called a meeting with all the homeroom teachers and said, "If we see boys and girls dating, we must put a stop to it. But now there is a special situation where boys are dating boys and girls are dating girls. We must crack down on this even more severely." His ideas are very homophobic, and he doesn't allow any presence of homosexuality on campus. I really wanted to stand up and argue against him by saying that homosexuality is not abnormal, and our country has long since moved away from pathologizing and criminalizing it. Discrimination against homosexuality is not something an educator should promote. However, he is the school leader, and I am just an ordinary teacher. Although I have been deeply troubled by his words, I don't have the courage to rebel against him. I also don't come out at school and keep a certain distance from my colleagues, in case they discover my sexual orientation.²⁰⁵

Another extreme case is a 21-year-old gay individual from Lanzhou (C2) who had previously attempted suicide due to verbal bullying related to his homosexuality. He stated that to avoid similar discrimination in the future, he would choose to avoid standing out and not take risks to challenge mainstream gender norms:

Whether in school or in society, coming out and acknowledging one's homosexuality is equivalent to giving others a handle to attack you. In the eyes of many people, sexual orientation is a tool to attack us. For instance, when I was in high school and wore an earring, my classmates said, "Don't you know that wearing an earring is a sign of homosexuality in foreign countries?" I replied, "Well, I am homosexual." He was quite frightened, and although he verbally said he accepted me, he would still gossip behind my back. And when I had a conflict with him, he would use my homosexuality to attack me. I have heard many personal attacks like this, where they discuss whether I have been circumcised or had sex with someone; it's a completely derogatory tactic.

²⁰⁴ Interview in Lanzhou, March 26, 2019

²⁰⁵ Interview in Chengdu, April 14, 2019

Therefore, coming out comes at a cost. Did you know that I once attempted suicide because of the attacks on my sexual orientation in school? The school at that time chose not to protect me, but instead wanted to expel me because of my suicide attempt. This news was considered by the school to be tarnishing its reputation. Additionally, the news of my suicide attempt was blocked, and teachers and students who knew about it were asked to refrain from discussing it. After the suicide attempt, I was sent to the hospital, and when some classmates came to see me, they told me that my class teacher pleaded with the school principal on my behalf so that I wouldn't be expelled. In short, they didn't care why I attempted suicide, they only cared about blocking the news and suppressing disobedient students.

So now, whenever I do anything, I consider whether I am being too different from the mainstream. I don't want to have too much conflict with the mainstream, so I can't always be myself. The bird that sticks its head out gets shot, and I don't want to be that bird anymore. The cost is too heavy for me personally. I also don't want to take such risks to fight against anything because my strength is not sufficient enough to fight back.²⁰⁶

In summary, the fear of societal punishment, such as discrimination, prejudice, opposition, and even bullying, is a significant reason why the Avoidant group within the LGBT community chooses to conceal their LGBT identities.

(3) Unable to Escape

The third factor contributing to the choice of avoidance is the inability to emigrate from China, which is closely intertwined with the range of survival challenges faced by the LGBT Avoidant group discussed earlier. In essence, pursuing immigration to another country poses significant challenges and limited feasibility for LGBT individuals who opt to remain avoidant. Within this context, the inability to depart from China has led to a decline in self-efficacy among many LGBT individuals, as they are compelled to adapt to a less accepting environment. For example, a 31-year-old lesbian participant (C4) emphasized the primary obstacles to her immigration as the lack of financial support and insufficient foreign language skills. Despite her

²⁰⁶ Interview in Lanzhou, March 3, 2019

aversion to the unfriendly environment in China, she found herself unable to leave and, consequently, was compelled to make compromises and adjust to the inhospitable conditions:

When I was younger, particularly during my college years, I often researched countries that recognized same-sex marriage. I dreamed of immigrating to these countries, but unfortunately, it is almost impossible for me to leave China due to the high English language proficiency and financial requirements for immigration. My family is not wealthy, and I am busy with work and daily life concerns. Therefore, like many others, I cannot escape my current situation. As I grow older, my aspirations have become more modest. I just want to find a partner and live a peaceful life. If given the opportunity, I would like to come out and receive acceptance and blessings from others. Furthermore, I want to be there for my parents as they age and ensure that they have a happy and fulfilling life. In this realistic and sometimes difficult environment, compromise is sometimes necessary to survive.²⁰⁷

Another 39-year-old gay individual (C15) expressed a similar perspective, highlighting those economic circumstances, a sense of social belonging, and social networks are among the factors that limit their ability to emigrate from China:

I believe it would be quite difficult for me to find an opportunity or have the ability to emigrate from the country. On the one hand, my family's economic condition is average, which makes it challenging for me to fulfill the financial requirements for emigrating. On the other hand, all my relatives, friends, and other social networks are here, and to migrate to a foreign country would require me to rebuild my entire network, which would be a huge challenge for me. Although the overall environment in China may not be ideal, I still feel a sense of belonging here. Therefore, I think that given the unfavorable conditions, I would be content with a simple life, with a partner and the ability to take care of my parents in their old age, to ensure they are happy in their final years.²⁰⁸

The inability to escape is closely intertwined with two other factors: survival challenges and the fear of punishment. The fear of punishment by state power (including concerns related to Chinese nationalism) and the fear of social discrimination partially contribute to the inclination of the LGBT Avoidant group to seek escape. However, the LGBT Avoidant group also faces survival challenges that hinder their ability to escape the inhospitable LGBT environment in China. Faced with the inability to escape and the absence of effective resistance, choosing to

²⁰⁷ Interview in Lanzhou, March 7, 2019

²⁰⁸ Interview in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

avoid their LGBT identity and Chinese nationalism represents a relatively pragmatic choice for the LGBT Avoidant group.

In summary, the avoidance approach adopted by the LGBT Avoidant group in response to the intersection of sexuality, Chinese nationalism, and globalization (SNG) is influenced by three intertwined factors: survival challenges, the fear of punishment, and the inability to escape. The group's primary focus on securing their survival leaves little room for introspection regarding their LGBT identity, leading them to adopt an avoidance attitude towards Chinese LGBT rights issues. Moreover, social stigma and discrimination exert external pressures that reinforce the concealment of their LGBT identities as a means of navigating an unsupportive social environment. State-sponsored discrimination exacerbates their apprehension of potential retaliation from authorities when advocating for LGBT rights, further encouraging the adoption of an avoidance approach towards the Chinese LGBT movement and human rights issues within the LGBT community. Additionally, the fear instilled by nationalist censorship, where they risk being labeled as "traitors" or "foreign forces," prompts the LGBT Avoidant group to actively distance themselves from the narrative of Chinese nationalism to avoid becoming targets of attacks by Chinese nationalists. Furthermore, the inability to escape the hostile LGBT environment in China restricts their ability to freely express their LGBT identities through immigration. Considering these factors, the LGBT Avoidant group finds themselves unable to evade the backdrop of survival pressures, state and social discrimination, as well as nationalist hostility. Unlike LGBT Liberals who adopt a confrontational stance or Pink Gays who align themselves with the Chinese authority and nationalism, the LGBT Avoidant group's options for addressing the relationship between sexuality, Chinese nationalism, and globalization (SNG) are severely limited. Consequently, adopting an avoidance approach, which prioritizes pragmatically

dealing with survival issues directly impacting their lives, becomes one of their few available strategies for navigating SNG.

6.2.2 Pragmatism and Resistance

In this section, I delve further into other controversial aspects of the LGBT Avoidant group: their pragmatism and whether their silence and avoidance can be regarded as a form of resistance against an unjust system. It is evident that the LGBT Avoidant group opts for the survival strategy of pragmatism in their day-to-day lives. Maintaining a practical stance is deemed the most viable choice in China, as it may help them minimize internal conflicts between their LGBT identities and the oppressive policies enforced by the Chinese government. One lesbian interviewee (C35) described this strategic and pragmatic approach as “round outside, square inside(外圆内方)” or “the golden mean(中庸之道).” In essence, this approach suggests that individuals should strive to be adaptable, avoiding direct confrontation with an unsupportive society, particularly the LGBT-unfriendly social environment and national policies in China. She elaborates on her philosophy of navigating dilemmas in the following manner:

During my time in university, one of my teachers imparted the idea that an ideal person should have a round exterior but a square interior. To me, this means that we should not simply conform to societal expectations but instead hold onto our own beliefs and values, such as my sexual orientation and lifestyle choices. However, when these beliefs clash with society’s norms, it is not necessary to display our differences in a confrontational manner. Rather, we can seek common ground while maintaining our individuality. Adhering to this principle has allowed me to live in harmony with the world and avoid unnecessary conflicts.

In my opinion, creating conflicts and attempting to impose our ideas onto others in an effort to achieve a perfect world is immature. For instance, if someone offends me with a homophobic joke, I choose to distance myself from them instead of engaging in a heated argument. Similarly, when family and friends urge me to settle down and start a family, I choose to ignore their comments as it is a personal choice.

Regarding gay rights, I believe that we do not have the power to challenge the state’s position. Rather than engaging in confrontations, I choose to adapt to the existing policies, although I may not fully agree with them. As I have grown older, I have come to

prioritize the opinions of only a few people in my life, and I do not let the noise outside affect me. Instead, I choose to focus on living my life on my own terms.²⁰⁹

In addition, the following statement made by an interviewee (C40) exemplifies the pragmatism shared by many LGBT Avoidant individuals:

I think it's important to be practical and survive in this unfriendly environment. For example, when the state isn't intervening, I feel free to express myself by wearing my favorite clothes, rainbow badges, phone case, and even holding hands with my boyfriend in public. However, if my sexual orientation goes against the state's expectations, I conceal it and conform to societal norms to avoid any repercussions.²¹⁰

Can avoidance, silence, and pragmatism be considered forms of resistance? One perspective argues against it. For example, a lesbian interviewee (C19) characterizes the avoidance of LGBT individuals and their reluctance to assert themselves as passive and detrimental. She employs terms such as “endure” and “wait” to portray the apathetic attitudes of LGBT Avoidant individuals, suggesting that they are tolerating the unfriendly Chinese government and social environment while waiting for the situation to improve on its own or for someone else to advocate for the Chinese LGBT community. According to her, this reflects a lack of self-awareness regarding LGBT rights. She further explains:

I believe that the majority of those who remain silent have grown accustomed to living in a relatively stable environment. They are content as long as they have a partner and the resources to meet their basic needs. Even when faced with oppression, they are unwilling to disrupt their peaceful lives and fight for their rights. In fact, they may even accept oppression despite the imminent threat it poses. This phenomenon is reflected in China's low rate of coming out among its significant homosexual population, with many homosexuals choosing to enter straight marriages. Furthermore, many people in China are unaware of the existence of LGBT NGOs. While some argue that we cannot blame them for their inaction, I believe that their silence poses a significant challenge to those advocating for LGBT rights. Whether intentional or not, their silence impedes the mobilization of the LGBT movement and undermines our efforts. To advance the LGBT movement in China, we need greater participation from those who are willing to come out and engage in advocacy, instead of hiding and remaining silent.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Interview online in Beijing, May 30, 2019

²¹⁰ Interview in Shanghai, June 10, 2019

²¹¹ Interview in Chengdu, April 27, 2019

Another gay participant (C15) shares a similar viewpoint, asserting that avoidance can perpetuate further oppression:

I believe that equal rights for the LGBT community mean that we should have the same rights as heterosexual individuals, which is a matter of basic human rights. However, many members of the LGBT community in China, to put it bluntly, do not realize that they have rights and are being oppressed. Instead, they are satisfied with the status quo and allow themselves to be exploited, lacking the awareness of their rights. I used to believe that same-sex marriage would eventually be legalized in China if we waited long enough. However, the continued oppression of the LGBT community has shown us that we cannot wait any longer, as we will never see the day when the government begins to protect our rights. We must take action to defend our own rights.

I think that many people have a poor understanding of their own rights, which may be related to China's thousands of years of traditional culture and authoritarian rule. In the family environment, we are taught to be obedient and submissive to our parents, and in society, rulers teach us to be obedient subjects, even if we have no real rights and cannot resist. This leads many people to feel that fighting for their rights is not their responsibility. For example, a friend of mine believes that the fight for LGBT rights is too far from him, and that his participation in such advocacy will not make any difference. I do not agree with this attitude of silence, as it only enables the government to continue to oppress us without consequences.²¹²

On the other hand, another perspective argues that avoidance can indeed be a form of resistance, as the LGBT Avoidant group, at the very least, maintains a boundary by refraining from defending the government like the "Little Pinks" do. For instance, a lesbian interviewee (C4) elucidated that numerous ordinary individuals residing in China are powerless when confronted with the might of the Chinese government, and resistance comes at a tremendous cost. The most substantial form of resistance she can undertake is "to safeguard herself and not follow the negative examples of those who extol the government." She went on to elaborate:

Given the current political and social situation, we don't have many choices. Our only option is to prioritize survival and then pursue other interests. It's impossible for me to fight for LGBT rights when I can barely make ends meet. Honestly, I want to express myself freely, share my sexual orientation openly, and flaunt my life with my girlfriend everywhere. However, I have too many practical issues that need to be resolved. I need to work, earn money, pay off my loans, and take care of my elderly parents. You see, if I lose my source of income, my entire family will be ruined. I didn't force myself into this situation. This is just how society operates now. Everything costs money, and even

²¹² Interview in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

getting sick can bankrupt many people. Therefore, the most significant resistance I can offer is silence. At the very least, I'm not like the zealous supporters of the government, waving their flags and shouting slogans. I can only adhere to the most fundamental principle of not singing praises to oppressors.²¹³

In the context of the Chinese LGBT community, the attitudes and approaches towards handling LGBT rights, Chinese state power, and Chinese nationalism through avoidance have sparked debates regarding whether it constitutes a form of resistance. This diversity in understanding resistance within the LGBT community aligns with broader academic definitions of resistance. For instance, some scholars define resistance as direct and explicit actions that openly challenge authority or power structures, such as protests, demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, public speeches, acts of civil disobedience, or other forms of direct confrontation with those in power (Tilly 2004). In contrast, James C. Scott (1985) argues that in authoritarian or totalitarian societies, resistance does not necessarily follow direct, public patterns but rather adheres to the logic of the weak. Specifically, the primary concern for individuals involved is to minimize the potential for retaliation from the government and law enforcement. Thus, they employ subtle, non-confrontational, and often covert strategies to resist oppression or challenge dominant systems (Scott 1985).

Based on my observations of the Chinese LGBT movements, I am inclined to perceive the avoidance approach adopted by the LGBT Avoidant group as a form of resistance by the weak. Faced with China's formidable state power, they choose non-cooperation rather than advocating for government oppression. Furthermore, criticizing the LGBT Avoidant group may inadvertently reinforce a discourse that blames LGBT individuals, disregarding the underlying structural reasons behind their adoption of avoidance. Moreover, considering the increasingly restricted political opportunities for LGBT activism in China in recent years, I hold a pessimistic

²¹³ Interview in Lanzhou, March 7, 2019

view that more Chinese LGBT movements will gradually shift from overt resistance to utilizing “weapons of the weak” (non-public and indirect forms of resistance). This transformation is currently unfolding in China, where openly LGBT organizations have been coerced into closure one after another due to state pressure. For example, Chengdu MILK, an LGBT NGO, was forced to shut down in 2019; Shanghai Pride ceased operations in 2020; LGBT Rights Advocacy China was closed in 2021, and Beijing LGBT Center ceased operations in 2023. Previous cases of public confrontation with the Chinese government, such as Qiu Bai’s lawsuit (2015-2017) against the Chinese Ministry of Education regarding homophobic textbooks (Qiu Bai 2017) or Fan Popo’s lawsuit (2015) against the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) due to the removal of his LGBT-themed documentary (Lin 2018), are unlikely to recur. Moreover, in the subsequent chapter (Chapter 7), I will also discuss the utilization of Chinese nationalism as a framework for advocating LGBT issues in China, which represents a distinct form of non-direct and non-public resistance through the utilization of Chinese state-sponsored nationalism discourse for activists’ LGBT advocacy (O’Brien 2002; Tenzin 2013). Therefore, given the severely constrained political opportunities in authoritarian China, a broader definition of resistance should be embraced, and the non-cooperative attitude of the LGBT Avoidant group can be partially categorized as resistance.

6.3 Conclusion

At the individual level, Chinese LGBT individuals employ diverse strategies to navigate the complexities of their identities within the intersecting realms of sexuality, Chinese nationalism, and globalization (SNG). Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive analysis of the Pink Gays subgroup, shedding light on how its members reconcile their LGBT identity with their

sense of patriotism and support for the regime. Moreover, this chapter introduces and examines two additional ideal types: the Chinese LGBT Liberal group and the Chinese LGBT Avoidant group. These distinct categories employ specific strategies in navigating the intersection of their LGBT identities with Chinese nationalism and globalization.

In contrast to the Pink Gays, LGBT Liberals find themselves in a profound conflict between their LGBT identity and Chinese patriotism, which leads them to adopt a critical stance towards social discrimination, government policies on LGBT issues, and Chinese nationalism. Moreover, the LGBT Liberal group embraces progressive values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights, supporting global efforts to advocate for the rights of the Chinese LGBT community while rejecting the nationalist discourse of foreign hostile forces. Furthermore, LGBT Liberals detach themselves from Chinese nationalism through three distinct approaches. Specifically, they couple LGBT suffering with the Chinese state, engage in upward comparison, and decouple “love for the country” from Chinese state-sponsored patriotism. These strategies serve to highlight not only the lack of protection for LGBT rights in China but also the state’s public erasure and direct suppression/harassment of the LGBT community. By employing these strategies, LGBT Liberals aim to challenge the state’s official narrative of patriotism and establish an inclusive and LGBT-friendly form of Liberal nationalism.

The LGBT Avoidant group is a distinct category that differs from both the Pink Gays and LGBT Liberals. Specifically, unlike the pro-regime stance of the Pink Gays and the critical stance adopted by LGBT Liberals towards Chinese nationalism, the LGBT Avoidant group chooses to avoid issues related to the intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization. This can be observed in their reluctance to disclose their sexuality, their detachment from the LGBT movement, their indifference towards state-implemented LGBT policies, and their lack of

engagement in international LGBT human rights advocacy. The underlying reasons behind the avoidance strategy adopted by the LGBT Avoidant group are straightforward and direct. Their primary concern is individual survival rather than actively advocating for LGBT rights. They fear punishment from the state and face social discrimination. However, due to limited resources and challenging circumstances, escaping the hostile environment is not a feasible option. Consequently, adopting an avoidance strategy becomes a highly pragmatic choice for the LGBT Avoidant group.

In Chapters 4 and 5, my primary focus has been to elucidate the diversity and heterogeneity of Chinese LGBT individuals at the individual level within the context of the intersection of sexuality, Chinese nationalism, and globalization (SNG). In addition to these three categories, my interviews also included 10 participants who identified as having religious beliefs. For these individuals, religion also played a role in navigating the intersection of sexuality, Chinese nationalism, and globalization. Specifically, religion not only aided these religious gender and sexual minorities in accepting their LGBT identities but also facilitated transnational connections for two Christian/Catholic individuals (C23 and C43). For instance, one gay Christian participant (C23) emphasized his identity as a global citizen. Being a gay Christian has facilitated his connections with other gay Christians worldwide. According to this participant, Christianity is a transnational and cross-border religion, with fellow believers in every country who can provide support and love. Therefore, through his identity as a gay Christian, he can establish connections with like-minded individuals wherever he goes, fostering a sense of security and belonging. His experience of engaging in cross-border communication with fellow gay Christians exemplifies how the identity of a gay Christian contributes to the

construction of a global citizen identity, which, to some extent, detaches himself from Chinese nationalism:

I travel internationally every year, exploring various parts of the world. Recently, a few of my close gay friends expressed interest in traveling to Israel next year. I have found that wherever I travel, I come across individuals who share my faith. Christianity, being a global religion, has enabled me to connect with like-minded individuals in different parts of the world. My fellow believers have been of tremendous help, offering accommodation and guidance wherever I go. I have conversed with Christians from the United States and Thailand, and their unwavering faith in God and love for humanity resonates with me. In countries that welcome and embrace the LGBT community, such as Thailand, I find myself making connections and feeling a sense of belonging.

During my recent trip to Thailand, I reconnected with a Thai friend I met over a decade ago while interning at the United Nations. We had lost touch over the years but discovered that we shared the same faith and sexual orientation. We attended a worship gathering in Bangkok together, where we met over a thousand Christians. Our friendship deepened, and I was fortunate to meet his parents and his boyfriend. It is fascinating how small the world can seem, as I discovered that my friend's former classmate in Germany was a colleague of mine from my time at the UN office in Thailand. Furthermore, during my month-long stay in Switzerland a few years back, I also met my landlord through a couch service. He was a warm and welcoming gay man who left a lasting impression on me. He even visited me in China a couple of years ago, and I took him on a tour of Xi'an. While studying in the United States, I also provided couch services to people from various countries, such as Canada, India, and the United Kingdom. Many of them shared my faith or sexual orientation, which opened my eyes to the world's diversity.²¹⁴

However, due to the limited number of participants with religious beliefs, it is challenging to fully elucidate the characteristics of this group and their rationale. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding, future research should adopt a broader scope, which includes observing diverse churches and temples across China and conducting in-depth interviews with gender and sexual minority individuals from various religious backgrounds. Such research endeavors will enable a more nuanced examination of the multifaceted role that religion plays in mediating the intricate dynamics between sexuality, nationalism, and globalization.

²¹⁴ Interviewed in Chengdu, April 22, 2019

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that it overlooks the multidimensionality and variability that each individual may possess when establishing the ideal types. For example, in the case of the gay participant C15 discussed in this chapter, his identity underwent a shift from being a Liberal to an Avoidant individual influenced by the strict censorship environment in China. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the interviews were conducted prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and since then, the LGBT environment in China has continued to deteriorate. Significant setbacks have been witnessed, including the aforementioned closure of pioneering LGBT organizations such as Chengdu MILK in 2019, Shanghai Pride in 2020, LGBT Rights Advocacy China in 2021, and Beijing LGBT Center in 2023. Moreover, during the pandemic, the Chinese government implemented extensive population control and surveillance measures, and particularly stringent lockdown protocols, resulting in severe humanitarian crises. This period also saw the rise in popularity of “run philosophy” (runology, 润学) in China, which refers to the knowledge of escaping from China (Yuan 2022). Additionally, changes in China’s international relations, particularly conflicts with the United States and Taiwan, have fueled multiple waves of nationalism, exemplified by the significant surge in Chinese nationalism following the visit of former US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan. These evolving domestic and international dynamics in China raise questions about their impact on the LGBT community and necessitate a follow-up survey to examine any noteworthy shifts in the national identity of the entire LGBT community.

Chapter 7 Navigating Nationalism and Global Support: Strategies for LGBT Advocacy in Authoritarian China

Finding opportunities for human rights advocacy in authoritarian China presents significant challenges due to the limited availability of political opportunities. The rise of Chinese nationalism has further restricted the political space for the LGBT movement. Despite these obstacles, local LGBT activists in China have demonstrated remarkable creativity in utilizing all available political space for LGBT activism. This chapter examines the strategies employed by Chinese LGBT activists in advocating for local LGBT rights in the context of rising nationalism. To achieve this objective, an analysis was conducted on news media and social media coverage of LGBT advocacy in China, along with 26 observations²¹⁵ and interviews involving 9 activists and 15 volunteers. The initial focus was on discussing the constraining role of Chinese nationalism in contemporary LGBT activism in China. Subsequently, the exploration centered on how Chinese LGBT activists navigate these imposed limitations. It was discovered that despite the perceived constraints of Chinese nationalism, NGO_X employs a creative approach by utilizing Filial Nationalism as a form of LGBT advocacy. This approach proves effective as NGO_X incorporates key elements of Filial Nationalism, such as family values and parental authority, as protective layers for addressing LGBT issues. By emphasizing their alignment with and contributions to the government's mainstream values (Harmonious Family and Three-Family Construction), NGO_X is able to engage in various forms of LGBT advocacy. Lastly, attention was given to how local LGBT activists can leverage foreign LGBT support,

²¹⁵ These activities encompass 3 volunteer training sessions, 9 speaking forums (led by guest speakers), 6 internal community sharing and discussion sessions (without guest speakers), 7 film screenings/art exhibitions/theatrical performances, and 1 award ceremony (Rainbow Media Award).

despite the stigmatization of such support by Chinese nationalism. Despite the vilification of foreign LGBT support as a foreign force by Chinese nationalism, China's deep integration into the global economy necessitates contributions from foreigners and foreign companies for its economic growth. This leads to a paradoxical situation of both exclusion and privileges for foreigners and foreign companies in China. Within this contradiction lies a political space that allows local LGBT activists to utilize foreigners, multinational corporations, foreign embassies, and UN human rights mechanisms for local LGBT advocacy. Through an analysis of the strategies employed to navigate Chinese nationalism and leverage global LGBT support, this chapter contributes to an enhanced understanding of how local LGBT activism in China effectively persists despite confronting significant limitations.

7.1 Nationalism and Contemporary LGBT Activism in China

China is currently witnessing a surge of nationalism that has evolved from affirmative patriotism emphasizing national survival to assertive patriotism seeking to demonstrate China's major power ambitions globally (Zhao 2021). This shift in Chinese nationalism is being driven by both the state through a top-down approach, and by patriotic or nationalist individuals and groups from the bottom-up (Zhao 2021; Weiss 2019). From the state-level, the Chinese government implemented an updated Patriotic Education Outline in 2019, which aimed to reinforce state-led patriotism ideology (Zhao 2021). From the public's perspective, the evolution of Chinese nationalists can be traced from the "Angry Youth" of the 1990s to the "Voluntary Fifty-cent Army" in the 21st century and more recently, the "Little Pinks" (Yang and Zheng 2012; Han 2015a; Fang and Repnikova 2018), as elaborated in Chapter 5. According to Weiss (2019), the younger generation in China demonstrates a heightened level of assertiveness and

aggression in advocating for a forceful and confrontational approach in safeguarding Chinese national interests, relative to their older counterparts. Furthermore, nationalism, led by the Chinese government, has become a rationale for censorship in China (Fung 2014). Thus, expressing disapproval of the government or disclosing unfavorable social information, which the authorities prefer to conceal, is considered to be spreading “negative energy” (Yang and Tang 2018). Such actions, which may lead to unfounded accusations of colluding with foreign entities or providing them with the means to harm China, commonly referred to as “di dao zi (递刀子, giving a knife to one’s enemies)” (Wu 2023), imply the act of disseminating negative or harmful information to foreign forces to use against China. Consequently, patriotism has become the dominant voice in the public sphere, while other voices have been largely silenced.

Regarding the LGBT movement in China, Chinese nationalism has acted as a hindering force rather than a supportive one. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, as the Chinese LGBT community has become more visible, LGBT activism and the community have faced backlash attacks from nationalists. Two central mechanisms through which nationalism fends off foreign support for Chinese LGBT issues were discussed: Authenticity and Securitization. The mechanism through which Chinese nationalism targets foreign support for LGBT issues is highly similar to the mechanism by which it targets domestic LGBT activism and activists within China. Firstly, Chinese nationalists employ nationalist narratives to undermine and attack the legitimacy of LGBT activism in the discourse arena. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 4, on public discourse platforms such as Weibo, both macho nationalists and homonationalists employ similar rhetoric to attack LGBT advocacy. These nationalist narratives include phrases such as “collusion with foreign forces,” “subversion of the regime,” “disturbance of social order,” “traitors,” “haters of the country,” “lackeys of capitalism,” “eating the food of the Communist

Party and smashing the bowl of the Communist Party,” “ulterior secrets and purposes,” “agents of colonialism,” and “imperialism’s desire to kill us will never die.” As queer activist C31 during my interview argues, “such nationalist attacks are very effective, although they are old-fashioned and baseless.”²¹⁶ In another case, one gay volunteer (C22) from NGO_X encountered verbal attacks from Chinese nationalists during his promotion of the “Rainbow Cruise” project²¹⁷, which demonstrates the power of these discourse attacks. According to this gay volunteer (C22), the Rainbow Cruise is one of the most innovative forms of LGBT advocacy NGO_X has done. However, during the promotion of the project, this volunteer told me there were numerous attacks from Chinese nationalists, which forced NGO_X to change the destination from South Korea to Japan:

When we started advocating for this project in 2017, we faced a lot of so-called patriots’ abuse. Initially, our plan was to go to South Korea, but because of the THAAD incident,²¹⁸ some patriots to attack us with statements like “Why do you want to be traitors? South Koreans are your ancestors?” or “South Korea is helping the United States prepare for war against China through THAAD. They’re already threatening us on our doorstep. So why do you still want to go to South Korea?” They seemed to think that visiting South Korea meant supporting THAAD’s alleged invasion of China and that we would be traitors. As a result, we felt pressured to change our destination to Japan.

²¹⁶ Interview in Beijing, May 14, 2019

²¹⁷ The Rainbow Cruise is a project initiated by NGO_X that commercializes LGBT advocacy. NGO_X describes this project as a grand gathering for the gender and sexual minority community, aiming to promote communication among participants, foster self-acceptance and family acceptance within the Chinese LGBT population, and enhance social visibility and inclusiveness for the LGBT community. In addition to the aforementioned aims, the Rainbow Cruise, as an international travel project (with destinations in Japan in 2017 and Vietnam in 2019), can also circumvent the surveillance imposed by the Chinese government on large gatherings. The specific operations involve NGO_X and its volunteers utilizing various online platforms such as Weibo, WeChat groups, QQ groups, and others to promote the cruise project. They encourage gender and sexual minority individuals to invite their parents and friends to join them on the cruise. In 2017, the number of gender and sexual minorities, along with their friends and family, participating in the cruise exceeded 800 people, while in 2019, the number reached 1200 people. Taking the 2019 Rainbow Cruise project as an example, participants engage in various activities organized by NGO_X during the 5-day, 4-night journey. These activities include the National Sharing Forum, Coming-out Support Group, Gay and Lesbian Matchmaking Events, Intimacy Workshops, as well as other games and parties. The 2019 Rainbow Cruise event was also documented in a documentary film titled “Rainbow Cruise,” released in 2020.

²¹⁸ The THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) incident refers to the deployment of the THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea with the assistance of the United States in 2016. However, China strongly opposed the deployment of THAAD in South Korea, arguing that the system’s powerful radar could be used to spy on Chinese territory and that its deployment would upset the strategic balance in the region. The incident caused a diplomatic rift between China and South Korea, and also triggered a wave of nationalist sentiment in China.

Similarly, we faced too much abuse from patriots who attacked us for “forgetting our patriotic duty,” “forgetting how Japan invaded China,” and “forgetting the Nanjing Massacre during Japan’s invasion.” According to them, traveling to Japan meant supporting our historical enemies. So, we had to be careful and stopped promoting the project publicly. Instead, we only shared information with our own private circle of friends.²¹⁹

Furthermore, apart from the discourse-level attacks of nationalism, six out of nine LGBT activists participating in my interview research reported instances of experiencing actual repression under nationalism. The LGBT activists I interviewed can be broadly classified into two groups: campus-based LGBT activists and public activists outside of the campus. According to their accounts, academic institutions, police officers, and national security personnel subjected them to interrogation, surveillance, inspection, and harassment on nationalist grounds. For instance, queer activist C31, who was a senior university undergraduate student, faced interrogation by his university counselor and the dean of academic affairs due to his involvement in organizing advocacy initiatives concerning LGBT and women’s rights at their university. One of the key questions posed to him during the interrogation was whether his advocacy efforts received support from foreign entities. As a means of coercion and intimidation, the counselor even informed this activist’s (C31) parents that he was engaged in LGBT and feminist activism and that Western forces had manipulated him into organizing these activities on campus, which disrupted the campus order. This activist (C31) experience provides evidence supporting the prevalent utilization of “relational repression” by the Chinese government, which refers to the application of coercive measures by law enforcement agencies, national security organizations, and even educational institutions towards the relatives of dissidents or activists, as a means to repress dissidents or activists, suppress social unrest, and uphold societal harmony (Deng and O’Brien 2013).

²¹⁹ Interview in Chengdu, April 11, 2019

A comparable LGBT campus incident took place in Shanghai, where a gay undergraduate student (C36) observed that all the rainbow flags planted by a campus-based LGBT group at his university on the 2019 International Day Against Homophobia were swiftly removed. In addition, he noticed that all the LGBT contestants in the 2019 campus singing competition he participated in were eliminated by receiving low scores. Thus, he intended to protest the university's discrimination against LGBT students by waving a rainbow flag during the campus singing contest. However, after the staff of the School Youth League Committee learned of his plan, they also subjected this gay student (C36) to questioning using the discourse of "foreign forces." The staff informed him that "recently, issues concerning gender and sexuality have been manipulated by Western forces, who have infiltrated the political ideas of LGBT members. Therefore, the school does not want any rainbow elements at public campus events."²²⁰

In the realm of public advocacy outside of schools, the involvement of foreign embassies and individuals in LGBT activism in China has become a sensitive issue. Specifically, a lesbian activist (C19) in Chengdu asserted that if a foreigner is invited as a guest speaker or appears in their promotional posters, their activities may be compelled to cancel as a result of government surveillance.²²¹ Moreover, this lesbian activist (C19) underscored that certain LGBT activism associated with foreign countries may yield more severe consequences. For example, the Chengdu local LGBT activists recounted an incident during the 2017 International Day Against Homophobia, where they collaborated with the French Consulate to host an event, namely the

²²⁰ Interview in Shanghai, June 1, 2019

²²¹ According to activist C19, the accessibility of information regarding their activities by the government is attributed to the utilization of WeChat groups or official accounts for event promotion. However, it should be noted that the WeChat platform, like all other internet platforms in China, is subjected to government regulation (CDT 2020). Consequently, the Chinese government can easily acquire the desired information from internet platforms, including WeChat. As a result, if an event involves the participation of foreigners or includes promotional content containing information about foreign individuals or organizations, the government can readily obtain and monitor such event through the WeChat platform.

120Gigabit LGBT Film Screening and Sharing, at a local lesbian bar. However, midway through the screening, the police arrived and demanded an immediate cessation of that LGBT film screening, forcing all participants to vacate the premises. The proprietors of the lesbian bar, a lesbian couple, were summoned to the police station for questioning as they had rented the space to a foreign consulate. According to the lesbian activist (C19), the police did not communicate with foreign embassies but targeted the owners of the lesbian bar and closed it down under the pretext of fire safety, which the activist (C19) deemed a “ridiculous excuse.” Additionally, the police warned the owners that the bar must either be sold or closed. Under such pressure, the lesbian couple decided to sell their establishment considering their own safety. This utilization of safety and security as a pretext by police authorities to monitor and control the LGBT community and other marginalized groups is widespread in various societies, including Australia, North America, Western Europe during the latter half of the twentieth century, as well as present-day China and Russia (Buyantueva 2018; Russell 2019). This practice represents a discriminatory treatment directed at suppressing LGBT communities through the exertion of state policing power.

Furthermore, as a result of the Chinese government’s suppression of LGBT activists, these activists have resorted to self-censorship practices, specifically in terms of creating distance from foreign support. As lesbian activist C19 argues, “presently, local LGBT activists attempt to avoid any financial or staffing contact with foreign embassies when organizing events, as such links are likely to cause unnecessary troubles for us.”²²² And similarly, another gay activist (C11) asserts that “nowadays, in our work on LGBT issues, we have to read the government’s official media releases to find politically sensitive points of the government, in

²²² Interview in Chengdu, April 27, 2019

order to avoid offending the government and subjecting LGBT activists, volunteers, and their organizations to stricter scrutiny.”²²³ As an illustration, the organizer of the 798 Advocacy (detailed in Chapter One) received multiple invitations from foreign media to be interviewed, including the Beijing branch of the New York Times and an Australian TV station. However, he declined these invitations and explained:

After the 798 Advocacy, I have tried to limit my contact with foreign media due to the current political situation in China. As a journalism graduate, I am aware of the strong influence of Western media and their reports on the visibility of the Chinese LGBT community. However, given the strict censorship and xenophobia prevalent on the internet in China, I am concerned about my personal safety if I were to have too much contact with Western media. There are extreme nationalists in this country who, upon seeing a story in the Western media, would assume that I am receiving money from foreign media or the US government to advocate for LGBT rights. While such stigmatization is baseless, the current climate of public discourse is still dominated by such nationalist views. Therefore, I choose not to provoke these extremists.

Moreover, many foreign embassies have raised rainbow flags in support of the LGBT community, and many gay people have taken pictures and posted them online. However, since I had just organized the 798 Advocacy, I was worried that if I were to attend the Embassy and have my photo taken and posted online, it would lead to another wave of attacks against me. While I was not summoned for questioning by the police during the 798 Incident, I am concerned that too many accusations of “collusion with foreign forces” could draw the government’s attention, and I would have to face the consequences. All in all, I still believe in the importance of advocating for LGBT rights in China, but I must be cautious in my approach.²²⁴

A comparable manifestation of self-censorship is evident in the account of another gay volunteer (C21), who explicates how he and his organization aim to avoid expressing opinions on sensitive issues in order to circumvent unnecessary troubles. For instance, following the legalization of same-sex marriage in Taiwan in 2019, the leadership of the LGBT organization to which he belongs requested volunteers to abstain from commenting on the issue, especially avoiding criticisms of the Chinese government. He explains,

China is extremely sensitive to anything related to Taiwan. When Taiwan passed the special law on same-sex marriage in 2019, many volunteers, including myself, received a

²²³ Interview in Chengdu, April 5, 2019

²²⁴ Interview in Beijing, May 9, 2019

notice from the leadership of the organization. The notice advised us not to compare the situations in Taiwan and mainland China regarding same-sex marriage to avoid unnecessary trouble for the organization and its volunteers. Additionally, we were told not to criticize the current situation in China. Speech control remains quite strict, and even if we express our opinions, we may be asked to delete them periodically. Otherwise, our accounts may be deleted.²²⁵

In summary, Chinese nationalism has exerted a pronounced adverse influence on LGBT activism in China. This influence encompasses the deployment of nationalist assaults aimed at undermining the legitimacy of LGBT activism, as well as the direct suppression of LGBT advocates and activists. Consequently, the political sphere for LGBT advocacy has been further constrained, exacerbating the already restricted avenues for meaningful participation and engagement. In particular, maintaining connections with overseas LGBT support has become a politically sensitive issue. Chinese LGBT activists have responded to attacks based on Chinese nationalism by engaging in self-censorship, often decoupling the local LGBT movement from foreign support or making such links more obscure. As one gay activist (C29) stressed, “the primary goal of LGBT organizations today is not to influence as many people as possible, but to keep the organization alive.”²²⁶ Therefore, in this context, Chinese LGBT activism requires more intricate strategies to evade the risks posed by nationalism.

The stringent surveillance enforced by the Chinese government, combined with the attacks from nationalist groups, have presented significant obstacles for Chinese LGBT activists in advocating for LGBT rights. Nonetheless, the existence of these challenges does not imply that LGBT activism in China has ceased. Rather, in the face of such adverse conditions, Chinese LGBT activists have demonstrated ingenuity in seeking out viable political spaces and persisting in their efforts to promote LGBT equality. In the following section, I will delve into an

²²⁵ Interview in Chengdu, April 10, 2019

²²⁶ Interview in Beijing, May 11, 2019

exploration of two strategies employed within the realm of Chinese LGBT activism, drawing from my observations of 26 Chinese LGBT activities, news media and social media research focused on Chinese LGBT activism, and interviews conducted with 9 activists and 15 volunteers. These strategies encompass the strategic utilization of Chinese nationalism as a tool and the strategic leveraging of global LGBT supporting forces, with the aim of advancing the cause of Chinese local activism.

7.2 Employing Filial Nationalism for LGBT Activism

In the preceding section, the limiting influence of Chinese nationalism on the Chinese LGBT movements was examined. Consequently, navigating the relationship between LGBT activism and Chinese nationalism as a censorship criterion in China necessitates practical and intricate skills. According to Charles Tilly, the development of social movements throughout history is closely linked to the advancement of democracy, as the process of democratization inherently fosters social movements, and the proliferation of social movements often contributes to further democratization (2004:141). Therefore, the diverse forms of social movement activism observed in Western democratic societies, such as rallies, marches, demonstrations, and strikes, are seldom seen in authoritarian China, despite the nominal guarantees provided by the Chinese constitution. In authoritarian China, the primary consideration in Chinese resistance and collective actions is to avoid group punishment and repression by the state. As a result, many non-direct confrontations have become a crucial form of resistance, as described by James C. Scott (1985) as a weapon of the weak. One noteworthy form of indirect resistance is the utilization of official discourse for the advocacy of activists (O'Brien 2002; Tenzin 2013). Specifically, activists present themselves as supporters and defenders of "China," Chinese

traditions and culture, and align with the government/state's agenda, rather than as opponents or rebels against the government. They then employ the regime's own words as a tool to safeguard their lawful rights and interests (O'Brien 2002:147; Tenzin 2013). This approach can be succinctly summarized as "Waving the Red Flag²²⁷ to Oppose the Red Flag (打着红旗反红旗)" (Shao 2010: 217).

In terms of Chinese LGBT activism, the strategy of "Waving the Red Flag to Oppose the Red Flag" can be employed by local activists to provide a protective cover and legitimacy for the local LGBT movements and community, and to mitigate the risk of government crackdowns and repression. This section discusses how an NGO (hereafter referred to as NGO_X) promotes its LGBT advocacy by using the state's "harmonious family culture" slogan. By framing their advocacy in the context of "harmonious family culture," NGO_X actively integrates their LGBT advocacy into the government ideology and nationalism, thereby significantly reducing their operational risk.

However, not all forms of nationalism can be utilized by LGBT activists for their advocacy. "Filial Nationalism," as identified by Vanessa Fong (2004), is a specific form of Chinese nationalism that can be effectively employed by Chinese LGBT activists. Fong describes Filial Nationalism as the strong sense of nationalism among Chinese young nationalists of the 1980s generation, who considered their loyalty to China as equivalent to their unwavering loyalty to their parents (2004:632). Filial Nationalism not only serves as a means for individuals to express their identification and loyalty to their country but also functions as a primary tool for the Chinese government to construct its ideology, particularly patriotism. According to Fong, "it

²²⁷ In Chinese context, the red flag is the symbol of the Chinese Communist Party and government. Thus "Waving the Red Flag to Oppose the Red Flag" means use a Chinese Communist Party's ideology to criticize or oppose Chinese Communist Party's ideology.

was the analogy of filial duty that served as the most effective basis for [Chinese] nationalism in the globalized, neoliberal environment of the 20th century” (2004: 642).

In 21st century China, family culture and Filial Nationalism have gradually gained a higher status in government official ideology. For instance, during the Hu Jintao era (2003-2013), “family harmony” was the cornerstone of the Harmonious Society ideology since harmonious families can facilitate harmonious societal development and social stability (Xinhua News 2010). Under Xi Jinping’s leadership (2013-present), family values and Filial Nationalism have been elevated to a new level. “The family is a small nation, and the nation is a larger family” has been summarized by state media Xinhua Net (2018) and People’s Daily (2018b) as Xi’s patriotic devotion to the country and people. Since taking office, Xi Jinping has delivered a series of speeches on “family, family virtues, family education,” which are referred to as the “three-family construction.” For example, in 2015, Xi delivered a speech to the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the People’s Republic of China State Council (CCPCC and PRSC) on the “Three-family construction” that emphasizes the importance of family education and family virtues in serving national development and social harmony. In 2019, Xi further emphasized the significance of family values and Filial Nationalism in maintaining social stability in Chinese society, as evidenced by his speech to the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the People’s Republic of China State Council:

Being filial at home and loyal to the country is an excellent tradition of the Chinese nation. Without the prosperity and development of the country, there can be no happy and prosperous families. Similarly, without millions of happy and prosperous families, there can be no prosperity and development of the country. We must vigorously promote family and country values throughout society, cultivate and practice socialist core values, promote patriotism, collectivism, and the socialist spirit, advocate the unity of loving the family and the country, and let every individual and family contribute to the Chinese nation’s big family (Xinhua Net 2019)

Furthermore, under Xi's leadership, "family virtues, family education, and family building" have gradually become institutionalized (People's Daily 2022). For example, in 2016, the Central Guidance Commission for Building Spiritual Civilization of the Chinese Communist Party issued the "Opinions on Deepening the Construction of Civilized Families" (XinhuaNet 2016); in 2019, the All-China Women's Federation and the Ministry of Education revised the "National Guidelines for Family Education" (CNWomen 2019); in 2020, the All-China Women's Federation and the Ministry of Education issued the "Basic Behavioral Norms for Parents and Family Education" (Thepaper 2020); and in 2021, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the Central Civilization Office, and the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection jointly issued the "Implementation Opinions on Further Strengthening the Construction of Family, Family Education, and Family Virtues" (People's Daily 2021). All of these policies emphasize that socialist core values should be an essential element of the construction of family culture so that the family can serve national development, national progress, and social harmony (People's Daily 2022). As Wang (2020) argues, the Chinese government promotes loyalty to the state by regularly linking nationalism and filial piety and deliberately using these ideas to disseminate the state's messages through social relationships and family ties.

Moreover, Filial Nationalism is rooted in Confucian cultural values, particularly in its emphasis on patriarchal family values and paternalistic cultural norms (Wang 2020). China has been heavily influenced by Confucianism, and this cultural heritage makes China distinct from other parts of the world (Hill 2000). Confucian values place great importance on the family, order, and consensus, leading some scholars to argue that Chinese society is paternalistic and emphasizes hierarchical authority (Adamczyk and Cheng 2015). More specifically,

traditional/Confucian family culture comprises interlocking elements such as filial piety, obedience, conservative sexual morality and gender roles, family connectedness (keeping the family intact and family lineage), and benevolence (Adamczyk and Cheng 2015; Yeh and Bedford 2003). Firstly, filial piety is a fundamental principle of Chinese family culture that emphasizes children's duty and obedience to their parents, including fulfilling parental wishes and needs and providing attentive support for aged parents (Lin et al. 2016). Secondly, family honor typically takes precedence over individual interests, which gives parents significant power to influence their offspring's lives, especially in areas such as spouse choice and family planning (Gao 2003; Yan and Sorenson 2006). The success of parents is often measured by their ability to raise an obedient and docile child who follows their instructions, bringing them pride (Adamczyk and Cheng 2015). Thirdly, obedience entails compliance with conventional traditions and adherence to parental orders (Yeh and Bedford 2003). In traditional Chinese family culture, individuals who behave unconventionally are more likely to be punished. Fourthly, conventional gender roles prescribe clear social roles and responsibilities for men and women (Adamczyk and Cheng 2015). The family culture imposes strict rules on women, known as the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues (三从四德)."²²⁸ Women are still primarily responsible for housework and childcare, while men are viewed as leaders and primary breadwinners (Xu and Lai 2004). Sex is mainly viewed as serving the function of fertility and procreation, while the aspects of sex for pleasure continue to be repressed (Lin et al. 2016). Continuing the family bloodline and having more children are considered basic filial piety duties, as reflected in orthodox Confucian statements such as "there are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the

²²⁸ Three Obediences and Four Virtues were developed to discipline women. The Three Obediences require women to obey the father before marriage, obey the husband after marriage, and obey the first son after the death of husband. The Four Virtues are (sexual) morality, proper speech, modest manners, and diligent work.

worst is to have no descendants” (不孝有三，无后为大) (Xie and Peng 2017). Traditional gender roles assume a binary distinction between femininity and masculinity, with what is not feminine being masculine and vice versa (Whitley and Ægisdóttir 2000). Fifthly, traditional family values emphasize individuals’ interdependence and strong relationship ties (Bian 1997). These strong ties create expectations for individuals to meet the authorities’ expectations (parents in the family), rather than the “be yourself” concept prevalent in Western societies.

While traditional family values in China are often conservative, they also have a more reciprocal and humanistic dimension, which is the principle of benevolence (仁爱) (Yeh and Bedford 2003). In other words, children are expected not only to obey their parents, but parents are also expected to show benevolence towards their children. Furthermore, the principle of benevolence also requires elder siblings to be kind to younger siblings, and husbands to be kind to their wives. Despite this, Confucian cultural values emphasize obedience, patriarchy, the heterosexual nuclear family, and parental authority, with benevolence being an additional value.

In addition to relying on core Confucian values, Filial Nationalism heavily depends on another ideology, namely the isomorphic relationship between the family, the clan, and the state (Zhou 2019). This enables the conversion of an individual’s loyalty to their family into loyalty to the nation. The isomorphic relationship can also be referred to as the family/clan-nation same construction (jia guo tong gou 家国同构) or family/clan-nation one system (jia guo yi ti 家国一体) (Du 2020; Zhou 2019; Tao and Wen 2022). The term “isomorphic institution” refers to the synchronous constitution between a family, clan, and state, where a clan is the expansion of families, and the state is the expansion and stretch of clans (Zhou 2019). As a member of a family, an individual must follow the orders of their family and clan, where the parent holds the supreme position and power. Similarly, as a member of the nation, one must follow the orders of

the state, which is the supreme authority, akin to following the family order (Du 2020). This hierarchical order connects family ethics with state ethics, as embodied in the core ethical value of the “three cardinal guides (三纲)”: the ruler guides the subject, the father guides the son, and the husband guides the wife. Therefore, this isomorphic institution stipulates the obedient relationships between children and parents within the family and between citizens and the state or ruler within the nation.

Therefore, the Chinese government actively utilizes Filial Nationalism as a tool to leverage patriarchal family values and paternalistic cultural norms to justify and maintain its authoritarian legitimacy and demand loyalty to the state (Wang 2020). This approach exemplifies the moralizing governance of the Chinese government, which aims to integrate moral values into its policies, including the regulation of social order through the regulation of family relations (Lin and Trevaskes 2019). Filial Nationalism places emphasis on concepts such as heteronormativity, patriarchy, and parental control, which conflict with the principles of equality and diversity advocated by the LGBT movement. Nevertheless, the significance of the family in Filial Nationalism also provides a political space for non-governmental organizations, such as NGO_X, to promote LGBT advocacy while simultaneously emphasizing the family’s role as a bond between individuals and the state and its function in upholding social morality and stability.

NGO_X focuses primarily on promoting self-acceptance and family acceptance for Chinese gender and sexual minorities. To gain legitimacy from the government, the organization highlights its contribution to “family culture/values.” Despite repeated rejections of their registration requests by the local Ministry of Civil Affairs, NGO_X has emerged as one of the largest LGBT organizations in China, with branches established in 77 different cities, as evidenced by its 2019 Annual Report. Through an analysis of the organization’s website

documents, research on news and social media related to NGO_X's advocacy, and observations²²⁹ and interviews conducted with 4 activists and 14 volunteers affiliated with NGO_X, two primary strategies that utilize Filial Nationalism are identified: (1) using family culture as a connection to frame LGBT activism as part of maintaining national and social stability, thereby aligning with official ideology and nationalism; (2) utilizing parental authority by emphasizing obedience to both the state and parents, which is inherent in nationalism, and mobilizing volunteer parents to advocate for LGBT issues.

7.2.1 Using Family Culture

NGO_X places its primary focus on the issue of family acceptance for gender and sexual minorities, and consequently, it seeks to establish its own legitimacy by emphasizing its contribution to “family culture.” This alignment with official values regarding family enables the organization to gain a veneer of legitimacy from the government. At the core of NGO_X's values and beliefs is a desire to maintain consistency with official ideology concerning “family values.” For example, when it was founded in 2008, NGO_X included “family harmony” in its slogan, as it was deemed an important aspect of the official ideology of Hu Jintao's government, which emphasized the building of a harmonious society. Following President Xi Jinping's proposal in 2015 of the “Three-Family Construction” as a crucial part of socialist core values, NGO_X revised its explanation of its core values to incorporate Xi's narrative of constructing “family, family virtues, and family education.” The organization's latest introduction reflects this change, with the concepts of “family virtues,” “family harmony,” “state harmony,” and “three-

²²⁹ The observations used for analysis in this section include 2 volunteer training sessions, 5 speaking forums (led by guest speakers), and 2 internal community sharing/discussion sessions (without guest speakers) organized by NGO_X.

family construction” directly drawn from Xi Jinping’s speeches. Furthermore, NGO_X emphasizes its advocacy as “small family helping big family,” utilizing Filial Nationalism as a narrative technique. Here is a brief introduction of NGO_X on its Website:

Over the past 13 years, we have helped tens of thousands of parents’ transition from focusing solely on their own small families to helping big family and becoming more loving, generous, and compassionate. As volunteer workers, these parents promote family virtues, improve family harmony, and foster healthy development among the younger generation. As a result, millions of families have become a vital cornerstone for the development of the country, the progress of the nation, and social harmony. Family harmony is the foundation of social harmony. We will actively explore new ideas of family in the modern era, cultivate affectionate family relationships, promote positive and virtuous family values, pursue shared family goals, help more individuals strive for a better life, and contribute to the “Three-Family Construction.”²³⁰

Furthermore, NGO_X emphasizes on its website that its LGBT activism should “comply with socialist core values, including values such as family harmony, mutual assistance, and love.” This strengthens the connection and consistency between NGO_X and the official government ideology. To highlight this connection, NGO_X directly posted the government’s document, “Implementation Opinions on Further Strengthening the Construction of Family, Family Education, and Family Virtues,” jointly issued by The Central Propaganda Department, the Central Civilization Office, and the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Organs. According to a core member Activist DF’s (pseudonym) explanation, NGO_X’s positioning of linking the core issue of accepting LGBT children into families with family harmony and social harmony is “accurate, given the current political environment.” Activist DF further elaborated that addressing the issue of family acceptance within the LGBT community and fostering improved relationships between families and their LGBT children contributes to the cultivation

²³⁰ Sources from NGO_X Website, retrieved on December 12, 2022

of harmonious families and a harmonious society. Importantly, these efforts are both permitted and encouraged by the government.²³¹

Furthermore, NGO_X strategically aligns itself with official ideology through its actions, including media promotion and volunteer training. For instance, the organization uses official rhetoric in shaping its media image and endorses state media outlets such as Portrait (Renwu, 人物) and Global Times, as well as UN News and Phoenix News on its website. In a 2021 UN interview report, one of NGO_X's leaders avoided discussing the government's inaction on discrimination against gender and sexual minorities and instead praised Chinese society for its tolerance towards homosexuality. In the report, he argued that Chinese society has rapidly developed acceptance of homosexuality in the last decade due to a culture that does not suppress it through religion, as some Western countries do. Similarly, in a 2021 Phoenix News report, two mother volunteers shared their experiences of accepting their gay children and helping other parents, leading to a positive evaluation of NGO_X's contributions to small and big families based on the premise that "the family is the smallest country, and the country is a big family" (Ifeng 2021). Phoenix News argued that since its establishment, NGO_X has dedicated itself to helping children and parents resolve intergenerational conflicts, eliminate barriers, promote communication and understanding, bring love back to the "small family," create an upward and friendly parent-child atmosphere, help family members build their quality, improve their spirituality, nurture their family relationships, and contribute to a harmonious and stable society through the warmth of a small family (Ifeng 2021). In addition, these parent volunteers promote family virtues, harmony, and the healthy growth of the next generation, which in turn make millions of families an important base for national development, progress, and social harmony

²³¹ Observation D2, a volunteer training session that took place in Chengdu on April 7, 2019

(Ifeng 2021). NGO_X seeks this type of evaluation in media coverage, which is consistent with its efforts to maintain consistency with official values.

In terms of volunteer training, my interviews with 14 NGO_X volunteers found that the organization's core beliefs, particularly their approach to LGBT activism and government relations, were widely accepted and supported by most volunteers. Here is how one volunteer (C20) explained his understanding of the NGO_X core beliefs and its relationship with the government official ideology:

Family culture and harmony are integral parts of traditional Chinese culture. We advocate for family culture, which is also aligned with the government. We are not against the government, and we do not agree with the notion that if the government does not provide us with rights, we will cause trouble. Instead, we believe in promoting mutual understanding and cooperation with the government. We promote LGBT people's self-acceptance and encourage parents to accept their children, facilitate a better relationship between children and parents, and alleviate family conflicts. I think when families are harmonious, society is more likely to be stable. In this way, our actions also contribute to positive social change.²³²

In summary, NGO_X is proactive in aligning with the official ideology through the use of family culture as a link, not only in the design of their core organizational principles but also in their practical operations, including volunteer training and media representation. Furthermore, by using Filial Nationalism, NGO_X has constructed a narrative of "small family helping the 'big family' (Chinese nation/society/state)" to emphasize its contribution to the country and society and thus justify its legitimacy.

7.2.2 Utilizing Parental Authority

The utilization of parental authority in LGBT advocacy involves leveraging the characteristic of obedience rooted in Confucian culture and the ideology of Filial Nationalism.

²³² Interview in Chengdu, April 28, 2019

The political opportunity of utilizing parental authority in LGBT advocacy by NGO_X relies on several factors. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, Confucian culture places significant emphasis on filial piety and obedience to parents, granting them considerable authority within the family and society. Secondly, Filial Nationalism emphasizes the expectation for Chinese individuals to demonstrate loyalty to the nation, paralleling the loyalty shown to their parents and family (Fong 2004), thereby heightening the significance of parents and family. Additionally, the Chinese government has integrated moral values, particularly those associated with family ethics, into the social control system, aiming to leverage the authoritative role of families or parents to regulate individual behaviors and promote societal stability (Rojek 1989; Lin and Trevaskes 2019). For instance, the “Law on the Promotion of Family Education in the People’s Republic of China” enacted by the Chinese government in 2021 mandates families to cultivate and practice socialist core values, promote traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and socialist advanced culture, and ensure the healthy growth of minors (Ministry of Education of China 2021). According to this law, parents have the responsibility to implement family education and teach minors to “love the Communist Party, love the country, love the people, love the collective, and love socialism, establish the concept of maintaining national unity, strengthen the consciousness of the Chinese nation’s community, and cultivate patriotism” (Ministry of Education of China 2021). This policy emphasizes the need for parents to utilize their authoritative role in the family to serve national stability and national ideology, including patriotism education. Hence, NGO_X can leverage parental authority to find political opportunities to advocate for LGBT rights. This strategy is directly reflected in its slogan, “Gathering the power of family and friends to improve the living environment of the LGBT community.”²³³ As one volunteer (C1) noted, “In Chinese

²³³ This slogan can be observed within NGO_X’s presentation of its guiding principles on its website.

society, people still respect the status of parents. People will make some concessions when they face the parental group.”²³⁴

According to information on the NGO_X website, in 2021, the organization has enlisted the help of more than 2,000 parent volunteers from across China. These parent volunteers have taken on nicknames that include “Mom” or “Dad” as a title, such as “Mom Rainbow,” “Mom Dong,” and “Dad Kai,”²³⁵ creating a symbolic sense of kinship within the LGBT community. These volunteers fulfill multiple roles. Firstly, their companionship plays a critical part in assisting families to accept their LGBT children. According to the NGO_X website, these parents have helped tens of thousands of families to accept their LGBT children. One example of such assistance comes from Mom F (pseudonym), a parent volunteer who initially struggled for 10 years to accept her son’s homosexuality. During a sharing session with a theme centered around coming-out consultations,²³⁶ Mom F expressed that she frequently receives expressions of longing from children who wish she were their mother. Many children approach her, holding her hand and expressing their desire for a supportive parental figure. They often seek comfort through hugs and tears, releasing pent-up frustrations and bitterness. Mom F highlights that many of these children express a need to cry but lack a safe space and someone willing to listen to their struggles with depression. Mom F further shares that many of the children refer to her as “mom” because they lack an accepting parent in their lives. Consequently, these children feel a special sense of connection with and closeness to her.

²³⁴ Interview in Lanzhou, March 1, 2019

²³⁵ Parent volunteers in NGO_X typically adhere to a naming convention in which they refer to themselves as “Mom/Dad + Noun.” This chosen noun can be their own surname, the name of their child, or any other noun of their preference. For instance, “Mom Dong” signifies a mother with the surname Dong, “Dad Kai” indicates that the child of this father is named Kai, and “Mom Rainbow” is a personalized name created by the mother.

²³⁶ Observation D8, a coming-out consultation session that took place in Beijing on April 7, 2019.

Secondly, parental identity holds significant authority, which makes parent-led LGBT advocacy the least opposed form of advocacy. By appearing in public as “fathers” and “mothers”, these parents are at a lower risk of being censored or attacked. As a gay volunteer (C1) argues,

In Chinese culture, it natural for parents to speak for, protect, stand up for, and speak out against injustices to their children. Most people respect and understand this kind of ethical morality. In other words, although the government and the public may not always empathize with gender and sexual minorities, but they are more inclined to empathize with parents.²³⁷

Here is one successful parent-led LGBT public advocacy project, 100 Rainbow Parents’ Stories project. This project records stories of how parents accept their gender and sexual minority children and disseminates them on various platforms. Specifically, between July 2022 and July 2023, NGO_X uploaded a total of 17 videos featuring Rainbow Parents’ Stories on the Bilibili website. These videos garnered over 4.37 million views and received more than 28,400 comments. To further explore the discourse, I selected the top 20 comments with the highest engagement for each video and conducted a discourse analysis²³⁸, as depicted in Figure 7.1.

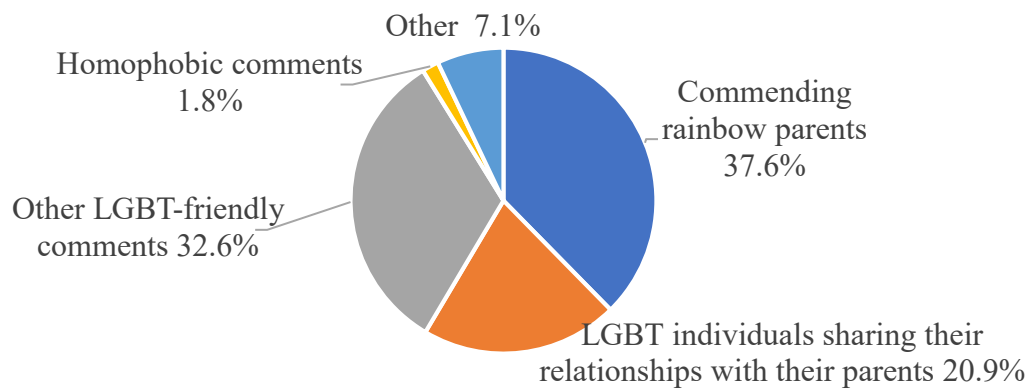


Figure 7.1 Distribution of Comments Under Rainbow Parent Videos (total = 340)²³⁹

²³⁷ Interview in Lanzhou, March 1, 2019

²³⁸ On the Bilibili platform, the comments below the videos are automatically sorted by popularity, making it very convenient to collect and analyze these top comments.

²³⁹ Data collected on July 15, 2023

Out of these top comments, only 6 (accounting for 1.8% of the total top comments) contained homophobic remarks. This is in stark contrast to Chapter 4, where over 38% of the comments under LGBT advocacy posts by the US Embassy consisted of macho nationalist and societal security attacks targeting the LGBT community (see Figure 4.3, 4.5, and 4.6 in Chapter 4 for more detailed information). Below, I have provided two examples from the compiled set of six homophobic comments:

Actually, many people maybe naturally bisexual, and these individuals can easily be misled into believing they are homosexual. So, I really can't understand those people who constantly promote same-sex relationships as true love. (@LaoxiadeBaobei (老夏的宝贝), July 17, 2022)

I also believe that we should respect homosexuality, but homosexuality should not become mainstream. (@Jennifer-kim, July 17, 2022)

However, none of the comments in the video criticized these parents. Instead, 37.6% of the top comments praised the courage of these mothers and fathers and expressed deep emotions and appreciation for their stories. Here are some representative comments:

This auntie is amazing. I thought it would be a typical story of a parent initially not accepting and gradually coming around, but I never expected that the auntie would even register on a lesbian dating app to personally experience it. Even novels dare not depict such a story. (@Yizhi_Yanqi (一只_言其), December 18, 2022)

I particularly love this mother's simple words: "This world is not scary because Mom is here." (@LIONDESIGN, December 17, 2022)

The child is not the problem. The main issue for this auntie is that it was a completely new, shocking event that shattered her worldview. It was like reconstructing her worldview, a painful process akin to shedding a layer of skin. Thankfully, she made it through. (@ZhangZhang (张张 202020111), September 5, 2022)

I am truly moved by the knowledge and cultivation of this father, not only in regard to his attitude towards homosexuality, but also his attitude towards the world. He does not evade or discriminate. I feel that his responsibility extends beyond being just a father; he takes on the responsibility of being a person in society. He loves the world with understanding and respect, treating everyone with human care. This world is often cold,

but I am grateful for people like him who bring warmth, making the world feel hopeful. I hope this family can continue to live happily. (@Nathan(Nathan 星空の夢), July 3, 2023)

This father understands human nature, respects others, and loves his son. He doesn't care about the face that others hold dear. This kind of father is the backbone of Chinese families! (@JinghaiYumumu (京海榆木木), March 27, 2023)

Furthermore, these videos also encouraged many sexual minority individuals to share their personal experiences, comprising 20.9% of the top comments. These shares received responses and words of encouragement from other commenters. Here are some examples of LGBT individuals sharing their own experiences in the comments section of the Rainbow

Parents' videos:

I have also come out of the closet, but my parents think I'm sick and urge me to see a doctor. I have explained a lot to them, but they don't listen. However, now they don't pressure me to get married as much, they just occasionally mention that this is a psychological problem and as long as I resolve it myself, I can marry a wife. There's nothing more to say, I can only slowly make them accept it over time. (@Tobias ヽ', April 29, 2023)

It's similar with my dad. After he found out about my sexual orientation, he sold our ancestral house in the hometown and bought a new one in the city, saying that this is how things will be in the future. Some relatives may not have much contact with us anymore, it's better to distance ourselves and avoid hearing unnecessary gossip. He still hopes that I can lead a "normal" life, but if I can't change, he doesn't oppose it. He's just worried about what will happen to me after they are gone. Sometimes, thinking about it makes me feel quite sad. (@bZhanFeizhengshiJianchayuan(b站非正式监查员), March 12, 2023)

In addition to praising Rainbow Parents and sharing the experiences of LGBT individuals, there are also other LGBT-friendly comments under the Rainbow Parents' videos, accounting for 32.6% of the top comments. For example, user @ammi2018 commented, "If my child is GAY, as long as they are truly certain about their sexual orientation, I will respect them. As long as they are happy, that's all that matters."²⁴⁰ Similarly, another user @Hong Zhao (红枣

²⁴⁰ @ammi2018, April 29, 2023

枸杞桂圆儿) argued, “I don’t mind whether my son likes boys or girls. Even if he wants to become a girl in the future, it’s completely okay. He is first and foremost himself, with his own life, and secondly, he is my precious baby.”²⁴¹ Furthermore, there are also comments advocating for LGBT rights, such as @snow130’s comment, “I hope same-sex marriage can be legalized soon so that everyone can be with the person they love.”²⁴²

There are various similar examples of parent-led LGBT advocacy. For example, in 2013, a group of 100 parents of gay and lesbian individuals wrote a letter to the National People’s Congress, urging for the amendment of the Marriage Law to include same-sex marriage (RFA 2013). In 2017, Rainbow Parents displayed “marriage advertisements”²⁴³ for their gay children in the matchmaking corner of People’s Park in Shanghai (China News 2017). Furthermore, when a homophobic banner was displayed at Huazhong University of Science and Technology in 2017, which read “Safeguard the traditional ethics of the Chinese nation, defend the core values of socialism, resist the erosion of Western corrupt ideas, and keep homosexuality away from the university campus,” a group of mothers fought back with a banner that read, “Don’t let homophobes hurt our children!” and called on the university to investigate the incident (Chengdu Economic Daily 2017). In 2017, three mothers, along with other volunteers, wrote letters to the Internet Audio-Visual Association and the State Administration of Press, Radio, Film, and Television to oppose the censorship of homosexual content (China Digital Times 2017). In summary, NGO_X engages in various forms of LGBT advocacy under the authority and protection of parents.

²⁴¹ @Hong Zhao (红枣枸杞桂圆儿), March 28, 2023

²⁴² @snow130, May 1, 2023

²⁴³ In the matchmaking corner, marriage advertisements are typically displayed on an A4 paper created by parents. These advertisements contain information about their children and the desired characteristics of their potential partners, including age, height, photos, occupation, property ownership, household registration, and educational background. The matchmaking corner is open every Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

Parental involvement can play a significant role in reducing conflict in communication with the government due to the authority of their parental status. Mom F's advocacy experience reflects the advantages of parental identity in communication with the government. Mom F joined LGBT activism in 2013 and noted that most of the volunteers were parents rather than LGBT individuals themselves. In 2015, Mom F went to the Beijing Center for Disease Control (CDC) to distribute calendars that included educational information about homosexuality with the intention of influencing government departments to change their attitudes towards homosexuality. She started with the CDC as it is responsible for HIV/AIDS issues, which have been widely stigmatized as being related to homosexuality. Upon her arrival, no one initially paid attention to her, but given that she was "a parent and an old lady," they did not ask her to leave. To ensure her message was received, Mom F distributed a specially designed calendar containing information on homosexuality to each staff. A female staff member thanked her but did not understand why she was there, prompting Mom F to explain that she was doing homosexual advocacy work and wanted to help the homosexual community with the serious HIV infection issue. The female staff member then introduced Mom F to their department head. Although the department head did not know how to work with her initially, Mom F suggested that the Beijing CDC could collaborate with NGO_X and provide on-site HIV testing for the participants. As a result, the CDC was invited by Mom F to NGO_X's subsequent sharing session.²⁴⁴

Similarly, the important role of parents in communication with the government is evidenced in additional events that I observed. During my attendance at a southwest regional LGBT conference in 2019, one activist (C10) shared with me that it was possible national

²⁴⁴ Observation D8, a coming-out consultation session that took place in Beijing on April 7, 2019

security police might visit the venue to monitor the event. If such an occurrence transpired, it was planned that Mom K (pseudonym), a senior volunteer, would assume the role of communicator with the police or national security. Moreover, in cases where parents are not the primary communicators, NGO_X organizations may utilize the positive news of parent volunteers as an opportunity to communicate with the government, whereby parents still hold significant influence. For example, Activist DF, responsible for handling national security and police matters, emphasized the importance of timing when engaging with these entities.²⁴⁵ According to Activist DF, the majority of activists involved in social movements in China prefer to maintain distance from the government in order to evade surveillance by the police or national security personnel. However, Activist DF expressed a preference for proactive communication with the police or national security forces as a means to reduce the risk of government surveillance. Activist DF considered reporting events such as the awards received by parent volunteers to the police as an excellent opportunity for local police engagement.²⁴⁶ To illustrate, Activist DF provided an example of a recent interaction with the police, which occurred when a mom volunteer received a charity award in her district for her contributions to social service. Activist DF shared the “positive news” of the mom volunteer’s award with the police and requested an opportunity to discuss their LGBT activities, a process referred to by Activist DF as “voluntarily having tea.”²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Observation D2, a volunteer training session that took place in Chengdu on April 7, 2019

²⁴⁶ It is important to note that the awards received by parent volunteers do not necessarily need to be reported to the national security police. However, for Activist DF personally, the awards received by parent volunteers serve as a positive message about the LGBT community. Activist DF sees it as an opportunity to improve the negative perception that the national security police may have towards the LGBT community.

²⁴⁷ In the Chinese context, the term “drink tea” or “being invited to drink tea” specifically refers to individuals with differing political views being summoned by the police for questioning due to their speech or civic actions. In this case, “drink tea voluntarily” refers to Activist DF actively seeking opportunities to engage with national security police and making efforts to mitigate the government’s hostility towards their organization.

In summary, NGO_X has incorporated the elements of Filial Nationalism, specifically family culture and parental authority, in formulating its core concept, carrying out specific public advocacy, and communicating with both the government and the public. These tactics have proven effective and, to some extent, successful, as they project an image of supporting the government, integrating into the mainstream, fostering harmonious families, and contributing to social stability. Consequently, NGO_X is gradually receiving official recognition, albeit still unable to register as a government-recognized NGO. Furthermore, in 2018, NGO_X established a partnership program with a government-recognized foundation, enabling them to legally raise funds in China. Additionally, as per their website, their sharing session project was chosen as part of the China Good Public Welfare Platform of Nandu Public Welfare Foundation in December 2020. Of greater significance, NGO_X has garnered official media recognition. In June 2018, the state media outlet Global Times reported and praised their 10th-anniversary conference, portraying it as a “family reunion” of gays and lesbians with their parents. The article depicted NGO_X’s members as “mostly down-to-earth and having a positive attitude toward life; and their pragmatic grassroots work adds to social harmony and family harmony.” Furthermore, Global Times highly commended NGO_X’s “sincerity” in cooperating with local officials and affirmed that many of NGO_X’s public service activities were showcased on CCTV’s English Channel (CGTN), which has become a kind of “business card” for China’s outreach work.

In conclusion, NGO_X’s utilization of Filial Nationalism’s family culture and parental authority, coupled with its pro-regime stance, represents a practical and utilitarian approach in serving the LGBT activism movement, particularly within China’s authoritarian political system. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the strategies employed by NGO_X, utilizing parental roles

and family values to advance LGBT advocacy, are also observed in other countries. For instance, in North America, PFLAG similarly leverages the influence of parents and motivates them to engage in activism aimed at eradicating discrimination and securing equal civil rights for the LGBT community (Broad 2002, 2011; Broad, Crawley & Foley 2004; Broad et al. 2008; Fields 2001). However, the LGBT advocacy undertaken by NGO_X in China not only confronts conservative opinions prevailing in society but also, more significantly, contends with an authoritarian regime. Consequently, NGO_X must seek the legitimization of its LGBT advocacy discourse from official narratives to mitigate the risk of political scrutiny. This places NGO_X in a distinct context from PFLAG in North America, necessitating nuanced differences in their specific advocacy approaches. Further comparative analysis between NGO_X and Western counterparts like PFLAG is a topic that holds promise for future research.

7.3 Leveraging Global LGBT Support for Chinese Local Activism

The LGBT movement in China has had a close association with international support (Hildebrandt 2012). For instance, the 1995 World Women's Conference held in Beijing had a specific forum for lesbians and drew visits from government officials (Wei 2015). Additionally, the inflow of foreign HIV/AIDS prevention funds was instrumental in the emergence of several LGBT organizations (Hildebrandt 2012). However, the political space for the Chinese LGBT movement has recently become increasingly restricted. On one hand, this can be attributed to bottom-up factors, such as the emergence of a new wave of nationalism and the rise of "little pinks," which have fueled xenophobia and created a sensitive environment for cooperation between local LGBT organizations and foreign supporters, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. On the other hand, more significant restrictions come from top-down government institutions,

specifically the implementation of the Law on Administration of Activities of Overseas Nongovernmental Organizations in Mainland China (hereafter referred to as the Overseas NGO Law) in 2017, which severed financial support between local LGBT NGOs and foreign entities. Through discourse analysis of the Overseas NGO Law, I argue that this law has had a profound impact on the cooperation between domestic social organizations and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), which is manifested in the following ways. Firstly, INGOs are prohibited from establishing branch offices in China and are only allowed to establish representative offices, which limits direct communication, cooperation, and coordination between INGOs and Chinese civil organizations (NPC 2017). Secondly, both representative offices and temporary projects of INGOs must obtain approval from competent authorities to ensure legal registration (NPC 2017). This implies that the Chinese government has the power to filter out INGOs it does not want to enter China. Thirdly, both representative offices and temporary projects of INGOs are subject to supervision and management by various departments, including those responsible for national security, foreign affairs, finance, financial supervision and management, customs, taxation, and foreign experts (NPC 2017). Representative offices of foreign NGOs are specifically required to submit annual reports that detail project implementation, fund utilization, and next year's activity plans to relevant government departments (NPC 2017). Fourthly, collaboration between representative offices or temporary projects of INGOs is limited to social organizations that have legal registration with the government (NPC 2017). This exclusionary approach prevents locally-based LGBT organizations without legal registration from participating in such collaborations. As a result, since 2017, local LGBT organizations have turned to domestic fundraising, while some organizations have been forced to dissolve after losing foreign funding. Fifthly, both foreign

non-governmental organizations and their representative offices face the risk of deregistration or the prohibition of temporary activities if they engage in activities such as spreading rumors, defamation, or disseminating harmful information that endangers Chinese national security or undermines Chinese national interests. This provides the government with the authority to ban any project it wishes to discontinue, justifying it on the grounds of “national security.” Due to these limitations imposed by the Overseas NGO Law, from 2017 to 2022, a total of 681 international non-governmental organizations (representative offices) registered in China, but none of them focused on LGBT issues, as discussed in Chapter 4. Out of the 4,752 short-term collaborative projects, only 40 were centered on HIV/AIDS prevention and merely 11 focused on gender equality.

Despite the challenges faced, the collaboration between local LGBT activism and international support has persisted. Based on news media research, 13 observations²⁴⁸ and 9 interviews conducted with local activists, I have identified several strategies that have proven effective in sustaining LGBT support from foreign forces: (1) at the individual level, making use of the privileged status of foreigners in China; (2) at the organizational level, engaging with transnational corporations that operate in China; and (3) at the national level, making use of embassy support and leveraging UN mechanisms for LGBT human rights pressure.

These foreign LGBT support forces continue to provide assistance and support to China’s LGBT movement because China is deeply embedded in globalization, particularly in its economic development. This creates a paradoxical situation in which China is experiencing a rise in nationalism and xenophobia, while at the same time, foreigners and foreign companies in

²⁴⁸ The observations in this section cover a range of 13 LGBT activities, including 1 volunteer training session, 6 speaking forums led by guest speakers, 1 internal community sharing and discussion session without guest speakers, 4 film screenings, art exhibitions, and theatrical performances, and 1 award ceremony called the Rainbow Media Award.

China enjoy some privileges. This paradoxical imagination of foreigners and foreign countries has a long history in China. In pre-modern China, the Sino-centric model (with the superior Han Chinese and the inferior foreign “Other”) dominated (Wang 2012). Foreigners were considered barbarians or devils due to the ethnocentric cosmology that placed China at the center of human civilization (Ho 1985). The Sino-centric model was disrupted by colonization led by Western imperialistic powers in the early 19th century (Gries 2004; Wang 2015). The First Opium War (1839-1842 AD) saw Western imperialistic powers defeat the Qing Dynasty government and force China to open its doors to the world and the global trade system (Gries 2004). Chinese intellectuals launched the May Fourth Movement in 1919, hoping to learn from the modern, civilized, progressive, and advanced West (Gries 2004; Wang 2015). Thus, the conflicting imagination of foreigners and foreign countries emerged: on the one hand, foreigners and foreign countries were regarded as the evil, aggressive, and dangerous White Other; on the other hand, the West was seen as embodying advanced military technologies, political systems, and scientific knowledge that was worth learning from (Wang 2015).

Since China’s opening-up policy in the 1980s, the Chinese government has gradually relaxed the restrictions on foreign residency that existed during the period between 1949 and 1978. Additionally, following China’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, an increasing number of foreign individuals and companies have established a presence in China (Liu 2009). As part of its open-door policy, the Chinese government has offered foreign-owned enterprises, foreign-invested enterprises, and foreigners various concessions and conveniences, including tax incentives, land use rights, and administrative approvals, with the aim of attracting foreign investment to China (Tang, Selvanathan, and Selvanathan 2008; Economic Daily 2018). During the 1990s, foreign experts enjoyed a range of privileges that were not available to

Chinese nationals, including independent housing, social prestige, high income, and access to luxury hotels and shopping malls (Lan 2022). However, on December 1, 2012, the Chinese government began to impose city maintenance and construction taxes and education surcharges on foreign-invested enterprises, foreign-owned enterprises, and foreigners, signaling an end to the supranational treatment of foreigners in the realm of taxation (XinhuaNet 2010).

Nevertheless, foreign enterprises continue to enjoy certain privileges, such as tax incentives or even land provisions from the Chinese government (Ulusemre 2022). Even during periods of strong anti-foreign sentiment, some foreign migrants in China have acknowledged that they receive privileges living in China (Liu and Croucher 2022).

The occurrence of foreign individuals or companies enjoying privileges in China is influenced by various factors. In addition to the primary factor of the Chinese government's institutional arrangements designed to attract foreign investment to facilitate China's economic development, it is also linked to the imbalance resulting from the lack of protection of the human rights of Chinese citizens. For instance, a gay activist (C15) stated that "foreigners do have privileges over Chinese people."²⁴⁹ This activist (C15) cited several cases, including an instance in which a foreigner lost a bicycle, and the police located it for him within a day. If they could not locate it, they would provide him with a new one. "However, local police generally ignore cases where local residents are victims of theft."²⁵⁰ Another example he provided pertains to international students in China, who are also granted privileges over native Chinese students. For instance, his university administration offers international students much better scholarships and accommodations than local students. In his words, "If you look at the dormitories of Chinese local students, you will see that the better ones have four students sharing one dormitory, and

²⁴⁹ Interview in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

²⁵⁰ Interview in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

some worse ones have eight students sharing one dormitory. But in international student dormitories, it is usually two people per dormitory.”²⁵¹

Although the privileges enjoyed by foreigners imply inequality to some extent, they can be leveraged as a resource for LGBT advocacy in China. In the following section, I will discuss how local LGBT activists utilize the privileges of foreigners, foreign corporations, and foreign countries for their advocacy work based on my observations and media research data. However, it is important to note that China’s Overseas NGO Law and nationalist censorship systems make it difficult to observe and examine the details of overseas LGBT support operations in China. The discussion that follows is based on limited observations of the LGBT community and media research, and it portrays only one aspect of the link between overseas LGBT support and local LGBT advocacy. Further interviews with relevant activists are necessary to obtain more detailed information on these mechanisms. This represents an important direction for future exploration.

7.3.1 Employing Foreigners’ Privileges

This section focuses on analysis of how activists at the Shanghai Pride Festival utilize foreigner privilege for local LGBT advocacy. The Shanghai Pride Festival is the only major event in China that was founded by foreigners. According to Charlene, one of the festival’s co-founders, the festival came about by chance in 2009 when many foreigners in their Yahoo group “Shanghai LGBT” were leaving China. A few of their friends decided to throw a farewell party, which led to the birth of the pride festival (Qdaily 2020). Unlike Pride parades typically seen in Western societies, the Shanghai Pride Festival has been positioned as a cultural festival since its inception due to China’s strict control over street demonstrations and protests. The event that

²⁵¹ Interview in Chengdu, April 16, 2019

comes closest to a Pride parade is the Rainbow Ride and Pride Run, a group street event that began in 2013. Participants bring rainbow flags and stickers on the day of the event and form a unique “Rainbow Team,” riding or running together along a designated route to reach the endpoint. Most of the other activities are indoors, such as in bars, restaurants, commercial hotels, and consulate venues. Their 2020 schedule shows that the activities were mainly held from June 13th to the 21st. The main events included five “Workplace Forums” aimed at supporting LGBT people in their workplaces and helping employees create an inclusive environment for LGBT employers. The “Pride Open Day” aimed to provide a platform for Chinese LGBT organizations to communicate with each other and attendees. Three special forums focused on topics including LGBT people’s mental health, inclusive academia, and rainbow marriage, and several parties were held, such as the Ladies Party and a Pink Party, as well as many queer film screenings. Although the specific topics of discussion vary each year, the main format is generally the same, with seminars, parties, film screenings, and open days being the main activities.

The Shanghai Pride Festival, held for 12 years, owes much of its success to the fact that its primary organizers are foreigners who possess significant privileges. During the festival’s early years, six of its eight core co-founders were foreigners, and Tiffany Lemay and Hannah Miller, both Americans, served as the primary public faces of the event. Recently, the festival has been led by Charlene Liu and Raymond Phang, both foreigners from Malaysia. The contribution of their foreign privileges to advancing the local LGBT movement in China can be succinctly encapsulated in two principal ways: (1) utilizing their foreign identity to mitigate the risk of censorship faced by LGBT activists in China, and (2) providing a platform for local LGBT NGOs to communicate and collaborate with each other.

(1) Utilizing Foreign Identity to Mitigate the Risk of Censorship

Firstly, it is important to note that possessing privilege does not necessarily guarantee immunity from scrutiny and surveillance by the Chinese government, particularly from the police and national security agencies. According to Tiffany Lemay, one of the co-founders, the preparation process for the Shanghai Pride Festival, which lasted three months, focused less on designing the event program and more on contacting and negotiating with the Shanghai government (The China Press 2016). As organizers, they were required to communicate with the government about what activities were permissible for the festival, and which ones were not. For example, a parade, a common form of expression in Western societies, was deemed a “total no-no option” in China, as stated by Lemay (The China Press 2016). In addition, their communication with the government resulted in a ban on outdoor signs and banners, low volume during events, and a compressed schedule of one week for all related activities. According to Lemay, “We need to assure the government that we will not do anything that embarrasses them” (The China Press 2016).

However, due to their foreign identities, foreign LGBT activists in China possess a unique advantage and ability to negotiate with the local government, particularly when it comes to bargaining for permits and regulations. This advantage is widely recognized and shared by both foreign and local activists at the Shanghai Pride Festival. As both Lemay and Miller have highlighted, possessing foreign passports makes them less susceptible to intimidation (The China Press 2016; Miller 2020). Similarly, during the festival’s planning process, co-founder Hannah Miller consulted with a local Chinese lawyer who was knowledgeable about Chinese LGBT policies. The lawyer recommended that the organizers intentionally promote the event as a social celebration led by “foreigners” and for “foreigners” (Miller 2020). In other words, the organizers

should emphasize the “foreigner” aspect as the festival’s packaging design. In contrast, Chinese local activists do not possess the same qualifications and power as foreigners when negotiating with the local government, as Miller emphasized, “as foreigners, it is perhaps easier for us than our Chinese colleagues to promote the event” (Hogg 2009).

Therefore, the organizers of Shanghai Pride highlighted the foreign elements in the specific organization process of the festival. For example, in the early days of the festival, they published all promotional literature in English and framed it as a party for foreigners to avoid resistance and interference from the government and police (Hogg 2009). When asked who was in charge, Miller provided the local government with her contact and passport information (Miller 2020). Overall, it was safer for Miller, as a White foreigner, to introduce their activities and face news media interviews, as her “White and American privilege would hopefully shield her from severe consequences” (Miller 2020). In recent years, however, the festival’s advocacy and publicity efforts have included bilingual (English and Chinese) promotion. For example, all public articles in 2020 were in both Chinese and English, distinguishing Shanghai Pride from other local LGBT advocacy groups. During my participation in the 2019 Shanghai Pride Festival, most film screenings and discussions were conducted in both Chinese and English, with the organizers introducing the main event content in Chinese first and then translating it into English. Additionally, although more Chinese volunteers have joined Shanghai Pride’s team, the festival’s website’s volunteer requirements state that proficiency in both Chinese and English is a must-have skill. Therefore, from the festival’s inception to the present day, the Shanghai Pride Festival has consistently adhered to the principle of utilizing the foreigner advantage.

Furthermore, their privilege has been utilized to safeguard local activists of the Shanghai Pride Festival, particularly when they are subjected to police interrogation and scrutiny. To put it

differently, the utilization of privileges held by foreigners to protect local LGBT activists essentially transfers the risks associated with Chinese government monitoring and surveillance onto the foreign organizers of the Shanghai Pride Festival. Raymond and Charlene, both from Malaysia and recent organizers of the Shanghai Pride Festival, revealed that despite the festival organizers' attempts to steer clear of any contentious issues, they could not evade police questioning. In 2014, their Pride Run was cautioned by the police. Specifically, the day prior to the 2014 Pride Run, Charlene was notified by the event venue's vendor that the police requested organizers' presence for an immediate meeting. Charlene recognized that due to higher risks, she could not dispatch Chinese volunteers (Qdaily 2020). Thus, she requested that Raymond, who possessed a foreign passport, attend the meeting with the police and respond to their queries, such as what exactly the Pride Run would do, whether there were decorations on site, and how many people would gather (Qdaily 2020).

The early organizers and participants of the Shanghai Pride Festival were largely composed of foreigners; however, since 2013, the festival has been predominantly organized, volunteered, and attended by Chinese individuals living in Shanghai (Aqiang 2013). Nevertheless, the privileged status of foreign organizers has played a significant role in shaping the festival's public image and facilitating communication with government officials. According to Activist DF's statement during a volunteer training session,²⁵² the success of Shanghai Pride can be attributed to the foreign identity of its core organizers who work in Shanghai. This unique position as foreigners in China has resulted in relatively less government pressure and intervention on the event. Activist DF further argues that the Chinese government, mindful of

²⁵² Observation D2, a volunteer training session that took place in Chengdu on April 7, 2019

China’s global reputation, has tended to overlook the activities of Shanghai Pride, allowing it to be held for several years without cancellation.

(2) Providing a Platform for Local LGBT Organizations to Communicate

Shielded by their privileged status as foreigners, Shanghai Pride has transformed into a platform for local Chinese LGBT organizations and activists to engage in communication and collaboration through the implementation of the “Pride Open Day” project. Launched in 2014 by Shanghai Pride, this exhibition project provides exhibition space and extends invitations to approximately 30 local Chinese LGBT organizations annually to participate in the Shanghai Pride Festival and showcase their LGBT advocacy resources, including exhibiting booths and delivering ten-minute speeches (see Figure 7.2). Furthermore, Shanghai Pride has established workshops for these local LGBT organizations. Specifically, Shanghai Pride engages professional LGBT speakers to facilitate open discussions and knowledge-sharing among different local LGBT organizations, with the goal of motivating these organizations to have a greater influence on their target communities (Shanghai Pride 2020).



Figure 7.2 Groups Showcased on the Pride Open Day

The Pride Open Day project has indeed assisted local LGBT organizations in various ways, particularly in enhancing the visibility of these organizations within the community. Specifically, Priest E (pseudonym), a leader of a Rainbow Christian/Catholic group, was invited to the first Pride Open Day in 2014. Firstly, he believed that the Pride Open Day promoted his leadership of the Rainbow Christian/Catholic Group because he needed to pay more attention to shaping the group's external image during the exhibition. For example, when Priest E received an exhibition invitation for the first Pride Open Day, he immediately expressed his willingness to participate, stating that "it was an excellent opportunity to promote our group."²⁵³ Since the organizers of Shanghai Pride suggested providing display materials to make it easier for participants to understand their organization, Priest E decided to write a thin booklet entitled "When Gay People Meet Jesus." After contacting a printing company, he printed more than 2,000 copies. This booklet is still being distributed and is considered by Priest E to be their "face," as well as a quick way for the public to understand LGBT Christians.

The Pride Open Day has raised the profile of the Rainbow Christian/Catholic Group, allowing more Christian sexual minorities who were previously unaware of the group to find a place to seek help. Priest E commented, "Shanghai Pride Festival is a perfect platform, and thanks to the Shanghai Pride Festival, our group is growing. Every year after the Pride Festival, new sexual minority Christians come to join our organization."²⁵⁴ Furthermore, through the Pride Open Day, the Rainbow Christian/Catholic Group can exchange experiences with different LGBT organizations from all over the country. Although the Rainbow Christian/Catholic Group has private contact with other local LGBT organizations, it is rare to have a gathering as public as the Shanghai Pride Festival. As Priest E argued,

²⁵³ Interview online in Shanghai, June 26, 2019

²⁵⁴ Interview online in Shanghai, June 26, 2019

the Chinese government now has such strict control over Christianity and LGBT content, that it is a regular occurrence that our WeChat and Weibo accounts are banned. So, you can see how incredible the Shanghai Pride Festival is. We can participate in the Pride Festival without hiding to give out Bibles or give out this booklet, *When Gays Meet Jesus*.²⁵⁵

Shanghai Pride has provided local Chinese LGBT organizations with support beyond the Pride Open Day platform, including financial assistance. For instance, in 2012, the Shanghai LGBT Center received funding from Shanghai Pride, and in 2014, Les Talk and Chengdu Tongle Health Counselling Service Center were supported (Shanghai Pride 2015). During the 10th anniversary of Shanghai Pride in 2018, four transgender organizations, including Trans Life in Beijing, Transgender Center in Shanghai, Transgender Shelter in Nanjing, and Transgender Center in Guangzhou, received Shanghai Pride financial support (Shanghai Pride 2018). Moreover, Shanghai Pride has offered its own social network to local Chinese LGBT organizations. For instance, in 2019, the Gay and Lesbian Campus Association of China (GLCAC), an LGBT organization in Guangzhou, held a gender and education-themed sharing session in Shanghai. As GLCAC's social network was predominantly located in Guangzhou, Shanghai Pride organizers utilized their social network to assist in finding a more cost-effective venue in the city.²⁵⁶

In summary, the Shanghai Pride Festival serves as a successful model for promoting the local LGBT movement in China through the advantages and privileges conferred by foreigners. Shanghai Pride has not only safeguarded its own Chinese LGBT activists, volunteers, and participants, but also provided a communication platform for other local Chinese LGBT organizations. However, utilizing foreign privileges entails the transfer of the risk of government censorship to foreigners. Furthermore, advocacy efforts undertaken through foreigner privileges

²⁵⁵ Interview online in Shanghai, June 26, 2019

²⁵⁶ Observation D16, an LGBT campus equality forum held in Shanghai on June 1, 2019

are more susceptible to attacks by Chinese nationalists. For instance, in 2013, Shanghai lawyer Zhou Dan expressed his opposition on his Weibo account to foreigners and foreign organizations organizing “Gay Pride Month” events in Shanghai. He argued that these activities, which are not indigenous to China but instead originated from foreign (Western) contexts, are acknowledged and endorsed by foreign (Western) governments as a means to exert foreign influence or intervention (Aqiang 2013). In recent years, foreign organizers of the Shanghai Pride Festival have also been targeted as hostile foreign elements (Wei 2022). Nevertheless, given that the government has maintained these privileges for foreigners and endorsed their LGBT activities, the opposition and attacks by nationalists have not resulted in any significant harm to the Shanghai Pride Festival during its 12-year tenure (2009-2020).

7.3.2 Leveraging the Inclusiveness of Transnational Corporations

Using the inclusive LGBT policies of transnational corporations for local LGBT advocacy represents another relatively safe strategy for promoting LGBT rights. This section will discuss the localization of LGBT-friendly policies in transnational corporations, using IBM (China) as a case study. The discussion will focus on how Activist JM, an employee of IBM, established a local LGBT employee network and promoted the protection of LGBT employee welfare in Chinese IBM by leveraging existing IBM LGBT-friendly policies. Additionally, based on their experience in localizing LGBT-friendly policies in the workplace, Activist JM and other local LGBT activists are collaborating to establish an advocacy network for workplace equality, aimed at assisting other companies in their own workplace advocacy efforts.

It should be noted that, as a premise for promoting LGBT-friendly policies in the branches of transnational corporations in China, it is required that these corporations have

already established LGBT-related policies. Conversely, it is highly unlikely to promote the establishment of LGBT-friendly policies in China if the headquarters of the transnational corporations themselves have not established such policies. For example, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's (2018) report revealed that 91% of Fortune Global 500 companies have included sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies, while 83% have included gender identity. This provides an institutional basis for local Chinese LGBT activists to leverage these LGBT-inclusive policies. In the case of IBM, the IBM Global Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Council Report (2012) indicates that IBM has a long-standing commitment to promoting LGBT workplace equality. Specifically, IBM included non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in its equal opportunity policy in 1984 and began providing domestic partner benefits to its gay and lesbian employees in the United States in 1996. In 1997, IBM employees established the Employees Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Empowerment (EAGLE), which has since become one of the world's largest LGBT employee coalitions. These LGBT-friendly policies laid the foundation for IBM to implement similar policies in China, enabling local LGBT activists such as Activist JM to leverage these policies in their advocacy efforts.

In addition, the non-discrimination policies regarding LGBT individuals within transnational corporations in China are not subject to government supervision or scrutiny, thus reducing the difficulty of implementing such policies in the local environment. Foreign companies operating in China are required to comply with laws and regulations pertaining to labor and employment under the Foreign Investment Law of the People's Republic of China (2019). However, with the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997 and depathologization of homosexuality in 2001, along with the government's "three-no" policy (Zhang 2014), transnational corporations can adopt LGBT-friendly policies proactively without the need for

government oversight. For instance, Activist JM successfully promoted IBM to adopt LGBT non-discrimination policies in China in 2008, and since then, IBM has been actively supporting the promotion of LGBT workplace anti-discrimination, without facing any government pressure. Additionally, an increasing number of transnational corporations have joined the LGBT workplace network under Activist JM's leadership,²⁵⁷ indicating a substantial potential to promote LGBT workplace equality in China.

In the aforementioned context (where multinational corporations have established LGBT-friendly policies, and these company-specific policies fall outside the scope of government oversight and scrutiny), Activist JM led the establishment of the IBM Employee Alliance for LGBT Empowerment in Greater China Group (EAGLE-GCG). His efforts can be divided into two significant steps: contacting the global manager of LGBT initiatives abroad and then convincing the head of the China region. Initially, the overseas LGBT project managers played a crucial role in Activist JM's successful implementation of IBM's pre-existing LGBT policies and EAGLE organization from the United States to China. In a discussion at an LGBT workplace equality forum in Beijing²⁵⁸, Activist JM recounted that in 2008, he chose to bypass the local IBM personnel in China to avoid the potential risk of rejection arising from possible intolerance within the local IBM branches. Specifically, he reached out to two influential global executives who provided guidance on establishing an EAGLE chapter within IBM China.

With support from two IBM global executives, it became easy to convince the local IBM China Branch to adopt the company's existing LGBT non-discrimination policies. Activist JM believed that highlighting the commercial benefits of LGBT-friendly policies would help

²⁵⁷ Observation D5, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Beijing on May 13, 2019; and Observation D12, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Shanghai on June 1, 2019

²⁵⁸ Observation D5, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Beijing on May 13, 2019

company leaders accept suggestions regarding LGBT issues.²⁵⁹ Specifically, Activist JM proposed that when engaging with top executives, there is no need to emphasize noble motives such as social justice; instead, the primary focus should be on the core objective of any business: profitability.²⁶⁰ By highlighting the advantages of implementing LGBT-friendly policies, such as attracting skilled employees and accessing the Pink Market, companies can achieve significant results.²⁶¹

In the case of Activist JM's endeavors to advance workplace equality through IBM's EAGLE-GCG program in the early 2000s, his strategy involved a particular sequence of steps, as indicated above. However, upon examining recent initiatives aimed at promoting workplace equality at Ford Motor Company China Branch, I have observed that seeking support from global managers is no longer regarded as a prerequisite first step. For example, Activist XM has been leveraging Ford's internal LGBT network, Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Employees (GLOBE), since 2015 to promote the localization of LGBT policies in Ford China. As some multinational companies already had established internal LGBT policies during this period, promoting advocacy within the company became easier. According to Activist XM, she faced no resistance while promoting LGBT inclusive policies within the company, and the leadership even supported it because Ford had such policies globally.²⁶²

Activist XM followed a strategy similar to Activist JM's to convince the China Branch Manager. She emphasized the benefits of a more inclusive LGBT policy, such as greater utilization by LGBT employees and increased employee loyalty. She likened the process of communicating LGBT inclusive policies to a "business negotiation," where the core of the

²⁵⁹ Observation D5, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Beijing on May 13, 2019

²⁶⁰ Observation D5, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Beijing on May 13, 2019

²⁶¹ Observation D5, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Beijing on May 13, 2019

²⁶² Observation D12, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Shanghai on June 1, 2019

negotiation was direct benefits for the company within a particular policy. Her communication with Ford China's top management can be summarized into three key points. Firstly, adopting LGBT inclusive policies can attract more customers to the company. She argued that China has a huge LGBT population of about 70 million, larger than the total population of many European countries. Therefore, some will become Ford's customers because of Ford's LGBT tolerance and diversity. Secondly, providing LGBT policies can save company costs. She argued that as there is no same-sex marriage in China, most LGBT employees do not have children, which means very few need maternity and paternity leave. Therefore, the employment costs saved by LGBT employees in terms of maternity and paternity leave can be understood by company leaders. Thirdly, adopting LGBT inclusive policies can increase LGBT employee loyalty. She directly expressed to the Asia Pacific Vice President that if the company provides a more inclusive environment, these LGBT employees will be more willing to focus their energy on their work. Additionally, some of these sexual minority talents will also become Ford's employees because Ford has adopted a diversity and inclusion policy.²⁶³

Activist JM and the EAGLE-GCG have accomplished noteworthy success in promoting an LGBT equal benefits policy in IBM China Branch. Specifically, in 2011, IBM China extended its equal benefits policies to include financial insurance, maternity and paternity leave, medical insurance, partner health insurance, and other benefits for LGBT employees. Subsequently, in 2012, the EAGLE-GCG launched the LGBT Mentoring for Leaders project, where LGBT employees serve as mentors and offer guidance to IBM managers and presidents in China. Moreover, since 2009, IBM China has organized an annual Diversity Workplace Forum

²⁶³ Observation D12, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Shanghai on June 1, 2019

in September and October, where company executives, LGBT employees, and allies actively participate in discussions.²⁶⁴

Based on his successful experiences, Activist JM has collaborated with 16 companies, mostly multinational corporations, to offer them consultation on the localization of LGBT company policies or assist them in establishing LGBT employee networks. Moreover, Activist JM and several other activists have developed the Inter-Company LGBT Network, which is dedicated to promoting workplace equality. According to Activist JM, this network comprises approximately 70 representatives, including corporate HRs and LGBT employees from various companies. The platform aims to enhance inter-company communication and attract more companies, particularly local ones in China, to adopt workplace equality policies.²⁶⁵ For example, during the 2019 Workplace Diversity Equality Forum that I participated in, Activist JM from IBM, Ms. Mai and Ms. Luo from Ford China, Ms. Wu from Schneider, and Ms. Hung from Ernst & Young shared their experiences in promoting LGBT equality policies in their respective companies, encouraging more companies to join the initiative.²⁶⁶

Additionally, there are other ways to promote local LGBT advocacy through multinational corporations. For example, in 2012, the CEO of Starbucks publicly supported the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States, which was protested by the National Organization for Marriage (NOM), an anti-same-sex marriage organization in the US. 27 LGBT organizations in China, such as Danlan and Feizan, joined forces to launch the “Support Starbucks, Oppose Boycott” campaign, calling on the LGBT community to consume Starbucks products and share photos on social media (China Daily 2012). This type of advocacy not only

²⁶⁴ Observation D5, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Beijing on May 13, 2019

²⁶⁵ Observation D5, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Beijing on May 13, 2019

²⁶⁶ Observation D12, an LGBT workplace equality forum held in Shanghai on June 1, 2019

demonstrates support for LGBT-friendly businesses but also increases visibility for the local LGBT community (Yang and Lin 2014). Similarly, during International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia and Pride Month, some multinational brands in China, such as Coca-Cola, publish statements on Weibo expressing their support for the Chinese LGBT community (see Figure 7.3²⁶⁷), “#International Day Against Homophobia# Don’t be afraid of rainbows, everyone is born different. Thank you for existing and making the world more colorful #Fearless#”. Gay Voice, a local Chinese LGBT organization, shared Coca-Cola China’s Weibo post to advance their advocacy efforts, stating, “[#Wu Yao Qi# Forwarding] Coca-Cola cares about us (LGBT community), not only today. @Coca-Cola China + @Gay Voice, see you again in June #PrideMonth#.”

²⁶⁷ The post garnered 13,000 likes, 10,000 shares, and 1,588 comments. Coca-Cola featured nine recreated posters based on artist Edvard Munch’s “The Scream” to promote bravery and self-acceptance within the Chinese LGBT community. Each poster depicted a different character with accompanying text, as follows: (1) Oscar Wilde, “Don’t be afraid of never growing up,” (2) David Bowie, “Don’t be afraid of glamorous rock,” (3) Vincent van Gogh, “Don’t be afraid of your art not being popular,” (4) Qu Yuan (an ancient Chinese poet and politician during the Warring States period), “Don’t be afraid of writing poems that others don’t understand,” (5) Alan Turing, “Don’t be afraid of artificial intelligence or Apple,” (6) Leonardo da Vinci, “Don’t be afraid of being a multi-talented individual,” (7) Marilyn Monroe, “Don’t be afraid of being too sexy in front of the camera,” (8) Andy Warhol, “Don’t be afraid of only being famous for 15 minutes,” and (9) Leslie Cheung (a Chinese gay icon), “Don’t be afraid of being a different kind of firework.”



Figure 7.3 LGBT Advocacy by Gay Voice and Coca-Cola China

In general, utilizing the LGBT policies of multinational corporations as a strategy for advocacy is highly effective and relatively safe. Whether it is localizing the LGBT policies of multinational corporations or amplifying the visibility of the local LGBT community through the friendly LGBT discourse of multinational corporations, this form of advocacy has proven to be highly successful.

7.3.3 Utilizing Foreign Embassies and UN Human Rights Mechanisms

At the country level, Chinese LGBT activists use foreign embassies (mainly LGBT-friendly countries such as the US Embassy, Canadian Embassy, Netherlands Embassy, Czech Embassy, EU Embassy, Danish Embassy, UK Embassy, Australian Embassy, etc.) and UN LGBT human rights mechanisms as a strategy for local LGBT advocacy. This strategy has similarities with the use of the privileges of foreigners and the use of multinational corporations,

but also has significant differences. For example, during important LGBT community events such as the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia and Pride Month, some foreign embassies show support for the LGBT community by raising the rainbow flag and posting rainbow posters at their own embassy. In addition, some foreign embassies also make statements supporting the LGBT community on their Weibo and WeChat public accounts. All of the LGBT-friendly statements can be utilized by local LGBT activists, as illustrated in Figure 7.4. JaneMen (@简男同志聚合), a news group focused on LGBT issues, the China Rainbow Media Awards (@中国彩虹媒体奖), a group dedicated to monitoring media coverage of the LGBT community, and Li Chunji (@北国佳人李春姬), an LGBT public opinion leader, have expanded the influence of some foreign embassy and UN LGBT statements by sharing and commenting on them. In 2018, JaneMen summarized that eight embassies, including Canada, the United States, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands, and the European Union (EU) Embassy, showed support for the LGBT community and opposed LGBT discrimination by raising the rainbow flag during the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. Furthermore, during Pride Month in June 2018, JaneMen criticized the Chinese government's inaction against LGBT discrimination and censorship of LGBT content, citing a resolution passed by the UN Human Rights Council entitled "Preventing Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity." Similarly, the China Rainbow Media Awards in 2018 cited the Netherlands Embassy's display of the rainbow flag to support the LGBT community and call for the elimination of discrimination against sexual minority groups. Li Chunji shared the UN's International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia advocacy statement and encouraged the LGBT community to be united and courageous. Additionally, some LGBT individuals expressed their support for the

LGBT community by taking photos with the rainbow flag at foreign embassies on International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. For instance, Xiaoyezi_Jiang (@小叶子_酱) went to the Canadian, Dutch, and German embassies on May 17, 2018, to take pictures with the rainbow flag and embassy posters promoting the LGBT community, which were shared on Weibo.



Figure 7.4 Foreign Embassies and the UN’s LGBT Statements and Local Activists’ Reposts

In addition to the aforementioned public advocacy, there are covert strategies employed by local Chinese LGBT activists, which are hardly publicized in the media and conducted in a more discreet manner. For instance, during my observation of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOTB) or Pride Month in 2019, local activists

collaborate with foreign embassies on numerous events. These events are perceived as embassy events to the public, but the local activists are the ones who plan them, invite guests, and mobilize participants. An activist (C29) involved in planning such events stated, “The embassy is in the foreground, and we are in the background. To the outside world, it is an embassy event because the embassy provides the venue, snacks, and gifts. It may appear that these events have nothing to do with us, but in reality, we are the ones who do all the backstage work.”²⁶⁸ This strategy of local LGBT activism is analogous to the principle behind the Shanghai Pride Festival, which leverages the privilege of foreigners to protect local LGBT activists and establish communication platforms for local LGBT organizations.

In addition, among all the forms of advocacy I observed, the most challenging and high-risk advocacy was referred to as “international advocacy/lobbying”²⁶⁹ by a gay activist (C30). Specifically, it involves local LGBT activists collecting LGBT-related data and lobbying foreign ambassadors or United Nations officials to pressure the Chinese government during the review of China’s LGBT human rights. As I discussed in Chapter Four, UN human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, and the mechanism for reviewing the treaty body signed by China, have played a crucial role in exerting pressure on China regarding LGBT issues. However, the UN’s efforts to pressure China on LGBT issues are closely linked to the lobbying efforts of local LGBT activists and organizations. In my interviews, two activists participated in this international lobbying. One of the activists, C30, was directly engaged in communication with UNDP, OHCHR, and other UN representatives. The challenges and risks associated with this strategy are evident in the specific operational aspects of global lobbying.

²⁶⁸ Interview in Beijing, May 11, 2019

²⁶⁹ Interview in Beijing, May 13, 2019

To advocate and lobby on an international platform, local activists in China must possess strong English language skills as Activist C30 argues, “it is the universal language used for face-to-face communication with foreign ambassadors or UN officials.”²⁷⁰ In addition, local activists should be adept at conducting independent research and composing reports in English. This is because when lobbying foreign ambassadors, international human rights experts, or UN human rights experts, it is imperative to provide compelling evidence to support their arguments. As stated by Activist C30, possessing these skills is crucial to achieve effective lobbying:

Independent investigation is the most convincing evidence on the international platform. However, in Chinese universities and research institutions, only a few university professors actively engage in LGBT research. Therefore, for activists to promote issues such as sexual orientation conversion therapy, workplace discrimination, the mental health of gender and sexual minorities, and campus bullying, activists and LGBT organizations need to conduct independent community research. For example, we interviewed 1,000 people, 700 of whom experienced discrimination because of their gender and sexual minority identities. Based on this objective data, we want foreign ambassadors or UN officials to make very specific suggestions, such as we hope that the SOGIE Independent Expert should ask the Chinese government to introduce measures to eliminate all kinds of workplace discrimination.²⁷¹

Additionally, engaging in international LGBT lobbying involves reporting and exposing China’s unfriendly treatment towards gender and sexual minorities. This is a highly risky endeavor in China’s authoritarian regime, which suppresses dissent. As Activist C30 puts it,

This process of international lobbying exposes China’s dark side to the global community, which is a slap in the face to the government. Naturally, the Chinese government does not want local activists to engage in such activities. What they want is for everyone to praise China. However, what we have done is the exact opposite of what the government desires.²⁷²

Therefore, it is crucial for local activists to use specific confidentiality measures in their communication processes with the UN and other international human rights experts. For

²⁷⁰ Interview in Beijing, May 13, 2019

²⁷¹ Interview in Beijing, May 13, 2019

²⁷² Interview in Beijing, May 13, 2019

instance, when contacting foreign experts, they should meet in embassies or secure spaces within the UN. Additionally, when sending text messages, they must use encryption software to avoid government monitoring. Therefore, global lobbying is the most complex activism strategy.²⁷³

In summary, despite the rise of Chinese nationalism, local LGBT activists continue to exercise creativity within the limited political space available to them. These activists use various strategies at the individual, organizational, and national levels to advocate for LGBT rights, leveraging the support of foreigners, multinational corporations, foreign embassies, and the UN.

7.4 Conclusion

China's LGBT movement faces significant obstacles due to the intersection of China's authoritarian system and Chinese nationalism. Chinese nationalism is frequently utilized to suppress and censor LGBT activists, both in public discourse and through physical attacks. Consequently, mitigating the risk of censorship and repression has become a top priority for local LGBT activists in China. This chapter demonstrates that, despite stringent government surveillance, local LGBT activists exhibit remarkable ingenuity in leveraging nationalism and foreign influences to advance their cause.

NGO_X employs a distinctive form of nationalism, referred to as Filial Nationalism, which emphasizes the Chinese government's pursuit of social control through moralization governance and underscores the loyalty of Chinese citizens to the state, akin to the loyalty they demonstrate towards their parents. Filial Nationalism in China rests upon two ideological pillars, namely Confucian cultural values and the isomorphic institution linking the family/clan-state. In essence, this type of nationalism posits that "The family is a small nation, and the nation is a

²⁷³ Interview with Activist C30 in Beijing, conducted on May 13, 2019.

larger family.” This brand of Filial Nationalism has been constantly reiterated and utilized as a means of public discipline during both the Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping administrations. NGO_X leverages Confucian cultural values to underscore that their organization contributes to social stability by resolving family acceptance issues for the LGBT community, and, by extension, benefits the nation. This approach aligns their advocacy with the government’s official ideology, thereby rationalizing and legitimizing their advocacy. Furthermore, Filial Nationalism stresses the importance of respecting the authority of parents and the state, which implies that the authority of parents can also be leveraged to advocate for LGBT issues. Overall, by leveraging Filial Nationalism, NGO_X has organized a diverse range of LGBT advocacy initiatives.

However, NGO_X’s use of nationalism as a tool for advocacy is also contentious within China’s LGBT community. For instance, one activist (C26) criticized NGO_X’s advocacy strategy as being “too conservative” due to the fact that “their proactive approach of aligning with state power requires them to abandon the rebellious nature of the LGBT movement to integrate into mainstream discourse and the state ideology.”²⁷⁴ Moreover, in his view, some of NGO_X’s advocacy, particularly the promotion of the LGBT community coming out, gaining family acceptance, and being accepted by the heterosexual community, clashes with contemporary society’s emphasis on values such as individuality, diversity, respect, and equality. For example, this activist (C26) criticized one of NGO_X’s leaders for their comments on the failure of the Taiwan same-sex marriage referendum:

I disagree with the type of advocacy employed by NGO_X, particularly their tendency to seek the approval of both heterosexual society and the government, as well as their inclination towards victim-blaming the LGBT community. For example, in response to the failure of the Taiwan same-sex marriage referendum in 2018, NGO_X’s leader released an article criticizing the LGBT community in Taiwan for not coming out enough and not working hard enough. This is especially problematic as many LGBT individuals who have not come out are too afraid to speak up for themselves. I strongly disagree with

²⁷⁴ Interview in Beijing, May 9, 2019

this viewpoint because it reduces the problem to LGBT individuals not being diligent or courageous enough. Even if all LGBT individuals were to come out, they would still only account for about 5% of the population, and even if all their families were to accept them, they would still only account for about 15% of the population. Blaming victims who are still in the closet is victim-blaming, as no one would choose to hide if our society were more accepting and open. The real problem lies within our social system and culture, not with these victims. However, addressing the institutionalized discrimination against the LGBT community implies pointing fingers at the government, which NGO_X is reluctant to do. This is the main reason why I do not approve of NGO_X's advocacy approach.²⁷⁵

During my research, I also observed that NGO_X also engages in self-reflection. Activist DF of NGO_X expressed the opinion that the emphasis on the parent-child relationship in contemporary society is antiquated. Nevertheless, he justified the organization's continued emphasis on family culture by stating that many of its advocacy activities would be challenging to execute without it. Additionally, he elaborated on NGO_X's recent shift towards promoting "being true to oneself" over traditional family values:

We also know that emphasizing family culture and parent-child relationships is "rubbing the edge of the ball"²⁷⁶ by finding loopholes in regulations to avoid punishment. We are now beginning to discuss the topic of being true to oneself, which is indeed what LGBT advocacy should do. Being true to oneself is actually unrelated to the family. Regardless of whether your parents accept your sexual orientation or not, you can still be true to yourself. We also advocate that parents of sexual minorities should be true to themselves, because the older generation of parents did not do so, they spent their whole lives being babysitters for their children. However, this transition is quite difficult because the core philosophy of the organization is still based on family culture.²⁷⁷

The second important strategy, which involves using foreign forces to support domestic LGBT activism in China, is highly dependent on the privileges of foreigners and foreign companies. This strategy encompasses both safe tactics, such as localizing the LGBT-friendly

²⁷⁵ Interview in Beijing, May 9, 2019

²⁷⁶ In the Chinese context, "rubbing the edge of the ball (擦边球)" refers to engaging in activities or behaviors that are technically within the boundaries of rules or laws but are considered to be pushing the limits or skirting the edge of what is acceptable. It implies performing actions that are on the borderline of legality or ethicality, exploiting loopholes, or finding ways to bypass restrictions while still technically complying with the rules. In the context of using family culture/values to promote LGBT advocacy, "rubbing the edge of the ball" refers to strategically navigating the boundaries of government official ideology and societal norms and expectations related to family values.

²⁷⁷ Observation D2, a volunteer training session that took place in Chengdu on April 7, 2019

policies of multinational corporations, and high-risk tactics, such as international advocacy and lobbying. Essentially, utilizing foreign resources for local advocacy shifts some of the censorship risks associated with the government to foreign entities. It is important to note that the privileges of foreigners and foreign companies are not absolute, and the Chinese government possesses various means of revoking them. For instance, Raymond Phang, the core organizer of the Shanghai Pride Festival, was denied a work visa by the Chinese government and was thus unable to enter the country. He explained that Shanghai Pride “has grown to a scale that was probably being too visible, probably making an impact, and thus catching too much attention” from the government (Shanghai Pride 2021). Regrettably, with the increasingly stringent social controls in China during the COVID pandemic, the Pride Festival announced its permanent suspension after its twelfth event in 2020. Nonetheless, other core organizers of the Shanghai Pride Festival have not ceased serving the LGBT community. For example, Charlene Liu, one of the co-founders of Shanghai Pride, continues her LGBT activism with her new organization, Diversity & Inclusion Consulting (D&I), which aims to support the LGBT community and promote LGBT inclusion in the workplace (SHINE 2021).

Additionally, the data in this chapter is primarily sourced from news media investigations and observations, but due to China’s strict censorship of speech, obtaining data has become increasingly difficult. For instance, the Weibo and WeChat accounts of the Gay and Lesbian Campus Association of China (GLCAC), an organization focused on gender equality education, were deleted. Moreover, while some other LGBT organizations and public opinion leaders have retained their accounts, they only display half a year’s worth of Weibo content to prevent being reported. Future research could explore new directions by incorporating more activist interview

data. Additionally, given that LGBT advocacy strategies always evolve with changes in political space, ongoing monitoring of the Chinese LGBT movement is a meaningful research direction.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis has examined the intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization within the context of authoritarian China. In this concluding chapter, I will provide a summary of the main findings, reflect on the significance and contribution, analyze the limitations encountered during the research process, and suggest potential directions for future studies. Firstly, based on the analyses presented in the previous chapters, I develop a synthesized model that explores the intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization. This model sheds light on the interplay and operational mechanisms of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization in the context of state and public discourse, individual experiences, and social movements. Subsequently, I discuss the contributions of this thesis across various dimensions. Specifically, this research contributes to expanding the analysis of intersectionality beyond the individual level to include the examination of how individuals intersect with larger institutions and cultural contexts. Additionally, it extends the analysis to encompass state-level intersectionality and intersectionality at the level of social movements. Moreover, this research also contributes to the understanding of heterogeneity among marginalized social groups facing similar situations. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to the comprehension of the internal heterogeneity within nationalism, the dynamics of state-society relations, the dynamics of center-periphery relationships, as well as globalization of sexuality within a dual-center and dual-periphery framework. Lastly, I will address the inherent limitations of this study and propose potential avenues for future research.

8.1 Building the Sexuality Convergence Model

The research questions of this thesis emerge from puzzles prompted by the 798 Incident (refer to Chapter 1), specifically pertaining to the phenomenon of Chinese nationalists attacking local LGBT advocacy and activists, branding them as collaborators with hostile foreign forces in public discourse. This stigmatization and assault on local LGBT activism originated not only from Chinese nationalists external to the LGBT community but also from Chinese nationalist individuals within the LGBT community itself. To address this puzzle, comprehensive research was undertaken to explore the following questions: How does Chinese nationalism influence the impact of foreign support for the Chinese LGBT community (Chapter 4)? How do different subgroups within the Chinese LGBT community navigate the intersection of their gender and sexual identities with nationalism and globalization in China (Chapters 5 and 6)? How do LGBT activists engage in local LGBT advocacy amidst the ascent of Chinese nationalism and the era of globalization (Chapter 7)?

Drawing on interviews conducted with 43 Chinese LGBT individuals, data gathered through participant observation of the LGBT community, as well as document, news media, and social media analysis, this thesis endeavors to address these research questions within the framework of the intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization. The argument put forth maintains that despite China's extensive involvement in and economic benefits derived from globalization, Chinese nationalism continues to exert a significant influence on LGBT activism and identity politics within the contemporary authoritarian context of China. Being LGBT in China necessitates navigating multiple identities and balancing the pursuit of cultural, economic, and political aspects of life. The findings of this research reveal that Chinese national identity, discourse surrounding patriotism and nationalism, LGBT identity, and foreign support for LGBT human rights carry distinct meanings for individuals within the Chinese LGBT

community. Consequently, Chinese LGBT individuals employ diverse negotiating strategies to reconcile their multiple identities within the frameworks of nationalism and globalization. These strategies encompass compliance and acceptance, critique and detachment, avoidance and pragmatism, and utilization and resistance. The first three strategies correspond to the ideal types developed in the analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6, which are referred to as “Pink Gays,” “LGBT Liberals,” and “Avoidant Group,” respectively. On the other hand, the final strategy aligns with the advocacy approach of Chinese LGBT activists in Chapter 7. In conclusion, by examining the interplay between LGBT sexuality, nationalism, and globalization, this thesis sheds light on the intricate complexity of the marginalized Chinese LGBT community and the nuanced dynamics of state-society relations in China.

Based on the analysis conducted in Chapters 4 to 7, I propose a synthesized SNG (Sexuality, Nationalism, and Globalization) model based on China and introduce the concept of “Sexuality Convergence.” This term refers to the intersection where the dominant narratives of Chinese nationalism and the forces of globalization intersect with Chinese LGBT issues. Within this intersection, there is a dynamic relationship characterized by interaction, contestation, and negotiation between the Chinese state and global forces, serving as the two central actors. Furthermore, within this intersection, the Chinese LGBT community and LGBT activism exist on the periphery of both Chinese nationalism and global LGBT politics, leading to internal conflicts and heterogeneity. This includes the presence of the “Pink Gay” group, which aligns with Chinese nationalism, as well as the pragmatic avoidance group and the critical Liberal group. Chinese LGBT activism within this intersection demonstrates both resilience and heterogeneity, encompassing advocacy approaches that seek political space and opportunities within the framework of filial nationalism, as well as approaches that rely on foreign or

international support to advance local LGBT advocacy. Therefore, it is crucial not to view marginalized and minority groups simplistically as singular and homogeneous entities. Instead, marginality should be understood as a convergence space that enables a comprehensive understanding of the complexities within marginalized communities and their interactions with the centers of dominant nationalism and global forces. Specifically, in the Chinese context, “Sexuality Convergence” can be further elucidated through the examination of interactions at three components: the state and public discourses, the individual experience, and the LGBT movements.

(1) The State and Public Discourses

As outlined in Chapter 4, the relationship between Chinese nationalism and foreign/international pressure on LGBT issues is characterized by significant tension. I argue that despite the potential for international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), foreign governments, and entities like the United Nations to exert pressure on China regarding LGBT concerns, these foreign pressuring mechanisms encounter two principal contradictions: the conflict between intervention and non-intervention and the tension between universalism and particularism. The former revolves primarily around the question of whether international pressure infringes upon the principles of respecting the sovereignty and independence of nations in the realm of international relations. In other words, it pertains to the clash between transnational human rights concerns and the notion of nation-state sovereignty. The latter emphasizes whether advocating for transnational LGBT rights and LGBT identity politics violates the principles of respecting cultural diversity and specificity.

The Chinese government has utilized these two contradictions of foreign pressuring mechanisms to hinder or counteract international pressure on LGBT issues, as outlined in Chapter 4 with my analysis of Chinese government discourse on LGBT issues at the United Nations. Specifically, the Chinese state employs nationalist mechanisms to justify its opposition to foreign pressure on Chinese LGBT issues, drawing on notions of authenticity and underscoring societal security. By emphasizing China's unique national circumstances and the prominence of mainstream traditional culture, China establishes the supremacy of heterosexuality within the framework of Chinese nationhood. Through the lens of societal security, the Chinese government recontextualizes international LGBT support as a threat originating from hostile external forces within public discourse. It portrays foreign LGBT support as an endeavor by antagonistic forces to interfere in China's domestic affairs and undermine social stability. This narrative of Chinese nationalism, bolstered by state support, dominates the discursive space in China and serves as a significant criterion for censorship. Consequently, international support for LGBT causes encounters significant obstacles imposed by Chinese nationalism.

(2) The Individual Experience

Gender and sexual minorities in China, as marginalized individuals, employ various negotiation strategies to reconcile conflicts and contradictions arising from their different identities within the intersection of Sexuality, Nationalism, and Globalization (SNG). Specifically, at the individual level, significant heterogeneity exists among the Pink Gays, LGBT Liberals, and LGBT Avoidant Group in terms of their attitudes and positions regarding Chinese patriotism, globalization, LGBT identity, and LGBT movements.

Pink Gays, as outlined in Chapter 5, utilize intricate reasoning to reconcile their LGBT identity with their identity as patriots. They may resort to practices such as victim blaming, public blaming, and downward comparison to justify their support for the government and their identity as patriots. Furthermore, they assimilate the nation's pride as their own, and their fear of social unrest deepens their sense of patriotism. In terms of actions, they identify with exhibiting positive energy, which entails demonstrating loyalty to the state and adhering to mainstream heterosexual norms as a means of advocating for LGBT rights.

In comparison, LGBT Liberals, as analyzed in Chapter 6, represent a distinct faction within the Chinese LGBT community that stands in opposition to the Pink Gays. For LGBT Liberals, discriminatory LGBT policies, an unsupportive social environment, and the prevalence of macho nationalism are in conflict with the identity and rights of the LGBT community, warranting criticism. They embrace universal values and consequently appreciate, support, and encourage international assistance for the LGBT cause. Moreover, they detach themselves from Chinese nationalism by drawing upon the oppressed experiences of the LGBT community and making upward comparisons to LGBT-friendly countries. While Liberals criticize Chinese nationalism, they also experience conflicts in their sense of belonging, particularly regarding the tensions between their LGBT identity and their Chinese identity. Some LGBT Liberals may choose to distance themselves from or even renounce their Chinese identity as a means of reconciling these conflicting identities. However, for the majority of Liberals, relinquishing their Chinese identity is not a viable option, so they opt for decoupling. This entails holding deep love for the land of China and their Chinese identity while not expressing the same level of affection for the Chinese Communist Party or the Chinese government.

In contrast, the LGBT Avoidant Group (see more in Chapter 6) adopts a more straightforward and pragmatic approach to navigating the intersection of Sexuality, Nationalism, and Globalization (SNG), which is to avoid conflicts that arise within this realm. They choose avoidance because, for them, survival takes precedence over LGBT rights, and they harbor apprehension regarding punishment by state power and societal discrimination. Simultaneously, they lack the means to escape from these circumstances, leading them to adopt a highly practical avoidance strategy.

(3) The LGBT Movements

The rise of Chinese nationalism has emerged as a significant obstacle to LGBT activism in China. However, in the face of nationalist constraints, the local LGBT organization NGO_X continues to operate within the framework of Chinese filial nationalism, as discussed in Chapter 7. This is primarily accomplished through the emphasis on family culture and the strategic utilization of parental authority. By aligning themselves with the Chinese government's official ideology, which includes promoting the concepts of a "harmonious family" and the "Three-Family Construction," NGO_X has successfully undertaken a series of advocacy efforts that have yielded relatively positive outcomes.

Furthermore, despite the rise of Chinese nationalism leading to xenophobic sentiments, China's economy remains deeply integrated into the global market system, necessitating contributions from foreigners, foreign companies, and capital to sustain its economic growth. This creates the paradoxical situation discussed in Chapter 7, wherein China both excludes and grants privileges to foreigners and foreign entities. However, this situation provides a political opportunity for Chinese local LGBT activists. Therefore, by leveraging the protection offered by

foreigners, multinational corporations, foreign embassies, and UN human rights mechanisms, Chinese local LGBT activists have creatively engaged in various LGBT advocacy endeavors.

In summary, viewing SNG (Sexuality, Nationalism, and Globalization) as a convergence zone for sexuality provides a comprehensive understanding of how nationalism and globalization intersect and interact with regards to sexuality and gender issues across multiple levels, including national and public discourse, individual experiences, and social movements.

8.2 Contributions of the Sexuality Convergence Model

The primary contribution of this thesis is the development of a Sexuality Convergence Model based on the Chinese case, as discussed above. Additionally, this model offers significant contributions to various areas of theory and knowledge. Specifically, it enhances (1) the understanding of intersectionality at multiple levels simultaneously, (2) the heterogeneity within marginalized social categories facing similar social situations, (3) the internal heterogeneity of nationalism, (4) the dynamics of state-society relations in an authoritarian context, (5) the exploration of the center-periphery paradigm, and (6) the globalization of sexuality within a dual-center and dual-periphery framework. These contributions expand the existing body of knowledge and offer valuable insights for future research and scholarly exploration in these domains.

(1) Expanding the Understanding of Intersectionality

The concept of “intersectionality” was initially introduced by Black female scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Patricia Collins (2000) in the late 1980s. They used this concept to highlight the unique “intersections” of disadvantage faced by Black women in their

everyday lives, leading to their simultaneous exclusion from gender equality and racial equality movements in the United States. The concept of intersectionality offers valuable insights and theoretical contributions by recognizing that discrimination against specific identities is not limited to a singular pattern. Instead, discrimination always occurs in specific social contexts, depending on the intersection of multiple identities an individual possesses, leading to diverse manifestations. Therefore, intersectionality allows us to pay attention to social complexity and multidimensionality, thus avoiding oversimplified perspectives when understanding social issues. For example, besides Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Patricia Collins (2000) highlighting the multiple disadvantages faced by Black women, under certain circumstances, the intersection of race and gender/sexuality may lead to a phenomenon of mutual offsetting. For instance, “Black gay men” and “Black straight men” both face severe discrimination in the US job market. However, Pedulla’s (2014) research revealed that stereotypes about gay men as effeminate and weak counteracted common negative stereotypes held by Whites that Black men are threatening and criminal. Consequently, this led to less job discrimination against Black gay men compared to straight Black men.

It is common for a substantial portion of research to primarily concentrate on the individual-level correlation between the intersectionality of multiple identities/social positions and individual social experiences, such as healthcare disparities (e.g., Damaskos et al. 2018; Kelly-Brown et al. 2022), discrimination (e.g., Kelly 2009; Pedulla 2014), educational attainment and achievements (e.g., Jang 2018; Strand 2014), immigrant encounters (e.g., Mahalingam, Balan & Haritatos 2008; Adames et al. 2018), as well as mental health and well-being (e.g., Price et al. 2019; Duran 2021). However, scholars such as Collins (2000, 2003) and Dill and Zambrana (2009) have underscored the applicability of intersectionality at micro, meso,

and macro levels, facilitating an exploration of how the “structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal dimensions of power” contribute to the construction of oppressive systems across various facets of identity (Dill and Zambrana 2009: 7). This thesis extends the understanding of intersectionality by incorporating diverse institutional, systemic, and global powers, including state power, nationalism, and the forces of globalization, into the framework of intersectionality.

Thus, the first theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in the construction of “The Sexuality Convergence Model,” enabling the simultaneous examination of different levels of intersectionality (individual, social movement, and state levels). The model explores the intersectionality of multiple identities at the individual level while expanding the idea of intersectionality to encompass relationships with institutions such as the state, particularly state-sponsored nationalism, and the forces of globalization, all of which significantly influence people’s identity, position, and behavior. As elucidated in Chapters 5 and 6, Chinese LGBT individuals experience intersections of individual sexual identity with their Chinese identity and state-led nationalism, further entwined with the forces of globalization. This intersectionality within the Chinese LGBT community results in differentiation, giving rise to “Pink Gays,” “LGBT Liberals,” and “LGBT Avoidant Groups,” each adopting distinct navigational strategies to address the intersection of their LGBT identity with Chinese nationalism and globalization.

Moreover, in addition to extending intersectionality to individuals’ interactions with larger societal forces and institutions, this thesis delves into intersectionality at the state and social movement levels, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 7, respectively. By extending intersectionality to the state level, this thesis explores two distinct types of nationalism, “machonationalism” (Mosse 1996) and “homonationalism” (Puar 2007), stemming from the intersection of sexuality with Chinese nationalism and globalization. Similarly, by extending intersectionality

to the social movement level, this thesis showcases the strategies that local LGBT activists creatively employ, such as “filial nationalism” (Fong 2004), within the context of state-led nationalism, and their utilization of global forces to provide protection for local LGBT advocacy amidst China’s integration into the global market economy.

In summary, the most significant theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in the extension of intersectionality through “The Sexuality Convergence Model,” providing a framework for discussing how sexuality intersects with and is impacted by the state (especially state-sponsored nationalism) and the forces of globalization at different levels (individual, social movement, and state) simultaneously.

(2) Diversity and Heterogeneity within People in Homogeneous Contexts

In addition to expanding the understanding of intersectionality to encompass sexuality, nationalism, and globalization within the same intersectional framework at micro, meso, and macro levels, the second theoretical contribution of the Sexuality Convergence Model lies in providing a framework to explore and comprehend diversity and heterogeneity within individuals who share homogeneous contexts. Much of the existing literature on intersecting social identities tends to concentrate on the combination of multiple marginalized social categories, such as being Black, female, an immigrant, or LGBT, and argues that the intersection of these disadvantaged identities results in additive or multiplicative oppressions, such as “double jeopardy” (Beal 2008) or “multiple jeopardy” (King 1988), for individuals occupying those social positions (Crenshaw 1989; Best et al. 2011; Parent, DeBlaere and Moradi 2013). However, scholars such as Collins (2000, 2003) and Pedulla (2014) advance beyond this rudimentary mathematical perspective, recognizing that in diverse contexts and for individuals

occupying distinct social positions, these intersecting systems of oppression can result in diverse and nuanced experiences and outcomes. This thesis recognizes the intricate and distinct approaches and outcomes arising from intersecting systems of oppression. It examines marginalized Chinese LGBT populations' different perceptions of their intersected social categories/identities and their varying perceptions of institutions contributing to their marginalized positions. Thus, the Sexuality Convergence Model provides us with a better understanding of marginalized populations, revealing their heterogeneity and diversity in terms of their perceptions, experiences, interactions, and navigation of so-called marginal positions and the oppressive systems affecting them.

Indeed, LGBT communities in China undoubtedly occupy a marginalized position within society. As elucidated in Chapter 4, a series of official government statements emphasizes the association of heterosexuality with China's historical and cultural traditions, while simultaneously portraying homosexuality as vulgar, obscene, immoral, pornographic, low, and unhealthy. Consequently, gender and sexual minorities face discrimination and stigmatization across various spheres in China, including the workplace, schools, public opinion spaces, healthcare, and more. This shared experience of marginalization fosters a certain level of collective identity among gender and sexual minorities.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that characterizing gender and sexual minorities as a monolithic identity group based solely on their shared social encounters oversimplifies their complexity and heterogeneity. When the identities of gender and sexual minorities intersect with Chinese national identity, a diverse spectrum of differences emerges, as explored in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. This spectrum includes "Pink Gays," who exhibit patriotic and nationalistic sentiments; LGBT Liberals, who criticize and detach themselves from Chinese nationalism; and

“Avoidant Gays,” who adopt a pragmatic and practical approach in their everyday lives. These distinct groups within the Chinese LGBT community highlight the various strategies employed by different subgroups in navigating their national and LGBT identities. While Pink Gays, LGBT Liberals, and LGBT Avoidant groups have different understandings of the marginality of LGBT identity, Chinese nationalism, and the forces of globalization, as well as different strategies for navigating these intersections and self-rationalization strategies, from their own respective perspectives, each approach is rational and makes sense.

Furthermore, even within smaller and more tightly-knit groups of LGBT activists who share the common goal of advancing LGBT rights, heterogeneity persists. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 7, Chinese LGBT activists exhibit tendencies towards either actively aligning themselves with national identity, attempting to utilize Chinese nationalism (specifically filial nationalism) to promote LGBT advocacy, or distancing themselves from Chinese nationalism and leaning towards entirely different advocacy approaches that draw on international LGBT support. In the backdrop of government oppression, the Chinese LGBT movement is compelled to decentralize, resulting in diverse approaches to LGBT advocacy based on individual understandings of sexuality, nationalism, and the forces of globalization. This diversity and heterogeneity are evident in the varied forms of LGBT advocacy pursued by Chinese LGBT activists.

However, it is important to recognize that reality often proves to be more intricate, diverse, and heterogeneous. For instance, in my online survey, approximately 72.9% of gender and sexual minority participants expressed pride in their country, while around 60% expressed a desire to relocate to a more LGBT-inclusive environment. To be more specific, individuals who both expressed pride in their country and a desire to migrate to a more LGBT-inclusive

environment accounted for 38.4% of the total sample. Therefore, we cannot perceive the LGBT community as a unified entity inherently opposed to state oppression. On the contrary, diversity and heterogeneity do not solely occur based on readily apparent categories, but within the same status and social categories and identities, there is still diversity and heterogeneity. In other words, heterogeneity exists among marginalized social groups with similar situations. This approach not only allows for the analysis of the Chinese context but also enables the examination of queer heterogeneity among Western LGBT cultures, such as the coexistence of the radical LGBT movement and conservative Log Cabin Republicans in the US.

(3) Internal Heterogeneity within Nationalism

In discussions of nationalism within a nation-state, it is often described as a sense of belonging, where individuals from diverse backgrounds and locations come to identify themselves as part of a larger, unified group, an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that print capitalism and a common language contribute to constructing a shared understanding of the nation’s history, present, and future, reinforcing the notion of a cohesive community with a shared destiny. However, many scholars also emphasize that nationalism can lead to the exclusion and marginalization of certain groups (Anderson 1983; Mosse 1996; Puar 2007). The Sexuality Convergence Model constructed in this thesis expands the understanding of how nationalism can exclude gender and sexual minorities and provides further insight into the complexity and diversity within nationalism, even under state-led nationalism. As demonstrated in Chapters 4 to 7, using China as an example, state-led nationalism in China exhibits various internal dimensions when analyzed in its intersection with sexuality and globalization. These dimensions include the existence of macho nationalism

(Chapter 4), homonationalism (Chapters 4 and 5), liberal nationalism (Chapter 6), and filial nationalism (Chapter 7) within Chinese nationalism.

Specifically, as an authoritarian state, China began to adopt nationalism as an ideology in the 1990s to strengthen people's identification with the Chinese government, the Communist Party of China, and Chinese socialism, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of the regime. This has been one of the most significant reasons for the recurrent surges of Chinese nationalism in recent years. For instance, the Chinese government implemented the patriotism education policy in 1994 to seek support from the public, especially intellectuals, and bolster its authority in the face of challenges from civil society (Zhao 1998). In the 21st century, the Chinese government has further reinforced nationalism through various measures, including the introduction of the "National Anthem Law" in 2017, the enactment of the "Law of the Protection of Heroes and Martyrs" in 2018, and the revision of "The Outline of the Implementation of the Education of Patriotism" in 2019 (see Chapter 4 for more details). Furthermore, on June 26, 2023, China began to deliberate on the draft of the Patriotism Education Law, elevating patriotism to a higher institutional status (People's Daily 2023). Additionally, the emergence of the Internet has provided a platform for grassroots nationalists to express their views, leading to a voluntary public enthusiasm for nationalism. As discussed in Chapter 5, nationalist sentiments have undergone generational shifts, transitioning from the "Angry Youth" to the "Voluntary Fifty-Cent Army," and more recently, the "Little Pinks." With the Chinese state acting as the ultimate proponent of nationalism, nationalist voices have gained prominence in public discourse, resulting in the marginalization of liberal voices (as explored in Chapter 4). Consequently, nationalists can boycott their opponents, often targeting liberal voices, with impunity, while the

influence of liberal voices diminishes. Regrettably, the increased visibility of the LGBT community has made it a target of nationalist attacks.

However, despite the dominant control exerted by the state over nationalism and its role as a censorship criterion in public discourse, it is overly simplistic to characterize Chinese nationalism as a homogeneous entity. As explored in Chapter 4, with regard to LGBT issues, China predominantly emphasizes macho nationalism. This entails the government's official recognition and promotion of a gender culture that emphasizes heterosexuality, masculinity, and traditional gender stereotypes. The government has consistently classified homosexuality as a deviation, as pornographic, and associated with other negative categories in various policies, particularly in censorship policies. However, the Chinese government also adopts a "three-no" attitude (no support, no opposition, no promotion) towards LGBT issues (Zhang 2014), and there have been instances where the Chinese state has compromised and taken a stance in support of LGBT equality issues. Furthermore, China decriminalized homosexuality in 1997 and depathologized it in 2001. Hence, the ambivalent official stance on LGBT issues has created a limited space for the construction of an alternative form of sexual nationalism known as homonationalism in China. As discussed in Chapter 4 and 5, homonationalists (or Pink Gays) utilize the remaining ambiguity to present a contrasting view of what constitutes authentic Chinese gender and sexuality in opposition to macho nationalism. Specifically, homonationalists frequently cite idioms such as "male love/porn (nan feng/nan se 男风/男色)" and historical accounts of same-sex intimacies, such as "Jinlan Qi (金兰契)" or "Zi Shu (自梳)," which are recorded in Chinese history and ancient stories of homosexuality like "Long Yang (龙阳)" and "Broken Sleeve (断袖)," to showcase China's traditional and authentic LGBT-friendly nature, thereby redefining the concept of authentic Chinese gender and sexuality. Although

homonationalism and macho nationalism in China diverge in their interpretations of traditional Chinese gender culture, both forms of nationalism share a common perception of foreign LGBT support forces. They view the United States and other Western powers as external hostile forces attempting to exploit LGBT issues to interfere in China's internal affairs, thereby posing a threat to China's social stability. Consequently, homonationalists have found space to exist within the realm of public opinion by aligning themselves with the pro-regime stance.

LGBT Liberals hold opposing views compared to Pink Gays regarding their attitude towards state-led nationalism. As discussed in Chapter 6, LGBT Liberals not only criticize state-sponsored nationalism but also aim to detach themselves from it. However, this does not imply that LGBT Liberals lack love for China and a sense of belonging to the country. On the contrary, I argue that LGBT Liberals have a strong affection for the land of China. However, due to the Chinese government's appropriation of patriotism as an ideological tool, LGBT Liberals find themselves having to decouple their "love for the country" from "patriotism." Furthermore, LGBT Liberals aspire to see China become inclusive, diverse, and equal, as well as LGBT-friendly, prompting them to look to more progressive LGBT-friendly countries as a model. Therefore, LGBT Liberals' sense of belonging to China and their expectations for a more open and LGBT-friendly China can be classified as Liberal nationalism (Yang and Lim 2010).

Additionally, within the framework of official-led macho nationalism, there exists a subcategory known as Filial Nationalism, as discussed in Chapter 7. Although Filial Nationalism incorporates Confucian cultural values that emphasize heterosexuality, masculinity, hierarchy, and authority, which contradict LGBT rights, under specific circumstances in China, particularly in the face of increasing repression on the LGBT movement, some LGBT activists choose to employ Filial Nationalism's family values and parental authority as a protective shield for LGBT

rights. Even though this approach may be criticized by radical LGBT activists, it demonstrates a form of creativity and adaptation to the restricted LGBT environment in China.

Therefore, while the state and nationalists have driven the new wave of nationalism to its climax, contradictory narratives can still coexist within its framework. It is crucial to closely examine the internal heterogeneity of nationalism. In the context of Chinese nationalism dominating cyberspace, individuals can utilize nationalism as a tool to empower themselves and provide a protective shield for the issues they wish to advocate. From this perspective, nationalism, to some extent, transcends state control as it begins to fragment internally. This perspective allows for the examination of various phenomena in China, such as patriotic environmentalism, patriotic animal protection, patriotic feminism, and patriotic fandom. Similarly, Western research on nationalism can learn from this Sexuality Convergence Model to examine the internal heterogeneity of nationalism, such as the coexistence of macho nationalism affected by religious conservatism and homonationalism (Puar 2007) in the United States.

(4) Dynamic State-Society Relations in an Authoritarian Regime

Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan classify authoritarianism as an ideal type of regime and define it as a political system “with limited, not responsible, political pluralism,” “without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities,” “without extensive nor intensive political mobilization,” and “in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power” (1996: 44-45). From Linz and Stepan’s classification, it can also be observed that authoritarian states possess internal complexity and heterogeneity, along with limited pluralism, and should not be perceived as a monothetic entity. However, avoiding a reductionist model in understanding authoritarianism is not common, and only a subset of scholars, such as Elizabeth

Perry (1994, 2002), Kevin O'Brien (2002), and Tenzin (2013), view authoritarian states as hegemonic single entities, while recognizing that "society" is not always unified against the authoritarian state.

In this thesis, the Sexuality Convergence Model also maintains the perspective of viewing authoritarianism as a heterogeneous entity and recognizes the presence of internal variation within society. The interaction between the authoritarian state and society is seen as a dynamic interplay. Specifically, concerning authoritarian heterogeneity, China upholds the mainstream value of heterosexuality while maintaining a "three-no" policy on LGBT issues (Zhang 2014). Additionally, the Chinese government may make compromises when facing resistance from society. For instance, after the "I am Homosexual" movement (see Chapters 1 and 5) gained significant momentum, official government media made LGBT-friendly statements to pacify the situation. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 7, while state-led nationalism fosters rising xenophobic sentiments, China remains deeply integrated into the global economic system, necessitating foreign individuals and companies to drive its economic development. This contradiction results in the Chinese government's simultaneous exclusivity towards foreigners while granting them certain privileges. These examples illustrate the internal heterogeneity of authoritarianism.

In terms of societal heterogeneity, this can be clearly observed from the coexistence of macho nationalists and homonationalists discussed in Chapter 4, the evolution of Chinese nationalists from the "Angry Youth" to the "Voluntary Fifty-Cent Army," and then to the "Little Pink" as discussed in Chapter 5, as well as the simultaneous presence of Pink Gays, LGBT Liberals, and LGBT Avoidant Group in Chapters 5 and 6.

Furthermore, the dynamic interplay between the authoritarian state and society can be observed in the different strategies adopted by Pink Gays, LGBT Liberals, and LGBT Avoidant Group in navigating their LGBT identities in relation to Chinese nationalism and globalization (as explained in Chapters 5 and 6). Moreover, this dynamic interplay between the authoritarian state and society is even more evident in the discussions of China's LGBT activism strategies in Chapter 7. Specifically, while the Chinese state is renowned for its authoritarian rule, it is not a monolithic entity. Within this framework of strict social control, significant ambiguity exists, providing opportunities for minority groups to navigate and resist the Chinese authoritarian state. The Chapter 7 demonstrates that while patriotism and nationalism have become criteria for censorship in Chinese public opinion spaces, local LGBT activists in China have strategically employed nationalism, specifically filial nationalism, to advance LGBT activism. To elaborate, NGO_X actively supports and praises family culture, emphasizing its role in fostering family harmony and social stability, thereby mitigating the risks associated with their LGBT advocacy. Moreover, NGO_X leverages the concept of parental authority as a protective layer for local LGBT activism in China. The efficacy of this strategy, which involves the utilization of filial nationalism in LGBT activism, is facilitated by the alignment of family culture with the Chinese government's ideological framework. In addition to employing coercive measures to maintain social stability, the Chinese government consistently emphasizes the moralization of governance and utilizes the family's influence in shaping individuals to achieve social governance (Lin and Trevaskes 2019). Furthermore, filial nationalism heavily relies on the isomorphic institution between the family and the state (Zhou 2019). Consequently, the family assumes a critical intermediary role, linking individuals and the state, and the Chinese government employs it as a means to foster loyalty to China, equating it with unconditional loyalty to one's parents.

Through incorporating LGBT elements within the framework of mainstream and government official ideologies, such as the Three-Family construction (associated with Xi Jinping's government ideology) and Harmonious Family (associated with Hu Jintao's government ideology), NGO_X explicitly expresses its pro-regime stance and its willingness to collaborate with the government rather than opposing it. This demonstrates the organization's keen awareness of the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the official discourse and its successful development of a strategic approach to engage with the official ideological representations. Furthermore, this case provides evidence that in the Chinese context, LGBT advocacy does not necessarily involve viewing the state and the government as entirely antagonistic. Instead, LGBT activists can utilize the state and the government to further their goals.

Furthermore, the contradictory nature of the Chinese state, characterized by both xenophobic tendencies and the provision of privileges to foreigners and foreign companies, highlights a notable ideological divide within the Chinese government. This divide serves as a foundation for alternative advocacy among numerous Chinese local activists involved in the LGBT movement. These activists leverage the presence of foreigners, foreign companies, foreign embassies, and international organizations in China to promote LGBT activism.

The relationship between the state and society is not simply a dichotomy but rather encompasses diverse modes of interaction, including cooperation and mutual exploitation. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the state-society relationship as a dynamic interaction that is contingent upon specific contexts. By situating the LGBT movement in China within this dynamic state-society interaction, a broader range of strategies employed by Chinese LGBT activists becomes apparent. In addition to the two categories of LGBT advocacy discussed in this

thesis, which are closely linked to Chinese nationalism and globalization, other strategies within LGBT activism warrant further exploration. For example, it is worth noting that most LGBT organizations are unable to obtain civil registration and operate as legal non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (UNDP and USAID 2014). Instead, these organizations are compelled to register as private companies, incurring higher costs and full taxation. As a result, some LGBT organizations have embarked on a transformative path towards commercialization, which requires them to strike a delicate balance between commercial endeavors, public welfare objectives, and state regulations. Furthermore, many NGOs have adopted an innovative approach known as affiliation. This approach involves LGBT organizations that are unable to secure legal NGO registration seeking affiliations with stronger and legally recognized non-LGBT NGOs or foundations in order to leverage benefits and support. Through affiliation, LGBT organizations address the issue of legal status and gain authorization to raise funds on various fundraising platforms in China. Consequently, some LGBT organizations have successfully transitioned from an illegal to a legal status to some degree. It is worth emphasizing that the foundations and NGOs that can legally register in China function as both quasi-state agencies and quasi-civil society organizations since they are directly subordinate to and guided by the government, while also serving as intermediaries connecting society (Howell 2015). Thus, LGBT organizations, unable to independently acquire legal status, collaborate with these legally recognized foundations, resulting in a complex state-society relationship: state-quasi-state agency/quasi-civil organization-LGBT organization. These diverse strategies within the Chinese LGBT movement reflect distinct facets of the state-society relationship and merit further investigation.

(5) Center-Periphery Paradigm and the Issue of Marginality

In the context of the center-periphery paradigm, scholars have moved beyond the simplistic center-periphery dichotomy and have instead focused on the dynamic interaction between the two, emphasizing the contextual, negotiable, and dialogical aspects of this relationship (e.g., Bhabha 1994; Hannerz 1992; Tenzin 2013). The Sexuality Convergence Model draws significant inspiration from Bhabha's (1994) idea of hybridity, Hannerz's (1992) theory of creolization, and Tenzin's theory of convergence zone (2013), applying their concepts to analyze the intersection of sexuality, nationalism, and globalization. In this Sexuality Convergence Model, the Chinese state, Chinese state-sponsored nationalism, and global LGBT supporting forces represent the central positions, while the Chinese LGBT community experiences dual forms of marginalization.

The interaction between the Chinese state and global LGBT support operates dialectically as analyzed in Chapter 4. In particular, the international LGBT pressure mechanism, exemplified by the United Nations, exhibits inherent contradictions. It raises questions regarding whether the UN's human rights mechanisms and Western societies promote universal LGBT norms as a means of assimilating other cultures (universalism and particularism conflicts) and whether such efforts constitute interference in the internal affairs of other countries (intervention and non-intervention conflicts). The Chinese government adeptly addresses these contradictions within the international pressure mechanisms. China responds to the UN's inquiries concerning LGBT issues by emphasizing its unique characteristics, such as special national conditions, cultural distinctiveness, and traditional ethics. Additionally, it underscores the importance of national security and non-interference in internal affairs. Essentially, China strategically and actively marginalizes itself within the UN human rights arena by accentuating its distinctiveness. Through this strategic self-marginalization, the Chinese government justifies its inaction on

LGBT human rights or its suppression of the LGBT community. Consequently, the Chinese state and international forces, as two central actors, engage in a complex and dynamic interaction.

The LGBT community in China, facing dual marginalization, engages in various creative interactions with the centers. In the case of NGO_X advocacy (seen in Chapter 7), it is evident that NGO_X consciously works towards reducing or blurring the marginality of the Chinese LGBT community through its framing process. Moreover, NGO_X actively aligns itself with the center of state power by positioning itself as a contributor to the center, thereby establishing itself as an integral part of the government. For instance, NGO_X claims to have facilitated the improvement of parent-child relationships for tens of thousands of families, promoted family virtues, and contributed to social harmony. As a result, NGO_X becomes an important force within the official ideology of Three-Family Construction and Harmonious Family. NGO_X demonstrates a willingness and proactive approach in communicating with local government authorities and maintaining a positive relationship with them. Overall, their tactics reflect a strong sense of patriotism and support for the regime. Through these efforts, NGO_X conveys an important message: (1) the demands of the LGBT community for their rights as citizens of the state are legitimate and should be supported and protected by the government and the law, as supporters of the state, the party, and as patriotic citizens; and (2) the advocacy of NGO_X and the LGBT community is not disruptive to social order or colluding with foreign forces, but rather contributes to a harmonious and stable society.

Regarding Chinese traditional culture, both NGO_X (Chapter 7) and homonationalists (Chapter 4) emphasize the inclusiveness of Chinese culture and history for the LGBT community. For instance, NGO_X highlights that many individuals in the LGBT community value family virtues, exhibit filial piety towards their parents, and aspire to be accepted by their

families and society. Thus, NGO_X chooses to directly incorporate or reiterate official ideology while integrating LGBT elements, such as coming out for sexual minorities, acceptance in parent-child relationships, and acceptance of parents towards their sexual minority children. In comparison, homonationalists draw upon numerous historical anecdotes on same-sex relationships in Chinese history to argue for the inclusive nature of authentic Chinese gender and sexual culture. These strategies create a space of mimicry or hybridity at the intersection of mainstream and official Chinese tradition and LGBT issues. Both NGO_X and homonationalists attempt to establish a state of “you in me and me in you” (Zhang and Li 2021: 317), deconstructing and reconstructing government macho nationalism to some extent into concepts of benevolence and inclusiveness. Ultimately, NGO_X, as well as homonationalists, utilize the official discourse of the center (the Chinese state) to their advantage (O’Brien 2002; Tenzin 2013).

In terms of international support for LGBT rights, Chinese LGBT activists and the LGBT community do not simply adopt Western ideals and norms from Western centers. Instead, they adapt these concepts to the Chinese context. For example, as analyzed in Chapter 7, LGBT activities such as pride parades and street protests, which are common in Western societies, undergo modifications in China. Even the Shanghai Pride Festival, primarily organized by foreigners in China, must adjust to the local environment, particularly the regulatory landscape. Consequently, the majority of festival activities are held indoors, with outdoor parades and street advocacy being canceled. Furthermore, Chinese activists can leverage global LGBT-supporting forces to advance the local LGBT agenda. They effectively engage with foreigners, embassies, multinational corporations, and UN mechanisms to provide a protective layer for Chinese LGBT

activism. This showcases the agency of marginalized Chinese LGBT activists as they utilize one center (international LGBT support) to challenge another center (the Chinese state/nationalism).

Moreover, marginality should not be viewed solely as a constraining force that marginalizes the Chinese LGBT community. Instead, when Chinese LGBT activists adapt LGBT-friendly policies from multinational companies to the local context, they transform their marginality into an advantage. For instance, as explained in Chapter 7, when persuading multinational companies' leadership to implement LGBT-friendly policies in China, these activists emphasize that LGBT employees in China typically do not have children, exempting them from the company's costly maternity leave policies. By providing benefits, companies are more likely to gain the commitment of LGBT employees who seek protection for their fundamental rights. In this case, LGBT activists highlight their marginality as an advantage. Through strategic self-marginalization, their position reveals the financial and economic superiority of LGBT individuals compared to the heterosexual community, which focuses on marriage and parenthood.

In conclusion, the relationship between the center and the periphery is not fixed; it is variable, flexible, communicative, and even interchangeable. However, this does not diminish the importance of the Chinese state and macho nationalism in the power structure. The attempts made by the Chinese LGBT community to access the center reflect their marginalized status. Although some of these attempts have been successful, it is crucial to acknowledge that the strategies employed by LGBT activists to enter the center are precarious, heavily relying on the limited and ambiguous space provided by the center.

(6) Globalization of Sexuality within a Dual-Center and Dual-Periphery Framework

Closely intertwined with the center-periphery paradigm, the Sexual Convergence Model also contributes to an expanded understanding of the globalization of sexuality. As described by Altman's (1996, 2002, 2004) theory of “global queer,” Western societies, particularly the US, have been rapidly disseminating contemporary queer sexual culture to global domains. Previous research has explored a variety of phenomena within the globalization of sexuality, including activities such as human trafficking for prostitution, the prevalence of mail-order brides, the global expansion of the sex industry, sex tourism, and the spread of the AIDS pandemic (Binnie 2004). In the realm of LGBT issues, numerous scholars, including Altman (1996, 2004), Binnie (2007), Stychin (2004), and SeckinelGin (2012), have examined the globalization of sexual identity, the consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the universalization of LGBT human rights, and the worldwide dissemination of homophobia. However, much of the existing literature on the globalization of sexuality remains confined to a paradigm centered around a singular “center (the Western center)” and a single “periphery (the non-Western periphery)” (e.g., Altman 1996, 2004; Binnie 2007; Stychin 2004). The limitation of this analytical framework lies in its disregard for the presence of state power within non-Western societies, which serves as another influential center. The Sexual Convergence Model introduces a dual-center and dual-periphery framework for comprehending the globalization of sexuality. Specifically, Western society functions as one center influencing the sexual culture of non-Western locales, while non-Western state power functions as another center similarly impacting local sexual culture. In this context, non-Western LGBT communities are subject to the influences of both centers. For instance, as explored in Chapter 4, China’s state power (one center) obstructs the influence of Western societies (the other center) on China’s sexual culture.

More specifically, China utilizes regulations on overseas NGOs and state-led nationalism as tools to filter or even censor LGBT human rights pressures originating from Western nations.

Therefore, grounded within a dual-centered and dual-periphery framework, the Sexuality Convergence Model offers a more diverse and heterogeneous range of expressions for the sexuality of non-Western local LGBT communities. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, under the dominance of Western societies in shaping LGBT human rights discourse, China's local LGBT community encompasses not only LGBT Liberals who embrace, accept, and align with transnational LGBT support forces while rejecting state-led Chinese nationalism influence, but also Pink Gays who reject and resist the globalization of LGBT influences while embracing Chinese state discourses. Additionally, there are LGBT Avoidant Groups that avoid engaging with their sexuality due to its intersection with both globalization and Chinese state power.

Similarly, situated within the context of a dual-centered and dual-periphery structure, the Sexuality Convergence Model further enriches our understanding of the globalization of LGBT human rights. As explored in Chapter 7, within this dual-centered and dual-periphery framework, local LGBT advocacy strategies are not mere replicas of Western LGBT movement models. Conversely, Chinese local LGBT activism necessitates intricate designs to navigate the political space between state power and foreign LGBT support. This results in two distinct paths within China's local LGBT advocacy strategies: one involves strategically embracing state power by utilizing official endorsements of filial nationalism for LGBT activism, while the other path involves the strategic embrace of Western LGBT support, utilizing foreign individuals, corporations, foreign embassies, and UN human rights mechanisms for local LGBT advocacy.

In summary, the Sexuality Convergence Model enhances our comprehension of intersectionality, the heterogeneity present within the LGBT community, the variations in

nationalisms, the dynamics of state-society relations, the center-periphery paradigm, and the phenomenon of the globalization of sexuality. While initially conceived within the framework of the Chinese context, I contend that this theoretical model holds relevance and applicability to other contexts, albeit to a certain degree. For example, this conceptual framework can be effectively employed in non-Western settings such as East Asian societies (e.g., Taiwan, Japan, South Korea), Southeast Asian societies (e.g., Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore), and South Asian countries (e.g., India). It can be utilized to explore pivotal questions, such as: How does state-led nationalism in these societies intersect with foreign support for the LGBT community? How do LGBT individuals in these societies navigate their sexual identities in the context of local nationalism and global influences? To what extent do local LGBT activists interact with state-driven nationalism and broader global forces in their pursuit of LGBT advocacy within their respective societies? Furthermore, I posit that the applicability of the Sexuality Convergence Model extends to the examination of the sexual experiences of immigrant populations in Western nations. For instance, immigrants from Asian, Middle Eastern, and African countries who have settled in countries like the United States and Canada continue to grapple with the impact of a dual-centered framework, wherein their cultural or national identity/nationalism from their countries of origin intertwines with that of the host countries. Exploring how these newly arrived immigrants navigate their sexuality within the context of these dual nationalistic influences and the overarching force of globalization remains an imperative and intriguing avenue for future research.

8.3 Limitations and Future Research

This section focuses on the limitations of the thesis and proposes future research directions. Although the research included 43 participants representing a diverse range of demographics, the majority of participants were young (18-40 years old), urban lesbian and gay individuals in China. Recruiting participants from deeply closeted groups, older age groups, lower-educated populations, gender and sexual minorities residing in rural areas, and other LGBT groups beyond the lesbian and gay community posed significant challenges for conducting interviews. Furthermore, the strict censorship system in China had a substantial impact on the collection of social media data. Liberal-leaning opinions and discussions pertaining to gender and sexual minorities were frequently deleted by popular online platforms such as Weibo and WeChat Official Accounts, which are the primary channels for expressing opinions. Additionally, observing the LGBT movement in China, particularly in relation to sensitive issues like international lobbying for LGBT advocacy, proved to be exceedingly difficult. On one hand, discussions on sensitive LGBT topics often occurred in closed settings. On the other hand, activists engaged in sensitive advocacy work were reluctant to participate in interviews. Consequently, the study of LGBT activism in China for this thesis relied heavily on non-interview data sources.

Despite these limitations in data collection, this research has presented a diverse range of experiences related to the LGBT community, Chinese nationalism, and Chinese LGBT activism. The thesis introduces the model of Sexuality Convergence, which provides a significant foundation for future research. Expanding on this Sexuality Convergence Model, future studies can consider the following directions. Firstly, conducting longitudinal surveys to track the experiences of the LGBT community is imperative. The interviews conducted for this research took place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and since then, the Chinese government has

implemented extensive population control and surveillance measures, including strict lockdown protocols, resulting in severe humanitarian crises. The zero Covid policy and Xi Jinping's progressively repressive governance have prompted certain Chinese citizens to flee China, resulting in the emergence of "run philosophy" (or "runology," 润学)²⁷⁸ within China (Yuan 2022). Furthermore, the LGBT environment in China has witnessed notable setbacks, such as the closure of pioneering LGBT organizations like Chengdu MILK in 2019, Shanghai Pride in 2020, LGBT Rights Advocacy China in 2021, and Beijing LGBT Center in 2023. Contrasting these disheartening changes, the encouraging news is that societies that have made relative progress on LGBT issues are gradually giving greater attention to the plight of LGBT refugees. For instance, on June 8, 2023, the Government of Canada became the first country in the world to announce its partnership with the non-profit organization Rainbow Railroad, offering protection to LGBTQI+ refugees who experience violence and persecution (Osman 2023). This collaborative effort between the Canadian government and Rainbow Railroad signifies a heightened level of support and aims to facilitate the secure resettlement of a greater number of LGBTQI+ individuals and their families in Canada (Osman 2023). Therefore, the prospect of immigrating to an LGBTQI+ - friendly country is no longer as politically challenging as it was before. These evolving domestic and international dynamics emphasize the need for a follow-up survey to examine any notable changes at the intersection of sexuality, Chinese nationalism, and globalization.

Secondly, comparative research is a noteworthy perspective to expand this study. For instance, a comparison can be made between China's Pink Gays and the Log Cabin Republicans in the United States (Rogers and Lott 1997). Despite Pink Gays existing in China under a collectivist and authoritarian regime, and Log Cabin Republicans existing in the individualistic

²⁷⁸ This term pertains to the knowledge associated with escaping from China.

and democratic system of the United States, both groups embrace conservative values. A comparative study of Pink Gays and Log Cabin Republicans would be a fascinating topic. Additionally, exploring the comparison between Pink Gays and other “little pink” groups within China, such as Pink/Nationalist Feminism, would also present an interesting research direction.

Furthermore, this thesis primarily focuses on examining the pressure and influence exerted on China by international LGBT supporting forces. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the impact of international anti-LGBT forces on China. For example, the case of Xu Haoyang illustrates the intersection of international anti-LGBT forces with sexuality and Chinese nationalism. Specifically, on April 5, 2023, Xu Haoyang, a 21-year-old Chinese gay student, was detained in Russia. The Russian police justified his detention and subsequent expulsion under the “Russian Federation Administrative Offenses Code,” citing his “propagation of non-traditional sexual relationships to minors” (Di 2023). According to the Russian police report, Xu Haoyang had posted 19 videos on his YouTube channel depicting his non-traditional relationship with Gela Gogishvili (Xu Haoyang’s boyfriend), involving acts such as kissing, hugging, and touching various parts of each other’s bodies, including genital areas (Di 2023). Prior to the Xu Haoyang incident, Russia had implemented a ban on the distribution of propaganda promoting non-traditional sexual relationships, initially targeting minors but later extended to cover all age groups (Kottasová and Chernova 2022). The anti-LGBT stance in Russia, along with the discussions surrounding Xu Haoyang on Chinese internet platforms, has sparked debates among Chinese netizens regarding Xu Haoyang’s Chinese identity, his sexual orientation, Russia’s persecution of Chinese homosexuals, and the dynamics of China-Russia relations. These discussions from various perspectives contribute to further refining the Sexuality Convergence Model.

Lastly, I have found interesting data that goes beyond the scope of the SNG Model, serving as a pilot investigation for future research. For instance, among my observations of LGBT community activities, there are four events where parents share their experiences of accepting their LGBT children. Exploring how these parents navigate and transform their existing heterosexual norms and values influenced by Confucian culture to accept their children's sexual minority identities is an intriguing topic that merits further investigation. Furthermore, among the participants in my interviews, ten individuals identify as having religious beliefs, indicating the potential for fruitful research exploring the intersection of religious and sexual identities within the Chinese context.

In summary, this thesis has developed the Sexuality Convergence Model through an analysis of Chinese case studies. By employing this analytical model, we gain insights into the interaction between Chinese nationalism, globalism, and the LGBT issue at the national, individual, and social movement levels. Furthermore, this model enhances our understanding of Chinese nationalism as a prevailing standard of censorship, the inherent heterogeneity within the LGBT community, the interplay between the state and society, the dynamics of center-periphery relations, and the globalization of sexuality within a dual-center and dual-periphery framework.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Interview Questions

Section One: Background Questions

1. Can you please introduce yourself, including your age, education, marital status, occupation, and how you identify in terms of gender and sexuality?

Section Two: Sexuality and Gender

1. How did you become aware of your sexual orientation and/or gender identity? How do you understand your gender and sexuality in terms of sex, sexual orientation, LGBT identity, and LGBT rights?

2. Have you come out to friends, family, colleagues, or others? If so, could you share your experience? If not, could you explain why you chose not to come out?

3. Have you participated in any LGBT activities or events, such as volunteering with LGBT organizations? If yes, could you talk about your experiences and the impact they've had on you? If not, could you explain why you chose not to participate?

Section Three: National Policies

1. What do you know about national policies and regulations related to gender and sexuality, such as those issued by the General Administration of Press and Publication, Radio, Film and Television, or the State Administration of Radio and Television? How do you evaluate them?

2. How do you understand patriotism (爱国) and national identity as a Chinese person?

3. How do you understand the relations between your Chinese national identity and your LGBT identity? Have national policies affected your sense of patriotism or national identity?

Please explain your opinion.

4. How do you reconcile your Chinese national identity with your LGBT identity?

5. (For LGBT activists) How have national policies affected the mobilization and framing of the LGBT movement in China? What strategies have you used to cope with the impact of these policies?

Section Four: Foreign Support in China

1. Have you ever noticed any LGBT events occurring in foreign countries, such as the legalization of same-sex marriage, the Pride Parade, or Pride Month? What do you think of them? Have they had any impact on China? How did they impact China?

2. Have you ever noticed any foreign LGBT activities or support in China? How do you evaluate the participation of Western governments, NGOs, or international organizations in China's LGBTQ rights movement?

[If they do not have ideas or are not familiar with foreign support, I provide two types of information for them to comment on]

(a) During the IDAHOTB, the US and Canadian Embassies organized activities in China to support the Chinese LGBT community. What is your opinion on their support? Do you think it is necessary to have their support? What about their resources and funding aid for the Chinese LGBT community?

(b) At the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Chinese government was questioned about the human rights status of gender and sexual minority groups in China. How do

you evaluate the UN's LGBT pressure on China? Do we need this pressure? Explain your opinion.

3. (For LGBT activists) Whether/how did foreign supports affect the mobilization and framing of LGBT activism in China?

4. Do you know about the "798-Advocacy" organized by Piaoquanjun in Beijing in May 2018? What is your opinion on this advocacy?

Some people argued that the "798-Advocacy" was supported by the US, which was taken as hostile anti-China forces, and Piaoquanjun was colluding with anti-China forces. What do you think about this idea? Do you think there exist an-China forces? How do you understand the term "anti-China forces"? Who are the anti-China forces? How did Chinese LGBT issue connect with anti-China forces?

5. Taiwan recently legalized same-sex marriage. What is your opinion on this? How do you think it will impact mainland China?

Section Five: Future Expectations

1. What are your expectations for personal life, national policies on LGBT issues, Chinese LGBT activism, and global LGBT human rights?

2. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your perspectives, opinions, or evaluations?

Appendix II: Interviewees Details

I.D.	City	Date	Age	LGBT Identity	Activist/Volunteer/Other
C1	Lanzhou	2019-03-01	24	Gay	Volunteer
C2	Lanzhou	2019-03-03	21	Gay	Volunteer
C3	Lanzhou	2019-03-05	22	Gay	Other
C4	Lanzhou	2019-03-07	31	Lesbian	Volunteer
C5	Lanzhou	2019-03-12	38	Gay	Other
C6	Lanzhou	2019-03-17	29	Lesbian	Other
C7	Lanzhou	2019-03-26	32	Gay	Other
C8	Lanzhou	2019-03-28	35	Lesbian	Volunteer
C9	Lanzhou	2019-03-29	23	Gay	Volunteer
C10	Chengdu	2019-04-04	33	Gay	Activist
C11	Chengdu	2019-04-05	27	Gay	Activist
C12	Chengdu	2019-04-14	28	Gay	Volunteer
C13	Chengdu	2019-04-18	33	Gay	Other
C14	Chengdu	2019-04-15	22	Queer	Volunteer
C15	Chengdu	2019-04-16	39	Gay	Activist
C16	Chengdu	2019-04-18	27	Gay	Other
C17	Chengdu	2019-04-19	26	Lesbian	Other
C18	Chengdu	2019-04-21	31	Gay	Other
C19	Chengdu	2019-04-27	30	Lesbian	Activist
C20	Chengdu	2019-04-28	32	Gay	Volunteer
C21	Chengdu	2019-04-10	21	Gay	Volunteer

C22	Chengdu	2019-04-11	31	Gay	Volunteer
C23	Chengdu	2019-04-22	33	Gay	Volunteer
C24	Beijing	2019-05-02	22	Gay	Other
C25	Beijing	2019-05-08	31	Gay	Volunteer
C26	Beijing	2019-05-09	22	Gay	Activist
C27	Beijing	2019-05-09	28	Gay	Volunteer
C28	Beijing	2019-05-10	31	Lesbian	Volunteer
C29	Beijing	2019-05-11	42	Gay	Activist
C30	Beijing	2019-05-13	22	Gay	Activist
C31	Beijing	2019-05-14	22	Queer	Activist
C32	Beijing	2019-05-20	23	Transwomen	Other
C33	Beijing	2019-05-22	35	Transwomen	Other
C34	Beijing	2019-05-26	30	Transmen	Other
C35	Canada	2019-05-30	31	Lesbian	Other
C36	Shanghai	2019-06-01	23	Gay	Other
C37	Shanghai	2019-06-03	26	Gay	Volunteer
C38	Shanghai	2019-06-04	29	Gay	Other
C39	Shanghai	2019-06-06	30	Queer	Other
C40	Shanghai	2019-06-10	30	Gay	Other
C41	Shanghai	2019-06-20	24	Transwomen	Other
C42	Shanghai	2019-06-22	21	Transmen	Other
C43	UK	2019-06-26	33	Gay	Activist

Appendix III: Observations Details

I.D.	City	Date	Activity Content	Count	Venue
D1	Lanzhou	2019-03-10	Personal Story Sharing Session	10~20	NGO Meeting room
D2	Chengdu	2019-04-05 2019-04-06 2019-04-07	Volunteer Training	20~40	Other
D3	Chengdu	2019-04-13	Volunteer Training	20~40	NGO Meeting room
D4	Chengdu	2019-04-10	LGBT Activist Lecture	40~80	Foreign consulate
D5	Beijing	2019-05-13	LGBT Activists Sharing Forum	40~80	Foreign embassy
D6	Beijing	2019-05-15	Film Viewing and Discussion Session	40~80	Foreign embassy culture center
D7	Beijing	2019-05-20	Rainbow Parent Forum	40~80	Foreign embassy
D8	Beijing	2019-05-11	Rainbow Mom Sharing and Exchange Meeting	10~20	Commercial venue
D9	Beijing	2019-05-18	Film Viewing and Discussion	20~40	Commercial venue
D10	Beijing	2019-05-25	Volunteer Training	20~40	Commercial venue
D11	Beijing	2019-05-12 2019-05-19	Intimate Relationships Sharing Session	10~20	NGO Meeting room

D12	Shanghai	2019-06-01	Workplace Equality Conference	above 80	Commercial venue
D13	Shanghai	2019-06-23	BDSM and Sexuality Session	40~80	Commercial venue
D14	Shanghai	2019-06-30	Lesbian-Specific Sharing Session	40~80	Commercial venue
D15	Shanghai	2019-06-30	Coming Out Conference	above 80	Commercial venue
D16	Shanghai	2019-06-01	Gender Equality Education Forum	40~80	Commercial venue
D17	Shanghai	2019-06-15	Transgender Sharing Session	10~20	Commercial venue
D18	Shanghai	2019-06-18	Rainbow Story Theatre	40~80	Commercial venue
D19	Shanghai	2019-06-25	Rainbow Catholic Fellowship Gathering	10~20	Other
D20	Shanghai	2019-06-11	Pride Film Screening	40~80	Foreign consulate culture center
D21	Shanghai	2019-06-12	Pride Film Screening	40~80	Foreign consulate culture center
D22	Shanghai	2019-06-14	Pride Film Screening	40~80	Foreign consulate culture center

D23	Shanghai	2019-06-08	Pride Art Exhibition	above 80	Commercial venue
D24	Shanghai	2019-06-16	Rainbow Family Forum	above 80	Commercial venue
D25	Shanghai	2019-06-16	LGBTQ Groups Open Day	above 80	Commercial venue
D26	Shanghai	2019-06-16	China Rainbow Media Awards	above 80	Commercial venue

Appendix IV: Documents from the Chinese Government

Laws Related to LGBT Issues:

1. criminal law: In 1997, the National People’s Congress revised a criminal law and removed “hooliganism.”

2. Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders, 3rd Edition (CCMD-3)

3. Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorder (2020)

4. Voluntary/Adult Guardianship

5. General Rules for Television Series Content Production (2016) (SARFT 国家广电总局

https://www.sohu.com/a/61883713_154166)

6. General Rules for Auditing the Content of Network Audiovisual Programs (2017) (CNSA 中

国网络视听协会 http://www.xinhuanet.com//zgjx/2017-07/01/c_136409024.htm)

7. Sex Change Operation Technical Management Standard

8. Regulations on Blood Donor Health Inspections

9. Civil Service Recruitment Examinations Standard

Patriotic Policies:

1. Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education (1994)

2. Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education in the New Era (2019)

3. National Anthem Law

4. Law of the Protection of Heroes and Martyrs

Punishment for Violating Patriotic Policies

1. National Security Law of the People’s Republic of China (2015)

2. Treason in Criminal Law

3. Cybersecurity Law of the People’s Republic of China (2017)

Appendix V: Documents from the UN

(1) OHCHR's Role in Protecting LGBTI People

(<https://www.ohchr.org/en/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity>)

(2) LGBT-related Resolutions

(<https://www.ohchr.org/en/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/resolutions-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-and-sex-characteristics>)

(3) LGBT-Related Statements:

(<https://www.ohchr.org/en/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/speeches-and-statements>)

(4) LGBT-Related Annual Thematic Reports:

(<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/annual-thematic-reports>)

(5) Universal Periodic Review of China

(<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cn-index>)

Appendix VI: Main Weibo Accounts:

Categories of Weibo Accounts	Samples
Chinese government agencies and official media	Central Committee of the Communist Youth League; People's Daily; Global Times
Foreign embassy agencies	the US Embassy; the E.U. Embassy; the Canadian Embassy; the Netherlands Embassy; the U.K. Embassy
Nationalist KOLs	Hu Xijin; Shangdi Zhiying; Guyan Muchan; Wuhe Qilin
LGBT NGOs	Beijing LGBT center; Tongyu; Shanghai Pride; PFLAG China; Tong Cheng; Voice of Tongzhi
LGBT-public opinion leaders	Piaoquanjun; Zhudingzhen; Beiguojiaren Lichunji; Sakuraway; Chen Yongkai
Nationalist gay (Pink Gay)	Xisi Douzhi; Qiaoqiao Afeng; Tuwei Xuan; Cui Zijian